

Explaining the Loss of the SAD-BJP alliance and AAP: Role of Poor Governance and Policy Paralysis

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Due to deterioration in governance and failure of the SAD-BJP ruling alliance to handle major problems of the state, it was becoming clear a year ahead of elections that there will be change in government in the state. But it was not clear which party will replace the ruling alliance. Many observers believed that AAP will be able to form the government in view of their early campaign and mobilization both in rural as well in the urban areas. But as the campaign picked up AAP faced serious internal differences in selection of candidates leading to splits in the party with allegations and counter allegations. On the other hand the Congress party was able to consolidate internally and was able to add some leaders from SAD, BJP and APP. The Congress Party was not only able to consolidate and present a united face it was also able to announce the name of its projected Chief Ministerial candidate before elections. Apart from other problems AAP could not decide on its Chief Minister candidate due to internal conflict and ultimately it lost the initial lead, creating winning space for the Congress Party.

Introduction

The 2017 election to the Punjab assembly after ten years of Akali Dal-BJP rule acquired special significance because previously no party or alliance had been able to win consecutively for two terms after reorganization of Punjab in 1966. At the same time this alliance had strong support from the ruling NDA government at the Center led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Due to poor performance of the ruling alliance to handle the agrarian crisis, slow down of economic growth and deterioration of governance, a powerful challenge was thrown by Indian National Congress and AAP in the state. This was a highly contested election due to the entry of AAP in the field with its vast mobilization of youth. This election was held with pending socio-economic crisis, wide spread drug abuse, suicides by farmers and agricultural laborers, massive youth unemployment, governance deficit and crippled state finances. While the ruling alliance remained in denial mode, other parties focused on these issues which they argued needed to be handled in the post-election period. This paper examines the factors and causes of outcomes of this election in the state. Attempt has been made to identify the role of poor governance and incapacity of the SAD-BJP government to take cognizance of the pending issues, formulate and implement relevant policies and link them to the outcome of the election. The

behavior of the contenting parties in organization of the election campaign, building of alliances and projection of effective leadership are also relevant to understand the results of these elections. The paper is organized into five sections, in addition to the introduction. Section one covers the outcome of elections. Poor governance is discussed in section two while section three deals with policy paralysis in the state. The fourth section analyses the way AAP lost the game to the Indian National Congress. The last section makes some concluding observations.

Outcome of the 2017 Assembly Election

Election results of Punjab Assembly elections held on 4th February 2017 and results declared on March 11, 2017 have surprised the major players. The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) combine experienced an unprecedented drubbing. The Congress Party emerged victorious beyond its own expectations. The third player, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), expecting a landslide victory, performed poorly finishing at a distant second place. In terms of seats, Congress won 77 out of the total 117 it contested. The AAP could manage only 20 seats on its own with two seats going to its ally, the Punjab Insaaf party. The SAD-BJP alliance could only manage 18 seats, down by 53 seats whereas the Congress gained 31 more seats compared to the 2012 election. The remaining loss of 22 seats of the SAD-BJP alliance has been AAP's corresponding gain in 2017. In terms of vote share, the Congress Party experienced a decline from 40.1 per cent in 2012 to 36.6 per cent in 2017 but still improved from its 34.6 per cent in the 2014 parliament elections to 36.6 per cent in the Assembly elections in 2017. The SAD-BJP alliance lost its vote share of 41.9 per cent in 2012 Assembly elections to 33.9 per cent in the parliament elections in 2014 and further to 30.6 per cent in the 2017 Assembly elections. The AAP, of course, did not exist during Assembly elections of 2012.

