

Modernising Governance: Insights from Maharaja Ranjeet Singh's Administration

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Abstract

The study of the civil administration under Maharaja Ranjeet Singh is the main object of this paper. Fundamental rights and a pluralistic society characterised by the value of secularism are the main components of the Maharaja's civil administration. A very efficient administration was given to the people and even minute points regarding administration received his attention. He reorganised the whole structure of the civil administration and introduced many new Daftar (Institutions). He created a well-organised state based on the support of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims alike. The overall structure of civil administration and its nature are analysed. A historical, analytical, and comparative approach is adopted. Another object of this paper is to analyse Maharaja Ranjeet Singh as a Punjabi statesman and his revolutionary humanistic philosophy through which he brought an atmosphere of peaceful co-existence of all faiths, ensuring all the fundamental rights to freedom of conscience.

Keywords: Maharaja Ranjeet Singh, Punjab, Sikhs, administration, Sher-e-Punjab.

Mahan Singh, the father of the Ranjeet Singh, was the head of the Sukerchakia Misl. He was the only son of Mahan Singh Sukerchakia and Raj Kaur, given the name Ranjeet Singh means victor in battle. He was six years old when he lost sight in his left eye to smallpox. He didn't get a formal education in school and cannot read or write.¹ He was only ten when he lost his father and was too young to run his Misl's

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¹ Narendra Krishna Sinha, *Ranjeet Singh* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1933), 4.

administration and hold his father's state. So his mother was practically administering the state affairs with Lakhpat Rai's help, holding the post of Diwan during his father's time. Ranjeet Singh tied the knot with Mehtab Kaur of Kahnaiya Misl. These connections with Kahnaiya Misl gave Ranjeet Singh a significant edge to Ranjeet Singh in his later struggle. His mother-in-law gave much support to Ranjeet Singh in his early career and his battles and conquests. When Ranjeet Singh grew old and was seventeen or eighteen years old, he started looking after all the state affairs. Now Ranjeet Singh began to unify the different sections, which were previously divided. To fulfil his purpose, he entered into a matrimonial alliance with Kahnaiyas as well as Nakkais. He also consolidates his power through a coalition with Fateh Singh Ahluwalia. These were the strongest misls of Sikhs and now stand with Ranjeet Singh.²

At that time, there was triple ownership of the city as Chet Singh, Sahab Singh, and Mohar Singh were the rulers of Lahore. The oppressive nature of that combined government also provides the ground for the success of Ranjeet Singh.³ On the other side, Ranjeet Singh got the invitation to attack Lahore from some noble citizens, as Mian Badruddin, a Choudhary of Lahore, was imprisoned by Chet Singh, one of the rulers of Lahore.⁴ A delegation was sent by some prominent citizens to Chet Singh for the release of Mian Baddruddin, but remained to fail. After that, they invited Ranjeet Singh to invade the city. Nothing could have pleased Ranjeet Singh better than the proposed project. He very quickly and sharply gathered his force, his force of horses and foot, as he could muster in an emergency, and at once set out for Amritsar and sought his mother's help in law Sada Kaur. She willingly gave him assistance and encouragement. In this way, Ranjeet Singh gathered five thousand men and marched towards Lahore, where Mian Ashiq and Mir Mohkam Din opened Shahalmi and Lahori Gates for his admission to the city. After twenty-four hours of fighting on Lahore fort, Chet Singh surrendered, and Ranjeet Singh became victorious.⁵ Other leading Sikh Sardars could not bear his fame and gathered their forces against Ranjeet Singh. He met them along with Bhasin's forces, about 16 km from the city, and won a straightforward victory within three days. When he triumphantly came

² Tarlochan Singh, *Sikh Tawarikh* (Lahore: Lehran Adabi Board, 1996), 43.

³ Narendra Krishna Sinha, *op.cit.*, 13.

⁴ Kunahya Laal Hindi, *Tareikh e Punjab* (Lahore: Majlis e Taraq e Adab, 1981), 140.

⁵ Harbans Singh and others (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, vol. 3 (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1997), 480.

back to Lahore, he got a royal reception from his subjects.⁶

Soon after Ranjeet Singh invaded Jammu, he captured Narowal and Virowal on the way. Jammu's king was much afraid of him and accepted his defeat and paid an offering of twenty thousand and an elephant as a gift. Ranjeet Singh returned as conqueror and occupied Sialkot and Dilawargarh on his return journey. 1801 AD was the year when Ranjeet Singh assumed the formal title of Maharaja.⁷ Ranjeet Singh revolutionized the way to start his rule; he denied sitting on a throne and preferred to sit on a Chair. He established his Darbar in Diwan-i-Aam instead of Diwan-i-Khas so that the common people could approach him easily. He ordered to strike coins in Baba Nanak's name instead of his name and assumed the title for his government as Sarkar Khalsa Ji, while his court was called Darbar Khalsa Ji.⁸

People from all the communities were included in his council of ministers. The same was the case in his army, though its nucleus remained Sikh; however, the artillery mainly consisted of Muslims and Hindus.⁹ Now, for about ten years, Maharaja focused on the task of expanding and consolidating his empire. After 1820, Maharaja was keener on the consolidation of his kingdom than annexation or conquests. Maharaja also evolved a regular system of administration and government. All kinds of records were maintained in the central office in Lahore.¹⁰ Foreign visitors to Punjab were impressed by Maharaja's popularity among the masses.¹¹ Foreign travellers who visit India would not miss visiting Punjab because of the famed Maharaja. He won popularity among the masses due to his attitude towards them. Except for open warfare, he never wantonly marked his hands in blood.

