2.1. Introduction

The word ‘Sikhism’ derives from the word ‘Sikh’, which means a disciple or a learner, especially a seeker of truth. The word Sikh is derived from the Sanskrit word Shishya, so Sikhism is basically the path of discipleship. Sikhism has often been described by scholars as a way of life, one that can be best understood by studying the life of the people professing it. According to the Sikh Rehit Maryada (the code of discipline of the Sikhs), Sikh is the one who only believes in Sikh religion, accepts and follows the teachings and manner of living taught by the ten Sikh Gurus and Guru Granth Sahib, has faith in baptism and practices the Rehit Maryada.

According to Kahan Singh Nabha (1930), Sikh is one who is a follower of Guru Nanak Dev (the first Sikh guru), one who adopts the Sikh religion of, and one who considers Guru Granth Sahib as his religious Granth and ten Gurus as same body and spirit. Sikhism, one of the youngest of world’s religions, has made a deep impact on the life of people. The Sikhs are unique people in the religious civilisation of the world. They are deeply attached to their religion. The roots of Sikhism are traced to the Bhakti reform movement during the 1500s (Dhillon, 2000). Guru Nanak was to some extent influenced by Kabir and Sheikh Ibrahim Farid (1450 - 1535), a descendent of the famous Sufi saint Sheikh Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar of Pak Pattan, whose hymns were later on incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib. Significantly, he experienced both Hindu and Muslim religions and it was only after deep contemplation that he evolved his own school of thought as a new dispensation.

Guru Nanak’s rejection of the cult of gods and goddesses and his emphasis on the unity of mankind by rejecting the prevalent social system based on inequalities and repression was a bold and clear departure from Hinduism. He challenged the conventional system of religion and society of his times by disapproving caste system, idol worship, and the role of a priest between God and man. Sikhism arose in the sixteenth century as a new ideology, opposed in its fundamentals to the contemporary religions (G. Dhillon, 2000). Early followers of the Sikh Gurus were known as Nanak Panthis (followers of Guru Nanak’s ideology). In due course, people started to call them Sikhs (B. Dhillon, 1995).

According to the 2001 Census of India, total population of the Sikhs was 19.2 million (1.9%) in India (Census, 2001). At present, there are almost twenty-five million Sikhs making Sikhism the sixth largest religion in the world (“Major Religions”, 2009).
Slightly less than a million Sikhs live outside Punjab and India, with significant population spread across six continents. The North America (the United States and Canada) boasts slightly over half a million, while Europe has over one quarter of a million. Oceania (Australia, New Zealand and Fiji) has the least number, about 24,800. It is estimated that 3,750,000 Sikhs live outside India (“Sikh Population”, 2005).

Sikhs have contributed in every sphere of life. They are the largest contributor of food grains to the central pool. They were in forefront during the independence struggle of India. Out of 2,175 Indian martyrs for freedom, 1,557 (75%) were Sikhs. Out of 2,646 Indians sent to the Andamans for life imprisonment 2,147 (80%) were Sikhs. Out of 127 Indians who were hanged 92 (80%) were Sikhs. Out of 20,000 who joined the Indian National Army, under Subhase Chander Bose, 12,000 (60%) were Sikhs. And the Sikhs comprise only 2% of India’s total population (Puri, 1992).

### 2.2. The Inception of Sikhism

Sikhism was established and developed by ten Gurus during the period 1469 to 1708. Each Guru appointed his successor. Guru Nanak Dev was the first Guru and Guru Gobind Singh the last Guru in human form. Guru Gobind Singh designated Sri Guru Granth Sahib (the holy book) as the ultimate and final Sikh Guru. Sikhism, basically religious in the beginning, was forced by the pressure of circumstances into a militant organisation.

Mohsin Fani, the author of *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*, gives a near contemporary account of early Sikhism. According to Mohsin Fani, the disciples of Nanak condemned idol-worship. During the time of each Guru, the number of Sikhs increased till in the reign of Guru Arjan (G. Singh, 1969). They became sizeable, and there was hardly any city where some Sikhs were not found (M. Singh, 2004).

The Sikhs gradually started to distinguish themselves from other religious sects through a separate order, language, and community kitchen. Main characteristic of Sikhism was its non-sectarian character and its understanding with worldly life. It underwent some political, religious and military developments over a period of time which finally paved the way for Sikhism to break away completely from the older faith of Hinduism and finally develop in the form in which we find it today (M. Singh, 2004).
2.3. The Sikh History - The Time line

Sikh history can be broadly divided into six phases:

- The Guru Period (1469-1708)
- The Post Guru Period (1708-1748)
- The Misl Period (1748-1799)
- Sikh Kingdom (1799-1849)
- The British Period (1849-1947)
- The Post Independence Period (A.D. 1947-till date)

2.3.1. The Guru Period (1469-1708)

The Guru period can be further divided into two parts, the first up to the time of the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev and the second thereafter. The execution of Guru Arjan in 1606 was a turning point in Sikh history. After this, the Sikhs gradually turned from a peaceful sect of Nanak Panthis into a militant organisation. Following is the brief discussion of the ten Sikh Gurus:

Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539): Guru Nanak Dev was born on April 15, 1469, in a small village called Talwandi (now Nankana Sahib forty miles to the Southwest of Lahore in Pakistan). Guru Nanak travelled throughout India and far beyond into Arabia, Mesopotamia, Ceylon, Afghanistan, Burma, and Tibet. For over twenty years of his life, he covered all these areas on foot, accompanied by one of his most devout followers, Mardana, a Muslim, who played on the rabab (traditional musical instrument) while Guru Nanak sang to audiences his spiritual message (G. Singh, 2000). Guru Nanak realised the great truth of the brotherhood of religions. He came at a time when there was conflict between Hindus and Muslims. He spread the message of brotherhood and love (Vaswani, 1922). Guru Nanak’s teachings can be summed up in the injunction: *Naam Japo* (meditate on God), *Kirt Karo* (earn by your own effort), and *Wand Chako* (share your earnings with the unprivileged). He preached that his followers should meditate on God and godly ideals to get their bearings on life, to distinguish between the important and the trivial and to lose their ego in the wonder of God’s creation (I. Singh, 1989).

