

Political roots of Andhra coup

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Parliamentary democracy functions on the assumption that elected representatives will work in the larger interests of their defeat in the next election. Accountability is thus built into the system. But anyone familiar with the actual functioning of parliamentary democracy will know that this does not operate in this country. What we have today is a façade of parliamentary democracy. This does ensure civil liberties (even though limited in nature) and an opportunity to mobilise the vast masses of India in favour of a transformation of the system.

In the absence of a real alternative to the candidates or parties which have failed the people, accountability becomes a farce. Competitive politics should mean availability of political choices through which people can effectively improve their living conditions. The way a section of the Telugu Desam defected and joined hands with the Congress (I) to form a minority Government and also the frequent floor-crossing by members of other parties and in other States prove that there is no distinct or conflicting interest among a majority of political parties. The institution of Governor has been misused by the ruling party to further its own interests.

Simultaneously, the existing institutions which ensure decentralisation are also being weakened.

Prof Bashiruddin Ahmed, in his essay in the book under review, observes that the results of the January, 1983, elections in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka show that the accountability mechanism of the system did operate. He also goes into the details of the factors which put this mechanism into operation.

Analysts should not reduce the notion of accountability into one of rejection or election of political parties, whatever their ideological commitments. Populist slogans used in electoral politics give a distinct touch to competing political parties and subsequently, evoke a measure of popular interest. The very nature of political parties prevents the mobilisation of people on real issues.

Not only this, Populist slogans like “garibi hatao” and “land to the tiller” or actions like the bank nationalisation, abolition of privy purses or harping on vague threats to national security are used only to win votes. Populist concocts displaced targets. These manifest in the form of religious caste, regional or group identities.

Electoral politics provide the main channel of upward and downward mobility as well as the means of recruitment of new leaders. These leaders flourish on conflicting caste, religious, personal and sectional interests. This point has been dealt with by K. Raghvendra Rao, Lalitha Nataraj and V.E. Nataraj. However, these authors have not examined why caste or communal factors have social appeal.

It is harmful to recruit myopic leaders who cannot take note of the newly emerging groups deriving legitimacy from regional, economic and other narrow interests. The leaders rely on an ad hoc policy of intimidation or a display of money power to influence important community leaders or even individual voters. This is conducive to compromise on principles

and the growth of opportunism and obscurantism. Such a situation also relegates the real problems of the people to the background.

The increasing centralisation of power has resulted in making local self-government bodies such as the panchayati raj set-up and municipalities ineffective and non-functional F.D. Vikal, Amal Roy, M. Shatrugna highlight these factors.

Vakil talks of the bogey of rational disintegration raised by the ruling party to assume more mercive powers. The non-functioning and failure of national institutions to accommodate the existing regional diversities and interests have led to the assertive forces of regionalism linking up with localism, separatism and sectionalism. These forces have given a sub-national bias to these movements.

This bias has been further strengthened by the uneven growth of the Indian bourgeoisie in various regions. This has given a direction to regional movements.

The main inadequacy of the book is that none of the authors have attempted to place “polity” in society. Since Independence the dynamic process of social change generated expectations and led to the mobilisation of groups. The issues these groups have brought to the fore are economic disparities, lack of avenues to retain the socio-cultural identity of various segments of the population and a more equitable share in the political power.

These assertions have manifested in the form of the Naxalite movement, the agitation for the creation of Punjabi Suba, the Nav Nirman stir in Gujarat in 1973, the Jharkhand morcha in the tribal belts of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the surfacing of discontent among the Rajabansis and the Nepalis in West Bengal, the nascent fight for the creation of a separate State of Chattisgarh in Madhya Pradesh, the Jammu and the valley competition in Jammu & Kashmir, Telengana separatism in Andhra Pradesh, the movement against Marwaris in Orissa and peasant agitations in almost all regions.

The “liberal” Government of India responds to these agitations and movements by centralising more power and by slurring over the real problems faced by the oppressed but powerless electorate.

Ratna Naidu discusses how the real issues get blurred by the use of demagoguery and symbolic imageries. Mr. N.T. Rama Rao succeeded because he assiduously created images – over a long period of 30 years and through 300 films in which he appeared in the role of Krishna, Rama, Karna, Bhishma, Veera Brahmendra Swamy (a local legend), Krishnadeva raya and brahma Nayadu. All political leaders, including those of the ruling party at the Centre, have been using these symbols.

It is rather unsatisfying that none of the analysts has dwelt on the likely future trends at the national and regional levels. These will have wider repercussions on the functioning of democratic institutions in India. The articles lay undue stress on empiricism mistaking symptoms for causes.

The way democratically elected Governments in Sikkim, Jammu & Kashmir and Andhra Pradesh have been dismissed and the way the communal ideology is blatantly used for electoral gains are indicative of the growing fascist and theocratic tendencies in Indian polity.

– Pramod Kumar

Need for reposing faith in people

by Pramod Kumar

The issues relating to the progressive revival of democratic institutions and norms or continuation of "masked authoritarianism" have assumed significant importance after the 1989 Lok Sabha elections in Punjab. There has been a consistent opposition to hold elections to other democratic institutions in the state of Punjab, which has brought to the surface a larger question relating to the use of democratic methods as an antidote to terrorism. Unfortunately, the proponents of the use of the repressive police machinery to eliminate the terrorists, are guilty of the same perverse wisdom which the proponents of terrorism suffer from. The latter feel that it is necessary and desirable to use terror as a substitute for political agitation or mass mobilization. Their rationale is that terror is the only way rough which they can destroy the massive state structure and bring about the perceived social and political changes.

The Indian state also seems to be of the view that it is only with the help of excessive use of physical violence against the terrorists that it is possible to restore confidence and faith of the people in the system and also to subsume the fear generated by terrorism. It appears that both the Indian state and terrorists do not have faith in people's power and patience to mobilize masses for a long drawn political and ideological struggle.

Analysing situation

If one tries to analyse the situation from 1980 onwards, one finds that the state and political parties have been shying away from launching an ideological and political struggle against terrorism. What in fact the state has been doing is fighting its battles with the help of the police. And it was within this limited intervention that Ribeiro's policy of bullet for bullet and now the Mufti's "Gun for Gun" was propounded and implemented. When this policy was launched, it was stated by Mr. Ribeiro, the then DGP, that there were 74 terrorists, but after more than

five years of its implementation the government claimed that there are more than 3000 active terrorists after killing thousands of them. In spite of these policies, the terrorists' mobility and operational activities have expanded manifold.

It is also wrong to say that only during the last four months of President's rule has the situation worsened. In fact, the situation has been deteriorating from 1981 onwards, except in the year 1985 when the Punjab Accord was signed and elections to the State Assembly were held. Terrorist killings increased to the extent of 485 per cent in the year 1986 with 1985 as base year. The killings further multiplied by 86 per cent, and 96 per cent in 1987 and 1988 respectively. The police killings increased by more than 500 per cent by the year 1987-88 with 1985 as base year.

Repressive machinery

The excessive use of the police repressive machinery was contributed to "forced disunity, dispersion and helplessness" among the people. Had there been some serious thinking on launching a political and ideological struggle against terrorism, and not merely against the terrorist, the damage would have been much less. This error was the result of lack of appreciation of the need for liberal democratic norms and politics. It is this which has provided a basis for politics becoming deadlier in the post-1980 phase. The Indian ruling elite has been guided more by the threat perception rather than by the need for liberal democratic institutions like judiciary, press, party system and legislatures and panchayati raj.

The police has been isolated and given vast powers to perform even the functions of other democratic institutions. Police men, like terrorists, are in a position to annihilate any attempt at opposition. They can arrest anyone they desire at any time. For instance, the incident at the house of the Deputy Commissioner, Bathinda, is an aggravated reflection of the police raj. According to a news item published in the Punjabi Tribune, a senior police officer in an evening party at the house

of Deputy Commissioner got angry when somebody questioned his thesis on the Punjab crisis. The SSP ordered a siege of the Deputy Commissioner's house and did not allow the guests to return home till the next morning and that too after the Deputy Commissioner personally requested him to lift the siege. It is this kind of exercise of limitless power which has to be curtailed and given back to the democratically elected bodies and other institutions.

It is in this context that there is a need for giving a massive dose of democracy to Punjab. Another question which has been raised in the political debate by Mr. V.N. Narayanan in his rejoinder to Satyapal Dang is regarding the 1989 Lok Sabha election mandate being "perverse". It has been observed by Mr. Satyapal Dang that "the Lok Sabha poll in Punjab strengthened terrorism because terrorists were given full freedom to terrorise voters especially in rural areas and thereby vitiate a really democratic electoral choice." Now the question is: who gave the terrorists the freedom to terrorise? Naturally, the Indian state. Instead of condemning the state apparatus for giving this freedom, Mr. Dang has concluded that it is the election which has strengthened terrorism. One can agree with Mr. Dang that elections have produced Hitlers. But it will be wrong to conclude that elections have produced only Hitlers. And that Hitlers have been produced only through elections.

Built-in leverage

Let us assume for a while that there is a built-in leverage for the growth of terrorism in the electoral process itself. Even if it is so, one must not forget the dual role of these liberal democratic institutions and processes. It is possible to use elections to fight fear psychosis and at the same time it is also possible to generate fear and win elections. The similar duality of functions exist in the working of other liberal democratic institutions like the judiciary and the press. For instance, a court of law may release an individual whom the administration has charged with serious crimes. If the same logic

is applied one can conclude that the judiciary is strengthening terrorism and courts should be closed down. The press too performs a dual role. It is possible that a few newspapers may publish inflammatory material. The remedy for such a situation is not to clamp censorship or mark out newspapers for harsh treatment. Because it is the same press which offers a chance for secular and democratic forces to reach the people. The point is that all these democratic institutions and organs of the state apparatus offer both types opportunities i.e. to strengthen healthy tendencies (although in a limited way) as also to subvert progress.

The aim must be to enter into this historical struggle between the use and misuse of liberal democratic institutions. It is very difficult to predict who will win this struggle – forces of perversion or forces of progression. This question becomes relevant only if there is a struggle launched. But unfortunately this kind of struggle is going by default. Some political parties are shying away from the political ideological struggle with the fear that they may not lose it and others do not ideologically subscribe to these kinds of struggles.

It is, therefore, necessary to work for eliminating those conditions which create terrorism rather than merely eliminating terrorists. Unfortunately terrorism has been delinked from its social environment and ideological surroundings. This has led to the exclusion of the questioning of the conditions which have bred terrorism. The net result is that the increasing terrorism has been seen as a result of inadequacy of police apparatus and foreign hand. This has legitimated the use of "masked authoritarianism" and building up of a war hysteria with Pakistan. In fact it may be more realistic to say that retrogressive tendencies like terrorism is not a result of progressive or just system. On the contrary, it is a result of retrogressive and unjust system. The need is to reverse the trend. It can only be reversed if the existing leadership reposes its faith in people.

A choice-less election

Any serious study of the political history of Punjab would show that parties and leaders here manage to get themselves into the corner on the first opportunity. After that they desperately search for face-saving devices. Both the boycotters and the government have done exactly that during the run-up to the February 19 poll.

The government defaulted in not creating the conditions for all Akali Dals to participate in elections and compounded it by scuttling the non-violent boycott movement. The Akali Dals damaged their case by appealing to the Sikhs not to Punjabis in general. The former put expediency above norms and the latter relied totally on a communal response. When the congress boycotted the 1991 elections and appealed to Punjabis not to participate in them Political analysis did not term it undemocratic. At that time leading congressmen argued: "The present election (i.e. June 22, 1991) is doomsday for Punjab and Punjabis.... Punjab has been pushed to the brink of volcano for the sake of just 13

Lok Sabha seats. The elections are sought to be a referendum for Khalistan and these shall neither be fair nor free. The PCC, therefore, appeals to all Punjabis to keep themselves away from the elections. The

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boycott of elections would be a true homage to Mr. Rajiv Gandhi". The same Congress today calls the boycott call of Akali Dal undemocratic and the government crackdown on them as democratic. In such a situation reason becomes a casualty and truth becomes an expedient.

The Akali Dals' call to boycott the elections and the response from a section of the Sikhs has added a new communal dimension to the already vitiated politics by the gun — both of the police and the militants. The boycott call has been built on the logic that initiatives on issues like autonomy, repealing of Article 365, etc. should have been taken to set an agenda for poll. For the first time in history, elections in Punjab seem to have divided voters on communal lines. Ten years of bloodshed

could not achieve, what the forthcoming elections are aspiring to achieve, namely to divide Punjab on communal lines.

The danger is that a government formed as a result of this poll may not have a representative character. The holding of elections per se may provide a face saving. The absence of multiple choices and issue-oriented politics and the fear of the gun have belied the hope that with the holding of elections the democratic process will get restarted.

These lurking fears have been compounded by the visible absence of those political and social concerns in the campaigning of political parties in the election fray or even those who are boycotting the elections, which can transform the conditions responsible for the growth of these trends. Elections, therefore, have even ceased to be a contest and orthodox questions like who are all in the run and who is going to win have become irrelevant.

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The major political parties have blurred the real issues by projecting terrorism and national integrity as the main issues without drawing the people's attention to the nature of politics which has led to the multiplication of threats to the sovereignty of the country and to the growth of terrorism.

This kind of politics reduced the autonomy of a common voter. Further the absence of multiple choices and perceived incapacity of political parties to address themselves to the real issues and later on resolve them has made the common voter helpless. It is interesting to note the perception of the people regarding the issues which they consider serious and real. For instance, most of the respondents interviewed by us were of the view that the electoral politics does not articulate issues like dowry, consumerism, caste purity and pollution, religious bigotry etc. Politicians only used these issues to reinforce them and not to transform the conditions which have given rise to them. Another set of issues which these

respondents mentioned were price rise, unemployment, poverty eradication and corruption. To be specific, the small and marginal peasants advocate more subsidies for agricultural inputs, writing off the debts, recruitment in the army and police, loans on operational land holdings at easy interest rates and subsidised supply of inputs like fertilizers and irrigation.

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A small section belonging to this category demanded concessions for agro and ancillary based industries, industrialisation through cooperatives and states sponsored market for processed products.

Correspondingly, the majority of them are not as vocal as the rich and the medium peasants for the greater state autonomy. Instead, they are in favour of greater representation of small and marginal peasants and landless labourers in the panchayats. However, they are very vociferous for taking stern action against culprits of November riots and also

lower ranks of police officials for their harassment.

During the last 10 years politics has been promising these things, but it has never shown enough will to implement these promises, observed most of the respondents. In this sense respondents considered most of the political parties competing in the elections to be deceptive. Issues will be responsible for taking voters to the polling booth. They are very clear that none of the political parties will be able to transform society and making it more humane and livable.

The issues which may influence the voters are: the end to bureaucratic raj, hope for restoration of democracy and some other small individual benefits. The voters are clear that none of these political parties can improve upon the existing economic and political scenario.

Therefore, it clearly shows that individual voters do not have much choice in terms of political parties and issues which they think a democratic system must address itself to. Therefore, their participation in the decision making

process will be limited by the availability of very few options. This decimation of individual in a liberal democratic set up will also have the corresponding impact on the government elected by them. It will also not have the kind of autonomy required to bring about radical changes in society.

— Pramod Kumar

PUNJAB CHANGING AGENDA

The 1996 Lok Sabha election in Punjab are different from the previous ones in that they are being held in the context of the restoration of peace in the State. In the preceding three elections (in 1985, 1989 and 1992) the political agenda was shaped by issues relating to the Sikh identity. At that time, the agenda for peace was still being negotiated, as was reflected in the signing of the Rajiv-Longowal Accord in 1985, the attempts to create conditions for the political participation of hardliners in Sikh politics in 1989, and the efforts to provide an appearance of representative politics in 1992. The 1992 elections were boycotted by a major political party in the State, the Akali Dal.

POLITICAL AGENDA

The political agenda of the present elections is being shaped by the people of the State who are recovering from a decade-long period of humiliation and torture. In other words, political parties have become relatively less able independently to shape the political agenda as compared to earlier elections. Earlier, political postures taken by the Akali Dal had been instrumental to a large extent in giving direction to Punjab's politics. For instance, in all the previous elections the main stance of the Akali Dal was anti-Centre and it was on the basis of this that it demanded greater State autonomy. But in this election the Akali campaign does not revolve around anti-Centrism.

Another shift in the Akali posture is the move away from issues relating to the Sikh identity and emphasis on communal amity. This seem to have been prompted by the fact that during the phase of terrorism, legitimate demands like State autonomy, a greater share in river waters and the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab had degenerated into the movement for "Khalistan" which played havoc with people's lives. Further, there is a noticeable shift in emphasis from human rights to the maintenance of peace in the State.

As for the Congress (I), there is only a marginal change in its priorities in the state. This attitude stems from its perception that even after the assassination of Chief Minister Beant Singh, "peace with prosperity" continues to be the main guiding principle of people's political preference in Punjab. The marginal shift in the Congress agenda in the post-Beant Singh phase has been from an emphasis on economic subsidies for most sections of society. The economic concessions offered by the Congress Government on the eve of the elections include concessions for the peasantry, urban traders, landless labour, Dalits and people in services and various other occupations, apart from the poor.

