

The 2007 Punjab Election: Exploring the Verdict

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There has been a discernible disconnect between the political economy and the political processes in the recent Punjab, with the former hardly influencing the latter in terms of public policies. Substantive economic issues like the structural crisis in the agrarian sector hardly find space in the political discourse of the state. It is reminiscent of the earlier failure of the political class in negotiating the demand for autonomy resulting in the emergence of militancy. The closed nature of the state politics in terms of caste/community/gender hardly helps. The electoral outcome in the 2007 assembly elections should not be construed as a positive vote in favour of the SAD-BJP alliance but rather an indictment of non-performance compounded by the internal bickering within the Congress Party. In the absence of credible alternatives, the electorate in Punjab has repeatedly been forced to go for what they possibly begin to perceive as a lesser evil with the passage of time.

The 2007 assembly elections in Punjab witnessed one of the most closely fought electoral battles between the two traditional rivals namely the Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD). The intensity was reflected in the nature of electoral participation among 1.69 crore eligible voters, which at 76 per cent turn out was exceptionally high even by previous Punjab standard.¹ The volatility of the electoral process in Punjab can be attributed to the interplay of several determinants of its electoral politics as the state in social terms has been a mosaic of religious, ethnic, linguistic, and caste groups (Kumar, 2004b: 5441). However, if the electorates came in record number on the polling date despite inclement weather and incessant rain, it was also due to a sense of desperation among the people who were looking for political solutions to a crisis situation at a time when one form of technological solution that went by the name of green revolution has long outlived its utility.²

In what has now become a familiar feature of electoral campaigns in the state, people were subjected to no holds barred media war and public utterances verging on personal slandering that emanated primarily due to personal animosity between Amrinder Singh and Prakash Singh Badal, the two chief ministerial candidates. The campaign also witnessed star-filled road shows and door-to-door campaigning in one of the costliest election ever to take place in Punjab.³ A notable feature of the campaign in this 13th assembly election was the cross-mobilization by the Congress and the SAD. Instead of concentrating on their traditional support bases like in the past, the Akalis made concerted effort to enlist the support of the *dalits* and also the urban based caste Hindus especially *Khatri*s and *Arora*s whereas the Congress went all out to garner

greater support among the Jat Sikh peasantry, which traditionally has been identified with the Akali Dal.

The Electoral Verdict

Like the high percentage of voter turnout, the electoral outcome that went against the ruling Congress was also on predicted line. Post-1966 reorganized Punjab has always voted for a change and this time it was the turn of the Shiromani Akali Dal-Bhartiya Janata Party (SAD-BJP) alliance to come back to power. As for the precise number of seats, the coalition won 68 seats in the 117 member assembly with the SAD winning only 49 seats compared to 41 seats won in the 2002 elections and the BJP gaining an all time high 19 seats compared to a mere 3 seats in 2002. The SAD contested in 94 seats whereas the BJP contested in 23 seats. Significantly in a reversal of 2002 when the poor performance of the BJP spoiled the chance of a divided SAD to retain power, this time the unprecedented success paved the way for the SAD-BJP coalition government. In 1997 the SAD had also formed the coalition government with the BJP but unlike in 2007, it had a majority of its own in the assembly. In a major departure from the past, the SAD in an attempt to become a 'catch all party', invaded into the traditional Congress support base by giving tickets to 7 Hindu candidates, four among them actually winning. Earlier in 2005, it had also included the dalits in its reconstituted political affair committee, the highest body of the party. Besides reflecting the decline of identity politics in the state, it also shows the party's attempt to bring about a change in its image of being primarily a Jat Sikh party.

The Congress this time contested alone, unlike in the last elections when it had an alliance with CPI and CPM. Bahujan Samaj Morcha gave it unconditional support though it did not count much in terms of getting votes. Fighting anti-incumbency, the Congress put up a decent fight by winning 44 seats as compared to 62 in the 2002 poll. The other parties in contention like CPI, CPM and the Lok Bhalai Party who had entered into electoral alliance; or Bahujan Samaj Party, Bharatiya Janshakti Party who had fought alone; could not open their accounts nor could they play this time the role of spoilers. It held true for the splinter Akali Dals who came together on a common platform in the name of panthic issues. The SAD (Amritsar) led by Simranjit Singh Mann, SAD (1920) led by Ravi Inder Singh, SAD (Longowal) led by Prem Singh Chandumajra and Inder Singh Zira, Majha Akali Dal led by Raghbir Singh, Dal Khalsa and Shiromani Khalsa Panchayats all come together on the eve of the elections with the aim of having a three cornered fight against the Congress and the SAD-BJP alliance. As in most of the other states of India, the emergence of electoral bipolarity was evident in this election as the winning and the closest losing candidates in all but two seats were either from the Congress or from the SAD-BJP alliance. Only from the Joga (Mansa) and Dhaliwal (Gurdaspur) constituencies, the independents came second. The number of winning independent candidates came down from 9 to 5 this time. Table 1 provides details of the election outcome.

