

## **What Went Wrong With the Third Alternative? Exploring the Rise and Demise of the Aam Aadmi Party in Punjab**

Ronki Ram  
*Punjab University*

---

Behind the initial meteoric rise of AAP in Punjab lay the widespread desperation of the common people, albeit buried under the burden of ten years long rule of the SAD-BJP combine. However, AAP saw in the restive people of Punjab an easy means to achieve the desired goal of capturing power at the center. The people of Punjab, who had favored the party in 2014 parliamentary elections, gradually moved away and recognized its hidden agenda somewhat belatedly, but then silently turned their back resulting in the rout of AAP in the state assembly elections of 2017. In this steep downfall of AAP, loss to the people of Punjab was substantially more, as it washed away, along with its own demise, their deeply cherished dream of introducing alternative politics in Punjab.

---

*Baba Bharati, a sanyaasi, was tricked by Kharak Singh, the dacoit, posing as a handicapped person seeking lift. As Khadag (sic) Singh sped away with Baba's prized Arabian horse, Baba asked him to halt and made an unusual request: "I am not worried about the horse. Just don't mention this incident to anyone." This stumped the dacoit. Baba explained, "Should they get to know about it, people will stop trusting any helpless stranger on the street." .... These are the only times when I wish to connect to Arvind and say something that echoes Baba Bharati: I wish you well for a successful tenure and higher successes to come. Just don't use words like honesty, swaraj and alternative. People will stop believing these words. The road to alternative politics was always tough; don't make it tougher. [Yogendra Yadav, 2016]*

### **Background**

Punjab assembly elections 2017 took place at a time when Indian political system was passing through a most crucial phase. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had replaced the Indian National Congress (INC) at the centre in 2014 parliamentary elections and further pledged to liberate India from the control of INC i.e. Congress *Mukt* Bharat. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which had been aspiring to replace INC at the centre, failed to acquire political power even in the assembly elections in the pivotal state of Uttar Pradesh in 2017. Though the replacement of the INC by the BJP failed to make any change in the political regime (rule by a single political party with a weak opposition), the victory of the latter introduced a new idiom of *achhe din* (good days) in the arena of populist electoral politics in the country. It was in this context of the promise of a better India that a new wave of hope for an alternative politics began emerging

in the country around middle of 2012. The ‘Arab Spring,’ the ‘Occupy movement’ and the ‘Anti-Austerity movement’ in Europe, to an extent, had also acted as a trigger.

During the second term rule of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government led by INC (2009-2014), financial scams provided a fertile ground for the emergence of a paradigm shift. And it was precisely at this crucial juncture that a spontaneous movement for corruption-free India emerged under the almost messianic leadership of Anna Hazare – who was widely perceived as a latter-day Gandhi. Soon after its emergence, the movement gave birth to a new political party, known as the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). In less than a year after coming into existence, the AAP established its credential as an alternative political force, riding on the discontent and aspirations of India’s masses – in particular the newly-minted middle class, a child of the economic reforms of 1991.

After its victory in 2013 Delhi assembly elections, where it formed the minority government with outside ‘unconditional’ support from the INC, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) focused its gaze on expanding its base beyond the National Capital Region (NCR). The Delhi assembly elections were shortly followed by the parliamentary elections in 2014. The AAP jumped into the national electoral fray while fielding its candidates throughout the length and breadth of India.<sup>1</sup> Though it failed to open its account anywhere in the country except Punjab, from where it returned 4 candidates out of the total of 13 parliamentary constituencies, and garnered substantial vote share in most of the other constituencies, it succeeded in making its presence felt at the national level. Shortly thereafter, the AAP won with a thumping majority in Delhi Assembly Elections in 2015 by winning 67 out of total 70 seats.

After its surprising victory in parliamentary elections 2014 in Punjab, AAP started grooming its base in the state while keeping an eye on the 2017 state assembly elections. Though it failed to open its account anywhere in the country except in Punjab, from where it returned 4 candidates out of the total of 13 parliamentary constituencies and also garnered a substantial vote share in most of the other constituencies, its success in this northwestern borderland state of India expanded its base beyond the National Capital Region (NCR). The period from the formative year of the AAP in November 2012 to the beginning of the assembly elections in Punjab in February 2017 is a sufficient time span to make a critical assessment of reasons behind AAP winning four seats in 2014 General elections and its subsequent failure to form a government after the 2017 assembly elections. There exists a general impression that far more consequential than the failure of the AAP to replace the Shiromani Akali Dal-BJP (SAD-BJP) government was the damage done to the prospects of the emergence of a third alternative in Punjab (Rai, 2017).

This article attempts to explore what went wrong with the AAP strategy to acquire the center stage and emerge as a third alternative in Punjab. The underlying assumption is that the initial spectacular admiration showered on AAP in Punjab emanated from the vast desperation among its people – borne out of widespread corruption, drugs, sand and real estate mafias, monopolies in

electronic media and transport, and an arrogant venal bureaucracy – who aspired for the emergence of an alternative politics that can emancipate them from the clutches of the corrupt duopoly of the SAD-BJP alliance and the Indian National Congress (INC) (Ram, 2017). It is further argued that once the people of Punjab recognized that the centrally controlled leadership of AAP was more interested in capturing power than work towards realization of the goal of an alternative political regime, they shifted their loyalty to Captain Amarinder Singh-led INC. A critical examination of the factors and forces that led to the failure of AAP to translate its popularity into victory in the assembly polls 2017, impairing the future of a third alternative in the state of Punjab is the central focus of this paper.

This paper uses the ethnographic method to provide an analysis of the organization, leadership and functioning of AAP in Punjab. A large number of people from diverse walks of life were consulted at different points during late 2014 and early 2017 to gather their views on the phenomenon of a ‘third alternative’ and AAP in the state. Though based primarily on extended conversations with some volunteers of AAP who had been assigned tasks of building and strengthening party structure, polling booth management and various other electoral processes, the study also draws upon national/vernacular newspapers, leaflets, billboards, pamphlets, posters, and graffiti scattered across the rural and urban settings of Punjab. Even though this material is not reflected in the notes and references, it was of great help in shaping the arguments presented in the paper. The study has also used personal primary sources, both digital and printed, available with some volunteers of the AAP.

### **The Context**

AAP entered Punjab with the promise not to ‘do politics’ but to ‘change politics’ and not to do *Rajniti* but to practice *Lok Niti*. Its main focus was on “alternate politics based on the need for change in the political discourse”.<sup>2</sup> In the words of Yogendra Yadav, one of the pioneers of AAP who was later dismissed from the primary membership of the party:

It was not about governing better than others; it was about changing the paradigm of governance with a new model of democracy and development. ... It was not just about winning the political game but about changing the rules of this game. It was not just about creating a new party, but about creating a new kind of party. ... It was about creating a democratic, transparent and accountable instrument for democratic politics (Yadav, 2016).

The slogans of *Lok Niti* versus *Rajniti* and from ‘doing’ to ‘changing’ politics brought AAP in quick connect with the restive electorates of Punjab who perceived themselves as being taken for granted by the SAD-BJP government during its ten year regular rule. The uninterrupted historic victory of the SAD-BJP alliance in 2012 was made possible by the tectonic shift in the parochial

agenda of the SAD from ethno-religious issues towards development and Hindu-Sikh harmony or Punjabi-ism. It occurred against the backdrop of the politically orchestrated 'high economic growth image' of Punjab manufactured through mega advertisements focusing on the vast spread of concrete four-lane highways interspersed with huge flyovers and glamorous Malls (Ram, 2017a: 1). Much of this involved sleight of hand, since the federal government, whose coffers were engorged by the higher revenues resulting from a healthy national economy, generally funded the major highways. Though all this projected a high growth outlook of the 'emerging' Punjab economy, ironically it has been seen as closing its doors to the *aam adami* (common person) lost in the drudgery of everyday life.

The conspicuous absence of an *aam adami* in the so called emerging high growth economy of Punjab has not only further worsened the problem of acute unemployment but also reinforced the relatively unacknowledged spread of drug abuse among the youth and unemployed sections of the society. What added further to the disenchantment of the afflicted common person was the translation of their plight into a lucrative drug business run by the *Saudagars* (traders) of death from within the state and astutely managed by their international handlers from across the borders. The failure of SAD-BJP government to bridle drug abuse and facilitate good governance led to a massive trust deficit among the electorate. When all these are considered together, we can see how they converted the political turf in Punjab into a hot pitch during the second term (2012-2017) rule of SAD-BJP alliance (Ashraf 2016). Sandwiched between rampant corruption and *halqa*-in-charge<sup>3</sup> led parallel political administration, on the one hand, and the tacit understanding between SAD-BJP and INC to exchange power at different intervals, on the other, people of Punjab wanted a way out of the dark tunnel of the venal politics meticulously managed by the mandarins of electoral politics. They had come to realize that though SAD-BJP and INC look different from each other, in reality they are two sides of the same coin. This had led them to cultivate a hope for the emergence of a third alternative force that could liberate them from holds of the vicious political duopoly in the state. In fact, it was supremely fortuitous for AAP that Punjab offered a fertile ground to advance its proclaimed agenda of alternative politics - and propelling it towards fulfillment of its objective of competing for power at the national level (Chakraborty, 2017; Thukral, 2017). It was at this crucial juncture that the newly formed AAP entered into the volatile political terrain of Punjab with the promise of introducing an alternative political regime of *Lok Raj* (rule of people).

However, the subsequent events highlighted an unsavory truth. That AAP had viewed Punjab merely as a necessary stepping-stone for helping to realize its national ambitions, and that the methodology of its functioning, revealed huge chasm between what was practiced, and what had so loudly been proclaimed from the pulpit. The next section intends to provide a comprehensive account of the organizational structure of AAP in Punjab. Such an account is essential in understanding how in a less than a five-year period AAP was able

to begin transplanting roots in Punjab and what subsequently led to its failure to form a government in the state.