ADVANTAGE CONGRESS

As far as the articulation of this agenda is concerned, the Congress (I) has an advantage. The political leadership which has at the helm of affairs at the time of Operation Bluestar and Operation Woodrose, the November 1984 riots and the

suppression of assertions of the Sikh identity, is no longer on the scene. In other words, the traditional Congress leadership in the State has been replaced by a new leadership which is not under any compulsion to own up to the political legacy of its predecessors. The Akali Dal, on the other hand, continues with the same old leadership, which is finding it very difficult to adapt itself to changing political circumstances.

The process of this change started earlier but became distinctly visible in the post-1992 period which saw a revival of democratic practices in Punjab. Though only about 22 per cent of the electorate voted in the 1992 elections, the lowest turnout since 1966, they marked a turning point in the politics of the State.

Punjab's highest voter turnout, 72 per cent, was registered during the 1969 mid-term elections, when it entered an era of coalition politics. However, voter turnout gradually declined, and in the 1989 Lok Sabha elections, it was only 62.67 per cent. In the 1992 Lok Sabha elections the decline was unprecedented, but that was due to the exceptional political situation; the Akali boycott. The trend changed in the January 1993 elections to panchayats and municipalities, when there was a massive turnout of 82 per cent. This was interpreted as a vote against terrorism.

The representative character of democracy having been restored, competitive politics was seen functioning in the post-terrorism phase once again during direct elections to panchayat samitis and zilla parishads in October 1994. The three Assembly byelections in mid-1994 also witnessed such competition. In these byelections, the Congress was forced to give political space to other parties. Of the three seats, two went to the Akalis; the ruling Congress retained the Nokodar seat.

However, the Gidderbaha Assembly byelection brought to the surface the desire of the Jat peasantry – a traditional support base of the Akalis – for peace. Although the Akalis won this election, a large section of the Jat peasantry voted for the Congress (I). Had the Congress Government complemented its performance on the law and order front with good governance, the results, for it, could have been more encouraging. Prakash Singh Badal, the Akali leader, recognised this when he termed his party's win as a victory against the rampant corruption in the State. At a victory rally in Ajnala, Badal said the outcome was also an eye opener for the Akalis who had misused religion for their vested interests.

The message was clear. Issues like State autonomy or the Anandpur Sahib Resolution did not merit first preference so far as the people were concerned. In their agenda, peace ranked high, accompanied by concerns regarding unemployment, price rise and better remuneration for crops. Political parties adjusted their postures accordingly.

POLITICAL ALLIANCES

Political alliances have also undergone a change in response to the changing mood of the people. This time the Akalis have not entered into any alliance with their traditional ally, the BJP. Although Punjab has a history of four Akali-Jan Sangh coalition governments, during the last 10 years urban Hindu voters have moved away from the Akalis. It was apprehended that even in the event of an Akali-BJP

alliance, the urban Hindu voters may not support the Akalis. So the Akalis thought it appropriate to forge an alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which is contesting three constituencies. The Scheduled Castes account for 28.31 per cent of Punjab's population. They are spread evenly in all constituencies. The BSP has substantial political influence among the Scheduled Castes in Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Ferozpur, Phillaur and Bathinda districts.

This adjustment may give the BSP an advantage in three seats – Hoshiarpur, Phillaur and Ferozpur. In Hoshiarpur, BSP supreme Kanshi Ram is facing a tough fight from Kamal Chaudhury of the Congress (I). In the parliamentary constituency, three Assembly seats are held by the BSP, four by the Congress, and two by the BJP. Kanshi Ram's success will largely depend on the support he receives from the Akali cadres. The Akalis secured 22.4 per cent and 32.5 per cent of the votes here in the 1971 and 1985 Lok Sabha elections respectively. In Phillaur, Santosh Chaudhry of the Congress (I) faces Harbhajan Lakha of the BSP. In this parliamentary constituency, five Assembly seats are held by the Congress (I), three by the BSP and one by the Akalis. In the 1992 elections, the BSP won from Ferozpur, with 34.7 per cent of the votes. The Congress (I) won 34.5 per cent. In this constituency too the support of the Akali Dal will make all the differences. It is likely that because of this alliance the Sikh voter will vote against the Congress (I) with the BSP being the beneficiary.

Another possibility exists, that of polarisation along caste lines. This may help the Congress in all 13 constituencies. In other words, Scheduled Caste voters in the 10 constituencies where the BSP is not contesting may not get transferred to the Akali Dal for reasons of caste. Similarly, in three constituencies where the BSP is contesting, the Jat peasants may not vote on bloc for the BSP candidate. Moreover, just as alliances can benefit political parties, factionalism and infighting can adversely affect their chances.

FACTIONALISM

Factionalism among the Akalis is a matter of tradition, particularly on the eve of elections. This election is no exception. The Akali Dal (Mann) has declared that it will oppose the candidates of the Akali Dal (Badal) in all constituencies. Sohan Singh, the former Panthic Committee chairman, has been released on bail; his presence may adversely affect the chances of the Akali Dal (B). Unity efforts between the Akali Dal (M) and the Akali Dal (B) did not succeed due to Akali Dal (M) president Simaranjit Singh Mann's "extreme position and unpredictable political behaviour", as a Badal group leader put it. Secondly, the Akali Dal (B)'s political agenda, which is relatively liberal, is being seen as opportunism by hardliners.

After Beant Singh's assassination, the Congress in Punjab has been faction-ridden, with infighting over sharing the spoils of power. In the past, competitive politics between the Akali Dal moderates and the Congress led to the emergence of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. This danger still persists. These tactics may get the congress a few more votes, but it will adversely affect normalcy in Punjab.

Summary of results, 1977-92																			
																		(Seats 13)	
Year	Turn-out	INC W/C	Votes %	BJP W/C	Votes %	JD/ JNP W/C	Votes %	Left W/C	Votes %	JNPS /LKD W/C	Votes %	SAD W/C	Votes %	SAD (M) W/C	Votes %	Others W/C	Votes %	Ind. W/C	Votes %
1977	66.8	0/13	32.9	0/0	0.0	3/3	12.9	¼	6.8	0/0	0.0	9/9	43.6	0/0	0.0	0/6	0.5	0/46	3.4
1980	62.7	12/13	52.5	0/0	0.0	0/9	10.0	0/2	3.8	0/0	0.0	1/7	23.4	0/0	0.0	0/11	5.1	0/105	5.3
1984	67.6	6/12	37.6	0/3	3.4	0/2	2.2	0/6	6.8	0/0	0.0	7/11	37.2	0/0	0.0	0/0	0.0	0/40	12.8
1989	62.7	2/12	23.8	0/3	4.1	1/4	5.4	0/7	5.9	0/3	0.0	0/4	1.2	6/8	28.7	1/47	16.3	3/139	14.6
1992	24.0	12/13	49.3	0/9	16.9	0/4	1.3	0/4	5.5	0/2	0.1	0/0	0.0	0/3	2.6	¼	20.3	0/32	4.0

W: Won C: Contested

Lok Sabha election 1992: Category-wise analysis																				
																			(Seats 13)	
yYear	Turn-out	Total seats	INC W/C	Votes %	BJP W/C	Votes %	JD/ JNP W/C	Votes %	Left W/C	Votes %	JNPS /LKD W/C	Votes %	SAD W/C	Votes %	SAD (M) W/C	Votes %	Others W/C	Votes %	Ind. W/C	Votes %
General	25.8	10	9/10	49.7	0/8	19.7	0/4	1.6	0/2	3.0	0/2	0.1	0/0	0.0	0/2	2.1	1/11	19.5	0/28	4.3
S.C.	17.8	3	3/3	47.8	0/1	3.3	0/0	0.0	0/2	17.6	0/0	0.0	0/0	0.0	0/1	5.0	0/3	24.4	0/4	2.4
S.T.	-	0	0/0	-	0/0	-	0/0	-	0/0	-	0/0	-	0/0	-	0/0	-	0/0	-	0/0	-

W: Won C: Contested

GUEST COLUMN | *Dr. Pramod Kumar*

Ad-hoc claims, and gains

IF POLITICIANS are to be believed, elections are a matter of *Atta-Dal* subsidies, freebies, shagun at the time of marriage, and enticements of a foreign LTC for government employees. And if you have pretensions of being a psephology literate, then you may believe the pollsters that elections are a matter of incumbency levels, of popularity ratings – that too of leaders and not parties, with vote swings emerging from individual candidates epitomised by the “phenomenon of Sidhuism”. But can elections be absolved from the reality of people’s fight for mere survival, demand for dignity in governance and protection from abuse?

Elections have become a ritual of democracy. They have failed to make democracy distributive and justice oriented. They use the popular screen to make their politics appear pro-people. To provide content to this, serious issues are reduced to doles rather than the right of electorate.

In Punjab elections, price rise has emerged as a major concern of the people. Political parties have reduced it to mean subsidised *Atta-Dal* and are using it to spearhead their election campaign and manifestoes. For example, the SAD manifesto reads: “Prices of wheat *atta* have gone up from Rs 6.50 per kg in 2002 to Rs 17 at present. Similarly, the price of ordinary pulses has also shot up from Rs 18 per kg in 2002 to Rs 65 at present. Diesel prices have gone up from Rs 14.50 per litre to Rs 32 per litre whereas a cooking gas cylinder which cost only Rs 210 in 2002 now costs Rs 375. The new government will provide *atta* at Rs 4 per kg and *dal* at Rs 20 per kg to the poor.”

Similarly, the Congress campaign took up this issue belatedly and their manifesto reads “Strengthen Public Distribution System (PDS) in the state to ensure timely availability of sufficient foodgrains and cereals to the Dalits, economically weaker sections and BPL families at affordable prices. Ensure provision of 35 kg of wheat/*Atta* and 10 kg of rice @ Rs 2 per kg for the poorest of the poor (Antyodaya families). Ensure provision of *dal* up to 5 kg to the poorest of poor (Antyodaya families) @ Rs 20 per kg.”

Both the parties have not cared to analyse the causes and ways to reduce the prices and raise the purchasing capacity of the poor. And they are silent on formulating policies for food security. These parties have not cared to ponder over why a large section of the poor in Punjab are finding it difficult to afford two meals a day. And how pau-

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whereas people continue to assert autonomy through various protests in non-electoral space

perisation and land alienation have become a major electoral issue in the 2007 elections.

Political parties, however, are not expected to confess, particularly at the time of elections, that they have ceased to govern. When the market is allowed to govern, the government becomes powerless to effect any radical changes. And the proponents of market reforms have no plans for those who do not have the resources and income to buy even two meals a day. The signals are bold that those who cannot pay for their food have no right to survive. These poorer sections of society are reduced to mere victims, beneficiaries, clients and recipients. In this dichotomous relationship the state is seen as the ‘dole giver’ and the people the ‘dole receiver’. In other words, a patron-client relationship defines the boundary conditions for electoral discourse.

The price rise of essential commodities, food subsidy and poverty, perhaps for the first time since 1967, could emerge as main issues in elections. Whereas, other traditional issues like danger to the “Sikh Panth”, federalism and Sikh identity could not find much space in electoral discourse. To the discomfort of the Congress party, a ‘Sikh’ Prime Minister could not emerge as a star campaigner and vote catcher. Most of the election rallies addressed by the Prime Minister were thinly attended and without usual Pun-

jabi enthusiasm. Not to deny the fact that the Prime Minister has never presented himself as a ‘Sikh’, but as a professional economist. Therefore, the extent to which he mirrors the economic reforms agenda and the price rise as its fallout along with the opposition to free electricity and water for the farmers may have distanced the “*aam admi*”.

Similarly, the changed political context from Sikh identity to Punjabi identity has pushed leaders like Uma Bharti and Narendra Modi to the margins of electoral politics in Punjab.

Ten years of violence in Punjab have made people realise that it is dangerous to follow the communal logic and support the politics of drift. And also the memories of the Army’s entry into the religious shrine of the Sikhs at Amritsar, the November 1984 massacre of the Sikhs and the killings of both Hindus and Sikhs, acted as a check on the political parties’ use of the communal divide. Further, the Congress Party has not learnt the lesson from the defeat of the Akali-BJP alliance in 2002 and its own defeat in 2004 parliamentary elections that it is not electoral savvy to cater to sectional interests. In the 2007 elections the Congress Party has targeted the Sikh peasantry for the distribution of doles. Their major claim is efficient procurement of food produce without causing harassment to the peasantry. This is true but it is also true that the debt burden on farmers has increased to Rs 24,000 crore and their income from crops has declined. Secondly, the party is not very vocal on its achievement vis-à-vis other sections of society like Dalits, urban traders, slum dwellers etc.

Political parties seem to be making ad hoc claims and promises for quick electoral gains. Whereas, people continue to assert their autonomy through various protests in non-electoral space. For example, in the recent past, most of the protests in Punjab by the *kisans*, the unemployed youth, the professionals, the employees were launched by non-electoral groups and organisations. It must be recognised that irrespective of market governed politics, people remain bound to survival, livelihood and identity issues. Political parties will have no choice but to respond to these in a secular and distributive justice framework.

(The writer is a Chandigarh-based political analyst)

GUEST COLUMN | *Dr. Pramod Kumar*

Dalits as a vote-bank

POLITICS IN Punjab operate within the given social boundaries. The composite religio-cultural tradition lends a distinct flavour to the otherwise divisive politics. Caste hierarchy is pervasive in society. But in electoral politics it could not emerge as an exclusive factor for vote catching machines. Even the lower rung in caste hierarchy the Dalits do not constitute a captive vote bank. Dalits in Punjab may have experienced socio-economic neglect, but they are not hounded like prey in the manner their counterparts in other parts of the country.

Dalits constitute around 29 per cent of the population of the state as per the 2001 census. Interestingly, of the 1014 MLAs in the state from 1967 to 2002, Dalits were 25 per cent, OBCs 9 per cent and urban traders (Khatris) 23 per cent. But, a majority of the MLAs i.e. 44 per cent came from the rural Jat peasantry. Notwithstanding this disproportionate representation of the rural Jat peasantry, Dalits have been adequately represented in the state's electoral politics.

A detailed analysis of the Dalit factor in Punjab politics can help understand the larger issue of caste dynamics in electoral politics. The 'uncertain religious allegiance' of the Dalits and in the absence of caste as a defining parameter for social position, Dalits found representation in all the political parties in the state. It is interesting to note that even the Jat dominated Shiromani Akali Dal gave substantial representation to the Dalits. For instance, in 1969, of the 25 Scheduled Caste elected legislators, 44 per cent were in the Akali Dal. Not only this, in 1977 (48 per cent), 1985 (62 per cent) and 1997 (77 per cent), a majority of the Scheduled Caste legislators were from the Akali Dal. Similarly, in 1967 (52 per cent), 1972 (61 per cent), 1980 (45 per cent), 1992 (63 per cent) and 2002 (48 per cent) a majority of the elected Scheduled Caste legislators were from the Congress. Even the Bharatiya Janata Party gave representation to the Dalits. For instance, in 1997, 13 per cent of the Scheduled Caste members belonged to the BJP. It is interesting that Dalit legislators have been elected from political parties other than the BSP and the Communist parties.

Resource allocation, access to jobs, services, health and education facilities must reach the socially-deprived sections, failing which the Dalits may emerge as an exclusive vote-bank and disturb the political arithmetic of the state

In fact, the Dalits could not emerge as a vote-bank for the BSP in Punjab. For instance, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) could find a positive response in Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), whereas, in Punjab which has the highest percentage of Dalit population in the country, it could find a nominal response. To illustrate, the BSP vote share in Uttar Pradesh increased from 11 per cent in 1993 to 23 per cent in 2002. Both in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh the initial response of the Dalits was to identify themselves with the BSP as there was a low degree of representation of the Scheduled Castes. But in Punjab there is a trend to move away from the BSP. For instance, in 1992 it secured 16 per cent votes, which declined to 6 per cent in the 2002 elections. It could register a win only in 9 constituencies in three assembly elections since 1992. However, the BSP could only act as a spoiler mainly for the Congress in 14 and 11 constituencies in 1997 and 2002 elections, respectively. Interestingly, two per cent increase in vote share of the BSP can cost the Congress five to 10 seats. To illustrate, between 1997 and 2002 elections, the BSP votes decreased from 7.4 per cent to 5.6 per cent and the Congress party gained in nine constituencies. In the forthcoming elections, if anti-incumbency becomes operative with the Dalits and the BSP register an increase of 2 per cent in vote share, it may affect the Congress adversely.

Why could the BSP not make electoral inroads

in the state? Punjab has been known for its liberal religious practices in relation to caste. Both Sikhism and the Arya Samaj have liberated the Dalits from the stringent purity-pollution based behavioural patterns. Further the political content of the BSP has been unable to capture the regional, cultural and economic specificities of Punjab. The purity-pollution and *Manuvad* that are the BSP's main ideological planks do not find expression in Punjab in view of the role of Sikhism and the Arya Samaj.

It is in this backdrop the BSP-Akali Dal alliance in 1996 parliamentary elections made a discernible impact in Doaba region which consists of Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar and Phillaur constituencies.

Kanshi Ram, the BSP supreme, won the seat only because of the active support of the Akali Dal (B). In Hoshiarpur, according to an estimate, the Jat Sikhs and the SCs together constituted around 44 per cent of the votes polled.

Similarly, the Akali Dal (B) candidate won the Jalandhar seat due to the swing in the SC votes in favour of the party. According to a rough estimate, the Jat Sikh and SC votes polled here constituted around 56 per cent of the total votes.

In Malwa region as well the alliance worked to the advantage of the Akalis, particularly in Ropar, Patiala, Faridkot, Bathinda, Sangrur and Ludhiana. This reinforces the religio-cultural ethos which negates the existence of exclusive caste categories for electoral mobilisations.