Table 1: The 2007 Punjab Assembly Elections at a Glance

	1997		2002		2007	
Party	Contested/won	Vote %	Contested/won	Vote %	Contested/won	Vote %
INC	105/14	26.59	105/62	35.81	116/44	40.9
SAD	92/41	37.64	92/41	31.08	93/49	37.09
IND	92/75	10.87		11.27	43/5	6.82
BJP	22/18	8.33	23/3	5.67	23/19	8.28
CPI	15/2	2.98	11/2	2.15	25/0	0.76
CPM	25/0	1.79	13/0	0.36	14/0	0.28
SAD (M)	30/1	3.10	84/0	4.65	37/0	0.52
	117		117		117	

Source: Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi, Data Unit

Mapping Regions within the Region

What was exceptional about these elections was the very different kind of electoral verdicts in the three geographical regions of Punjab namely *Malwa*, *Doaba* and *Majha*. In the last two assembly elections, the winning party had taken lead in all the three regions (Kumar, 2002:1385). This time the Congress registered a lead over the SAD-BJP alliance in Malwa, traditionally considered the strong hold of the Akalis. It won 37 out of 65 seats from the Malwa region. In the other two regions, however, where Congress has had impressive victories in the last assembly elections, this time it was the SAD-BJP combine that repeated its 1997 election victories winning 20 out of 25 seats in the Doaba region and 23 out of 27 seats in the Majha region. It was the first time in post-1966 Punjab that a party that won the elections was unable to win the majority of the seats in the Malwa region.

What were the possible factors that impacted upon the electoral verdicts at the regional levels? The success of the Congress in Malwa was largely attributed to the directive of the leader of a religious sect called *Dera Sacha Sauda* to its followers to vote for Congress.⁴ However, in all fairness to the Congress, it also received success due to its performance in this cotton belt, notable among them was the smooth procurement of food grains by the government and the successful introduction of BT cotton. The leadership factor also played a role as Amrinder Singh comes from the region and was given relatively free hand to pick the candidates; many of them were new faces.

Among the factors that went against the Congress in the north-west bordering Majha region of Punjab were: lack of development in the border areas, illegal colonization of the urban peripheries, drug addiction among the youth who are mostly unemployed or unemployable due to poor education system, and rebel factors. The SAD-BJP alliance received the support of the farmers in the border region of Gurdaspur, Amritsar, and Ferozepur districts. The farmers, in this once militancy infested region, have been asking for easy access to their land for cultivation that falls beyond the fencing besides the resumption of monetary compensation that was stopped by the Congress

government. The SAD-BJP alliance not only promised monetary compensation to the aggrieved farmers but also to give proprietary rights to farmers who have been tilling the government land at subsidized cost. The alliance also received the support of a sizable chunk of the votes of the Rai Sikh community, mostly borderland farmers on the promise of trying to get them the Scheduled Caste status. The candidature of Navjot Singh Sidhu from Lok Sabha seat of Amritsar on a BJP ticket enabled the combine to garner its complementary support bases of both Sikh and Hindu votes in the region.

From the Doaba region, the Congress could win only 3 out of the 26 seats contested whereas the SAD-BJP won 20 out of 25 seats contested. In Jalandhar district, with its large dalit population in the rural belt, the combine won 9 out of the 10 seats in a reversal of the outcome of the 2002 election. In recent elections especially in 1997, the BSP had succeeded in weaning away the dalit votes at cost to the Congress. This time, however, despite the poor performance of the BSP, the Congress fared even badly. Its prominent dalit leaders like Shamsher Singh Dullo, Jagjit Singh, Mohinder Singh Kaypee and Gurkanwal Kaur lost the elections. The SAD benefited from its recent attempt to draft support among the dalit Sikhs. The SAD also mobilized the other backward castes through its Kirti Samaj Wing. The sizable migrant farm labourers, though mostly dalits, voted in favour of Akalis under the influence of their Jat Sikh landlords in constituencies like Ludhiana (rural). The BJP, meanwhile, gained victories in the Hindu dominated urban constituencies at the cost of the Congress.

