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## **Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Khalsa Raaj or Pluralistic State? A Critical Study of Religious Policies and Conduct in Punjab, 1799-1839**

### **Abstract**

*Maharaja Ranjit Singh's four-decade rule (1799–1839) over Punjab was marked by a consciously inclusive approach to governance. Presiding over a religiously diverse population and facing strategic pressures from both the Afghans and the expanding British Empire, he adopted policies that drew on the abilities of people from all faiths. His administration, military appointments, charitable grants, support for religious institutions, and patronage of schools collectively reflect a commitment to interfaith cooperation. The evidence indicates that Ranjit Singh fostered a climate of tolerance, celebrating festivals across communities and ensuring the protection of places of worship, including facilitating Muslim observance at the Badshahi Mosque. His rule demonstrates a pragmatic and principled dedication to treating all subjects as equal participants in the life of the state.*

### **Introduction**

Throughout the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth century, the British set about consolidating their control over the Indian Subcontinent through various means such as annexation and conquest. Many states capitulated to the oncoming onslaught and could not match the might of the growing British empire in India. However, in contrast to this trend, there did exist a state which outlasted the British conquest for the longest amount of time. This state was none other than Punjab or what back then was known as the Sikh Empire.

The Sikh Empire existed from 1799 up until 1849 when it was eventually annexed by the British after fifty years. The prime reason behind the Sikh empire lasting so long was the efforts of its Founder Maharaja Ranjit Singh who successfully united the divided twelve misls (Tribes) of the Sikhs into one along with transforming these misls into a fighting force. He was also able to unite the various communities that existed within his empire at that time. The Punjabi society at that time had a diverse mix of Population which included Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, and Christians. Presiding over such a delicate balance, Maharaja

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Ranjit Singh was able to inculcate within his court, army, and administration a blend of all the religious communities in an attempt to unify all within his empire to co-exist peacefully and contribute to the state. Therefore, it was necessary for Maharaja Ranjit Singh to ensure communal harmony during his rule through both his Policies and Conduct relating to different religious communities including his own. Despite this, scholars often depict Maharaja Ranjit Singh as a despot or a religiously Intolerant ruler, with some claiming him to be a tyrant in regard to different religious communities. Therefore, it is important to explore and compare different perspectives both from Indian Historians as well as British Historians on the Conduct and Policies of the Maharaja in the context of Religious Communities in Punjab in a bid to understand the Founder of the Sikh Empire better and to examine his treatment in terms of policy and conduct of different religious communities.

The purpose of this study is to examine the policies and conduct of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in relation to the different religious communities residing in Punjab during his rule and evaluate his promotion or negation of religious freedom in Punjab. Maharaja Ranjit Singh has often been subjected to contradictory portrayals by different sources, highlighting the existence of bias in conducting historical analysis. Furthermore, this study aims to investigate in depth the instances where Maharaja Ranjit Singh is dealing with his subjects particularly those of different religions including his own in a bid to better understand whether Maharaja Ranjit Singh in fact promoted religious freedom or was as certain sources claim intolerant to different religions and implemented *Khalsa Raj*, a theocratic Sikh state. The study will contribute to a better understanding of the Policies and Conduct of Ranjit Singh in Punjab relating to different faiths and in the attempt will help form an improved understanding of Ranjit Singh's reign in a holistic light. What were the policies and conduct of Maharaja Ranjit Singh towards religious communities in the Sikh Empire? What was the composition of different religious communities in the Court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh? What was the composition of different religious communities in the Army of the Sikh Empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh? What sort of Grants did Maharaja Ranjit Singh award to the religious communities in his empire? What was the conduct of Maharaja Ranjit Singh towards religious places belonging to different religious communities in his empire? What was the role of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in promoting education among different religious communities in his empire?

This literature review is an attempt to investigate the claims made by various sources such as books and journal articles on Ranjit Singh's policies and conduct in regard to religious communities in Punjab, that is an attempt to critically investigate the statements made by both sources the ones which support his policies and conduct towards religious communities within his empire and of those which embody a disagreement of his policies and conduct towards religious communities. This is an attempt to provide a more holistic understanding of the figure of Ranjit Singh himself both as a ruler and as an administrator.

The first source in the analysis is a book edited by Lt. Col. H. L. O. Garrett & G. L. Chopra titled *Events at the Court of Ranjit Singh 1810-1817*.<sup>1</sup> This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition being Published in 2002 with the 1<sup>st</sup> edition being published in 1935. The purpose of this book is to record the day-to-day activities in the court of Ranjit

Singh on numerous fronts namely judicial, administrative, personal, financial, and military along with providing the most intricate details of how the Maharaja conducted himself in his dealings with other communities in his empire in order to give an authentic account for a specified period.<sup>2</sup> The interesting thing to note is that this book is written by the author in a diary format meaning it has the day, month, and year most of the time and at certain recordings even goes further by recording the dates in the Islamic calendar. Furthermore, it records the dealings of Ranjit Singh from standpoint that neither exaggerates nor demonizes Ranjit Singh as a ruler but simply records whatever the author saw occurring in the court with precise details like when Ranjit Singh went to bed at what time he woke up even what ailments he was afflicted with and how it was treated, furthermore, it also records how Ranjit Singh dealt with religious communities in his empire such as Ranjit Singh made the Muslims of Lahore on Eid-Al-Adha offer prayers at the Badshahi Mosque by calling upon the Qazi to issue a fatwa and furthermore he even ordered his men to be posted throughout Lahore in order to ensure their safety and also ordered to report to him immediately if any mistreatment occurs, such an incident shows the regard of Maharaja Ranjit Singh for religious communities in his empire in his policy and conduct.<sup>3</sup> However, even though the author attempts to be objective the information recorded seems to not only focus on a specific seven-year period of Ranjit Singh's reign but often at times has lapses in recording information such as one entry may be recorded in June and the next may skip to September generating an issue in keeping with a consistent image of the day-to-day dealings in the court of Ranjit Singh. Furthermore, although, the data entry carries remarkable intricate details of daily activities there is still a question of the actual identity of the author which is interesting to note as the book has been edited by two people who are not the original authors of the text. Overall, this book has helped form the framework of this study and has added in forming a base for the analysis of numerous other works employed as it is an attempt to record the daily activities and dealings of Ranjit Singh in an objective manner.

In contrast to this source, another book that was consulted was written by Major H. M. L. Lawrence titled *Adventures of an Officer in the Services of Runjeet Singh*.<sup>4</sup> It was published in 2003 and departs from the objective view on Ranjit Singh, his policies, and conduct but in its place employs subjectivity as its point of analysis. The author constructs an imaginary officer called Bellasis who serves Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1830, the officer never existed and his service is shown through the lens of subjectivity by the writer Henry Montgomery who himself interestingly only entered Punjab in the year 1839 as a British Political agent, which was also the year Ranjit Singh died so it can be speculated that the author did not spend significant time interacting with the Sikh monarch.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the author claims that Lahore has been destroyed three times namely by Nadir Shah, Ahmad Shah, and the Sikhs as well.<sup>6</sup> However, it is interesting to note that the author tends to restrict the nature of Ranjit Singh himself entering Lahore which appears to be omitted. The circumstances in which he entered Lahore highlight firstly his conduct towards various faiths, approximately five Muslims, two Sikhs and a number of Hindus invited Ranjit Singh to take Lahore in order to free the citizens from the Bhangi tribe, furthermore, Ranjit Singh's first act after taking Lahore was to visit Badshahi mosque, an act which depicted the openness of Ranjit Singh in terms of treatment of Muslims who welcomed his arrival,

Muslims were in minority at that time and this gesture also communicates his gratefulness for their assistance in taking Lahore.<sup>7</sup> The author does highlight the conduct of Ranjit Singh in relation to Colonel Bellasis in which Ranjit Singh not only appoints him the governor of Kot Kangra but also rewards him with receiving the nazrana of the villages near Kot Kangra, bestows upon him different valuable gifts such as necklaces, shawls, a horse and, even a sword, shows how Ranjit Singh treated even new inducts in his administration Bellasis being a Christian and a foreigner was treated amicably under Ranjit Singh.<sup>8</sup> It is also interesting that the author highlights the conduct of Ranjit Singh with his conquered enemies recognizing that Ranjit Singh at least to his knowledge did not order executions, even to his conquered foes he provides for them and their families, these are the hallmarks of a monarch who appears to choose peace by sparing his enemies be they of any religious community in his empire<sup>9</sup>. The author mentions remarkable in-depth details of the experience of the Sikh empire through the eyes of his character Bellasis, However, interestingly, he does not mention dates of certain events which depicts a lack of accuracy even when communicating the workings of the day the author tends to drift off in describing what other individuals think about the Sikhs rather than his own thoughts and does not attempt to verify their claims. Furthermore, the author critiques the European soldiers employed in the services of Ranjit Singh by stating that their input is not heard, it appears the author lacks clarity in the role of a soldier whose role most often is not to act as an advisor, therefore, their advice in matters of the court would not be required with many qualified individuals of different religious disposition present in the court of Ranjit Singh such as Ram Singh or Faqir Azizudin.<sup>10</sup> Overall, this work has led to an in-depth analysis of how the court of Ranjit Singh appeared from the perspective of a foreigner and this will permit the formation of well-balanced analysis for this study to understand in greater capacity the policies and conduct of Ranjit Singh with religious communities in his empire.

