

The Aam Aadmi Party and Emerging Political Scenario on the Eve of the 2017 Punjab State Assembly Elections

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With the assembly elections looming on the horizon, the political landscape of Punjab is getting more complex with each passing day, and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) remains the main protagonist in the ongoing theatrical mode of politics, so typical of the state. The question in the minds of election analysts is whether a four-year-old party facing two of the oldest surviving parties in India will be able to bring about a critical shift in the bipolar party system well established in the state since the 1997 elections. Punjab for long has been reeling under endemic crises in the form of agrarian distress, drug menace, crony capitalism, corruption and an overall governance deficit. Arguably then, any significant electoral gain for the AAP in the 2017 elections, as in the case of the 2014 parliamentary elections, would signify the desperation of the electorate with the firm grip of the Congress and Akali Dal over the levers of power. This explains why despite being a party lacking in terms of state-wide organizational presence, state-specific agenda or state-level leadership, the AAP as a self-proclaimed movement party, committed to clean and principled politics, with politically novice but apparently well-meaning candidates, has been able to raise hope among the wider electorate across the state's three electoral regions. However, since 2014, as the paper discusses in detail, the party has had a checkered inning in the state.

Introduction

The forthcoming assembly election in Punjab in early 2017 is receiving much attention as an exceptional election because the emergence of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has not only transformed it into a triangular electoral fight but could end the bipolar electoral system in the state. The Indian National Congress (Congress) had its electoral sway over the state until the states underwent reorganization in 1966. The Akali Dal set the political agenda of Punjabi Suba after 1966, whether in power or not. However, as the state readies for the forthcoming elections, the AAP has emerged as the clear game changer by setting the agenda, identifying and defining important issues and providing a credible challenge to the established parties of the state, namely the Congress and the Akali Dal.

The emergence of the AAP in Punjab raises important questions. A bipolar party system is firmly rooted in the state, in the context of thriving identity politics. The political scene in Punjab is vibrant, with high levels of political participation and contestation. How did a party like the AAP, without a

definitive ideology or traditional social or regional support base in the state or state-level leadership or resources manage to mark its presence? Another question that relates to recent developments in the state, with the political landscape of Punjab getting more complex with each passing day, and with the AAP being at the receiving end, is whether the party's success is going to be long-term or will there be a return to the status-quo in the state? The present paper addresses these two questions, while taking up the recent political developments in the state for detailed discussion.

Punjab's Political Landscape

After the partition of India, the Congress dominated politics in Punjab. Following the reorganization of the state in 1966, either the Congress or the Akali Dal formed the state's governments, either as the single party in power (in the case of the Congress) or as part of a coalition government (in the case of the Akali Dal). The Akali Dal has formed coalition governments with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as well as the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) party (Table 1). Since 1997, the BJP as a junior ally of Akali Dal has remained part of the coalition governments formed in 1997 and then in 2007 and 2012 (Table 2).¹ The two mainstream left-wing parties, namely CPI and CPI (M), which were once significant enough to have alliances with the Akali Dal (1980) on respectable terms and with the Congress (1997 and 2002) – though as a diminished ally – have become less relevant over the period. The two communist parties have polled less than two per cent of votes in the last three assembly elections and not having won a single seat since the 2002 elections (Table 1 and 2).² The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is another political party that has become less relevant in Punjab over time after a promising start.

If there were to be a party in Punjab's post-militancy period that could have emerged as a relevant, if not a winnable party, it is the BSP. In a state with nearly one-third of its population belonging to the scheduled castes (SCs),³ the BSP with its social support base among the lower castes, especially the SCs, was expected to present the third alternative after its impressive debut in 1992. The founding president of the BSP, Kanshi Ram, was a Punjabi from Ropar. Ram is credited with winning the Lok Sabha seat of Hoshiarpur in 1996, a rare feat for a SC candidate to win from an unreserved seat in India's electoral democracy. The decline of the party in Punjab has coincided with the ascendance of Mayawati as the party chief in the post-Kanshi Ram period. Under Mayawati, the party concentrated its focus and energy on capturing and retaining political power in Uttar Pradesh. In the process, the party leadership, mainly drawn from Uttar Pradesh, largely neglected Punjab. As a result, the party has floundered in the state, securing less than five percent of the polled votes in the last two assembly elections.⁴ Besides, the apathy of the party leadership, internal factionalism, allegation of "ticket"-selling and a tacit understanding with the Akali leadership have all had a negative impact on the party's performance in the state.