The distributing aspect is that the socio-economic index of the Dalit population (50 per cent of the total poor in Punjab) continues to be dismal as compared to other castes. The allocation for the development and welfare schemes are multiplying every year. And it is making not significant difference to the socio-economic status of Dalits. Resource allocation, access to jobs, services, health and education facilities must reach the socially deprived sections, failing which the Dalits may emerge as an exclusive vote-bank and disturb the political arithmetic of the state.

(The writer is a well-known Chandigarh-based Political Analyst of repute)

सोमवार, 12 फ़रवरी, 2007 को 09:41 GMT तक के समाचार

डॉक्टर प्रमोद कुमार
राजनीतिक विश्लेषक

पंजाब: राजनीतिक संस्कृति में दीवारें नहीं

यदि चुनावी पंडितों की मानें तो सत्ताधारी पार्टी पर भरोसे या उसका अभाव, नेताओं की लोकप्रियता (पार्टियों की नहीं) और व्यक्तिगत नेताओं की भूमिका से होने वाले 'वोट स्विंग' चुनावों का परिणाम तय करते हैं.

संदेश ये जाता है कि जब लोकप्रियता चरम पर हो तब चुनावों कराओं और सत्ता में लौटो. और कुछ नहीं तो आटा-दाल सस्ता बेचकर ही चुनाव जीत लो!

काश, ये सब इतना आसान होता! और चुनावों को जाति के गणित, राजनीतिक बदलों और सभी दलों में 'उच्च वर्ग' की नातेदारी से अलग किया जा सकता.

पंजाब में चुनाव का अखाड़ा है - गाँव, परिवार और सांस्कृतिक क्षेत्र हैं. सांस्कृतिक क्षेत्रों में शामिल हैं मेले, उत्सव, धार्मिक डेरे और संप्रदाय.

ये अखाड़ा धार्मिक और जातिय दीवारों से ऊपर है और इस तरह से पंजाब का राजनीतिक अखाड़ा अनूठा है. इसमें वैचारिक शुद्धता या छुआछूत की कोई जगह नहीं है.

पार्टियों के बीच दीवार नहीं

पंजाब में राजनीतिक दलों ने अपनी विचारधाराओं और दावों को परे रखते हुए अपनी सुविधा के मुताबिक गठबंधन बनाए हैं या एक दूसरे में उनका विलय हुआ है.

कांग्रेस और अकाली दल का 1937, 1948 और फिर 1956 में विलय हुआ और इनमें से कई नेता जो कांग्रेस में गए, वे फिर अकाली दल में वापस नहीं आए.

अकाली दल से कांग्रेस में जाने वाले नेताओं में प्रमुख थे - प्रताप सिंह कैरों, गुरमुख सिंह मुसाफिर, स्वर्ण सिंह, बलदेव सिंह, उज्जल सिंह और वर्तमान मुख्यमंत्री कैप्टन अमरिंदर सिंह.

यदि अकाली-भाजपा गठबंधनों पर नज़र डालें - फिर ये चाहे चुनाव के पूर्व या फिर चुनाव के बाद अस्तित्व में आए हों - तो ये पूरी तरह अवसरवाद की मिसाल थे.

वर्ष 1966 में पंजाब के पुनर्गठन के बाद, अकाली दल और भाजपा में चार गठबंधन चुनाव के बाद हुए और तीन चनाव-पूर्व हुए.

मिले-जुले राजनीतिक परिवार

ग्राम स्तर पर पार्टियों के गुट अपने प्रतिद्वंद्वियों को देखते हुए अपनी प्रतिबद्धता बदलते रहते हैं और इन गुटों के सदस्य भी अपनी सुविधा के मुताबिक काम करते हैं.

लेकिन उनकी राजनीतिक प्रतिबद्धता किसी भी तरह से उनकी रिश्तेदारी या नातेदारी पर असर नहीं करती.

पंजाब में ज़्यादातर राजनीतिक परिवारों का दोनो ही मुख्य राजनीतिक दलों - अकाली दल और कांग्रेस में प्रतिनिधित्व है.

इस तरह उनकी राजनीति उनके सांस्कृतिक माहौल के मुताबिक चलती है.

अकाली दिग्गज प्रकाश सिंह बादल की बेटी कांग्रेस पार्टी के मुख्यमंत्री रहे प्रताप सिंह कैरों के पोते से बयाही हुई हैं. अकाली मंत्री रहे सुखजिंदर सिंह के पुत्र सुखपाल इन चुनावों में कांग्रेस के प्रत्याशी हैं. बादल-टोहड़ा विवाद में टोहड़ा के बादल के कड़े आलोचक रहे प्रेम सिंह चंदमाजरा आज अकाली दल (बादल) के प्रत्याशी हैं.

मेले-उत्सवों की संस्कृति

राजनीतिक झुकाव सांस्कृतिक हर्षोल्लास का अभिन्न हिस्सा है। पंजाब में कम से कम एक दर्जन ऐसे मेले होते हैं जहाँ विभिन्न पार्टियों के राजनीतिक दीवान चलते हैं ताकि जनता तक संदेश पहुँचाया जा सके।

इस तरह राजनीतिक पार्टियाँ अपनी चुनावी ज़रूरतों के मुताबिक धार्मिक पहचान और धर्मनिरपेक्ष पंजाबी पहचान के बीच डोलती रहती हैं।

अकाली दल और भाजपा चरमपंथ के बाद के समय में इन पहचानों के बीच डोलते रहे हैं। उधर कांग्रेस पर 'ऑपरेशन ब्लूस्टार' और 1984 के सिख विरोधी दंगों का धब्बा लगा हुआ है।

इस तरह ये संभव नहीं कि आप कांग्रेस, या अकाली दल या भाजपा को सांप्रदायिक या धर्मनिरपेक्ष पार्टी ठप्पा लगा दें।

एक अन्य पहलु ये है कि राजनीतिक क्षेत्र में समर्थन जुटाने के लिए केवल जाति ही एक बड़ा कारण नहीं है।

जाति छोड़, गाँव का नाम अपनाया

चुनावी परिदृश्य सांस्कृतिक और क्षेत्रीय रंगों में भी रंगा हुआ है।

अधिकतर नेता राजनीति में प्रवेश करने से पहले अपने नाम से अपनी जाति का नाम हटा देते हैं और अपने गाँव का नाम इसकी जगह जोड़ लेते हैं।

ज़्यादातर प्रमुख नेता अपने गाँव का नाम इस्तेमाल करते हैं जैसे बादल, टोहड़ा, मजीठा इत्यादि।

ये विभिन्न पहलु इस विभाजन वाली राजनीति को एक सांझा सांस्कृतिक रंग दे देते हैं।

इसी के कारण वो हर्दें या सीमाएँ तय हो जाती हैं जिन्हें लाँघ कर राजनीतिक दल अपने राजनीतिक प्रतिद्वंद्वियों से बदला नहीं ले सकते।

रविवार, 11 फ़रवरी, 2007 को 20:48 GMT तक के समाचार

डॉक्टर प्रमोद कुमार
राजनीतिक विश्लेषक

पंजाब में दलित वोट की अहमियत

पंजाब में राजनीति तय सीमाओं के तहत चलती है। मिश्रित धार्मिक और सांस्कृतिक परंपराएं विभाजनकारी राजनीति को एक अलग रंग देती है।

जाति व्यवस्था तो यहाँ भी समाज में व्यापक तौर से फैली हुई है लेकिन चुनावी राजनीति में केवल इसी के बल पर वोट अपनी ओर नहीं खींचे जा सकते।

जाति व्यवस्था में सबसे निचले पायदान पर माने जाने वाले दलित भी किसी पार्टी के एकमुश्त वोट बैंक नहीं हैं।

इसकी वजह ये है कि पंजाब में दलित भले ही सामाजिक और आर्थिक रूप से उपेक्षा के शिकार रहे हों लेकिन दूसरे राज्यों में रहने वाले दलितों से काफी बेहतर स्थिति में हैं।

वर्ष 2001 की जनगणना के अनुसार पंजाब में दलितों की जनसंख्या 29 फ़ीसदी है और राज्य में वर्ष 1967 से 2002 तक चुने गए 1014 विधायकों में दलितों की संख्या 25 प्रतिशत रही है।

पंजाब चुनाव में दलित फैक्टर के विस्तृत विश्लेषण से चुनावी राजनीति में जाति विज्ञान के असर जैसे बड़े मुद्दे को समझने में मदद मिल सकती है।

दलितों को प्रतिनिधित्व

दलितों के 'अनिश्चित धार्मिक रुझान' और सामाजिक स्थिति तय करने वाले जाति व्यवस्था के अभाव में, दलितों को पंजाब की सभी पार्टियों में प्रतिनिधित्व मिला हुआ है।

यह रोचक तथ्य है कि जाटों की बहुलता वाले शिरोमणि अकाली दल में भी दलितों को ठीक-ठाक प्रतिनिधित्व मिला हुआ है।

वर्ष 2002 में चुने गए अनुसूचित जाति के विधायकों में सबसे अधिक (48 फ़ीसदी) कांग्रेस के थे। भारतीय जनता पार्टी ने भी दलितों को टिकट दिए थे।

महत्वपूर्ण है कि ज़्यादातर दलित विधायक बहुजन समाज पार्टी और कम्युनिस्ट पार्टियों की जगह अन्य पार्टियों से चुने जा रहे हैं।

दरअसल पंजाब में बहुजन समाज पार्टी यानी बसपा दलितों को अपना वोट बैंक नहीं बना पाई। उत्तर प्रदेश में तो बसपा को भारी सफलता मिली लेकिन पंजाब, जहाँ देश में प्रतिशत के हिसाब से सबसे अधिक दलित हैं - बसपा को इक्क-दुक्का सफलता ही मिली है।

उत्तर प्रदेश में बसपा को 1993 में 11 फ़ीसदी वोट मिले थे जो 2002 में बढ़कर 23 फ़ीसदी हो गया।

दरअसल शुरू में कम प्रतिनिधित्व मिलने की वजह से उत्तर प्रदेश और पंजाब, दोनों ही जगह दलित बसपा के साथ जुड़ाव महसूस करते थे लेकिन बाद में पंजाब में वे दलित पार्टी से दूर होते गए।

यही कारण है कि वर्ष 1992 के चुनाव में पंजाब में बसपा को 16 प्रतिशत वोट मिले जो वर्ष 2002 में घटकर महज छह फ़ीसदी रह गए।

वर्ष 1992 से 2002 तक के तीन विधानसभा चुनावों में बसपा को सिर्फ नौ सीटों पर सफलता मिली।

हालांकि बसपा ने वर्ष 1997 में 14 और वर्ष 2002 में 11 सीटों पर से कांग्रेस का गणित बिगाड़ दिया था।

सिख धर्म और आर्य समाज की भूमिका

रोचक तथ्य ये है कि बसपा के वोट में दो फ़ीसदी की वृद्धि से कांग्रेस को पाँच से 10 सीटों का नुक़सान हो सकता है।

आगामी विधानसभा चुनाव में अगर बसपा के वोट में दो फ़ीसद की वृद्धि हो जाती है और सत्ता-विरोधी रूढ़ान भी असर दिखाता है तो कांग्रेस की संभावनाओं पर असर पड़ सकता है।

सोचने वाली बात ये है कि बसपा राज्य में अपना असर क्यों नहीं छोड़ पाई?

दरअसल पंजाब अपनी धार्मिक सहिष्णुता के लिए जाना जाता है। सिख और आर्य समाज के लोगों ने दलित को जाति व्यवस्था आधारित कठोर सामाजिक आचरण से मुक्त कर दिया है।

इसके अलावा बसपा का राजनीतिक नारा भी पंजाब के क्षेत्रीय, सांस्कृतिक और आर्थिक मिजाज़ के अनुरूप नहीं है।

बसपा के दो महत्वपूर्ण नारे- जाति आधारित भेदभाव और मनुवाद को पंजाब में सिख धर्म और आर्य समाज की वजह से ज़मीन नहीं मिल पाई।

इसे वर्ष 1996 के संसदीय चुनाव में बसपा और अकाली दल के गठबंधन से दाओब क्षेत्र में जो परिणाम आए उसकी पृष्ठभूमि में समझा जा सकता है।

दाओब में होशियारपुर, जालंधर और फिल्लौर संसदीय क्षेत्र आते हैं।

बसपा के मुखिया कांशीराम होशियारपुर से अकाली दल (बादल) के सक्रिय सहयोग की वजह से जीत पाए। आकलन के अनुसार डाले गए वोट में से 44 फ़ीसदी जाट सिख और अनुसूचित जाति के थे।

राज्य में दलितों के सामाजिक-आर्थिक सूचकांक के कुछ विचलित करने वाले पहलू भी हैं।

पंजाब में गरीबों की कुल जनसंख्या का आधा हिस्सा दलितों का है और दूसरी जातियों के मुकाबले यह बढ़ता ही जा रहा है।

दलितों के विकास के लिए चलाए जाने वाले कार्यक्रमों का बजट हर साल बढ़ाने के बावजूद इनकी सामाजिक और आर्थिक स्थिति में कोई खास सुधार नहीं हुआ है।

संसाधन, नौकरी, स्वास्थ्य सेवाएं और शिक्षा, समाज के कमजोर तबके तक पहुँचने चाहिए, नहीं तो दलित एक खास वोट बैंक के रूप में उभर सकते हैं जिससे राज्य का राजनीतिक गणित गड़बड़ा सकता है।

GUEST COLUMN | *Dr. Pramod Kumar*

Punjab Shining on whom?

ELECTORAL POLITICS has come of age. It is marked by opulence, mega-mergers, media managers, a slew of promises and doles and politics of amnesia. It has liberated political parties from consistent political positions and ideological filters. The electoral process has also acquired its own autonomous space. It has become a battle of false claims and empty promises, of political leaders presenting themselves as representatives of the common persons and servants of the privileged, of trivialising of issues and appealing on a modelled image. In other words, it has been reduced to a "parade of clowns and acrobats, elephants and donkeys".

The forthcoming elections in Punjab seem to be part of this design. Interestingly, political parties are making false claims and empty promises as a cover-up for their non-performance, only a little more blatantly. For example, one of the advertisement released by the Congress Government claimed that it had "inspired top industrial houses to invest Rs. 86,161 crore in 282 mega projects thereby generating 20 lakh jobs". It is not known that how far these 'inspired industrial houses' have been able to create 20 lakh jobs by December. Whether such mega claims will prove voter friendly is a moot question. As leading political analyst Alan Altshuler commenting on the claims of the political parties in the USA, said, "Though their little favours went to little men, the big favours went to land speculators, public utility franchise holders, government contractors, illicit businessmen and of course, the leading members of the machines themselves."

At least, in this sense Punjab has been globalised. However, the glitter of "shinning Punjab" has made the political leaders candid about the outcome of their performance. It has also shown that the poorer sections have tremendous capacity to enrich the rich through their extra labour and culture of resilience. For instance, it has been claimed that if the opposition party, the Akali Dal, is brought back to power, land prices will crash. Such a claim is contrary to the ideological filter of *aam admi* used by the Congress Party in the last election. Those who do not have the means may be deprived by the rising prices of land of even their own shelter or a house. The irony of the situation is that the compensation received by the farmers ranging from Rs. 40 lakh to Rs 60 lakh for an acre of land is not adequate to get them a shelter of 5 marlas on the same land. If a political leadership is committed to the *aam admi* agenda it would not market as development, which in reality is pauperisation of poor farmers. Those aspiring to own a shelter or a piece of land for their shop or micro-enterprise educated enough to know that their life of deprivation, poverty and inequalities will continue as ever and the promises to eradicate pover-

Political parties are making false claims and empty promises as a cover-up for non-performance, only a little more blatantly. Besides anti-incumbency that provides a safe passage to issueless political, winnability criteria allow faceless politicians to find entry into the political management. Above all, the money a candidate can invest with the hope of recovering it later is a major facilitating factor – symptomatic of erosion of parties' ideological support base

ty and deprivation are a necessary ritual that constitute the core of an election campaign of the dominant political parties. Not only this, it has many more additionalities attached to it. In the words of a well acclaimed political analyst Michael Parenti, "The candidate sells his image as he would a soap product to a public conditioned to such bombardments. His family and his looks; the experience in office and devotion to public service; his sincerity, sagacity, and fighting spirit; his military record, patriotism, and ethnic background; his determination to limit taxes, stop inflation, improve wages, and create new jobs by attracting industry into the area; his desire to help the worker, farmer, and business person, the young and old, the rich and poor, and especially those in between; his eagerness to fight poverty but curb welfare spending while ending government waste and corruption and making the streets and the world itself safe by strengthening our laws, our courts, and our defences abroad, bringing us lasting peace and prosperity with honour, and so forth—such are the inevitable appeals that like so many autumn leaves, or barn droppings, they cover the land each November' these image building pronouncements without much content. In the background of these the style of governance, doles and electoral arithmetic emerge as preferable parameters for participation in elections.