### **Establishing an Organizational Structure**

AAP became popular in Punjab much before its organizational setup was established in the state. Before the 2014 General Elections, AAP in Punjab barely had an organization. Despite that, people of Punjab surprised the nation by returning 4 out of its 13 candidates to the lower house of Parliament. Punjab is perhaps the only state in India, from where a political party was able to send some of its candidates to Parliament even before building a working organizational structure. Given the absence of a formal organizational setup, what helped AAP to win four seats in its debut contest in the Lok Sabha elections in Punjab, was the resentment and desperation of Punjabi people who were fed up with the SAD-BJP alliance's ineffective rule (Kumar, 2014: 113-121). This surprising electoral success of AAP in the state convinced its central and local leadership that Punjab offered a vital opportunity to extend its base beyond Delhi. That also led AAP to nurture an ambition to capture power at the center in 2019. Inspired by such an ambitious objective of forming its own exclusive government at the center AAP started deepening its roots in Punjab by meticulously building an effective organizational structure.<sup>4</sup> For the first time, a beginning was made towards that end through establishing a formal two tier organizational setup at the state and districts levels in October 2014. At the state level a Nine Members State Committee was formed.<sup>5</sup> Sucha Singh Chhotepur, a former State Minister of Tourism and an independent member of State Legislative Assembly, was appointed its State Convener.<sup>6</sup> It was followed by the appointment of 22 District-in-Charge. Each District-in-Charge in turn had set up a Steering Committee comprising three to four volunteers. All District-in-Charge were appointed on the basis of their relationship with the State Convener or in lieu of the properties they had made available for opening AAP offices in their respective districts.

Before even putting in place a proper organizational structure of AAP in time for the start of campaigning for the assembly elections in 2017, a 15 member team was sent to Punjab by the Delhi headquarters of AAP in April 2015.<sup>7</sup> None of the members of the team headed by Sanjay Singh<sup>8</sup> and Durgesh Pathak<sup>9</sup> belonged to Punjab. It was precisely because of this reason this team came to be known pejoratively in Punjab as the 'Delhi Team of Outsiders' (belonging to Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar).<sup>10</sup> The team visited 950 villages and met approximately 8,500 volunteers to take stock of the political landscape of Punjab. The team was further divided into three sub-teams: base, rural and urban.<sup>11</sup> The base sub-team had to be stationed in the central place of its visits to one district at a time. The rural sub-team was assigned the job of visiting the villages; and the urban sub-team had the mandate to survey the cities. Both the rural and urban sub-teams were supposed to collect feedback from their respective areas and hand over the same at the base sub-team end.<sup>12</sup> The main

function of the base sub-team (consisting of Durgesh Pathak and Deepak Tomar) was to meet the volunteers one by one and to talk with them in details about the emerging political configurations and permutations in their respective areas.<sup>13</sup> The basic modus operandi of the rural and urban sub-teams was to pay visit to different places in villages and cities, to meet and talk with the volunteers at *dhabas* (roadside restaurants), shops, milk booths, workplaces, farm fields in their given electoral regions.<sup>14</sup> Durgesh Pathak used to conduct conversations with the volunteers at the base sub-team and Deepak Tomar took notes on his laptop.<sup>15</sup> The base sub-team was also assigned the job of collating the feedback provided by the rural and urban sub-teams.<sup>16</sup>

This team began its survey work in April 15, 2015 and completed its task on June 20, 2015.<sup>17</sup> The primary objective was to understand the pulse of the electorate and help in concretizing the organizational structure of the AAP in readiness for the ensuing assembly election in Punjab. During its survey tour in Punjab, the team hardly allowed anybody from within Punjab to accompany it. It was under the overall control of this survey team, consisting of 'outsiders', that the organizational structure of the AAP was manufactured and approved at its Delhi headquarters. It was finally launched on July 3, 2015.<sup>18</sup> Sucha Singh Chhotepur was made its State Convener. It was organized at 4 levels – Zones, Sectors, Assemblies and Circles. Each level was placed under the command of a Coordinator barring the assemblies, which remained non-functional.<sup>19</sup> Though Punjab volunteers staffed this newly structured organization (popularly known as the Punjab Team), all the Coordinators at Zone, Sector and Circle level were appointed with the final approval of the State Convener and Delhi Observers.<sup>20</sup> There were 13 Zone Coordinators corresponding to 13 parliamentary constituencies. Each Zone was divided into 3 Sectors leading to a total number of 39 Sector Coordinators.<sup>21</sup> Down the line each Sector Coordinator was asked to look after 20 Circles. This led to the formation of a total number of 2340 Circle Coordinators throughout the 117 assembly constituencies in Punjab.<sup>22</sup> Apart from these four levels there were 7 wings known as General wing, *Mahila* (women) wing, *Kisan* (peasant) wing, Ex-servicemen wing, Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes wing, Trade & Transport wing, and Intellectual wing.

The organizational structure of AAP in Punjab was once again restructured and expanded on August 25, 2016.<sup>23</sup> In other words, all the organizational work including the appointment of Coordinators at all the above-mentioned levels were declared defunct. That means when the new organizational structure for managing the electoral process was framed on 25 August 2016, there was no effective team of Coordinators at the Circle level to support the MLA candidates in the assembly elections announced for February 4, 2017. The restructured pyramidal organization was known as 'Punjab State Booth Volunteer Organization.' Although totally reliant on Punjab based volunteers, it was also controlled and minutely managed by an invisible parallel Delhi team of Observers. At the top of the pyramid was the 'State Booth Coordinator'.<sup>24</sup> A Co-coordinator<sup>25</sup> and Data Management Cell<sup>26</sup> assisted the State Booth Coordinator. The next component in the team were the Group Booth Coordinators. The State Booth Coordinator, Co-coordinator, Data Management Cell and Group Booth

Coordinators together formed the State Booth Management Team.<sup>27</sup> Also known as 'Booth Management Wing', the State Booth Management Team had an exclusive and emphatic focus on building teams at the polling booth level.<sup>28</sup> The Group Booth Coordinators were authorized to work in partnership with 13 Zone Booth Coordinators. In a descending order, each Zone Booth Coordinator coordinated 9 Assembly Booth Coordinators placed under her/him. Each Assembly Booth Coordinator coordinated 20 Circle Booth Coordinators placed under her/him. Further down the line, each Circle Booth Coordinator was tasked to look after 10 Booths. Each Booth had 10 to 12 Polling Booth Volunteers.<sup>29</sup> Out of the 12 Polling Booth Volunteers, one was to be designated as Polling Booth Coordinator. There were approximately 280,800 Polling Booth Volunteers covering the whole of the state. Each polling booth had a catchment area of approximately 1,000 voters representing approximately 250-300 households. Thereby each Polling Booth Coordinator was to be entrusted with approximately 25 households.<sup>30</sup>

As the election date approached, each MLA candidate was asked to appoint his/her Campaign Manager.<sup>31</sup> After induction of the new component of a 'Campaign Manager' in the organizational structure, the State Booth Management Team was directed to guide and steer the MLA candidates and Campaign Managers in the electioneering process at the grassroots.<sup>32</sup> 'Door-to-Door Campaign Teams' accompanied by volunteers of the 'cultural wing' assisted the MLA candidates and Campaign Manager in awareness generation and support building campaigns. In addition, '*Nukkad Meeting*' teams were also pressed into action for streamlining the campaign in the assembly constituencies.

#### *Delhi Team vs Punjab Team*

It appeared that the organizational structure was further divided into two components called Punjab/local volunteers' team and Delhi/outside Observers team. Sucha Singh Chhotapur, H.S. Phoolka and Bhagwant Maan dominated the Punjab team. Sanjay Singh and Durgesh Pathak commanded the Delhi team. In fact, the entry of Delhi Observers in Punjab in April 2015 led to the formation of a parallel organization of Delhi Team directly controlled and supervised by Arvind Kejriwal, the national convener of AAP and Chief-Minister of Delhi (Bal, 2016). Observers, imported from Delhi, were placed alongside the State, Zone, Sector and Circle Coordinators in the organizational structure of the Punjab team. These Observers were 'Observers' only in name – in reality they received instructions from Delhi, which they in turn transmitted to the Punjab team either through compliant Zone Coordinators, but if encountering resistance from any Zone Coordinator, then directly to the Sector Coordinators with the assistance of their Sector Observer brethren. Recalcitrant Zone Coordinators were browbeaten into submission, whereas the holdouts were ostracized from the official decision-making process.<sup>33</sup> The same processes were applied to Sector and Circle Coordinators. All Coordinators, appointed from among the

local Volunteers, at each level were subordinated to the Observers of the Delhi team.

Effectively only Delhi's writ was allowed to run in Punjab, and any independence of thought or action was heavily frowned upon and even penalized by the Delhi team of Observers. Though the Zone, Sector and Circle Coordinators were appointed from the local volunteers, they were effectively controlled and managed by the Delhi Observers. Consent of the Delhi Team was mandatory in the appointment of Coordinators at all the levels of the organizational structure. The appointment of the State Convener was also only made after the final approval of the Delhi team.<sup>34</sup> The concept of '*Swaraj*' was proclaimed but hardly practiced within the party. In fact, sometime in 2014, this concept was formally removed from the AAP Constitution itself.<sup>35</sup>

Both the Punjab and Delhi Teams appeared to be suffering from 'internal factionalism'.<sup>36</sup> The Punjab team was divided into two camps. Sucha Singh Chhotepur-led camp was affiliated with Sanjay Singh, who was overall in-charge of the Delhi Team. H.S. Phoolka and Bhagwant Maan-led camp was associated with Durgesh Pathak, the Punjab state Observer. The two groups of the Punjab Team were competing with each other for the much-coveted post of Punjab Chief Minister. The alleged 'factionalism' within the Delhi Team was used as a camouflage by the central leadership of AAP to dislodge local leaders in their scramble for the position of Chief Minister of Punjab. Whenever one of these leaders appeared to achieve preeminence over the others, subtle attempts were made to sabotage it. The Delhi Team, acting primarily through its Observers in Punjab, ensured that no claimant from Punjab became powerful enough to assert a credible stake in being nominated for Chief Ministership. During extended conversations with a senior member of the Punjab team, the author of this paper was told that Durgesh Pathak had asked him to instruct the Coordinators of Amritsar and Khadoor Sahib Zones to stop working in support of Sucha Singh Chhotepur.<sup>37</sup> Whereas, Ashish Khetan, a journalist turned politician and Delhi based Volunteer of AAP, approached the same senior member of the Punjab Team, as well as the respective Zone Coordinator, asking them not to support the candidature of H.S. Phoolka in the 2017 assembly election.<sup>38</sup>