It is also important to note that the politically marginalized scheduled castes in Punjab are better off socially as well as economically than their counterparts in other Indian states. The Green Revolution caused an increase in wages in Punjab. The mostly-landless scheduled castes have benefitted significantly from this wage increase. The scheduled castes in Punjab, especially those belonging to the Chamar caste, benefited greatly from social reform movements like the Ad-Dharam and Ravidassia movements. One significant reason for the electoral marginalization of scheduled castes in Punjab, as elsewhere in the country, is the presence of hierarchies in the community. These hierarchies lead to factionalism that can cause the various caste-based groups - Chamars, Mazhabis, Balmikis - to have very different opinions on matters and very different methods to mobilize political change. For instance, some of these groups use music to this end. Interestingly, even their music reflects the differences in the means employed.⁵

The Punjab Peoples Party (PPP), founded in 2010, is another political party that declined after a promising start. Under the charismatic leadership of Manpreet Badal,⁶ the PPP secured five percent of the votes cast in the 2012 elections. However, since then the PPP simply withered away. The now defunct party, however, shall be remembered for ensuring the unexpected victory of the incumbent Akali Dal-BJP in 2012 elections as it received crucial anti-incumbency votes that would otherwise have gone to the Congress.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF LOK SABHA ELECTIONS IN PUNJAB, 1967-2014

Year	Total Seats	Turn Out	Congress		BJP (1984-) / JNP (1977-80) /BJS(1967-72)		CPI		State Party with most seats			State Party with second most seats		
			Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Party	Seats	Vote	Party	Seats	Vote
1967	13	71.13	9	37.31	3	12.49	0	4.28	SAD	1	22.61	ADM	0	4.42
1971	13	59.90	10	45.96	0	4.45	2	6.22	SAD	1	30.85	NCO	0	4.48
1977	13	70.14	0	34.85	3	12.50	0	1.65	SAD	9	42.30	CPM	1	4.94
1980	13	62.65	12	52.45	0	9.97	0	1.27	SAD	1	23.37	INC	0	2.56
1985	13	67.36	6	41.53	0	3.39	0	3.84	SAD	7	37.17	CPM	0	2.98
1989	13	62.67	2	26.49	0	4.17	0	2.10	SAD	6	29.19	JD	1	5.46
1992	13	23.96	12	49.27	0	16.51	0	1.57	SAD	0	2.58	BSP	1	19.71
1996	13	62.25	2	35.10	0	6.48	0	1.60	SAD	8	28.72	BSP	3	9.35
1998	13	60.07	0	25.85	3	11.67	0	3.40	SAD	8	32.93	BSP	0	12.65
1999	13	56.11	8	38.44	1	9.16	1	3.74	SAD	2	28.59	BSP	0	3.84
2004	13	69.7	2	34.7	3	10.4	0	2.55	SAD	9	34.2	BSP	0	7.65
2009	13	70.6	8	45.23	1	10.6	0	0.33	SAD	4	33.85	BSP	0	5.75
2014	13	70.61	3	33.05	2	8.6	0		SAD	4	26.4	AAP	4	24.5

Source: CSDS Data Unit [Note: In the 1989 elections, one seat was won by the BSP, which secured 8.62 per cent of the vote, while Independents won 3 seats. In 1998, the Janata Dal won one seat and secured 4.18 per cent of the votes].

Table 2: Performance of Political Parties in the Assembly Elections in Punjab (1997-2012)

Party Name	Year of Assembly Elections											
	1997			2002			2007			2012		
	Seats Contested	Won	Votes Polled %	Seats Contested	Won	Votes Polled %	Seats Contested	Won	Votes Polled %	Seats Contested	Won	Votes Polled %
BJP	22	18	8.33	23	3	5.67	23	19	8.28	23	12	7.18
INC	105	14	26.59	105	62	35.81	116	44	40.90	117	46	40.9
BSP	67	1	7.48	100	0	5.69	115	0	4.13	117	0	4.29
CPI	15	2	2.98	11	2	2.15	25	0	0.76	14	0	0.82
SAD	92	75	37.64	92	41	31.08	93	48	37.09	94	56	34.73
IND	244	6	10.87	274	9	11.27	431	5	6.82	418	3	6.75
PPP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	87	0	5.04