Another influential work explored for this study was a book by Priya Atwal titled *Royals and Rebels: The Rise and Fall of the Sikh Empire*.<sup>11</sup> It was Published in 2021. The author approaches the figure of Ranjit Singh from a unique perspective namely by attributing the success of Ranjit Singh not primarily down to himself alone but also by recognizing the contributions of those around him namely the women, the princes and the courtiers who made it possible to place Punjab to the heights it reached under the rule of Ranjit Singh. These figures have mostly remained in the background but the author asserts that they had a pivotal role in assuring stability within the empire, the author examines the contributions and personalities of leading elite figures such as Maharani Jind Kaur his youngest wife, Mai Nakain his wife, Raj Kaur his mother and Sada Kaur his mother-in-law and Mehtab Kaur his first wife.<sup>12</sup> Sada Kaur played an important role in the development of young Ranjit Singh in terms of personality and leadership, she even played a decisive role in helping Ranjit Singh take Lahore by aiding him with military support from her Kanhaiya Misl of which she controlled, in the taking of Lahore she even taught Ranjit Singh on how to deal with conquered enemies by engineering an agreement for the Bhangi Sardar to leave Lahore in peace.<sup>13</sup> The author reaffirms such as discussed earlier that it was the Muslims of Lahore which invited Ranjit Singh to free them from the rule of the Bhangi Sardars, interestingly enough the instance of Ranjit Singh visiting Badshahi to pay homage upon

entering Lahore communicates the amount of reverence the Sikh Monarch held for different religions namely Islam, furthermore it must be noted that the Muslims that called Ranjit Singh to Lahore depicts how willingly the people were to receive him, this might be because he might have had a favourable reputation in his treatment of people from different religious communities.<sup>14</sup> The author highlights the various instances in which Ranjit Singh and his court celebrated numerous religious festivals held by various numerous communities such as Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, this the author highlights was primarily Punjabi society quite fluid in boundaries in terms of faith, even so, Ranjit Singh openly celebrated them which is interesting to note.<sup>15</sup> However, the author appears to not focus on the Impact that Ranjit Singh personally had on his Empire in Punjab. while it is true that figures like his wives, the princes, and courtiers helped Ranjit Singh run the empire there can be no denying that after the death of the central figure of Ranjit Singh the Sikh Empire began to rapidly collapse all the way to its demise in 1849 just 10 years after the Sikh monarchs death. This work has helped in initiating a sense of understanding around the key figures present during the time of Ranjit Singh, what their contributions were, and also how they mentored the monarch in dealing with his enemies in ways of peace rather than resorting to violence. This work has also added to the study conducted as it mentioned the fluid religious boundaries that existed in Punjab during the time of Ranjit Singh, this helps understanding not only the Punjabi Society but also sheds light on the context in which Ranjit Singh created policies and conducted himself towards religious communities in his empire.

Another work consulted for this study was a Journal by N. C. Banerjee and N. C. Banerji titled "Maharaja Ranjit Singh (the Man—His Achievements and Ideals)".<sup>16</sup> It was published in 1939. This work provides the background in which Ranjit Singh took control, including his family history and how the Sukerchakia Misl among the twelve Misls rose to prominence and eventually in the figure of Ranjit Singh unified all under his banner, interestingly enough the author mentions just like the previous work discussed also mentions how Ranjit Singh's Mother-in-law Sada Kaur played a primal role as a mentor of the young monarch and helped him in his various expeditions, furthermore, the author also provides an overview of the conquests of Ranjit Singh over the years during his reign while highlighting his struggles in taking Multan and Peshawar to his eventual conquering them.<sup>17</sup> Like previous sources consulted the author agrees that upon winning in battle Ranjit Singh would make sure his conquered enemies including their families are looked after and would seek to avoid capital punishment, a notable fact to understand here is that once his enemies were defeated and under his empire he would also reward them with Jagirs or Grants of land this was the case concerning various Sikh Misls such as the Nakai, the Ramgarhias, while Ranjit Singh in a manner imitating Akbar subdued the Bhangis without conflict by way of marriage, also in terms of different religious communities within his empire particularly the Muslims, were also granted Jagirs when their territories were conquered a popular example of this is when Uch was conquered Ranjit Singh awarded Jagirs to local Syed families, this shows the man's inclination to avoid violence at all cost and amicably sort out any issues by granting jagirs to his subdued rivals who were now citizens in his empire.<sup>18</sup> What is interesting to note is that unlike our previous author Major H. M. L. Lawrence who claimed that rank or position awarded by the

Maharajah was not done so upon merit when referring to the rapid accension of his own character Bellasis.<sup>19</sup> However, our current author would disagree with this claim with the assertion that one of the three attributes of his personality which allowed him to win over his conquered people to his side and maintain control was his ability to award and recognize merit while the other two attributes were being open-minded in terms of religion and being devoted not just to the overall welfare of his empire but also his people.<sup>20</sup> The author also highlights the conduct of Ranjit Singh in dealing with different religious communities in his empire as in the case of Muslims he did not interfere with any religious practice and even left the Kazi to carry on his duties once Lahore was conquered, Muslims were among his advisors in court, they were awarded positions such as Iman Bux was named Kotwal of Lahore, in the case of the Hindus, Ranjit Singh displayed respect for their religion by visiting places of worship such as Hardwar and Jwalamukhi, there are also instances of Ranjit Singh distributing charity among not only Brahmins but also Muslim saints, such actions depict a ruler not only conscious of the various religions existing within his empire but also of how important it was to uplift these religious communities for the sake of his own empire.<sup>21</sup> The author also highlights the positions of well-known figures within the court belonging to Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh religious communities, such a composition shows that Ranjit Singh knew how to use qualified men to the use of the state as most of these appointments in court went on to serve the Maharaja loyally and to good effect.<sup>22</sup> However, it is interesting to note that the author excludes the mention of the European soldiers under the employ of the Maharaja, their roles, and their accomplishments while it is understood that the paper specifically focuses on the Maharaja there is a need to also highlight the open-mindedness of Ranjit Singh in terms of making army modern through the employ of European soldiers. Overall, this source has been a comprehensive overview of Ranjit Singh and his to prominence, along with providing details of his character, dealings with conquered enemies, and appointing capable men belonging to various religious communities in his court, this journal has enhanced understanding of how Ranjit Singh conducted himself and also hint at his policies such as the jagir system and allows for a further investigation for this study to proceed in understanding the conduct and policies put in place by Ranjit Singh on religious communities under his reign.

Another aspect to be considered to determine the extent to which Ranjit Singh formulated his policies and conduct keeping in view the various religious communities of his empire is the Agrarian system under the ruler, the work consulted was a Journal by Indu Banga titled “Agrarian System of Ranjit Singh”.<sup>23</sup> It was published in 1975. The author claims that under Ranjit Singh land proprietorship was non-communal as the majority of this agrarian property was owned by small landowners who were responsible for the cultivation of their land, what is interesting to note is that among the numerous policies the Maharajah employed in a bid to boost land cultivation for this work two stand out the first being the policy of encouraging pastoral tribes to settle as Agriculturalists and the second the awarding of lands that were not charged rent to those that promoted the practice of agriculture and in certain cases they would be granted loans as well.<sup>24</sup> These policies depict the absence of any discrimination from Ranjit Singh as these policies are applied to all agrarian engaging communities and do not exclude a particular religious community, this can be further evidenced by Ranjit Singh’s

concern for the welfare of peasants when even in the notices issued by his court they are referred to as a 'Trust from God' this implies that Ranjit Singh was aware of his responsibility of ruling over different religious communities and was active in caring for their welfare, delving deeper into aspects of the Agrarian system under the monarch reveals the term known as Jagirdars becomes prominent, these Jagirdars were not only patronised by Ranjit Singh, but also, they belonged to diverse background being composed of numerous religious communities and these Jagirdars would be awarded Jagirs often as replacement of Salary, in this manner Ranjit Singh ensured that their loyalties would be to the state as now their interests were also involved in the form of Jagirs awarded to them regardless of religious community.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the author points out the awarding of certain grants known as Dharmarth grants, which were hereditary in nature and were granted to all religious communities in the empire, also, it is of interest to highlight that there was also upward social mobility through the awarding of Jagirs to lower social classes, this meant that even among the various social classes present in Punjab under Ranjit Singh there was an opportunity to change or improve one's social position, the author highlights that the nobility of the Sikhs was not entirely composed of Sikhs but also included representatives from various religious communities such as the Muslims and Hindus.<sup>26</sup> However, the author does not highlight the names of the prominent people belonging to the Muslim and Hindu communities who were part of the court of Ranjit Singh. Overall, this work has contributed to the study by aiding it to understand the details regarding how the Jagirdari system included within it the transfer and reassignment of Jagirs to all communities regardless of religion as well as the intricacies of policies such as the Dharmarth grants provided to different religious communities under the rule of Ranjit Singh.