Explaining the Verdict

Let us now explore the big picture. What went against the Congress besides the all-important anti-incumbency factor?⁵ Among the factors that explain the overall Congress loss, the most decisive was the distinctive shift in the votes of the urban, mostly upper caste Hindus, which led to unprecedented success of the BJP in the urban and semi urban constituencies. The alienation was attributed to the pro-Jat Sikh image of Amrinder Singh Government and also his attempt to dabble in Gurudwara politics, something which the Congress never did so openly in the past. With the Congress taking a lead over the Akalis in celebrating religious and cultural festivals primarily related to the Sikh community, this only acted to strengthen the perception. Third in importance was the lackluster performance of the government led by a Chief Minister who remained a remote figure even for his own party men, always surrounded by his group of loyalists that included highly controversial bureaucrats. After coming to power on an anti-corruption and good governance platform, all that the government did was to launch an offensive against the Badals, completely forgetting about governance. The ministry was also stymied by the internal bickering between groups led by Amrinder Singh and Rajinder Kaur Bhattal. It was only after the debacle in the last Lok Sabha elections that there was some serious attempt to bring forth private investment induced development on the agenda. As a response, special economic zones were proposed, most significantly in greater Mohali on the pattern of Chandigarh. The move,

however, backfired as the government was accused of entering into shady business deals with the big business houses to the detriment of the farmers whose lands were appropriated for the purpose without adequate compensation, especially at a time when real estate prices skyrocketed. On another count the government failed to live up to its 'pro-common man' image. This was clearly evident in the form of high-handed behaviour of the police against the agitating unemployed teachers, students, doctors and farmers. In the media campaign, the SAD-BJP effectively used photographs showing police excesses even against women protesters. Refusal of the government to take action against the erring officials aroused popular anger. Fourth, failure of the Congress in adding to the power generation capacity during the last five years made it unpopular among the farmers critically dependent over mechanized irrigation. The non-completion of projects like the Ranjit Sagar Dam was highlighted. The Akalis, on the other hand, underlining their pro-farmer image proposed to set up 600 Mega Watts thermal plant at Goindwal Sahib and the Shahpur Kandi Project. Fifth, the recent increase in the prices of essential commodities also hit the Congress badly, as being the party ruling both at the center and the state, it could not escape responsibility. Sixth, wrong decisions regarding the distribution of tickets also cost the Congress as many sitting ministers and MLAs lost their elections.⁶ The Congress, after initially making promises to drop the non-performing sitting MLAs, finally gave tickets to only 32 new faces. This was primarily due to the fear of dissident activities within the party that had cost it heavily in 2004. However, the internal bickering continued as this time it was the rivalry between Sahamsher Singh Dullo, belonging to the late Beant Singh group and Amrinder Singh that played havoc despite the concerted effort by top party leadership, including Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh, to retain power in this crucial borderland state. Jagmeet Singh Brar, lately joined by Bir Davinder Singh, both CWC members, was also another long-standing crusader against the leadership of Amrinder Singh. Ambika Soni, in charge of the state party and also acting as representative of the party's high command was unable to bring together the feuding factions.

Why, then was the Congress still able to put up a credible performance? Besides the factors mentioned above, the Congress benefited from the effective implementation of an ambitious free health insurance scheme for the poor farmers under the Sanjeevini scheme that benefited 4.70 lakh BPL families. Medical treatment worth rupees 2 lakh was made available to them in about 300 hospitals of the state. The recruitment of 1200 schoolteachers without any charge of corruption or favouritism, abolition of Octoroi also helped the Congress as the Akalis, in contrast, when in power had failed on both counts. The three-phase extensive *vikas yatras* undertaken by Amrinder Singh at the fag end of his reign that was joined sporadically by senior leaders like Dullo, Bhattal and Lal Singh also helped. The Congress also tried to take credit for giving India the first Sikh Prime Minister. The non-performance of the earlier SAD-BJP government (1997-2002) was also a factor that must have played in the minds of the voters. In a significant move, reminiscent of the ongoing federalization of the party system in India, the state unit of Congress, without