The AAP in Punjab

It is in this political context that the gains for the AAP in 2014 elections have received much attention. The AAP remains a definitive possibility for the emergence of a third alternative. In the 2014 national election, the debutant AAP⁷ managed to win four seats, all of them in Punjab.⁸ In the state's 13 constituencies, the AAP finished third in eight Lok Sabha constituencies. Translated into assembly segments, the AAP was ahead of the other parties in 34 out of the 117 assembly constituencies in the state, 18 of them represented by the Akali Dal and 16 by the Congress. The electoral gains for the AAP arguably indicate the desperation of a significant segment of the electorate under the persistent grip of the Congress and Akali Dal over the levers of power in the beleaguered state. Since recovering from militancy, Punjab has been reeling under post-Green Revolution stagnation, drug menace, alleged institutionalized crony capitalism, corruption, and an overall governance deficit. This explains why voters chose to put their faith in the debutant AAP despite the party lacking in terms of organizational presence or a state-specific agenda⁹ when the party did so badly in other states including Delhi and Haryana. Those who voted for the party saw AAP as a movement party of volunteers fresh from their participation in the Anna Hazare-led 'India against corruption' movement. The party was viewed as committed to clean and principled politics. Arguably, the AAP's victories in Punjab contributed somewhat to its grand success in Delhi. In the AAP's electoral victory in Punjab, the rest of the nation saw a three-year old debutant party, taking on two of the oldest parties of the nation that have been entrenched in the state's politics since colonial days.¹⁰

However, soon after the 2014 elections the dim prognosis of skeptics who saw the party's success as an aberration seemed to be coming true. Two of its elected Lok Sabha members Dharamveer Gandhi¹¹ and Harinder Singh Khalsa¹² and many other volunteers turned rebels following the expulsion of Yogendra Yadav, who had played a significant role in setting up the party in the state.¹³ Many of the expelled/deserting volunteers who had shaped the AAP's impressive electoral debut in Punjab now joined the *Swaraj Lehar Abhiyan*.¹⁴ Consequently, the AAP became leaderless and the party lost two assembly by-elections very badly. The party chose not to contest the third by-election. Akali Dal won all the three by-elections. The Congress did not contest in that round of elections given the fact that the party in power has always had an advantage in by-elections held in Punjab.

At this time, when the AAP stood at the threshold of diminishing in Punjab as a one-election wonder, the party leadership in Delhi chalked out its 'Punjab Mission Plan 2017' and appointed Durgesh Pathak¹⁵ to build up the party organization in the state. Pathak had earlier managed the AAP campaign in the Delhi assembly elections. He was also involved in the Kejriwal campaign during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections when Kejriwal was pitted against Narendra Modi. In July 2015, Pathak turned Punjab's 13 Lok Sabha constituencies into zones for organizational purposes and the party leadership in Delhi appointed an observer/zonal-in-charge for each zone. These 13 leaders were part of Pathak's

team from Delhi.¹⁶ Pathak further sub-divided the zones into 39 sectors and each sector into three assembly constituencies. An observer was appointed to each sector by the Delhi leadership represented in the state by Pathak and Sanjay Singh. Some of these observers were district-in-charges previously and were loyal to the local leaders.

The 'Punjab plan' led to large-scale purging of all rebellious elements and gave leadership positions to only those loyal to the Delhi leadership. Sucha Singh Chhotepur, the party's state convener since 2014, played a key role.¹⁷ Like him, the other leaders promoted by the party from Punjab, i.e., Bhagwant Mann,¹⁸ H. S. Phoolka and Kanwar Sandhu belong to the populous, land-owning Jat Sikh community. Over the past two years, under this new dispensation, the party is off to a fresh start with a newly launched recruitment drive, well-attended public rallies, door-to-door campaigns, and allowing entry of select leaders from other political parties (like Sukhpal Khaira from the Congress). These efforts appear to be successful, as opinion polls/media reports about the AAP are encouraging and highlight the party's popularity among the state's youth and the influential Punjabi Diaspora.