The AAP participated in the parliament elections of 2014 and got 23.6 per cent of the total polled votes which it has retained in the 2017 Assembly elections of Punjab with a vote share of 23.7 per cent. It was able to eat mainly into the SAD-BJP vote share which shrunk in both the major elections of 2014 and 2017. The SAD-BJP lost 8 per cent of its vote share between 2012 and 2014. Other smaller parties namely CPI, CPI (M), BSP and independents got 18.0 per cent of the polled votes in 2012 assembly elections but this declined to 7.0 per cent in 2014 and stood at only 7.2 per cent in the 2017 Assembly elections. It is evident that the AAP managed to win mainly the anti-incumbency SAD-BJP votes and also votes which have traditionally been against both the Congress and the SAD-BJP combine, generally votes of left parties and also votes of BSP. The Congress party recovered its vote loss between 2012 Assembly elections and the parliamentary election in 2014 (4.6 per cent point) in the 2017 Assembly elections (3.0 per cent point). Although the vote share of AAP (23.7 per cent) in the 2017 election is less than that of SAD-BJP (30.6 per cent) yet the seats it had won were 20 compared to SAD-BJP's 18 seats. This is largely because AAP has performed comparatively better in the *Malwa* region of the state. In the Malwa

region, it has done particularly well in a specific belt of Malwa, represented by Jagraon, Moga, Barnala and Mansa regions. As for the rest of the state, its performance has been very poor in the *Majha* region and only moderate in *Doaba* region. It could not win any seat in Majha region and only managed to win two seats in the Doaba region, compared with the 18 seats it won in the Malwa region, especially from the belt mentioned above. In spite of a lower vote share compared to the SAD-BJP, the AAP has emerged as the main opposition party in terms of number of seats in the state. The Congress Party has done well in all the three regions of Punjab. It won 22 out of 25 seats in Majha, 15 out of 23 seats in Doaba and 40 out of 69 seats contested in the Malwa region. It has won from the traditional Hindu majority seats in cities of Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Bathinda, Moga, Faridkot, Bathinda and Rajpura (Vasudeva, 2017). It has also done well in belts with sizeable Dalit votes in the rural areas of Jalandhar, Nawanshahr, and the Sikh dominated rural areas of the entire state. In this election the Congress has seen the return of Dalit and Hindu votes, in addition to the Sikh Jat (peasantry) votes. This paper examines the causes of decline of the SAD-BJP alliance after ten years of continuous rule on one hand and the failure of AAP which lost the early gains and popularity at the beginning of the election campaign, a campaign which in fact started almost one year in advance of the scheduled election.

Poor Governance and: Deterioration in Law and Order

The return of Congress to power in the state and decline of the SAD-BJP can be explained in terms of governance failure and policy paralysis. The SAD-BJP Government constituted the Governance Reforms Commission in the state in 2009 under the chairmanship of Dr. Pramod Kumar and was reconstituted in 2012 retaining him as chairman, which made a series of recommendations especially relating to time bound services to the citizens and making official records available online. Up to February 2017, the number of notified services were 351 under the Right to Service Act 2011 (Agarwal, 2017). In several cases, such as applications for succession certificate, dependence certificate, marriage palaces, ex-India leave, for ration cards, reimbursement of medical bills, marriage certificate, etc. the requirement of submission of an affidavit has been abolished and self-attestation of documents introduced. This list includes 38 services provided by the state government. But, governance in the state deteriorated because of collusion between the service providers, such as police, civil administration and transport authorities, with the politicians (Kumar, 2017). The SAD-BJP government made a notification in 2010 to change the jurisdiction of police stations and sub divisions within districts to synchronize with assembly constituencies and appointed Akali Dal functionaries as *Halqa* (constituency) in-charges. The Station House Officers (SHOs) and Sub Divisional Magistrates (SDMs) were placed under the halqa in-charges for day to day functioning, making the police and civil administration look partisan. The Akali MLAs were appointed as halqa in-charges where the party had won

elections and *defeated* Akali candidates or *potential* candidates were made halqa in-charges where the party lost in elections including in the constituencies where the MLA belonged to its ally, BJP. Many of the halqa in-charges were known to have acted as extra constitutional authorities. They were passing orders to the subordinate officials within their constituencies to act in a particular way in decision making to promote partisan or personal interests. Whenever the subordinate officials refused to oblige them they were transferred on the verbal recommendation of the halqa in-charges. This contributed to make functioning of administration far from free, fair and effective. The institution of halqa in-charge contributed to the deterioration of law and order in the state. The supporters of the ruling party could get away with the crimes and excesses against their opponents while the supporters of the opposition party or even neutral citizens faced excesses of the law.