#### *Membership Drive*

Membership drive constituted one of the foremost functions of the AAP organization in the state. The Circle and Booth Coordinators were deputed to enroll volunteers. The process of membership drive was organized through party camps held at various venues scattered across *melas* (festivals), rallies, religious events, and college functions. In addition, membership drive was also organized through 'focused efforts membership contact programs' conducted at Town Hall meetings and other civic venues. Social Media and Online group sites were also used for this most essential component of organization building activity. The membership process involved filling of membership slips, data entry into the register at circle and booth levels, and categorization of members into

sympathizers, supporters, volunteers and workers on the basis of the criterion of 'profess to the party philosophy,' 'can not assign time or resources,' and 'likely to vote when polling.'<sup>39</sup> Supporters were the ones who subscribed to the party philosophy and agreed to take up some sort of task work during the elections but not ready to assign time or resources for the organization. The volunteers were willing to assign few hours in a week, to provide services during campaign and polling and happy to pay monthly subscription. The workers included all the sympathizers, supporters and volunteers who committed full time and assigned 6 to 8 hours a day to the party organization.<sup>40</sup>

#### *Collecting & Managing Information*

Collection and management of electoral information about the given households under each polling booth was an integral part of the functional and regulatory aspects of the organizational structure of AAP in Punjab. The entire information pertaining to polling booth households was to be accumulated at the Data Management Cell (DMC). The DMC formed the most vital part of the AAP booth management structure. The DMC was assigned the herculean task of helping with collecting and managing the multivariate data received from all the 23,400 polling booths formed across all the 117 assembly constituencies in Punjab. The entire data was collected at two sources: Zonal Booth Coordinators and Assembly Booth Coordinators. Zonal Booth Coordinators' report included total figure of Circle Booth Coordinators, Pooling Booth Coordinators, Polling Booth Volunteers and the number of candidates declared. Similarly, the report of the Assembly Booth Coordinators consisted of names of Circle Booth Coordinators and their mobile numbers. All such data was collected in a sheet at Zonal Booth Coordinators and Assembly Booth Coordinators levels through a system of 'goggle sheets.' The Pooling Booth Coordinators and Polling Booth Volunteers manually collected the data from all the households placed under their respective area of jurisdiction and the same was directly sent to the Assembly Booth Coordinators. The latter converted the manually collected data into excel sheets and passed it on directly to the Data Management Cell. The Zonal Booth Coordinators and Group Booth Coordinators were kept informed about the accumulated data but in numbers only.<sup>41</sup> Zonal Booth Coordinators sent data to their respective Group Booth Coordinators through the given 'goggle form' system. Each Zonal Booth Coordinator was provided with a password by its Group Booth Coordinator to operate the given goggle form.<sup>42</sup>

For effective collection and management of data, all Zonal Booth Coordinators and Assembly Booth Coordinators were required to have a smart phone/laptop with 'sheet app' uploaded and working Gmail ids. All the Assembly Booth Coordinators were given access on the data management portal to work daily from 5pm to 8pm. If any Assembly Booth Coordinator failed to log in at the given time, there was a provision to send the collected data along with the next day's report. Zonal Booth Coordinators were given two hours from 9am to 11am to send the report through goggle form to their respective Group Booth Coordinators.<sup>43</sup> The data was kept under tight security. No one except

data cell members and analysts were allowed to edit data. ‘Only view access’ was provided on request of the State Booth Coordinator. Password of accounts of all the Zonal Booth Coordinators and Assembly Booth Coordinators were changed on a daily basis.<sup>44</sup> The entire data was presented in four pie charts providing a holistic view about the electoral strength of AAP in the state of Punjab. Detailed information about the 13 Zones was presented succinctly through the medium of 52 smart pie charts.<sup>45</sup> The entire exercise was aimed at facilitating the data analyst to draw strategy for the state assembly elections 2017.

### *Training the Trainers*

After formation of the AAP organizational structure, the next crucial step was to chisel the training structure of the organization for the purpose of preparing coordinators at different levels – from district to the polling booths – to meticulously run and manage the 2017 state assembly election. The main objectives of the training program included intellectual capital development among the volunteers of AAP, developing their core competencies and organizational development, inculcate clarity of role and sense of responsibility, capacity building at Sectors, Circles, and Polling Booths, functional unification at all levels, standardization in documentation and processes, institutionalizing organizational functioning, familiarization with statutory provisions and organizational integration.<sup>46</sup> In a nutshell, all these objectives were aimed at developing a capacity building mechanism among the coordinators at different levels of the AAP organization, who in turn were supposed to guide volunteers at the grassroots level.

The training task was planned at Zonal, Sector, Circles and Booth levels. All coordinators at the respective levels were to be trained through a similar rigorous training module.<sup>47</sup> The training format included State level seminars where individual presentations were made by the Zonal coordinators on varied topical issues relevant to their catchment area. In addition, panel discussions, speeches by central and state leaders and keynote presentations from outside the state were to be organized. At the Sector level the training module consisted of workshops, presentations and lectures by learned faculties, sharing of case studies and paper exercises.<sup>48</sup> Similarly down the line, at the Circle and Polling Booth level workshops, lectures, videos, role-play, and paper exercises were planned as standard practices of the training exercise.<sup>49</sup> In the state seminars, internal state leadership and domain specialists from outside the state were invited to make presentations. The panel discussion were supposed to include experts from central and state leadership and external resource persons. External specialists from reputed institutions were also invited to deliver keynote addresses. In the zonal seminars, the respective zonal coordinators were asked to make presentations and in the panel discussions state leadership, domain specialists and external faculty were invited as resource persons.<sup>50</sup> Keynote speakers were usually invited academics from outside the state. At the Sector/Circle/Booth training level workshops, Zonal Coordinators were asked

to make presentations. Internal faculty and Observers were invited to deliver lectures and present case studies.<sup>51</sup>

At each Zone a total number of 6 training program were planned. Each program consisted of 15 participants trained by 2 teams of two faculty members each. At each Sector 10 training programs involved 23 participants and 4 teams of 2 faculty members each. At 2340 Circles, there were 2 programs per Sector and 6 per Zone with 30 participants trained by 6 teams comprising 2 faculty members each. At 23400 polling booths, 5 per Assembly, 15 per Circle, 45 per Zone programs were to be organized involving 40 participants at each level trained by 2 teams at each Sector, 6 teams per Zone. A total number of 98 teams consisting of two faculty members each were planned to be constituted.<sup>52</sup> A faculty development program schedule was prepared inviting nomination of names of potential speakers on October 25, 2015. Shortlisting and team formation was to be completed on October 31, 2015. The programs were supposed to run from 1<sup>st</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2015. The schedule for 'Train the Trainers' was fixed from November 01 to 10, 2015 and training of the training teams were scheduled to be organized from November 11 to 30, 2015.<sup>53</sup>

The training materials included detailed syllabus, instruments for paper exercises, and scripts for role-play. The study material for the participants included texts on organizational structure, roles-responsibilities, project planning, booth management, membership process, documentation, public/community meetings, conduct process, and communication matrix.<sup>54</sup> The syllabus for the training at block level consisted of organizational structure and development, capacity building, historical perspective of major political parties, their performance and implications, relevance of AAP and Punjab victory.<sup>55</sup> The operational block syllabus at Zonal level included membership, project, issues, resolutions, documentation and electioneering process. At the Sector level, the program syllabus consisted of organization, its structure and development, political-historical perspective of politics in India, relevance of AAP and Punjab victory. The syllabus for the operational aspects included Sectoral functioning, project, processes, task performance, and regulatory and statutory details.<sup>56</sup> For the Circle and Booth levels, the syllabus included literature on organizational structure, historical process in India, relevance of AAP and Punjab victory. The operational aspect included Circle functioning, projects, documentation, booth setting and management, and RTI process. For the behavioral aspect syllabus included material on attitudes, morals and motivation. The syllabus for the leadership component included texts on motivation and conflict management.<sup>57</sup>

The training was planned to take place on December 15, 2015 and to be concluded on January 31, 2016. The training program was to last for 47 days spread over 67 programs. The programs were supposed to be held concurrently one per week at each Zone, two per week at each 234 sectors and one per week at each assembly leading to 2340 Circles. The Central focus of the above-mentioned training module was to generate electoral awareness and critical political consciousness among the volunteers at the grassroots, to inculcate the urgency of overcoming the duopoly of SAD-BJP and INC, and to help institutionalizing the third alternative. However, the meticulously prepared

structure was never allowed to function. As argued by one of the prominent members of the State Booth Management Team of AAP, “the attempt was to keep the capable local volunteers embroiled in the organizational activities of the party and to hold them at bay while the Delhi Team freely persisted with its dubious designs.”<sup>58</sup>

### **Social Media and Personal Contact**

Campaigning through use of social media and mass personal contact was an integral part of AAP's organizational structure in Punjab. The social media and mass personal contact programs were supported by various teams like ‘Poster Campaign’, ‘Banner Designing’, ‘Cartoon Designing’, ‘Videography’, ‘Content Writing’, and ‘Research and Development (R&D)’.<sup>59</sup> The main function of all these various teams was to prepare relevant campaign material for strategic utilization during the electioneering process. It was perhaps for the first time in the electoral history of Punjab that such a comprehensive system of information collating and dissemination was put in order through the agency of social media and personal contact.

In fact, WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook were the lifeline of AAP.<sup>60</sup> Parallel to official groups at the Zonal level, a large number of working WhatsApp groups constituted the hub of information generation and dissemination process among the volunteers.<sup>61</sup> Abhinav Buddhiraja, National Social Media Coordinator of AAP, was the overall in charge of comprehensive ‘Social Media Programme’ launched in Punjab under the popular ‘Pulse Programme.’ This program was aimed at linking AAP headquarters at Delhi with all the polling booths in Punjab while circulating information among them within a short span of 27 minutes.<sup>62</sup> In other words, any information relating to AAP would reach Punjab from Delhi within less than an hour and vice versa. In the same vein, another program, ‘Tele-conference Call’ was launched. This program made it possible for the AAP leadership in Delhi and Punjab to be in touch with each other on a daily basis from 7am to 9pm.<sup>63</sup> In addition, there were teams of ‘Facebook Circulation’, ‘Facebook Live’, ‘WhatsApp Circulation’, and ‘Twitter Trending’. If we consider all these teams together, they constituted a strong contingent of the Social Media army. Each team had a minimum of 40 volunteers working round the clock. The Twitter Trending team had many more anonymous volunteers assisting it in its trend setting endeavors. In the public programme of the team of ‘Facebook Live,’ the central focus was mostly placed on the main leadership of the Delhi team with some attention on a few major leaders of Punjab team like Bhagwant Maan, H.S, Phoolka and H.S. Shergill.<sup>64</sup> All the social media teams were placed under the overall supervision of ‘Punjab Social Media Head.’ None of the heads of these teams and their overall supervisors belonged to Punjab.<sup>65</sup> All of them happened to be outsiders and directly controlled by the Delhi team.<sup>66</sup>