Guru Angad Dev (1504-1552): Born in Matte-di-Sarai in the Ferozepur district of Punjab into a very poor family, he was forty five when he came to Guru Nanak. He
improved and introduced a script, named *Gurmukhi*, and got the sayings and memoirs of his master written in this script. The script was known and widely used even before him by the *Khatris* for keeping their accounts (G. Singh, 2000). His aim was to make *Gurmukhi* a complete vehicle of Guru’s spiritual message and thereby taking away the Sikhs from the caste-ridden tradition of the Sanskrit literature considered to be the sacred and sole vehicle of the Hindu spiritual tradition, with Brahmins as its exclusive masters (D. Singh, 1992). The initiatives taken by Guru Angad Dev enabled the Sikhs to drift away from the mainstream Hindu society. (M. Singh, 2004). He continued the work of Guru Nanak for thirteen years after him.

**Guru Amar Das (1479-1574):** Born in Basarke, in the district of Amritsar, Guru Amar Das was a farmer-trader and he met Guru Angad at a fairly advanced age. His contribution to the Sikh movement is manifold (G. Singh, 2000). He made the institution of *langar* (community kitchen) so important that no one, rich or poor, could see him or participate in his *sangat* (*congregation*) till he partakes food from the *langar*. He created 22 teaching and administrative *Manjis* (centres) for the organisation of the Sikh society in areas far and wide (D. Singh, 1992). Guru Amar Das condemned the cruel custom of *sati* (a religious funeral practice in which a recently widowed woman would have immolated herself on her husband’s pyre), *Purdah* (veil) and female infanticide and advocated the remarriage of widows. He persuaded his disciples to desist completely from the practice of *Sati* (G. Singh, 2000).

**Guru Ram Das (1534-1581):** Guru Ram Das (also known as Jetha) was born at Lahore. He was married to Bibi Bhani, eldest daughter of Guru Amar Das. He served as a Sikh Guru for seven years only, but he made the significant decision of founding city of Ramdaspur, now called Amritsar in 1577. He developed the new city, as the sacred centre of a new community, which has since then played a crucial role in Sikh history (D. Singh, 1992). He obtained a grant of the site together with 500 *bighas* of land, from the Emperor Akbar, on payment of Rs. 700 to the *zamindars* (who owned the land) (G. Singh, 2000).

**Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606):** He was the youngest son of Guru Ram Das. He was a brilliant poet, a philosopher in his own right, a builder and a great organiser. He was the first martyr in the Sikh history (G. Singh, 2000). Guru Arjan served as the Guru for twenty five years. He completed the construction of Amritsar and founded other cities such as Tarn Taran, Kartarpur and Sri Hargobindpur. The most important work of
Guru Arjan was the compilation of the *Adi Granth*. He collected all the work of the first four Gurus and got it compiled in the form of verses in 1604.

**Guru Hargobind (1595-1644):** The martyrdom of Guru Arjan was a turning point in Sikh history and made the Sikhs hostile towards the rulers. In Sikhism, Guru Hargobind brought *Miri-Piri* (temporal-spiritual) concept in the forefront. At the time of being appointed as the Guru, he was only eleven years old. He donned two swords declaring one to be the symbol of the spiritual (*Piri*) and the other of the temporal power (*Miri*) (Scott, 1930). Thereby making it clear the future role the Sikh society was to play (D. Singh, 1992).

Guru Hargobind travelled throughout the country and visited Kashmir where he converted many people to his faith. He also travelled in Uttar Pradesh and went to as far east as Pilibhit, building Shrines to the memory of his predecessors and creating followers (G. Singh, 2000). The process of transformation of the peaceful followers of Nanak into a militant sect was started by him (Radhakrishnan, 2000). The period of Guru Hargobind was of open militarisation and conflict with the empire. Military training was started and even mercenaries were enlisted. There were open clashes with the forces of the state. A fort was constructed at Amritsar and Akal Takht, the centre of political activity, was created side by side with Harmandar Sahib. Two flags of *Miri* and *Piri* were raised at the common compound between Harmandar Sahib and Akal Takht (D. Singh, 1992). He made it known to his followers that he would welcome offerings of arms and horses instead of money. He trained a body of soldiers and spent much time in martial exercise and hunting. He built a small fortress, Lohgarh (the castle of steel) in Amritsar (K. Singh, 2004a).

**Guru Har Rai (1630-1661):** Although, Guru Har Rai was a man of peace, he never disbanded the armed cavalry and kept a cavalry of 2,200 Sikhs ready to defend the faith, earlier maintained by his grandfather, Guru Hargobind. He always boosted the military spirit of the Sikhs, but he never himself indulged in any direct political and armed controversy with the contemporary Mughal Empire. He not only pursued the policy of militarization, but even went to the extent of meeting the rebel Dara Shikoh, a Sufi brother of Aurangzeb and offering him military help (D. Singh, 1992). During his whole period, the Guru pursued missionary activities with great zeal and never gave an opportunity to clash with the Mughal rule.
He died in 1661 handing over his charge to his tender son, Har Krishan (G. Singh, 2000).

**Guru Har Krishan (1656-1664):** Guru Har Krishan was born in Kiratpur Sahib (District Ropar) to Guru Har Rai and Kishan Kaur (Mata Sulakhni). Before his death in October 1661, Guru Har Rai designated his younger son Har Krishan as the next Guru. Har Krishan, the eighth Sikh Guru, came to the throne when he was only five years old. Unfortunately for the Sikhs, however, the Guru died at the age of eight because of small-pox (G. Singh, 2000).

**Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675):** Guru Tegh Bahadur was the youngest son of Guru Hargobind and Bibi Nanki and was born at Amritsar on April 1, 1621. From a young age, he was trained in the martial arts and religious affairs by Baba Buddha and Bhai Gurdas. Guru Harkrishan suddenly fell ill at Delhi in 1664. Before his death, being too weak to move or speak, the Guru had said his successor would be in Baba Bakala (a town in Amritsar district). Hearing that the last Guru referred Baba Bakala as the place of the new Guru, many claimants to the throne settled there and created confusion in the minds of the Sikhs as to who in fact the Guru was. But devout Sikhs found out Tegh Bahadur and installed him as the Guru, at the age of forty four (G. Singh, 2000). Aurangzeb’s policy of Islamisation had become extremely oppressive in its execution. To shake the people out of their fear and to strengthen his Sikhs for the major struggle ahead, the ninth Guru felt that the occasion was ripe for him to sacrifice himself for the faith. Guru even declined the offer of the emperor that if he desisted from political activities he would not be disturbed in his religious interests (D. Singh, 1992). But he chose to intervene and protest against religious persecution and attack by the Empire on the freedom of Kashmiri pandits. He was beheaded in Delhi in 1675 (D. Singh, 1992).

**Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708):** Guru Gobind was only nine years of age when he was appointed as Guru in times of tribulation and stress (G. Singh, 2000). From his childhood, he strengthened his military preparations, fortified Anandpur, and proclaimed an independent political status. He recruited mercenaries for his army. In this struggle with Mughals, he lost all his four sons and his mother, but he continued the confrontation uninterrupted and undismayed (D. Singh, 1994).

On the day of Baisakhi in 1699, the Guru created the Khalsa and revealed the prime objective of his mission. He selected the five beloved leaders of the community on the
basis of their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the Guru’s cause. Four of them belonged to lower castes. In order to establish the Khalsa brotherhood, the Guru first baptised all five of them and later requested those five to administer amrit (the sacred water) to the Guru himself (D. Singh, 1992). He fulfilled the mission of Guru Nanak by creating a casteless and classless brotherhood, the Khalsa, to fight for justice and against all socio-political injustices. In 1708 the Guru passed away, leaving the Guru Granth as the spiritual guide of the Sikhs and the Khalsa as the active instrument of conducting the ideological battles of life (D. Singh, 1992).

2.3.2. The Post Guru Period (1708-1748)

After the creation of the Khalsa, the 18th century began with warfare that involved the Mughal authorities of Sirhind and the Sikhs. A lengthy siege was followed by the evacuation of the Guru’s stronghold of Anandpur in 1705 and he moved to a remote area of southern Punjab. The Guru suffered considerable losses during the period, but he did not accept any defeat. It emphasises the loyalty, heroism, and endurance of his followers and the supreme example set by the warrior Guru, Guru Gobind Singh himself (McLeod, 1992).

The Khalsa, created by the Guru, started showing results within a short period of time after the demise of the tenth Guru in 1708 (D. Singh, 1992). The Sikh forces, led by a devoted follower named Banda, led back the remnant of the Khalsa to Punjab and awaited the death of the aged Aurangzeb. On the death of the emperor, the struggle for supremacy between rival princes followed. The Marathas were driving the Mughal armies from Central India and the whole empire became disorganised. Under these circumstances, Banda, with a considerable force of Sikhs attacked and captured the province of Sirhind, a strong imperial province in the north of India between the Sutlej and the Yamuna. He avenged the murder of Guru Gobind’s younger sons (Scott, 1930).

Bahadur Shah, issued an imperial ordinance on the 10th of December 1710 from Delhi to “kill and finish them (the Sikhs) wherever they were found”, thus ordering indiscriminate destruction of Sikhs. That royal proclamation, outlawing the Sikhs and seeking their complete extinction, was repeated by Emperor Farrukh Siyar and it remained in force for three long years in all parts of the Mughal Empire. According to it, every Sikh wherever seen was to be immediately arrested. He was to be offered only one alternative, either Islam or sword (Shan, 1992). The Emperor’s orders were
strictly obeyed. The Governors of Sirhind, Lahore and Jammu tried to surpass one another in persecution of the Sikhs in order to win the goodwill of Farrukh Siyar (Shan, 1992). The struggle and persecution of the Sikhs was severest during the mid 18th century. A price was put on every Sikh’s head and twice it was reported to the authorities that the Sikhs had been completely eliminated (G. Dhillon, 1989). Bahadur Shah after defeating his rivals called up his armies from the South and drove the Sikhs back across the Sutlej.

Bahadur Shah’s successor, Farrukh Siyar, drove them from their strongholds, shot them down wherever they were found and totally isolated them. Banda and several hundred of his followers were captured; a large number were killed on the spot, but Banda with some hundreds marched off towards Delhi (Scott, 1930). Banda fought bravely in obedience to his deceased master’s command and eventually suffered the cruel death of a true martyr (McLeod, 1992). The uprising under the Banda finally ended with Banda’s execution by the Mughals in 1716. Thereafter, the Sikhs remained under continuous persecution. Although Banda’s success was short-lived, it proved that the farmers were discontented and that the administration had become weak. In seven years, Banda changed the class structure of land holdings in the southern half of the state by liquidating many of the big Muslim landlords (K. Singh, 2004a).

The history of Sikhism from the fall of Banda to the occupation of Lahore by the Sikhs in 1768 is a record of the struggle between the declining power of the Mughal and the rising state of the Khalsa. The defeat of Banda and the destruction of his army were followed by persecution which for the time being proved most destructive to the Sikhs (D. Singh, 1992). Hundreds became victim every day to the prejudice and fanaticism of the Mughal rulers, and thousands, who had joined simply for the sake of booty, cut their hair, shaved their beards and vanished in crowds. The true Sikhs fled to the jungles, hills and deserts of Rajputana and Bikaner. Those who had fled from the persecuting hand of the authorities dared not comeback and passed their days in the greatest hardship. Their families were left to the tender mercies of the Mughals (Dekan, 1910).

After the death of Banda in 1716 for about eight years Sikhs were quite, but they were not the kind of people to remain quiet for very long. In the year 1724, they began to make their presence felt again in the plains of the Punjab. They formed themselves
into small Jathas (groups) and began their old tactics of harassing the government by their aggressive expeditions and guerrilla warfare (Dekan, 1910).

The first thing done by the rejuvenated Khalsa was to punish the traitors who had betrayed them and the rulers who had vented their wrath upon their unprotected wives and children. The fresh devastation by the Sikhs aroused the anger of the emperor against Abdul Samad the governor of Lahore. He was consequently transferred to Multan in 1726 and his son Zakriya Khan was appointed in his place. A moving column was established to look after the Sikhs and prevent them from assembling anywhere in large numbers. This moving column acted strongly, chasing the Sikhs whenever they appeared, but the Sikhs were fast becoming strong and getting out of control. Clashes between the Mughal rulers and the Khalsa were becoming more frequent with every passing day (Dekan, 1910).

In 1730, the Sikhs fell upon the guards carrying treasure from Lahore to Delhi and took away everything. An army was sent from Delhi to punish the robbers but the Sikhs once again fled to the hills. In 1731, they came down again and began their old tactics of harassing the governor. The Muslims of Lahore gathered in large numbers and joined the governor in a religious war against the Sikhs and gained two victories over the Sikhs but were ultimately defeated with great loss. In 1733, an effort was again made to crush the Sikhs by concessions and bribes. Zakriya Khan recommended to the Government of Delhi the grant of a Jagir and title to the Sikhs. His suggestion was accepted and the offer of a Jagir of Rs. 100,000 and title of Nawab for their leader was sent to their representative at Amritsar. The offer was at first rejected but later better sense prevailed and the jagir was accepted and Kapur Singh, a Jat of Faizullahpur, was decorated with the title and robes of a Nawab. The Sikhs now continued peacefully for sometime living upon the revenues of the new jagir.

