

Editors' Introduction to Special Issue, Part 2

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Introduction: The Legacy of 1984 and Contemporary Challenges for Punjab, India, Part 2

This issue of the *Journal of Punjab Studies* presents the second collection of articles dealing with the topics elucidated in our title. In our introduction to the first issue (*Journal of Punjab Studies*, 22 (1)), we provided the background and motivation for our undertaking this effort, and refer readers to that summary (Chima and Singh, 2015). The eight articles in the first collection focused primarily on the causes and consequences of a breakdown of “normal politics”¹ in the Indian state of Punjab, its human and societal costs, and reasons for the persistence of political instability and social unrest to the present day. What was striking about that collection, at least to us, was the rawness of those events, even after decades, and even filtered through academic analysis.² Partly, this reflects the lack of closure that was the central theme of Paul Wallace’s lead essay in that first part (Wallace, 2015). This second collection has two complementary emphases. One is on the economic (and, to some extent, social) causes and consequences of Punjab’s prolonged conflict, and the other is on the impact of that period on the state’s global diaspora. Several of the themes of governance, federalism, and economic problems that were implicit in the first issue come to the fore in the current collection of articles.

The lead article in this issue is by Murray Leaf, an anthropologist who did pioneering fieldwork in post-independence, Green Revolution-era Punjab.³ His article explores the interplay of local social relations, politics, religious identities and developmental efforts. Leaf traces out the political and economic causes of the conflict in Punjab, paying careful attention to economic issues. In a particularly innovative analysis, Leaf identifies the problems inherent in a political system that stifled local autonomy, especially during the conflict period of centralized rule of the state, but even after then, despite the passage of subsequent constitutional amendments designed to create more autonomous local governments. Thus, a political and administrative system that initially enabled economic innovation subsequently grossly stifled it in Punjab.⁴

Prakarsh Singh, in his contribution, uses rational choice theories to frame empirically testable hypotheses about civil conflict in general, but the main thrust of his article focuses on impacts of the conflict in Punjab. First, he argues that macroeconomic (state-level) data is inconclusive as to the impacts on agriculture, but then turns to microeconomic data drawing on his own previous work. Here, he offers quantitative evidence that the conflict had negative

impacts on long-term agricultural investment and on some aspects of educational investment (which could also have reciprocal long-term impacts).⁵ The article also suggests several areas for further empirical research on the impacts of Punjab's conflict on its subsequent economic performance.

Lakhwinder Singh's article also focuses on Punjab's economic problems. He discusses the political events that contributed to the conflict, arguing that religious sentiments were used by politicians to divert attention from economic challenges that were not being addressed adequately. The essence of his argument is that Punjab "over-stayed" in agriculture, specifically the foodgrains at the heart of the Green Revolution. Singh discusses the political causes and material consequences of this failure to achieve structural change in the state's economy. Subsequently, he traces the relative decline of the state's economy and points out the ecological and societal dangers of continuing along its current path.

Sumita Kale and Laveesh Bhandari provide an analysis of Punjab's economic trajectory around the theme of state size. First, they present suggestive empirical evidence that smaller Indian states have done better – the key methodology involves comparing the economic performance of certain states before and after they were divided. However, Punjab turns out to be an exception in the Indian context. After considering various explanations – including geography, national politics, and conflict – they conjecture that Punjab's problem has been its weak civil society institutions, which are unable to provide checks to unproductive political competition. This is an intriguing idea, and has some relationship to Leaf's analysis. All four of this first set of papers raise important questions not just for Punjab, but for other Indian states as well, about the interaction of politics, social structures and economics.

Pritam Singh and Nadia Singh's co-authored article addresses a lingering sociological and health care problem in Punjab – the status of the female child. The authors demonstrate that, while the overall sex ratio and child sex ratio have improved in the state over the past decade and half, there have not been corresponding improvements in the health and well-being of the female child in comparison to the male child. In fact, as Singh and Singh show, the relative status of the female child has actually seen a relative decline on numerous health-related measures such as nutrition, immunization, and health-care seeking behavior. Even more disturbingly, these differences are found to exist across socio-economic lines, including prominently among upper middle-class households. This article raises, but does not directly address, the question of how the loss of human capital resulting from this discrimination against the female child has affected the economic development of Punjab.