Maharaja's terrain's early organisational structure was simple, and a limited number of personal assistants ensured the effective running of administrative affairs. This organisational structure served as a basis and developed over time with Maharaja's land's growth and expansion. It

⁶ Major G. Carmichael Smyth, *A History of the reigning family of Lahore; with some accounts of the jammoo Rajahhs, Sikh soldiers and their Sirdars* (Calcutta: W.Thacker & Co.-St. Andrew's Library, 1847), 19.

⁷ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Oxford university Press, 1999), 200.

⁸ Harbans Singh, *op.cit.*, 481.

⁹ Hon. W.H. Osborne, *Court & Camp of Runjeet* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 143.

¹⁰ J.S. Grewal, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1982), 54.

¹¹ Joginder Singh Kairon, *Tales around Maharaja Ranjeet Singh* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev Uni, 2001), 12.

was 1790 AD when Ranjeet Singh succeeded to the leadership of Sukerchakia Misal after his father Maha Singh's death by the rule of inherited succession. He was only ten years old, so administrative affairs were temporarily looked after by his mother. Misaldar Ranjeet Singh was surrounded by three important personalities: Mai Malwani (his mother), Dal Singh (his uncle), and Lakhpat Rai. At the age of seventeen, he assumed the charge, and it was by no means difficult for him to administer the state affairs because of the simple structural configuration and also because of his vigour.¹² In the context of civil administration, we see three important posts held at Misaldar Ranjeet Singh's disposal. These posts were named as Diwan (financial adviser), Toshakhana (treasure), and Munshis (clerks).

Lakhpat Rai enjoyed the designation of Diwan since the time of Ranjeet Singh's father. Lakhpat Rai carried out his duties effectively, also during the time of Ranjeet Singh. The second specialised task under Ranjeet Singh's supervision was performed by Misr Basti Ram, the treasury office's prime caretaker. He had inherited this seat from his grandfather. Misr Basti Ram, however, occasionally got the assistance of Jassa Misr and Gurmukh Singh. Gurmukh Singh was appointed with him in 1780 A.D. Later on, Gurmukh Singh acquired a special significance in Ranjeet Singh's court. He escorted him during his invasion of Lahore in 1799 A.D. He was appointed as an authority for the disbursement of money to the forces and was in charge of all the treasure captured and accumulated at Lahore.¹³

It is pertinent to note that after conquest of Lahore, the Maharaja could not give immediate attention to the reorganisation of the managerial structure. But the rise in income and further expansion of territory gradually led towards the development of finance and other departments. In due course of time, the departmental organisation of Maharaja's secretariat was furnished, and the institution of the various Seals was established. These were the indicators of the excellence achieved by the Sikh government concerning civil administration.¹⁴

Keeping in mind the democratic customs of the Sikh belief, Maharaja Ranjeet Singh refused to sit on a throne or wear a crown. Though a grand durbar was arranged on 12 April 1801, he declared the Maharaja of Punjab. Baba Sahib Singh Bedi marked the Maharaja's forehead with saffron, tied a sword around his waist, followed by the royal salute to indicate the foundation of the Maharaja's rule. Maharaja

¹² J.S. Grewal, *op.cit.*, 23.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Harbans Singh, *op.cit.*, 482.

Ranjeet Singh's seal had the words 'Akal¹⁵ Sahai' (May God help) rather than his name. Similarly, he did not issue coins in his name, but in the name of the Khalsa. These coins were known as Nanakshahi.¹⁶

It was an absolute removal of the courts' customs of those times, as the protocol was rigidly practiced to keep distance between the sovereign and the masses as much as possible. Maharaja Ranjeet Singh never lost contact with his subjects.¹⁷ Maharaja Ranjeet Singh started his day with prayers in the early hours of dawn and listened to Gurbani. After it, he usually goes for horse riding, which is followed by breakfast. Once done, he holds his Darbar to listen to people's complaints and to run state affairs. Maharaja had the habit of solving the problems on the spot and never lingered on a decision regarding any matter. He had the habit of inspecting his troops in the evening.¹⁸ According to Col. C. M. Wade, Maharaja always keeps a secretary besides him so that he can dictate orders on the spot.¹⁹

Soon after becoming Maharaja of Lahore, Ranjeet Singh made necessary arrangements to meet financial and other departments' requirements. Following is the brief history of the beginning and the development of different Daftar(institutions). It is worth noting that the most ancient seal of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh dates back to the year 1800. It clearly shows that Maharaja initiated the use of seals after the subjugation of Lahore. He was then authorised to establish a mint in 1801. The inclusive organisation of the Sarishta-i-Hazur department came into being in 1803. Dewan Devi Das was appointed in the same year. All the pay orders were officially approved with the affixation of a seal on them.²⁰

Daftar-i-Devi Das was established in 1803, the same year as the establishment of Sarishta-i-Hazur, as the seals of both of them embark upon. Most importantly, it was established under the headship of Dewan Devi Das. Dewan Devi Das was an efficient worker with more

¹⁵ Akal is translated as The Timeless Reality.

¹⁶ Teja Singh & Ganda Singh, eds. *Maharaja Ranjeet Singh, first death century memorial* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1939), 19.

¹⁷ Prem Singh Hoti Mardan, *Sher-e-Punjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, Punjabi ed. (Unknown publisher 2015), 14-15.

