

Editors' Introduction to Special Issue, Part 1

Jugdep Singh Chima and Nirvikar Singh

Hiram College (USA) & University of California, Santa Cruz

Introduction: The Legacy of 1984 and Contemporary Challenges for Punjab, India

Punjab is a frontier region that was the birthplace of the Sikh faith. These characteristics fed into the brutal reality of Partition in 1947 and its disproportionate impact on the Sikh community. After the contestations of the Indian independence movement and the disruption of Partition, almost another two decades passed before the final redrawing of political boundaries of the state of Punjab in independent India. This reorganization created a Sikh-majority state, where Punjabi was the undisputed official language. But, the 1966 reorganization of greater Indian Punjab into the smaller states of Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh did not resolve problems of multiple claims to the vital water from Punjab's rivers. The status of Chandigarh, a city built from scratch to be the capital city of post-independence Punjab, also remained a lingering inter-state issue. The Green Revolution of the 1960s brought many economic benefits to Punjab, but also introduced new problems and challenges. The influences of regional geopolitics and modernity also seemed to pose special challenges for the people and government of the state, including its majority Sikh population. From exceptional promise, Punjab descended into conflict and suffering three-and-a-half decades after Indian independence, belying its position as a relatively well-off state within the country.

Recent events in Punjab have only highlighted the persistence of the long-term and structural issues that continue to have a significant impact on the state's society, polity, and economy. The two-decade-plus arc of heightened conflict and its subsequent repression in the state, running from the Anandpur Sahib Resolution in 1973 to the election of an Akali Dal government in 1997, did little or nothing to resolve complex and contentious issues of economic development and employment creation, natural resource use and sustainability, religious identities, and social change. Arguably, the long disruption of normal politics during the decade of violent insurgency also contributed to the crisis of governance from which the state continues to suffer even today.

This two-part special issue on contemporary challenges for Punjab, spanning Volumes 22 (1) and 22 (2) of the *Journal of Punjab Studies*, was conceived to provide an opportunity for scholars to reflect on the state's current situation, and how it came about. In the broader Indian context, Punjab can be seen as a relatively small and well-off state, but less critical to India's future than other contemporary states. On the other hand, Punjab's geographic position as a

border state, its long-running status as a major contributor to India's public food-grain procurement system, and the presence of its majority Sikh population make the state's social, economic and political conditions difficult to ignore. It is important to recognize these factors, and to also look at the state of Punjab in a comparative context with respect to other states in India.¹ This, too, was one of the goals of this exercise - that is, highlighting that what happens in Punjab, while obviously vital for its own people, also has broader national and sometimes international implications.

This first issue of two contains eight papers, with overlapping themes centered on the political dimensions of events in Punjab, including the violent conflict that lasted over a decade from the early-1980s to the early-1990s. The upcoming second issue will examine aspects of the economy, society and global diaspora of Punjab, as they have been shaped by (and have help to shape) events, outcomes, perceptions and memories in the region. Before providing a brief overview of the eight papers in this issue, we would like to gratefully acknowledge the many distinguished scholars who served as reviewers for the two issues. These individuals include Shilpa Aggarwal, Bidisha Biswas, Ambrish Dongre, Sumit Ganguly, Maitreesh Ghatak, Sambuddha Ghatak, Rahuldeep Singh Gill, Landon Hancock, Robin Jeffrey, Devesh Kapur, Ravinder Kaur, Ashok Kotwal, Dilip Mookherjee, Baldev Raj Nayar, Sanchari Roy, Juned Shaikh, Ajay Shenoy, Paul Staniland, Shinder Thandi, Reeta Tremblay, and Virginia Van Dyke. Special thanks are due to Eilin Francis, who combined multiple and intensive reviewing and editing duties with great efficiency and aplomb.

This journal issue's lead article, by Paul Wallace, provides a comparative and conceptual perspective on the conflict that wrenched Punjab² and its lack of "closure." Wallace's central point is that, without acknowledgment of the suffering and human rights violations that occurred in Punjab, there can be no real resolution let alone effective closure. Much of Wallace's article surveys other conflicts, several much more severe than Punjab's and the varied attempts to achieve some kind of "truth and reconciliation" in post-conflict societies. As far as we are aware, this is the first attempt to put the issue of "closure" in relation to the Punjab conflict in a comparative conceptual context, although there have been many reports documenting the various human rights violations related to those events. Wallace draws on these reports of course, as well as summarizing what happened in Punjab and its continuing post-conflict challenges.

