The temples in India are closely entwined with Indian culture. They cover a plethora of interest-covering architecture, art, religious faith and rituals culminating into economic stability. The temples in India, thus, play a vital role for the community-specific to the place of location. It acts as an institution which plays an important role in uplifting the society in terms of discipline, motivation and commitment to bringing better changes in life. We, in India, have some fascinating example of such temples performing a pivotal role to uplift the society such as Puri, Benaras, Nathadwara, Tirupati, Meenakshi etc.

Though, enough is being researched on the various facets of our religion and associated temples but still few of these temples need to be studied in-depth to bring their importance to the fore, so that adequate efforts and resources can be put in by the government to resurrect them.

My topic on the, “Temple Economy in Himachal Pradesh A Case Study of Jawalamukhi (Kangra District) 1905-2000 A.D.” is an effort to spring out a void in a somewhat neglected area of Kangra District in Himachal Pradesh. Himachal Pradesh state is known for its astonishing natural beauty and is a land which is the abode of many gods and temples.
Most of the works, on temples of Himachal Pradesh, generally, deal with architecture, myths and rituals, history, legends etc. Nothing concrete has been done on the economy of the temples of the state. It can be said that the study of the temple economy in Himachal Pradesh has so far remained neglected, as compared to the temples in other parts of India. This attempt would be a drop in the ocean but would certainly throw open the floodgates for further research.

The Jawalamukhi temple has intrinsic beauty; with uniqueness for being sacred without there being an idol within the precinct. It consists of flames erupting from the earth due to some volcanic eruption below which is taken as the blessed flame by the devotees all over the country. People visit this place from every part of the country to pay their obeisance.

The delimitation of the period taken has a logic to it, as in the year 1905, Kangra Valley was hit by a severe earthquake. The impact of the devastation was seen profusely all over the valley but, in specific, it brought immense damage to the temple of Varjeswari Devi and the Jawalamukhi. The temple of Varjeshwari Devi was nearly converted into debris.

It was due to the impact of this natural calamity that a restoration committee was made in 1905, to revive the lost heritage. In 1909, a Temple Administration Committee was constituted to ensure smooth functioning of the temple. A case was
filed against the bhojki priests for misusing the funds by the people of other castes living in Jawalamukhi township. It came to lime light that a temple committee already existed and followed rule and regulations formulated by the Britishers. Filing of the court case helped in the reconstitution of the committee to work effectively.

An attempt has been made to study the economy of the temple of the Jawalamukhi. The temple economy is studied in three different phases:-

The first phase is pre-independence when the temple was getting patronage from petty rajas, Princely States, merchants and individual donors and the impact of the Britishers was also there.

The second phase is after independence when it lost its patronage and faced decline. The rajas were replaced by merchants and later NRI’s (Non Resident Indian) who made huge donations. Individuals and middle class too became major donors.

The third phase is when the temple was taken over by the Himachal Pradesh government. It brought about a sea change in the overall development of the temple.

In the present study, only a single institution has been taken up, to observe the interplay of several key variables influencing the role and impact of the Jawalamukhi temple on its surrounding and the emergence of a new stream of secular patrons.

The focus is on the economic aspect of the temple and changes that have taken place in each phase. The study highlights
more information about the temple, with particular aspects of evolution during the three phases. This study has certain unusual peculiarity, since, it covers the ambit of economic characteristics of the temple. In the past, no temple in Himachal Pradesh has been studied with a view to covering the economical aspect.

The present study is based on a comprehensive list of the primary sources, especially fieldwork, interviews conducted with pilgrims and the priests of the temple of Jawalamukhi. A thorough study of relevant documents like gazetteers, reports, and records maintained by priests of the temple, Newspapers, darmartha grants of Patiala State, Municipal records, legal records, have been carried out. The existing records helped in crystallization of my thoughts and fabricated the existing work.

The entire study is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is introductory in nature and deals with the concept of the temple and its importance. It throws light on various temples in Kangra District and importance of the Jawalamukhi temple and review of literature. Second chapter deals with geographical position of the temple, architecture, uniqueness of the flame and myths associated with the Jawalamukhi temple. It also highlights the political history of Himachal Pradesh, in particular, Kangra District which determines the place of the temple. The main characteristic of the temple is the absence of any idol and yet it
being so sacred. It also covers various other faiths prevalent in Himachal Pradesh.

The third chapter delineates with the administration of the temple in different phases. The first phase commences from the Pre-Independence to the Post-Independence period and the subsequent period when the Himachal Pradesh government took over the assets of the temple. It covers the administrative set up and its impact, which was reconstituted with the passage of time with new terms and references.

The fourth chapter deals with the daily routine and rituals associated with the temple. The rituals have their own sanctity, since, large numbers of pilgrims come from across the country to perform them, and hence rituals have not changed with the passage of time. The rituals performed, boost the economy of the temple as they are traditional and consist of offerings in cash and kind. Traditional practice also ensures that local priests and population are engaged in some kind of trade based on needs of the devotees.

The fifth chapter amplifies the disposal of collection offered to the temple. To study this aspect, help has been taken of stone slabs, records of dharmarth grants, pattas of rajas given to their priests, in particular. The donations are made by individuals, and mercantile class for showing their gratitude towards the goddess. The offerings are made in both in cash and kind. Earlier, priests
had been maintaining records based on the directions of royal patronage in the form of an occasional grant. With the passage of time, the rajas were replaced by M.L.A’s (Member of Legislative Assembly), mercantile class and NRI’s, these classes made a profound contribution in improving the economic strata of the temple. Another category which made an impact on the economical growth is the middle class. The wealth collected by offering is disposed off under various heads covering salaries for employees, bhog prasad and maintenance work at the temple. It also deals with the disposal of the collection/offering made after the government undertaking. This procedure has brought in, a lot of transparency in disposing off the offerings made at the temple. The accurate statistics and records are maintained with the government in terms of collection and disposal of funds. Investment of funds to accrue advantage and generate income for the future is being done with the approval of the elected committee. This phase has given a new dimension growth to the temple.

The sixth chapter highlights the multi dimensional role and impact of the temple. The Jawalamukhi temple has always offered and generated employment, social bondage, enhanced culture and source of living for many in its near proximity. The most important of all is that the people of Himachal Pradesh feel proud of this sacred gift of God. The seventh chapter is the conclusion of the entire work.