¹⁸ Syed Fakir Wahiduddin, *The real Ranjeet Singh*, 1st ed. (Karachi: Lion Art press Ltd, 1965), 17-20.

¹⁹ Front Col. C.M. Wade to the Secretary to the Governor-General of India, Dispatch dated 31 May 1831, India Office Records, British Library, London.

²⁰ G.L. Chopra, 'Civil Administration of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh', In *The Punjab – Past and Present*, Ganda Singh, ed., vol. XXII- part I (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1988), 123.

extraordinary abilities in his work, along with his brother. Both of them served as financial officers in the Maharaja's government. The relevant seal of this Daftar was found under the caption of 'navishta shud' (recorded). It was during the time of Dewan Devi Das that the revenue of the country started declining. On the other hand, territorial expansion was increasing. The decline in revenue resulted in the mortgaging of approximately thirty lac rupees per annum of the country's income. Dewan Devi Das thus worked hard to make up for this deficiency.

Naqal Daftar, or copying office, was put into work and the establishment of the original office of Hazur in 1803. Sarishta-i-Dewani Daftar originated in 1807 AD. Its seal bore the inscription of 'Sarishta-i-Dewani' with the caption of 'Kirpa Ram, 1864'. The first time, an attempt was made to put away the imprints of Muslim rulers in favour of Bikrami, as the caption suggested. Seals of Sarishta-i-Diwani were put on pay orders.²¹ The fifth department (Daftar) was Sarishta-i-Bhawani Das and was introduced in the year 1808, and was under Diwan Bhawani Das. The concerned Seal of this Daftar bears 'Sambat 1865' and Bhawani Das's name under the caption 'Sabt Sarishta Shud'. This Daftar was reorganised when Bhawani Singh improved the economic system. The new seal was used with the words 'Sabt Daftar, 1868'. Meanwhile, during the establishment and reorganizing this Daftar, Bhawani Das was assigned to organise revenue assessment and collection in the recently occupied areas. Afterwards, he continued to work in his office in the finance department.²²

The 'Daftar' was the government's general secretariat and possessed a seal with the words of 'Sabt Daftar, 1868'. These are the exact words that were used for the fifth Daftar. The only difference was that it bore no caption. This Daftar was reorganised twice.²³ Daftar-i-Ganga Ram was founded in 1817 under Ganga Ram's headship. Ganga Ram was specially invited by Ranjeet Singh due to his capabilities and was warmly welcomed at Lahore. He has imparted the headship of the military office and the seals. He also rendered his services as principal paymaster of the Irregulars. He worked discreetly and profoundly under the head of the department, Bhawani Das, and played a vital role in reforming the military accounts system to a plausible extent. After the death of Ganga Ram, his office was held by Dina Nath. Dina Nath was also very competent and thus reached the position of finance minister

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 124-25.

²³ Teja Singh & Ganda Singh, (eds.), *op.cit.*

after Bahawani Das.²⁴ Sarishta-i-Daftar possessed the seal of ‘Sarishta-i-Daftar 1875’, which shows its organisation’s date. Another seal of this Daftar was with the words ‘Hans Raj 1876’ under the caption ‘Navishta Shud’ in Hans Raj’s time. The seals on *Parwanas* represented this Daftar. Daftar Toshakhana-i-Khas was also organised in 1818 AD and was headed by Misr Basti Ram. Misr Beli Ram succeeded Misr Basti Ram in the office of Toshakhana. The Tenth Daftar’s formation happened in 1819 AD under Shankar Das’s headship, owing to the seal ‘Shankar Das, 1876’. Later on, this office was also held by Rattan Chand after 1834 AD. The *Parwanas* issued from this office bear seals of both of them.²⁵ Daftar-i-Shahzada appeared in 1821 AD as the seals on the *Parwanas* bore witness. This Daftar was established two years after the establishment of the Tenth Daftar. Daftar-i-Darogha was the twelfth Daftar headed by Darogha. Its seal on *Parwanas* bore ‘Ram Dayal’ under the caption of ‘Sabt daftar-i- Darogha’.²⁶ Abdul Karim headed Daftar-i-Roznamcha, and the date of its origin was assumed to be 1817 AD. This assumption was based on the issuance of *Roznamcha* papers among the ‘Dina Nath’ series. The vital function of this Daftar was to keep documentation of expenditures daily.²⁷ Daftar-i-Moharyani was held responsible for affixing the seals of the Maharaja. It also charged commission, and the amount of commission was deducted from the pay issued from Toshakhana. Daftar-i-Khas, also known as Daftar-i-M’uala, implemented its tasks under Dewan Singh, and the date of its organisation is known to be 1822 AD.²⁸

The comprehensive organisation of Ranjeet Singh’s government’s financial department was brought about mainly after Bhawani Das was appointed finance minister. Right after his appointment in 1808, he worked under Rama Nand, a wealthy banker of Amritsar. Rama Nand was dealing with the accounts of revenue receipts and costs. As soon as Bhawani Das assumed his engagements as finance minister, he revived the finance department. It, for the most part, goes to his credit, the organisation of the State Treasury.²⁹ Bhawani Das made five separate *Dafatar* so that the financial transactions could be categorised accordingly. However, in later years, various modifications and adjustments were

²⁴ G.L. Chopra, *op.cit.*, 126.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁶ Nand Laal Rajpal, *Report on the Examination of Documents Recently Discovered in the Fort of Lahore* (Punjab: Punjab Government Records Office Publication, n.d.), passim.