Apart from the agency of social media, ‘Mission Vistaar’, ‘*Samaj Joro*’ (bringing society together), ‘*parivar Joro*’ (bringing family together), and ‘*Dastak*’ (Women wing) were some of the most prominent groups among the

mass contact programmes that added further importance to the well organized structure of AAP. A comprehensive mass personal contact program was launched simultaneously to hone one-to-one contact with the electorates at the grassroots. Several personal contact programs were initiated at the grassroots with the dual intention of firstly creating 'Brand recognition' amongst the electorate, and secondly building a database of those who expressed enthusiasm for AAP, may be for use in future party work.<sup>67</sup> The modus operandi of the mass contact program was to organize door-to-door visits of the volunteers in their respective constituencies, and convey AAP's objectives and philosophy directly to the people. Such groups were closely integrated through well-maintained WhatsApp groups.<sup>68</sup> Another step of mass contact program was that of holding rallies. Each Zone planned and executed its own rally within its catchment area. A total number of 39 rallies were organized throughout all the Zones in the state. The Zonal rallies' program was finally concluded with the State-level rally, that is, the 40<sup>th</sup> rally, which was held at Lambi, the assembly constituency of the then Chief Minister, Prakash Singh Badal.<sup>69</sup>

However, as far as the second objective of database building of those who expressed enthusiasm for AAP was concerned it was little realized. The lists of AAP supporters were often left to languish in party offices.<sup>70</sup> To rectify this common lapse, the Delhi central command made collection and compilation of such data as an integral part of the performance assessment of the Observers.<sup>71</sup> This, however, only led to an upsurge in malpractices by the Observers as they raced to outdo each other, for example, some encouraged the lifting of names and mobile numbers directly from directories, in order to file reports to impress the Delhi-based leadership.

### **Organizational Barriers and Slogan of *Swaraj***

Given the excellent organizational structure of AAP in Punjab, it seemed, at times, that the demise of the well-entrenched political duopoly of the SAD-BJP and the INC was not far off. Neither the SAD/BJP nor the INC was any match to the above-discussed meticulously detailed organizational setup of the AAP in Punjab. The organization was structured to provide inclusiveness, role clarity, empowerment, transparency, accountability, system driven philosophy, institutionalized and not individualized functional environment, and to facilitate the realization of participative democracy.<sup>72</sup> The dexterous strategists of AAP had woven such a seamless organizational web, from zones to polling booths, that given the freedom to work uninterruptedly, it would have ensured that any AAP volunteer would be heard, and his/her grievances addressed. However, this was not what actually happened, and silent, insidious interventions were made to subvert intra-party democracy, freedom of thought and expression, which the party had vociferously pronounced from the rooftops.<sup>73</sup> No activity of the Punjab volunteers was allowed to escape the skeptical gaze of the Delhi-based team of outside Observers.<sup>74</sup> The local volunteers were systematically subjected to dictatorial commands of these Observers and their team of 'outsiders', who were too arrogant to grant any heed to the opinions and suggestions emanating from

the grassroots.<sup>75</sup> It seemingly became apparent that the miraculous victory of AAP in the four parliamentary constituencies in Punjab in 2014 had created a misplaced confidence among its central leadership that no one can defeat AAP in the 2017 assembly elections. Commenting on this aspect of AAP's super-confidence, Col Gill stated "It therefore decided to tame, colonize and harness the resources that Punjab had to offer, towards the prime, but camouflaged goal of crowning Kejriwal as the Emperor of the Delhi durbar".<sup>76</sup>

It was against this backdrop that all the routes were blocked for the free flow of independent thinking/opinion within the highly centralized party structure. The actual operational system was the antithesis of the one publicly declared. It was a system, which ensured first and foremost that Delhi's commands flowed forcefully downward. It further ensured local obedience by blandishing inducements of power and position before gullible volunteers. The very fact that during the fact-finding survey from 15th April until late June 2015, only the team of 'outsiders' met approximately 8,500 peoples in Punjab without the participation of any local volunteer, revealed the *mala fide* intentions of AAP in Delhi.<sup>77</sup> For instance, when Sucha Singh Chhotepur, State Coordinator and Head of the AAP Punjab State Committee, was forced to step down by a majority of its members, Sanjay Singh, the AAP Punjab *Prabhari* unilaterally dismissed the majority opinion of this highest state body and reinstated Chhotepur.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, in September 2015 when Daljit Singh, head of the AAP Punjab State Disciplinary and Grievances Committee, expelled 15 volunteers who had been appointed by Chhotepur from amongst his confidantes,<sup>79</sup> the central leadership once again snubbed the local leadership and annulled the expulsion.<sup>80</sup> However, when Chhotepur was perceived as trying to strengthen his hold over the local structure of the party, the central leadership abruptly clipped his wings too.<sup>81</sup> Chhotepur was implicated in a case involving acceptance of an illegal gratification of a couple of lakh rupees, allegedly captured in a much-hyped sting operation, and was unceremoniously and ignominiously expelled from the primary membership of the AAP in Punjab sans the grace of even given a personal hearing.<sup>82</sup>

This 'divide and conquer' policy dictated the Delhi team's efforts in Punjab, and was nailed down to the grassroots level through instigating groupism between inimical elements.<sup>83</sup> Though on the surface local volunteers' were primarily chosen to manage the party structure, the reality was that the Observers appointed by the Delhi team surreptitiously monitored and managed each and every level of the structure. Additionally, and for good measure, an entire layer, the Zonal Booth Coordinators, were all directly selected by the Delhi team, and operated as Trojan Horses.<sup>84</sup> In order to preclude the emergence of a popular local leadership in Punjab, Sector Coordinators were appointed from one of the three Sectors that fell in that particular Zone. In other words, a Coordinator would not be appointed from his/her parent Sector. For instance, in the Zone of Anandpur Sahib, the Mohali Sector Coordinator was appointed from Ropar Sector; the Nawanshahar Sector Coordinator was appointed from Mohali Sector, and the Ropar Sector Coordinator was appointed from the Nawanshahar Sector.<sup>85</sup>

The unstated Machiavellian purpose of such an above-mentioned arrangement was to preempt the stability and growth of local leadership on the one hand, and to lend legitimacy to the Delhi Team of ‘outsiders’ and establishing a dependency of the Sector Coordinators on the Zone and Sector Observers, on the other.<sup>86</sup> In a communication to Jatinder Tomar, an MLA from Delhi, who was sent to manage assembly elections in Punjab in January 2017, Col. L.J.S. Gill, Coordinator of the Punjab State Booth Management Wing, lamented that:

*Hum ne jis adhar par kaam karne ki yojna banayee hai us ka aap ulanghan kar rahe ho. Total confusion create kar ke rakhi hai. Aise parallel kaam se koi Faida nahin. Jo kehte ho aur jo kar rahe ho dono alag haqeeqatein hain. Tumhari koi bhi Baat par vishvwas nahin kiya ja sakta. Tum kehte ho help karne ke liye aaye ho. Help parallel kaarvayee nahin hoti. Discussions aur Durgesh ke Aadeshon ke baavazood parallel structure chalaya ja raha aur coordination hone hi nahin diya ja raha. ZBCs ko jo Adesh diya ja rahein hain wo hame nahin bataye ja rahe aur jo discussion mere saath hui uskey barkhilaaf hain*

[You have been violating the principles on the basis of which we made the strategy. Total confusion had been created. Such a parallel work wont helps any more. What you said and what you have been doing were two realities. You cannot be trusted. You said that you had come to help. Help did not imply parallel activity. Despite discussions and the orders of Durgesh, parallel structure has been created to run and coordination was not being allowed. The orders being passed to the ZBCs are not being conveyed to us, and were against the discussions that took with me].<sup>87</sup>

Col Gill continued:

*Meri salah hai ki is tarah party ka nuksaan ho raha hai aur poora 6 Maheeney mein hua kaam radd ho raha hai. Is liya jo tumhari yojna hai us par kaam karva lijiye. Punjab team se jo madad chahiye bata dena. Party ko koi nuksan na ho*

[It is my opinion that this way the party is harmed, and no work was being done in full six months now. Therefore get your work done as per your plan; Let the Punjab team know what help you need. No harm should come to the party].<sup>88</sup>

Once the elections came closer, the Delhi team tightened its grip even further. Its clandestine activities not only created confusion among the local volunteers but also made them feel as if they were unwanted in their own home. The Delhi team was pressurizing the Circle Booth Coordinators to share their data with the Campaign Managers. The Circle Booth Coordinators were authorized to collect

the desired information from the electorates at their households situated within the catchment areas of the polling booths falling under their respective circles. They were administered oath not to share their data with anyone except the Data Management Cell.<sup>89</sup> The local Volunteers, who had spent a lot of their precious time, money and energy in cultivating a wave in favor of AAP, were compelled to cooperate with the recalcitrant outsiders. An alleged fascistic culture was created, wherein volunteers were individually subjected to close surveillance.<sup>90</sup> The Delhi team formed 6 member 'sleeper cells' in every assembly constituency supported by another team of three members enlisted from the locals who were expected to report back daily on events and activities of the local leadership in the state.<sup>91</sup> Volunteers were deployed to strengthen and carry the AAP brand to the Punjab electorate by investing their own time, effort, and finances. The glaring dichotomy between AAP's rhetoric and its practice was visibly appalling but was almost irreversible.<sup>92</sup>

The wider moral emphasis of AAP was on 'assignment of responsibilities and not on designations.'<sup>93</sup> But this principle was not only abandoned by the central leadership but also because, barring few exceptions, the great majority of local the volunteers too harbored ambitions, both declared and concealed, of some substantial personal gain. Hopes of tangible benefits included allotment of a AAP ticket for the forthcoming state assembly or MC elections, a Chairmanship or some other such office of profit.<sup>94</sup> Though AAP leadership and volunteers never tired of talking about selfless service, equal respect and dignity for all, and commitment towards serving the interests of a common person, there was rabid scramble for promotion of individual self-interest among all of them. One of the pioneers of AAP Punjab told me that when its formal organizational structure was yet to be created during the pre-2014 Lok Sabha elections, there was much commotion for offices of profit and/or recognition, even at this early formative stage of AAP.<sup>95</sup> Though many volunteers pretended to come into the fold of AAP because of its egalitarian philosophy of Swaraj and inner party democracy, majority of them, deep in their hearts, were looking for an opportunity being thrown up by this newly established so-called pro-people party. Given the saturated space within the mainstream political parties of all shades in the state, their wish of tasting the privileges of power remained at best a mirage.<sup>96</sup> This was evident from the fact that for a single Chandigarh parliamentary constituency as many as 302 volunteers filed their candidature.<sup>97</sup>

