

# Ranjit Singh & Sikh State

July 2, 2019

## Manifest pedagogy

The personalities in the news are always important for UPSC. In the current case, Ranjit Singh statue is unveiled in Lahore in exams which have a mere orientation for current affairs they might ask where the statue has been unveiled or whose statue has been unveiled. But when it comes to UPSC they go many steps further they pick up the current event and go to the static syllabus. These kinds of questions are called current inspired static at Manifest

## In news

Recently Ranjit Singh's sculpture was unveiled in Lahore to mark his 180th death anniversary.

## Placing it in syllabus

Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present-

- Significant events, personalities, issues.
- The freedom struggle
  - Its various stages
  - Important contributors/contributions from different parts of the country.

## Static dimensions

- The conflict between Mughals and Sikh gurus
- The emergence of Sikh state under Ranjith Singh
- Ranjit Singh's relation with the British
- Ranjit Singh's reforms
- Sikh state annexation after Ranjit Singh – first and second Anglo Sikh wars

## **Content**

On the 180th death anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the legendary ruler of Punjab, his statue was unveiled at the Lahore Fort in Pakistan. The sculpture is the result of a collaboration between Fakir Khana Museum and Sarkar Khalsa Foundation

## **Mughals and Sikh gurus**

Guru Nanak was preaching his philosophy while Babur was building the foundations of his Mughal Empire. Akbar had a cordial relation with the Sikh Gurus and even participated in Sanghat and Panghat. The conflict between the Mughals and Sikhs started during the reign of Jahangir because of his execution of Guru Arjun for supporting the claim of prince Khusrau to the throne. This conflict leads the sixth guru (Guru Hargobind) to establish the concepts of Miri (temporal) and Piri (spiritual) which represented the union of both temporal and spiritual authority in the hands of the guru leading to the conversion of Sikhism into a political movement from an essentially socio-religious organization.

The souring of the relations took a new turn with the accession of Aurangzeb to Mughal gaddi. The Sikh Gurus were favourably disposed to the accession of Dara Shiko which made Aurangzeb persecute the Gurus and the 9th Guru of Sikhs Guru Tegh Bahadur was executed by Aurangzeb. This act converted Sikhism into an armed revolt against the Mughals. Guru Gobind Singh formed a Military brotherhood called Khalsa and fought battles of Chamkur and Anandapur with Mughals. He wrote a letter of condemnation to Aurangzeb chastising him for his moral degradation which is called the Zafarnama or Fathenama.

Thereafter the institution of the guruship as a succession ended and the guruship was placed permanently with the Granth. Banda Bahadur emerged as the military head of the Sikhs and he is captured and executed by Bahadur Shah 1. Thereafter the

Sikh Khalsa broke down to Misls. These misls took advantage of the decline of the Mughal Empire and the continuous invasions from the north-west by Nadir Shah and Ahmed Shah Abdali. The vacuum created by the declining Mughal state is effectively filled by Ranjit Singh and his Sukerchakia Misl

### **Emergence of Sikh state under Ranjith Singh**

When the Mughal Empire started declining, taking advantage of it regional states started emerging. On the same pattern, Banda Bahadur tried to establish the first Sikh State in Punjab. He issued the coins in the name of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. He named his government as Sarkar-i-Khalsa. But his weakness was that he was of Marathi origin.

As he was an outsider, he failed to get the support of all the sections of Punjab. In 1716, he was caught and killed in the fort of Lahagarh.

From 1740, the condition became very critical in Punjab because of the end of the Mughal Dynasty and Nadir Shah's and Ahmad Shah Abdali's invasion. Kapoor Singh created Khalsa Panth under which the Sikh army divided into different wings which were given different charges. These military units slowly turned into political cum economic power or Misls i.e ruling houses in Punjab. Punjab got divided into **12 Misls and** out of these 12, Ranjit Singh of Sukerchakia misl succeeded in establishing the first Sikh state in Punjab. They organized themselves into bands and carried on warfare with their rulers

Maharaja Ranjit Singh, also called Sher-i-Punjab was born November 1780 at Gujranwala. When he was 12 years old he became the chief of his own misl after the death of his father in 1792. By the end of the 18th Century, there was anarchy in Punjab. Ranjit Singh, by his conquests, united the whole of Punjab into one kingdom and that was his greatest achievement. In 1799, he captured Lahore from the Bhangi misl and made it

his capital. This was the first important step in his rise to power. In 1802, he conquered the Sikh holy city of Amritsar from the Bhangi Misl. In the following years, he brought the whole of central Punjab from the Sutlej to the Jhelum under his sway.

He proclaimed himself maharajah of Punjab in 1801. He wanted to bring all the Sikh states under his control. He had Malwa, on the south side of the Sutlej river, as his next target. So, he sought to establish his sway over the cis-Sutlej states which were informally under the British protection. He crossed the Sutlej, and in 1806 occupied Ludhiana and some more territory. The Sikh states appealed to the British for protection. The British also thought Ranjit Singh's advances injurious to their interest. So, the East India Company concluded the **Treaty of Amritsar with him on April 25, 1809**. By this treaty the Sutlej was fixed as the boundary between the two governments and both powers became friendly to each other. However, Ranjith Singh compromised his cherished political ideas besides suffering territorial and economic losses. Thus the cis-Sutlej Sikh states formally came under the protection of English



### **Ranjith Singh's relation with the British**

The treaty permitted him to complete freedom of action to the north of it. This enabled him to extract tribute from less powerful chieftains, including Jats and other Sikhs, and ultimately to gain control of areas such as Peshawar and Kashmir. The unification of these territories, which was aided by him westernising his armies, formed the Sikh empire that lasted until British subjugation in 1849.