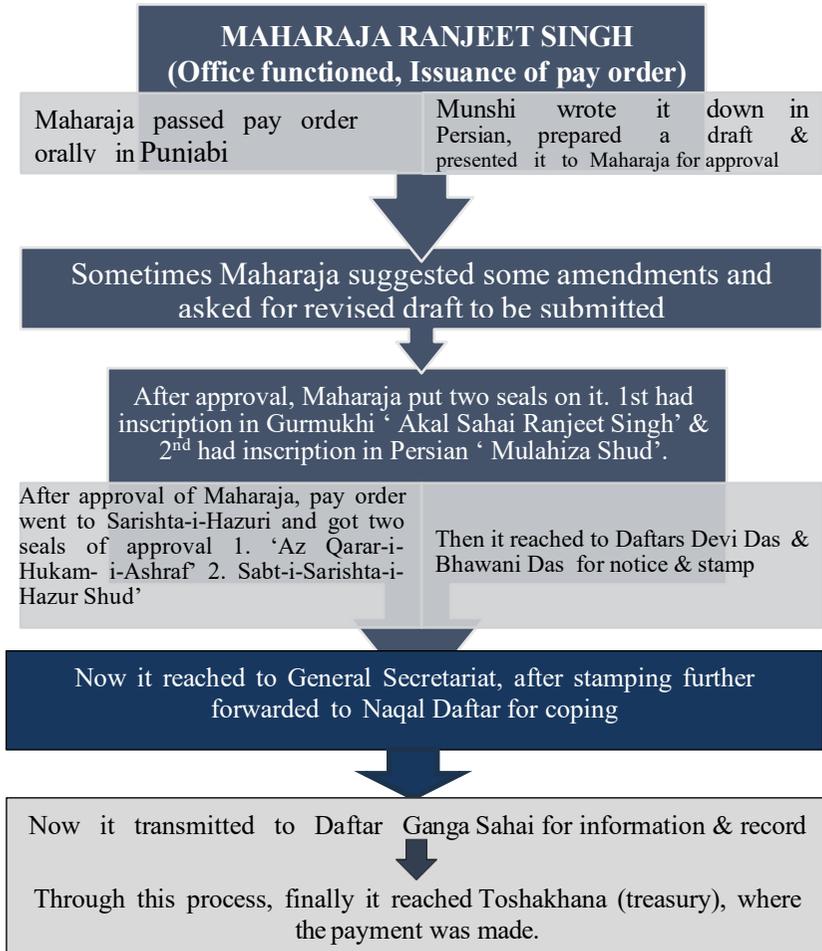
²⁷ G.L. Chopra, *op.cit.*, 127.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Khushwant Singh, *Ranjeet Singh: Maharaja of Punjab* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1962), 49.

made in these Dafatar according to the suitability of requirement of that time. In the process of development, many of them were thus subdivided for more specific tasks. When the British annexed Punjab, twelve prime offices in this regard were established in Lahore. Their work was primarily supervised by Maharaja himself or through one of his distinguished courtiers.³⁰

The functioning or procedure of Circumlocutory Offices under Maharaja Ranjeet Singh could be understood through the following chart;



³⁰ G.L. Chopra, *op.cit.*, 131.

Five Dafatar which served as the base of financial administration and were established under Bhawani Das,³¹ were Daftar-i-Abwab-ul-Mal (Daftar-i-Maliyat), Daftar-i-Abwab-ul-Tahwil, Daftar-i-Tauzihat, Daftar-i-Mawajib, and Daftar-i-Roznamcha-i-Ikhrajat. Daftar-i-Abwab-ul-Mal was held responsible for maintaining accounts of the revenue receipts and was working with its two sections, i.e., 'Jam'a Kharch-i-Taaluqat' & 'Jam'a Kharch-i-Sairat'. These two sections worked discretely. 'Jam'a Kharch-i-Taaluqat' dealt with those entries which referred to the revenue of land. On the other hand, 'Jam'a Kharch-i-Sairat' was concerned with all other sources of income. The other sources of income mainly included Nazrana, Zabti, Abkari, Wajuhat-i-Moqarari, and Chaukiyat.³² Nazrana was a homage or tribute paid to the head of state in the form of money or other valuable stuff. This act of reverence was practised on different occasions and according to different situations by subjects. Most of the nazranas were paid by the people of high ranks and the rulers of captured lands. Zabti was another significant source of income for Ranjeet Singh's government. It included the amount of fines imposed upon officials on account of punishment or withdrawal of grants on several bases.

The charges levied on the sales of different drugs were collected under the head of 'Abkari'. However, it was not a significant income source. The income of Wajuhat-i-Moqarari was collected in the form of different charges. It included specifically those charges that were to be paid for affixation of seals, for addressing petitions to the authorities and all proceedings of justice, including the fee paid for rectifying legal decisions and fines to be paid for criminal acts, etc. Chaukiyat was a kind of tax or customs duty levied on articles of trade and all other goods. It was collected under different heads and was an essential source of income.

