

Life Stories: Ranjit Singh

Dates	Wednesdays 8, 15 and 22 May 2024
Times	18.00-20.00 BST
Location	Online (Zoom Webinar)
Tutor	Dr Sâqib Bâburî
Level	All Levels



Maharaja Ranjit Singh (r.1799-1839) with his favourite, Raja Hira Singh, the cup-bearer (detail) © Toor Collection

Course Description

Through objects presented in our new exhibition *Ranjit Singh: Sikh, Warrior, King*, alongside other material aspects of his court, explore the exceptional life and legacy of the great Sikh leader Ranjit Singh (1780-1839).

In the 18th century, the once powerful Timurid (Mughal) Empire retreated from the wealthy region of the Punjab, now divided between India and Pakistan. Unstable and continually plundered by invasions from Afghanistan, peace and prosperity was eventually restored to the region through local resistance and the enigmatic leadership of Ranjit Singh.

Over three sessions, we'll examine Ranjit Singh's rise to power and the multifaceted reasons for the stability and duration of his almost four-decade reign - regarded as a highpoint in an otherwise violently unstable century.

Session One: Ranjit Singh, an Origin Story

We'll begin our course by tracing the rise of Ranjit Singh's ancestors through the Persian account, *Tazkirat al-umarā'* (Remembrance of the Nobles) written by his contemporary Colonel James Skinner (1778-1841). We'll also examine the significance of militant resistance to the Timurid Empire and Afghan invaders in Ranjit Singh's journey to rule over a cosmopolitan kingdom, termed the Khalsa State, centred on Lahore.

Session Two: Between War and Peace

In our second session we'll explore the tensions between Ranjit Singh's private life and public duties, focusing on his early years as a free-spirited prince taking pleasure in military exercises and avoiding bookish learning. Looking at his household, consorts and offspring, we'll also chart the significant developments that shaped the course of his career as an administrator, patron and military leader. We'll look closely at architecture, paintings, manuscripts, documents and arms and armour to understand the aesthetic and thematic range of Ranjit Singh's patronage.

Session Three: European Encounters

In our final session we'll consider Ranjit Singh's role in promoting transregional and international commercial and diplomatic relations. Once holding an antagonistic attitude towards the Timurid Empire, we'll understand his efforts to renew connections across India, as well as West and Central Asia. Finally, we'll look at how Ranjit Singh's later relations with Britain, Russia and France anticipated future disputes over the Afghanistan-Punjab corridor, leading to the collapse of the Khalsa State within a few years of his demise.

Course Tutor

Dr Sâqib Bâburî is a Content Specialist Archivist with the Qatar Foundation Partnership, based at the British Library, where he was formerly the Curator for Urdu Collections and Curator for Persian Manuscripts. His research interests include the history and art history of Persianate South Asia, palaeography and manuscript cultures, ornament and design, arms and armour, regalia, and culinary cultures. He has worked among other institutions with the Royal Collection Trust, Victoria and Albert Museum, the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Oldenburg, Göttingen, Singapore, King's College London, Warburg Institute, SOAS University of London, and the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

Previous Skills, Knowledge or Experience

None required. This course is designed as an introduction to the subject.

Joining Information and Format

This course will be taught through [Zoom Webinar](#). Each course session duration is 120 minutes, including a five-minute break and time for Q&A with the tutor.

Tickets are for all dates. Ticket holders will be emailed the Zoom link, Webinar ID and Passcode 24 hours in advance of the first course session, which should be retained for accessing both sessions of the course.

Course Recording

This course will be recorded. Within 48 hours of each course session, ticket holders will be emailed a link to view the recording, which will be available for two weeks only.