The AAP's recent troubles started with the release of the first two lists of party candidates for the 2017 elections. The Political Affairs Committee selected the candidates after ticket seekers were shortlisted at the local level. The AAP's strategy to declare its candidates early is understandable. Early nomination of all candidates gives a head start to the party over its opponents and allows the advantage of a longer campaign period. The resulting greater and longer public exposure would be particularly advantageous to the AAP's relatively unknown/less-known candidates.

In the first round, the party leadership released names of thirty-two candidates using their "three Cs" criteria - any nominee should have good moral character, and should have neither criminal record nor charges of corruption against them. However, the release of lists with these thirty-two names was met with protests fueled by rejected candidates who alleged that only allies of Pathak and Sanjay Singh or those who paid money were nominated to the party tickets. A particularly surprising outcome of the nomination process was that despite being the party's state convener, Chhotepur was not included in the committee. Apparently, Chhotepur was not considered close to shortlisted candidates, thus effectively forestalling his chances of chief ministership, in the event that the AAP won the 2017 elections. This became a major reason for his voice of dissent.¹⁹

Shortly after this the party leadership removed Chhotepur from his role as state convener on charges of accepting money from aspirants to the ticket after a sting operation allegedly found him accepting money from an AAP worker. Chhotepur being subjected to a sting operation was the last straw for many of the party's Punjab leaders, who were disgruntled with the control held by leaders like Pathak who enjoyed proximity and access to Kejriwal. The masses of Punjab viewed the sting operation as a dishonorable act of betrayal by Delhi-based leadership against a leader with a long and unsullied public life. They perceived the operation to be motivated as a disgraceful rebuttal to his bold

stand, ostensibly taken in favor of committed party workers.²⁰ Chhotepur's contribution to the revival of the party was significant in garnering this wide support for him. Moreover, Chhotepur received support and sympathy not just from a significant section of the AAP workers and leaders but also from a few opposition leader like Captain Amarinder Singh, whom he had supported as an independent legislator from 2002-07 when the Captain was the Congress chief minister.

In response, Chhotepur brought charges against Kejriwal for not being respectful of the Golden Temple and neglecting or being disrespectful to Punjabi leaders whenever they tried to approach him. In his public appearance during his *parivartan yatra*, he raised the issue of Punjabi identity and self-respect. In his public meetings, Chhotepur also raised the specter of Delhi rule over Punjab, in case AAP won the election. Under his leadership, the rebels brought a slew of charges against their own party's non-Punjabi leadership, ranging from demanding money to seeking sexual favors for giving tickets. Charges of financial irregularity and neglect and humiliation of the party's local volunteers and leaders have since been hurled against the party leadership by many erstwhile AAP leaders, including some of the zonal in-charges who sided with Chhotepur. Expectedly, Pathak and Sanjay Singh have been the main targets of these disgruntled elements. In fact, many AAP leaders still with the party have asked for allowing the Punjabi leaders to manage the campaign though their dependence over Kejriwal as a vote pooler is apparent.

These charges were particularly damaging to the party, as the AAP had vowed to adhere to the principles of financial transparency, internal democracy and internal vigilance of leaders, legislators and office-bearers at the time of its inception. Government corruption has been an important issue in Punjab. Thus, the charges of lavish lifestyle of Delhi-based leaders and their favoring of the moneyed could be destructive if the electorate considers them credible. What has apparently caused irreparable damage to the party image in the state, especially in rural, traditional Punjab, is the charge that the observer and the leaders sent from Delhi were not respecting the religion, language, culture and traditions of Punjab. Sikh sentiments had already been hurt when the party symbol of the broom was depicted along with the Golden Temple on the cover page of the AAP youth manifesto,²¹ which was then compared with revered Guru Granth Sahib by the party spokesman Ashish Khetan. Only half-hearted apologies followed as Chhotepur and Kanwar Sandhu, the newly drafted in-charge of the manifesto committee,²² refused to take the blame on them for the act that hurt the Sikh sentiment. Delhi-based leaders were then forced to take responsibility for this event as the manifesto, like other party literature, was printed in Delhi. In order to cut the damage, Kejriwal along with AAP leaders visited the temple for a few hours under full media glare for penance, but the damage was already done.