The style of governance becomes the main concern of the people who do not have the means or are facing harassment in having access to gov-

ernment services. In the forthcoming Punjab elections the inaccessibility of the ruling Congress leadership, in other words, the feel-good-factor seem to have become a major issue. For instance, most of the campaign of the opposition parties revolves around the inaccessibility of the leadership rather than its performance (good or bad). The 'Vikas Yatra' has been termed as a mechanical vote catching device. In a caricatured ad-campaign the opposition parties remind the people that this *Yatra* has been undertaken only to catch votes at the end of a five-year term, while the political leaders remained elusive during this period. Even the opposition parties' have failed to actively participate in protest movements emanating from the implementation of economic reforms to which they are a votary. For instance, number of protests by unemployed youth, ad hoc employees, pauperised farmers, medicos have been responded by the repressive arm of the state as these have been termed as anti-development. If people demand employment, wages, livelihood and social security in the face of disinvestment, mega projects and retrenchment, they are labelled as anti-development.

With political parties ideologically supporting economic reforms, pauperisation of people do not find voice in the popular arena of electoral politics. Economic reforms encourage privatisation of health, employment and other public facilities such as electricity, water, transportation without providing them with means of livelihood.

Real issues like the challenge posed by the WTO agreement to small and marginal farmers, decline in the social development index with the status of women being the lowest in India, increasing non-productive youth population, unemployment, etc. thus remain outside the realm of electoral politics. Elections then are treated like events where the voters need to be 'managed'. Anti-incumbency becomes a saviour by providing parties rotational preference.

Besides anti-incumbency that provides a safe passage to issueless politics, winnability criteria allow faceless politicians to find entry into political management. In the course of the selection of candidates, political parties use this novel criterion. It does not matter whether a candidate is with or without a criminal record, has or does not have the capacity to do pro-people work. But if he has the capacity to manipulate votes and is himself 'manageable', there is every chance of his being selected. Above all, the money a candidate can invest with the hope of recovering it at a later date is a major facilitating factor. This is symptomatic of the erosion of the ideological support base of political parties.

(The writer is a Chandigarh-based political analyst)

GUEST COLUMN | *Dr. Pramod Kumar*

Voters' choice in polls

The election din in Punjab is claiming that there is an incumbent party and another in its opposition. There are claims and counter claims; a showcasing of performance versus promise of a golden performance. A snapshot to impress the voter in believing that each party represents, if not the antithesis of the other, at least a different agenda, policies and modus operandi, each catering to different interest groups. Common to both may be the people's development and Punjab's growth. But scratch the paint of rhetoric and the work of media managers and each shows as the carbon copy of the other.

It has become difficult to neatly categorise the political parties as pro or anti-economic reforms, communal or non-communal, casteist or non-casteist. For instance, major national and regional parties i.e. the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Shiromani Akali Dal are in favour of economic reforms, yet speak against to these reforms in their election campaigns.

The elections have addressed the theme of distributive justice vacillating between pro-poor promises to protection and promotion of well-entrenched interests. The vacillation ranges from Nehruvian nation-building project, Indira Gandhi's apologetic state welfarism and market-driven governance initiated by Rajiv Gandhi and endorsed by a host of other political parties.

A near consensus on economic reforms package among the major political parties and actors exists, notwithstanding the occasional noises relating to *Swadeshi*. For instance, the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party election manifestos for 2004 on economic reforms reinforced each other.

During elections, political parties promise jobs, doles, subsidies and in government they reduce employment in the public sector for improving fiscal health of the state. They exhort people to mind their own health and give subsidies to private hospitals and impose user charges. This all is done without addressing the issues concerning livelihood. This has made a large section of poor to vote out the incumbent in the hope that other parties have learnt the lesson. To illustrate, the ruling Congress party which came to power in the 2002 election, on the agenda of *aam admi* initiated economic reforms, lost 23.9 per cent of the votes and 61.3 per cent of the seats in the 2004 parliamentary elections, as

Democracy in the present form is performing a choice limiting function. The need is not to merely look for a choice in the existing party system, but to struggle for creation of choice in the system.

compared to the 2002 assembly elections. The party learnt the lesson. It announced sops like free electricity to farmers and removed octroi. Not only this, it reinvented governance, by 'leveraging public funds for attracting private capital'. However, no institutional mechanisms were evolved to harmonise private capital driven by profit motive, and public funds to be spent on ensuring social equity. This led to a number of farmers' protests in the state.

Similarly, on secularism, political parties vacillated between the religious identity to a secular Punjabi identity. The SAD and the BJP vacillated between religious identity to Punjabi as per the electoral and political needs. The Congress carries the stains of Operation Blue Star and the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. Consequently, religious, linguistic and regional factors got so mixed up that none of these emerged as a single factor in electoral mobilisations. Therefore, it is not possible to label the Congress, BJP and Akali Dal as communal or non-communal. To illustrate, the BJP and the Akali Dal after winning the 1997 elections on Punjabi as reflected in the Moga Declaration of 1996, started operating in the Sikh religious domain due to confrontation between the two factions of the SAD alienated a large section of urban Hindus, the moderate Sikhs and the Dalits. Consequently, the SAD-BJP suffered a set back in the urban and semi-urban constituencies in the 2002 elections. Whereas, the vote share of the Congress party in the 2002 elections in semi-urban constituencies increased from 26 per cent to 31 per cent and in the urban constituencies from 31 per cent to 36 per cent as compared to the 1997 assembly elections. But after winning the 2002 elections, the Congress party focused more on the rural Jat peasantry and the Sikh identity by repealing the Punjab agreement on sharing of river waters and

overactive participation in religious celebrations of the Sikh and SGPC elections. Consequently, its vote share in the 2004 parliamentary elections in semi-urban constituencies decreased from 40 per cent to 35 per cent and in urban constituencies from 54 per cent to 48 per cent as compared to 1999 parliamentary elections. Traditionally, its core support base consists of a large majority of Hindu Dalits with their 'uncertain religious allegiance', urban Hindu traders and migrant landless labourers. The shift from Punjabi identity to narrow religious identity issues testifies the fluid response of voters.

Further, a content analysis of the development claims of the Congress between 2002 and 2007 and of the Shiromani Akali Dal (B) between 1997 and 2002 shows that there is hardly any difference between the two. The foremost claim pertains to diversification of agriculture, Minimum Support Price for grains, credit on easy terms, efficient procurement of agricultural produce and rural indebtedness. Other claims related to an increase in investment in industry and employment generation, crusade against corruption, building roads, power generation, rural and urban infrastructure.

A reality check shows that in spite of these claims, Punjab is on a downhill slide. The growth of per capita income is continuously declining. The per capita income at constant prices (1994-95) during 2004-05 was Rs 16,756, whereas in Maharashtra it was Rs 17,864 and in Haryana Rs 16,870. Punjab ranked seventh on the per capita income in 2004-05. The growth in per capita income in states like Bihar, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Uttaranchal has been much higher than Punjab. Whereas, farmer households under debt are 65.4 per cent higher than the all India average of 48.6 per cent and in other states like Maharashtra (54.8 per cent), Haryana (53.1 per cent).

Similarly, unemployment has increased at the rate of 4.03 per cent since 1999-2000. The number of educated unemployed is much higher i.e. 66.8 per cent. The claims need to be seen in the context of the decreasing income, falling growth rates, rising unemployment and rural debt.

Do people have a choice? Perhaps, not. Democracy in the present form is performing choice limiting function. The need is not to merely look for a choice in the existing party system, but to struggle for creation of choices in the system.

(The writer is a well-known Chandigarh-based Political Analyst)

Harvesting votes from a new political terrain

In Punjab, debates on development and governance pushed identity politics and mud-slinging off the electoral stage.

Pramod Kumar

For most pollsters, elections are purely a matter of incumbency levels, popularity ratings — that too of leaders not parties — and vote swings emerging from the role of individual candidates with a sprinkling of “Sidhuisms.” Real-life elections, however, do not lend themselves to such easy analysis, especially in Punjab. The arenas of politics here are the village, family, cultural spaces like *melas* and festivals, and religious *deras* and sects. These arenas transcend religious and caste barriers. In this sense, the political culture of Punjab is indeed unique. There is no concept of ideological puritanism. Political parties merge and enter into coalitions irrespective of their ideological claims. At the village level, factions shift their loyalty in opposition to the other. And members of these factions are mobile, depending on their convenience. Their political affiliations in no way dilute their kinship and village ties. Most families have representation in both political parties, the Congress and the Akalis. Thus, politics becomes subordinate to the cultural landscape.

Politics is an integral part of cultural festivity. There are more than a dozen *melas* where political *diwans* are held by different political parties to present their messages to the people. *Deras* and sects have also been lending their support to political parties as per their contextual preference. Prominent among these are the Damdami Taksal, Radhaswami Beas, Sacha Sauda, the Namdharis, Nirankaris and a string of localised sects. These distinct features, in a way, lend a composite cultural flavour to an otherwise divisive politics and draw the boundaries beyond which political parties find it difficult to go in settling scores with political opponents.

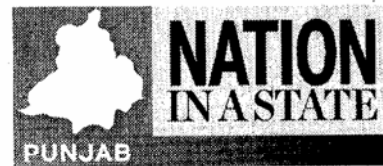
Identity-based politics

The 2012 Assembly elections in Punjab functioned within these distinct features and also marked a major departure from identity-based politics. The ruling Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)-BJP alliance



THANKSGIVING: Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal at the Golden Temple in Amritsar following his party's victory.

— PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



did not raise issues relating to identity politics. Their major emphasis was on development and governance reforms. The SAD made no emotional appeals about danger to the “Sikh Panth,” there was no frenzy against followers of the Dera Sacha Saudha as was done before the 2009 Parliament elections. Instead, the message that reverberated was that the protection of the rights of religious groups and the practice of electoral democracy are the only insurance against violent sectarian political articulations.

The shaping of the electoral agenda around development and reform built on the record of the alliance government, which had taken a number of steps to build trust with citizens and address productivity deficits in governance. These included the Right to Service Act, 2011 and the abolition of affidavits (except where required by law), with self-declarations taking their place. The Congress party failed to provide a superior alternative to this. It raised the rhetoric of corruption by branding SAD and BJP leaders as venal, without promising a practical solution to fight corruption and harassment in the citizen's everyday interaction with government.

Ironically, this emphasis on governance did not deter parties — especially the SAD — from raining sops on the poor, the middle class, youth, Dalits, women. This time there were promises of free electricity to farmers, free laptops for students, cable connections for Rs.100 and subsidised *atta-dal*. Of course, all these goodies come neatly packaged in market-driven governance in which subsidies are given, for instance, to private health providers and people are exhorted to mind their own health.

Another dynamic in the 2012 election was the presence of mega spoilers, most of which worked to the disadvantage of the Congress. Apart from rebel candidates, the presence of a third front, Sanjha Morcha, proved costly. At the core of the Sanjha Morcha was the People's Party of Punjab (PPP) of Akali rebel Man-

preet Badal. The PPP proved to be a wild card. It secured around five per cent of the votes, which affected the fortunes of Congress candidates in around 13 constituencies. The Bahujan Samaj Party was another spoiler. It secured around four per cent of the votes, as in 2007, adversely affecting the Congress in more than 10 constituencies.

Important lesson

In this election, anti-incumbency vis-à-vis the Central government functioned to the advantage of the BJP. The vote share of the BJP, no doubt, has declined from eight per cent to seven per cent, but it could win 12 seats. The SAD increased its seats in rural and semi-urban areas and maintained its position in urban areas as compared to 2007. The Congress lost seats in rural areas, but increased its tally in semi-urban and urban areas.

There is an important lesson from the Punjab results for the national political parties. For the Congress, there is an urgent need to regionalise its organisation, agenda and leadership. Paradoxically, the Congress has to compete with a strong regional party, but within limits defined by its national leadership. The BJP has to evolve its own identity rather than function under the shadow of the SAD.

It is interesting to note that the regional parties are making concerted efforts to “nationalise” their politics. The issues raised by the SAD in their manifesto relate to centre-state relations; but the Congress manifesto is silent on these issues.

To sum up, electoral politics in Punjab has graduated from an emotional agenda based on caste, religion and quotas, unlike in Uttar Pradesh. The electorate seems to be fed up of mud-slinging theatrics. Development and governance dominated the electoral discourse like never before. In political terms, this is new terrain, one which political analysts and party managers both failed to read.

(The author is a Chandigarh-based political analyst and Director of the Institute for Development and Communication.)

DAINIK BHASKAR
(JANUARY 31, 2012)



डॉ. प्रमोद कुमार
राजनीतिक विश्लेषक

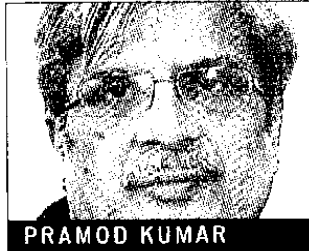
जब भी वोट ज्यादा पड़े, अकाली जीते

पं जब मैं चुनाव के पिछले नतीजों पर नजर डालें तो जब भी यहां ज्यादा मतदान हुआ, अकाली दल-भाजपा गठबंधन को फायदा मिला है। जब भी कम मतदान हुआ है, कांग्रेस ने सरकार बनाई है। 1997 और 2007 में ज्यादा वोटिंग हुई तो अकाली सत्ता में आए। 2002 में वोटिंग परसेंटेज 65 फीसदी था और कांग्रेस जीती। इस बार भी कुछ ऐसा ही होता नजर आ रहा है। इस बार लोगों ने भारी संख्या में अपने घरों से निकलकर मतदान किया है, इसका मतलब यही है कि मतदाताओं की सहभागिता चुनाव में पहले के मुकाबले ज्यादा रही है। खासकर से तब जब चुनाव आयोग की तरफ से भारी बंदिशें थीं। लोग अपने घरों की छतों पर किसी पार्टी का झंडा नहीं लगा सके और न ही चुनाव प्रचार का ज्यादा शोरगुल रहा। राजनीतिक पार्टियों को डर था कि कहीं उनके खिलाफ मुकदमा न दर्ज हो जाए। चुनाव आयोग का काम निश्चित तौर पर सराहनीय रहा है। पैसे और शराब के आवंटन को रोकने में काफी सफलता मिली है। युवाओं की हिस्सेदारी बढ़ी, जो चुनाव को गंभीरता से नहीं लेते थे। लोगों की सोच बदली है। लोग वोट डालकर व्यवस्था बदलना चाहते हैं। इसमें अन्ना फैक्टर भी दिखता है।

Polls reflect shift in political agenda

THINK AGAIN While development and governance issues were the focus in the run-up to the Punjab polls, the higher voting percentage is not open to easy interpretations

Guest Column



PRAMOD KUMAR

Electoral politics in Punjab has come of age. In the January 30 elections, a record number of people exercised their franchise. To understand the high percentage of polling, we need to examine how this election is different from earlier ones.

This time the main issues debated were development and administrative reforms. In other words, emotional issues like danger to the Panth and anti-Centre rhetoric were absent from political dialogue.

On the development front, employment generation, as flagged by the Congress party, and employability allowance to empower youth with technical skills and laptops promised by the Akali Dal-BJP combine came into focus.

A high dosage of idealism projected by the Sanjha Morcha also brought people to

polling booths.

Another factor that seems to have influenced voters' perception was the fight against corruption and harassment experienced by them in their interaction with the government. The experience of repression at the hands of a politicised police may have added to the anti-incumbent vote.

The role of the Election Commission in restoring the confidence of women and Dalit voters and motivating the youth to vote also contributed to the high turnout. Voter-friendly electoral practices like easy availability of voter's slips helped too.

Punjab elections have become highly competitive, with the

SAD-BJP making all-out efforts to come back to power, and the Congress determined to quell the perception that the missteps of the UPA would mar the party's electoral prospects.

Finally, the presence of Manpreet Singh Badal may have mobilised a section of first-time voters.

However, spurious generalisations should be avoided.

The voting percentage was high in the 1997 (69%) and 2007 (75%) assembly elections, and

the Akali-BJP combine captured power both times.

But it would be wrong to conclude that this time it is again advantage SAD-BJP. Similarly, a simple deconstruction of the anti-incumbent vote in favour of the Congress or speculating that first-time voters would give Manpreet greater clout can be misleading.

Let's look at the phenomena of higher votes cast closely:

(a) The additional votes polled may not have been in favour of a state-level leader or a particular party. To illustrate, there is nominal increase in votes polled in the constituencies where the Manpreet factor is seen to be relevant like in Gidderbaha, Muktsar, Lehragaga. In fact, in Maur, Mansa and Budhlada it has declined substantially. Further, in Patiala and Jalalabad, where state Congress chief Captain Amarinder Singh and SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal, respectively, were in the fray, the vote percentage has declined. The vote percentage also fell in Samana constituency where Amarinder's son Raninder Singh was contesting against SAD's Surjit Singh Rakhra.

(b) The voting pattern shows

that high percentage of votes is for or against individual candidates.

(c) There are around 28 constituencies with an increase of more than 5% votes polled. Of these, 19 are from Malwa region. This constitutes 28% of total seats from Malwa. Of these 28 constituencies, 28% and 9% are from Majha and Doaba, respectively. The increase in percentage of votes is mainly from Malwa and Majha.

(d) There are 25 constituencies where increase in polling percentage is more than 2-5%. Of these, 17 are from Malwa region which constitutes around 25% of the total seats from Malwa. Around 16% and 17% fall in Majha and Doaba, respectively. This clearly shows that more than 50% seats from Malwa region experienced high percentage of polling.

(e) More urban and semi-urban constituencies have experienced high polling.

(f) A significant number of constituencies with high polling are locked in four or even five-cornered contests.

What does all this signify for the fortune of political parties?