The work consulted was a Journal by Indu Banga titled "The Jagirdari System of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the Light of his Orders".<sup>27</sup> It was published in 1979. The author highlights the existence of three types of Jagirs namely Service, Subsistence, and in'am, the process of taking over a Jagir is also explored in this work with the person rewarded a jagir having to offer Nazarana to Ranjit Singh before he was given permission to take over the said Jagir, this Nazarana was applied to all who were awarded Jagirs meaning it was not restricted to one particular faith but applied to all faith communities, furthermore what is interesting to note here is that even the Jagirs belonging to princes were not exempted from being transferred and there have been recorded instances as claimed by the author when the transfer or resumption of a Jagir was not able to proceed smoothly in such instances, measures were taken to oblige the jagirdaar to give up their Jagirs, also, in cases when a Jagir had been in the possession of a family for a long duration out of respect the garrison under the control of the family of the Jagirdaar would be allowed to function while state officials undertook revenue management, here also there is no distinction of the Jagirdaar being of a certain faith or having been discriminated against because of their association with a certain faith.<sup>28</sup> The author also highlights the sense of justice that Ranjit Singh employed as in the cases when without his knowledge some Jagirs were resumed the monarch made it a point to not only investigate who was responsible but when found out even is claimed to have held accountable influential figures in his empire such as Sardar Tej Singh for unjustly taking over

certain lands in Jagirs without the command of the Ranjit Singh, Ranjit Singh ensured that that all jagirs and cash unrightfully taken would be diligently returned to the affected Jagirdaar and also a bill of accountability would be submitted to the concerned office to ensure such incidences would not reoccur later on, this attitude of the Maharaja depicts that he held accountability and Justice to high standards as earlier claimed he was concerned about the welfare of his people and such conduct in situations like these translate into evidence that neither were the Jagirdaars discriminated against due to belonging to a particular religious community but were looked after if wronged in any occasion under the reign of Ranjit Singh.<sup>29</sup> Also an interesting point to note regarding Dharmarth grants is mentioned by the author where all revenue officers were ordered by the court of Ranjit Singh to not bother those who were grantees to the Dharmarth grants because they qualify for being revered and respected and here, another instance of Ranjit Singh's conduct can be observed regarding religious communities as those rewarded these grants regardless of which faith they belonged were expected in exchange pray for the wellbeing and success of Ranjit Singh, this depicts that to the Sikh monarch loyalty mattered most regardless of which faith his subjected ascribed.<sup>30</sup> Although, the author injects a significant amount of detail into the Jagir System and Dharmarth grants, However, there appears to be a lack of exploration of who was exactly granted the Dharmarth grants it is clear that they were not restricted to a particular religion but there appears to be little mention of the names of the people who were given these grants. Overall, this work has helped in understanding the types and categories of Jagirs awarded, the instances of transfer and resumption of Jagirs, and highlighted Dharmarth grants. Furthermore, it has assisted in the research for this study in the context of the Conduct of Ranjit Singh displayed toward religious communities in his empire.

An insight into the type of Civil and Military Recruitment in the empire of Ranjit Singh was provided through a Journal by Shah Noor titled "Civil And Military Recruitment Of European And Non-Sikh Officers In The Kingdom Of Maharaja Ranjit Singh: An Analysis".<sup>31</sup> It was published in 2018. The author sheds light on the nature of the rule of Ranjit Singh and communicates that the Punjabi society under his rule was Multi-racial and Multi-ethnic and in response to this the policies adopted by Ranjit Singh in recruitment were along the same lines, this meant that people across all religious communities were recruited such as Christians such as Europeans, Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus, it is interesting to note that the author highlights the empire being under continuous danger from British India and Afghanistan and this is cited as being a major reason for the recruitment being across all religious communities as for the empire to exist all communities had to be recruited equally it is claimed.<sup>32</sup> Initially Ranjit was sceptical about these Europeans and suspected them of being spies but after careful vetting he inducted them into his service, the author provides a detailed account on the Europeans employed in the service of Ranjit Singh such as Messrs. Allard, Ventura, Court, Avitabile and Van Cortlandt all were assigned ranks such as Captain, Commander, General and Colonel, what is interesting to note here is that they were also assigned as provincial governors along with serving in a military capacity, furthermore foreigners such as Dr. Harlan was appointed governor of Gujrat in 1832, Dr. Honigberger was placed as the supervisor of Ordinance factories and Dr. Benet served as Surgeon-General in the army, these foreigners/Europeans were not



allowed to interfere in political matters regarding the State and they were bound by the regulations of the state by oath meaning they would be made to uphold all customs and traditions observed in the empire of Ranjit Singh, such as abstaining from the consumption of beef, not shaving their facial hair and not smoking tobacco and in return they were awarded good salaries and Jagirs, in short time the army was modernized due to their contributions.<sup>33</sup> The author also highlights the Hindu courtiers in the service of Maharaja Ranjit Singh such as the Dogra Brothers namely Dhian Singh, Gulab Singh, Suchet Singh, and Hira Singh, who gradually rose from humble beginnings to command considerable power and influence, in the service of Ranjit Singh, there were also Hindu administrators such as Diwan Bhawani Das, Diwan Ganga Ram, Diwan Dina Nath and Misr Beli Ram who were in charge of managing revenue system of the empire, some like Diwan Sawan Mall were also put in charge as provincial governors, there were also Muslim officials employed by the Monarch such as the famous Faqir brothers Aziz Uddin, Noor Uddin and Imam Uddin who were employed initially as Hakims but out of them Aziz Uddin rose to the position of being an advisor to Ranjit Singh on Foreign Affairs, apart from this Muslims under Ranjit Singh's ruled served in the military as well primarily in charge of Artillery such as Ghous Muhammad Khan and Sheikh Ilahi Baksh, Muslims also served as provincial governors such as Sheikh Ghulam Mohi was assigned as governor of Kashmir, this shows that Ranjit Singh was aware of the capable men at his disposal from various faiths and also was able to assign them in positions that allowed these men to maximize their talents and also rewarded them accordingly to their services in Salaries and Jagirs, there were also Sikh officers in the employ of Ranjit Singh such as notable Sikh families like the Majhithias, Sandhanwalias and Ahluwalias with other notable figures being Hari Singh Nalwa, Sirdar Fateh Singh Kalianwala and Sirdar Nihal Singh Attariwala and many more in the bureaucracy and army.<sup>34</sup> The author provides a detailed account of individuals belonging to various religious communities being employed in the service of Ranjit Singh in the Bureaucracy, Court, and Army of the State under the Sikh Monarch and this leads to the understanding that it was the policies of Ranjit Singh which led to the employment of officers and administrators across various religious communities and it was in conduct such as rewarding handsome salaries and Jagirs and considering their advice such as in the case of Faqir Aziz Uddin which ensured the loyalty of his subjects across all the communities that resided in Punjab at that time. Such steps also indicate the open-mindedness of Ranjit Singh and communicate that his interest was ensuring that the state along with his subjects prospered regardless of which community they hailed from. This work allows this study to gain considerable insight into the officials employed, their treatment by the Sikh Monarch, and their contributions to the state and shapes much of the groundwork researched for this study.

On the same subject the work consulted was a Journal by Robina Yasmin and Fakhar Bilal titled "From Foreigner to Local Citizens: Europeans in Punjab under Maharaja Ranjit Singh".<sup>35</sup> It was published in 2021. The authors agree with the previous paper that it was actually the interest of the state and the abilities of the Individuals which were considered first and foremost in terms of employment in the administration, court and military and that the religion of the individual in the service of Ranjit Singh was not important in shaping both the conduct and policies

of the Maharaja concerning religious communities, light is shed upon Ranjit Singh forming a diverse pool of courtiers in his service from various religious communities such as Muslims, Hindus, Europeans mainly Christians and Sikhs notable figures among the Muslims were Faqir Aziz Uddin, Noor Uddin, Elahi Baksh and Ghous Muhammad, among the notable Hindus apart of the administration, court and army some notables among other were Gulab Singh Dogra, Suchet Singh, Hira Singh, Dina Nath, Ganga Ram, Tej Singh and many more, among the Europeans there were notably four namely Allard, Venture, Court and Avitable who were mainly French and Italian who contributed significantly to the Sikh army and modernized it, among Sikhs there were the Hari Singh Nalwa, Lehna Singh, the Sandhianwala family, Sham Singh and many more.<sup>36</sup> The authors highlight that Ranjit Singh was an open-minded monarch who was open to adopting new methods if they benefited the state and his subjects evidence of this can be witnessed by the language of the court being Persian, at the same time speaking Punjabi as a language and furthermore, it is interesting to note that both the use of the Islamic Calendar and the Hindu Calendar was employed during the reign of Ranjit Singh, such measures speak volumes of the Sikh monarch fashioning his Policies and Conduct keeping in mind the diverse pool of people available in his Kingdom, the authors like the previous work discussed agree that Ranjit Singh's recruitment along diverse religious communities and emphasis on state loyalty and loyalty to him of his subjects were primarily due to threats on all sides of the Sikh empire with the Afghans to the west and British India to the east so therefore, the need to employ men of talent spread across different religious communities and discrimination was excluded out of the equation as the survival of the state itself depended upon cooperation of his subjects, Furthermore, the authors shed light upon the decision of not awarding the death penalty by Ranjit Singh even when his European officers insisted, this shows that even though as a monarch he was powerful he preferred avoiding capital punishment at all costs.<sup>37</sup> The authors also highlight the eye for merit of Ranjit Singh and his ability of rewarding his subordinates when work was done well such as when Ventura was ordered to construct a steamboat with a budget of Rs.40000, he was able to achieve this feat while keeping the cost at a maximum of Rs.2000 and as a result Ranjit Singh rewarded him with the remaining amount of Rs.38000, furthermore, the European Christian named Court serving under Ranjit Singh was promoted to the rank of general within the army with an increase of his salary upon modernization of the Canon department he was rewarded with an annual salary of Rs. 25000, even his European comrade's salary was increased from initially Rs.700 monthly to eventually Rs. 50000 a year, he was known for his administrative capabilities, such instances support the claim that Maharaja Ranjit Singh was not shy of awarding those with merit, these Europeans as claimed by the work previously discussed were subjected to the local traditions and customs of the Sikh empire meaning they were forbidden to smoke, eat beef and were ordered to keep beards and were also encouraged to settle down by way of marriage, in return, their salaries would be duly increased and they would be awarded Jagirs for their services.<sup>38</sup> This work provides fascinating detail onto the contributions of Europeans, their salaries, their journey to the Punjab and how they were appointed to governorships, However, it appears the authors do not mention or discuss the contributions of the Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus along with their salaries and their role in the administration yes the authors lightly touch upon them

but further investigation would be recommended to understand them in a holistic manner, this work's credibility speaks for itself as it employs figures to back up its claims and the use of citations communicate authenticity of the sources cited that have contributed to this study in understanding the Court, Administration and Army employment under Ranjit Singh of various religious communities.