The second Daftar established by Bhawani Das was Daftar-i-Abwab-ul-Tahwil, responsible for maintaining accounts of income and expenditure. It comprised of records that were sent to this Daftar by Tahwildars. Tahwildars were those officers who were in charge of collecting and spending government money.³³ Daftar-i-Tauzihat it was solely concerned with the financial records of the royal family. It included

³¹ Punjab Government. *A History of the Excise System in the Punjab 1846-1884* (Lahore: 1930), 1-3.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Shahamat Ali, *The Sikhs and Afghans, in connexion with India and Persia, immediately before and after death of Ranjeet Singh: from the journal of an expedition to Kabul through the Punjab and the Khaibar Pass* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1847), 26.

records of Zenana (ladies) expenses, expenditures of Toshakhana, payments made for the sake of presents, and khil'ats and guests' entertainment. Daftar-i-Mawajib mainly dealt with maintaining accounts of wages, salaries, as well as stipends regarding civil establishment, clerical staff, and armed forces staff. Hence, many departments were under its domain at first, but afterwards, it was subdivided to handle each department separately. Daftar-i-Roznamcha-i-Ikhrajat worked to document all accounts of Ikhrajat (expenses) done daily under various heads.³⁴

The judicial system in the time of Ranjeet Singh was crude and straightforward. There was no codification of law, as we do not find the laws in written form. Yet, the justice system was accessible to ordinary people because there were no technical hurdles in its way. As per the customary law, the basic judiciary system was best suited to the people of that area.³⁵ The following was the hierarchical structure of the Judiciary at that time.³⁶



Panchayats held the authority of decision-making and settling disputes of all kinds at the village level. Every village had its Panchayat, usually comprising five members. There was no fixed criterion to select these members. Usually, they were the leading, prestigious and influential elders of the village owning land. Panchayats dealt with a variety of cases. The cases of betrothals and matrimonial affairs were decided by keeping in view the general social traditions of that particular society. In this way, they were acceptable to the whole community. The state did not organise

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁵ G.L. Chopra, *op.cit.*, 136-37.

³⁶ Amarjit Singh, 'The Judicial Administration of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh', In *The Punjab – Past and Present*, Ganda Singh, ed., vol. II., Part-II (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1968), 347-350.

the system of Panchayat; instead, it was a traditional and local system. Therefore, the decisions of Panchayats were challengeable by either of the party. Kardars then handled such disputes.³⁷ Kardars were delegated the authority to work as a judge. They administered justice at the town level. Moreover, in their concern, T'aluqa, they used to handle all essential cases and disputes over inheritance matters, land boundaries, payment of revenue, etc. They could also revise the decisions made by Panchayats if necessity arose.³⁸

The next level was Nazims & Adaltis. Nazims being the head of Suba, dealt with all important cases in the cities. Sometimes there were also appointed specialised persons termed as Adaltis who were assigned the task of making judicial decisions. Under the supervision of Nazims, local record offices were maintained and were named Qazi-khanas. The regular record put in Qazi-khanas was used as evidence in many civil cases where there was some dispute over landed property among the local population. The successful party had to pay Shukrana to the government. A fee was also levied upon the successful party in the decisions based on the witness's sworn testimony after the proclamation of the final decision. Fines were also charged to the defendants if they wasted the time of the court. In this way, the judicial system was also resource generating department.³⁹ The next prominent exponent of the judiciary, 'Adalt-i-Ala,' was a distinct central court established at the capital level. It was equivalent to a high court. However, the information about its judges, its inner constitutional workings and the nature of its judicial verdicts is unknown to historians.⁴⁰

Some prominent ministers of Ranjeet Singh were also given the authority to decide about different cases on behalf of the ruler within the field of their prescribed departments.⁴¹ But the supreme executive and judicial power were exercised by the Maharaja himself. He regularly held his Durbar, where he directly listened to the petitions and appeals made against the decisions of ministers, Nazims, Kardars, and Adaltis. Ranjeet

³⁷ Lieut. William Barr, *Journal of a march from Delhi to Peshawur, and from thence to Cabul, with the mission of Lieut.-Colonel Sir C. M. Wade including travels in the Punjab, a visit to the city of Lahore and a narrative of operations in the Khyber Pass, undertaken in 1839* (London: James Madden & Co., Leadenhall-Street, 1844), 53.

³⁸ Lieut.-Colonel Steinbach, *The Punjab being a brief account of the country of the Sikhs*, 2nd ed. (London: Smith, Elder Co., 1846), 83.

³⁹ Sohn Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, V.S. Suri (tr.), vol. III (Delhi: S. Chand & Co., 1961), 261.

⁴⁰ *Punjab Government Records*, monograph no. 21, 67.

⁴¹ Syed Fakir Wahiduddin, *op.cit.*, 34.

Singh was very strict in making his officials accountable to him. He took many steps to minimise the chances of injustice. He made frequent visits to the different places of his territory and listened to bribery complaints, corruption, and injustices made by his officials. He also sent delegations to varying districts for removing complaints and decide exceptional cases. Moreover, strict orders were issued to many Jagirdars regarding their decisions, and they were bound to send regular reports to the Durbar of Ranjeet Singh. Hence, the abuse of authority was minimal.⁴² In short, the judicial system was direct and simple, according to the country's social and political environment.

The territorial division of Punjab facilitated ascertaining the local government system and ruling over it systematically. It also provided ease in collecting revenue at various levels and keeping law and order. This division was in continuity with the division at the time of the Mughal Empire. The division was also concerning the tribal affinities of the populace of different areas. Primarily, Punjab was divided into four Subas or provinces in the era of Ranjeet Singh. These provinces were Lahore, Multan, Kashmir, and Peshawar. Moreover, other principal hilly areas were under the rule of Ranjeet Singh. These subjugated areas regularly paid tribute to the Maharaja to prove their loyalty to the head of the state. The Subas were then divided into Parganas and Parganas into T'aluqas. Each T'aluqa consisted of fifty to a hundred Mauzas.⁴³ The administrator of Suba was called Nazim, who had under him several officials. Those officials were technically termed Kardars. Usually, one Kardar was appointed for one T'aluqa except in some cases where the concerned territory was so vast that it needed to appoint more than one Kardar. Kardars formed the most significant part of the machinery of the local government system, as they were the ones who were essentially in direct contact with the masses, as compared to a Nazim. Though Nazim possessed the higher rank, his role was of a general nature.

