From the birth of Guru Nanak till the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the followers of Sikhism lived like other Hindu subjects under Muslim rule. The torture of Guru Arjan by Emperor Jahangir enabled Guru Hargobind to sow the seeds of martial spirit among the Sikhs to stand against the Mughal rule. But it was Guru Gobind Singh who declared the Sikhs as Khalsa who could have the courage of fighting the lions. This marked development of the community averted the fears of the Muslim regime which adopted all measures to finish and exterminate this rising sect of the Hindus. Those who joined the fold of Khalsa had thorny ways of living before them. Their number did not increase much whereas Sehajdharis (Sikhs without keeping forms and symbols) Sikhs neither decreased nor increased much, and their economic conditions were the same as of other Hindus.

The Sikh confederacy made the Sikhs a ruling power in Punjab. This enabled them to add to their financial resources and a landed aristocracy arose among the Sikhs. Again under Ranjit Singh, while they got opportunity to consolidate their power which meant an era of prosperity for them, the system of jagirdari was discouraged. The Sikhs
acquired the best lands and were mostly either peasant-proprietors or jagirdars or soldiers in the army. Their economic condition was better than under the Muslim rule where they did not enjoy even the security of lives.

The economic conditions of the Sikhs did not deteriorate under British rule as their immediate losses in men and resources due to war with the British and ultimately becoming subjugated people were partly compensated by prosperity in agriculture by new schemes of irrigation brought into operation by the British. The Sikh peasantry was much cared for though the Sikh jagirdars were not much benefited as most of the big jagirs were confiscated by the British. The British Government encouraged the Sikhs to join the Army. This added economic utility for anyone joining Sikh religion as Sikhs were enrolled in the army in great numbers.

Consequently their population began to increase at the expense of Hindus who became Sikhs at a rapid speed. The lands in the new canal colonies made the Sikhs richer than they were even under Ranjit Singh. In other words, under the British rule, the economic conditions of the Sikhs underwent a great change for their betterment. While a greater majority of them were agriculturists, they took part in Industries, trades, transport, banking, provincial as well as central services, and above all in the Army and the Air Force.

They established their many new educational
institutes and their greatest achievement brought forward by their educational activities and religious fervour was to liberate their sacred Gurdwaras through the organisation of Akali movement.

But the worst set back to the Sikhs was inflicted upon them by the partition of Punjab when they lost their best irrigated lands in the canal colonies established by them since generations in the area of Western Pakistan. They left their everything behind so preciously guarded by them since their forefathers. The economic disaster had its counterpart on the spiritual plane - the sacred Gurdwaras were left behind in the Pakistan area. Their economic condition became bad and low.

During the ten years of Independence of India (1947 - 1957), the Sikhs have again somewhat built up their effects of the living conditions due to the massive programme of Rehabilitation undertaken on the State level. Under the National Government, the Sikhs themselves though a minority are free and respectable citizens of India. With the help of the State as well as Central Governments, they have almost raised their standard of living to which they were accustomed. Even the Sikh landed aristocracy has started farming themselves to which they were not accustomed as the environments have taught them to do so.

Though they have no reservation of seats in
Parliament or State Assemblies due to abolition of communal
weightage etc. yet they have occupied an honourable position
in shaping the political affairs of the country and are
serving almost everywhere in the Central as well as State
Governments. After the Partition, side by side with taking
up agriculture, they have started many new industries, and
have enlarged their activities in the business of motor
transport, trading shops, banking etc.

No attempt is made to sum up periodwise the interaction
between Sikh ideals and material conditions, though attention
may be drawn to the fact that the ideals arose in a particular
period out of circumstances and out of earlier ideas that
reached full development in the time of Guru Gobind Singh.
Their social effects continued to be worked out thereafter,
and they survive today among new ideological forces and
material conditions.

The religious spirit of Sikhism is still alive among
them. The old Gurdwaras are maintained and new ones are built
wherever the Sikhs happen to live. As usual the Gurpurbs are
celebrated and the institution of Langar is continued. The
caste system among the Sikhs for the sake of marriages is
dying out as the Sikhs are not observing it so rigidly as
before. They donate liberally for establishing new schools
and colleges. They have settled in the various foreign
countries and have built up their reputation as farmers and
industrialists and business men.
They have respected the dignity of labour taught to them by their Gurus which is one of the most important cause for their economic prosperity. As a matter of fact, the Sikhs are a community of workers, whether as tillers of land, soldiers in defence forces, carpenters, motor drivers, or as owners of industrial, trading and transport concerns etc. The Sikhs are playing a notable part in the army and air forces of the country in which they have kept a proud record. They are hard working, industrious, intelligent and adventurous. With the expanding national economy, they can carve out a very comfortable positions for themselves. It would be worth while to conclude about the Sikhs with the following remarks of M.L. Sharma:

"The Sikh community cannot die. It is their greatest victory that the ideals set by the Sikh Gurus have been accepted by the whole nation and all over the country an all out effort is being made to remove poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, disease, untouchability, exploitation, tyranny, and injustice in any shape or form. It is the duty of the Sikhs to help the nation in achieving these goals and thus can they render the greatest service to themselves and to the nation."