any approval of the high command, had got the assembly to pass unanimously the Termination of Water Agreement Act, 2004 on July 11, 2004. As a result, Punjab annulled the river water sharing agreement signed by it with the states of Haryana and Rajasthan in 1981. The Congress underlined the fact that the Akalis, despite projecting themselves as strong advocates of regional politico-economic interests could not even contemplate such a move despite being in power for full five years (Jodhka, 2005:224). The creation of new districts like Mohali and Fatehgarh Sahib in the name of greater development, administrative efficiency and decentralization of power also helped the Congress as evidenced in its wins in closely contested fights in Kharar (Mohali) and Amloh (Fatehgarh Sahib). Finally, the state in any case has never witnessed a massive swing in favour of a particular party like in Tamil Nadu in 'normal' elections like this (1985 and 1992 elections that took place under the shadow of militancy can be dubbed as 'abnormal' ones).

What were the factors that went in favour of the Akalis? The most decisive one was their newfound unity under the leadership of Prakash Singh Badal that showed in fairly early distribution of tickets without much protest. It gave the Akalis a head start in the campaign. With the demise of Gurcharan Singh Tohra and Surjit Singh Barnala no longer playing an active role, Badal senior, now the chief minister for the record fourth time, has for quite some time been the undisputed leader of the Akalis though not yet in the same league as Baba Kharak Singh, Master Tara Singh or Gyani Kartar Singh, the mass leaders of yore. During the campaign, he has had the support of senior Akali leaders like Capt Kanwaljit Singh and Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa.

The projection of Sukhbir Singh Badal, now the working president of SAD, as heir apparent during the campaign did not receive flak from the senior Akali leaders primarily due to his organizational hold over the party. Badal junior was also credited by the workers for showing courage to take on the Amrinder Singh government, raising corruption charges and leading an aggressive campaign against the government at a time when the Akalis were on the defensive. Then, in a deft move to placate senior leaders, their sons, popularly known as *kakas*, were preferred when distributing the party tickets.⁷ By holding the promise of continuity and change, Badal junior represents the emergent post-Bluestar generation of Akali leaders for whom, instead of having endless dharma yudh morchas in pursuit of an elusive panthic agenda and indulgence in gurdwara based politics, the deliverance of an economic push to the beleaguered state is far more important. Urban-based, well educated and widely exposed, this new generation of Akali leaders, closely related through kinship ties, are trying to come out of the traditional agro-centric approach to think differently and are viewed by the Akali workers as agents of change.

Politics of Populism: Reading the Election Manifestos

There was no change, however, in one aspect. Both the Congress and the Akalis continued to compete against each other in holding out the populist promises, without revealing the programmatic efforts to be taken in the event they came to

power. The Akalis, who had won the elections in 1997 on the promise of free power and water scheme for the farmers, this time, took a head start by promising public distribution of 4 rupees flour and 20 rupees pulses for the people below the poverty line if voted back to power (the party was derisively dubbed by its critics as Shiromani Atta Dal). In the wake of rising prices, the promise did have mass appeal, a fact grudgingly recognized by the Congress who also promised to do the same. Among other impressive promises made by the SAD-BJP coalition in their manifesto (for the first time having an English version too) were: filling all the government vacancies within 6 months of coming to power, a health insurance up to 2 lakh rupees for the farmers and landless labourers, free power to the dalits to be doubled from the present 200 units to 400 units, rupees 15000 for Shagun for the poor belonging to all the communities, old age pension and pension for the disabled, widows, dependent children ranging from rupees 250 to 400, 'make your own policy' for trade and industry, VAT to be streamlined, rupees 5 crore to be spent on 100 block level Adarsh schools that would be setup to educate 1.3 lakh children within 3 years, 10 medical colleges along with 500 bed hospitals within 3 years, training institutes for self-employment, five flying and cabin crew training institutes, joint ventures with foreign universities to provide world class education, free education for girls up to university level, getting rid of land scams and farmers getting the right price, a separate ministry for NRIs with representative offices in Europe, UK, Canada and USA to protect their property and business interests in Punjab, single window clearance for the NRI investments, international airport at Ludhiana and an airport in Jalandhar, new urban development policies to regulate the haphazard growth besides giving the colonizers and the builders freedom to plan their projects, urban development with a human face; additional 5170 MW of power for Punjab by measures like reviving the Goindwal power plant and the Bathinda refinery project to add 1000 MW, one time debt settlement scheme and staggered debt transfer plan for the indebted farmers, grant of cooperative education loans up to rupees ten lakh at a nominal interest to the children of the marginal, farmland to be acquired only with the consent of the affected farmers who were also to be given 30 per cent displacement allowances as settled by the local Sarpanch, MLA and the MP, package to the farmers for the second push to the green revolution, enhancing the power generation to ensure 24 hour free supply to farmers and to weaker sections within 3 years, the setting up of youth development and employment generation boards (SAD Election Manifesto; *Punjab Legislative Assembly 2007-2012: Committed to Service and A Better Tomorrow*, Chandigarh, 29-56).

