

## Helping Punjab

How the Issues in the State of Punjab Stem From  
Government Corruption and a Lack of Infrastructure

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Punjab is located in the north of India, bordering Pakistan. Although known as the “bread basket” of India, Punjab is currently suffering from a multitude of issues. Drug abuse problems and a lack of job opportunities have left the state struggling to get back on its feet.

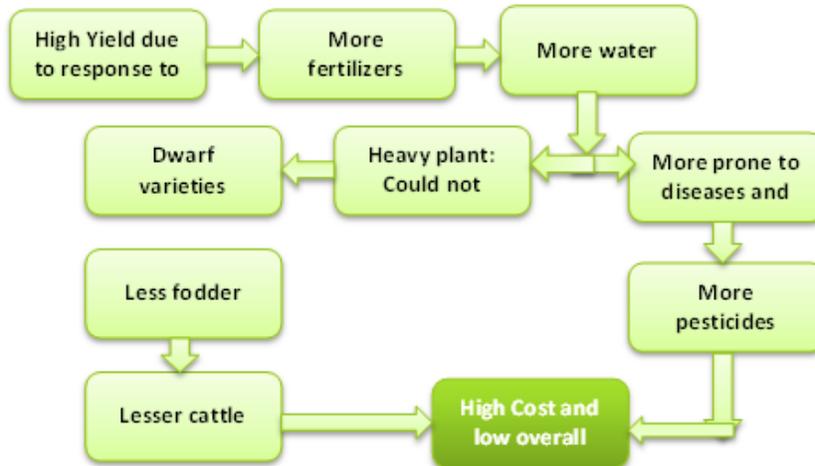
### **History**

India is the birthplace of the Sikh religion, the fifth largest religion in the world. The Golden Temple, a religious site for those of the Sikh faith, is located in Punjab, making Punjab a religious and cultural center. Punjab is currently the only majority Sikh populated state in India (Shiva).

In 1947, after India gained independence from the British, the Hindu and Muslim leaderships of India decided to separate and form two distinct nations. This event is known as the partition. Thus, as India and Pakistan were formed, a fertile region of land known as Punjab was divided in half (About Education). The population of this fertile region scrambled to get onto the right side of the border, and many were killed in this process. After the partition, Punjab continued to face many conflicts and struggles.

### **The Green Revolution**

The Green Revolution was a program implemented by the Indian national government, with the objective of increasing crop production in Punjab. In the 1960's and 70's, Punjabi farmers abandoned traditional farming methods in place of new irrigation systems, fertilizers, and high-yield crops. The Green Revolution was successful in producing crops; for some time, Punjabi farmers and the Indian economy profited. However, the Indian government and the Punjabi farmers had not considered the effect that chemicals and high-yield seeds would have on the environment (Shiva). These new high yield crops required much more water than the farmers could provide. The farmers began drilling in order to provide adequate water for their crops. This drilling greatly damaged the land. The tools and machinery required to drill into the ground were expensive, and many farmers took out large loans in order to purchase machinery. Eventually, the land was too damaged to farm further, and the farmers were left deep in debt with no way to pay it off (Agrarian Crisis).



A diagram showing the eventual negative impact on the farmers of Punjab. (Shiva)

### The Issues

The Green Revolution left many people living in poverty. Farmer suicide became a prevalent issue in Punjab as farmers began taking their own lives out of helplessness. This set the stage for the drug trade. The impoverished people were left with nowhere to turn other than drugs.

Currently, 73.5% of the youth ages 14-35 are addicted to drugs, 30% of which are girls. That is a huge portion of Punjab's working generation that is lost. Additionally, 67% of households have at least one drug addict. 26% of these addicts are HIV positive, raising another huge health concern (Ghosh).

With such a large amount of the population involved in substance abuse, the insufficient rehabilitation centers only create another problem. Only 23 of the 88 self-proclaimed rehabilitation centers in Punjab are official. The "unofficial" centers often support the addiction of prescription medication, in order to receive personal financial benefits (Singh).

The drug trade survives for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the border between India and Pakistan is not well protected. This allows smugglers to easily transport drugs across the border from Afghanistan and Pakistan into Punjab, and then even further south into India (Glut). Secondly, the rule of law is not enforced; there is an insufficient threat of persecution for those who break the law. Thirdly, there is a lack of academic and drug education available in Punjab. Punjab's economy is suffering partly because there are no

job opportunities. This issue stems from the lack of education and the involvement in substance abuse. Additionally, there is no drug education available for the youth of Punjab. Drugs and addiction are treated as taboo topics in society. This is incredibly harmful because it is difficult for youth to be acknowledged and find help, while it is easier for them to fall onto the path of addiction.

### The Roots

These issues are rooted in the government corruption of Punjab. The Punjabi state government is run by the Badal family. Parkash Singh Badal, the current Chief Minister of Punjab, has been involved in the Indian political system since 1970 (First Post). Along with serving three terms as Chief Minister of Punjab, he started the Akali Dal party. The Akali Dal party is a Sikh-centered regional political party. After serving, Parkash Badal passed on his leadership position to his son, Sukhbir Singh Badal. The Badals also have a strong influence on the Sikh religious institutions. This influence on religion has intertwined religion and politics in Punjab. The Badal family currently “runs” Punjab, and they are often under fire with allegations of corruption (Kant).

Many have cited the Badals as the source of these issues in Punjab. Police corruption also fuels many issues in the state of Punjab. Evidence shows that police are often involved in the drug trade. Police are also known for discriminating against Sikh persons, and for setting up fake encounters or planned disappearances in order to rid Punjab of Sikh “rebels” (Kant).

### The Sustainable Development Goals

Although the problems in Punjab are related to all of the SDGs, my research focuses on SDG 16: peace, justice, and strong institutions. Goal 16 aims to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”

### Solutions

Through my research, I have come up with three key steps to approach the drug abuse problem and corruption in Punjab: transparency, the rule of law, and economic reform. Transparency is the ability of the common man to be involved in government

processes, and for government policy and action to be enacted behind open doors instead of closed ones. Transparency reinforces trust between citizens and the government, and encourages citizen participation in government. The government is also held more accountable, and there is less waste of financial resources (Ghosh). The second step is to enforce the rule of law. Without the rule of law, people are essentially free to do as they please. If the police are fueling the drug trade by watching it happen with persecuting smugglers, how are we going to combat the flow of drugs? The third and final step is more for long-term development of Punjab. Economic reform is absolutely essential in order to lift Punjab out of its current position. Economic reform begins with education, both academic and drug education. Farmers, with their agricultural backgrounds, have the potential to pursue the fields of agricultural sciences, life sciences, manufacturing, and technology if given educational opportunities (Singh). Education would allow for more jobs, and would lift Punjab out of its economic standstill. An investment in human capital is necessary for change to occur.

Most importantly, as the global community we need to be aware of this issue. It is impossible for United Nation organizations and branches to go into Punjab and provide aid without the consent of the central Indian government. In order for this to occur, we need to raise awareness for this issue and apply pressure on the central government. Earlier this year in 2016, Bollywood released a film called “Uda Punjab”, highlighting the unseen drug problem in Punjab. The film called Punjab the “new Mexico” in terms of drug use, and brought this issue to light. Projects such as these are important for raising awareness.

To conclude, the issues in Punjab stem from government corruption and a lack of infrastructure. The three key steps to solving these issues are governmental transparency, the enforcement of the rule of law, and an economic reform. Most importantly, we need to raise awareness for this issue and bring it to light, because people are suffering and as a global community we need to help.

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