

Editorial Introduction

This double issue of the *Journal of Sikh and Punjab Studies* (JSPS, Volume 32, 2025) is dedicated to honouring Professor Autar Singh Dhesi. During his academic journey, spread over four decades, Professor Dhesi's areas of interest varied from core Economics to the broader canvass of social sciences. The papers in this festschrift, in one form or the other, reflect his areas of interest. After the demise of Professor Dhesi, and after deliberations with editors of the JSPS, it was decided to bring out a special issue dedicated to him. An approach was made to his past students and colleagues and others who had known him or worked with him, to submit a paper. There was an overwhelming response, and in this volume, we publish some of the papers that were submitted. This special issue carries sixteen papers, out of which three are from history which sets the context on Punjab, seven papers on dimensions of economic development and the final six cover aspects of social development.

The volume opens with a commemorative essay by B.S. Ghuman which traces Professor Dhesi's life and academic journey – as a renowned economist, an inspiring teacher, compassionate mentor, strict disciplinarian, hard taskmaster, an able administrator, policy advisor and a researcher of exceptional calibre.

Although largely engaged in Economics issues, Professor Dhesi maintained close academic relationships with scholars of history and motivated young historians to work on the history of Punjab. The first three papers interrogate Punjab's historical trajectory under British rule. The first paper by Sukhdev Singh Sohal focuses on events leading up to the annexation of Punjab in 1849. He demonstrates that Punjab under Maharaja Ranjit Singh had become one of the most powerful states in Asia. The British eyed the abundant richness of the soil and the potential to raise revenues from Punjab and the British waited for the right moment to annex it. Lord Dalhousie, the Governor General of India, succeeded in getting his wish and colonial Punjab was turned into a surplus producing region of foodgrains and cotton for enriching the British Empire.

Using new archival material, Hardeep Kaur's paper has a focus on the uprising of 1857, and she re-assesses Punjab's role in it. She argues that the view presented in the narratives of British and nationalist Indian historians, which say Punjabis, especially Sikhs, stayed loyal to the British, is fundamentally flawed. Archival files reveal that the British used various tools of repression and exile to punish the 'rebels' and even whole village communities. Kaur argues that the 'war' Sikhs and other Punjabis continued to wage against the British, to regain their lost independence after annexation in 1849, has been totally ignored.

Jasbir Singh and Harinderpal Singh focus on the establishment of Canal Colonies and how they changed West Punjab's agricultural landscape and demographics. They show how new colonial laws and technological knowledge, had a profound impact on the lifestyle and mindset of the people. Unfortunately, this massive social engineering project was destroyed by the Partition of Punjab

in 1947 as massacres forced the people, especially Sikhs and Hindus, to migrate back to East Punjab.

The next seven papers serve as an intellectual homage to Professor Dhesi as economic development was close to his heart. B. S. Ghuman and Manvi Khurana, in the first of three closely linked papers, identify two distinct phases of growth in the Punjab economy. The first phase of high growth, with Punjab earning the highest per capita income across Indian states, started from the mid-1960s and coincided with the reorganisation of Punjab and introduction of the Green Revolution. The second phase of slower growth vis-a-vis other states, was set in motion by the inception of economic reforms in India. Since then, Punjab has continued to lose its economic supremacy in terms of per capita income. For rejuvenating the Punjab economy, the authors suggest a roadmap for achieving faster and sustainable growth, along with rapid industrialisation and strengthening its linkages with agriculture and much more.

Lakhwinder Singh and Baldev Singh Shergill argue that Punjab failed to keep pace with rapid increase in per capita income overtime due to the declining share of the primary sector in the Gross State Domestic Product. Although the secondary sector recorded only sluggish growth, the tertiary sector experienced the highest growth during the post-reform period. However, Punjab failed to develop a modern, productive and high value-added services sector. The poor-quality employment this generated pushed educated youth to seek employment opportunities in other parts of the country or abroad. Singh and Shergill argue that the 'growth momentum' in Punjab's economy can only be revived by changing the social, economic and institutional setup and suggest implementing a holistic policy for coordinating all the sectors of the economy in order to generate inter-sectoral linkages and realise economies of scale and scope.

Ranjit Singh Ghuman expresses deep concern about the slowing pace of economic development in Punjab. He laments that Punjab's slipping down from a top performing to a laggard state vis-à-vis other major states is a cause of concern for the state and the nation as this has serious implications for country's food and national security. For moving forward, he suggests that Punjab's economic resurrection necessitates a well-functioning institutional framework, favourable investment climate, better tax compliance, judicious use of the public resources and rationalisation of freebies and subsidies, amongst others.