Some of the prominent cases which symbolized this phenomenon can be mentioned from different parts of the state. First, a young 15 year old girl was abducted, and her parents injured in the process, during broad daylight due to the support of a prominent Akali Dal member from Faridkot. Although the young girl was recovered but the culprit was only arrested after a prolonged struggle led by a local committee of citizens. Secondly, a young daughter of an Assistant Sub Inspector (ASI) of police was harassed by an armed group of youth led by a known Akali youth in Amritsar. When the ASI, in uniform, tried to stop the delinquents he was fired at and injured. When their ammunition ran out, they went to the house of their leader to fetch another gun and shot dead the injured ASI in the presence of his crying daughter and in full view of the public. Thirdly, in another case, an Assistant Inspector General of Police was assaulted with his left leg fractured in Ludhiana. Fourthly, in Jalandhar city a hotelier was killed by the relative of an Akali Dal MLA. Finally, a liquor baron, Shiv Lal Doda, a known supporter of the SAD/BJP alliance was involved in a heinous killing of one of his own employee at his farm house. These were prominent cases which were flashed in the media but a large number of cases which occurred at localized village level or in streets of cities went unreported. The institution of halqa in-charge ruined the professionalism of police and made it partisan in its conduct against common citizens. Furthermore, a large number of arms licenses were issued to supporters of the Akali Dal, promoting gun culture in the state (Gill, 2013; Sharma, 2016). Some BJP leaders had expressed resentment against this institution. Mr. Balramji Dass Tandon, for instance, stressed the need for doing away of the Akali practice of appointing a halqa in-charge. He demanded that 'the police and other officials should be given a free hand, so that they can discharge their duty as per law of the land. Clear instructions should be given to the police and other officials, that in case of their involvement in any wrong doings; they should be dealt with strictly' (The Tribune, 2014). He was speaking after the poor performance of the SAD-BJP alliance in the 2014 parliamentary elections in Punjab, in spite of the Modi wave in the rest of the country.

Along with decline of professionalism in the police force, the SAD-BJP alliance also promoted VIP culture in the state. Gazetted officers, in both civil

and police administration, were allowed to use red beacons on their cars. Similarly all MLAs, members of the SGPC, Chairpersons of boards, Mayors and prominent leaders were allowed a red beacon on their cars along with police guards. Several thousand police personnel were utilized for the security of VIPs of various types. Policing for the general public became not only poor but partisan and corrupt. Some of so called VIPs were allegedly involved in the drugs trade, using their official cars with red beacons as cover.

The over-involvement of politicians of the ruling alliance in the civil administration made institutions of the Deputy Commissioner/Collector and Senior Superintendent of Police very weak and ineffective. The District Planning Boards became centers for promotion of ruling party politics. The same thing happened with elections of Urban Local Bodies, Panchayati Raj Institutions, and cooperative bodies. These elections were rigged by blocking nominations of opponents in connivance with officials and even booth capturing was organized at some places. There were instances of threats of false cases being registered against adamant opponents under the Prevention of Narcotics Act, to make them yield to political pressure. This paralyzed the dynamism of the ULBs, PRIs and cooperative institutions. In mid-September 2015, when the state faced a very serious crisis of procurement of PB 1509 variety of rice, prices of this variety fell to between Rs.900-1000 per quintal against the Minimum Support Price (later fixed) at Rs.1450 per quintal and previous year's price of Rs.3500 per quintal (Gill, 2015). The peasantry was up in arms. Road and rail networks were blocked and general political atmosphere was turning against the Akali Dal in the rural areas.

There were several cases of sacrilege at Gurdwaras of several villages, where pages of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* were torn or burnt out or whole of the holy book was stolen, leading to large scale protests by the Sikhs in the state. At village *Behbal Kalan* in the Faridkot district, two youths were falsely implicated and tortured. Later on, in an unprovoked firing at this village, two youths were killed by the police. Neither was any policeman punished, nor were any of the real culprits arrested. This resulted in the general perception that most of these acts of sacrileges were sponsored by the powers that be. Later on Akali Dal used the institution of Akal Takht to pardon Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh (head of Dera Sacha Sauda at Sirsa) who had earlier been involved in a conflict with the Sikh community in the state. This further reduced the credibility of SAD (Badal) in the eyes of a section of Sikhs in general and the Sikh peasantry in particular. A large part of these annoyed Sikhs in the state, moved in favor of the AAP.