Among the numerous studies consulted the Journal by Indu Banga titled "Formation of a Regional State in Medieval India; a Study of the Punjab under Sikh Rule".<sup>39</sup> It was published in 1982. It focused on viewing Punjab as a regional state attributing its rise due to a gap generated according to the historical conditions of that time such as the decline of the Mughals, invasion of Afghans and the rise of the Sikhs during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, from this point onwards, the author traces the development of the Sikhs from being twelve separate Misl or tribes to one single unified state under Ranjit Singh after which light is shed upon the organization of the state politically and the vassalage system, due to which it was possible to link internal autonomy with political authority externally and this guaranteed that tribute was paid, there was a strong tradition of Vassalage in the hilly areas of Punjab that Ranjit Singh even coined new rajas who could be Sikhs, Pathans or even Rajput's, the author highlights the continuity of the master-vassal relationship system under Ranjit Singh along the same lines as Akbar and in the attempt it was possible to achieve a stronger inner-regional integration in the empire.<sup>40</sup> The author states that primarily the state under Ranjit Singh emphasized continuity from the Mughals in matters of administration at least at the local level in terms of its organization even in the case of the administration of land revenue it is interesting to note that the state patronized all those who kept their land under cultivation and paid their dues on them regardless of their religious community, this policy once again backs the claim that it was state loyalty that mattered most to Ranjit Singh and one religious community was not favored over the other in this regard, this policy also depicts the open-minded nature of Ranjit Singh as he was prepared to continue the already existent Mughal administration structure without the need of innovating a new one in this manner his subjects were also able to adapt quickly in his reign, it is only in the organization of the Military that Ranjit Singh innovated new methods as he understood that a strong and modern army can be advantageous in maintaining and extending control, furthermore, the author highlights the use of the Jagirdari system as payment for service, maintaining an army, as well as rewarding allies, the rewarding of Jagirs in lieu of salaries not only alleviated any financial burden but it also made the subjects being assigned jagirs as mutual beneficiaries in the well-being of the state and in the process ensuring their loyalty due to being a stakeholder in it also Jagirs were assigned to conquered foes for their service this alleviated the need of loss they felt after being defeated, prevented violence and this policy was undertaken regardless of the religion of the defeated foe.<sup>41</sup> It is interesting to note, that even the elite ruling class that took shape under the Sikh monarch consisted of a plethora of diverse individuals from different religions and social classes across Punjab such as the Khatri, Brahmins, Jats who were mainly Sikh, Pathans, Europeans and Syeds, these individuals served in multiple capacities such as courtiers, administrators, advisors, governors and military officers, the author also explores religious grants such as the Dharmarth grants older grants were preserved and new ones were issued under Ranjit Singh to all religious community members, in addition he also

patronized mosques, temples and khanqahs, such Conduct and Policies affirm that Ranjit Singh cared for the religious communities residing in his empire and took initiative to secure the welfare of their sacred places, the idea proposed by the author is that under Ranjit a formation of a Punjabi identity developed regardless of which faith the society members were.<sup>42</sup> However, the author appears to not have mentioned the exact amount of these grants given or some form of evidence showing some accounting of the number of grants issued. Overall, this work provides a new perspective for this study on a Punjabi identity and the formation of a regional state in Punjab under Ranjit Singh along with shedding light on the measures undertaken to secure this Punjabi identity regardless of which religion the subjects are associated with some examples being awarding of Jagirs, awarding of grants and patronage of sacred places and diverse recruitment across all faiths in Punjab.

In order to understand the extent of Patronage carried out by the state under Ranjit Singh the work consulted was a Journal by Meera Nagpal titled “State Patronage to the Secular Groups in the Punjab (Late Eighteenth Early Nineteenth Century)”.<sup>43</sup> It was published in 2011. The work explores the composition of state patronage under Ranjit Singh while acknowledging that a major chunk of the Patronage went to religious classes the specific focus is attributed to the Secular groups which although might belong to a certain faith were mostly patronized due to their contributions through their professions such as bhatts, poets, court historians, mirasis, musicians, painters, rababis, dhadhis, jesters and many more, particular instances are highlighted such in one instance approximately Rs. 8100 rupees was given in Patronage by the state to the mirasis throughout the Sikh empire, there are even recorded instances of grants made on a charitable basis to individuals who were bards professionally and at times some were even rewarded through grants for singing Romantic Ballads such as when a particular bard by the name of Baldu sang the ballad tale of Sassi Punnu, Ranjit Singh rewarded him with a well valued at Rs. 100, furthermore, when Rai Ram Singh created a poem praising Ranjit Singh for a recent conquest, he was rewarded a village valued over Rs.200, on the marriage of his son Kharak Singh the Maharaja distributed Rs 2500 among them and on his own wedding he distributed Rs. 50,000, musicians like Attar Khan were given grants for playing the Sitar by the Sikh monarch, rabab players known as rababis such as Amrika, Mali, Jalla Muhammad Khan and Mansukh were given grants.<sup>44</sup> Dhadhis who were individuals who sang ballads while playing an instrument called dhad are also mentioned to have received grants from Ranjit Singh such as Kharga Das and Jahangiri, who were awarded grants amounting to Rs.100 and Rs.400 respectively, in exchange the expectation was that they would pray for the wellbeing of the Ranjit Singh, what is interesting to note is that patronage was also bestowed about courtesans as well as dancing girls, Court Courtesans such as Zebo, Sahibo and Bashiran were given Jagirs by the Sikh monarch out of which Bashiran was granted a Jagir worth Rs.8000 rupees, among the painters employed by the Lahore court Nikka was given a jagir amounting up to Rs.125, furthermore, even poets were awarded jagirs in the case of court poet Syed Muhammad Hashim he was rewarded with a village as a Jagir by Ranjit Singh, lastly, even Court Historians like Sohan Lal Suri was bestowed with a jagir amounting up to Rs.1000 by the Sikh monarch for his creation of the work History of the Sikhs.<sup>45</sup> these records depicting state patronage of secular

groups belonging to different religions shows that Ranjit Singh valued people from diverse backgrounds as individuals from different religious communities were not only employed in the administration, Court and army but also in secular professions such as Musicians, Historians, Dhadhi players and many more as discussed above. This work was useful for this study in understanding the different categorisation of state patronage along both religious and secular classes. Overall, this work has added to a better understanding of the policies and conduct of Ranjit Singh in regard to both religious communities and secular groups which is interesting to note were also belonging to diverse religious backgrounds.

This study focuses on the policies and conduct of Ranjit Singh toward the religious communities residing in Punjab during his reign. The reason for conducting such a study is that Ranjit Singh has been depicted as a cruel tyrant who was intolerant towards other religious communities during his reign by British sources who more often than not have either created imaginary characters to back up their claims about Ranjit Singh or in books, they have tabled they tend to view the Sikh monarch along oriental lines stereotyping the monarch from their perspective. Furthermore, these British sources have often been written decades after the death of Ranjit Singh and the British officials who were the authors of such sources such as Henry Montgomery Lawrence have never even met Ranjit Singh themselves to construct such an opinion about the monarch which appears to be misguided not to mention that the British have often created imaginary characters such as Colonel Bellasis to discredit rulers or discredit a city such as the character of Kim by Rudyard Kipling looks down upon the walled city of Lahore and portrays the British modern Lahore as superior, such deliberate attempts to stereotype rulers or cities that existed in areas throughout the Subcontinent before the British are often evident. Therefore, it is important to conduct a study to understand the extent to which these sources are correct and analyze when they exaggerate to construct an image that is often not correct. It is necessary, in a bid to understand the Sikh empire and Ranjit Singh to compare both sources which record Ranjit Singh as being benevolent and exemplary in his Policies and Conduct towards religious communities in his rule to bridge the gap in an attempt to construct a clearer view of the nature of these policies and his conduct and by extension of Ranjit Singh himself. This study is significant as it is an attempt to understand a historical figure of the Subcontinent through the analysis of both sources the conquerors of the Kingdom verily, in this case, the British sources and the sources of the conquered which in this case are the sources during the time of Ranjit Singh and Indian sources in general, additionally such a study will also contribute by adding to the already available pools of sources on the topic of Ranjit Singh and his policies and conduct in the context of religious communities during his reign in Punjab.

The Scope of this Study due to a lack of resources and time is limited to focusing specifically on conducting an investigation related to the constructed research questions. In terms of policy, there was no codified religious policy in the time of Ranjit Singh, However, in order to understand his policy related to people of different faiths specific focus has been placed on his Farmaans/Commands issued by his court and his conduct in relation to different faiths residing in his empire. Furthermore, it was not possible to exhaustively analyze each and every

incident in which Ranjit Singh's Conduct or Policies in terms of religious communities can be examined as these are numerous in quantity, and therefore this study is limited to focusing on the specific incidents that lead to answering the research questions being investigated.

This study employs the use of qualitative methods in order to investigate and answer various questions about the policies and conduct of Maharaja Ranjit Singh towards religious communities in the Sikh Empire and questions such as what was the composition of different religious communities in the Court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh or even to understand the conduct of Maharaja Ranjit Singh towards religious locations belonging to different religious communities in the Sikh Empire, it is necessary to employ the use of the qualitative method in order to answer these questions as through the use of Documents and Articles. The data this study employs is in the form of Documents both Primary and Secondary which are qualitative. Since this study is focusing on an issue related to a historical figure such as Ranjit Singh and the aim is to understand the policies and conduct of Ranjit Singh toward religious communities in his empire, therefore the use of documents will be more appropriate than other methods such as interviews, which are irrelevant because individuals directly related to that time period no longer exist. As this study focuses on the 19<sup>th</sup> century, therefore it is essential to analyse and investigate documents related to that certain time period as well as the Articles that explore that certain time period and offer a different perspective.