An interaction with voters and the above analysis show that the increase is not an anti-

incumbent or pro-incumbent vote. The increase in votes polled may be due to a paradigm shift in the political agenda from identity politics to development, from governmentality to dignified access to government services, and from rotational corruption among political class to fight against corruption.

Yet, the role of money power, kinship ties, bribes in the form of drugs and alcohol, and the dera factor continue to be negative trends.

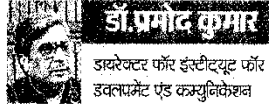
One hopes that the increase in votes may have resulted in diluting the influence of vote bank politics such as the dera factor. The political adventurism of deras have to be curtailed as they divert people's attention from real issues and push them to respond to dictates, and subsequently invite reactions from equally fundamentalist followers of competing religions, sects or deras.

To sum it up, predicting the election results on the basis of the available information would be a case of scientific adventurism rather than rational assessment. Let it be anybody's guess.

The writer is director, Institute for Development and Communication, Chandigarh

सब जानना चाहते हैं क्यों बढ़ा मतदान

पंजाब के मतदाता समझदार हो चुके हैं, इसका प्रमाण है कि इस चुनाव में रिकॉर्ड



उपरेक्टर फॉर इंस्टीट्यूट फॉर डवलपमेंट एंड कम्युनिकेशन

संख्या में लोगों ने दिल खोलकर वोट दिया। आखिर क्या वजह रही इस हाई वोल्टेज मतदान की। इसे समझने के लिए जरूरी है कि पंजाब में पहले हुए चुनावों को हम समझ लें कि किस तरह यह चुनाव पहले चुनावों से अलग है। इसमें शक नहीं कि इस चुनाव अभियान के केंद्र

में विकास और तमाम प्रशासनिक सुधार रहे। दूसरे शब्दों में कहें तो इस बार राज्य में लोगों को लुभाने के लिए रैलियों में न कोई भावनात्मक मुद्दे उठाए गए जैसे कि पंथ से जुड़े मुद्दे या केंद्र विरोधी नीतियों की लगातार आलोचना। विकास के मोर्चे पर देखें तो जहां कांग्रेस का पूरा ध्यान रोजगार पैदा करने के उपायों पर वहीं अकाली सरकार ने युवाओं को तकनीकी शिक्षा देने और यहां तक की युवाओं को लुभाने के लिए मुफ्त लैपटॉप देने का भी वादा किया गया। दूसरी तरफ साझा मोर्चे ने एक आदर्शवादी एजेंडा मतदाताओं के सामने रखा, जिसने पंजाब के मतदाताओं

को भारी संख्या में वोट डालने के लिए प्रेरित किया। मतदाताओं का रुझान ज्यादा से ज्यादा मतदान करने की एक बड़ी वजह रही कि वोट समाज में व्याप्त भ्रष्टाचार से बहुत ज्यादा त्रस्त हो चुका था। सरकार और व्यवस्था से उसे बहुत ज्यादा न्याय मिलता नजर नहीं आ रहा। पंजाब के लोग उन 'धक्कों' की बात कर रहे थे, जो उन्हें पुलिस थानों में खाने के लिए मजबूर होना पड़ रहा था। पुलिस अपनी भूमिका को भुलाकर कहीं न कहीं राजनीति से प्रेरित होकर काम करती नजर आ रही थी। ऐसे में चुनाव आयोग ने लोगों को एक बड़ी राहत दी और खासकर महिलाओं में और दलितों

में यह विश्वास पैदा किया कि वो ज्यादा से ज्यादा तादाद में मतदान कर सकते हैं और उन्होंने ऐसा किया भी। चुनाव आयोग ने घर-घर में मतदान स्लिप भिजवाकर एक बेहद सराहनीय काम किया, जिसने पोलिंग एजेंट वोटर्स की निर्भरता को खत्म कर दिया। इसमें कोई शक नहीं कि अकाली भाजपा सरकार ने सत्ता में वापस आने के लिए पूरी ताकत झोंक दी, वहीं दूसरी तरफ कांग्रेस के लिए भी केंद्र में यूपीए की गिरती साख के कारण ये चुनाव ज्यादा महत्वपूर्ण बन गए। मनप्रीत फैक्टर ने पहली बार मताधिकार का इस्तेमाल करने वाले लोगों का सबसे ज्यादा धुंकीकरण

किया। इस चुनाव के किसी भी ट्रेड का विश्लेषण करने से पहले चीजों को बहुत हल्के में लेने या उनका साधरणीकरण करने से बचना चाहिए। 1997 में वॉटिंग प्रतिशत (69 प्रतिशत) और 2007 में (75 प्रतिशत) ज्यादा था। इन चुनावों में अकाली-भाजपा गठबंधन ने जीत दर्ज की थी, लेकिन इससे अनुमान लगाना गलत होगा कि इस बार भी वॉटिंग प्रतिशत ज्यादा होने का फायदा अकाली-भाजपा को मिलेगा। इस बार कई फैक्टर काम करेंगे। मसलन विकास का मुद्दा, लुभावने वादे, मनप्रीत का आदर्शवाद और तमाम पाटियों का

दो मुख्य ट्रेड सामने आए

- » अतिरिक्त वोट किसी एक पार्टी या निर्दलीय उम्मीदवार के खाते में नहीं गए। गिहड़बाहा और मुक्तसर जैसे विधानसभा क्षेत्रों में जहां मनप्रीत फैक्टर मजबूत दिखा वहां मामूली वोट बढ़े, लेकिन मीड में वोटों में कमी दर्ज की गई। फिर पटियाला और जलालाबाद में वोट प्रतिशत में गिरावट आई है, जहां पूर्व मुख्यमंत्री अमरिंदर सिंह और उपमुख्यमंत्री सुरजबीर सिंह बादल में मुख्य मुकाबला था। समाना विधानसभा क्षेत्र में भी वॉटिंग प्रतिशत में गिरावट देखी गई, जहां रणिंदर सिंह सुरजीत राखड़ा के खिलाफ लड़ रहे हैं।
- » मतदान को देखते हुए यही कहा जा सकता है कि लोगों ने किसी उम्मीदवार के पक्ष में या उनके खिलाफ खुलकर वोट किया है। उपलब्ध सूचनाओं और जानकारी के आधार पर इस चुनाव के नतीजों का विश्लेषण करना आंकड़ों के जोड़-घटाव करने से ज्यादा कुछ नहीं होगा। बेहतर यही होगा कि जनता के फैसले का इंतजार किया जाए।

Shaping a new poll agenda for Chandigarh

GUEST COLUMN



Dr PRAMOD KUMAR

Elections are about winning and, for some, to ensure others lose. They are shorn of any ideological persuasions and, more recently, have even ceased to be political. Therefore, it is essential to decode the claims and counterclaims made by the various poll contestants in the fray for Chandigarh.

Elections in the city have to be decoded at three levels. Firstly, as to what extent do the political parties represent national concerns — like decisive leadership to free the country from the grip of land speculators, shady businessmen and crony capitalists as well rid it of plunder of the exchequer, unbridled inflation, soaring unemployment, unrelieved poverty and income and social inequality.

However, politicians will definitely be tempted to go in for occasional handouts ostensibly to alleviate people's misery. Political parties have made provision for safety nets to the poor and the aspiring middle class a major election issue. Voters now have a choice between parties giving these entitlements as a right and those for whom it is just another populist measure.

The key feature of an economic reforms agenda is

an increase in the quantum of corruption, and political parties never tire of making corruption a poll issue but they never address the core issues like the massive misappropriation of public funds. Further, poverty, discrimination and inequality have multiplied over the years.

In the background of the huge gap between performance and promises, the style of governance and local issues have become the principal concern in these elections. Those contesting the Chandigarh parliamentary seat appear to have covered every possible concern of city residents, ranging from creation of new jobs, improved living standards and increased safety for women to better civic infrastructure.

Amid all the noise let us remind these netas of some of the pressing issues facing the locals today. Though the city has commendable educational facilities, it cannot boast a single college or other institute (even architectural) of excellence. It has broadbased healthcare services but not even one first rate specialty institution. It has a sprawling shopping complex but has failed to emerge as a major commercial hub. The city has a large sports complex but major

facility dedicated to a particular sport. It has a large number of newspapers but no centre of excellence in communications and media education.

Why hasn't Chandigarh emerged as a city striving for excellence? As an island model, it is a unique experiment in urban governance where bureaucrats without any stakes and roots have been given almost unquestioned power without being hindered by significant political interference. It has all kinds of distortions such as encroachments, pollution, traffic snarls and parking congestion, and the quality of civic services like sanitation, power and water drainage has been steadily deteriorating.

People's participation in governance has been discouraged by the bureaucratic setup.

Excellence is sought to be achieved primarily through control over the use of the limited land in the city; as a consequence violation of prescribed land use regulations has become a convenient governance tool. Who among the current poll contestants will take a call to liberate this city from the bureaucrats' grip and ensure community participation?

In fact, Chandigarh has become a symbol of unequal-

ity and injustice perpetuated by a regulated pattern of land use. The sectoral demarcations - the northern sectors on the foothills of the Shivaliks that are inhabited by the elite - are well demarcated from the southern sectors where the middle class lives, along with the periphery inhabited by the poor. We notice a noticeable policy bias in favour of the northern sectors, for which huge resources are spent to make life comfortable for the residents at the expense of those living in the southern sectors and the fringes. The city has virtually been reduced to a tourist resort for the affluent and a refuge for hopeless migrants and helpless retired people. Chandigarh has started decaying before it could bloom.

Will the political parties gather the courage and have the vision to transform the city?

The immediate need is to reorient the existing plans based on land use, which are turning out to be a source of profit, to one that is flexible and allows scope for organic growth. The standards for attaining excellence have to be worked out for each sphere of activity in the city. The slums have to be rid of the land grabbing "mafia". It is also necessary to remove the north-south and ensure all residents enjoy the same standard of public utilities and civic infrastructure.

(Dr Pramod Kumar is director of the Institute for Development & Communication (IDC), Chandigarh)

IN THE BACKGROUND OF THE HUGE GAP BETWEEN PERFORMANCE AND PROMISES, THE STYLE OF GOVERNANCE AND LOCAL ISSUES HAVE BECOME THE PRINCIPAL CONCERN IN THESE ELECTIONS

An election of many firsts

Can Punjab's politicians get their act together in time and reconnect with the average voter?



PRAMOD KUMAR

Electoral politics in Punjab bucked an established trend when the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alliance overcame anti-incumbency in the 2012 Assembly elections. The Sikh-dominated SAD won the elections on a plank of development, a non-panthnic pitch and effective use of 'social engineering' whereby 11 urban Hindus and 21 Scheduled Castes won on Akali tickets.

However, in the 2014 general election, the anti-incumbency towards Akalis at the State level and the Congress at the Centre gave a fillip to a third political formation, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which ended up winning four Lok Sabha seats. It was a warning to the Congress and the SAD-BJP to reform or perish. The 2017 Assembly elections will demonstrate whether these established parties have reformed, or the AAP has joined their bandwagon.

'Manifestos' and celebrities

Punjab is witnessing a phase in which politics has become a matter of popular ratings of leaders (in any sphere) and not political parties; blatant promises to send competing leaderships to jail for their perceived or alleged misdeeds rather than activating and institutionalising the justice delivery system; empty or false promises (like debt waiver for farmers, one government job for each family); and trivialisation of the political agenda.

In line with the precedent set during the general election and the 2015 Delhi Assembly elections, the overall approach this time in Punjab has been to use a cocktail of doles and promises containing something for everyone — 'manifestos' rather than a manifesto, with menu cards for farmers, traders, students, Dalits, industrialists, women, etc. The 'credit' for this goes to the AAP, with a focus on how the leader is perceived by the voters.

Another distinct feature is that with a discredited political class, there is competition among political parties to poach singers, comedians, journalists, human rights activists to look credible.



STRIKING A CHORD: "The Congress and the Akalis have a regional orientation which the AAP is yet to develop." AAP Punjab State convener Gurpreet Singh Ghuggi at the Golden Temple in Amritsar. PHOTO: PTI

With a discredited political class, there is competition among parties to poach singers, journalists and human rights activists to look credible

Earlier, these celebrities were used to gather crowds for politicians; now many of them have transformed themselves into politicians.

Also, for the first time in Punjab's electoral history, all three main contestants have hired professional managers to connect them with the people. Elections are being treated as events, where voters have to be 'managed'. This has liberated political parties from holding any ideological position.

A high-stakes election

Historically, Punjab elections have been a bipolar affair. The main opposition is supposed to be the major beneficiary of any anti-incumbency vote. However, this time there is also the AAP and a third front consisting of AAP dissenters, wayward Akalis, religious figures and 'do-gooder' politicians. All three major political formations have high stakes. The Congress will look to its performance in Punjab to signal a re-

surgence at the national level after the low of the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. For the AAP, a victory in Punjab would provide the much-needed fodder to Arvind Kejriwal's ambition to launch himself in 2019 as a prime ministerial candidate. For the Akalis, it is a fight for survival and to save their alliance with the BJP.

As a consequence, there are claims and counterclaims; a showcasing of performance versus promise of a golden performance; efforts to impress voters that each party represents, if not the antithesis of the other, at least a different agenda and style of governance. But scratch the paint of rhetoric and the work of event managers, and each looks like a carbon copy of the other.

Unlike the Akalis and the Congress, the AAP is not saddled with historical baggage but it has no historical advantage either — the Congress and the Akalis have a regional orientation which the AAP is yet to develop. Another AAP disadvantage is that unlike Delhi, Punjab does not have a large 'footloose' population — people have resided there for generations, with their own culture and history. The only advantage the AAP has is its anti-drug and anti-corruption political stance. How far it will help the party to win is a moot

point.

Further, the Supreme Court judgment on November 10 quashing the 2004 Act passed by the Punjab legislature to deny Haryana its share of water has added another dimension to the political theatrics. How voters will respond to the ruling SAD's open defiance of the verdict, and the resignations of Congress legislators from the Punjab Assembly and its State unit president Amarinder Singh from Parliament in protest, remains to be seen. Interestingly, the Act passed by the Congress-run government in Punjab in 2004 did not result in the party losing Assembly elections in Haryana in 2005, nor did it help the party retain power in Punjab in 2007. In a way, after decades of the water-sharing dispute, people have become indifferent to political rhetoric, judicial diversions and administrative ad-hocism.

An assessment survey in Punjab by the Institute for Development and Communication in October 2016 found that one-third of voters approve of the SAD-BJP government's performance on issues but rated its top leadership negatively. In the case of the Congress, they view its leader, Amarinder Singh, positively, but the party's electoral agenda less favourably compared to that of the Akalis and the AAP. A large section of those surveyed identified with AAP's anti-drug, anti-corruption agenda but rate Mr. Singh higher than Mr. Kejriwal or AAP parliamentarian Bhagwant Mann.

If these findings are to be believed, the hired professional managers have a real challenge on their hands. When a political party's DNA, leadership choices and agenda are undercutting each other, what can hired managers project for their clients to win? Neither the leaderships nor the political parties have the capacity to pull the votes required on their own. Thus the predilection to pick faceless politicians and celebrities as candidates based on their 'winnability' in what are likely to be five-cornered contests. This is symptomatic of erosion of the ideological support base of parties, political leadership deficit and absence of a transformational agenda.

Pramod Kumar is Director, Institute for Development and Communication, Chandigarh.

TOI asks experts to **set the agenda** for Punjab ahead of the 2017 assembly polls

Need Solutions, Not Packaging

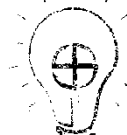


*Dr Pramod Kumar
is a political analyst
and chairman of
Punjab Governance
Reforms Commission*

For the 2017 Punjab assembly elections, the main political parties should spell out their vision on how they will tackle the issues troubling people of the state. Like previous elections, the problems are being highlighted but what voters want to know are the solutions. Besides, the parties are not coming up with the cause of the problems in a way that they project themselves are viable alternatives. As usual, the manifestos will make promises but there is no clear roadmap to deal with the issues.

The way things are shaping up, Punjab is getting into a managerial approach to elections with marketing style of campaigning where the candidates and the CM faces will be sold to the voters like products. Earlier, it was political parties' own brains that used to strategize but now professional people will take over who will focus on packaging the candidates for the voters. From the projection of a leader to the timing of raising an issue will all be well-planned in order to mesmerize the voters.

It is like one noodle company running an aggressive ad campaign to convince people that their product is better than rival's, even though a local product could be better. The parties seem to differ only in rhetoric and not in offering a concrete roadmap with workable ideas. People already know



**2017
SETTING THE
AGENDA**



**What do you think
are the real issues
ahead of the 2017
assembly elections
in Punjab?**

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with **Agenda 2017** in subject line

that the problems.

Drugs, unemployment and farmers' plight are problems that are likely to dominate the campaigns. But look at the way the political parties have turned the agrarian crisis into a farmers' suicide issue as it gives them an opportunity to strike an emotional chord with people and bring in an element of drama.

But this trend is not in the interest of people as what they really look forward to is a political party addressing problems. Also, the parties should tell people why things are wrong as they are competing with each other. If they do, people will connect with them.

(As told to Vibhor Mohan)

2017 Punjab elections: Game for spoilers

Prof Pramod Kumar

Punjab has a history of mergers, pre-election coalitions, and seat adjustments amongst contesting political parties. Interestingly, the Akalis have merged with the Congress in 1937, 1948 and 1956 as well. They formed pre-elections coalitions with the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) in 1997, 2002, 2007 and 2012 elections. These pre-election coalitions had their roots in an environment conducive to transfer of votes from one party to another.