On the other hand, Kardar had to perform diverse duties but with first-hand knowledge of his concerned territory.⁴⁴ He played a far more critical role than other officials. He had to supervise in general all the affairs of the masses, to collect revenue and supervise land settlements, to work as a Treasurer and Accountant, to work as a Judge and Magistrate and to work as an Excise and Customs officer. There are many examples of local officials praised for their just rule and fair dealings with the masses.

⁴² Sita Ram Kohli, *Maharaja Ranjeet Singh* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 2002), 218.

⁴³ G.L. Chopra, *op.cit.*, 134.

⁴⁴ J.S. Grewal, *op.cit.*, 63.

Some prominent names are Sardar Amar Singh Majithia, Lehna Singh Majithia, Misar Rup Lal, and Sawan Mal. Many writers, including Europeans, praise them. Sardar Amar Singh was the Governor (Nazim) of Hazara, challenging to administer because it was located at the borderline. Yet it was very well managed by the energetic Governor. Misar Rup Lal of Jullundur was also a very popular man because of his qualities. He was very just, upright and compassionate and worked for the betterment of the peasantry. Similarly, Dewan Sawan Mall of Multan upgraded its Suba and introduced significant agricultural reforms there, which had a far-reaching impact on the overall development of Multan.⁴⁵

Maharaja did a lot for his subjects' welfare, even though he had a habit of passing through streets listening to people's complaints and taking immediate action on the spot. He also put out a Box for complaints or petitions outside his palace so that people could leave their petitions in it. The key was in his possession, and these petitions were daily read out to him, and he took appropriate actions.

Maharaja Ranjeet Singh very frequently gave concessions on taxes, especially on land revenue, in case of any disaster and repaid unnecessary taxes on poor crops. In case of famine, actions were taken for the relief of the affected people.⁴⁶

The Maharaja very positively encouraged agriculture and industry. He was keenly interested in the promotion of arts and crafts. He also established many industries in Lahore and Amritsar. He granted 'Taccavi' loans to the agriculturists and sometimes provided them with seeds for cultivation. Outpouring canals were dug in the inadequate rainfall areas. Wells were also dug in a lot of areas. For the improvement of livestock, he managed cattle fairs very frequently.

There was a lot of urban development during his reign,⁴⁷ and he also provided a lot of facilities to those cities, like sanitation, etc. Therefore, no epidemics were seen in his regime. People had an abundance of food to eat and were very healthy. He also opened many dispensaries in different cities, and medicines were for all. Communication was not as strong as today, but he appointed mail runners

⁴⁵ C.M. Wade, 'British politics towards Punjab, Notes on the state of our relations with the Punjab and the best mode of their settlement', In *How to rule India* Ahmad Saleem, ed. (Lahore: Punjabi Adabi Markaz, 1978), 33.

⁴⁶ Captain Leopold Von Orlich, 'Travels in India Including Sinde and the Punjab', in *Rare Documents on the Sikhs & their rule in the Punjab*, H.S. Bhatia ed. (New Delhi: Deep & Deep publications, 1981), 190.

⁴⁷ Dr. Kirpal Singh, 'Urban Development During Maharaja Ranjeet Singh', in *The Punjab Past & Present*, Ganda Singh, ed., vol. XXII- Part-I, 64-73.

for correspondence between different cities. Maharaja made roads safe for travellers, and for this purpose, he appointed highwaymen. Maharaja also repaired the wells and sarais along with highways and built many new ones.⁴⁸

Though Maharaja Ranjeet Singh was an illiterate person, he knew the significance of education. Maharaja Ranjeet Singh was broad-minded and neutral towards donating to education. There were almost four thousand schools in his kingdom that belonged to every community, in which almost 12 million students were enrolled.⁴⁹ They were attached to the religious worship places such as Gurdwaras, Mosques, and Temples. He was very liberal in serving the guardians of these educational institutes. He promoted modern knowledge, and in the last days of his reign, he motivated the learning of English and the French language. There is some evidence that he also acquired Christian missionary services to establish English medium schools in Lahore. Still, it was strictly prohibited to promote Christianity or teach the Bible in these schools' syllabi.⁵⁰

Maharaja Ranjeet Singh fixed 1/10 of the total State revenue for charity. This is a tremendously significant act of Ranjeet Singh that highlights his character and interest in the welfare of his masses. Maharaja Ranjeet Singh used one-tenth of the total state revenue on the public welfare and charity known as the Dharam Arth grants.⁵¹ Ranjeet Singh was very keen on the welfare of his masses. He even arranged the marriage of the orphan girls in that context. The famous traveller Johann Martin Honigberger, in his account 'Thirty-Five Years in the East',⁵² quoted that the Maharaja arranged the marriage of two orphan girls at Nadoun, and these were the daughters of Sansar Chand.

Though Ranjeet Singh named his government as 'Sarkar-i-Khalsa' and court as 'Darbar-i-Khalsa', he did not try to establish a Sikh Kingdom. He found a Punjabi State in which everyone would have religious freedom as well as social justice, without any concern for his religion or community, and all for the welfare of his masses, without any religious discrimination. Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus were equal before

⁴⁸ Sachchidananda Bhattacharya, *A dictionary of Indian history* (America: George Braziller, Inc., 1967), 723-24.