The misery and hardship suffered by the Sikhs from 1716 to 1738 under the Mughal government had poisoned their hearts against the Mughals (Dekan, 1910). Sikhs again started attacking the imperial troops. Annoyed with continued attacks, in 1746, The Governor of Punjab Yahya Khan, issued a proclamation for a general massacre of all Sikhs, wherever they could be found. Thousands were put to death daily and their heads brought before the Subedar of Lahore for reward (Shan, 1992).

Despite persecution by the state, and pressures from the invaders, the Sikhs as ideologically fired and intensely motivated guerrillas, triumphed to form a state of
their own in the area. They upset the zamindari system and distributed land among the
tillers of the soil. It was a land-mark socio-economic revolution (D. Singh, 1992).

This conduct of the Sikh soldiers in victory was such as no modern army has been able
to equal so far. It is nothing short of a miracle that a leaderless community, without
any state, and drawn from the lowest sections of the society was able successfully not
only to dislodge the empire of the day, but also to repel the greatest invading general
of the time and to seal the north-western border against all future inroads into India (D.

2.3.3. The Misl Period (1748-1799)

Brief History of the Sikh Misl

An imperial ordinance, to kill and finish the Sikhs wherever they were found, made
some Sikhs revert to anonymity by adopting a Hindu appearance. It drove others,
especially the Khalsa, into the forests on horseback where they regrouped and
prepared for war. Sikhs had divided themselves into several states or confederacies
twelve in number. Initially, these twelve groups were called as Jathas (organized
group) but gradually, the word Jatha got replaced with misl. A file of every Jatha was
kept at Amritsar. It used to contain the feats of its Jathadar (the title of leader of a
Sikh jatha) and soldiers. Whatever loot was brought by a Jathedar, he used to have it
recorded in his file and then deposit it with the treasury. Everyone would say, “Please
write my details in the misl (file)” Thus the word Jatha dropped from their names and
the word misl got added (Sikh Missionary College). Many Jathas came up after 1733,
and up to the year 1745, bands of a dozen or more jathas under jathedar operated
independently. These Jathas played a decisive role in liberating the Punjab from the

Each misl obeyed or followed a Jathedar that was a chief or leader. The misls were
distinguished by titles derived from name, village, district, or the ancestor of the first
or the most eminent chief, or from some peculiarity of custom of leadership
(Cunningham, 1849). Misls helped in the development and spread of Sikhism and to
keep the Sikh organisations united.

The Sikhs, who were now without a personal leader, started the tradition of
deciding common matters concerning the community in the biannual meetings at
Amritsar on the Baisakhi and Diwali. These assemblies came to be known as the
Sarbat Khalsa and a resolution passed after deliberation by it became a gurmata (decree of the Guru), which was binding on all. The Sarbat Khalsa appointed jathedars (group leaders) and entrusted them with powers to negotiate on behalf of the Sikhs (K. Singh, 2004a).

Nawab Kapur Singh, in view of the threatened attack of Abdali, felt the need to unite all jathas under one flag and in Sarbat Khalsa held at Amritsar in 1748, Dal Khalsa was formed. Its command was handed over to Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. The misl system proved very useful in protecting the country against the external invaders. This system made the Sikhs invincible. Defeating a misl was not the total defeat of the Sikhs. The other misls used to face the enemy united and with courage. Misls, when put together, could bring into a battle field about 70,000 horses (Princep, 1834). That is why the Mughals, Maratha, and then Afghans could not succeed in their mission to capture Punjab. If at all any dispute or discord would arise, the Jathedar of Dal Khalsa would give a decision without any prejudice (“Brief History”, n.d.). The area of jurisdiction of each Jatha was also defined so as to avoid inter Jatha discords. There was no self-interest whenever they assembled at Amritsar, under the flag of Dal Khalsa (K. Singh, 2004a).

Gradually the Sarbat Khalsa became a real force. They felt proud calling themselves ‘Sarbat Khalsa’. Soldiers were at liberty to express their views, yet they honoured the decision of their Jathedars. There was no high or low in the misl, all were equal. A Jathedar was a soldier first and a soldier was as important as a Jathedar. He who enjoyed the confidence and trust of all was normally appointed as Jathedar. Every leader was the master as well as servant. He was a ruler as well as a follower. Every soldier had a right to leave a misl and join any other misl of his choice. The twelve misls (see Figure: 2.1) and their jathedars were as follows (“Brief History”, n.d.):

- **Bhangi misl**: Bhai Bhuma Singh and his son Bhai Hari Singh were so called from the fondness of its members for the use of an intoxicating drug Bhang.

- **Nishan walia**: Bhai Dasaundha Singh, The flag bearer of the united army the Dal Khalsa.

- **Shaheed**: Baba Bir Singh and Baba Deep Singh, were headed by the descendants of honoured martyrs.
- **Ramgarhia**: Bhai Hardas Singh and then Sardar Jassa Singh, who converted Ram Raoni into Ramgarh, took their name from Ram Rauni (Fortalice of God) at Amritsar.

- **Nakai**: Bhai Hira Singh, Natha Singh the Nakkais, from the area called Nakai, located to the south of Lahore.

- **Ahlulwalia**: S. Jassa Singh, got the name from the village Ahluwalia.

- **Kanahiya or Ghanais**: S. Khushal Singh and S. Jai Singh, derived from the name of the village of their chief.

- **Faizalpuria or Singhpuria**: Nawab Kapur Singh, derived from the village of their chief.

- **Dalewalia**: S. Gurdial Singh, derived from the village of their chief Dalewal.

- **Shukarchakia**: S. Charhat Singh, derived from the village of their chief Shukarchak.

- **Krorh Singhia**: S. Krorha Singh, S. Baghel Singh, took the name of their third leader, but they were sometimes called Punjgurhias, derived from the village of their first chief.

- **Phulkias**: This *misl* arose in the region south of the River Sutlej and was counted the twelfth *misl* though it did not form part of the *Dal Khalsa* like the eleven others.

![Figure 2.1: Map of the *misl* period, 1780 (Source K.Singh, 2001)](image)
It traced its origin to Phul, a Sidhu Jat of the village of Mehraj, now in Bathinda district of the Punjab, who met seventh Guru Har Rai, during his travels in the Malwa area and received his blessings.