It was no surprise that the manifesto of the Congress also read on similar populist lines: rice and flour at 4 rupees and pulses for 20 rupees for poorest of poor, free power supply to the farming sector, tube well connections to small and marginal farmers within 12 months, taking landowners as partners on board any major project, continuation of MSP schemes, reforming the cooperative sector, reducing the interest on farm loan to 5 per cent, streamline the private money lenders called arhitiyas, creating three new special economic zones, one each in three regions, abolition of sales tax by 2010, reworking the value

addition tax, reduction in the turnover tax on trade to 0.25 per cent, equal distribution of water to all parts of the state (unlike SAD, it however did not mention the intent to scrap section 5 of the termination of Water Agreement Act, 2004 that stipulated that Haryana and Rajasthan would continue to receive water as per their respective shares). Among other promises were to provide relief to the manufacturing sector from stamp duty and electricity duty and the waiver of the entertainment tax. It also promised to make Punjab an electricity surplus state by 2012, implementation of the recommendation of 5th Pay Commission, greater thrust on development of IT and BT based industries and imposition of a lump sum value added tax on brick kiln owners (*The Tribune*, January 29).

Paradigmatic Shift in the Electoral Agenda

A reading of the election manifestos and the public utterances once again confirmed the shift in the electoral agenda of Punjab that has witnessed three distinct phases, since its reorganization in 1966. The first years of post-partition two-community state were dominated by the panthic agenda, expressed first in the form of the demand for communal electorate followed by the Punjabi Suba movement and then in the form of Anandpur Sahib resolutions that 'inaugurated the center-state conflict in the late 1970's, and which gave an initial boost to militancy' (Chandhoke and Priyadarshi, 2006:811). Cessation of militancy in the early 1990's witnessed the revival of the formal democratic processes after a long period of President's Rule. The return to 'normal politics' was marked by the decline of identity politics. With the people yearning for peace, the agenda of the political parties, struggling to recapture their relevance in the political domain, underlined the need to achieve peace and Hindu-Sikh unity. The Akalis since then have moved from the politics of confrontation towards center to a party that 'believed in the sanctity of the Indian constitution and the parliamentary system of democracy' (Jodhka, 2005: 224).⁸ In the historic Moga declaration in February 1996, the SAD firmly committed itself to a more secular politics based on '*Punjab, Punjabi and Punjabiat*' (Kumar, 2004a: 1519). Accused of being regional, sectarian, and at times even communal by its detractors, the party, founded on December 14, 1920, now takes pain to underline its adherence to Guru Nanak Dev's principles of '*sarbat da bhala*' [welfare of all] and '*manas ki jaat sabhey ek hai pehchan bo*' [universality and equality of mankind] (Pandher, 2007:114). As mentioned above, what was significant about this election was the attempt on the part of SAD to become more inclusive by putting up the Hindus and dalits as the party candidates but also drafting them at the party's organizational level (Singh, 2007: 466).