Those who were attracted towards AAP could be placed in two broad categories. The first comprised those who were sincerely committed for the betterment of society and believed that AAP could be the medium for its realization. And the second belonged to a vast majority of those who joined AAP to promote their own vested interests.<sup>98</sup> Allegedly, it was the category of highly opportunistic local volunteers who provided the much-desired strategic space to the Delhi leadership and helped it succeed in its nefarious designs.<sup>99</sup> The majority of volunteers were competing among themselves surreptitiously for acquiring parliamentary and assembly tickets. They started approaching the Delhi team Observers for favors while pretending to be more loyal than the leaders themselves.<sup>100</sup> It was in this self-aggrandizement process that many of

them started offering money to buy the tickets, which catalyzed the metamorphosis of the Delhi Observers into auctioneers (of tickets). The Delhi Observers became convinced, particularly after the mammoth Muktsar rally at the *Maghi Mela* of January 2016 that AAP was going to win the state assembly elections 2017, come what may, and they considered it a God sent opportunity to manipulate the yearning of the rich and gullible local volunteers for acquiring power.<sup>101</sup> The craving for assembly seats made many seekers to eschew all principles of morality and ethics. Many stories had been making the rounds in the post assembly elections period, about the role of the Delhi Observers not only amassing a lot of money but also corrupting the socio-cultural fabric of the Punjabi society.<sup>102</sup> Cases of female volunteers being paid for maintaining their silence are galore in AAP circles even today.<sup>103</sup> The long prevalence of immoral politics in the state had dried up the often talked about self-respect and high moral conduct of the people who were forced into thinking about every possibility of acquiring political power as a passport not only to fulfill their greed but also to safeguard their enormously accumulated wealth.<sup>104</sup> How a senior and prominent member of the Punjab team allegedly placed his turban at the feet of a leader of the Delhi team and another prominent local leader touched the feet of a senior leader of the Punjab Team while lying prostrate before him are some of more glaring cases of spineless local leadership and their lust for political power.<sup>105</sup>

As against its principle of '*Maan Sanmaan* (dignity and respect) of all in the party,' Delhi Observers used to consider local volunteer as *kachra* (rubbish). Col. L.J.S. Gill recalls how once Durgesh Pathak, Delhi Team-in-charge, reacted vehemently during a meeting at his residence when a general grievance was being expressed by local volunteers against the Delhi Team. Gill recalls Pathak's responded in the following manner:

*Yeh volunteers Kachra aur gandgee hein. Sab saaf ho jaya ga jab  
Tickets baatein ge; yeh power hain mere pass*  
[These volunteers are rubbish and dirt. All of them will be  
cleansed from the party once the tickets are distributed. That  
power is with me].<sup>106</sup>

During the final stage of the campaign on January 28, 2017, Jatinder Tomar, while talking to a campaign manager whose father was an MLA candidate said:

That the votes will be polled for Arvind Kejriwal and not to his  
father.<sup>107</sup>

Similarly, when another former prominent volunteer conveyed to Durgesh Pathak that many of the MLA candidates had been asking about what duties they were supposed to perform once elected, he retorted angrily:

We did not allot tickets to these guys for asking such silly questions. Do you know the style of functioning of Arvind Kejriwal?<sup>108</sup>

Durgesh further remarked:

We know what we want to do, and how to get that done. Tell these guys to wait for our orders!<sup>109</sup>

Yet in another context, Jatinder Tomar while passing instructions to a Delhi Observer in one of the assembly constituencies, made a public comment regarding the MLA candidates as follows:

*4 galli nikaalo aur kaam karvao*  
[Abuse them and get the work done].<sup>110</sup>

Reacting to the abusive tone of Jatinder Tomar, Col. Gill said:

*Main apni team ki is tarah beizzatti nahin karwaun ga. 150 team members disturbed aur dukhi hai in haalaaton se. Main unko jawab deh hun jinhon ne 6 mahiney se roj 20 ghante kaam kiya hai*  
[I would not allow my team to be subjected to such an insult. In such circumstances 150 team members were disturbed and pained. I am accountable to them who worked for 20 hours every day for 6 months].<sup>111</sup>

Apart from the imperious attitudes of the central leadership, the modus operandi adopted by AAP for the distribution of tickets proved that it was no different from other parties. From the beginning of August 2016 to the middle of January 2017, a total of 6 probable lists of the MLA candidates were released. No transparent and democratic process was allowed to operate at the time of selection of candidates. Although some active volunteers of an assembly constituency were asked to choose their MLA candidate through a lottery system in which each one of them was supposed to contribute a slip containing the name of the proposed candidate, it was the Delhi team, under the overall directions and supervision of Arvind Kejriwal, that had the final authority to decide the allocation of assembly tickets. Out of 112 contested assembly seats, as many as 71 were given to those who had joined AAP barely six months earlier or even less before the elections. As per a reliable source, money played a pivotal role and each ticket was allegedly sold at a price.<sup>112</sup> During one of my extended conversations with a former Zonal Booth Coordinator, I was informed how a committed Volunteer, who had done a lot of work at the grassroots level, was denied a ticket in a Scheduled Castes reserved assembly constituency because he was not able to arrange the money as allegedly desired by a Delhi Team leader. The latter allegedly told him that:

*kaam bahut hai; daam kumm hai*  
 [You had done enough work; but the money you brought was less].<sup>113</sup>

In another case, a different Delhi team leader received a large amount of money from a businessman belonging to the catchment area of the above-mentioned Zonal Booth Coordinator for the allotment of an assembly ticket. But when the promised ticket was refused, the alleged businessman got an F.I.R. registered against the said leader.<sup>114</sup> Besides money, religious affiliation had a strong bearing on the selection of potential candidates. Merit of a candidate seemed to matter little. For example, the names proposed by the Coordinator of Punjab State Booth Management Wing, despite being requested by Durgesh Pathak himself, were thrown to the wind.<sup>115</sup> When enquired by the former, the latter simply said, “as per the criterion of the Delhi Team none were found suitable.”<sup>116</sup> To the surprise of the State Coordinator, neither Durgesh nor his team ever contacted any of the proposed candidates for assessing his/her capability for the assembly elections.

In a nutshell, the ticket allocating process adopted by AAP in Punjab went against its stated agenda such as Jan Lokpal Bill, ‘Swaraj’ and defied principles that had attracted a large number of people to its fold including participatory democracy, accountability, and financial transparency. Col. Gill cogently reported the matter to the Delhi high command of AAP while arguing that

Upright volunteers were never with AAP or Kejriwal. They came for the above-mentioned agenda. Arvind Kejriwal came to Punjab many times during the election period, but not once did he mention any of these key agenda points. In fact, many things were contrary to what the stated agenda was, e.g. the election slogan itself was very wrong. If AAP says that it is for power to the people, and against demagoguery then it cannot legitimately have a slogan like *Kejriwal Kejriwal Sara Punjab Tere Nal*. [Kejriwal the whole Punjab is with you]!<sup>117</sup>

To quote him further:

*jo haalaat banaaye ja rahein hain us mein kya karo ge. Maine tumhe bataaya – agar nateeje sahi nahin aaye to tum kaho ge ki Punjab team zimmewar hai. Sahi aayein ge to tumhari team ne hassil ki hai*

[What would you do in the circumstances which had been shaping up? If the results were not positive, Delhi would hold the Punjab volunteers responsible, and if they were positive then the Delhi team would be given the credit].<sup>118</sup>

Col. Gill wondered: “was this the ‘Swaraj’ that AAP wanted to bring to Punjab? Was this the ‘Swaraj’ on which the people of Punjab had pinned high hopes?”<sup>119</sup> Mincing no words while addressing Durgesh, he cogently argued that:

This is not participative democracy. I am sorry to say that AAP left its agenda. True volunteers and hopeful voters remain on that agenda. Therefore, AAP left true agenda, and not the other way around. *Honesty, integrity aur loyalty naam ki koi cheez nahin hai. Gaddari, jhooth, phareb aur Dhokha dhadi se power aur governance nahin ho sakey gi* [There was nothing something like honesty, integrity and loyalty. Through treachery, lies, fraud and deceitful means, power and governance cannot be done].<sup>120</sup>

He further said:

Politics is an art of possible. It is *kala* (art) and not a *kartoot* (deceitful act). A lot of respect and acceptance has been shown to you (Durgesh). All your dictates and decisions worked on without a question all these months even when there was a clear understanding that some of them were harmful and detrimental to the stated objectives. The gap or perhaps gulf between what was said and what was being done was so pronounced. Yet we invested in the project. At the end we felt cheated and robbed. You and your team of revolutionaries got every component of life funded through dictate and demand from the volunteers, while you drew salaries and allowances from the party money sourced from the public. That much for the moral fiber you are made of. Travelling around Punjab post the elections brought to light that few hundred volunteers suffer from depression while several have broken homes. They had invested everything to be part of this movement hoping....<sup>121</sup>

While commenting on the post-assembly election stand of the central leadership of AAP, Col Gill said:

Now all you guys are going Tom Tom furthering “EVM tempering” as the reason. Democracy murdered, constitution butchered and institutional fraud are the noises being made. Of course you will say ‘this is politics’ *yahan sab kuch karna padta hai* (everything is to be done here). You will not be able to douse the realities with these smoke screens. You have delivered the biggest fraud on the state of Punjab and exploited the volunteers’ sentiment, resources, commitment, money, hope, and aspiration. This is nothing short of treason. Modern day CHANAKYA; as you (Durgesh Pathak) pronounced yourself – do some soul searching.<sup>122</sup>

In the name of Swaraj and alternative politics, the Delhi Team of AAP perniciously manipulated the aspirations and hopes of the people of Punjab and ruined their dream of Lok Raj. The following verses penned by a former Sector Coordinator of AAP Punjab, sums up succinctly the betrayal of the Delhi team:

*mai tadd takk ee krantikari si, jaddon teek lode meri darkāri si.  
 Je maīm hān vich hān milaunda hān, tān ee inqlabi akhvaunda  
 hān.  
 Jis dīn mai jhooth ton mukh morh lia, naven krantikārān maithon  
 nata torh lia.  
 Oh ghreeb volunteer luttde rahey, asean maseehey jān ghar  
 puttdey rahey.  
 Sanu rosa si chache tāiān 'te, kar baithey yaqeen tān ee paraiyān  
 'te.  
 Apney mār ke vi chhāven suttdey ne, ghair tān ghair hundey, bass  
 luttdey te kuttdey ne.  
 Enni gall ghairān ne samjha ditti, ikk lammi seeman jivan dee  
 asān jharhoo lekhey la baithey.  
 Afsos ke gunahgar ho nibrhey, punjab vāsiān nu baniey palley pa  
 baithey.  
 Na smajh payee vaddiān nu, ki ganga puthi kiven vagaa baithey.  
 Aseen modhi si iss sangarsh de, vekhan layee vasda punjab si  
 tarsdey.  
 Ajj atamān 'te bhāri bojh hai, jharhoo vala tajurba gaNdi khoj hai.  
 Sanu muaafkareen ai punjab mata, kachra poorey des da teri jholi  
 pa'ta*

[I was a revolutionary so long I was needed to be one. Only if I agreed to be a yes man would I be termed as a revolutionary. The day I turned my face away from falsehood, the neo revolutionaries severed links with me. They kept robbing us, the poor volunteers, and we kept worshiping them as messiahs. Unhappy as we were with our *chachas* and *tayyas* (kith and kin), that's why we pinned our trust on rank strangers. For our own, always throws the dead under a shade even if they kill. But the strangers are strangers, after all. All they did was rob or beat us, mercilessly. The strangers did drill one thing in our heads that we had dedicated better part of our lives to the broom. Sad, it was our crime that we put Punjabis at the mercy of traders. Even the most sensible among us could not understand, how we could make the Ganga flow backwards. We were the leaders of this struggle, yearning to see our Punjab leap from progress to progress. We feel now a great burden on our conscience. This broom business is a dirty game indeed. Oh forgive us, our motherland Punjab; we have poured the garbage of the entire nation in your lap].<sup>123</sup>

### Overconfidence and Contempt for the Grassroot

What burst the bubble of the third force in Punjab was the overweening arrogance of AAP's central leadership, and its draconian control over the local leadership. Given their meticulously cultivated, near-absolute dependence on the central leadership, probably acted to make some of local volunteers equally, if not more, arrogant and stubborn. Bhagwant Mann's repeated vociferous assurance to put Badals and their coterie behind bars soon after coming into power is a case in point. From day one, the electoral narratives of AAP in Punjab, exclusively framed and articulated by the stubborn outsiders, hopelessly out of touch with ground reality, promised the moon to increasingly restive people of the state. During the pre-election rallies, they made extravagant promises, and as the election date moved closer, they flaunted several vote bank-specific election-manifestos (Kumar, 2016). But there was little surprise that AAP spokespersons were hard-pressed for providing credible answers when asked about the means for financing these farcical schemes. For instance, the much-trumpeted debt relief promised to farmers was estimated to cost far in excess of Rs.100 crore, and a State-level luminary of AAP had nonchalantly assured a skeptical audience that the Punjabi diaspora would cover this demand *in toto* through donations alone! Overconfident of AAP's victory, Durgesh Pathak used to boast often that:

*Agar Bhagwan bhi jamin per aa jayein, hamein koi hara nahin sakta. Punjab mein aag laga deinge, hamein election karwana aur jeetna aata hai etc.etc. Aag lagai aur sab jalaa dia. Jhank kar dekhoo upnein mein. izzhar kar sago gay upnein aap san.*

[If God Himself descended on earth, even then no one can defeat us. Punjab will be put on fire. We know how to conduct and win elections etc. etc. Everything burnt in the fire. Look within yourself. Will you be able to reconcile with the reality today?].<sup>124</sup>

Such a magical problem-solving approach and inexplicable overconfidence on the part of the local and central leadership of AAP, emanating perhaps from the stunning victory in Delhi assembly elections of 2015 and in the Punjab parliamentary polls in 2014, seems to have played a major role in its debacle. As argued by Rajesh Singh:

[i]ronically, the initial successes paved the way for the AAP's subsequent decline, as they made the party leadership overconfident, arrogant and oblivious to the people's mood. For all its grand talk of connecting with the masses, the AAP has never been more disconnected (Singh, 2017).

This victory-induced arrogance of the top leadership of AAP had also contributed to intra-party conflicts leading to the expulsion of many of its prominent volunteers including Yogendra Yadav, Prashant Bhushan (pioneers of AAP) and later on Dharamvira Gandhi and H.S. Khalsa, (MPs and former

Volunteers of AAP). This in turn led to the concentration of power in the hands of Arvind Kejriwal and his confidantes – against the declared AAP policy of ‘one person, one post’. In the opinion of Col. Gill:

AAP placed Arvind Kejriwal in the same role as the Badals, Chautalas, Mamta Banerjees, Abdullahs, etc. of Indian politics - i.e. a party supremo who is bigger than the party itself.<sup>125</sup>

The autocratic Delhi model of AAP, especially post the 2013 Delhi election, was replicated in Punjab.<sup>126</sup> In this autocratic model, the local volunteers and their activities were to be shepherded towards the central objective of AAP – i.e. to finally capture Delhi in 2019. It was towards this goal that Punjab was to be used as a strategic site to re-launch AAP at the national level, following the debacle of the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. It was also towards this end that aspiring Punjab AAP volunteers were to be motivated and mobilized to sponsor rallies in far off places like Goa. In return tickets were allegedly promised for the Punjab assembly elections in yet another major breach of AAP's proudly proclaimed principles.<sup>127</sup>

Though rather belatedly, the dedicated volunteers came to realize that what they had been working towards all through, with utmost enthusiasm at their command, was nothing but a mirage. The reality they encountered was a far cry from the promises made by the Delhi Team. There can be no doubt people of Punjab wanted an alternative to the current dismal state of affairs whereas the Delhi Team appeared hell-bent upon maneuvering and manipulating the local volunteers to help realize Kejriwal's alleged ambition to grab the highly coveted office of Prime Minister of India.<sup>128</sup> It was further presumed by the Delhi Team that once the dynastic rule of the Badals was decimated, the Punjab experiment would also play a catalytic role in wiping out the neighboring dynastic regimes in Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, J&K, and Rajasthan.<sup>129</sup> It was against such a backdrop that the local volunteers working for AAP at the grassroots in Punjab were converted into mere fodder for electoral success (Yadav, 2016). The sensibility and self-respect of many local volunteers, who had completely dedicated themselves to the objective of changing the idiom of state politics, were badly bruised by the belated realization of the deceit, which the central leadership of AAP had played so mercilessly upon them and their state.<sup>130</sup> During long conversations with this author some of the volunteers confided that had AAP been able to form a government in Punjab, they would have been implicated, and may even be arrested in false cases for no other reason except for their being vocal and independent in thought and action.<sup>131</sup> Their deep anger against the central leadership was quite obvious from their unwillingness to even listen to any of the Delhi advisors of AAP assembly campaign teams in Punjab.<sup>132</sup>

### Strategic Blunders and Failure of the Third Alternative

The 2017 assembly election in Punjab came after a dizzying succession of events, all of which, intertwined with pre-existing resentments, resulted in a vortex of extreme anger against the incumbent SAD-BJP combine. These included violent stirrings by debt-ridden peasants and landless agricultural workers in the Malwa belt, sacrileges of the religious scripture in a series of numerous such incidents (including a notable one at Bargadi village), a bloody public-police confrontation at Behbal Kalan village in October 2015 which led to the death of two protesters, and finally the Sarbat Khalsa at Amritsar by anti-Badal Akali factions (Sandhu 2017). A definitive manifestation of this was the mammoth gathering seen at the historic AAP rally in the Muktsar *Maghi Mela* of 14th January 2016. Had the election taken place immediately after the Muktsar rally, argued Amandeep Sandhu, “AAP would have got what they had claimed – 100/117 seats.”<sup>133</sup> However, within a year, what had been a politically verdant landscape for AAP had dramatically degraded to something far less promising. The unsung storm troopers of AAP – hardcore selfless volunteers – had largely become alienated, grassroots support had withered away, and Congress was struggling to claim territory recently vacated by a fading AAP. So, what led to such a steep and disgraceful fall from vociferously proclaimed high moral grounds? Much of this can be said to be self-inflicted. In less than a year, with their dreams of alternative emancipatory politics turning illusive, once dedicated and committed volunteers had started feeling severely alienated. What led to this massive alienation at the grassroots level and the consequent downfall of AAP in the state is the central puzzle before the analysis that follows.

The AAP central leadership sent 52 Observers (13 for Zones, and 39 for Sectors) to Punjab. Closer to the election, others were also brought into the state from Delhi, Bihar, UP, Rajasthan and Haryana (collectively called the Delhi Team) to assist the Observers. Local volunteers from Punjab, despite being conspicuous by their total absence from this category, were made to provide the Delhi Team with free of cost material comforts: air-conditioned houses, gadgets, offices, and even meals.<sup>134</sup> Many chose to do so hoping favors in return from the Delhi Team, including tickets for the 2017 assembly elections. Although some others, perhaps a small minority, did so as a part of traditional Punjabi hospitality.<sup>135</sup> Later it became known amongst volunteers that in addition to this local free hospitality, AAP allegedly paid monthly allowances and even made reimbursement of transportation and grocery expenses of the State, Zonal and Sector Observers.<sup>136</sup> Anecdotal stories had begun to circulate much earlier amongst volunteers about Observers collecting grocery, restaurant, hotel, and petrol/diesel bills – sometimes even retrieving them from wastepaper bins.<sup>137</sup> It was only much later that the realization dawned that this was done to claim fictitious expenses.<sup>138</sup>

Since for most volunteers the Observers were their sole point of live contact with the central leadership, the latter were expected to act as the spokesmen for the former. Thereby, the significance of every word and gesture of the Observers

magnified manifold. This simple, but almost unnoticed aspect, was to have massive negative ramifications for the fledgling party. Alongside their financial misdemeanors, the Observers were strangely furtive – changing residences every few months, and literally becoming untraceable a few months prior to the election.<sup>139</sup> To add further to the steadily growing unease of the local volunteers, the Observers often took with them heaps of household items (e.g. air-conditioners, toasters, cutlery, etc.) purchased by the former for them.<sup>140</sup> Thus they were not different at all from the routine glut of politicians. When the local Volunteers, somehow, became aware of the real faces and hidden agendas of these outside Observers, some of them started comparing them with Massa Rangar, an implanted notorious caretaker of the Golden Temple, who desecrated it by drinking, smoking and watching girls dancing inside the sacred complex in 1740.<sup>141</sup> Some of the local Volunteers also raised voices to make an inquiry about the identity of these outside Observers and their team members as they became highly suspicious about their role in Punjab, especially after the insidious acts of sacrileges and a blast at *Maur Mandi* in Bathinda district a few days before the assembly election on 4 February 2017.<sup>142</sup>