When the *misl* acquired their territorial possessions, it became the first duty of the chiefs to partition out the lands, towns, and villages amongst those who considered themselves as having made the conquest. Every leader of the smallest party that fought under a *misl*, demanded his share, in proportion he had contributed to the acquisition. As they received no pay from the chief, and he had no other reward to offer for their services (there was no resource), so this mode was adopted of satisfying them. The chief’s portion being first divided off, the remainder was separated into parcels for each leader according to the number of horses they brought into the field (Princep, 1834). Although *misl* were independent, they used to come together during emergent situations and offer a combined front to the enemy. They could never imagine their existence independent of *Dal Khalsa*. They used to put their loot in a common coffer and shared their exploits (“Brief History”, n.d.).

Ahmad Shah Abdali’s repeated invasions, from 1747-1767, created confusion and chaos in the whole of north-western India and the Punjab suffered the most. There was no sense of security. The Mughal government was destroyed by the Afghans and Marathas. The Marathas were subsequently defeated by Afghans (McLeod, 1992). Almost every alternate year Ahmad Shah Abdali came and devastated the Punjab and looted the population irrespective of their religion (K. Singh, 2003). The distractions arising from the repeated invasions by Afghans enabled the Sikh *jathas* to revive, and to acquire fresh strength by lending their military services, as occasion arose, to one party or the other (Steinbach, 1846). Sikh *jathas* resisted the invader and helped the peasantry.

Gradually different villages began to seek protection from various Sikh chiefs and started paying *rakhi* (protection money) to the Sikh chiefs. The joint forces of several *misl* took the field to collect *rakhi* under the name of *Dal Khalsa* (Prinsep, 1834). Under its instructions *jathedars* formed small *jathas* and began taking villages, near their mountain and jungle hideouts, under their protection. This led to the development of *rakhi* (protection) system. Owing to the continuous political insecurity and chaos, the prominent Sikh chiefs began to possess big patches of land and there developed *misldari* system (K. Singh, 2003).
Lahore, during 1748-1765, had fifteen governors with Mir Manu covering the first five and a half years. He began as governor appointed by the Mughals. Ahmed Shah Abdali, again crossed the Indus in 1748, and interrupted all Mir Manu’s plans for establishing Mughal administration in Lahore (Prinsep, 1834). After the third Abdali invasion of 1751-52, Lahore and Multan became part of the Afghan empire but he continued as governor. Mir Manu’s death, in November 1753, marked end of the organised government and Afghan control over administration. The Sikhs filled the vacuum in the administration by offering protection, *rakhi*, on payment of one-fifth of produce on harvests. After Abdali’s invasion in 1755, Marathas entered Delhi and rolled back, with the help of Adina Beg and the Sikhs. Abdali, in irritation against the Sikhs for the trouble they had given him and prejudiced against Sikhs, marched through Amritsar. The sacred Sikh shrine, Harmandar Sahib, was blown up with gunpowder. The sacred *sarovar* was defaced, and polluted with the blood and entrails of cows and bullocks (Prinsep, 1834). After Abdali’s invasion in 1756-57, the *rakhi* was recognised by Sarbat Khalsa to constitute the territorial possessions of the *misls*. The Sikhs for the first time, in 1757, defeated Afghan forces at the battle of Amritsar that constituted a turning point. The following year, they captured retreating Afghan forces and made them clean Harmandar and the sacred tank. The Sikhs cooperated with Adina Beg and Marathas to oust the Afghans in 1758. Abdali’s next invasion, 1759-1761, shattered Maratha power, but Afghans too were exhausted to the advantage of the Sikhs. The peasantry crushed, because of the Afghan depredations and roving provincial troops in search of the Sikh families, in large numbers joined the Khalsa fold or offered them protection (S. Singh, 1995).

They disrupted Abdali’s advance during his invasion of 1759-61 to crush the Marathas. With the death of Adina Beg in 1758, there were three claimants to Punjab in Afghans, Mughals and Marathas, but only one master in the Sikhs (S. Singh, 1995).

After dispersing the Marathas, Ahmed Shah returned to Kabul in 1761, leaving a governor with a very weak force to hold Lahore and collect revenues. Taking the advantage of the situation, the Sikhs occupied the areas of their strongholds and this added greatly to their power and resources. Amongst the Sikh chieftains, who benefited from the anarchy of twenty years, were the ancestors of Ranjit Singh, one of whom, named Charhat Singh, erected a small fortress at Gujerwalla, near Lahore. The force of Lahore’s governor was repulsed when it tried to take over the mud fort. From
that moment the Sikhs began to organise themselves into a still more compact and formidable union. The *Sarbat Khalsa*, or assembly of chiefs and followers, was publicly held at Amritsar to discuss the offensive operations on a large scale and other matters concerning the Sikhs (Steinbach, 1846).

The Afghan invader, Ahmad Shah Abdali, during his invasion of India in 1762 came back with an adequate force and put down this revolt. He continued his campaign against the Sikhs. The holocaust, of 5th February 1762, is known to the Sikhs as the *Vada Ghallughara* (a massacre). His forces killed about 35,000 Sikhs in the *vada Ghallughara* in a single day’s battle near village Kup, dist. Ludhiana (Chahal, 1999). Besides, he ransacked Amritsar and blew up their sacred shrine, Harmandar Sahib (Golden Temple at Amritsar), and desecrated its sacred pool with blood, bones, and entrails of cows etc. and filled it up with debris (Shan, 1992).

Most of the Sikhs killed in this massacre were old men, women and children, who were then being escorted to a safer place. Estimates of the number of Sikhs killed in this encounter vary from five thousands to thirty five thousands. Muslim and English historians mentioned it to be around five to seven thousands. Irrespective of the number of casualties, there is little doubt that the Sikhs were mostly non-combatant, since their fighting strength was hardly impaired, as was evident a few months after the *Ghallughara* (K. Singh, 2004a).

The main body of the Sikh fighting force remained intact. The Sikhs invariably harassed invading Afghan forces during their various invasions by depriving the booty-laden forces of much of the spoils of war besides prisoners, including Hindu and Muslim women. The Sikhs earned wrath of Abdali, who on three occasions, 1757, 1761, and 1762 pulled down Harmandar and defiled the sacred tank by carcass of cows (S. Singh, 1995).