Sucha Singh Gill diagnoses the emerging conflict between farmers and the corporate sector and how the three farm laws enacted by the Central Government in 2020 aggravated the conflict. Gill argues, although the Government withdrew the three farm laws due to the protracted farmers' agitation, it has attempted to bring back these laws through the back door, in the form of a draft National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing, 2024. Resolution of the tussle between the farmers and the Central Government necessitates that roots of this contradiction are understood and resolved. The author suggests the dire need for a dialogue between stakeholders and between Parliament and Legislative Assemblies to work out a negotiated settlement.

Vikram Chadha has opined that inequalities of income and wealth have burgeoned along with the high growth trajectory of the Indian economy. He

argues that although the government attempts to moderate inequalities, they would be advised to pursue policies that generate employment opportunities through a synergy of skill formation and entrepreneurial development, especially for the benefit of the younger population.

Parveen Brar and Balvinder Deo advocate that although crop residue is already used in various environmentally friendly ways in Punjab, a large quantity of crop residue still remains unused (as surplus) and is burnt in the fields by farmers. After weighing up the pros and cons, they argue that whilst the composting method is preferred, being more environment and resource friendly, compared with the current practice of crop residue burning, farmers and government agencies need to work together to solve crop residue management issues and deter crop residue burning. Anupama, in her paper, finds that the higher involvement of women in family enterprises as unpaid or underpaid workers reflects their limited access to formal employment opportunities. Policies should address barriers through greater integration of women with employment-oriented programs which must include provision of affordable childcare and eldercare opportunities amongst other policies.

Professor Dhesi was a keen student of social development, particularly the social fabric of Punjab. We include six essays on social development to carry forward his academic legacy. Ronki Ram, focusing on castes within castes, observes that Punjab has the highest number of Scheduled Castes (SCs) in comparison to other states in India. He argues SCs are not a monolithic group and can be divided into thirty-nine marginalised communities of varied subcastes scattered over Punjab's three spatio-cultural regions. They are further divided into various socio-religious denominations, including a profusion of *deras*. This heterogeneity among SCs in Punjab is a major hindrance to them forging political unity, with political parties using them as vote banks but failing to champion their interests.

H. S. Shergill and Varinder Sharma in their study state that estimates of the present standard of living and consumption of Punjab's Rural Scheduled Castes (RSC) show that a vast majority of them have attained almost a middle-class standard. Further, comparing Punjab RSCs with RSCs of other Indian States shows them holding the top rank. Punjab's higher level of agricultural development compared to other States is considered the main explanatory factor for this outcome. Gian Singh, et.al in their contribution, analyse different facets of international migration from rural Punjab. Their study reveals that international migration from rural Punjab was both male and youth-centric, with majority of the migrants representing the general population. They identify the major push and pull factors that drive this migration but emphasise the challenges posed by 'capital drain', 'brain drain', and 'loss of demographic dividend'.

Prabhjot Kaur and Sharanjit Singh Dhillon use several socio-economic indicators to illustrate the existence of urban- rural disparities. They find that urban areas have been growing faster than rural areas, leading to challenges such as overcrowding, environmental degradation, and urban sprawl. While both rural and urban regions have made notable progress in poverty reduction, the

absolute decline is larger in rural areas due to the initially higher poverty rate. Their study suggests that disparities in consumption patterns and living standards between urban and rural areas require targeted interventions to ensure more inclusive and equitable economic development. Simranjeet Kaur and Sukhwinder Singh focus on trends in child health in Punjab by analysing data from National Family Health Surveys 4 (2015-16) and 5 (2019-2021). They find that, despite Punjab's economic advancement, the state still faces persistent gaps and challenges in child and women's health. The study emphasises the need for targeted policy interventions and new public health initiatives to bridge existing gaps. Paramveer Singh and Amarjit S. Sidhu, in the last paper of this volume, identify major deficiencies in key information among cancer patients and their families throughout the patient's journey from prevention to diagnosis and treatment. Their study suggests several ways of improving the cancer diagnostic infrastructure in the state and proposes a policy framework to address the challenges posed by the rising incidence of cancer.

We are confident that each paper in this commemorative volume will motivate the readers of *JSPS* not only to enjoy reading the papers but also to go a step beyond by engaging themselves with additional studies to satisfy their quest for more knowledge. Collectively, these essays will add to the intellectual legacy of Professor Dhesi and inspire our inquisitive readers to know more about Professor Dhesi and his contribution to the body of knowledge of social sciences in general and economics in particular.

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