The documents are collected primarily through the Internet on online databases such as Jstor or Google Scholar as well as Archives in Lahore containing information relevant to the study.

The Primary sources such as Documents aid in understanding the Policies in place as well as the Conduct displayed by Ranjit Singh towards religious communities in Punjab. Furthermore, Primary sources help set the context of these policies and the reasoning behind the Conduct of Ranjit Singh in certain situations toward religious communities in Punjab. Secondary sources such as Articles and Book help understand the figure of Ranjit Singh through different interpretations and will also allow the opportunity to understand how his policies and conduct, in particular, influenced various parts related to Punjabi Society such as the Industry or education system and also aid in answering questions as to why certain policies were put in place by Ranjit Singh or help in understanding the composition of religious communities in the Court, Administration and Army of the Sikh empire during the reign of Ranjit Singh.

This paper will be divided into a total of three sections which in this case are Section 1, Section 2, and Section 3. Section 1 titled “Historical Background” focuses on exploring and discussing the circumstances or factors that led to the rise of Ranjit Singh and the Sikh empire in Punjab while linking this development to the decline of the Mughal central authority, the twelve misls of the Sikhs, and frequent attacks from the Afghans. The purpose of Section 1 is to depict the Background to explain the rise of Ranjit Singh and the formation of his empire in Punjab for the reader to better understand the time context on which this study focuses. Section 2 titled “Instances of Religious Intolerance towards different faiths in the Sikh Empire” aims to discuss the Policies and Conduct of Ranjit

Singh related to the religious communities in his empire. This Section will focus on the numerous Sources which present a negative viewpoint on Ranjit Singh's religious policies and conduct and paint him as an intolerant tyrant to the numerous religious communities residing in his empire. Section 2 discusses and analyses such viewpoints and attempt to evaluate whether or not such views were actually backed by evidence or just claimed with no proof Section 3 titled "Instances of Religious Tolerance towards different faiths in the Sikh Empire" also aims to discuss the Policies and Conduct of Ranjit Singh towards the religious communities in his empire, however, from the perspective of Historians either present during the time of Ranjit Singh working in his court or through Pakistani and Indian Historians who have written about Ranjit Singh, his religious policies and conduct towards the different faiths residing in Punjab during his reign. Section 3 attempts to analyse and assess the claims put forward by Historical Sources and Historians from the Subcontinent and aim to fill the gap where necessary between understanding what actually was and what actually wasn't the man who is often misunderstood to be a tyrant towards religious communities present in his empire in terms of his Policies and Conduct. After these three Sections, the study completes with its Conclusion on Ranjit Singh his religious policies and conduct towards religious groups in his state in which findings of the study generated is discussed and concluded upon and it is stated whether or not Ranjit was Intolerant and implemented *Khalsa Raj* or Open minded in his policies and conduct towards individuals from different faiths in Punjab.

### **Section 1- Historical Background**

During the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the once-powerful Mughal empire began slowly losing its grip on power, and governors rebelled and declared independence. Furthermore, invaders like Nadir Shah, Ahmed Shah Abdali, and Shah Zaman frequently raided the cities and the capital, further weakening it. The Punjab by this point had become a desolate place overrun with frequent invasions and expeditions of Plunder. The Sikhs who are known to be followers of Guru Nanak gradually rose to influence when they gathered under different influential chiefs in the form of the twelve Misls.

These twelve Misls were formed in response to the atrocities committed on the Sikhs by Mughal officials and frequent raids of the Afghan ruler Ahmed Shah Abdali. Some of the more prominent Misls among the twelve were Sukerchakia, Bhangi, Kanhaiya, and Nakkai They divided Punjab amongst themselves, meaning that each Misl administered a certain area of the province. These Misls would fight together in times of danger but would disperse in their respective administrative zones once the threat was abated, however, the chiefs of these Misls when not resisting a common rival had their own jealousies and conflicts which would hamper their progress as a collective unit. The Sikhs were in need of a figure who would be able to unite them, such an individual arose among them in Ranjit Singh.<sup>46</sup>

Ranjit Singh was born in Gujranwala in 1780 to the Sukerchakia Misl Chief Maha Singh. Ranjit Singh was married to Mahtub Kaur of the Kanhaiya Misl at the age of Six, this marriage took place upon the insistence of Sada Kaur who as

the mother-in-law assisted Ranjit Singh as an ally for numerous years. After the death of Maha Singh, Ranjit Singh became the head of the Sukerchakias at twelve years old, until the age of eighteen when he formalized his control of his Misl, he was guided by Sada Kaur and Dewan Lakhpat Rai.<sup>47</sup>

In 1799 Maharaja Ranjit Singh entered Lahore and assumed its control upon invitation of its citizens who wrote him a letter to free them of the oppressive Bhangi rulers with which largely the citizens of Lahore were unhappy, interestingly, in the letter inviting Ranjit Singh to take over Lahore a total of five Muslims, two Sikhs and a number of Hindus were its signatories this shows that even minorities such as the Muslims at that time held Ranjit Singh in High regard.<sup>48</sup> The Muslims in Lahore welcomed the arrival of Ranjit Singh and celebrated, in reciprocation, the first stop of the Sikh monarch upon entering the City was the Badshahi Mosque where he paid his respects, this is one of the few instances where a bloodless entry was made into a city, upon successful consolidation of his control, he declared all loans over the people of the city to be null and void and furthermore it was the state that took on the burden, furthermore, he consulted the Muslim family of the Fakirs of Bazaar Hakeeman to conduct his affairs in Lahore.<sup>49</sup>

It is from this point onwards that Ranjit Singh went on to establish an empire in the Punjab which lasted from 1799 to 1849 a period of 50 years almost. Ranjit Singh's Court, Army and Administration was composed of individuals of different faiths and cultures such as Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and European officers which in itself is a testament to his lack of narrow-mindedness in terms of recruitment. Ranjit Singh was aware of the threats that engulfed his empire in the West which were the Afghans and in the East which were the British East India Company, this inculcated the need for state loyalty above all else regardless of the faith which an individual may belong, furthermore, Ranjit Singh's non-discriminatory conduct can be seen upon employing all capable men in his service regardless of their religion, his employment of European officers to modernize the Sikh army is an example of this attitude, this depicts the Sikh monarch was willing to be flexible in his approach towards suggestion in military matters from individuals belonging to different faiths and cultures especially when it involved the preservation of the state. Ranjit Singh's decision to continue with Persian as the official language of the state which was the official language of the Court under the Mughals as well is a testament to his farsightedness in changing the language of the Court at a time when the empire was under threat can be a dangerous move so in continuing with Persian, Ranjit Singh not only secured the future of the Sikh empire but in the process facilitated the citizens of different faiths such as Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs who were already used to Persian as the language of Court and Protocol.<sup>50</sup>

## **Section 2- Khalsa Raj and Instances of Religious Intolerance towards different faiths in the Sikh Empire**

Ranjit Singh has been accused of being Intolerant towards his subjects, particularly the Muslims and his rule in Punjab was a theocratic rule of *Khalsa* consisted and based on Sikhism ideology and power . There have been claims of Instances where mosques have been desecrated or converted into stables, shrines have been assaulted, and Mosques being converted into Gurdwaras. Ranjit Singh



being far from perfect did commit a few of these crimes, upon coming into power it is claimed that he seized the Sonehri Mosque also known as the Golden Mosque in Lahore, and a section of his army known as the Akalis desecrated this mosque with cow dung and later on converted it into a Gurdwara, it is reported the after repeated attempts by the Muslims to ask Ranjit Singh to return this mosque to them, Ranjit agreed to do so only after the Muslims promised to pay the rental cost of the bazaar nearby to him and upon agreement that they would conduct the call to prayer in a quiet manner.<sup>51</sup> The rationale provided in asking the Muslims to conduct their prayer in a low volume or not at all is largely due to the fanatic Akali Sikhs who were extremists and the call to prayer would cause them to erupt in anger and cause harm to Muslims, so it is claimed this step was necessary to take.<sup>52</sup>

It is reported that the Akali Sikhs were extremist to such an extent that while even serving under Ranjit Singh they would mount insults upon him even while he would be passing by them, furthermore, more than on one occasion they had also tried to assassinate Ranjit Singh it is interesting to note that the Sikh monarch would ignore their insults and would only punish them if they commit a crime.<sup>53</sup>

The behaviour of the Akalis might be one of the reasons Maharaja Ranjit Singh might have asked the Muslims to pray at a low volume to prevent unnecessary conduct from the Akali Sikhs that might have ended in violence. In another instance, it is claimed that Ranjit Singh, after taking control of the Citadel of Lahore, also damaged the Badshahi mosque and deployed it to be used as a stable for his horses and an ammunition depot.<sup>54</sup> However, it appears the claim that the Badshahi mosque was used as a stable or an ammunition depot might not be true because, in a particular incident on the religious occasion of Eid, Ranjit Singh instructed influential religious figures such as Qazi Faqirullah to issue a fatwa to urge Muslims to come pray at the Badshahi Mosque on Eid, in addition to which to quell the threat of the Akali Sikhs the Sikh monarch instructed one of his officials to provide security on every street and by-lane and to report to him immediately if any form of violence or disruption took place.<sup>55</sup>