However after he went back, the Sikhs again regrouped under the guidance and leadership of the Dal Khalsa, and not only resumed their former position, but made fresh attempts upon the strongholds of Muslim governors. Again and again did Abdali return to punish and subdue them, and always with the same success, until at length, being deserted by a large body of his troops on the Sutlej, he retraced his steps (1764) to Kabul, and never again crossed the Indus. On his final departure, the Sikh *sardars* spread themselves over the country, and occupied it as a permanent inheritance (Steinbach, 1846).
Despite the *Ghallughara* disaster the Sikhs had regained enough confidence to assemble in large numbers at Amritsar to celebrate Diwali within six months. Abdali made a mild effort to win them over and sent an envoy with proposals for a treaty of peace. The Sikhs were in no mood for a treaty with the Afghan, and heaped insults on the envoy. Abdali did not waste any more time and turned up on the outskirts of Amritsar (K. Singh, 2004a). In October 1762, shortly after the *ghallughara*, the Sikhs again equitably measured sword with the Afghan forces in the battle of Amritsar (S. Singh, 1995).

By the spring of 1763, Abdal’s nominees were restricted to their camps. The largest Afghan pocket in the Punjab, Kasur, fell to the Bhangi, Hari Singh, yielding a treasure large enough to finance many expeditions. The Jullundur Doab was retaken by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. In November 1763, Charhat Singh Sukerchakia and the Bhangis inflicted a defeat on General Jahan Khan at Sialkot. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia defeated Bhikhan Khan of Malerkotla (who was slain) and plundered Morinda. As in the past, the wrath of the Sikhs was vented on Sirhind, which was recaptured in January 1764. At the site of the execution of Guru Gobind’s sons, a shrine was raised and named Fatehgarh, the fort of Victory (K. Singh, 2004a). In 1764, they captured Lahore and in retaliation split hog’s blood in the Shahi Mosque. But living upto their character, they did not destroy the mosque or kill a single Afghan prisoner in cold blood (S. Singh, 1995).

After Abdali’s departure in 1764, the Sarbat Khalsa met at Baisakhi on 10th April 1765. The pool of the Harmandar was cleansed and the shrine rebuilt at considerable expense. Six of the twelve *misls* appointed representatives to look after their interests in Amritsar. Religious services and the *Guru ka langar* were resumed on a scale larger than ever. The Sarbat Khalsa resolved to take advantage of the absence of Abdali’s governor, Kabuli Mal (who was in Jammu recruiting Dogras for his army) to retake Lahore (K. Singh, 2004a).

Abdali’s repeated incursions destroyed Mughal administration in Punjab. He dealt a crippling blow to Maratha pretensions in the north. Thus he created a power vacuum in Punjab which was filled by the Sikhs. Abdali failed to put down the Sikhs because they refused to meet him on his terms. They were everywhere and yet elusive. They displayed boldness in attacking armies much stronger than theirs and swiftness in running away when the tide of the battle
turned against them. The Sikhs were able to resort to these tactics because of the support of local population. The peasants gave them food, tended the wounded, and gave shelter. The Sikhs were also fortunate in having leaders like Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Hari Singh Bhangi and Charhat Singh Sukerchakia (K. Singh, 2004a).

On 16 April 1765, the Bhangis, Gujjar Singh and Lehna Singh forced their way into Lahore (the capital city). They were joined the next day by Sobha Singh of Kanahaya misl. They heeded the words of advice of the leading citizens. This city, called the Guru’s cradle, pleaded the citizens alluding to the fact that Lahore was the birthplace of the fourth guru, Ram Das (K. Singh, 2004a).

In November 1766, Abdali came to Punjab for the eighth time with the objective of destroying the Sikhs. He brushed aside two attempts by them to check him near the river Jhelum and proceeded triumphantly through Gujarat to Sialkot. He ordered the zamindars to arrest and kill, all persons carrying the marks of Sikhism. From Sialkot, the Afghans turned to Lahore. The three Sardars, who had parcelled the city between themselves, left immediately. Abdali entered the capital on 22nd December, 1766. In January 1767, Abdali’s General, Jahan Khan, who had suffered many reverses at the hands of the Sikhs, boldly marched up to Amritsar. By the end of 1767, the Sikhs had retaken the whole of the Punjab. In the north and north-west, Gujjar Singh reduced the Muslim tribes of the Salt range and Pothohar and established his representative in Rawalpindi (K. Singh, 2004a).

They forbade plunder and established a non-sectarian and just administration. They struck coins as a mark of sovereignty. The people by now were sick of Abdali’s incursions, and wanted the Sikh rule to firm up (S. Singh, 1995). The Muslims of Lahore shed their fear of the Khalsa and instead, like their co-religionists in the countryside, began to look upon the Sikhs more as fellow Punjabis than as infidels and to regard the Afghans more as foreigners than as defenders of the faith. This change of heart was the most decisive factor in the success of Ranjit Singh later (K. Singh, 2004a). Syed Bulleh Shah, the Sufi Saint, openly welcomed the Sikh rule. Abdali after another couple of predatory incursions gave up (S. Singh, 1995).
Till 1767, all the *misls* were focussed to deal with one objective of thwarting the invasions of Abdali. Thus they remained united under the common flag of *Dal Khalsa*. They obeyed the command of one *Jathedar*. They honoured all the decisions of *Sarbat Khalsa* without any reservations. After 1767, the link of a common enemy and common danger of Abdali disappeared. Influence of Mughal and Marathas too had weakened in Punjab. There was no power in Punjab that was compatible with the Sikhs. Thus selfish motives surfaced, political aspirations, discords and mutual aggression commenced between the various *misls*. All *misls* started expanding their territory of jurisdiction. Their desire to extend their rules changed their attitude of love and respect into jealousy and hatred. Thus the entire Punjab got divided into twelve parts. The attendance on *Sarbat Khalsa* at Amritsar started thinning. Those who attended would show total respect and regard to the *Gurmatas*. Those who were absent started flouting such respected decisions. Many started raising objections. As a result, the holding of *Sarbat Khalsa* became infrequent. The last meeting of *Sarbat Khalsa* took place in 1805 during the times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (“Brief History”, n.d.).

Amongst the chieftains who profited by this state of things, Charhat Singh and Maha Singh were the most fortunate. After a series of manoeuvrings and collisions extending over a period of twenty years, from 1773 to 1791, the former being accidentally killed, the latter found himself master of a considerable amount of territory. He administered this territory until his death in 1792, leaving his son, the Ranjit Singh, who gradually extended his territory until he became sole ruler of the entire Punjab (Steinbach, 1846).

