

[Maharaja Ranjit Singh reformer for 50 years]

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A nation it has been using the first half of the eighteenth century that the practice of Akbar's rule, the commonest reading of the fifty Crown States, developed. The purpose was to organize and unite the Sikhs, including their women and children, who were constantly on the move from one village to another.

Sikh power grew as Mughal rule weakened, partly because of Afghan-Mughal wars but also because the central government was weakening and the local governments lacked the authority.

In 1752 the Sikhs were able to organize themselves into 12 states or military groups, covering most of the Punjab. Bhai Bhanu and David Cory succeeded in Amritsar.

A leader of one of the states was Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He was born in 1730 and became leader of his small state at age 15, upon the death of his father. In his early years he had a bad case of smallpox which left its mark on his face and caused the loss of his left eye. But he soon recovered. His health and grew up to be a fierce and daring warrior.

His father took him often to the battlefield. His practice had been a great deal of battle even as a child. He had no other education and was unable even to sign his name.

When Ranjit Singh was 16, he was crowned at his father's suggestion as ruler of his state. Another rival ruled by his mother-in-law since his father's death. After acquiring several smaller states, he became the most powerful ruler. Little after capturing Lahore, he was ruler of the Punjab. He made Lahore his headquarters.

The city had been governed by three Sikhs who governed so badly the people welcomed Ranjit Singh as a liberator. Soon after that, he took the hill Mughals.

They then tried to take him but in 1802 he took the holy city of Amritsar as well.

As he continued his march through the lower Kingdoms, they turned to the British for help. He



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signed a treaty with the British to keep the peace. Then Ranjit Singh was prevented from taking all the Sikh states under one hand. He had to be satisfied with the land lying to the north and west of the Sutlej River. The British, however, was careful in another way. He had no money to star from the east and could thus advance his power to the west.

After signing the treaty with the British in 1809, the Maharaja concentrated upon Kangra and sent a force to the Gurdikar only to make it his own. By 1819, he had captured Multan, Rawalpindi and Peshawar.

He would have been 50 as well had not the British stepped in. To this day, he remained a faithful friend of the British, when sending his forces to fight alongside them.

In spite of having more faith in a man, Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a good and able ruler. He created

the concept of Peri and Mir, the two social classes of Sikhs. Peri is used to denote a religious leader or Guru. Mir is derived from the word Amir, meaning commander of the faithful.

Although Ranjit Singh ruled over an independent Punjab, it was not a Sikh state and despite the often general religious beliefs, it should be regarded as a state in which any religion could be expressed freely.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh is remembered today as the first of the Punjab. His policies led to the Sikh state in a great Sikh nation. The World Book Encyclopedia states the Sikh fought to achieve a separate kingdom until 1849 when they were conquered by the British and annexed to the rest of British India.

The 50-year period of his rule which brought domestic peace to the Punjab, even though the state was frequently at war, resulted in the building of Gurdwaras and the restoration of such places as the Golden Temple.

He treated his army on European lines and made them as fit and strong as any in Europe at that time. He employed officers both Sikh and non-Sikh without making any distinction between them. He even took Europeans into his service.

He gave high posts to Hindus and Muslims as well as Sikhs. He was very big-hearted and made no distinction between Hindus and Muslims, which added to his popularity. He died in 1839. All people mourned him.

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