A few months prior to the elections, there was firing at a prominent leader of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), brigadier (Rtd.) Jagdish Gagneja in Jalandhar, seriously injuring him on August 6, 2016 and who later on died on 21 September in a Ludhiana hospital. His killers remain untraced till now, raising doubts about the intentions of state police. This deadly attack alienated a section of the Hindu population from the ruling alliance, including a section of BJP supporters.

Policy Paralysis: Neglect of Social Development

There has been continuous neglect and apathy by state towards health and education in the state. This is reflected in the declining share of public expenditure in the state. This declined from 36 per cent for health and education in the early 1980s to around 20 per cent in the last few years of the second decade of twenty first century, especially during 2012-14. The outcome has been a collapse in the quality of rural schooling in government and government-aided schools. Recent surveys show that 49.3 per cent of the students in standard 1 to 8 classes are now enrolled in private unaided schools. These schools are costly and beyond access of the rural poor. Further, there now appears to be almost a complete social segregation of students in the villages. The students from the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and poor peasant families are enrolled in government schools while students from middle income and highly affluent farming families attend private unaided schools. Although educational outcomes are slightly better in private unaided schools than in government schools, the quality of education has become extremely poor in the rural areas (Pratham, 2015). The majority of the students in the rural areas drop out after primary level schooling and hardly 3-4 per cent reach a higher level. The fall in quality of government schools is largely due to the fact they remain understaffed, are poor in infrastructure and teachers are put on non-teaching duties causing less teaching days and contact hours with the students. There is also poor monitoring of government schools with a lot of political interference in postings, transfers and appointments.

The story is not much different in the rural health system. Rural hospitals, primary health centers, sub centers and dispensaries operate with inadequate staff, do not offer simple paramedical tests and lack basic medicines, making them defunct. This is forcing people to access health care either from quacks or the private sector. Out of pocket expenditure has risen enormously. The Additional Chief Secretary, Health, has stated that 'about 75 per cent of the spending on healthcare is by the people who fall sick – out of pocket expenditure on hospital expenses, medicines and diagnostics.... resulting in impoverishment' of people with moderate means in Punjab. According to Mahajan 'The people in general are not satisfied with the services provided by the government system....On the other hand, there is also widespread dissatisfaction with the private providers. The private sector is largely unregulated, and often abuses the asymmetry of information in health care' (Mahajan, 2017). The government has remained a silent spectator to the needs of the ailing population by neglecting its budgetary priorities and administrative responsibilities.

Apart from social sector neglect, Punjab has also been witnessing a fast degradation of its environment. Farmers have been openly burning paddy and wheat straws in spite of the official ban on them. There has been no check on untreated water being thrown in the rivers of Beas, Sutlej and Ghaggar, causing serious water pollution. There has been absence or very weak monitoring of pollution caused by industrial units, especially brick kilns, thermal plants,

cement plants and liquor manufacturing units. The state has failed to take any action on hazardous and biomedical waste. As Pannu has argued 'While mechanisms for the disposal of this waste exist, their monitoring is weak. The exact quantity of this waste is anybody's guess.....the unreported waste, thus, goes into the municipal solid waste' (Pannu, 2017). This is the case both with government hospitals as well as the private medical institutions. The apathy of the SAD-BJP government towards services of education, health and environment has been irritating people who began to think that the ruling alliance was least interested in people's welfare.