⁴⁹ Syed Fakir Wahiduddin, *op.cit.*, 31.

⁵⁰ Colonel H.R. Goulding, *Old Lahore: Reminiscences of a resident* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publication, 2006), 106-7.

⁵¹ Charles Masson, *Narratives of various journeys in Balochistan, Afghanistan and the Punjab*, vol. I (Karachi: OUP, 1974), 432-437.

⁵² Johann Martin Honigberger, *Thirty Five Years in the East* (London: H. Baillière, 1905), 53.

the law and could enjoy the same privileges and high status. Maharaja hired competent persons for his services included many Hindus and Muslims; for example, Fakir Aziz-u-Din,⁵³ who was minister of Foreign Affairs in his Darbar, was a Muslim and was very close to the Maharaja. In the same way, Fakir Nur-ud-Din acted as home minister and the Maharaja's physician. At the same time, Fakir Imam-ud-Din was responsible for the royal treasury at Gobindgarh Fort in Amritsar.

He paid much respect to the sacred places of all the religions and participated in religious festivals. He participated in Dussehra celebrations. He ordered to spend money from the royal treasure to illuminate all the public buildings and his palace on the occasion of Diwali. He used to visit the tomb of Muslim Divine Madho Laal Hussain on Basant.⁵⁴ He also joined his co-religionists on the celebrations of Amavas & Baisakh and took a bath at Amritsar or Taran Taran. He presented a lot to the shrines of Jawala Mukhi (Kangra), Jagannath Puri (Benaras), Haridwar, Dargah of Mian Mir (Lahore) and Dargah Baba Farid (Pak Pattan). This was utterly related to the belief in nonviolent co-existence put forward by the Sikh Gurus. The outstanding characteristic of his policy was the equivalent esteem and respect given to every faith. He never took care of the Sikh community as an advantaged class. The non-Sikh communities did not have to pay any particular or discriminatory tax. His policies for his subjects' welfare were utterly free from racism and the narrowness of ethnic superiority or pride.⁵⁵ Although Ranjeet Singh was born into the Sikh faith and grew up in a Sikh family, and was thoroughly familiar with the Sikh tradition, which had visible impacts on him and his policies, he never announced any religion as the state religion nor made any effort to promote his religion. The fundamental doctrine of Sikhism made it possible for him to bring absolute religious harmony in his realm.⁵⁶ He neither proceeded as a dictator nor sat on a throne or wore a crown.⁵⁷

Freedom of expression and careers were utterly given to all under Ranjeet Singh's rule. He always chose men based on talent without concerning religion, caste, or social class differences. He was very liberal

⁵³ Baron Charles Hugel, *Travels in Kashmir and the Punjab* (Lahore: Majlis-e-Taraqi Adab, 1990), 292-93.

⁵⁴ Dr. Mubarak Ali, *History – Punjab and Sikh (number)* (Lahore: Fiction House, 2002), 35-37.

⁵⁵ S.N. Qanungo, 'Decline and Fall of The Maratha Power', *The History and Culture of The Indian People*, R.C. Majumdar, (ed.), vol.VIII (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2001), 515-16.

⁵⁶ Ronald Segal, *The Crisis of India* (London: Penguin Books, 1965), 79.

⁵⁷ Syed Fakir Wahiduddin, *op.cit.*, 57.

in his donations to worship sites without creating any difference between Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh.⁵⁸ Soon after he came into power, he went to Badshahi Masjid and prayed there. He presented enormous grants to many learned Muslims. *Fakirs* and *dervishes* were rewarded with great respect in his empire. He issued multiple grants to renovate the Muslim shrines and other places of Muslim concern. There are two significant examples: he restored the Sunehri Masjid of Lahore from the non-Muslims to the Muslims and repaired the tombs of Hazrat Data Ganj Bakhsh, and Mouj Darya and all the expenditures were paid from the royal treasury. Another example is that a Muslim calligraphist was travelling with a beautifully handwritten Quran manuscript and was going to sell it to the Nizam of Hyderabad, who was a Muslim. Ranjeet Singh saw him and asked him where he was going, and when the calligraphist told the whole story, the Maharaja offered him one lakh and brought that Quran to his palace. He even obtained the translations of the holy books of the Muslims and the Hindus. In return, his subjects gave him their loyalties and prayers on crucial occasions when he initiated a battle, whenever he became victorious, at the time of his illness, or when he became healthier from disease. To give equal status to other religions and Sikhism was a big deal for Ranjeet Singh, as Sikhs had suffered much at the hands of the Mughal rulers and faced the most horrible prosecutions of two of their Gurus by them. Hence, it was admirable that the Maharaja gave equivalent status to his Muslim subjects and completely trusted his Muslim workers. They acquired very high positions in his Governmental setup.⁵⁹

In the same way, the Maharaja did not show any cruelty or hatred to Hindus. There were many examples in history when Hindus showed disloyalty to Sikhs, such as Chandu Shah, who played an essential role in the martyrdom of the fifth Sikh Guru Arjan⁶⁰ and of Rajput Rajas. There was another example of Gangu, who deceived Guru Gobind Singh and passed his two younger sons into the custody of the ruler of Sirhind, and they were put to death. The other Hindu betrayal cases were Diwan Lakhpat Rai, who was involved in Harimander Sahib's obliteration.⁶¹ Ranjeet Singh ignored all this and assigned the uppermost duties of the

⁵⁸ Dr. A.C. Arora, 'Secular Policy of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh', *The Punjab – Past & Present*, Ganda Singh, ed., vol. XXII-I, 150-65.