The controversies surrounding the AAP Delhi legislators and ministers - including charges of rape and molestation against two Delhi party legislators, the inability of the government to fulfill its tall poll promises in Delhi and its impact on the credibility of the Kejriwal leadership and his much flaunted 'Delhi

model' of governance and development - have been publicized in newspapers printed in Chandigarh and Punjab. However, what seems to have hit the party the hardest in the state is the issue of Punjabi pride, first raised by Chhotepur and subsequently taken up by the opposition. The Navjot Sidhu episode has led to further negative attention on the party and is viewed by many in the state as an act of betrayal by the Delhi leadership against a fellow Punjabi. Navjot Singh Sidhu, three times BJP MP from Amritsar, was allegedly made to resign his Rajya Sabha seat by the AAP leadership, ostensibly on the promise of making him the face of the AAP in Punjab. However, as per Sidhu's version – not refuted by AAP spokespersons – he was subsequently asked by Kejriwal not to contest the election but only campaign for the party. Sidhu then, with the help of Bains brothers, two independent legislators from Ludhiana, as well as Pragat Singh, another legislator expelled from Akali Dal, has formed a political forum, *Awaaz-e-Punjab*.²³ If this forum decides to contest in the elections, it would be another potential challenger to not only the Akali Dal but also the AAP, as it would most likely cut into the anti-Akali and the anti-AAP vote. This would be true for the fourth front consisting of Swaraj Party and other splinter groups, mostly offshoots of the AAP. The fourth front, if it were formed, would raise the same issues of corruption and malgovernance and its campaign would hurt the AAP.

Impact on the Akali Dal and the Congress

These setbacks to the AAP seem to have given a new lease of life to the Akali Dal, which was apparently staring at a colossal defeat after remaining in power for an unprecedented two terms and in an environment of anti-incumbency sentiment. In fact, these two terms of the Akali Dal are the only instance when an incumbent party has continued in power in Punjab since 1966. The Akali Dal, too, has also been reeling under the adverse impacts of two recent incidents that threatened the traditional rural Sikh support base moving away from the party. First was the case of a spate of farmers' suicides²⁴ in the wake of crop failure in the cotton belt of Malwa region due to spurious pesticides, allegedly procured by the government with the connivance of corrupt officials. Second was the inability of the government to catch those responsible for the desecration of the Guru Granth Sahib (the central religious scripture of Sikhism) in many Gurudwaras. This hurt the party's new-found traditional panthic support base in the wake of decline of radical Akali factions like Akali Dal (Amritsar) and Dal Khalsa. Moreover, the leadership of Prakash Singh Badal has undermined the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhandak committee (SGPC) and Akal Takht, the other two pillars of Sikh politics and religion. This too, has also weakened the traditional hold of Akali Dal over the rural Sikh support base. SGPC elections, long contested in a democratic manner, have now become allegedly farcical as the party leadership (read Badal) allegedly decides the candidates beforehand. In fact, the Akali Dal, once a cadre-based and ideologically driven party has become a family party, which at best can be dubbed as an electoral party and not a movement party.²⁵ Allegations of some of the top Akali leaders being

complicit in the rampant drug trade as well as transport/cable/sand/liquor/real estate mafias have been raised not only by the opposition parties but also by independent media.

Akali leaders have also been accused of using the police to intimidate political opponents. Another allegation has been the creation of a parallel authority system by appointing party leaders/MLAs as *Halqa-in-charge* to whom the local officials have to report. Among all these allegations, the drug issue, raised by AAP as well as the Congress, has especially hurt the party's image, as it is the rural Sikh youth, mostly from landed Jat families, who are falling victims to costly synthetic drugs, which have replaced opium and other traditional intoxicants. To the dismay of the Akali Dal, the AAP has been making conscious efforts to secure rural Sikh votes, including their radical component.

It was arguably with this aim that AAP leaders took on the issue of desecration of the holy book. Some AAP leaders allegedly joined the *Sarbat Khalsa* (convened after decades) that was called over the issue of the desecration of the Guru Granth Sahib contrary to the wishes of Akali Dal and SGPC.²⁶ In addition, the party used the Golden temple on the cover page of their youth manifesto to attract the panthic vote, but it boomeranged, as noted above. Such AAP leadership efforts to meddle with panthic politics by raising the issue of anti-Sikh massacres and by visiting Sikh *deras* and Gurdwaras explains why the Akalis have been the most vocal in joining hands with the AAP rebels by letting them access the Badal-owned TV channels.