At a time when people of the state were facing serious and wide ranging problems, the government came to be afflicted with policy paralysis. There has been general attitude of lethargy towards centrally-sponsored schemes and programs. This is quite evident from Punjab's performance under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Act (MNREGA) and Rashtriya Swastha Bima Yojana (RSBY) schemes (Gill et.al 2013). At the same time, the government's attitude towards all-India policies has been apathetic. In many cases the leadership of SAD has been arguing that 'one-size fits all' policies at the national level are not acceptable to the state but it has been reluctant to formulate its own policies even when opportunities avail themselves. For example, the government of India formulated a National Water Policy in the year 2013, the government led by the SAD-BJP alliance rejected it stating that water is a state subject. The state government did not initiate the process of formulating its own water policy even though the state is suffering from an acute problem of pollution of surface and ground water resources, over-use of ground water resources, leading to a disturbance and fall in the water table. The latter has put a heavy financial burden on farmers as they have to deepen their borewells every alternative year, leading to even further depletion of ground water resources. The state government has not been able to formulate and initiate any effective program or projects to effectively deal with emerging water scarcity and poor quality of water.

The government of India, in which SAD-BJP are partners, started the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) from the kharif crop of 2016. This is a major initiative, designed to provide effective insurance cover with a minimum burden on the farmers. Under the scheme, premiums ranging from 2% to 5% were to be paid by the farmers and the rest was to be shared equally by the state and the Union government. The state government of Punjab rejected the PMFBY initiative on the grounds that it does not suit the state in terms of premium rates but at the same time did not decide on its own crop insurance policy. As a consequence, the majority of farmers in the state remain without crop insurance and would be deprived of proper compensation in case of crop loss, especially in view of the adverse impact climate change is expected to have on the state in the coming years.

Agriculture of the state has been facing general stagnation in production and productivity for traditional crops like wheat and paddy. A large majority of small and marginal farmers and some sections of lower middle farmers are facing a crisis of viability and several thousand farmers and agricultural laborers

have already committed suicides (Singh et. al, 2016). The expert committees and individual experts have put forward a number of recommendation to bring agriculture out of crisis. This compelled the SAD-BJP government to appoint the Kalkat Committee in 2012 to prepare an agricultural policy for the state. The committee submitted its report in March 2013 but the political leadership had no time to examine and accept this report for four years.

So the state had no health policy, no education policy, no environment policy, no water policy or crop insurance policy. It seems that the leadership had written off the idea of serious policy making. The Chief Minister was always busy, meeting the people and distributing finances and funds in local meetings at village level, in events called *Sangat Darshans*. Adhocism had plagued the state government in decision making, allowing the problems to become more compounded and complex with every passing day. Adhocism destroyed the process of translating government decisions into serious actions. The outcome has been that the ranking of the state at national level, both in terms of real per capita income and Human Development Index (HDI), has fallen since 1991-92. This alienated the educated and enlightened sections of the population. A very perceptive observer of the state described the situation in the following way: 'Punjab: A Frozen Tear' (Gill, 2015) awaiting to be rejuvenated. People have elected a new Congress government with a lot of hope for effective governance and meaningful policy making and its effective implementation.

AAP Lost the Game to Congress

In the middle of 2016, when parties began to pull up their socks in preparation for the elections in February 2017, it was clear that the people of the state, both in rural and urban areas, were thoroughly alienated from the ruling SAD-BJP alliance. People talked about poor governance, policy paralysis and apathy of the government towards problems of youth unemployment, drug menace, agrarian crisis and closure of industrial and business enterprises. The government always appeared in a denial mode to the existence these problems and to the slowdown of the economy and losing of Punjab's ranking at an all-India level. People also talked of amassing of wealth and resources of the state by a few ruling families through government patronage to the real estate mafia, sand mafia, liquor mafia, drug mafia and transport mafia. Media reports also suggested that change of government was likely to happen after the elections. At that time, AAP was pulling large crowds in its rallies and road shows. It was still a united force under the convenorship of Sucha Singh Chhotepur, and a large number of ticket aspirants were joining it. It was attracting youth both from the left parties as well as the rightist parties. It appeared that an 'AAP wave' was blowing in the state. The Congress Party was also active under the leadership of Captain Amarinder Singh but its cadre and party were not very enthused. Although the Congress had engaged Prashant Kishor, an expert in management of elections, to prepare a roadmap and strategy for the forthcoming elections, it lacked the necessary dynamism. However, the early advantage and wave of AAP began to decline with passing of time. The party had predicted winning

100 out of the 117 seats in the state. Several names were circulating within the AAP unit of Punjab for position of the Chief Minister. The team of AAP party workers from Delhi were meeting experts and public figures offering them positions, with the expectation of forming a government in the state.

