

Editorial Note

This issue of the *Journal of Punjab Studies* reflects the research being done in the universities and institutes at Chandigarh, Amritsar, Patiala, Shimla, Delhi and Baroda. Altogether, it covers a wide span of time, from the protohistoric period to the first decade of the present century, and studying the entire north-western region as well as its sub-regions in the plains and the hills, reflecting the distinctiveness of their historical experience in the larger context of Indian history.

In the first essay, Chetan Singh discusses how a hegemonic system was created in the Western Himalaya by integrating the local cults of villages and chiefdoms with the 'great tradition' of Brahmanical Hinduism, presided over by the *raja*. J.S. Grewal makes sense of the disparate facts and places in Ganesh Das's *Char Bagh* to reconstruct a coherent picture of socio-cultural configuration in the pre-colonial Punjab. Karamjit Malhotra throws light on the processes by which new gender norms were being formulated for the Sikh social order and community life in the eighteenth century. A comparative analysis of the *Panchal Pandita* and the *Punjabi Bhain* by Mini Sandhu shows that the change in the relative position and role of women designed by the male reformers was significantly different from the aspirations of the women themselves as the objects of reform. Prem Chowdhry discusses how the reigning ideology of excluding women from inheriting property was constructed by the colonial state and how it is pitted against the implementation of post-Independence legislation in the south-east Punjab. While underlining the iconoclastic radicalism of Wazir Singh, a dalit poet, Raj Kumar Hans sees his life and work as a continuation of the medieval Sant movement into the nineteenth century Punjab. Anshu Malhotra's analysis of Giani Ditt Singh's life and work brings out the constraints of a dalit intellectual in dealing with the debilitating institution of caste within the framework of the Lahore Singh Sabha. Sheena Pall's discussion of the Sanatanist assertion that Sikhs are Hindu and of its comprehensive rejoinder by Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha underscores the persistent refusal of the Punjabi Hindus to recognize Sikh identity. Sasha Tandon brings out the bearing of the colonial situation *per se* on the outbreak and handling of epidemics in the Punjab region. Sukhdev Singh Sohal discusses the underlying causes of the deepening food crisis and escalating inflation in the 1940s and attributes it mainly to the priorities and policies of the British. Delineating the urban patterns in the Punjab region from the mature Indus phase to the end of the twentieth century, Reeta Grewal finds the changes in urban landscape under the British significant enough to be considered revolutionary, brought about by the Western technology subserving the demands of the colonial situation.

As an exercise in 'second order history', the last essay dwells on the growing richness of historical writings on the Sikhs and the emergence of controversies over nearly all the important aspects of Sikh Studies today. This essay focuses

on J.S. Grewal's position on the issues under debate but its bearing is evident on some other contributions as well. Incidentally, nearly half of the essays in this volume relate to Sikh history which, by now, has acquired autonomy of its own, partly because of its scope, complexity and sophistication, and partly because interest in the Sikh past began much earlier than in Punjab history.

Even when all the contributions are located in the discipline of history, there are significant differences of approach. Reliance on theory is explicit in some and implicit in others, though a few rely more on empirical evidence. Some analyse contemporary literature for historical reconstruction; some take note of ideological underpinnings and some tend to minimise these. This diversity of approach is as much due to the standpoints of the authors as to the bearing of different allied disciplines: geography, archaeology, social anthropology, sociology, literature, philosophy, political science, economics and religious studies. Differences in approach and interpretation can be taken as a sign of the vitality of the field of Sikh and Punjab Studies.

While breaking fresh ground in different facets of the region's history these essays throw up several new questions. Views expressed by the authors are entirely their own. The Editor is thankful to them for their contributions.

Institute of Punjab Studies,
Indu Banga, Chandigarh.