It is claimed that the Sikh Monarch was Selfish in increasing his power and influence to such an extent that it appears he went against the members of his own faith Sikhism as well by systematically being intolerant towards key figures and taking over their estates and possession such as in the case of Fateh Singh of Kapurthala, after publicly demonstrating brotherhood with him proceeded to annex his assets, even when his celebrated general Hari Singh Nalwa perished on the field of battle it is claimed that since Ranjit Singh was against the idea of the wealth being inherited so the Sikh monarch seized all large properties of Hari Singh Nalwa in the process leaving his sons subject to poverty.<sup>56</sup>

It is claimed that Ranjit Singh was an opportunist who took advantage whenever it was a favorable instance for him to cement his authority, for this it appears that he would bestow large amounts of money and gifts to several religious institutions and priests when it was convenient for him, additionally, by employing Brahmans in his service it is asserted that he went against the teachings of his own religions Guru Govind Singh who forbade employing them.<sup>57</sup> It is claimed that he often spared his enemies after conquering their territory however,

this appears to not be the case as when after multiple attempts Ranjit Singh finally took over the city of Multan he not only slaughtered its Muslims Governor as it is asserted but also proceeded to eliminate any potential threats by condemning the sons of the governor to their deaths.<sup>58</sup> This appears to be contradictory to accounts of him never sentencing someone to death, However, it must be observed that circumstances during battles are different when it is possible for slaughter to take place. What is more interesting to note is that this account of slaughtering the Governor of Multan and his sons is provided by the British agent Henry Montgomery who goes on to create a fictional character by the name of Colonel Bellasis based in 1830 entering into the service of Ranjit Singh while Henry Montgomery entered Lahore in 1846 almost seven years after the death of Ranjit Singh such fictional accounts generates a degree of skepticism regarding the claims made by Colonel Bellasis about Ranjit Singh. It is interesting to note, contradictory to the assertion made earlier, it is also stated that Ranjit Singh most often provided for the families of his defeated enemies.<sup>59</sup> It is correct that Ranjit Singh did indeed cause damage to certain Shrines and Mosques, However, unlike many rulers, once he realized these mistakes, he almost immediately resorted to correcting them. An incident related to Data Darbar in Lahore is noted, when Ranjit Singh oversaw the desecration of the outer Madrassah of Data Darbar for its unique marble, after a day of its removal, it is claimed that The Maharaja became ill and started to vomit, upon consultation according to one account he was advised that the root of his illness was the saint being displeased due to his desecration of the marble of the Madrassah, upon realizing this, Ranjit Singh not only ordered it to be repaired but also started to finance its maintenance and upkeep annually until his death and on occasions when he would be passing nearby the shrine it is claimed that he would stop and pay his respects before proceeding onwards.<sup>60</sup> On another instance, in 1799 Ranjit Singh along with his courtesan Moran came to the Wazir Khan mosque and spent an entire day drinking in the mosque, the grave of the Saint Syed Ishaq Gardoni is in this mosque, so it is reported that Ranjit Singh fell ill that very evening and upon consultation he was advised that the saint was displeased due to his conduct in the mosque it is reported that the very next morning the Maharaja realizing his mistake asked for forgiveness at the grave of the Saint and donated 500 Rupees to its maintainer along with setting an annual financial tribute for the maintenance of the Saints grave.<sup>61</sup> Incidents like this communicate that although Ranjit Singh made mistakes that disrespected certain faiths, however, upon realization, he would prudently work to make up for them and over the years the Sikh ruler can be seen to only grow from the experience and as a result become more conscious in respecting the different faiths in his empire.

### **Section 3- Instances of Religious Tolerance towards different faiths in the Sikh Empire**

Ranjit Singh ruled Punjab for approximately 40 years. The extent to which Ranjit Singh was a religiously tolerant ruler can be gauged by the fact that it was among many other faiths Muslims who requested Ranjit Singh to come liberate Lahore from the oppressive Bhangi rulers, this means that the Muslims and Hindus of Lahore had heard of Ranjit Singh or had thought of him as being a religiously tolerant ruler and therefore judged him to be more favorable for themselves even

though Ranjit Singh was a Sikh.<sup>62</sup> This was an empire consisting of numerous religious communities namely the Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and European Christian officers. Punjab's demographic composition allowed Ranjit Singh to include Muslims and Hindus in his court and army with the Muslims making around 50 percent and Hindus consisting of 42 percent while the Sikhs themselves only made-up 7 percent of the total demographic composition of the Punjab.<sup>63</sup>

The recruitment of Muslim and Hindu courtiers and officers in his court and army along with the Sikh recruits showcase Ranjit Singh's willingness to incorporate them into the running of the state regardless of their religion for the Sikh Maharaja the survival and prosperity of the empire was more important than which faith an individual belonged. Ranjit Singh was mature enough to realize that the smooth running of his empire would require the support of the Muslim and Hindu locals, who were in the majority.

In order to effectively evaluate the religious tolerance of Ranjit Singh in relation to different religious communities in Punjab it is necessary to examine both the religious policies and conduct of Maharaja Ranjit Singh across several parameters which in this case are the composition of different religious communities in the court and army of Ranjit Singh, the types of grants awarded to religious communities in the Sikh empire, the treatment of religious places of worship belonging to different religious communities, the role of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in promoting education among different religious communities and the instances where Ranjit Singh patronized the religious communities in his empire. These parameters will help establish to a certain extent the length to which Ranjit Singh actually was tolerant in terms of religious policy and conduct towards the religious communities residing in the Punjab during his rule.

It is important to consider the composition of religious communities in the court and army of Ranjit Singh. These courtiers and army officers from different religious communities have been divided into Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and European Christians for clarity. Ranjit Singh recruited Muslims into this court and army. Among others, the most famous Muslims that were recruited into the court of Ranjit Singh were the Faqir brother namely Aziz Uddin, Noor Uddin, and Imam Uddin. Faqir Aziz Uddin was the most prominent among the brothers he was an Hakim by profession but gradually arose to become the foreign minister of the Sikh empire as well as an advisor to Ranjit Singh who would consult Faqir Aziz Uddin before taking a decision a significant decision, furthermore, on various occasions he also was called upon to military service and served diligently, Faqir Imam Uddin served in numerous positions both in governance and the military, Faqir Noor Uddin also served under Ranjit Singh in multiple positions such as a physician, home minister, maintainer of the royal gardens such as the Shalimar Garden and many more.<sup>64</sup> Sultan Mahmood and Elahi Bakhsh are two of the famous Muslim generals who served in the army of Ranjit Singh, Elahi Bakhsh was an expert in handling artillery, apart from these two famous Muslim generals many other Muslims served in the army such as in the cavalry of the European General Allard, some of which even participated in the campaign to capture Kabul by gathering at the city of Peshawar under the leadership of another Muslim colonel called Sheikh Basawan.<sup>65</sup> Another Muslim general that served under Ranjit Singh was Ghous Muhammad Khan, he participated in many campaigns of

Ranjit Singh, he was appointed as an artillery officer in charge of maintaining two artillery depots namely Topkhana Mubarak and Topkhana Khas, his son Mahmud Khan also served in the Sikh army in the artillery regiment, Imam Shah another Muslim served in the Sikh army as a Colonel and contributed by taking part in numerous campaigns under the Sikh ruler, Furthermore, in an administrative capacity Diwan Lakkhi Mall was appointed with the task of governing Dera Ismail Khan and Bannu.<sup>66</sup>

The appointment of Muslims into his court and army portrays that Ranjit Singh was willing and able to include Muslims into the day to day running of the Sikh empire. He did not discriminate by not appointing them to positions of service but in fact their recruitment displays open-mindedness in terms of religion in the policy and conduct of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

One cannot be claimed as tolerant or open-minded if other religious communities are not considered. Hindus were also inducted into the service of Ranjit Singh both in the Court and in the Sikh army. The Dogra brothers namely Dhian Singh, Gulab Singh, and Suchet Singh were the most famous of Hindus working in the service of the Sikh Ruler. The Dogra brothers arose to become the most influential group in the Court of Ranjit Singh, among the three brothers, Dhian Singh rose to serve as the prime minister under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, while his brothers also served in high positions in the service of Ranjit Singh, the nature of their influence can be gauged from the fact that the title of Raja was bestowed upon all three of the brothers and the son of Dhian Singh named Hira Singh was conferred with the title of Farzand-e-Khas or special son by Ranjit Singh. Among other Hindus groups employed in the service of Maharaja Ranjit Singh Gurkhas were also enlisted in the army notable Gurkha army men namely Amar Singh Thapa who served as a general in the Sikh Army and his two sons Arjan Singh Thapa and Bhupal Singh also were serving in the army under Ranjit Singh, furthermore, Hindus were also employed in the administration of the Sikh state by Ranjit Singh, in particular the revenue and finance system of the state spearheaded by the likes of capable Hindu Administrators such as Diwan Bhawani Das, Diwan Dina Nath, Misr Beli Ram and Diwan Ganga Ram. Diwan Bhawani Das was a financial expert employed by the court, Diwan Dina Nath worked as an administrator who was well renowned and diligently served the court under Ranjit Singh. Misr Beli Ram was appointed in charge of the treasury.<sup>67</sup> Hindus were also employed in the Sikh army such as Misr Diwan Chand who served as a general under Maharaja Ranjit Singh and also took part in the campaigns related to Kashmir as well as Multan, Another Hindu known as Diwan Dhanpat Rai served in numerous capacities the most notable of which was the commandship of the army under Kharak Singh. A Brahmin Pandit by the name of Tal Kaul also served in the Sikh army and participate in the Kashmir campaign, later on was also appointed as a governor to the city of Multan by Ranjit Singh, the most notable Hindu official who was appointed in Multan as governor by Ranjit Singh was Diwan Sawan Mall who worked diligently in the city to ensure an increase in productivity in agriculture, industry, trade and even law and order of the city improved under Diwan Sawan Mall.<sup>68</sup>

