

Punjab society and politics have, during the last few decades, undergone a radical transformation. When in June 1984, the Indian Army entered the Golden Temple, Punjab events became international media attraction. Since then debate and analysis continue with a view to understanding the issues that have come to fore as a result of Punjab's peculiar demography, economic, especially agricultural, development, different phases of struggles for fulfillment of identity demands, the militancy and violence the state witnessed for over a decade and its future place in Indian society and polity. Much has been written, both from subjective and objective points of view, to locate Punjab in its different facets. Yet much remains to be explored. The volume under review is a serious attempt to fulfil some of the gaps in understanding the Punjab situation in its various facets.

The volume, edited by historians J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, brings together selected papers presented at three seminars organised at Chandigarh by the Institute of Punjab Studies in 1995, 1996 and 1997. These papers cover a wide spectrum of themes including administration, politics, violence, demographical change and the condition of the relatively unprivileged sections of the society like women, people afflicted with indebtedness, debts and labourers.

The volume opens with an essay on administrative space by Gopal Krishan and Surya Kant. Tracing back the nature of administrative structures in Punjab during the colonial rule and its adoption and changes brought in it in various phases of reforms and reorganization, the authors find that the spatial organization of administration in Punjab since Independence represents both the persistence of the colonial pattern and a process of decolonisation. In its shift of focus from land revenue collection and order maintenance function to development promotion era, the administrative organization of space in Punjab has been assuming a more complex form over the years. And some important problems remain to be satisfactorily resolved. The authors refer especially to such problem areas as the right kind of decision making process with regard to size and shape of districts, and the number of tiers in which the administrative units of different hierarchical order should be organised. These issues need to be expeditiously resolved. The authors, however, do not make any concrete suggestions in this regard. Nor do they say anything about the issue of administrative accountability and responsibility which have become so important during the last decades.

P.H. Vaishnav underlines the fact that the Punjab has been running the

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A.S. NARANG

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administrative system that it inherited from the British administration in 1947 very efficiently. It has also been able to produce some creditable results. He comes to this conclusion after reviewing the performance of bureaucrats during different regimes in the state as well as its role in dealing with the phenomenon of militancy. Vaishnav, of course, takes a limited view of administration which does not include participatory administration. Therefore, he also does not have anything to say about accountability.

Tejwant S. Gill's essay on Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Punjab can be described as a starting point for debate on the current situation in Punjab. Various aspects of this debate have been explored in subsequent essays by J.S. Grewal, K.S. Dhillon, Pramod Kumar and Birinder Pal Singh. Gill argues that Nehru had begun the process of rethinking about Punjab; however, the outcome this process reflected his own conception of historiography, which was overly influenced by his emotional attachment to India and the issue of unity in diversity. Proceeding on the basis of this conception and its impingement on the character of Punjab's demographic situation and historical background, he felt that Sikh nationalism, that emerged and became an active ingredient of Punjab politics since the end of the nineteenth century, represented a sectional nationalism working for a more distinct and separate existence of the Sikhs. However, Nehru felt that the negative aspect of sectional nationalism was offset by an amazing exhibition of courage and endurance by the Sikhs. But when it came to evaluating the Sikh's position after independence, Nehru felt that, when the Sikhs found their significance reduced considerably after partition, they began imitating Muslim nationalism. This posed, Nehru felt, a danger to the edifice of secularism. It was this understanding of the Punjab problem that prompted Nehru to deal with Sikh demands including the one for the linguistic re-organization of the Punjab the way he did. Gill suggests

that Nehru's thinking resulted only in a diffident policy, that complicated the issues further.

After Nehru's death, his diffidence was replaced by duality by Indira Gandhi. While she conceded the demand for a Punjabi speaking state, she excluded from it Chandigarh and certain Punjabi-speaking areas. In addition, she also placed water-head works under central control. The result was that the impression that she was biased against the Punjabi Suba became widespread.

The historical background from pre-independence period that was instrumental in the formation of the Sikh psyche is provided by J.S. Grewal in his essay on "Sikh Identity, the Akalis and Khalistan". Grewal argues that the constitutional movement for greater autonomy for the state in India and the militant Sikh movement for a sovereign state outside the Indian Union, both constitute consciousness of important strands in the Sikhs as a distinct identity. Analyzing the events during nationalist movement and after independence, Grewal points out that both the Akalis and the protagonists of Khalistan invoke Sikh identity as essentially relevant for their political programmes. It figures prominently in their political discourses and *praxis*. In this, their distinct appearance, institutions (particularly gurudwaras), past events, including the establishment of Sikh state by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, etc., help them.

