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BOOK REVIEW

Recent Perspectives on Agriculture, Population and Environment

By Krishna Mohan, Navneet Kaur and Sucha Singh (Editors)

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Recent Perspectives on Agriculture, Population and Environment, edited by Krishna Mohan, Navneet Kaur and Sucha Singh, is a festschrift in honour of Prof. Dhian Kaur. It is organised around three interlinked geographical themes: agriculture, population and environment. The central strength of the book lies in treating these not as separate domains but as mutually connected processes that has shaped the north-west India, especially the states of Punjab and Haryana. The title of this volume therefore is significant as it signals a movement from traditional sectoral geography to an integrated regional geography of agrarian change, demographic mobility and ecological stress.

The volume is also a tribute to a specific regional tradition of geographical scholarship associated with Panjab University, Punjabi University, Kurukshetra University and Jawaharlal Nehru University. Prof. Dhian Kaur's work on agricultural land use change in Bist Doab, food security, water resources, rural livelihoods, climate change and north-west Indian agriculture provides an intellectual foundation to the volume. Her emphasis on field-based geography, regional analysis and socially useful research is evident from the empirical orientation of the book.

The agricultural section forms the foundation of this book. The four chapters on

agricultural themes are central to the geographical literature on agriculture of Punjab and Haryana. While the Green Revolution transformed Punjab into India's food basket, the authors have shown that it has also narrowed the agricultural base by privileging the wheat-rice system. This finding echoes earlier concerns raised by geographers about ecological imbalance and resource depletion related to agriculture.

The chapters on Punjab and Haryana have shown how the Green Revolution region has entered a post-Green Revolution crisis. The study conducted by Shamsheer Singh and Mahabir S. Jaglan on fruit cultivation in Haryana highlights diversification of agriculture through horticulture. The authors document the emergence of horticulture as an alternative to cereal-centred agriculture under post-liberalisation policies. The study demonstrates how citrus fruits, guava and mango have expanded spatially, indicating the attempts to diversify away from the Green Revolution model.

In contrast, the study by Shivjeet Kaur and K.S. Sohal has shown that Punjab has shifted from diversified cropping to wheat-rice specialization, with more than 90 per cent of the cropped area under this rotation. This has led to higher food grain output but at the cost of groundwater depletion, soil degradation, agro-

chemical contamination and declining ecological resilience.

Agricultural labour adds another dimension often neglected in studies of agricultural change. Mechanisation, labour-saving technologies and changing rural employment structures have reduced dependence on agricultural labour. This contribution links agricultural geography with labour and social geography, showing that technological change redistributes opportunities and vulnerabilities rather than simply increasing agricultural productivity. A study by Sucha Singh, Navneet Kaur and Asim Charas has shown that mechanization and the shift away from labour-intensive agriculture have altered the position of agricultural labourers, especially Scheduled Caste workers. This is where the book connects agrarian geography with social geography, by highlighting that the technological change is not socially neutral; it restructures rural labour, caste relations and livelihood security.

Similarly, the study on irrigation-cropping intensity of Jammu and Kashmir challenges the simplistic assumptions about agricultural intensification. By showing that physical geography and topography mediate the relationship between irrigation and cropping intensity, the chapter revives the regional geographical tradition associated with R.L. Singh and with later north-west Indian agricultural geographers who emphasised environmental controls on land use patterns.

The population section is conceptually richer than it first appears. Rather than merely discussing demographic trends, it addresses four distinct dimensions of population geography. It broadens the frame beyond agrarian production to include mobility, health, and social access. Rajeshwari's chapter on

socio-spatial inequalities in health expenditure compares Haryana and Bihar. The study highlights how economic liberalization has intensified uneven access to healthcare. The study shows that health outcomes are deeply embedded in regional inequalities and state capacities. It extends the concerns of Indian population geography beyond fertility and mortality to the questions of welfare, accessibility and social justice.

The chapter on the distribution and redistribution of religious minorities deserves serious attention. By analysing the spatial concentration of Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains, it contributes to a long tradition of social and cultural geography in India, associated with scholars such as G. S. Gosal, A. B. Mukerji, Aijazuddin Ahmad, Moonis Raza and Abdul Shaban. The chapter highlights that demographic change remains uneven across regional space of India. The chapter further reveals the relevance of location quotient and concentration analyses for understanding minority geographies.

The migration chapter by Rashmi and Gurinder Kaur is particularly significant in contemporary Punjab. It captures a major transformation in Punjabi society, the aspiration-driven migration of youth to foreign destinations. The chapter effectively illustrates how migration has become a structural feature of economy and culture of Punjab. However, it could have engaged more critically with the literature on transnationalism, remittance economies and demographic ageing. Another study brings labour precarity, housing insecurity and urban marginality into the discussion, focusing on construction workers. It reveals the contradictions of rapid urbanisation, in which migrants contribute to urban growth while remaining excluded from its

benefits. The study resonates strongly with contemporary labour geography and urban political economy.