Arguably, while the AAP troubles are likely to help the Akali Dal in cutting its losses, the party expected to gain the most out of this cauldron is likely to be the Congress. However, the party needs to keep its endemic factionalism under check and choose its candidates judiciously to benefit from this. The Congress party chief, Captain Amarinder Singh, has visited all constituencies as part of campaigns titled *Coffee with Captain* and *Halqe Vich Captain*. This campaign has been well-received, connecting to the people (especially youth), making traditional promises like ensuring farmers timely procurement of and payment for their grains, putting an end to corruption, reviving industries, creating jobs, establishing law and order in the state, and settling farmers' debts. Factional leaders have also come around, realizing what a third straight defeat would mean for the grand old party. What helps them also is that Congress always has had the advantage of having decent support among both Hindus and Sikhs. However, people do not have many positive experiences to recall from the Congress rule of 2002-2007 when the Captain was the chief minister, as indebtedness was rising then, corruption charges were brought against the chief minister, and the liquor mafia was active. The Captain's inaccessibility to people and even to his own party workers/leaders was also a big issue then. However, to his credit the Captain, along with Badal senior, is the only leader in the state now who enjoys statewide support across communities and castes, as other leaders in the Congress or in the Akali Dal are at best regional leaders like the former state Congress chief Pratap Singh Bajwa who has some hold only in the Majha region.

Summing Up

Where do all the recent developments concerning AAP lead then? Will the AAP prove to be a 'seasonal crop', withering away like the PPP as its adversaries have been taunting? Will this new party that briefly raised so much hope in a segment of the electorate be able to measure up to the challenge posed by the state to any contestant party pitted against the established parties of the state, like the Akali Dal and the Congress? As the above discussion shows, a host of identity issues that relate not only to religion, sect and caste but also language and script remain relevant in Punjab, making state-level politics extremely complex to comprehend and predict. This is a state where history has a tremendous impact on the present; people still nurse memories of past wounds. Identity remains important despite all the rhetoric about the paradigmatic shift from ethnic politics to peace politics and now to politics of development and governance. The Akali Dal in its verbal attacks on the AAP shows that it is a master of identity politics. In desperation, the party may attempt to revive a panthic agenda, though this would be a difficult task, due to the party's own attempt to weaken the panthic institutions, as discussed above.

What also complicates the politics and society of the state, a factor not well researched, is that the state witnessed very high growth in the aftermath of the Green Revolution and then experienced a rapid decline as that growth was confined to the farming sector and was capital/energy intensive. This period of growth and decline was rapid, contained within no more than three decades, and probably unparalleled and specific to Punjab, as other parts of India like coastal Maharashtra and Haryana have thrived on industrial growth. It also went against the climatic requirement of the state, shifting from traditional crop patterns. A flawed capital-intensive strategy was used as a technical solution to overcome the food deficit in India. The plan to develop agro-based industries side-by-side remained only an agenda, never coming to fruition. The diversification of crops, development of agro-based industries, and implementation of Swaminathan Committee report, all have remained confined to party manifestos.²⁷ Industries moved out of the state, first in response to militancy and then in response to neighboring states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh being given special category status, a consequence of which has been that these states were able to provide more incentives to industries. Agricultural growth also stagnated during this time. The state has witnessed rising desperation among the people, especially among the state youth, as reflected in their yearning to emigrate. For all the past tragic events in the state and economic deceleration, Congress and Akali Dal takes the blame, as both have shared political power in the state and at the center in this recent period of despondency.

This double anti-incumbency gives hope to the AAP. Post-crisis, AAP has been trying to make its debut as the ruling party through its Punjab Jodo movement that aims at covering all of Punjab through a door-to-door campaign. The party is harping on its promises to provide clean and effective governance of the variety of the 'Delhi model'. However, the pertinent question remains whether AAP's Delhi-based leaders understood the scale of hopes and

expectations of Punjab's people from the party when it made its entry. Everyone, and not just the party's detractors, ask whether the party will succeed in changing Punjab not by dictates from Delhi but through rule from Punjab by their Punjab-based leaders. Unfortunately, the way the AAP is run raises doubts whether Punjab, like Goa (the other state where AAP seems to be interested) is considered just a stepping-stone for the party to fulfill their long-term agenda of emerging as a national party.