The next three articles are all by Punjab-based scholars - Kuldip Singh, Jagrup Singh Sekhon and Nirmal Singh, and Satnam Singh Deol. Each piece provides a detailed analysis of the rise and decline of conflict in Punjab, from the 1970s to the 1990s. In some cases, deeper history is summarized.³ The three articles differ in details and perspectives: they draw on earlier work, as well as adding new insights and specifics with respect to what transpired in Punjab. But, they also share commonalities by conveying the suffering that accompanied the conflict resulting from the actions of militants, security forces and opportunistic criminals. These analyses also examine the role of various political and religious

leaders in shaping the manner in which events unfolded during the decade of insurgency. All three articles draw on copious earlier work and, even though they are not exhaustive, provide important new reflections on what happened in Punjab, how it happened, and why. For example, Kuldip Singh explains the inability of the separatist movement to sustain itself by examining dissenting Sikh voices, which offered different visions for the Sikh community in contrast to those constructed by the militants. Jagrup Singh Sekhon and Nirmal Singh critically assess the literature claiming to explain both the rise and fall of the Sikh separatist insurgency, including competing theories for the phenomenon. Satnam Singh Deol analyzes the different phases of both insurgent and state violence during the 1980s and 1990s, including the factors determining the differing dynamics of violence during this period. Along with their respective analysis, these Punjab-based scholars convey the feeling of what it must have been like to live through that disturbing period for the common people of Punjab.

Philip Hultquist's article provides an important new analysis of the Punjab conflict by utilizing the theoretical literature on counterinsurgency and civil war settlements. An important component of his analysis is identifying counterinsurgency constraints on the government's strategy flowing from national political considerations, which are significant in India's federal context, as well as the dynamic nature of the interaction between insurgent and state violence. Matthew Webb provides another innovative analysis of the events in Punjab, by comparing it to the ongoing Kashmir conflict. He examines the similarities, but also the complex differences between the two conflicts including the roles of religion, ethnicity, language, culture, and political economy in each. Hultquist and Webb both cover many of the same events as the three Punjab-based scholars, but they provide their own emphases and interpretations through innovative and rigorous theoretically-informed analysis. We hope that this set of articles will eventually yield to a new and fruitful synthesis that deepens our understanding of the tragedy of Punjab.

The articles by Jugdep Singh Chima and Ashutosh Kumar that round out this special issue examine contemporary events in Punjab. Chima's piece focuses on emerging ideological cleavages within contemporary Sikh politics. He shows how polarization in both Sikh and Punjab politics continues in forms that reflect events of the recent past, but also include new alliances and alignments that may eventually result in new forms of unproductive conflict which potentially compromise Punjab's political stability. Kumar provides a detailed, dynamic account of the role of a new political player, the Aam Aadmi Party, which may give Punjab's long-suffering population a viable alternative for representation or, alternatively, further destabilize the state's already volatile electoral politics. Unfortunately, both these articles only highlight the continuing challenges that Punjab faces in terms of finding effective political leadership that can serve the interests of the state's diverse population in an effective and problem-solving manner.

In short, this collection of articles provides the reader with a rich and probing journey into the politics of Punjab, focusing on the events of 1984 and their immediate aftermath, and continuing into the present day. The tragic and

disturbing events of 1984, as this collection of scholarly articles amply demonstrates, have had a lasting impact on the state's politics and the collective memory of its people. As the state of Punjab faces new political, economic and social challenges in the contemporary period, these can only be properly understood by examining the connections between the state's very recent past and its current situation. This two-part special volume of the *Journal of Punjab Studies* strives to do just that, but within the confines of peer-reviewed academic analysis.

Notes

¹ It would also be useful to compare the Indian state of Punjab with its eponymous counterpart across the international border in Pakistan. We could not get such an analysis for this volume, but hope the collection here will inspire a future effort in this particular direction.

² Wallace prefers the term "terrorism," and discusses that choice in note 2 of his article. Another academic perspective is that "terrorism" is just one possible tactic often used by various militant and insurgent movements (and also by the state). When talking about violence used for a political purpose, one can also use the more neutral and inclusive term "political violence," unless referring to a very specific act which is explicitly designed to send a symbolic message to a public audience by frightening and the use of extreme violence. Other papers in this special issue use terms such as "insurgency," "militancy" and "violent conflict" to describe the overall situation in Punjab.

³ This history, as it pertains to Sikh identity is sometimes contentious. For example, see Singh (2016) for a critique of some of the historical interpretation upon which at least one of these pieces relies.

References

Singh, Nirvikar (2016), 'Cosmopolitanism, Tradition and Identity: Framing the Sikh Experience in California', *Sikh Research Journal*, 1 (5), September, <http://www.sikhfoundation.org/sikh-research-journal/>.