Ranjit Singh wanted to annex Sind but could not do so because of the English opposition. In **1831 he signed the treaty of perpetual friendship with the English**. In 1838 he entered into

a tripartite treaty with the English and Shah Shuja to depose Dost Muhammad Khan, the exiled Amir of Afghanistan and placed Shah Shuja on the throne. This led to the Afghan war. After ruling the Sikh empire successfully for forty years, Maharaja Ranjit Singh died on June 27, 1839.

### **Ranjith Singh's reforms**

Maharaja Ranjit Singh gave territorial identity to Punjab by the policy of diplomacy and aggression. He was also a born administrator and a wise diplomat. Although he was illiterate, he patronized learned and brave men. He was free from religious bigotry and all his subjects lived in peace and amity. He considered himself a servant of the Khalsa and he did not permit the coins to bear his name

### **Economic reforms**

Ranjit Singh came out with Land revenue system based on Mughal period **Zabti System** in which assessment of land revenue was based on the measurement of land. The state demand was fixed at around 33-40% depending on the fertility and richness of the soil. Along with this, trade and commerce also provided revenue to the state. The next important form of revenue was fine in return for punishment. The Kardars were responsible for the collection of revenue. Of the total income, 1/4th was on the army and the rest on the civil administration

### **Administrative Reforms**

He established the government in the name of **Sarkar-i-Khalsa**. He also issued currency in the name of Guru Gobind Singh and Guru Nanak Dev. He divided the entire state into four provinces and he emphasised on the maintenance of law and order. Justice seemed to be the main concern for Ranjit Singh. There was no code of law. Most of the crimes were punished with a fine. There was no capital punishment. Justice was administered by the Panchayats in the villages and the Kardars in the towns. There was no hierarchy of courts. In the

provincial headquarters, there were the courts of the Nazims. Above them, there was the Adalat-i-Ala in Lahore which heard appeals from the district and provincial courts

## **Military Reforms**

Ranjit Singh possessed a very strong and well-equipped army called **Fauj-i-Khas**, which was trained and disciplined by Italian and French officers on European lines. His army consisting of cavalry and artillery was doubtlessly the best in India. He adopted '**Mahadari**' system in which he made a monthly payment of salaries to soldiers and officers. He also established the Canon factory in Lahore and Amritsar

## **Anglo Sikh wars**

The **First Anglo-Sikh War** was fought between the Sikh Empire and the East India Company between 1845 and 1846. It resulted in partial subjugation of the Sikh kingdom and cession of Jammu and Kashmir as a separate princely state under British suzerainty. Ranjith Singh died in 1839. By 1843, the ruler was a boy, the youngest son of Ranjit Singh whose mother was proclaimed queen regent.

Actual power, however, resided with the army, which was itself in the hands of military committees. Relations with the British had already been strained by the refusal of the Sikhs to allow the passage of British troops through their territory during the First Anglo-Afghan War (1838–42). Having determined to invade British India under the pretext of forestalling a British attack, the Sikhs crossed the Sutlej River in December 1845.

They were defeated in the four bloody and hard-fought battles of Mudki, Ferozpur, Aliwal, and Sohraon. The British annexed Sikh lands east of the Sutlej and between it and the Beas River. Kashmir and Jammu were detached, and the Sikh army was limited to 20,000 infantry and 12,000 cavalries. A British resident was stationed in Lahore with British troops.

## Second Anglo Sikh war

Although the Sikh Army was weakened by the first Anglo-Sikh war, resentment at British interference in the government led to the Second Anglo-Sikh War within three years. The Sikh regent, Maharani Jindan Kaur was not treated properly by the British. She was removed from Lahore on conspiracy charges against the British resident in Lahore. Multan which was a part of the Sikh Empire when Maharaja Ranjit Singh had captured it in 1818 was governed by Dewan Mulraj. He resented the Lahore Court's demand for increased tax assessment and revenues.

The British Resident at that time was Sir Frederick Currie. He undermined Mulraj and imposed another governor Sardar Kahan Singh along with a British agent Patrick Vans Agnew. In 1848, Vans Agnew and another officer who arrived in Multan to take charge were murdered by Mulraj's troops. This news led to unrest in Punjab and many Sikh soldiers joined the rebel forces against the British. Battles were fought in Ramnagar and Chilianwala.

The final battle was fought at Gujrat near Chenab in 1849 which was won by the British forces.

After the war, Punjab was annexed by the British in March 1849 (under Lord Dalhousie) as per the **Treaty of Lahore**. The eleven-year-old Maharaja, Duleep Singh was pensioned off to England. Jindan Kaur was separated from her son the Maharaja and taken to Ferozpur. Her allowance was reduced to a meagre amount and her jewels and money confiscated.

Sir John Lawrence was appointed as the first Chief Commissioner of Punjab to take care of the administration. The famous Koh-i-Noor diamond went into British hands.