It was quite clear that the *misls* had seen their day and, if the Punjab was to remain free, it would have to be united under one man who had both the power to abolish the *misls* and the vision to create a state which all Punjabis, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs could call their own. This was the analysis made by the English traveller, Forster, when he wrote in 1783:

“We may see some ambitious chief, led on by his genius and success absorbing the power of his associates, display from the ruins of their commonwealth the standard of monarchy”.

These visionary words were written when Ranjit Singh of the Sukerchakia *misl* was only three years old. On 7th July 1799, the massive gates of the Lahore fort were opened and its eighteen-year-old conqueror entered the citadel to the

2.3.4. Sikh Kingdom

Then a brilliant story of military struggle and success started, crowned at last by the splendid victories of Ranjit Singh, the Lion of Punjab, who made Punjab practically the Sikh empire. Ranjit Singh was born on 13\textsuperscript{th} November, 1780 at Gujranwala. His father Mahan Singh, a leader of the Sukarchakia \emph{misl}, fought a number of battles against the Afghan armies and died in 1792 when Ranjit Singh was only 12 years old (Kapoor, 2000).

After taking over the leadership of the Sukarchakias, Ranjit Singh’s main desire was to get control of Lahore, which the Sikhs had long regarded as the political centre of their community. The city, though under the authority of the ruler of Afghanistan, was held by the Bhangi \emph{misl}, since its capture in 1764 by the two Bhangi sardars, Lehna Singh and Gujar Singh. At that time Lahore was governed by Lehna Singh’s three sons. People were unhappy with their poor governness and Ranjit Singh was told that the inhabitants would rejoice at their overthrow. He deemed, therefore, that the time had come for action.

Shah Zaman, who in 1793 had succeeded Timur on the throne of Afghanistan, had twice invaded India, between the years 1795 and 1797. On each occasion, the Sikhs had followed their old tactics, withdrawing their possessions to the hills on the approach of the Afghan army, seizing every opportunity to impede its movements, and returning to their homes as soon as it had crossed back the Indus. During his third invasion in 1798, Shah Zaman occupied Lahore. He was taking steps for the recovery of his father’s lost provinces. Suddenly, he had to leave for Kabul because of the hostility of the Shah of Persia. In a rush to reach Kabul, he left behind twelve of his guns which he had been unable to carry across the Jhelum, the river being then in flood (Payne, 1915). He sent a message to Ranjit Singh promising him the grant of the city of Lahore if he would recover the guns and convey them to Peshawar. The request was complied with, and the Shah granted him the city of Lahore. Armed with the Shah’s authority, and supported by Sada Kaur and her troops, he reached the city. As expected, the gates were at once opened to him, and the people welcomed him.

The Bhangi \emph{sardars} fled without offering any resistance. This feat aroused bitter jealousy amongst the Sikh \emph{sardars}. The Bhangis and the Ramgarhias joined hands to take back Lahore from Ranjit Singh, and to check his growing power. But neither of
these things was accomplished. The title of ‘Maharaja’ was assumed by Ranjit Singh in 1801, placing him at the head of a large force. He attacked and wrested control of one Bhangi stronghold after another. Then allying with the Ahluwalia misl, he captured the holy city of Amritsar in 1802. The Bhangi misl never recovered from this blow. In the course of a few years, all its possessions were annexed by Ranjit Singh. The Ramgarhia misl stayed for another decade in semi-independence, and then it too was absorbed into the kingdom of Lahore (Payne, 1915).

Ranjit Singh annexed Kasur in 1801 and Multan in 1803. In the next two years, he brought whole of the Central Punjab, from the Sutlej to the Jhelum, under his control. He occupied Ludhiana in 1806. The Sikh Cis-Sutlej states as Nabha, Patiala and Jind appealed to the British for protection. The British and Ranjit Singh signed the treaty of Amritsar on 25th April, 1809. By this treaty, the river Sutlej was fixed as the boundary between the Sikh and the British Empire (Kapoor, 2000). Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s advance southward of the Sutlej was stopped by the treaty of Amritsar. Now he turned his attention towards North, East and West. He conquered the hill states of Kangra, Jammu, Harsota, Rajouri, Bhimber, Noorpur, Jaswal and Chamba from 1807-1809. Kashmir was defeated in 1814 but officially annexed in 1819 (Kapoor, 2000).

In the Northwest Frontier, Attock was conquered in 1813. Peshawar in 1818, Dera-Gazikhan, Hazara and Dara-Ismail khan were annexed in 1821. An uprising in
Peshawar was quelled by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1824, when he entered the town with great pomp and show. He was given a very warm welcome by the native population. Ladakh in the Kashmir valley and Jamrod, a border town of Afghanistan and India, were conquered by the Maharaja in 1837 (Kapoor, 2000).

The Maharaja was presented with the ‘Kohinoor’ by the Wafa Begum, the wife of Shah Sujah, the former ruler of Kabul, for saving her husband’s life first from his brother Shah Mohammed and then from Fateh Khan, the Wazir of Kashmir.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh died in Lahore, on 20th June, 1839 after a severe attack of paralysis. He was 59 years old and had very successfully ruled Punjab for about forty years (Kapoor, 2000). Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s forty years (1799-1839) remains the golden age of the Sikh political achievement. With his death began the disintegration of the Sikhs as a political and social force. The two Anglo-Sikh wars ended in defeat of the Sikh armies and the annexation of their kingdom in 1849. Their social decline, though little noticed in the earlier stages, began at the same time (K. Singh, 2004b). Ranjit Singh’s rule was, by all standards, fair and tolerant towards all communities, and humane to the extent that he never found it necessary to sentence even a single person to death, not even those who attempted to murder him (D. Singh, 1992).

2.3.5. British Period (1849-1947)

British could not take over Punjab because Sikhs held a dominant force under the ruler Ranjit Singh. After Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s death, the saddest period, treachery and betrayal started. Brave warriors and gallant men were deceived and sold. Ultimately, the Sikh empire began to collapse. The Punjab was annexed by the British within ten years of his death on 23rd March, 1849. After the Maharaja’s death, the unfaithful Dogras of Jammu with their well-rehearsed plan, double-crossed the Sikh sardars and sold the Sikh empire to the British. Battle of Mudki and Ferozshah (1845) saw heavy fighting between British and Sikhs. Sikhs were defeated due to the treachery of their Generals. The final battle of Sobraon on 10th February, 1846 proved decisive where Sikhs again lost due to the betrayal of their generals. The British were able to capture most of India after defeating Sikhs in 1849 in second Anglo - Sikh war.