In a significant shift to the electoral politics in the state, visible since the 1997 assembly elections, both the SAD and the Congress have been asking for votes in the name of development. The decline of identity politics was visible in the findings of the national election studies post-poll survey conducted by the center for the study of developing societies (CSDS) in 2002 that revealed the shift in the electorate preferences as an overwhelming 83.9 per cent of the

respondents had voted either on the basis of the candidate (33.9 per cent) or the on the basis of the party (50.1 per cent). Factors of caste and community had influenced only 6.9 per cent of them in deciding about their electoral preferences. (Kumar, 2002: 1387-88). The CSDS exit poll for the 2007 elections further substantiated the shift in electoral behaviour as 85.9 per cent respondents considered the candidate (33.6 per cent) and the party (52.2 per cent) as the most important factors while deciding for whom to vote, as opposed to an insignificant 3.9 per cent who considered caste and community as most important - see Table 2). As for suitability for the Chief Minister's office, there appeared to be no strong preference as shown by Table 3. If one has a cursory look at the issues around whom the campaigns swayed the voters, their main concerns become obvious, some of which were: economic growth and development, inflation and corruption, incidence of suicide among farmers, improvement in infrastructure including water and power supply, strengthening of education and health care systems.

Table 2: CSDS-CNN-IBN Punjab Assembly Exit Poll, 2007

While deciding for whom to vote, what was the most important consideration for you?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Candidate	1660	33.6	33.6	33.6
	Party	2578	52.2	52.2	85.9
	Caste Community	192	3.9	3.9	89.8
	Something else	341	6.9	6.9	96.7
	No option	164	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	4935	100.0	100.0	

Source: CSDS-CNN Punjab Exit Poll, CSDS Data Unit

Table 3: CSDS-CNN-IBN Punjab Assembly Exit Poll, 2007

Who would you prefer as the next Chief Minister of Punjab?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	01: Capt. Amrinder Singh	1930	39.1	39.1	39.1
	02: Parkash Singh Badal	1931	39.1	39.1	78.2
	03: Rajinder Kaur Bhattal	72	1.5	1.5	79.7
	04: H. S. Brar	8	2	2	79.9
	05: Sukhbir Singh Badal	88	1.8	1.8	81.6
	06: Simranjit Singh Mann	90	1.8	1.8	83.5
	07: Navjot Singh Sidhu	55	1.1	1.1	84.6
	08: Samsher Singh	32	.6	.6	85.2

Dullo				
09: Avinash Rai Khanna	14	.3	.3	85.5
10: Avtar Singh Karimpuri	38	.8	.8	86.3
97: Others	479	9.7	9.7	96.0
99: Not answered	198	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total	4935	100.0	100.0	

Source: CSDS-CNN Punjab Exit Poll, CSDS Data Unit

Closed Polity: Caste and Gender

In Punjab the dalits constitute 31 per cent of the population, the highest in the country. Beyond filling up 29 reserved seats, the dalits figure nowhere in the politics of the state irrespective of governments formed. After making an impressive start with 9 seats in the 1992 elections, the BSP has managed only one seat, that too way back in the 1997 elections. In this election only 2 out of the 117 candidates of the BSP could save their security deposits while the rest could not get even one-sixth of the total votes polled. State president of the BSP Avtar Singh Karimpuri was one among them. The failure of the BSP to emerge as the credible third force in the state can be attributed to the factors such as internal divide within the community along the lines of religion and caste, neglect by the top leadership (read Mayawati) that remains focused on UP, factionalism, and refusal to enter into strategic alliances. Thus Punjab is comparable to other states like Madhya Pradesh, Orissa or Haryana where despite having numbers, the depressed classes have failed to register their claims over the politics and economy of their respective states.

Politics of Punjab also remain lop-sided in terms of gender representation. In terms of numbers, women legislators have never reached into two digits. The 2007 election was no exception as merely 54 women candidates (the Congress had given tickets to 10 women) were in the fray and of whom only 7 could win. The most important winners being Laxmi Kant Chawla and Dr Upinderjit Kaur, both now cabinet ministers, from the Amritsar central and Sultanpur Lodhi constituencies respectively and Rajinder Kaur Bhattal, now CLP leader, from Lehra Gaga. A notable win was that of Rajia Sultan, serving MLA of the Congress over the SAD candidate Abdul Gaffar in Maler Kotla, the only Muslim dominated constituency of the state.