This issue closes with the respective works of two sociologists – Didi Mitra and Shruti Devgan – working on Punjab and the Sikhs, including on the overseas diaspora. In her article, Mitra questions the binary between traditional "homeland" and overseas "diaspora." In contrast, she demonstrates how these two categories often intersect in the construction of "home" for Sikhs living in America. This interaction, she argues, includes a variety of different avenues ranging from support for Sikh political causes such as Khalistan and "liberating"

the Akal Takht, to more non-political involvement such as support for charitable or educational endeavors in their native villages. Both “homeland” and “diaspora,” as Mitra argues, are interconnected in notions of “home” and “self” for most Sikh-Americans. In her article, Shruti Devgan examines how a new generation of Sikhs, primarily within the diaspora, have engaged in “digital memory work” on the traumas of 1984. This “memory work” has challenged the dominant (but contrasting) narratives of both the Indian state and Khalistani activists – the former interpreting the events of 1984 (including Operation Blue Star and the anti-Sikh pogroms) as legitimate state responses to separatist terrorists and a potentially seditious community, and the latter interpreting these events as illegitimate actions to crush an entire community and its legitimate rights. In contrast, as Devgan argues, recent “digital memory work” on Sikh websites devoted to 1984 has presented a more nuanced and humanistic approach to these tragedies, causing a “digital fracture” in the previously dominant narratives. Both of the articles by Mitra and Devgan explore evolving notions of “self,” “community,” and “history” as related to various aspects of 1984 and its aftermath.

Thus, the articles contained in this second issue of the two-part special volume complement the content of the first volume in numerous ways. This second volume explores some of the main economic and social challenges facing Punjab, many of which are closely connected to the tragedies of 1984, whereas the first issue examined many of the political dynamics related to 1984 and their after effects. Politically, Punjab continues to grapple with the aftermath of conflict in the form of continuing debates about the causes and dynamics of insurgency, the lack of purposeful “closure” to the conflict, continued instability within internal Sikh politics, and state-level political parties committed to unprincipled competition and unbridled short-term populism. Economically, the state’s dominant sector – agriculture – has become stagnant and unable to propel the state’s economy into 21st century national and world economies characterized by education, globalization, specialty commodities, and industrial/service sector growth. Sociologically, Punjab faces continued bias against the female child, and skyrocketing youth drug addiction especially in its rural areas. The large and ever-growing Punjabi and Sikh diaspora provides an additional dimension in examining contemporary “Punjab” with its extensive economic ties, close cultural affinities, and changing notions of “self-identity.” As Punjab heads further into the 21st century, it remains to be seen how these interrelated political, economic, and social challenges will be addressed, and potentially transform the traditional birthplace of the Sikh faith and people. While the challenges are real and deep-seated, we are cautiously optimistic that the Punjabi and Sikh people – with their spirit, ingenuity and work ethic – are up to these challenges.

Finally, we conclude by once again acknowledging with gratitude the distinguished scholars who served as reviewers for the two issues. These individuals were 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. Last but not least, Eilin Francis very effectively carried out multiple reviewing and editing duties. Both issues of this two-part special volume are better as a result of their services, for which we remain ever grateful.

Notes

¹ For a discussion of this term in the Indian context see, for example, Brass (1994).

² We must also acknowledge that the analyses presented in our collection were not necessarily unique or comprehensive. During the 1980s and 1990s, many scholarly books and articles examined the ongoing conflict. A particularly useful piece that foreshadowed some of the work in our collection is Thandi (1996). In contrast, our contributors had the advantage of the passage of time and the perspective that comes with that.

³ See Leaf (1972, 1984).

⁴ Leaf's earlier books also touch on the role of Sikh identity and values in the process of innovation in Punjab – these were possibly eroded by a combination of geopolitics and modernity, though those are factors not examined in the article in this issue.

⁵ This is in contrast to Aiyar (2013), who dismisses any long-run economic impacts of the Punjab conflict.

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