The reckless use of competitive populism instead of coming up with substantive, doable programs to turn around the state's primarily agrarian economy and making it viable and diverse, the stifling of democracy within the party by resorting to nomination by the Delhi-based leadership, and consequently foisting loyalist leaders from above rather than developing democratic mechanisms to recruit and promote leaders from below – all these make the AAP look like just another 'mainstream party.' If the AAP continues as it is presently operating, the electorate in the state may have a third winnable party as an electoral option, but in terms of politics and governance, there will hardly be much change. The larger question that arises then is whether it is necessary for a party to shun its ideology and principles and just become another 'mainstream party' in order to survive electorally in India. Recent incidents indicate that the AAP leadership has answered this question in the affirmative.

Notes

¹ The BJP, due to its limited support base among the urban caste Hindus, has been unable to contest on its own. It has been dependent on the Akali Dal to gain rural as well Sikh votes. This has been one of the reasons that the BJP has not been able to break the alliance despite getting a meager 23 out of 117 seats in the assembly. The Akali Dal has been distributing the seats according to its own choice, keeping maximum seats to itself in the electorally important Malwa region. The most lucrative portfolios have also been with the Akali Dal leaders.

² In 1997 and 2002, CPI and CPM contested assembly elections in alliance with the Congress. However, they were not part of the government even though the CPI won on two seats. At that time, both CPI legislators Nathu Ram from Malout and Gurjant Singh from Kuttiwal had joined the Congress subsequently. The erstwhile People's Party of Punjab (PPP) of Manpreet Singh Badal, who has moved to the Congress, had an alliance with the CPI and seat-adjustment deal with the CPM in the 2012 state elections, and it drew a blank.

³ The failure of the BSP has meant that the social basis of political power has remained largely unaltered in favor of the dominant castes/communities in the state. Political participation of the dalits and other backward castes, mostly landless, has remained confined to mere 'presence' in the party forums or in the legislative bodies. There has hardly been a sincere attempt by the relevant parties in the state, to mobilize the marginal castes/communities except to secure their vote at the time of elections. Of late, the AAP leadership has also been trying to get the Dalit support through the same route, by making populist promises, by

enlisting the support of Kanshi Ram family as well as using its symbol of broom, given the fact that the Balmikis are numerical strong community in the state. Like the other parties, the AAP leadership has also been visiting the Deras, to enlist support of the socially marginal people who visit these places and are under the influence of babas/gurus.

⁴ Kanshi Ram, a Dalit who belonged to Ropar district in Punjab founded the BSP in 1984.

⁵ I owe this observation to Prerna Trehan, a researcher in the department. For her doctoral thesis, she is working on the role of music as an effective tool for socio-political resistance and change by scheduled castes, while referring to their assertion at three historical moments in the state namely, spirituality and reform of hymns by Ravidasis; followed by the left movement and music of assertion and revolution; and lastly the present era of pop music that is dominated by the Chamar community.

⁶ Manpreet Badal, nephew of Prakash Singh Badal, won from Gidderbaha constituency for the first time in 1995 and was then perceived as Badal senior's political heir. However, after the elevation of Sukhbir Badal within the party differences arose between the two cousins. After winning in 1997, 2002 and 2007, Manpreet Badal was elevated to the post of finance minister of Punjab but then resigned in 2010, attributing his resignation to differences over the finance policy to be chalked out for the state. Since then he has lost Gidderbaha seat in the 2012 election followed by defeat in Bathinda Lok Sabha against his sister-in-law Harsimrat Kaur Badal in the 2014 election.

⁷ AAP was formed on November 26, 2012 by the activists who had earlier participated in Anna Hazare led 'India against corruption' (IAC) protest/movement. IAC was against the corruption in higher echelons of the government. It aimed at putting pressure on parties in the parliament to set up an independent institution of Jan Lokpal to curb corruption in the political administration. After the IAC fizzled out, Arvind Kejriwal and some other activists and academics, intellectuals, media people and lawyers like Yogendra Yadav, Prashant Bhushan and Shanti Bhushan (all expelled and now part of the newly founded Swaraj India Party), among others, thought that the failure of the protest necessitated a direct political involvement so that they could change the system from within. The views of pro-party activists was echoed by Anand Kumar, one of the founding members of the party arguing that 'the new party (had) the prospect of widening, deepening and strengthening the movement against corruption by walking on two legs active citizenship-based multi-layered initiatives for basic reforms and voter-oriented political organisation for electoral intervention'.