As the party decided to announce the first badge of candidates in August 2016, a conflict over names of candidates on the list developed between the state convener Sucha Singh Chhotepur and the central leadership of Delhi, mainly Arvind Kejriwal. Ultimately the list was declared without the signature of the state convener. This conflict led to the removal of Chhotepur as convener of AAP in the last week of August 2016. In this ongoing conflict within AAP, 12 district conveners out of a total of 22 conveners, supported Chhotepur. But the Delhi leadership decided to remove him, by framing dubious charges of collecting money from people and aspiring candidates without maintaining proper accounts. He was replaced by Gurpreet Singh Waraich (Ghuggi), a relatively new entrant to the party. Sucha Singh Chhotepur announced, in consultation with his supporters, formation of the Aapna Punjab Party (APP) at the beginning of October 2016 and decided to contest all 117 seats in alliance with likeminded parties. This split disillusioned some active leaders and cadres from the AAP. Some went with APP, some became inactive and some of them even joined Congress Party. Chhotepur and his supporters alleged that AAP leadership based in Delhi was not allowing leaders from Punjab to exercise their autonomy on selection of candidates for the forthcoming assembly elections. A charge also began to circulate that tickets were being sold to influential persons and but not based on the recommendation of the party cadre from the respective constituency. A narrative began to be develop among dissidents within AAP, SAD-BJP and Congress Party that the voice of Punjab leaders within AAP was being muzzled by the centralized Delhi leadership. It was also argued that the Delhi leadership will not be able to protect Punjab's river waters in the ongoing dispute with Haryana over the construction of Sutlej Yamuna Link Canal. This put the AAP leadership of Delhi on the defensive and it was forced to declare that a Punjab leader will be made Chief Minister in the wake of AAP winning a majority in elections, rather than Arvind Kejriwal. But the AAP could not decide on the name of its Chief Ministerial candidate even up till the day of polling. This created suspicion in the mind of many people that in the eventuality of AAP getting a majority in the elections, Arvind Kejriwal, a Hissar born Delhi Chief Minister will be made the Punjab Chief Minister.

After the AAP started to face early dissidence in ticket allocations and trading corruption charges, the Congress Party began to consolidate under Captain Amarinder Singh. The Party accepted Captain's formula of one ticket for one family of Congress leaders. This firmly established his leadership within the party and outside as the face of Congress and as an acceptable Chief Minister of the state. Earlier, in March 2016, his resignation from membership of Lok Sabha in the wake of Supreme Court's decision to hold Punjab's Termination of Agreement Act 2004 as null and void, had enhanced his status as a leader of substance who could assert his position against the central leadership of the Congress Party in Delhi. Besides, he began to address a large number of rallies

and meetings in all parts of Punjab, both in rural and urban areas. He shed his image of a late riser and an inaccessible leader but now had transformed himself to be a changed, active, accessible and popular leader in the state. The split in AAP boosted his image with some leaders from this party as well as from SAD starting to join the Congress. Many people began to look at him more as a regional leader of Punjab rather than a representative of Congress controlled by Delhi-based central leadership. He began to be perceived as a trusted leader who could effectively lead the state for its better future. AAP began to be viewed as a party of inexperienced leaders lacking a popular face in the state. The AAP wave began to wane and scales started tilting in favor of the Congress. The final blow to the AAP was given by a combination of factors during the last phase of canvassing. AAP leaders talked of putting SAD leaders in jail for drug menace, illicit sand and liquor trade compared with Captain Amarinder Singh who pleaded moderation and non-vendetta politics to put the state back on the right tracks. A few days before the election the national convener of the AAP, Arvind Kejriwal stayed a night in the farm house of an ex-terrorist, Mr. Gurinder Singh of *Ghal Kalan* village near Moga. As news of this quickly spread in the media, there was a sudden impact on minds of a section of voters amongst the major religious communities of Sikhs and Hindus. The people who had suffered during the political violence of the 1980s and early 1990s did not want people in power who had links with militancy. A section of moderate Sikhs and many Hindu voters shifted away from AAP. Since they were already alienated with the SAD-BJP alliance, they moved towards the Congress party. A bomb blast at *Maur Mandi* in Bathinda district two days before elections were due, further consolidated Hindu voter support towards the Congress. The Congress Party was successful in attracting voters from all sections in the state. In spite of SAD's attempts to resurrect the *panthic* agenda and revive the 1984 issues associated with Operation Blue Star and massacre of Sikhs in Delhi, laying all the blame at the door of Congress, did not distract moderate Sikh votes from voting for the Congress party led by Captain Amarinder Singh. The Congress party, under Captain Amarinder Singh was able to control factionalism and dissidence in the party and convince the voter that it was a better party to rule the state.