As far as the mechanism for protection of Sikh identity is concerned, Grewal argues that the Akalis never demanded a sovereign state for the Sikhs after 1976. There has been a demand for Sikh Homeland which could have a special relationship with the centre coupled with a special internal arrangement. But this demand was voiced only by a few individuals or small splinter groups of the Akalis. Even Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale's initial concern was with religious reform. To look upon his advocacy or use of violence in this connection as a political programme is to do violence to the ordinary connotation of the term

political violence. But he used violence for other purposes, partly in reaction to violence used by others, which created a vicious circle. Grewal's essay throws significant light on the causes and the background of various events that took place in Punjab politics, particularly events related to demands and struggles connected with identity issue both in pre-partition, post-partition and post-reorganized Punjab. His analysis in placing the issues and events in their proper perspective. This facilitates proper understanding of policies in Punjab.

Pramod Kumar's essay on "Violence in Retrospect" and Birinder Pal Singh's "The Logic of Sikh Militancy" further support and reinforce Grewal's analysis by providing theoretical and ideological contents to the issues and events. Pramod Kumar throws light on the growth of violence in Punjab against the background of social conditions and the functioning of social institutions. His theoretical assumption is that violence is a reaction to the predominantly repressive state apparatus. It is particularly so in Punjab, where the Sikh religious tradition legitimizes the use of violence provided it has its basis in human values. Pramod Kumar offers an account of what he calls "insensitive acts" of the state both in the spheres of language-cultural policy and economic development leading to alienation of people. But, like Grewal, Pramod Kumar argues that the mainstream political forces had nothing to do with the demand for Khalistan. The slogan of Khalistan did not receive mass support despite of imaginative and ruthless political and administrative initiatives and brutal, sense-less killings that resulted. The most visible source that Pramod Kumar claims provided support not merely to the national aspect of Khalistan, but, in concrete terms, to the so-called Khalistan movement, was the external stimulus. He, however, concludes that the return of peace to Punjab does not imply that the conditions which caused violence have been moderated, submerged or resolved.

Following almost the same line of thinking, Birinder Pal Singh also locates militancy in Punjab in the context of capitalist development and the nature of state. He analyses the events of pre-independence and post-independence periods that led to the growth of militancy. He also brings into focus the socio-political basis of Sikh religion that legitimizes the use of arms under certain conditions, particularly in fighting social oppression. Detailing and analyzing various aspects and phases of militant movement of the 1980s, Pal suggests that it was certainly based on logic rooted in a particular way of looking at things. It is a different matter that different

persons joined the movement with different motives; this influenced the movement in different ways. But, like Pramod Kumar, he concludes that the logic of the movement remains even if it has not succeeded.

Yet another essay by K.S. Dhillon, a former Director General of Police, deals with militancy in Punjab during the 1980s. Dhillon pinpoints some of the significant causative factors in the overall theoretical perspective on militancy, terrorism and insurgency differentiating political terrorism from criminal terrorism. The rise of militancy in Punjab, culminating into political terrorism, is attributed by Dhillon to the policies of the Congress led Central Government directed primarily at preventing the Sikh political party, the Akali Dal, from coming to power in Punjab. Congress' ultimate move, particularly after the emergency and Akali's steadfast opposition to this, was to finish the Akalis altogether as the legitimate political voice of the Sikhs. Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was chosen by the Congress itself for this purpose. While this strategy proved to be successful, it had other serious consequences leading in due course to events like Operation Blue Star, assassination of Indira Gandhi and so on.

Dhillon also concludes that, in spite of Rajiv-Longowal Accord and return of peace in Punjab, the basic grievances of the community remain unaddressed. Obviously, another political initiative is required to consolidate the gains and utilize the return of peace purposefully to end the state of its troubles. Since Dhillon was the Director General of Police in Punjab immediately after Operation Blue Star, his observations are based on first hand experiences, must, therefore, be taken seriously. Dhillon suggests that to deal with terrorism merely as a law and order problem may succeed in the short term, but not in the long term. Since militancy and terrorism are becoming a countrywide phenomena, Dhillon's observations have some important lessons for policy makers and others.