In addition to the above mentioned factors, the volunteers carried a long list of grouses with respect to these Observers' personal conduct, which, more often than not, qualified as simply arrogant, dismissive, unresponsive, inaccessible, demanding, and uncultured.<sup>143</sup> There was perhaps a good reason for this. Almost exclusively, the Delhi Team members were widely perceived as coming from the lower end of the socio-economic scale. It was further alleged that they were less comfortable in the company of local volunteers with better education and belonging to higher social strata.<sup>144</sup> Suffering from an extreme sense of insecurity these outside Observers often used to repeat:

*kon sunne inne kee kich kich. Yeh kich kich bahut kartee hai*  
[Who will listen to their bunkum? They drivel too much].<sup>145</sup>

However, mesmerized by the aura of Kejriwal, the local volunteers considered these Observers, despite them being highly arrogant and corrupt, their saviors.<sup>146</sup> Conversely, the Observers often treated the local volunteers with disdain.<sup>147</sup> The former were generally noted for cultivating 'yes-men/women volunteers'.<sup>148</sup> This was particularly noticeable during the election rallies at stage events, where often disproportionate time was granted to a few relatively unknown, and ungifted, 'leaders', who were entirely synthesized by the Delhi Team members and were completely in their awe.<sup>149</sup> Though deeply offended by the arrogant behavior of the Delhi Team, volunteers chose not to make their anger public, except for some isolated incidents spread across the state.<sup>150</sup> Many respondents in the field told the author that the local volunteers knew very well the real *aukaat* (worth) of the Delhi Observers, but did not open their mouth for fear of spoiling the image of AAP in Punjab.<sup>151</sup>

At the level of policy, the Delhi Team made several monumental blunders such as (a) placing AAP's *Jharu* (broom) symbol at the top of a photograph of the Golden Temple on their manifesto cover; (b) making a comparison between

*Siri Guru Granth Sahib* and AAP's Youth Manifesto; (c) overtly indulging in vote banks politics by actively wooing *Deras* and (d) promising a Dalit Deputy Chief Minister. All these incidents sapped AAP's momentum tremendously (Singh, 2017a; Yamunan, 2017). Further to this, what deeply alienated a large number of Hindus, Dalits and moderate Sikh electorate from AAP was the alleged closeness of its central leadership with some of the former radical groups in Punjab (Shah Singh, 2017). The spontaneous arrival of a large number of NRIs in support of AAP in Punjab lent a significant weight to the suspicion of its alleged links with former pro-Khalistan persons who had migrated to foreign countries fearing harassment at home (Ashraf, 2016; Chaba, 2017; Yamunan, 2017).

Yet another blunder that turned the once committed AAP volunteers against their own party was highly unethical practice on the part of the Delhi Team of promising a single seat to multiple candidates in a given constituency. This in turn forced the volunteers to spend a lot of their money on publicity, kept them guessing/waiting for the ticket allotment, which eventually was allotted to the highest bidder.<sup>152</sup> A widespread rumor of the day was that one of the mainstream political parties had sponsored 25 candidates with the intention of infiltrating AAP and check its further advances in the state. Another equally hyped rumor was that the central leadership of AAP received a huge amount of money from one of the mainstream political parties in Punjab with the intention of shifting its base to other states with larger number of parliamentary seats.<sup>153</sup> Finally, authorizing the Delhi Team to undertake complete monitoring of candidates' campaign process turned out to be a strategic blunder (Sandhu, 2017). Things deteriorated to such an extent that in the post 2017 election result period, outside Observers had disappeared from Punjab, allegedly fearing a violent backlash from vengeful volunteers.<sup>154</sup>

## Conclusion

The key argument in this paper is that the sudden popularity of the AAP in Punjab was neither due to its superb organizational setup nor because of the social media campaign run by its election managers. It was rather an outcome of the acute desperation and widespread desire among Punjabi youth and toiling masses seeking an alternative politics. Tired of entrenched duopolistic rotation of power between SAD-BJP combine and the INC, people of Punjab had come to a belated realization that even though these two political poles looked different, they were, in reality, two sides of the same coin. Thus it was the dream of the people of Punjab to realize an alternative politics that motivated them to embrace AAP and visualize it at the center stage of politics in the state.

During the field work, it was found that the people of Punjab perceived that the Delhi Team hardly shared with them matters like leadership, strategy, tactics etc., which made them feel cheated. But once they came to realize the real agenda of AAP, they eventually and silently turned their back on it. They did listen to all of its gimmicks, but refused to be misled. They did not allow their widespread alienation, frustration and anger to be manipulated for votes. What

they wanted was to save their state from being further pushed into the labyrinth of vindictive political whirlpool unleashed by Delhi based AAP's culture of political manipulations and maneuverings. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that at the end of the day, the AAP looked like a ship, which had lost its ideological bearings that were splendidly visible at the beginning of its journey. In hindsight, wide-ranging reasons can be identified behind a stream of highly disappointing failures including socio-political naivety, arrogance combined with the ignorance of ground realities in Punjab, and hobnobbing with former radical forces.

Further, at the organizational level, the indulgence of Observers in morally repugnant practices proved to be highly corrosive for local support structures, and ultimately politically counterproductive. One of the most notable unintended effects of such political practices and electoral strategies was the encouragement of groupism, and then subsequently the promotion of internecine competition resulting in serious intra-party conflict. With barely respectable figure of 20 seats, the denouement of the election for AAP was not only a political anticlimax but also a moral-ethical debacle of the 'Third Alternative'.

**[Acknowledgements:** I am grateful to Col. L.J.S. Gill, Dr. Dharamvira Gandhi, Air Marshal P.S. Gill, Col. C.M. Lakhanpal, Dhilpreet Gill, Dr. Gurpreet Sandhu, Manjit Singh Lovely, Gagandeep Sharma, Gurpreet Brar-Gill, and many more who helped me generously during my fieldwork. I thank P.S. Verma, Sanjay Chaturvedi, B.S. Brar and also once again Dhilpreet Gill for their critical comments and brilliant suggestions that helped me tremendously in sharpening the arguments in the paper. I am indebted to Seema, Sahaj and Daksh who managed our home well during my sojourns in the field. Last but not the least, my sincere thanks to Shinder Thandi and Autar Dhesi, who persuaded me to prepare this paper. For all the views articulated in this article, however, I alone am responsible.]

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> AAP is believed to have fielded a total of 434 candidates out of the total 545 seats for which elections were held.

<sup>2</sup> Based on personal records of Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>3</sup> In 2010, the SAD-BJP government through an informal decision made the territorial jurisdiction of police sub-divisions co-terminus with Assembly constituencies. 'It effectively established a one-to-one relationship between DSPs and MLAs or the political persons who were made in-charge of the constituency.' White paper of the Congress government as quoted in *The Tribune*, 20, June 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Based on field notes.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Dharmaviraa Gandhi, Bhagwant Mann, Harinders Singh Khalsa, Sadhu Singh, Yamini Gomar, Daljit Singh, Sucha Singh Chhotepur, Himmant Singh Shergill, and H.S. Phookla.

---

<sup>6</sup> Before the formation of the Nine Member State Committee and the appointment of Sucha Singh Chhotepur as its State Convener, Harjot Singh Bains and Sumail Sandhu worked as State Convener of AAP in Punjab for a short while. Based on extended conversations with Dr. Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, former Volunteer of AAP.

<sup>7</sup> Sanjay Singh (President), Durgesh Pathak, Kapil Bhardwaj, Deepak Tomar, Chandan Singh, Gajinder Sharma, Ranga, Romi Bhatti, Ambrish Trikha, Rohit Singh, Saurav and Dagar.

<sup>8</sup> Hailed from Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh, he was sent to Punjab by the AAP headquarters in Delhi as *Parbhari* (over-all in-charge) of AAP in Punjab. Before joining AAP, he was personal assistant to Amar Singh, former General Secretary of the Samajwadi Party and a member of the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Indian Parliament.

<sup>9</sup> He was appointed by the Delhi AAP headquarter as an Observer and National Organisation Builder of the AAP in Punjab,

<sup>10</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill, and Harpal Singh Sodhi.

<sup>11</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>12</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Gagandeep Sharma.

<sup>13</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill, and Gagandeep Sharma.

<sup>17</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> The assemblies were left non-functional precisely for the reason that at the time of ticket distribution for the assembly elections the Coordinators would not be there to put up their claims for the same. Based on personal records, and extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>20</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Keeping in view the regulatory conditions of the State Election Commission. Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Col. L.J.S. Gill was the State Booth Coordinator.

<sup>25</sup> Dhilpreet Gill was the Co-coordinator.

<sup>26</sup> Gagandeep Sharma, Aem Chawla and Harjinder Singh, volunteers of AAP from the Zirakpur, Abhor and Balachaur respectively, used to manage the entire system of DMC under the overall leadership of Gagandeep Sharma.

<sup>27</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>28</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Dhilpreet Gill.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Gagandeep Sharma.

---

<sup>32</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Gagandeep Sharma and Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>33</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Dhilpreet Gill.

<sup>34</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Based on extended conversations with C.M. Lakhnupal.

<sup>37</sup> Based on extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. Also based on extended conversations with Col. C.M. Lakhnupal. However, H.S. Phoolka showed his ignorance when asked about the same during conversation with him at his residence in Chandigarh.

<sup>39</sup> Based on personal records of Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Gagandeep Sharma.

<sup>48</sup> Based on personal records of Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill

<sup>59</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Gagandeep Sharma.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill and Gagandeep Sharma.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Dhilpreet Gill.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Based on extended conversations with Harpal Singh Sodhi and Dhilpreet Gill.

<sup>70</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Dhilpreet Gill.

<sup>71</sup> Performance of Observers was monitored with the objective of incentivizing them with the possibility of being conferred a public office in Delhi, as well as tickets for the upcoming municipal elections in April 2017.

---

<sup>72</sup> Based on personal records of Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>73</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill and Dhilpreet Gill.

<sup>74</sup> Based on extended conversations with Dhilpreet Gill and Harpal Singh Sodhi

<sup>75</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill and Dhilpreet Gill.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Jasbir Dhaliwal at Anandpur Sahib, Bajwa at Amritsar, Manu at Hoshiarpur, Bhagowalia at Khadoor Sahib, Narinder Pal Bhogta at Bathinda, Advocate Sandhu at Ferozepur, and Advocate Virender Khara at Fatehgarh Sahib. Based on various extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>80</sup> In a protest against this autocratic act of the central/outsider leadership, Daljit Singh resigned from the primary membership of AAP. Based on extended conversation with Dr. Dharmavira Gandhi, Member of Parliament and former member of AAP.

