



## MAHARAJA RANJITH SINGH: LEADER IN NEWS

**NEWS:** November 13 marks the birth anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

### Birth and Early Life

- **Date of Birth:** November 13, 1780.
- **Place of Birth:** Gujranwala, now in modern-day Pakistan.
- **Early Challenges:** Born in an era of fragmented rule in Punjab, where power was divided among several competing chieftains (Misls).

### Rise to Power

- **Conquest of Lahore:** In 1799, Ranjit Singh unified the Sikh territories by conquering Lahore, overthrowing local chieftains, and establishing a centralized Sikh empire.
- **Title of "Lion of Punjab":** He was honored with this title (Sher-e-Punjab) for defending Punjab against repeated Afghan invasions, particularly after securing Lahore as his capital.

### Expansion of the Sikh Empire

- **Territorial Reach:** His empire expanded to include former Mughal provinces like Lahore and Multan, parts of Kabul, and all of Peshawar.
- **Boundaries:** Extended to Ladakh in the northeast, Khyber Pass in the northwest, and Panjnad in the south.
- **Six Rivers:** During his reign, Punjab was known as the land of six rivers, including the Indus.

### Cultural and Religious Policies

- **Support for Religious Institutions:** Ranjit Singh supported Sikhism while respecting other faiths:
  - **Sikh Temples:** Reconstructed the Golden Temple in Amritsar, using marble (1809) and gold (1830).
  - **Hindu Temples:** Donated gold for the Hindu Kashi Vishwanath temple in Varanasi.
  - **Muslim Mosques:** Supported mosques and Sufi shrines.
- **Banning of Cow Slaughter:** In deference to Hindu beliefs, he prohibited cow slaughter.



- **Freedom of Faith:** Fostered religious tolerance by allowing his Hindu and Muslim wives to practice their faiths.



## Military Reforms and Modernization

- **European Influence:** Unusual for his time, Ranjit Singh hired European mercenaries to modernize his army.
  - **French and Italian Officers:** Employed former Napoleonic soldiers like Generals Jean-Baptiste Ventura and Jean-Francois Allard.
  - **Creation of Fauj-i-Khas:** Established a specialized brigade, trained and led by these European experts.
  - **Integration into Indian Culture:** Many European generals settled in Lahore, embraced Indian customs, and married locally.

## Decline of the Sikh Empire

- **Death of Ranjit Singh:** June 27, 1839 marked the end of his nearly four-decade rule.
- **British Expansion:** Following his death, the British East India Company increased its military presence near Punjab, leading to inevitable conflict.



## Anglo-Sikh Wars and Aftermath

- **First Anglo-Sikh War (1845-46):** The conflict resulted in partial British control and the separation of Jammu and Kashmir as a princely state under British suzerainty.
- **Second Anglo-Sikh War (1848-49):** Ended with a decisive British victory, marking the end of Sikh sovereignty.
- **Duleep Singh's Fate:** Ranjit Singh's successor, the young Maharaja Duleep Singh, was taken to England, becoming a British pensioner and favorite of Queen Victoria.

## Legacy and Impact

- **Koh-i-Noor Diamond:** One of the most famous assets acquired by the British during their annexation of Punjab, the diamond remains a symbol of colonial acquisition, still part of the British Crown Jewels.
- **Global Recognition:** Statues and memorials have been erected worldwide in his honor, including a bronze statue in St Tropez, France, unveiled in 2016.

## Cultural Endurance

- **Influence on Punjabis Worldwide:** Ranjit Singh's legacy as a unifier and protector continues to inspire Punjabis globally, emphasizing his role as a just ruler and a symbol of Sikh sovereignty.

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