Some Conclusions

The SAD-BJP government had ruled Punjab for a whole decade, but it alienated large sections of the middle class, urban population and a section of rural population, especially the farmers. These sections articulated anti-incumbency against the ruling alliance. Mismanagement of the economy, agrarian crisis, closure of industrial units, poor law and order situation, spread of drug abuse especially in the rural areas and massive unemployment among the youth were the visible factors. It was already becoming evident nearly one year ahead of the elections that there will be a change of government in Punjab.

In this scenario, AAP looked to be forging ahead of Congress till May and June 2016. People were talking about the 'AAP wave' in the state. The AAP

also started an early election campaign by organizing rallies in various parts of the state. They had a large following among the youth and a large number of young volunteers were clearly visible during the rallies and for distributing their election literature in cities and villages. This early lead was lost by the AAP leadership through engaging themselves in a leadership struggle. This resulted in the expulsion of the Punjab convener of the party who had support of the majority of district conveners. This was the time when election campaign had begun to pick up and first batch of candidates' names were announced by the party. Thus the leadership struggle created a virtual split in the party. Some of the disaffected leaders and cadres joined a new outfit - Aapna Punjab Party. Some of them became disillusioned and became inactive while another section joined the Congress Party. The distribution of tickets for assembly elections became an issue which the AAP could not handle skillfully. In fact the voice of the local leaders was sidelined by the leadership based in Delhi. No local leader was projected as potential Chief Minister of the party. This is how the positive wave in favor of AAP began to wane. The final blow came during the last phase of elections when the party leadership inadvertently or by design displayed its bias in favor of radical sections of the Sikhs. It is a story of the AAP losing a battle which appeared almost won in the early phase of its campaigning in Punjab.

The Congress Party, which was trailing behind in popular support in the early phase consolidated its position. The first step was to appoint Captain Amarinder Singh as President of the Punjab Pradesh Congress committee. He united the party under his command in consultation with the central leadership. He enabled leaders and cadres from AAP, SAD and BJP to join the party. He was able to win over leaders and voters from different sections of the population who were annoyed with the ruling alliance. In the process he managed to build a united front of rural Sikhs, urban Hindus and Dalits under the Congress Party. Ultimately, the mistakes of AAP's leadership swung the pendulum of popular votes in Captain's favor. People visualized him as the best hope for leading Punjab out of multifaceted crises. It is important to mention that for an effective management of party affairs there is a critical need for a mature and effective leadership. The Congress had that leadership whereas the AAP displayed a weakness in it.

At the same time it is important to note that Punjab has a long tradition of opposing centralization processes in the country. As a consequence, people of Punjab want a Chief Minister who can assert his autonomy as a distinct Punjabi. At the same time, people like a leader who represents the social and cultural ethos of Punjab. Along with a Sikh majority population (57.69 per cent) in the state, Hindus constitute another major minority community (38.49 per cent). A leader's personality in the state must be able to inspire confidence among both the major communities. The AAP failed to present such a face after the expulsion of Sucha Singh Chhotepur while the Congress Party was able to present a formidable face in Captain Amarinder Singh. This ultimately paid off in the form of better management of the campaign and tickets allocation and ultimately helped in gaining confidence among the different sections of

population. One of the important lessons which one can draw from the 2017 assembly election is that winning election can put you in power but its sustainability depends on performance in governance and policy initiatives, which tackle pressing economic and social challenges facing the state. On this account, the SAD-BJP lost the game in the state.

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