In caste terms, electoral politics in post-green revolution Punjab has for long been dominated by the Jat Sikhs constituting the 'rich farmers' who come across as a dominant caste in the sense of the term as used by Srinivas. Being 20 per cent of the population they are numerically strong, own the 60 per cent of land and are a middle peasant caste having a presence in all the three regions of the state like the *Kammas* and *Reddis* in Andhra. Within the caste too, it is the kinship and family ties that determine the leadership role in the parties whether it is the Congress or the SAD, as is clearly evident in the make-up of the current Punjab Assembly, especially the Badal cabinet. Such a closed nature of electoral

politics in terms of the leadership role 'complements' the exclusionary nature of the market economy that is being prescribed under the shadow of globalization. The entry of corporate houses in the real estate business in the garb of attracting private investment under the new economic policy has resulted in the conversion of precious agricultural land for constructing residential and commercial complexes. It is hardly surprising then that one finds a 'marked dissonance between political economy and electoral process in Punjab, with the former hardly influencing the latter' (Chandhoke and Priyadarshi, 2006: 812).

Conclusions

The 2007 electoral outcome can not be seen as a positive vote in favour of the SAD-BJP alliance but rather an indictment of the non-performance compounded by the internal bickering within the Congress Party. In the absence of credible alternatives, the electorate in Punjab has repeatedly been forced to go for what they have possibly began to perceive as the lesser evil with the passage of time. Like in the case of the Congress victory in 2002, the SAD-BJP has come back to power primarily due to the follies of their opponents rather than their own policies and programmes or rather lack of them. The glaring failure of the parties to focus on substantive issues like the structural crisis in the agrarian sector facing this once widely hailed 'model state' and 'the granary of India', does not augur well for a state that not long ago experienced violent militancy which could only be contained with the use of state coercion and without a single demand of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution being conceded. It is hardly surprising that the incumbent Akali-BJP coalition government that held out the promise of providing cheap flour and pulses in its electoral campaign has so far shown no real inclination to desist from resource-guzzling populist schemes that over the years has brought the state to the brink of economic and financial disaster. Nor has the personalizing and centralizing leadership desisted from following the now very familiar politics of vendetta against their marked rivals.

[Acknowledgement: The article uses the CSDS-CNN-IBN Exit Poll data collected in Punjab on the day of election, February 13, 2007. The author along with JS Shekhon coordinated the exit poll. Students from Panjab University and Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar interviewed 4935 voters, covering 120 polling stations across the state. Sample of constituencies and polling booths were drawn randomly from all the three regions of the state. The author is especially thankful to Malkit Singh, Sunil Devi, Suraj Thapa and Jaspal Singh, researchers in the department, for their help in coordinating the poll. This is an expanded and revised version of an article earlier published in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 10, 2007].

Notes

¹ The voting percentage in the assembly elections in the post-1966 reorganized Punjab has been 71.18, 72.27, 68.63, 65.36, 64.33, 66.5, 23.82, 68.73, and 62.14 respectively in 1967, 1969, 1972, 1977, 1980, 1985, 1992, 1997, and 2002. Significantly despite the calls for boycott given by the militant factions of Akalis and the All India Sikh Students Federation and threatened by the terrorist organizations, the electoral participation was most impressive in the 1985 assembly elections, even for any state in India during 'normal elections'. The only exception to the overall impressive electoral participation has been the 1992 assembly elections that saw exceptionally low participation due to the boycott of the election by the Akalis and also due to threats of violence by the militants. The elections for the local bodies only a year after heralded the return to 'normal way of doing politics' in a turbulent Punjab wracked by political unrest and militancy. Nearly 70 per cent of the voters turned up for the elections to the municipal bodies whereas for the panchayat elections, the figure was an impressive 82 per cent (Verma, 1995). For all the relevant electoral data related to the assembly and Lok Sabha elections up to 2002 in Punjab, see the special issue on electoral politics of *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy*, edited by Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar, January-June 2003.

² The continuing deceleration of economic growth has particularly hit the farming sector in this erstwhile richest state of India. Successive governments have failed to deliver on the oft-repeated promises to introduce a second green revolution by supporting crop diversification, cooperative farming, organic farming and so on. With potential investment in the industrial sector going to the neighbouring 'progressive' states, the agro-centric Punjab economy growth rate during 2002-2007 was just 4.8 per cent against the national average of 7 per cent. State's debt is at rupees 53000 crore rising from rupees 32000 crore in 2002. As per the national sample survey organization (2006) estimates Punjab has the third highest extent of rural indebtedness in India (65.4 per cent) after Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu (*Hindustan Times*, February 14, 2007). According to the CAG report, 2007 Punjab's 13 PSUs have so far incurred a cumulative loss of rupees 3,934 crore. Subsidies and top-heavy bureaucracy continue to bleed the economy. Factors such as the fragmentation of landholdings, rapid rise in the cost of inputs, stagnating returns, declining public sector investments, inadequate marketing and pricing, decline in the research inputs from institutes like PAU, Ludhiana, absence of food processing facilities, persistence with two-crop (paddy-wheat) economy, failure of cash crops, extensive use of technology that results in the degradation of environment, loss of most of its wetlands, all have resulted in to a grave agricultural crisis in the state (Punjab Development Report 2004, Chapter 4). Technical solutions do exist to raise productivity and reduce per unit cost of agricultural produce through harnessing biotechnology. This second green revolution, however, would require massive public investment in frontline technology and strengthening of institutional infrastructure like developing agro-processing units. Rising costs