EXPERT OPINION

There are other contestants in electoral politics who are labelled as spoilers. Spoilers are those who have a capacity to make others lose rather than their own win. These spoilers become relevant in constituencies where the difference between the winner and the runner up is lower. It is significant to note that in Punjab between 1997 and 2012 elections, the effective number of parties sharing votes was higher as compared to their share in seats.

For instance, parties like Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Shiromani Akali Dal (Tohra) and People's Party of Punjab (PPP) act as a major spoiler



➤ **In 2012**, there were two main spoilers, BSP and PPP. They led to the defeat of 22 Congress and 29 SAD candidates

➤ **In 2007 polls**, BSP emerged as the main spoiler with only four per cent votes which led to the defeat of 18 Congress and 14 Akali candidates

in these elections without winning even a single seat. In 1997, the BSP polled eight per cent of the votes without winning a seat led to the defeat of nine Congress, five Akalis and three BJP candidates. In 2002 elections, the vote share of BSP was around six per cent votes and it led to the defeat of 10 Congress, 15 Akalis and two BJP candidates. In these elections, Akali Dal (Tohra) got around five per cent votes that led to the defeat of seven Akali candidates.

➤ **In 2002 elections**, the vote share of BSP was around six per cent votes and it led to the defeat of 10 Congress, 15 Akalis and two BJP candidates. In these elections, Akali Dal (Tohra) got around five per cent votes that led to the defeat of seven Akali candidates

Interestingly, in 2007 elections, BSP emerged as the main spoiler with only four per cent votes which led to the defeat of 18 Congress and 14 Akali candidates. However, in 2012, there were two main spoilers, i.e. BSP and PPP. BSP and PPP led to the defeat of 22 Congress and 29 SAD candidates. These political groups acted as spoilers for main political parties. The BSP and the PPP acted as wild cards and whereas Akali Dal (Tohra) group spoiled the chances of the Akali Dal

(Badal). However, other than political parties, there are rebels and dummy candidates which enter into fray due to factors other than political which may spoil the chances of winning contestants. In Punjab, the rebels from various parties have also played a spoiler's role.

In the 2012 elections, Congress lost 10 seats because of these rebels and Akali Dal lost two seats because of their rebel candidates. It can, therefore, be stated that at the micro level the political parties follow the strategy of supporting individual candidates to make the competing parties lose the elections. However, these spoilers, i.e. the political parties, individual rebels and dummy candidates often act as wild cards.

As is evident, the 2017 election shall witness five cornered contest between the Congress, the Akali-BJP, the AAP, the BSP and various fringe groups. The main traditional contestants are the Akali-BJP and the Congress. Like in 2012 elections, PPP worked to the disadvantage of both the main political parties, in 2017 elections AAP may perform the same role. Or will it emerge as third party with sufficient number of seats to become relevant for government formation in hung assembly scenario?

(The author is director, Institute for Development and Communication (IDC), Chandigarh)

Crafting electoral politics in Gujarat

The election is being fought on the turf of religious identity, caste categories and personality of leaders rather than on the performance of the incumbent government.

PRAMOD KUMAR

Director, Institute for Development and Communication

THE outcome of Gujarat elections will be a precursor to the 2019 parliamentary elections. If this election goes the Congress way, a weak Modi will be in the fray in 2019. However, if it goes the BJP way, a weak Congress will have no choice but to transform its politics radically for its survival in the electoral game.

Earlier elections in Gujarat have shown that ideologies are relevant to win elections. And, as such, an effortless anti-incumbency campaign may not, on its own, dislodge the incumbent government. For the present election, the same is true. The only difference is that there is widespread dissatisfaction amongst the voters. As the electoral scene is hotting up, the parties in fray are trying to outcompete each other on the same turf be it religiosity, caste based reservations, caste arithmetic and religious polarization, of-course gamished with development rhetoric and populist bluster. No signs of alternate political discourse.

The expansion of the right wing politics coincided with the transformation of economy from command to market economy in the nineties. Modi's emergence as a leader in Gujarat can be located in this transformation. Thus, the so-called Gujarat model of development in terms of economic reforms is no different from the model adopted in the country in the nineties. The difference lies in its implementation without moderating the negative impact on poor farmers, workers and people, and in its blending with the right wing ideology.

Historically, political parties, be it the Congress or the BJP, are on the same side of the neo-liberal path of development, but the electoral discourse conveniently located crony capitalism, unemployment,



POLL DIN: An election rally scene in Surendranagar, Gujarat. AFP

How Gujarat 'model' fares

Wage data from the Labour Bureau for 2015 suggests that the average daily wage of agricultural labour is Rs 169 in Gujarat compared to the national average of Rs 230. For the rural non-farm sector, wages in Gujarat are Rs 191 compared to Rs 241 for all India. Gujarat is among the five worst states in India on the Hunger Index, and ranks 11th in Human Development Index. The state slipped from rank 9 to 13 between 2008 and 2012 in health index, and from 7th in 1996 to 10th in 2012 in composite education index. These are the natural outcomes of the neo-liberal path of development being implemented in India.

poverty and inequalities in policy paralysis and/or incapacity of the leadership to carry forward the neo-liberal agenda. In other words, during the Congress regime, it was attributed to policy paralysis and now, on the incapacity of the incumbent leadership to address the crises. So, whatever consequences of growth Gujarat has experienced, the same can be seen as a precursor to the things to come in other parts of India.

Gujarat has experienced faster economic growth. Has this growth been inclusive? Studies have shown that the workers received only 8.3 per cent of the value added, while the rest was pocketed by profiteers. In terms of the share of the workers' wages in other states, the value addition is better, for instance, in Kerala it is 22.47 per cent, West Bengal 21.90 per cent, Tamil Nadu 16.37 per cent and Punjab 15.27 per cent (*The Hindu*, September 27, 2012).

Then what is the Gujarat model of development? It is growth without moderation of inequities, privatisation of health and education. Historically, the BJP in Gujarat

has nurtured regional aspirations, patronised new aspirational class filtered through the regionalised version of Hindutva, particularly post liberalisation. The whole tenor of electoral mobilisation in Gujarat has been a clever blend of *Gujarat ka gaurav* and Hindutva identity.

Electoral discourse in Gujarat has three dimensions.

1 Firstly, it revolves around mobilisations on regionalised Hindutva identity leading to polarisation in 62 urban constituencies on religious lines, whereas, in rural areas on caste-cum-class lines.

2 Secondly, to counter this, Mandal versus Kamandal politics of 1980s has been invoked by coopting Hardik Patel (reservation for the Patidar caste), Alpesh Thakur (reservation for OBCs) and Jignesh (reservation and welfare for the Dalits). The opposition is relying on simple arithmetic that is the sum total of Hardik Patel, Alpesh and Jignesh will ensure the defeat of the BJP. This is not the way electoral politics works. For instance, the Patidars' manifest

protest is for seeking reservation in government jobs, but the crux of the unrest is in their relative deprivation: in short, the loss of political power. Similarly, the Dalits who constitute around seven per cent may find it difficult to go along with the Patidars with whom they have major contradictions at the village level. Further, the OBCs may see their share in reservations reduced if Patidars are included in the OBC list. Then, the Patels are divided into two groups: Leuva and Kadvas. Hardik has a major support base in the Kadva Patels while the BJP in Leuva Patels. To overcome heterogeneity amongst the Patidars, the authority of religious 'dhams' is being invoked. Both the BJP and Congress are making rounds of religious dhams to overcome these differentiations within the caste groups. It is nothing, but competitive communalism.

3 The third issue is the use of *gaurav* of Gujarat as a universal category that appears to be purer and unadulterated through a clever underplaying of the structural inequalities of caste, religion and ethnicity. And, since the Opposition has made Modi the fulcrum of the elections, defeat of the BJP in Gujarat is being propagated as a precursor to Modi's defeat in the 2019 elections. That is not liked by many voters as they see Modi as the *gaurav* of Gujarat.

No doubt, the voters are dissatisfied with the 22 years of anti-incumbency and the leadership's incompetence to manage the contradictions in society, economy, and politics. However, the electoral campaign could not converge the national and local issues like demonetisation and GST with local issues of unequal access to education, health, poverty, hunger, and employment. The election is being fought on the turf of religious identity, caste categories and personality of leaders rather than on the performance of the incumbent government-advantage the BJP. The electoral outcomes will be largely influenced by electoral arithmetic and electoral management.

क्या कांग्रेस 'आप' का झटका झेल पाएगी?

प्रोफेसर प्रमोद कुमार
राजनीतिक विश्लेषक

13 जनवरी 2017



CONGRESS PARTY TWITTER

पंजाब में अब तक हुए ज्यादातर चुनावों में दोतरफा मुकाबले ही देखे गए हैं. एक तरफ कांग्रेस तो दूसरी तरफ अकाली-बीजेपी गठजोड़. हालांकि इस बार के चुनाव में एक तीसरी ताकत भी है. वह है आदमी पार्टी जो पहले से जमे जमाए राजनीतिक दलों के सामने चुनौती पेश कर रही है.

पंजाब में इस बार सत्तारूढ़ अकाली-बीजेपी गठजोड़ के खिलाफ पड़ने वाले वोटों को 'आप' कांग्रेस से झटकने की पुरज़ोर कोशिश में लगी है. पीछे मुड़कर देखें तो पंजाब में सत्ता की चाभी कभी कांग्रेस तो कभी अकालियों के पास रही है.

पंजाब बीजेपी में घमासान, फ़ायदा किसको?

अकालियों के साथ बीजेपी मज़बूत या कमज़ोर?

क्या पंजाब का रास्ता पटना से होकर जाता है?



CONGRESS PARTY TWITTER

मौजूदा सियासी समीकरणों को देखें तो खेल बिगाड़ने वाले खिलाड़ी की मौजूदगी के कारण किसी एक राजनीतिक दल को नुकसान हो सकता है. हालांकि साल 2014 के संसदीय चुनावों में शिरोमणी अकाली दल और बीजेपी और कांग्रेस को कुल मिलाकर 68 फीसदी वोट मिले थे.

इससे पहले 2009 वाले लोकसभा चुनाव में तीनों का वोट शेयर 89 फीसदी था. ये गिरावट चुनावी मैदान में सियासी पार्टियों और उम्मीदवारों की बढ़ती तादाद की तरफ इशारा करती है. इसका एक और मतलब निकलता है कि हर सीट चुनाव दर चुनाव मुकाबला कड़ा हो रहा है.

पंजाब में दिल्ली जैसी जीत दोहरा सकेगी 'आप'?

केजरीवाल को पंजाब में फिर दिखाए काले झंडे

सुखबीर बादल से टकराएंगे भगवंत मान



CONGRESS PARTY TWITTER

कांग्रेस के लिए ये चुनाव शायद राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर खुद को रेस में बनाए रखने का आखिरी मौका है. क्षेत्रीय स्तर पर भी लगातार दो हार के बाद ये चुनाव कांग्रेस के लिए अस्तित्व की लड़ाई है. पारंपरिक रूप से पंजाब के हिंदू दलित, शहरी हिंदू कारोबारी, सिख खत्री और दूसरे राज्यों से

आए भूमिहीन मजदूर कांग्रेस का समर्थन करते रहे हैं.

यही कांग्रेस का राज्य में बुनियादी जनाधार रहा है. ग्रामीण इलाकों में रहने वाले जाट किसान भी गांव की गुटबाजी, रिश्तेदारी जैसी वजहों से कांग्रेस का समर्थन करते रहे हैं. राज्य में बदलते राजनीतिक घटनाक्रम के कारण कांग्रेस पार्टी के वोटबैंक का रुझान बदलता देखा गया है.

यूपी के दंगल का फैसला 11 मार्च को होगा

"मुख्यमंत्री नहीं, दुखमंत्री बनना चाहता हूँ"

पंजाब में सत्ता विरोधी लहर का नाम सुखबीर तो नहीं?



GETTY IMAGES

शुरुआती सालों में और साठ के दशक के मध्य तक अगड़े और मंझोले किसानों ने कांग्रेस का समर्थन किया. उस वक्त राज्य में कांग्रेस की कमान प्रताप सिंह कैरो के हाथ में थी. उन्होंने ग्रामीण इलाकों में सुधारों की शुरुआत की.

लेकिन 1967 से 1980 के बीच कांग्रेस का जनाधार शहरी सिखों और हिंदुओं, दलितों और जाट किसानों के एक छोटे तबके की तरफ खिसका. लेकिन 1985 के ऑपरेशन ब्लू स्टार के बाद शहरी सिखों का एक तबका अकालियों को पसंद करने लगा.

हालांकि पंजाब के चरमपंथ की पृष्ठभूमि में हुए 1992 के चुनाव में जीते ज्यादातर विधायक ग्रामीण पृष्ठभूमि के नौजवान थे. नेतृत्व में बदलाव ने राजनीति की दिशा भी बदली और कांग्रेस पार्टी के अर्जेंडे में नई बातें देखने को मिलीं. साल 1997 में कांग्रेस का शहरी और कस्बाई जनाधार खिसकता हुआ दिखा.

लेकिन ग्रामीण इलाकों में कांग्रेस के अच्छे दिन आए. 1997 के विधानसभा चुनाव में कांग्रेस को ग्रामीण पंजाब में 26 फीसदी वोट मिले थी, वहीं 2012 के चुनाव में यह बढ़कर 39 फीसदी हो गया. पर कांग्रेस के लिए मुश्किल यहां नहीं है.

शहरी हिंदुओं, हिंदू दलितों और बाहर से आए भूमिहीन मजदूरों के पारंपरिक जनाधार को बरकरार रखने में कांग्रेस को परेशानी पेश आ रही है. पंजाब में कांग्रेस का मुकाबला एक ताकतवर क्षेत्रीय पार्टी से है और अकालियों से उसे राष्ट्रीय नेतृत्व की खींची लकीर के दायरे में

लड़ना पड़ रहा है.

वैसे सतलुज यमुना लिंक नहर के मुद्दे पर पंजाब कांग्रेस और पार्टी के केंद्रीय नेतृत्व में मतभेद रहे हैं. पंजाब कांग्रेस में कैप्टन अमरिंदर सिंह के नेतृत्व को लेकर कोई सवाल नहीं है. उन्होंने मोदी लहर में भी मौजूदा वित्त मंत्री अरुण जेटली को अमृतसर सीट पर हराया है.

हालांकि विधानसभा चुनाव में मुख्यमंत्री पद के उम्मीदवार की घोषणा में देरी कर के कांग्रेस अपनी स्थिति कमजोर कर रही है. इसके बाद कांग्रेस को अकाली-बीजेपी गठजोड़ और फिर आम आदमी पार्टी के चुनावी वादों से भी निपटना है.

आम आदमी पार्टी ने पंजाब के मतदाताओं से नौकरियों और सब्सिडी का वादा किया है हालांकि अतीत में 'आप' इनका विरोधी करती रही है. 'आप' ने हर परिवार को एक नौकरी देने, किसानों को कर्ज माफी, सभी दलितों और बेघरों को घर और नौजवानों को मोबाइल फोन जैसी चीजें देने का वादा किया है.

इसके अलावा 'आप' ने पंजाब को कर्ज मुक्त करने की बात भी कही है. इन वादों को इस संदर्भ में भी देखा जा सकता है कि लोगों की आमदनी कम हो रही है, विकास दर गिर रहा है, बेरोजगारी बढ़ रही है और ग्रामीण इलाकों में लोग ज्यादा कर्जदार हो गए हैं.

हालांकि उसने इन परेशानियों को लेकर 'आप' ने कोई सुलझा हुआ फॉर्मूला नहीं दिया है. 'आप' के चुनावी वादों को हकीकत से परे कहा जा सकता है लेकिन ये ऐसे वादे हैं जिनका भार राज्य के खजाने पर ही पड़ने वाला है. चुनाव मतदाताओं को खैरात बांटकर खरीदने का तरीका बन गया लगता है.

सभी पार्टियों के चुनावी घोषणापत्र नेहरू के विकास मॉडल की तर्ज पर दिखते हैं. और इन सब के बीच कैप्टन अमरिंदर सिंह कांग्रेस के लिए सबसे अच्छा दांव लग रहा है.

(लेखक इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ डिवेलपमेंट कम्यूनिकेशन के निदेशक हैं.)

Politics of tragedies: Need to de-legitimise violence

GUEST COLUMN



DR PRAMOD KUMAR

The ruling establishment in Punjab has shown its commitment to implement electoral promises made during the assembly poll campaign. While it is desirable to fulfil the commitments, they may not be sufficient as politics is much more than meeting the promises made in the “menu-festos”. It is understandable that all promises made cannot be implemented, and that too in a jiffy in just one cabinet meeting. These promises have to be prioritised by using the filter of vision and ideology to provide purpose and add value for making progress sustainable and equitable.

Further, the agenda that emerges from the elections is not only what the political parties promise, but what people seem to have articulated. These articulations can be explicit in the form of demands and implicit in their voting behaviour. The main agenda that emerged from people's voting behaviour was to bring closure to the tragic politics of the 80s. The performance of three main political parties in terms of strata-wise percentage of votes polled and the response of the voters to their political programmes shall in all likelihood help to narrow down the main concerns of the people.