The inclusion of Hindus and Muslims in the court and army lays testament to Ranjit Singh implementing Policy of recruitment towards multiple religions in his

empire. However, where the matter concerning religious tolerance is concerned it is important to explore the extent to which his own community namely the Sikhs were involved in the court and army which allowed the running of the Sikh empire in an effective manner. Among the Sikhs the families like the Majithias, Ahluwalias and Sandhanwalias stood out for their contributions to the Sikh state. Furthermore, among the famous Military generals and officers' men of note such as Hari Singh Nalwa, Sham Singh Atarivala and Lehna Singh Majithia stood out and were among the Sikhs the most capable and trusted in the army, Lehna Singh Majithia was a capable administrator who was tasked by Ranjit Singh to run an armament factory and he ran it efficiently as he also had knowledge of mechanics, Hari Singh Nalwa was appointed initially as a personal attendant by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, However he gradually arose across both lines as a general and as a governor, under Ranjit Singh, he was tasked with the governorship of Hazara, Peshawar and Kashmir in different time periods, among other Sikhs the father of Lehna Singh Majithia was recruited in the Sikh army by Ranjit Singh and fought several military expeditions such as in Kashmir, Multan and Kangra and was even appointed as governor of Kangra and Hill districts, additionally, prominent notables among the Sikhs were Sirdar Fateh Singh Kalianwala and Sardar Nihal Singh Attariwala who served in the Sikh army from 1801 to 1817 under Ranjit Singh, other Sikh officers in the army were General Zorawar Singh, Dhanna Singh Malvai, Mihan Singh, Fateh Singh Ahluwalia and many more who loyally served the state.<sup>69</sup> Apart from Hari Singh Nalwa being assigned as governor of Peshawar, another influential Sikh known as Desa Singh Majithia was appointed as governor of Amritsar and of Jalandhar Doab.<sup>70</sup>

This examination of the recruitment in the court and army was an analysis of the primary religious communities which resided in the Sikh empire during the rule of Ranjit Singh. However, in order to ascertain how much of an open-minded or religiously tolerant ruler an individual is, it is necessary to examine the recruitment of European Christian officers who were enlisted in the Sikh army from 1822 onwards. Two European Christian military officers who had served in the army of Napoleon Bonaparte, after his fall had arrived at the court of Ranjit Singh to seek employment. These two officers were namely the French general Allard and the Italian general Ventura. Before inducting them into his service Ranjit Singh made sure they were properly confirmed to not be spies, afterwards, on the insistence of Faqir Aziz Uddin they were incorporated into the Sikh Army.<sup>71</sup> This particular incident shows how highly the opinion of Faqir Aziz Uddin was valued by Maharaja Ranjit Singh despite him being a Muslim, this incident also shows that Ranjit Singh was open-minded enough to listen to capable men regardless of religion. These two Europeans officers facilitated the modernization of the Sikh army and taught them how to fight according to European methods of war which revolutionized the Khalsa army. Furthermore, a Prussian officer by the name of M. Mevius was also inducted into the Sikh army and was tasked to train a regiment of the Sikh army, it was four years later another group of European Christians namely General Court and General Avitabile came into the service of Ranjit Singh on the recommendation of General Allard and Ventura.<sup>72</sup>

These European Christian Officers that came into the service of Ranjit Singh were eventually made the head of a brigade or a division in the Sikh army in return they were required to respect the local religious beliefs of the citizens of the Sikh empire such as they were not allowed to shave their beards, they were not permitted to smoke tobacco and not to eat cow meat.<sup>73</sup> This is interesting to note that in encouraging the European Christians to adhere to the local religious beliefs of the people Ranjit Singh is not only taking into account the benefit the Sikh army would receive from the acumen of the European Christian officers but is also taking into consideration and respecting the religious beliefs of namely the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs.

In order to evaluate effectively how the policies and conduct of Ranjit Singh effected different religious communities in the Sikh empire, it is important to examine the types of grants awarded to various religious communities. Ranjit Singh is known to have on several occasions awarded religious and charitable grants to different religious communities in the territories under his control and in those that were newly inducted into the Sikh empire. These religious grants were also referred to as dharmarth grants. In the areas that were newly inducted Ranjit Singh would establish the continuance of the existing grants that were set by the conquered rulers and in addition would add new ones of his own to all religious communities presiding in his empire, this meant that religious places of worship such as mosques, shrines, not only continued to receive these financial religious grants for their maintenance and upkeep but various religious castes such as Syed, Brahmans, and Sheikhs were extended the same privilege often getting new religious grants in revenue and cash form awarded to them in addition to the previous grants.<sup>74</sup>

Ranjit Singh issued an order related to these dharmarth grants to his revenue or tax collecting officers to not demand tax from those granted these religious grants as in the eyes of the Sikh monarch these grantees were to be respected and revered, in return for this tax waiver these grantees were encouraged to offer prayers in their respective place of worship for the wellbeing of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.<sup>75</sup> This tax/revenue waiver depicts the extent to which Ranjit Singh was willing to accommodate the different religious groups during his reign in terms of policy as can be seen with the instructions regarding the grantees of the dharmarth grants given to the revenue collection officers. An interesting aspect to note is that these religious grants were made hereditary by Ranjit Singh this was despite the fact that the previous grants made by the conquered rulers were not made hereditary, this meant that the progeny of the dharmarth grant recipient could inherit it in the process ensuring that generational financial grants were guaranteed for the maintenance of religious places of worship and for various religious castes.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, in cases when the revenue officials wrongly resumed lands and collected cash that was originally for the dharmarth grantees Ranjit Singh ensured that these lands or cash was returned to them and would demand a receipt from the grantees to confirm whether or not their land or cash has been returned to them.<sup>77</sup> Such instances prove that Ranjit Singh kept a vigilant watch on upholding the rights and welfare of different religious communities in his empire and also ensured that any policy which in this case is that of the religious grants were duly granted to the respective grantees regardless of their religion and if they were

wronged by the revenue officials or jaghirdar swift action was taken by Ranjit Singh to administer justice.

The treatment of religious places of worship and conduct towards religious festivals is a parameter which is important to explore as it helps to evaluate how open minded or religiously tolerant the ruler is. Ranjit Singh is known to have financed the maintenance and upkeep of numerous religious places of worship of different religious communities residing in the Sikh empire, at the same time, he also would donate money to these places of worship on auspicious occasions or during religious festivals such as Holi and Eid. Ranjit Singh ensured that when religious festivals were about to arrive preparations were taken accordingly beforehand such as on one instance when the festival of Holi was approaching Ranjit Singh issued letters to the officials of various cities such as Lahore and others and ordered them to urgently prepare the necessary requirements as it was fast approaching so that people could celebrate with ease.<sup>78</sup>

Being a Sikh himself for Ranjit Singh to undertake great urgency to celebrate a religious festival alien to his own religion shows that the Sikh ruler was aware of his responsibilities in a position of authority and respected the numerous religious faiths residing in Punjab. Once religious festivals arrived it was ensured that they were celebrated pompously as when Holi arrived all his officials participated in the celebrations as well as in the lac-dye game of colours, furthermore, everyone was granted a reward on the day of Holi and Ranjit Singh distributed alms and cash such as gold utensils, land grants Pashmina suits, cows and large amounts of cash among not only Brahmins but also to those that deserved them such as needy.<sup>79</sup>

Dussehra was also celebrated by Ranjit Singh and his officials along with the people on one occasion it was celebrated at Tang village near the city of Amritsar during which effigies of the characters from the epic of Ramayana were installed and an act depicting the conquest of Lanka and Ram's victory over evil would be performed paying homage to the religious event, furthermore, on another instance Holi was celebrated in 1832 under Ranjit Singh from March 15th to March 17<sup>th</sup>, the Sikh ruler ordered Rupees 500 to be given every day for the preparations of the event of Holi festivities to be held that year at the garden of Shah Bilawal in Lahore, Afterwards a Darbar was held at the garden of Chota Ram also in Lahore where the officials, as well as dignitaries, were invited to take part in the celebrations of Holi, upon conclusion of which the dignitaries were rewarded robes of honor.<sup>80</sup>

Basant which is a Hindu festival dedicated to the worship of Sarasvati the goddess and also celebrating the arrival of spring would be celebrated at the Mausoleum of Madho Lal Hussain in Lahore, furthermore, the officials and the army would be ordered to wear yellow in respect of the festival of Basant, the Maharaja would perform ablutions and after inspection of the troops clad in yellow would proceed to enjoy the fair of Basant.<sup>81</sup> When it came to his own religion Sikhism the Sikh monarch would perform his religious duties diligently. On one occasion Ranjit Singh donated ten cows, a tin of ghee, one roll of red cloth, and some muradi cloth to the Brahmans in charity.<sup>82</sup>

He held the Holy book of Sikhism the Guru Granth Sahib in special reverence he would listen to its recitation daily and would also consult the Granth Sahib before taking important decisions and when in trouble hoping to receive divine guidance. Ranjit Singh would regularly visit sacred baths such as at Taran Taran, Harmandir Sahib and at many other Holy places, he went to Amritsar on the day of Maghi for a sacred bath and donated money and possessions and then he went to Taran Taran and financed the construction of stairs of the sacred bath with approximately a few thousands of rupees.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, on the Sankrant day of Baisakh Ranjit Singh in 1831 visited the Darbar Sahib in Amritsar and donated there, after which he went to Dukh Bhanjani Sahib gave away alms and charity up to Rs.50,000.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, on another occasion of Sankrant of Baisakh Ranjit Singh gave away around 8 pitchers of gold in charity and an amount 15,000 thousand in total in cash were assigned for the performance of Sankrant.<sup>85</sup> There are also instances when Maharaja Ranjit Singh visited shrines and even financed their maintenance or donated to charity at the premises. One such shrine is that of Chajju Bhagat also known as Chajju da Chaubara which Ranjit Singh used to frequent regularly on one such visit Ranjit Singh made an offering of Rs. 100 and gave a Pashmina coat and Rs. 300 to Dwarka Dass Fakir, along with Rs.1 or Rs.2 to every Fakir or Sadhu nearby.<sup>86</sup>