along with stagnant technology and near freezing of the minimum support price of wheat and paddy have brought indebtedness among the farmers who are being forced to commit suicides especially in the cotton belt (UNDP Report 2004, 167-179).

³ In the exit poll (CSDS-NES), both Captain Amrinder Singh and Prakash Singh Badal emerged as the most preferred candidate for the post of Chief Minister (see Table 3). Within the Congress, the then Deputy Chief Minister Rajinder Kaur Bhattal and the Congress state President Shamsheer Singh Dullo, a dalit Sikh were the other prominent campaigners for the Congress. For the SAD-BJP alliance, Sukhbir Singh Badal, Captain Kanwaljit Singh and Navjot Singh Sidhu played the supporting roles. Sidhu overshadowed the state BJP chief Avinash Rai Khanna and Manoranjan Kalia, newly elected leader of the BJP legislative party. Arun Jaitley oversaw the BJP campaign. The BJP poll platform revolved around the three Ps, all of which were aimed at its urban voters: price hike, power crisis, and police excesses.

⁴ The *Dera Sacha Sauda* is a religious congregation that has its headquarters in Sirsa. The Dera's head, Sant Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, directed its supporters, estimated to be 40 lakh and spread over the Malwa region of Punjab and neighbouring Haryana, to support the Congress candidates. Among the possible reasons for the support was the head's relationship with Harminder Singh Jassi, a Congress nominee from Bathinda. Another religious sect called *Radha Saomi* and influential in the border districts also backed the Congress.

⁵ The anti-incumbency factor plays an important role in Punjab as the two relevant parties have their traditional support base. Whenever there is a balance in terms of support, like in this election, then the anti-incumbency factor comes to play a large role. The negative nature of the verdict was evident as the 13th Punjab assembly witnessed the defeat of two-thirds of the sitting legislators cutting across party lines and the elections of 40 new members.

⁶ Besides the state party president, the prominent losers among the Congressmen were many cabinet ministers like Jagmohan Singh Kang, Chaudhary Jagjit Singh, Harnam Das Jauhar, Raghunath Sahay Puri, Ramesh Chand Dogra, Mahender Singh Kaypee, Gurkanwal Kaur, Sardool Singh, and Avtar Henry. From among the SAD the prominent losers were senior leaders Tota Singh, Gurdev Singh Badal and Bibi Jagir Kaur.

⁷ Prominent among the Akali leaders' relatives who won were ones related to Badal himself. Manpreet Singh Badal and Adesh Pratap Singh Kairon, nephew and son in law of Badal senior and Bikramjit Singh Majitha, brother in law of Sukhbir Badal after winning elections got cabinet berths in the newly formed government. Other prominent winners were Tej Prakash Singh, son of late Beant Singh, former chief minister and Kuldeep Bhattal, son of Rajinder Kaur Bhattal. Among the losers cutting across the two parties were Jasjit Singh, son of Capt Kanwaljit Singh; Gaganjit Singh Barnala, son of Surjit Singh Barnala; Jagdev Singh Talwandi's son Ranjit Singh Talwandi, Inder Iqbal Singh Atwal, son of Charanjit Singh Atwal, and Gurkanwal Kaur, daughter of late Beant

Singh. That fact that kinship and family ties play a big role in the Akali Politics was evident by the composition of Badal's 17 member cabinet in which 5 are his close relatives.

⁸ In an interview given in a run up to the elections, Badal expressed regret over tearing the copy of the constitution during the days of militancy to protest against the central government for clubbing Hindus with Sikhs under the constitution (*Frontline*, 2007:108).

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