The section on the environment gives the volume its contemporary urgency. Harjit Singh's chapter on the Indian Himalayas and the study by Surjit Singh Saini, S.P. Kaushik, Ravinder Jangra and Sapna Saini on the Ghaggar basin extend the regional canvas from the Punjab-Haryana plains to the fragile Himalayan and riverine systems of north-west India. The Ghaggar chapter is particularly important because it uses geospatial methods to identify flood vulnerability across a basin shared by Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh.

The principal strength of the volume lies in its empirical grounding, regional focus and policy relevance. Most chapters draw on detailed field investigations, district-level data and spatial analysis. The volume documents ongoing transformations in north-west India at a time when agriculture, migration and environmental sustainability are increasingly interconnected.

At its core, *Recent Perspectives on Agriculture, Population and Environment* is not merely a collection of independent essays but an exploration of how agrarian restructuring, demographic change and environmental stress are reshaping the socio-spatial landscape of north-west India. The volume reflects a long tradition of regional geographical scholarship associated with Panjab University, particularly the intellectual legacy of Prof. Dhian Kaur, whose work consistently emphasised the interrelationship among land, people and the environment.

Critically, however, the book could have gone further in theorising the links among liberalisation, agrarian distress, ecological

degradation and social inequality. Many chapters are empirically rich, but the conceptual dialogue among agriculture, population and environment remains uneven. The book would have been stronger had it explicitly engaged with political ecology, agrarian political economy, caste-class relations and feminist perspectives on migration and labour.

Its main limitation is theoretical. While the empirical analyses are rigorous, many chapters remain largely descriptive and could have engaged more explicitly with contemporary theoretical debates in political ecology, labour geography, social justice, environmental governance, neoliberal restructuring and climate resilience. A stronger integrative concluding chapter that conceptually links agriculture, population and environment would also have enhanced the volume's coherence.

Nevertheless, the collection is a significant contribution to contemporary Indian geography. It shows that the central questions that animated earlier generations of Punjab and Haryana geographers land use, agricultural change, population redistribution, migration, resource management and environmental vulnerability which remain highly relevant, albeit in new forms shaped by liberalisation, globalisation, technological change and climate uncertainty. In that sense, the volume stands as both a tribute to Prof. Dhian Kaur's scholarly legacy and a reflection on the future directions of geographical research in north-west India.

In fact, the title "*Recent Perspectives on Agriculture, Population and Environment*" raises expectations that the volume will engage with the newest conceptual, methodological and policy debates in geography. While the empirical studies are valuable, one can

legitimately argue that the book is stronger in documenting recent changes than in advancing recent perspectives. This distinction is important.

A critical question raised by the volume concerns the appropriateness of its title. Although the chapters examine relatively recent empirical developments, particularly those associated with post-liberalisation agriculture, migration, environmental vulnerability and demographic change, yet the "perspectives" themselves are not always recent in a theoretical or methodological sense. Most contributions remain firmly rooted in the traditional regional and empirical traditions of Indian geography, employing descriptive spatial analysis, statistical techniques, mapping and district-level comparisons that have long characterised geographical research in north-west India. While these approaches remain valuable, the volume engages only marginally with the major conceptual developments that have transformed geographical scholarship over the past two decades.

For instance, there is little sustained engagement with political ecology, critical agrarian studies, environmental justice, resilience theory, food systems, climate adaptation, mobility studies, intersectionality, feminist geography, or the political economy of neoliberalism, all of these now occupy central positions in contemporary human geography. Similarly, although geographical information system (GIS) and remote sensing are used in some chapters, there is limited discussion of emerging geospatial technologies such as spatial modelling, big data analytics, machine learning, participatory GIS, or integrated socio-ecological systems analysis. Consequently, the volume presents recent geographical realities more effectively than it offers

genuinely new geographical perspectives.

I would also add a further observation that is particularly relevant to the north-west Indian context. Despite addressing agriculture, population and the environment, the volume has given relatively little attention to some of the defining contemporary challenges being faced by the region, including the agrarian crisis following the farmers' movement (2020-21), groundwater governance and climate resilience beyond descriptive accounts, contract farming and corporate restructuring of agriculture, precision farming, labour precarity under neoliberal reforms, stubble burning as a socio-political rather than merely environmental issue, rapid peri-urbanisation around Chandigarh, Mohali, Gurugram and the National Capital Region, artificial intelligence, digital platforms and changing agricultural markets, gendered dimensions of agrarian transformation, and sustainable food systems within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Addressing some of these themes would have strengthened the claim that the book presents. However, the observations listed above should not be taken to diminish the book's scholarly value. Rather, it reflects the continuing strength of the Panjab University tradition of rigorous regional geography, field-based research and policy-oriented empirical analysis. The collection succeeds in documenting important transformations in Punjab, Haryana and north-west India, but it remains largely within established paradigms of agricultural, population and environmental geography.

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