Ranjit Singh also paid attention to Muslim mosques and Shrines by restoring them and financing their maintenance and upkeep. Among the numerous mosques and shrines, he helped to maintain or finance the Shrine of Data Ganj Baksh Ali Hujwari also known as Data Sahib is the most well-known, he financed the construction of the outer boundary wall of the Shrine.<sup>87</sup> Interestingly the Maharaja had a list of Muslim Mosques, Shrines, Scholars, fakirs to whom he gave jagirs/land, grants and donations, the most notable after Data Sahib Shrine was Shrine of Baba Farid Saidan Shah, Shrine of Madho Lal Hussain and the Shrine of Abu-al-Muali, the custodians of the Data Sahib Shrine received annually Rs.1000 and in addition to this wells and land, interestingly when the British came this was reduced the cash grant was reduced to Rs.100.<sup>88</sup>

Ranjit Singh used to visit Muslim Shrines on a regular basis like the Shrine of Hazrat Syed Yaqoob Zanjani was visited by him, furthermore, he also visited the Shrine of Baba Farid and increased land and cash grants attached to the Shrine under the Supervision of the Custodians of the Shrines also known as Sajjada nashins, Ranjit Singh also donated to the Shrine of Abu Ishaq around 3.5 acres of land, the shrine of Bibi Pak Daman received a huge amount of land, the monastery of Hazrat Moj Darya was given Rs.40 on a monthly basis these among other shrines continued to receive cash and land grants from Ranjit Singh, he also allocated Rs.15,000 in Lahore for the repair of mosques.<sup>89</sup>

It is interesting to note that during the rule of Ranjit Singh Muslim notables such as the Ulema and Syeds were exempt from tax and among conquering Peshawar the grants of the Syeds and Ulema residing in the city were continued and not stopped. Furthermore, it is reported that on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1839, Ranjit Singh also visited the shrine of Hazrat Mian Mir, the famous Muslim Saint associated with the brother of Aurangzeb, Dara Shikoh.<sup>90</sup>



The Conduct of Ranjit Singh towards the treatment of religious places of worship along with religious festivals of different faiths in the Sikh empire depicts a ruler who was deeply concerned about the wellbeing of his subjects regardless of the faith they belonged and made an effort in respecting their beliefs as well as ensuring their welfare during his rule.

Apart from the offering of grants to religious categories such as Brahmins, Syeds and Ulema, the conduct of Ranjit Singh towards his subjects was not only limited to these religious categories alone but the patronage of the Sikh ruler extended to various other classes belonging to different faiths such as the Bhattas, the musicians, the poets, the historians, courtesans, wrestlers, scholars, rababis and mimics, although in the case of Bards charitable grants were made for being a bard, however, on certain instances some would be issued financial grants for the composition of ballads such as in one case when a Hindu Ballad called Baldu composed the ballad of the famous Sassi Punnu through song he was granted Rs.100.<sup>91</sup> on another occasion a village valued around Rs.200 was granted to the Hindi Poet Rai Ram Singh who created a poem praising Maharaja Ranjit Singh for a conquest, furthermore, even musicians were allocated grants such as in the case of the Muslim musician Attar Khan was given grants for playing a musical instrument known as the Sitar and other Muslim musicians such as Imam Buksh, Bhai Baba and Ghulam Hussain were given cash grants for their singing ability.<sup>92</sup>

Among the Poets and Historians of the Court, Syed Muhammad Hashim the court poet was granted a village as a Jagir, and the court Historian Sohan Lal was also awarded a jagir amounting to Rs.1000 for writing a book covering the history of the Sikhs.<sup>93</sup>

The analysis of the religious policies and conduct of Ranjit Singh towards different religious communities residing in his empire cannot be effectively understood until there is a focus on the role of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in promoting education among religious communities in the Sikh empire. Education is important for every state and the manner in which the state administers its educational aims speaks volumes about how religiously tolerant it might be. In this case, Ranjit Singh financed and gave grants to schools belonging to different religious communities. It is estimated that during his reign Punjab had around four thousand schools, in addition to which, religious education was free for everyone, furthermore, what is interesting to note is that every place of worship such as a Gurdwara, mosque, or temple had a school alongside it which was responsible for imparting religious education to its students, Interestingly Madrassahs and schools run by Muslims worked well and had to face no restrictions from the state this communicates the religious freedom which Muslims enjoyed under Ranjit Singh in terms of religious education as well.<sup>94</sup>

Despite Persian being the official language these schools there existed schools which were open to all regardless of the religion that one belonged and these schools taught languages in addition to Persian such as Gurmukhi, Urdu, Arabic and Hindi which were key to understanding religious texts and also for securing employment, this depicts the religious tolerance of Ranjit Singh and the respect he held for other religions if he had wanted to place Gurmukhi instead of

Persian he could have but he was far-sighted enough to understand that Persian being the language of court since Mughal times could be beneficial for the growth of the state while letting other languages exist and providing patronage for them being taught in these schools so that the citizens of the Kingdom belonging to different faiths could observe their religious obligations and secure employment.<sup>95</sup>

Muslim men and women ran these schools the syllabus of such schools contained reading the letters of Abul Fazal and the Sikandar Nama of Nizami so it can be observed that under Sikh rule Muslim teachers were also not restricted from teaching their preferred literature to students in these schools, Ranjit Singh had a keen eye for scholarship even though he himself was illiterate in one instance he invited Dubir-ud-Doulah, the grandfather of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan due to his expertise in economics as well as mathematics. However, he declined on account of illness.<sup>96</sup> There were five different types of schools operating during the rule of Ranjit Singh the first being known as Maktabhs which were Persian schools open for all, the second was the Madrasahs which were mainly Arabic schools with grades ranging from Primary to Higher modes of education, the third were the Patshalas which were mainly for Hindus but taught Sanskrit and were open to all regardless of religion, the fourth was Gurmukhi Schools for Sikh students and the fifth were schools known as Mahajani which taught economics and commerce, these schools often received grants in land and financial support for their maintenance.<sup>97</sup>

It is also important to highlight the famous schools in Lahore run under Muslim administration during the rule of Ranjit Singh. There were in total four most prominent Madrasahs the first being run by Khalifa Ghulam Rasool in the mosque of Mooran, the second Madrasah was run in Noor Iman Masjid, the third madrasah school was run in Masjid Khurasian and the fourth Madrasah school was run in the Fakir Khana of the Fakir brothers.<sup>98</sup>

In the realm of education Maharaja Ranjit Singh contributed significantly to improving and encouraging education of all religious schools during his rule. One of his most innovative methods of educating people was known as the Quaida Noor which was devised by Fakir Nuruddin under the command of Ranjit Singh, it was a booklet that helped the student to learn to read and write the basics of important languages such as Urdu, Persian, Punjabi and many more, around 5000 copies of the Quaida Noor were distributed among the heads of villages all over Punjab.<sup>99</sup> The devising of such a booklet promoting the reading and writing of so many languages was an attempt by Ranjit Singh to encourage students to learn languages for both the purpose of religious worship of their respective religions as well as gaining employment. This depicts the far sightedness of Ranjit Singh and also communicates the religious policies and conduct of Ranjit Singh towards different religious communities during his rule in a holistic light.

## **Conclusion**

Ranjit Singh ruled over Punjab from 1799 when Lahore was conquered until his death in 1839 a period of almost 40 years. Ranjit Singh inherited a land which composed of different religious communities namely the Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus

and European Christians. He ruled over his people keeping in mind their welfare regardless of religion. He ensured that he appointed capable men in key positions in his court and army from different faiths. Ranjit Singh granted religious grants also known as dharmarth grants to various religious communities. The Sikh monarch ensured that his conduct was respectful towards religious sites such as mosques, temple, and Gurdwaras and Shrines, there have also been instances where he financed their maintenance and gave them grants ensuring their continuity. Similarly, religious communities/castes were also patronized such as Brahmans, Syeds and Ulemas, in certain instances they were also exempted from the payment of tax. Ranjit Singh promoted education across several religious communities such as the establishment of different schools belonging to Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs such as Madrassahs, Patshalas and Gurmukhi schools. Despite Persian being the official language different languages were permitted to be taught in schools such as Urdu, Arabic, Hindi, Gurmukhi and more.

There have been a few instances where Ranjit Singh may have wavered in his conduct towards religious sites such as the desecration of Datab Darbars outer wall, however in such instances, Ranjit Singh despite making such mistakes would immediately realize his mistakes and take prudent actions to correct such as in the case of the desecration of Data Darbars outer wall Ranjit Singh not only repaired it but continued to finance the maintenance of the Shrine until his death. The Sikh monarch was a figure who indeed did commit mistakes but was quick to correct them and prevent such mistakes from being repeated later on.

Keeping in view the parameters discussed in the paper has led to the conclusion that Ranjit Singh was a religiously tolerant ruler both in terms of Policy and Conduct towards the citizens of his empire. This paper adds to the already extensive amount of literature available on Ranjit Singh. However, in terms of his Religious Policy and Conduct toward different religious communities in his empire, there are fewer studies present. The reason this paper was written was to clarify upon the misinformation regarding the role of Ranjit Singh in promoting religious tolerance during his rule.

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