Sandwiched between essays on militancy in Punjab, is the essay by P.S. Verma that deals with the Punjab Congress. It describes the rise and fall of the Congress in Punjab in terms of its electoral support and social base. His analysis is based on the study of Punjab elections till 1989 Parliamentary and 1993 Assembly polls. On the basis of party performance in various elections, he concludes that the support structure of the party in the state has considerably weakened; and alternative to it is provided by the Akali Dal which came to enjoy the status of the single majority party in the state. Verma also provides some

information on the social background of Congress legislators as an element influencing the support base of the Gopal Krishan discusses, in Demographic Change and Urbanisation since Independence, growth patterns of population in terms of general population growth, changes in sex ratio, urban-rural and religious proportions. He underscores the fact that Sikhs have emerged a majority in present day Punjab. This should not, however, mean that Punjab has become demographically homogeneous; important features like caste, urban-rural and agriculturist non-agriculturist differences as well as sectarian religious divisions like Nirankaris divide the people more than the Hindu-Sikh divide. This Krishnan seems to lose sight of.

Four essays in the volume focus on specific groups i.e. women, dalits, labour and village community. The essay on attached labour by Surinder S. Jodhka discusses the status and problems of attached rural labour in Haryana. Why this has been included in a volume on Punjab remains a mystery. Had the essay been an historical one dealing with pre-1966 situation, its inclusion could have been justified. The essay on Dalits in Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh by S.K. Gupta, in fact, deals with Dalit situation primarily in the pre-1966 Punjab that included Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. Gupta analyses the process of social mobility and other developmental changes among the Scheduled Castes in the state in post-independence period. He analyses these changes both caste-wise and region-wise and finds that the temporal trends are somewhat unilinear and reflect progressive improvement in the condition of the dalits, whereas the spatial and inter-caste scenario is divergent and multifaceted. In terms of inter-regional comparison, he finds that, in matters of social ostracism, the dalits in the present Punjab are somewhat better placed than, in certain hilly areas and Haryana. However, after re-organization of the state in 1966 literacy and occupational figures of 1971 and 1981 indicate that the dalits of Himachal Pradesh marched ahead of dalits both in the Punjab and Haryana. Researchers may find the information provided by Gupta useful in understanding various political and social events taking place in these states.

Rainuka Dagar's essay, "Patriarchal Structure and Violence Against Women", an important contribution to the volume, focuses on the status of women in Punjab and highlights the widespread prevalence of the ideology of the gender system in the state. This is emphatically reflected in the sex ratio which, in Punjab, is pronouncedly unfavourable to women despite

acclaimed developments in education and economic well being; it is steady at 882 as compared to All India average of 929 per thousand in 1991. Dagar provides extensive empirical evidence gleaned from surveys and statistics to substantiate her argument about social discrimination against women. The prejudice against women is also reflected in agitations against dowry deaths, alcoholism induced wife beating and against upper caste exploitation of lower caste women in the state. She makes it clear that the effort to create a gender-just society must go beyond merely the corrective justice such as closure of alcohol vends or stringent law enforcement. It makes it necessary to resolve the larger questions of dowry system, and the restricted placement of women. It requires transformation beyond the present stereotyped male-female roles in order to improve women's condition. It is only on this basis that atrocities against them will cease, and gender justice will be secured.

The last essay in the volume, "the Village Community in Punjab Novel" by S.S. Rahi and S.S. Khahra, may seem a misfit inasmuch as it seeks to recreate the nature of the village community with the help of Punjab Novels. The emphasis, in this essay, is not only on literary description, but also on understanding agrarian economy, political developments and social history, as reflected in the narration of creative writers. Using their sensitivity, creative writers play an important role in articulating people's perceptions and mobilize them for social and political action. In this sense, the authors highlight this trend in Punjab, particularly the realistic portrayal of community life, but this only goes regrettably only back to early 1960s. However, this trend is important and needs to be taken note of.

The volume, as a whole, offers an interesting study of politics and society of Punjab in a multi-disciplinary perspective. Some essays, in particular, provide an insight into the causes and contexts that led to the events that the state witnessed during the decade of 1980s in particular. They also provide pointers for the future, pointer that policymakers can use both as preventive measures and as mechanisms for meaningful and balanced development.

Being the first publication of the Institute of Punjab Studies it raises expectations. The editors must, however, in satisfying these expectations, focus on a common theme or, at least, common thread for the volumes they are planning.

A.S. Narang teaches Political Science in Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi.

Books Received

The New Cambridge History of India: An Agrarian History of South Asia, by David Ludden, Cambridge University Press, U.K., pp. 261, price not mentioned.

The Sikhs of the Punjab (rev. edn.), by J.S. Grewal, Foundation Books, New Delhi, pp. 276 PB, Rs. 175.

Role of Trade in Economic Development, by J.P. Isser, Siba Exim Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, pp. 108, price not mentioned.

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Hindu Thought & Carmelite Mysticism, by Swami Siddheswarananda, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 188 pp., Cloth Rs. 295, PB: Rs. 150.

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