⁵⁹ Surjit Hans, 'The Gurbilas in the Early Nineteenth Century', *The Journal of Regional History*, Vol. II (Amritsar: Guru Nanak, Dev University, 1981), 56.

⁶⁰ Bhai Vir Singh, ed., *Prachin Panth Parkash*, Rattan Singh Bhangu, (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev Uni, 1962), 291-96.

⁶¹ Joseph Davey Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs from Origin of the nation to the battles of Sutlej*, H.L.O. Garrett, ed. (Dehli: S. Chand & Co, 1955), 92.

State to the capable Hindus. As he appointed Misr Beli Ram as Revenue Minister, at the same time, Diwan Bhawani Das acted as General pay Master, Diwan Ganga Ram as Accountant General, and Diwan Dina Nath was Controller General in Khalsa Darbar. Dogra brothers Dhian Singh, Khushal Singh, and Gulab Singh were chosen for highly influential posts. Teja Singh, Diwan Mokham Chand, and Lal Singh were awarded absolute authority of the Sikh armed forces.⁶² The policy of tolerance and open-mindedness was an explicit feature of Ranjeet Singh's rule, and it had its deep roots in his religious faith.

There is not even a single piece of evidence of the eruption of communal fanaticism in his supremacy. It is a fact that this period was entirely away from any oppression, forced adaptation of religion, class subjugation, violence, death sentence, agony, and efforts of bloody retaliation. Penalties were gentle and not even a single punishment of a death sentence. He even forgave those who attempted on his own life. As quoted by Osborne, he never took any life; capital punishment was abolished in his regime.⁶³

Maharaja Ranjeet Singh generated the idea of Punjabi nationalism and patriotism. He did what no other Indian ruler had done before. He made conscious Punjabis that being a Panjabi was more significant than the Muslim, Hindu, or Sikh distinction. No doubt he was the pioneer of Panjabi nationalism, and all the aspects of his governance completely stand for this philosophy. It was proved in the Anglo-Sikh War fought after he died. All communities- Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs struggled side by side to save their foremost autonomous Punjabi State, which Maharaja Ranjeet Singh established. Maharaja Ranjeet Singh established a great Panjabi state, which was secular.⁶⁴

Let's compare the contemporary governments of the time of Ranjeet Singh. It can rightly say that his government was much humanitarian and popular⁶⁵ than others, not only among Eastern rulers but also in the West where there was a very centralized and autocratic rule, for example, the rule of Napoleon Bonaparte, Louis XVIII, Bourdon Charles X, Louis Phillippe of France, George III, IV and William IV of England and Czar Nicholas I in Russia. His rule cannot be called a military dictatorship or absolutism. According to Steinback: 'Ranjeet

⁶² Narendra Krishna Sinha, *op.cit.*, 149.

⁶³ Hon. W.H. Osborne, *op.cit.*, 94-95.

⁶⁴ Diwan Amar Nath, *Zafarnama-i-Ranjeet Singh*, Sita Ram Kohli, ed. (Lahore: University of the Punjab, 1982), 101.

⁶⁵ Sukhwant Singh, 'Communal Harmony in the Punjab under Maharaja Ranjeet Singh', *The Punjab – Past & Present*, Ganda Singh, (ed.), vol. XXI-I, 57-61.

Singh was an independent sovereign ruler who appointed officers according to his own desire, struck coins, was the foundation-head of justice, realised revenue as he liked, declared war, and established peace according to his own whims'. Absolute free will, self-determination, freedom of expression, and worship were his rule's outstanding characteristics. Although Ranjeet Singh was a true Sikh and had strong religious faith in Gurus and Sikh scriptures, he did not consciously publicise his religion.⁶⁶ Maharaja Ranjeet Singh's reign is the main inspirational model of a well-being welfare state, not only in those days but still for today's politics. Some historians compared his reign with the Napoleon but found him a more remarkable ruler given the reference to his circumstances.⁶⁷ There were so many similarities between the administrative systems of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh and the Mughal rulers in all crucial affairs, mainly referring to the civil administration. He did not take advantage of European intellect and skill in civil administration.

To conclude, like the other rulers, he kept all the civil and military rights in his hands. He was Commander-in-Chief of his Army and Chief Justice of his State, but even containing all the authorities in his hands, he did not act as tyrant or dictator. He always conferred and talked to his ministers about different issues related to civil administration, revenue, military administration, and judicial affairs. After that, he concluded his decisions. It was anticipated that all administrative machinery aspects under Maharaja Ranjeet Singh were amazingly modern and up to date. He upholds high standard checks and balances on incompetent, unproductive, and dishonest executive officers and soldiers. Maharaja Ranjeet Singh was an intelligent administrator of the Sikh Empire of Punjab with extraordinary, inspiring character.⁶⁸ In Indian history, Maharaja Ranjeet Singh is considered one of the great rulers and administrators of Punjab. It was only due to him that Punjab had seen forty years of harmony, delight, prosperity, and development.

⁶⁶ Satish K. Bajaj, 'Nature of State under Ranjeet Singh,' In *Punjab History Conference proceedings*, Seventeenth session (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1982), 101-107.

⁶⁷ Captain Murray, *History of the Punjab*, Vol.II (Patiala: Punjabi university, 1970), 174.

⁶⁸ Indu Banga and J. S. Grewal, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh: The State and Society* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 2001), 67.