<sup>81</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Jaideep Singh, former Volunteer of AAP.

<sup>82</sup> Based on various conversations with Harpal Singh Sodhi.

<sup>83</sup> Based on extended conversations with Dhilpreet Gill.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Rajinder Khepr was Sector Coordinator of Mohali. He belonged to Ropar. Manjit Singh Lovely was Sector Coordinator of Nawanshahar. He belonged to Mohali. Rajinder Sharma was Sector Coordinator of Ropar. He belonged to Nawanshahar. Jasbir Dhaliwal was the Zonal Coordinator of the Anandpur Sahib Zone. He belonged to Mohali. Based on various extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>86</sup> Based on extended conversations with Dhilpreet Gill.

<sup>87</sup> Based on personal records of Col. L.J.S. Gill. Unless otherwise stated, the author made translation of Punjabi/Hindi text into English.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Based on extended conversations with Gagandeep Sharma.

<sup>90</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill and Gagandeep Sharma.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Based on extended conversations with Dhilpreet Gill.

<sup>93</sup> Based on personal records of Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>94</sup> Based on conversations with Harpal Singh Sodhi.

<sup>95</sup> Based on extended conversations with Dr. Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, former Volunteer of AAP.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Based on extended conversations with Dr. Dharamvira Gandhi, MP and former pioneer Volunteer of AAP Punjab.

---

<sup>99</sup> Based on field notes.

<sup>100</sup> Based on extended conversations with Dr. Gurpeet Singh Sandhu, former Volunteer of AAP.

<sup>101</sup> Based on extended conversations with Harpal Singh Sodhi.

<sup>102</sup> Based on various extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>103</sup> Based on extended conversation many members of the Punjab Team.

<sup>104</sup> Based on field notes.

<sup>105</sup> Based on extended conversations with various members of the Punjab Team.

<sup>106</sup> Based on personal records of Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>107</sup> Based on extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>108</sup> Based on extended conversations with Jaideep Singh.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Based on personal records of Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Based on extended conversations with Col. C.M. Lakhanpal.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Some of the proposed names were: Justice Garg, Chairman NRI Commission, Punjab, Lt Gen. BPS Mandher, Lt Gen Jej Sapru, Maj Gen G.S. Grewal, Mrs Anu Randhawa, Dr. (Capt.) G.S. Dhillon, Chairman Dalhousie Public School, Adv. Bains, Punjab & Haryana, Air Marshal P.S. Gill (based on extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill).

<sup>116</sup> Based on extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Manjit Singh Lovely, former Sector Coordinator, shared these verses with the author. Amarjit Chandan, a well-known Punjabi writer, transliterated the same into Roman script. Amarjit Chandan and Rana Nayyar made the English translation.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Based on personal records of Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>126</sup> Based on extended conversations with Dr. Dharamvira Gandhi, Member of Parliament and former volunteer of AAP, at his residence in Patiala. Gandhi was of the firm view that after the 2013 Delhi assembly elections there was a steep downfall in the character of the AAP leadership. The 2015 Delhi assembly election was won by adopting all means; giving no importance whatsoever to its loudly proclaimed ideals and morals.

<sup>127</sup> Based on extended conversations with Jaideep Singh, former Volunteer of AAP and Dhilpreet Gill.

<sup>128</sup> Based on extended conversations with Col. L.J.S. Gill.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

---

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Based on extended conversations with Harpal Singh Sodhi, former Group Booths Coordinator of AAP Punjab.

<sup>132</sup> Based on extended conversations Col. Jasvir Singh Sarai, former Group Booths Coordinator of AAP Punjab.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Approximately Rs. 750,000 per month was spent on each Observer and his team of 25 members. All Observers and their teams stayed in Punjab approximately for 18 months. Based on extended conversations with Manjit Singh Lovely, former Sector Coordinator of AAP.

<sup>135</sup> Based on extended conversations with Dhilpreet Gill.

<sup>136</sup> Based on extended conversations with Gurpreet Brar-Gill, General Secretary of the Mahila Wing of AAP Punjab.

<sup>137</sup> Based on field notes.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Based on extended conversations with Manjit Singh Lovely, former Sector Coordinator of AAP.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Bhai Sukha Singh and Bhai Mehtab Singh, two devout Sikhs from Bikaner, beheaded him for his misdeeds and took away his severed head with them.

<sup>142</sup> Based on extended conversations with Manjit Singh Lovely, former Sector Coordinator of AAP.

<sup>143</sup> Based on extended conversations with Dr. Gurpreet Singh Sandhu.

<sup>144</sup> Based on extended conversations with Air Marshal (Retd) P.S. Gill.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Based on extended conversations with Harbans Singh Jalal, former MLA (Pb.).

<sup>147</sup> Based on extended conversations with Air Marshal (Retd) P.S. Gill.

<sup>148</sup> Based on extended conversations with Gurpreet Brar-Gill, General Secretary of the Mahila Wing of AAP.

<sup>149</sup> Based on extended conversations with Manjit Singh Lovely, former Sector Coordinator of AAP.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid

<sup>151</sup> Based on extended conversations with Air Marshal (retd) P.S. Gill.

<sup>152</sup> Based on extended conversations with Manjit Singh Lovely, former Sector Coordinator of AAP.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

## References

Ashraf, Ajaz (2016). 'Behind AAP's popularity in Punjab: NRIs and a Changing social structure,' available at <<https://scroll.in/article/802127/behind-aaps-popularity-in-punjab-nris-and-a-changing-social-structure>> (accessed on 3 July 2017).

- 
- Bal, Hartosh Singh (2017). 'Assembly Elections 2017: The AAP's Mistakes in Punjab,' available at:  
 <<http://volunteers.caravanmagazine.in/vantage/aap-mistakes-punjab-election-2017>> (accessed on 11 June 2017).
- Chaba, Anju Agnihotri (2017). 'Punjab election results 2017: After poll debacle, 'shocked' AAP's NRI supporters fly back,' available at:  
<http://indianexpress.com/elections/punjab-assembly-elections-2017-after-poll-dabacle-schoked-aaps-nri-supporters-fly-back-4569419>  
 (accessed on 17 July 2017).
- Chakraborty, Sumit (2017). 'More worries for Arvind Kejriwal,' available at  
 <<http://www.financialexpress.com/elections/punjab-assembly-elections-2017-more-worries-for-arvind-kejriwal-sad-bjp-gets-30-6-vote-sharw-in-punjab-aap-only-23-9/584360/>> (accessed on 18 June 2017).
- Kumar Ashutosh (2014). '2014 Parliamentary Elections in Punjab: Explaining the Electoral Success of Aam Aadmi Party,' *Journal of Punjab Studies* (UCSB), Vol. 2 (1), pp. 113-121.
- Kumar, Pramod (2016). 'An election of many firsts,' *The Hindu*, November 14.
- Oberoi, Jaspreet (2017). 'Why Did AAP Not Live Up to All the Pre-Election Hype in Punjab?' available at <<https://thewire.in/116929/aap-not-live-pre-election-hype-punjab>> (accessed 18 June 2017).
- Rai, Praveen (2017). 'AAP has Decimated a Historic Mandate for Alternative Politics,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 52 (17), 29 April, Web Exclusives, available at:  
<http://www.epw.in/journal/2017/17/web-exclusives/aap-has-decimated-historic-mandate-alternative-politics.html> (accessed on 31 July 2017).
- Ram, Ronki (2017a). 'Election, Politics, Democracy: Some Lessons from Punjab Assembly Elections 2017,' *Ambedkar Times* (Sacramento CA), Vol. 9 (4-7), April 27, p.1
- Ram, Ronki (2017). 'Do People Really Need Change? Exploding the Myth of Third Alternative,' *South Asia Post* available at:  
 <<http://www.southasiapost.org/do-people-really-need-change-exploding-the-myth-of-the>> (accessed on 13 March 2017).
- Sandhu, Amandeep (2017). 'Kejriwal and His Delhi Durbar Led to AAP's Downfall in Punjab,' available at:  
 <<https://volunteers.thequint.com/punjab-elections-2017/2017/03/12kejriwal-and-his-delhi-darbr-led-to-aaps-downfall-in-punjab-capt-amarinder-singh-congress-bhagwant-mnn-hs-phoolka>> (accessed on 11 June 2017).
- Shah Singh, Harmeet (2017). 'Why AAP lost Punjab,' available at:  
 <<http://volunteers.dailyo.in/politics/aap-could-have-lost-punjab-party-to-khalistani-narrative/story/1/16137.html>> (accessed on 11 June 2017).

- 
- Singh, Pritam (2017). 'Aam Aadmi Party as Third Player in Punjab Politics,' *Economic and Political weekly*, Vol. 52 (3), 21 January, Web Exclusives, available at: [http://www.epw.in/journal/2017/3/web-exclusives/aam-aadmi-party-third-player-punjabpolitics.html?0=ip\\_login\\_no\\_cache%3D76075bd3daac8ba73131877d95ee98113](http://www.epw.in/journal/2017/3/web-exclusives/aam-aadmi-party-third-player-punjabpolitics.html?0=ip_login_no_cache%3D76075bd3daac8ba73131877d95ee98113) (accessed on 31 July 2017).
- Singh, Rajesh (2017). 'Negative politics cripples Aam Aadmi Party's electoral prospects,' available at <<http://volunteers.wionews.com/south-asia/negative-politics-cripples-aam-aadmi-party-electoral-prospects-14595>> (accessed on 17 May 2017).
- Thukral, Gobind (2017). 'Is it the end of road for the AAP?' available at <<http://www.southasiapost.org/is-it-end-of-road-for-the-aap>> (accessed on 17 July 2017).
- Yamunan, Sruthisagar (2017). 'How the Aam Aadmi party squandered its shot in Punjab.' <https://scroll.in/article/831616/how-the-aam-aadmi-party-squandered-its-shot-in-punjab> (accessed 11 June 2017).
- Yadav, Yogendra. 'How AAP has tainted the idea of a new form of governance in a year.' Available at: <http://volunteers.firstpost.com/politics/the-alt-politics-series-a-year-on-aap-has-tainted-the-idea-of-a-new-form-of-governance-writes-yogendra-yadav-2629878.html> (accessed on 8 June 2017).