SHIFT IN VOTING BEHAVIOUR

In these elections, a major shift was noticed in the voting behaviour of the urban and semi-urban voters. There was 5% decline in the urban and semi-urban vote share of the

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), whereas the Congress' vote share in the urban and semi-urban constituencies increased by 14% between 2014 Lok Sabha and 2017 assembly elections. The BJP's vote share declined by 11%, and the Shiromani Akali Dal vote share dipped by 14% in the urban and semi-urban constituencies between 2012 and 2017 assembly elections.

POLITICAL MISADVENTURE

This volatility in Punjab politics disturbed the delicate balance between the urban Hindus and the Sikhs, the Dalits and the Jat peasantry. The rookie party, AAP, attempted to mainstream the radical fundamentalist discourse in politics. Their leadership publically patronised radical leadership and the Maur bomb blasts cemented the belief that it was dangerous to support the AAP as that might lead to the assertion of radical politics. The AAP flirtations with the Sikh radicals led to the alienation of the urban Hindus, moderate Sikhs and a large section of the Dalits. The purblind politics of the AAP could not succeed as the tragic and fearful outcome of such a kind of politics is still fresh in the people's memory.

Political misadventure to cultivate exclusive religious support base and, in the process, disturb the diversity sensibilities, brought about major shift in the support base of the political parties, particularly the AAP. Accordingly, the major beneficiary of this political dis-

course was the Congress which was seen to have a potential to defeat the AAP. In other words, the main agenda that took precedence over the menace of drugs, unemployment and farmers' debt was to decisively defeat the radical politics. The main lesson to be learnt from these elections is to bring closure to the politics of the 80s.

CASE FOR CLOSURE

Closure does not mean revenge, and it also does not mean to register a claim that “my” use of violence is privileged. Therefore, the same cannot be brought to justice. For example, the assertions that the violent acts of non-state actors must be pardoned and the state actors who were involved in the violence must be hanged or vice versa is nothing but subversion of justice. Closure does not mean subversion of the institution of justice for saving those who took life of others.

The main focus of closure should be the recognition of the atrocities that have been committed and a “willingness to live with the truth”. This may involve setting up of documentation centres, holocaust museums and the peace memorial monuments. This will create an understanding towards some degree of justice and reconciliation. Incidentally, that has been on the people's agenda since 1997 and found articulation in the newspaper articles since 2007.

NEED FOR PEACE MEMORIAL

This was further reinforced

by a group of Punjab citizens, including RS Cheema, senior advocate, Prof Harish Puri, Neelam Mansingh Chaudhary, Prof Atamjit Singh and others. To quote: “We earnestly believe that a peace memorial is to be built to commemorate the spirit of perseverance and eternal resilience of the people of Punjab, and also to reflect multi-cultural and multi-religious harmonious spirit of the Punjabis.

The memorial, while recording the sufferings of our people across board, shall epitomise our collective aspiration for peace-building, brotherhood and progress” (June 7, 2012). The Punjabi society has to initiate a process of setting up a monument in the memory of those who became victims of the decade-long terror, trauma and torture.

It is not to undermine the earlier efforts to bring closure.

Because of these, the tragedies produced and the hurt caused by the events of the 80s became universal. In a way, the efforts towards seeking “closure” surely weakened the divisive and separatist politics, but the delayed initiatives have provided a sort of lease of life to the extreme and fundamentalist politics.

Thus, there is a compulsive need to make concerted efforts to de-legitimise violence and reduce incentives to violence and deliver restorative justice. In other words, the obvious goals of closure, i.e. transparency, justice and reconciliation require to be addressed adequately.

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PUNJABI SOCIETY HAS TO INITIATE THE PROCESS OF SETTING UP A PEACE MONUMENT IN THE MEMORY OF VICTIMS OF THE DECADE-LONG TERROR, TRAUMA AND TORTURE

Punjab polls: Doles, *deras* and drugs

PRAMOD KUMAR

In the run-up to the Assembly polls in Punjab, political parties are wooing voters with a heady cocktail of faith, freebies and twisting of facts—be it about the drug menace or development. While the yearning for change is there, it remains to be seen whether hardened attitudes will change or not.

If pollsters are to be believed, elections are a matter of incumbency levels, not performance. A matter of perceptions and popularity ratings of leaders and not of the political parties. And the only slogan audible is change. Change for whom and for what remains ambiguous. Change the present incumbents and bring us in, to do the same. It has been reduced to a battle of false claims and promises, trivialising of issues and to quote Michael Parenti, "Elections have been reduced to parades of clowns and acrobats, elephants and donkeys." Elections in Punjab are no different and have presented to the people a heady cocktail of three Ds, that is *deras*, doles and drugs, garnished with choicest abuses.

If politicians are to be believed, elections are a matter of doling out *atta-dal*, sugar, utensils including pressure cookers, gas stoves, *shagun* at the time of marriage, bicycles for girls, smart phones, government jobs for each family, debt relief, pension to farmers, compensation for unemployment, incentives for suicide victims' families, houses for the homeless and so on.

Each party is trying to outcompete the other. It is competitive populism and blatant attempts to entice voters with these freebies at the expense of the state exchequer and in the same breath claiming to practice fiscal prudence as the state government is under debt.

Reasons that drive political parties

Political parties have not cared to analyse reasons and ways to raise the purchasing capacity of the poor and how pauperisation and land alienation of the farmers have become endemic. Why has the demand for drugs and alcohol multiplied among the youth? What are the ways to check the demand and increase avenues for productive engagement of youth?

During elections, political parties promise jobs, doles and subsidies. When in government, they reduce employment in the public sector to improve the fiscal health of



A shopkeeper displays cutouts of political leaders at a shop selling election material in Jalandhar. TRIBUNE PHOTO: MALKIAT SINGH

the state. They exhort people to mind their own health and give subsidies to private hospitals and impose user charges. This all is done without addressing the issues concerning livelihood. Political parties, however, are not expected to confess, particularly at the time of elections, that they have ceased to govern. When the market is allowed to govern, the government becomes powerless to effect any radical changes. And the proponents of market reforms have no plans for those who do not have the resources and income to buy even two meals a day. These poorer sections of society are reduced to mere victims, beneficiaries, clients and recipients. In this dichotomous relationship the state is seen as the "dole giver" and the people the "dole receiver". In other words, a patron-client relationship defines the boundary conditions for electoral discourse.

The term "anti-incumbency factor" came into currency in the 1990s as the political parties in power failed to fulfil electoral promises in view of the realities of the new political and economic policies. The "anti-incumbency factor" provides an honourable exit to one political party to be replaced by another party with a similar

track record. In the process, it does not allow to surface the insensitivity and incapacity of the political process to raise and resolve real issues.

An interesting example is the manner in which even the real issue of drugs have been raised in Punjab. Isn't it interesting that after more than three decades of using drugs to woo the voters, all politicians have now realised that the noises against drug abuse can get them more political dividends? Hence, each one is trying to outcompete the others in the blame game. There are claims that the drugs problem can be eradicated in four weeks by the competing political parties. Politics over drugs has become more serious than the problem itself. If researchers show that the 70 per cent of the addicts is youth, political discourse distorts it to say that 70 per cent of Punjab's youth is on drugs.

Do not play politics with drugs

The first and foremost thing that emerged from the recent debates is that the political parties have to stop playing politics with drugs. People can wait till elections and hope that after garnering votes on this issue they may address this problem

in all earnest. The Centre and the states should work together to check illegal drug trade and also to impose Section 68 of the NDPS Act, 1988, to forfeit the illegally acquired assets of people involved in drug trade. Policies to be made to make youth employable, build a partnership with the parents, community leaders to become mentors for the prevention and treatment of drug abuse.

Diktat by *deras*

Having used doles and drugs to woo voters, all politicians find it handy to use *deras* as the opium of masses to garner votes. *Deras* are poor cousins of religion in Punjab. They have occupied the religio-caste space. The presence of *deras* is a symbol of religious tolerance, a practice of diversity and pluralism. In the past decade, the *deras* have been in news because of the indulgence of some of the *deras* in electoral politics and incidents of violence involving some representatives of the institutionalised religion. For instance, incidents of violence involving various *dera* followers with sections of Sikhs such as Dera Nirankaris in 1978, Dera Bhanirawala in 2001, Dera Sacha Sauda in

2008-09, Dera Noormahal in 2002 and Dera Sachkhand Ballan 2009-10. The causes or the immediate provocation for this conflict are rooted in various practices and rituals of the *deras* such as the notion of a living Guru which is strictly opposed in the institutionalised Sikhism, the imitation of the imagery of the Sikh Gurus by the *dera* heads and the replication of the style or content of the Sikh holy book by the *deras*.

There are six major *deras* in Punjab. These *deras* together have influence in around 56 constituencies. The Radha Soami in 19, Dera Sacha Sauda in 27, Dera Nurmahal in 8, Dera Nirankari in four, Dera Ballan in eight and Dera Namdhari in two constituencies. Not all the *deras* actively engage in politics. However, Sacha Sauda came into prominence in 2007 elections when it openly supported the Congress. As a consequence, the Akalis suffered a loss in around 21 assembly constituencies.

Interestingly, as used to be in the past the Akali Dal did not make any emotional appeal like the danger to the Sikh *panth* and frenzy against followers of competing *deras*. On the contrary, all the political parties are trying to outcompete each other to woo *deras*. As mentioned, *deras* are a religio-caste space. To invoke their authority is to violate the secular principles of the Constitution. But, political parties are actively engaged in appropriating religious symbols with impunity. On the other hand, *deras* are issuing the diktat to induce people to vote according to their faith rather than their conscience. It is violative of the secular principles and free and fair elections.

It appears that people have swallowed the make-believe pills being traded by the political parties that the misuse of *deras* is justified, are being wooed by doles and drugs rather than seeking an alleviation of their miseries. If they really believe that problems like drugs and corruption can be resolved in a jiffy, then elections are the luck of the draw and a game of the sharpest gambler.

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Punjab's politics defies vote banks



GUEST COLUMN

PRAMOD KUMAR

Punjab's electoral politics has undergone a qualitative shift. It has transformed from two parties rotational system to multi-party contests, leading to crowding of the electoral space. Its distinct demographic terrain has evolved to place urban Hindus and Dalits as the game-changers. The peasantry and the urban Sikh traders who exercised hegemonic control for more than four decades have been divided into factions in support of three competing political parties — the Congress, the Akalis and the new entrant Aam Aadmi Party.

Metaphorically, Punjabi Hindus and Scheduled Castes decide their next 'Jat Sikh' CM. In view of this, it would be an electoral misadventure to cultivate exclusive support bases. There are only 11 Jat-majority, six Dalit-majority and three non-Jat-general-category-majority constituencies in Punjab. In other words, more than 97 segments are diversity sensitive. There is a need to initiate social engineering among these demographically placed distinct groups.

WHY SCs COULD NOT EMERGE AS A GROUP

The Scheduled Castes constitute more than 32% of the population in Punjab and yet do not affirm to be a homogenous group. As many as 60% of the SCs are followers of the Sikh religion and remaining 40% are Hindus. As a consequence, they have not developed as exclusive caste vote bank and are not represented in politics by a caste-based party. Among themselves, Dalits are fragmented into Mazhabis, Chamars, Ad-dharmis, and Balm-

ikis, accounting for 80% of all SCs. Like other identities, caste in Punjab has its own regional flavour.

The 'uncertain religious allegiance' of the Dalits and in the absence of caste as a defining parameter for social position, Dalits found representation in all the political parties in the state. Even the Jat-dominated Shiromani Akali Dal gave more representation to the Dalits in six elections out of 11 it fought since 1967. For instance, in 1969, of 25 SC legislators, 44% were from the Akali Dal. Not only this, in 1977 (48%), 1985 (62%), 1997 (77%), 2007 (55%) and 2012 (62%), a majority of the Scheduled Caste legislators were from the Akali Dal. Interestingly, they have allocated ticket to a Dalit candidate from a non-reserved constituency of Kapurthala.

PARTY POSITIONS

In five elections more Scheduled Caste legislators were elected on the Congress ticket. In 1967 (52%), 1972 (61%), 1980 (45%), 1992 (63%) and 2002 (48%) Scheduled Caste legislators were from the Congress. Even the BJP gave representation to the Dalits.

For instance, in 1997, 13% of the Scheduled Caste legislators belonged to the BJP. It is interesting that Dalit legislators have been elected from political parties other than the BSP and the Communist parties.

With the emergence of the third party, i.e. the AAP, the political dynamics has changed. The AAP has reached out to Scheduled Castes, particularly youth, effectively. For instance, in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the AAP was in lead in 14, second in one and emerged as a spoiler in 16 segments reserved for SCs.

In fact, the Dalits could not emerge as a vote bank for the BSP in Punjab. For instance,

SCHEDULED CASTES CONSTITUTE MORE THAN 32% OF THE TOTAL POPULATION IN PUNJAB AND YET DO NOT AFFIRM TO BE A HOMOGENOUS GROUP

the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) could find a positive response in Uttar Pradesh (UP), whereas, in Punjab that has the highest percentage of the Dalit population in the country, it could find a nominal response. Even the BSP leader, Mayawati, could not get elected from Hoshiarpur and Kanshi Ram, the BSP supremo, could win only once in the 1996 parliamentary elections in alliance with the Akalis. To illustrate, the BSP vote-share in Uttar Pradesh increased from 11% in 1993 to 23% in 2002.

Both in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, the initial response of the Dalits was to identify themselves with BSP as there was a low degree of representation of the Scheduled Castes. But in Punjab there is a trend to move away from the BSP. For instance, in 1992 it secured 16% votes. In 1997, the BSP polled 8% of the votes without winning a seat that led to the defeat of nine Congress, five Akali and three BJP candidates. In the 2002 elections, the vote share of BSP was around 6% and it led to the defeat of at least 10 Congress, 15 Akali and 2 BJP candidates in these elections.

In the 2007 polls, BSP emerged as the main spoiler with only 4% votes, which led to the defeat of 18 Congress and 14 Akali candidates. In 2012, BSP votes led to the defeat of 13 Congress and 10 SAD candidates.

BSP'S FAILURE

Punjab has been known for its liberal religious practices in

relation to caste. Both Sikhism and Arya Samaj have liberated the Dalits from the stringent purity-pollution based behavioural patterns. Furthermore, the political content of the BSP has been unable to capture the regional, cultural and economic specificities of Punjab. The purity-pollution and Manuwad that are the BSP's main ideological planks do not find expression in Punjab in view of the role of Sikhism and the Arya Samaj.

In the context of historical experience of mistreatment moderated by reform movements, religion and not caste is the defining marker of political participation. Also, societal dynamism has thwarted processes to cultivate caste as a core basis of social, political interactions. Politics continues to function on religio-caste domain, engaging citizens with a number of cultural possibilities and choices.

The disturbing aspect is that the socio-economic index of the Dalits (50% of the total poor in Punjab) continues to be dismal as compared to other castes. Unemployment rate is also higher in Dalits. The education and health status is also not very favourable to the Dalits. The gross enrolment ratio in higher education (18-22 years) is 6.1% as compared to 30% for others.

The allocation for the development and welfare schemes is multiplying every year with no significant difference in the socio-economic status of the Dalits. Resource allocation, access to jobs, services, health and education facilities must reach the socially deprived sections, failing which, the Dalits may emerge as an exclusive vote-bank and disturb the political arithmetic of the state.

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The Punjab poll vault

Erosion of ideological support base and leadership deficit are evident

PRAMOD KUMAR

THE electoral din in Punjab is like the lunatic swing of a pendulum creating a wave of different parties within a short span. It has moved from the Congress sweep at the time of the coronation of Amarinder Singh as PPCC president in December 2015 to the AAP rampage in post-Maghi in January 2015, and now the whisper of the Akali-BJP for a hat. These are often accompanied by claims and counterclaims — the showcasing of performance and the promise of golden performance. It has liberated political parties from consistent political positions and ideological filters.

Elections are being treated as events to be managed by professional managers without any ideology, commitment to pro-people politics with the sole aim to win. Besides anti-incumbency that provides a safe passage to parties without vision, the winnability criteria allow faceless politicians' entry into politics and incentivises the hopping from one party to another. As if parties are nothing, but dharamshalas without doors. Political leadership has been discredited, the political parties are poaching celebrities and oiling the slide of leaders from one party to another. Has the political culture and terrain of Punjab become an ideological freak or rudderless?

The history and culture of Punjab does not support such generalisations. Punjab politics can be located in three evolved axes. One is a stunted identity assertion ranging from religious, communal and secular Punjabi identities. The second is a unique feature of majoritarian arrogance and minority persecution complex in both the main communities — the Hindus and Sikhs. The Sikhs are in a majority in Punjab and minority in India and the Hindus are in a minority in Punjab and a majority in India. The third axis is the intermeshed religio-caste categories as caste is not a category in itself for electoral mobilisations in Punjab.

