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Comments on the book "Federalism,
Nationalism and Development: India and
the Punjab Economy " by Pritam Singh**

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10 October 2010

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/53357/>

MPRA Paper No. 53357, posted 04 Feb 2014 16:07 UTC

Roots of Disaffectation in Punjab

Comments on Pritam Singh's book: *Federalism, Nationalism and Development: India and the Punjab Economy*

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The proposed book represents a serious, thoughtful and original contribution to the study of the political economy of Punjab, and more generally to the analysis of regional economic development in federally organised states in the developing world. It focuses on the Punjab, a geo-politically important state on India's north-western frontier with Pakistan. Punjab is also the country's bread-basket providing a very large proportion of the food grains needed to feed the teeming urban population. The state comprises 2 per cent of India's population and a lower proportion of its land area, yet it provides 60-70 per cent of wheat and rice consumed by India's urban population.

Pritam Singh's (no relation – all Sikhs have a middle or last name as Singh), proposed book for which he has provided an outline and a summary of each chapter promises to be a wide-ranging work spanning economic history, geography, analysis of the Indian constitution, the genesis of Sikh nationalism in Punjab, its conflict with the Indian nationalism at the centre. The book concentrates on the federal structure of the Indian polity and it specifically examines the evolution of the relationship between the centre and the state of Punjab over the critical period of 1966-1991. The earlier date marks the division of the former state of Punjab along linguistic lines, with the new Punjab being reduced to those districts which had a Punjabi speaking majority. Although this division led to a much smaller Punjab than before, it also resulted in a state where for the first time, the Sikh community was in a majority, comprising more than 60 per cent of the new state. However, Sikhs have long migrated both to other parts of India and abroad to seek better economic prospects. The Sikh diaspora comprises nearly 40 per cent of the total Sikh population.

The period 1966-1991 also coincided with the introduction of the important new technology of Green revolution in Punjab's agriculture. The end of the period examined in this book however marks a watershed in the development of the Indian economy, rather than Punjab's. The year 1991 is conventionally regarded as bringing to an end the era of central planning and a high degree of central control over all aspects of the Indian economy.

The author traces the development of Punjabi (Sikh) nationalism and the Indian (Hindu) nationalism during the reference period of his study. His analysis sheds important light on the clash between these two nationalisms which erupted into a violent struggle in Punjab in the 1980s, leading to a huge loss of life and property. The author's argument can briefly be stated as follows: The centre introduced the green revolution in Punjab in order to achieve self-sufficiency for the country in foodgrain production. This led to a large increase in grain production and export from the state to the rest of the country and thereby increasing farmers' incomes in Punjab. This propelled Punjab to become the richest state in terms of per capita income in the 1960s and 70s, but it also diminished Punjab's prospects for future economic development. Very little industrial investment either in the public sector or in the private sector was permitted in Punjab under the country's planned economic regime. The latter insisted on inter-state equality, and as Punjab was doing so well in terms of agriculture and overall economic growth, the centre allocated resources for industrial investment to other states. The result was that Punjab had an economic structure which was lopsidedly agrarian-based with hardly any modern industry. This thwarted long-term economic development and modernisation, leading ultimately to the violent clash between Punjabi and Indian nationalisms.

A notable feature of this book is that apart from the published materials, and the primary sources of data, the author has interviewed a large number of top state officials, former chief ministers, high ranking politicians in the State as well as the centre, together with farmers and other ordinary citizens. The interview information is used to illuminate the actual nature of the relationship between the centre and the states in relation to agriculture, industry, banking and finance. Thus there is not only an analysis of the Indian constitution and its provisions (the law in books), but also how this constitution has in fact been implemented (the law in practice).

To sum up, the proposed book will definitely make a significant and substantial contribution to the political economy of Punjab and to the analysis of centre-state relations in the post-Independence Indian union. One of its strengths is its wide reach in terms of scholarship and analysis. It promises to integrate knowledge from economic history, ethnic studies, geography, and constitutional analysis to understand the nature of regional economic development within the Indian union. The focus on the relatively brief period 1966-91 will oblige the author to exercise the essential intellectual discipline required to make this wide-ranging project ultimately successful. This is not to say that I personally agree with all of the author's basic theses or that I would accept most of his judgements. The important point is that the author seeks to marshal analyses and evidence from an exceptionally wide range of scholarship to support his theses and even those who disagree with him would need to contend with this valuable contribution.

All in all, I expect the publication of Pritam Singh's book to be a landmark event. In view of the high professional standing of the author, and the topicality of his themes, the book will have a ready market, not only in Punjab and in India, but also among students and practitioners of Development Economics, Federalism, Regional Development and, above all, Political Economy all over the developing world. I am pleased to recommend the publication of this book in the strongest possible terms.