The annexation exposed the dispirited and leaderless Sikh masses to the preachers of Christian missionaries and the Hindu Arya Samajists trying to convert the Sikhs. The Singh Sabha met this challenge by reviving interest in the Sikh religion and tradition (D. Singh, 1992). The kesadhari Khalsa were
threatened with extinction as large numbers began to abandon the external forms (unshorn hair and beards) and became *sahajdhari* Sikhs. When the Khalsa was in the power, large numbers of Hindus had begun to grow their hair and beards and pay lip-worship to the Sikh gurus. After annexation, many of these returned to the Hindu fold (D. Singh, 1992).

The economic advantages offered by the British to the Sikhs, checked the disintegration of Sikhism and its lapse into Hinduism. The last decade of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century saw a phenomenal rise in the number of Sikhs. This was largely due to the patronage of the British government, which accorded *kesadhari* Sikhs economic and political privileges like preferential recruitment in the army and the civil services, and later, separate electorates and the reservation of seats in the legislatures. This induced the *kesadhari* Khalsa to distance themselves from the *sahajdhari* as well as from the Hindus (D. Singh, 1992).

### 2.3.6. The Post-Independence Period (1947-till date)

The early years of independent India were full of disruptive events like large scale migration of Sikhs to India from Pakistan after the communal violence. Sikhs suffered the most in the post-independence period. India was partitioned on the basis of the two nation theory, creating Pakistan for Muslims with the Muslim majority areas. Sikhs did not want the bifurcation of their homeland Punjab, as it would divide the Sikhs hearth and home and their fertile lands and other immovable properties between Pakistan and India. The main sufferers of the partition were the Sikhs who had to leave their vast tracts of canal irrigated lands and other immovable properties. About four million Sikhs had to migrate from Pakistan, leaving behind all of their wealthy possessions. Hundreds of thousands of Sikhs were killed mercilessly without any fault of theirs.

After independence, there was a long period of agitation and suffering for the creation of a Punjabi speaking state. But the commission which demarcated the boundaries on the basis of 1961 census left some of the Punjabi speaking areas out of the Punjab state and gave them over to Haryana which was created out of remaining areas. The commission even allocated Chandigarh to Haryana. The problem of getting Punjabi speaking areas and Chandigarh restored to the Punjab became a major issue (S. Singh, 2005).
After 1967, there were a couple of Akali led state ministries in Punjab, which also saw the Green Revolution. The Sikhs also spread widely in the Diaspora, especially England, Canada and USA, with some Sikhs from East Africa also going to those lands. There was spurt in Sikh presence all around, and Sikhs seemed to be in up spirit (S. Singh, 1995).

On October 16, 1973 the Akali Dal, when it was not in power, passed “The Anandpur Sahib Resolution” for regional autonomy of Punjab, and return of Chandigarh to Punjab etc. During the 1970’s and till the 1980’s the Akali Dal and Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee leaders have been centering around Prakash Singh Badal, Gurcharn Singh Tohra, Jagdev Singh Talwandi, Sujit Singh Barnala, Balwant Singh and Harchand Singh Longowal.

The anti-Nirankari movement was started by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and the Babbar Khalsa as a result of April 13, 1978 incident, in which thirteen devout Amritdhari Sikhs were shot dead by the Nirankaris in Amritsar. In August 1982 the 'Dharam Yudh' agitation was started under the leadership of Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, to whom all Akali Dal members of Legislative Assembly and Parliament had submitted their resignation. In October 1983, the Centre Government imposed President's Rule in Punjab. Punjab saw period of militancy from early eighties to early nineties.

During the operation Bluestar in the year 1984, government forces stormed the sacred Sikh shrine, the Golden Temple in Amritsar to root out Sikh militants. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s Sikh bodyguards avenged the act by assassinating her months after it. This was followed by anti-Sikh riots in capital Delhi and several other parts of the country that shook the conscience and secular fabric of the country. Manmohan Singh is the current prime minister of India. He became India’s first Sikh and non-Hindu prime minister. This is impressive due to the troubled relationship between India’s Sikhs and the Hindu majority during the 1980s (Bisnnoi, 2010).

2.4. Summary:

This chapter gives an overview of the Sikh history starting from inception of the Sikhism till the post-independence period. Sikh history is studied by dividing it into six phases as follows:

The Guru Period (1469-1708): In the Guru Period phase, lives and teachings of the ten Sikh Gurus are discussed. Guru period can further be divided into two parts, the first
upto the time of the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, and the second thereafter. The execution of Guru Arjan in 1606 was a turning point in Sikh history. After this, the Sikhs gradually turned from a peaceful sect of Nanak Panthis into a militant organisation. In 1699, the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa, a casteless and classless brotherhood and thus fulfilled the mission of the first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak Dev.

The Post Guru Period (A.D. 1708-1748): The post Guru Period starts with the demise of the tenth Guru. The Sikh forces were led by a devout follower of the last Guru, named Banda. After the death of Banda in 1716, Sikhs grouped themselves into small Jathas (groups) and began their old tactics of harassing the government by their aggressive expeditions and guerrilla warfare.

The Misl Period (A.D. 1748-1799): Sikhs had divided themselves into states or unions twelve in number, and the term used to denote such a union was the Persian word “Misl” meaning alike or equal. Misls helped to keep the Sikh organisations united and in the development and spread of Sikhism. All these Misls were united under one name, Dal Khalsa, in a large congregation of Sikhs held in 1748 in Amritsar known as Sarbat Khalsa.

The Sikh Kingdom (A.D. 1799-1849): Then a brilliant story of military struggle and military success, crowned at last by the splendid victories of Ranjit Singh, the Lion of the Punjab. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's forty years (1799-1839) remains the golden age of Sikh political achievement. British could not take over Punjab because Sikhs held a dominant force under Ranjit Singh. After Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s death on 27 June, 1839, the Sikh empire began to collapse. The Punjab was annexed by the British within ten years of his death on 23 March, 1849.

The British Period (A.D. 1849-1947): The annexation exposed the dispirited and leaderless Sikh masses to the preaching of Christian missionaries and the Hindu Arya Samajis trying to convert the Sikhs. The kesadhari Khalsa were threatened with extinction as large numbers began to abandon the external forms (unshorn hair and beards) and became sahajdhari Sikhs. The British government accorded kesadhari Sikhs economic and political privileges. This induced the kesadhari Khalsa to distance themselves from the sahajdhari as well as from Hindus.

The Post-Independence Period (1947-till date): This discusses briefly the various developments in the Sikh history after independence.