These axes lay down broad boundaries for the politics to function. Electoral alliances and coalitions have been formed with even diametrically opposed political parties. The Congress and the Akali Dal even merged in 1937, 1948 and 1956. Most Akalis who joined the Congress did not return to the Akali fold. Prominent among them



FIGHT, NO CAUSE: No party has a transformational agenda for Punjab.

were Pratap Singh Kairon, Swaran Singh, Baldev Singh, Bhai Mohan Singh, Darshan Singh Pheruman, and now Capt Amarinder Singh. The political culture of Punjab is, no doubt, competitive, but not conflictual. Apparently, in the post-Operation Bluestar and '84 riots period, the Congress faced opposition, but regained power in 2002. The lesson is that voters do not see parties as antagonistic, but competitive. Most people keep both a blue turban (Akali symbol) and a white turban (Congress symbol) ready to wear as per the need. To hinge the whole campaign that the Congress and the Akalis are mixed up and then expect that people will vote for a third party may not bring

Sikh peasants, gave representation to Punjabi Hindus with 11 out of 94 SAD candidates for the 2012 polls. The BJP that largely represents urban Hindu traders gave representation to Sikhs. Similarly, the Congress made inroads into the SAD support base of rural Jat Sikhs by fielding an equal number of rural Jat Sikhs with the SAD. Dalits who constitute around 32 per cent of the population have been represented in all political formations. Of the 1,248 MLAs in the state from 1967 to 2012, Dalits constituted 25.16 per cent, OBCs 8.97 per cent and urban traders (Khatris) 22.12 per cent. But a majority of MLAs (43.74 per cent) came from the rural Jat peasantry.

The Congress and the SAD have the advantage of a regional flavour. The AAP hopes its anti-drug, anti-corruption stance will work. Will it?

corresponding results.

The parties have not only merged with each other, but also formed coalitions. In reorganised Punjab, between 1967-1980, four post-election coalitions were formed between the Akali Dal and the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and in the post-terrorism phase the Akali Dal and the BJP formed three pre-election coalitions. In view of the lessons learnt from the decade of terrorism, the parties entered into pre-poll alliances. The Congress apologised for Operation Bluestar and the riots. And the competing parties gave representation to all existing fault lines of religion and caste rather than representing exclusive communal interests. The SAD, which has mainly been a party of Jat

The 'uncertain religious allegiance' of the Dalits and in the absence of caste as a defining parameter for social position, Dalits found representation in all parties. Even the Jat-dominated SAD has had a higher representation of Dalits in six of the 11 Assembly elections and in the remaining five, the Congress had a greater Dalit legislators. It is interesting to note that Dalit legislators have been elected from parties other than the BSP and the Communist parties. Thus Punjab politics has shown signs of blurring religious and caste fault lines. To mobilise people as exclusive categories like Hindu Banias, or Scheduled Castes may not bring the desired results.

Considering this background, which way will Punjab go? Will it go the AAP way? The AAP won a surprise victory with four seats and a 24 per cent vote share in the 2014 parliamentary elections. It had the advantage of anti-incumbency against the Congress at the Centre and the Akali Dal-BJP in the state.

However, wherever people could find a formidable alternative to the Akali-BJP alliance, the AAP candidates were not selected. This can be inferred from the results of two constituencies — Bathinda from where Harsimrat Badal defeated Manpreet Badal, and in Amritsar where Amarinder Singh defeated BJP stalwart Arun Jaitley. The two Assembly byelections, in Patiala and Talwandi Sabu, showed that the AAP may not be able to consolidate its support.

Unlike the Akali Dal and the Congress, the AAP does not have a historical baggage and therefore does not have a historical advantage either. Another AAP disadvantage is that unlike Delhi, Punjab does not have a large footloose population — as people have their culture and history. The Congress and the Akalis have a regional flavour to their advantage and the AAP is yet to evolve a regional identity of its own. The only advantage it has is an anti-drug and an anti-corruption stance. How far it will help to win is a moot question.

The SAD's non-Pantheic, development and governance reforms plank and the BJP's emergence at the national level have added a new flavour to the elections. How far will this alliance benefit from this and reversal of moral hegemony with demonetisation which brought Modi, Nitish Kumar and Navin Patnaik on one side and Arvind Kejriwal in the company of Mayawati and Lalu Yadav?

Punjab needs a paradigm shift. In order to outcompete one another, all parties are raining sops rather than initiating a debate on policies to diversify economy, building a consensus against drug abuse, suggesting policies for productive engagement of youth and empowerment of women. This is symptomatic of an erosion of the ideological support base of parties, political leadership deficit and absence of a transformational agenda.

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The real contest in Punjab

By **PRAMOD KUMAR AND YOGENDRA YADAV**

FEB 9

The forthcoming elections in Punjab will be a unique one as the contest is not between candidates but between those who are participating and those who are not. In the absence of competitive political choices non-participation is no more irrational than participation. Further, the availability of choice in non-voting as offered by the political parties having professed faith in democracy has added a new dimension to the political discourse in Punjab.

It should be remembered that non-voting in Punjab will not merely be a passive act, but a conscious act of participation in the political process. Ironically, the most decisive votes in this election would be those which may not be cast at all. This is important because the participation as well as non-participation will on the

one hand reinforce the legitimacy of the democratic system and on the other may question the credibility of the government. The mere fact that the Akali Dals have boycotted the elections, while reiterating their faith in democracy and offered people a choice in non-voting, should not be seen as a challenge to the democratic system.

Interestingly, both the participants and boycotters are trying to balance the terror factor. The massive presence of the Army will help the participants while fear of the militants will increase the non-voting. This process of use and misuse of paramilitary forces and militancy will lead to the curtailing of the democratic freedom of the common man. This in fact is a continuation of the politics being pursued in Punjab in recent years with the options being made in response to the threats posed by the competitive politics. The first casualty of this process was lib-

eral democratic norms. The threat posed by the moderate Akali Dal to the legislative power of the Congress led the latter to respond by either promoting extremist political leaders or using religious symbols to outcompete the Akalis. Delhi started the process of decimating the moderate Akali leadership while extremist leadership was negotiated with.

Packages were evolved and sabotaged. For instance, the demand for Chandigarh for Punjab and transfer Hindi-speaking areas to Haryana and appointment of river waters were sought to be considered in these packages. But these were later on dropped on the reasoning that even if these demands were met the situation will not improve and terrorism will not subside. It is further argued that if Chandigarh is given to Punjab, Chandigarh will also get affected by terrorism.

The election debate

Arguments for and against simultaneous polls are selective and inferential

PRAMOD KUMAR

RECENT preoccupation has been to debate the unsustainability of the frequent electoral cycle. The solution is being offered in holding simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas, and even synchronised with the local bodies elections. The feasibility of this is conditional as it requires amendments to the Constitution and People's Representation Act, and for that, political consensus is needed. Its desirability is debatable as its timings and motives are seen as suspect. The middle path can be to form clusters of the elections to the State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha, and these can even be synchronised with the municipal and local elections with the Election Commission playing a proactive role.

No doubt, any discussion on the elections is political. And it may have concealed motives to serve some individual and/or group interests. The motive attributed is that the BJP wants to hold simultaneous elections to overcome the burden of anti-incumbency that it faces in some of the poll-bound states, and to marginalise the regional political parties. Electoral system, for that matter any other system, is directed by the individual and/or groups to pursue their interests, concerns and power ambitions. It is not prudent in the political discourse to brand contentions as suspect (which they actually may be) and be summarily dismissive. There is a need to understand the contentions for and against holding simultaneous elections as they claim to be pro-people and pro-democracy.

No doubt, frequent elections are becoming unsustainable. The arguments in favour and against holding simultaneous elections are selective and inferential. Those who favour the idea highlight the fact that elections are held in about half a dozen states every year. And, the material cost to the governments and the stakeholders is phenomenal. The expenditure incurred by the political parties in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, as mentioned in a report by the Association of Democratic Reforms, was around Rs 1,587.78 crore. However, unofficial sources estimate that the total expenditure by the candi-



COST OUT: An estimate puts the election expenditure in 2014 at over Rs 30,000 crore.

dates and the political parties was more than Rs 30,000 crore.

Another factor mentioned in favour of simultaneous elections is that the entire development programme and activities of the Centre and in the poll-bound state governments are put on hold with the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct. The analysis indicates that in the year 2014, governance and developmental activities due to the imposition of model code, remained largely suspended for about seven months, and in the year 2015, for about three months. "This often leads to policy paralysis and gover-

human and material — may not be the only compelling reason to disturb the electoral cycle. However, political consensus should be built, to put a cap on the expenditure to be incurred by the parties, and make donations to the candidates and the political parties transparent. This has to be done irrespective of the fact whether there are simultaneous elections or not.

Notwithstanding these factors, most of the critics and political stakeholders have argued that the idea of holding simultaneous elections is neither feasible nor desirable. It is not feasible as it involves curtailment of the existing

Any discussion on polls is political, but it's true: frequent elections are becoming unsustainable. Consensus should be built to put a cap on the expenditure incurred by parties and make donations transparent.

nance deficit," observed the parliamentary standing committee on simultaneous elections.

Besides these, the other factors mentioned are disruption of normal life noise pollution, frequent invoking of the fault lines like caste divisions, religious sentiments and ethnic affiliations. It also diverts the security apparatus in commensurate with the vulnerability assessment of the regions every year, leading to the neglect of other police functions.

The above factors largely deal with the material and physical costs. Electoral democracy is the most expensive system of governance. But cost factor —

terms of some of the State Assemblies. Further, to have fixed terms of the Assemblies and Lok Sabha or after their premature dissolution, the re-elections to be held for the remaining period, have to be addressed by amending the existing constitutional and statutory Acts. And for achieving that, political consensus is needed which may not be easily forthcoming.

Also, the idea is neither desirable. Sanjay Kumar of CSDS and Jagdeep Chhokar of ADR have argued on the basis of the data that, out of "31 instances of holding simultaneous elections, in 24, the major political parties polled almost a similar proportion

of the votes both for the Assembly and the Lok Sabha". The inferential logic is that simultaneous elections would undermine the federal democratic structure and also push the regional political parties on the margins, leading to the subversion of the process of deepening of democracy.

Any serious student of politics understands that the voters are influenced by the hierarchy of multiple factors like non-performance of parties and their leaders, credibility of the promises, castes, religion and other local factors. To argue that the simultaneous elections may subvert the process of deepening of democracy as if to be perennially in the election mould, is healthy for any democracy.

Further, it has been asserted that the regional parties will be at a disadvantage in the event of simultaneous elections. On the contrary, it can be argued that simultaneous elections may be more diversity-sensitive as these elections will have representation of a large range of parties giving widespread choices to the people's heterogeneous needs.

It is a different matter that the arguments for or against holding simultaneous elections in the domain of federalism would amount to overstretching the logic which largely falls in the political economy of the neo-liberal path of development.

It would be appropriate to restrict the continuous electoral cycle by the Election Commission of India taking a proactive initiative to form electoral clusters of the states with or without making it coterminous with the Lok Sabha elections, and that might not require any amendments to the Constitution and changes in the People's Representation Act. Electoral management is no substitute for electoral reforms.

The voters' complaint regarding the quality of candidates, absence of the real issues, trivialisation of the promises, reducing manifestoes to menu-festoes, leaders' disconnect with the people, et al., have nothing to do with the timing of the elections, but the larger issues of democratic political culture and electoral reforms.

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Using disrespectful language spells social discord by branding the target groups as not being worthy of human compassion. It opens the door for cruelty and violence

The perils of dehumanising language

Time for rhetoric of justice



DR PRAMOD
KUMAR

Politics has touched a new low, though the language used in political dialogue does not cause any distress to politicians. The new normal in politics does not entail a sense of morality, fairness and dignity towards political competitors, opponents and enemies. The trend is mud-slinging theatrics by political actors. The language of power and wealth has on the one hand become legalistic and threatening and on the other, less humane and more animalistic.

The language became procedural as political parties and leaders started interacting with competing political groups through enforcement agencies. It became legalistic, as it was asserted that civil society activists have no right to dictate to Parliament to enact pro-people laws.

The language became threatening as a witch-hunt of those who were in opposition to the government began. The message was that only the pure, who have never committed a sin, have the right to point a finger at the sinner.

The language of power became dehumanised. The dominant trend in politics till recently was not to lose civility in political discourse. But those were the times. In a reply to a no-confidence motion, former prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee took serious offence at the use of adjectives to describe his government as "incompetent, insensitive, irresponsible and brazenly corrupt". He asserted that such language should not be used against democratically-elected governments.

Now, in contrast, political leaders fall foul of each other through foul language. Arvind Kejriwal in 2012 used *dalai* (broker) to describe Sheila Dikshit, the then chief minister of Delhi, and labelled Arun Jaitley a "crook" during defamation

proceedings. Further, rhetorical statements equating rivals and opponents with animals exposes an incapacity to manage one's own affairs. Narendra Modi described Sonia Gandhi as a "Jersey cow" and Rahul Gandhi as her "hybrid *bachhada* (calf)". Smriti Irani compared Rahul Gandhi to Chhota Bheem, a popular dwarfed cartoon character. To describe Mr Modi as a "monkey bitten by a dog", as Arjun Modvadia, Congress leader from Gujarat, did, or to a virus called *Namonitis* as senior Congress leader Renuka Chowdhry did, or to call him *Kutte ke bachhe ka bada bhai* (elder brother of a puppy) as Samajwadi leader Azam Khan did, sends out a message that opposition to Mr Modi does not amount to harming a human being. Even Priyanka Gandhi exclaimed that BJP leaders were scampering like "panic-stricken rats".

Amit Shah in a rally said, "The countdown for 2019 polls has begun. Attempts are being made for opposition unity. When huge floods occur, everything is washed away. Only a *vatvriksha* (banyan tree) survives and snakes, mongoose, dogs, cats and other animals climb it to save themselves from the rising waters. Due to Modi floods, all cats, dogs, snakes and mongoose are getting together to contest polls."

And Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis compared the opposition to "wolves". Kailash Vijayvargiya, BJP leader from Madhya Pradesh, compared opposition unity to a "pack of dogs".

It appears that dehumanisation is emerging as a new norm in politics by introducing animal comparisons leading to marginalisation of human species.

Sexism was inherent

THE LANGUAGE BECAME THREATENING AS A WITCH-HUNT. THE MESSAGE WAS THAT ONLY THE PURE, WHO HAVE NEVER COMMITTED A SIN, HAVE THE RIGHT TO POINT A FINGER AT THE SINNER

in former UP chief minister Akhilesh Yadav's reference to BSP leader Mayawati, when he said during a joint press conference with Rahul Gandhi: "How could we have given space to her (Mayawati)? She takes so much space, even her party symbol is that of an elephant." These animalistic expressions are a form of psychological violence against the opponent and done to hurt his/her supporters.

The sexual objectification of women leads to a disconnect with their humane, pro-people, compassionate and intellectual capabilities. And presenting enemies as anti-national is to represent them as less than human, undeserving of rights. For instance, the student protesters in Jawaharlal Nehru and Jadavpur Universities were labelled the anti-India brigade or breaking India brigade. These labels lead to the moral and political exclusion of patriotic individuals, who are fighting for jus-

tice. And those who target these individuals position themselves as saviours of the great nation. The need is to demystify this labelling lest it should lead to chaos.

If people oppose globalisation, demand activation of justice systems and question the dissemination of "pre-digested knowledge and easy to understand capsules", they are branded as undesirables against the particular notion of nationhood.

There are leaders who promise jobs to youth in a jiffy if elected; electricity tariff reduced to half if elected, and so on. But, if people protest and demand the promised bright future, they are branded anti-development.

The logical consequence of this is to morally exclude a large section from fair play, compassion and justice. Therefore, the language of dehumanisation, a derivation of language of power, must be demystified and replaced by a language of justice.

Albert Camus said: "I would like to love my country and justice too". History has witnessed that the better way to love one's country and have pride in its greatness is to appreciate and tolerate critical ideas without dehumanising political discourse.

I remember once having been interviewed by a self-appointed custodian of Indian nationalism, a TV anchor, on the hanging of Ajmal Kasab (the terrorist captured during the attacks on Mumbai). He reprimanded me for not supporting his idea that Kasab should be hanged expeditiously rather than getting bogged down in time-consuming legal processes. He asserted that not hanging him will make India look weak in the comity of nations. In other words, the idea that countries emerge stronger by becoming justice-oriented was branded as anti-national.

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AI LEARNS TO DITCH SWEAR WORDS

AN IBM SYSTEM REFINES OFFENSIVE CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA, WHILE KEEPING THE CONTENT INTACT, ACCORDING TO *THE NEW SCIENTIST*. THE IBM TEAM HARVESTED NEARLY 10 MILLION POSTS FROM TWITTER AND REDDIT. THE TEAM THEN DRAFTED AN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) ALGORITHM, OF SEVERAL PARTS – ONE PART PARSED A GIVEN OFFENSIVE SENTENCE TO WORK OUT ITS MEANING, A SECOND USED THIS TO CREATE A MORE PALATABLE VERSION AND A THIRD EVALUATED THE TRANSLATED SENTENCE TO SEE WHETHER THE TONE HAD CHANGED. THE NEW SENTENCE WAS THEN TRANSLATED BACK TO SEE HOW CLOSELY IT RESEMBLED THE ORIGINAL. IF THERE WERE ANY ERRORS, THE SYSTEM WAS THEN TWEAKED ACCORDINGLY.

"FOR F***SAKE, FIRST WORLD PROBLEMS ARE THE WORST," BECAME "FOR HELL SAKE, FIRST WORLD PROBLEMS ARE THE WORST", FOR EXAMPLE.

EXPERTS BELIEVE THE SYSTEM WILL BE ABLE TO HANDLE POSTS CONTAINING HATE SPEECH, RACISM AND SEXISM. BUT THIS RAISES COMPLEX ISSUES OF CENSORSHIP AND THE RESTRICTION OF FREE SPEECH.

SOONER THE AI ALGORITHM MAYBE USED AS A PROMPT: TELLING ONLINE POSTERS WHAT THEY'RE ABOUT TO SAY IS OFFENSIVE, AND OFFERING A KINDER OPTION.



TOO

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