[See <http://www.lohiatoday.com/CurrentAffairs/AamAdmiParty.pdf/>]

In the 2014 National Manifesto, the party claimed that, "the AAP is not just another party...This party is not here merely to fight elections. It is here to change the rule of game. It is here to rewrite the politics of this country. It is here to make the government truly of the people; it is party that brings with it the perspective of the common women and men of this country. It is party that

says it will solve your all problem. It is party that want ‘Swaraj’, that wants power to your hands, so that you can solve the problem’.

⁸ The AAP contested in all 434 Lok Sabha seats. However, the party could win only four seats that too only in Punjab.

⁹ The AAP has of late issued its state-specific detailed manifestos separately for farmers, industry, youth and Dalits. Kanwar Sandhu, a senior journalist, heads the AAP Manifesto committee. See <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/aam-aadmi-party-aap-arvind-ke-jriwal-kisan-manifesto-punjab-elections-3026083/>;

<http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ludhiana/punjab-2017-elections-aaps-youth-manifesto-promises-25-lakh-jobs-2892427/>;

<http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab-assembly-election-2017/punjab-polls-2017-aap-industry-manifesto/324516.html>;

<http://sikhsiyasat.net/2016/11/25/copy-aam-aadmi-partys-dalit-manifesto-punjab-polls-english-punjabi/>; all accessed on 11 December 2016.

¹⁰ Congress and SAD were founded in 1885 and 1920 respectively, making them two oldest surviving parties in India like the National Congress founded in 1939 and DMK in 1949.

¹¹ Dharamvir Gandhi before being elected from Patiala constituency had earned his reputation, as a selfless physician in Patiala city. He had no political background.

¹² Harinder Khalsa was elected from Fatehgarh sahib on an AAP ticket. He was earlier a Lok Sabha member from Bathinda for a period of two years (1996-98) as a member of the Shiromani Akali Dal.

¹³ Yogendra Yadav was expelled from the party along with Prashant Bhushan, Anand Kumar and many other founding members when he and others raised issues like distribution of tickets to candidates with dubious character as well as lack of transparency in the manner the party received donations during the run-up to Delhi assembly elections. After the AAP astounding victory in 67 out of 70 seats in Delhi elections, Kejriwal, the face of the party in the campaign, made it clear that he wanted all dissidents out of the party.

¹⁴ Gandhi since then has become sympathetic to *Swaraj Abhiyan* and also has been trying to forge a fourth front by ‘coming together’ of the splinter parties like the Democratic Swaraj Party, Awaaz-e-Punjab Jai Jawan Jai Kisan Party, Amritsar Voluntary Group, Apna Party Group and several other smaller political forums.

[See <http://www.firstpost.com/politics/fourth-front-formed-by-dharamvir-gandhi-in-punjab-will-contest-2017-assembly-polls-3020220.html/>]

¹⁵ Durgesh Pathak, 28, joined the Anna movement as a young civil services aspirant based in Delhi and then worked for the AAP in Delhi assembly elections.

¹⁶ Facing the charge of their state unit being run by outsiders, the AAP leadership asked these observers to return to Delhi, though Durgesh Pathak shall remain in Punjab along with Sanjay Singh, at least until the elections.

¹⁷ Chhotepur, a baptized Sikh, in his long career has been closely associated with two Akali stalwarts i.e. Sant H. S. Longowal and then Gurcharan Singh Tohra.

He takes credit for having resigned from Akali Dal government like Amarinder Singh, headed by Surjit Singh Barnala in protest against Operation Black Thunder, when the National Security Guards along with the Border Security Forces personnel had entered into Golden Temple to flush out the terrorists, holed in the Temple premises.

¹⁸ In the run-up to the elections in Punjab, interestingly, the AAP has given prominent political role to two of its politicians who has been stand-up comedians namely Bhagwant Mann, the party campaign committee chairperson and Gurpreet Ghuggi, the newly appointed AAP convener. Navjot Singh Sidhu who almost joined AAP before leading the Awaaz –E- Punjab has also had a long career in television as a Judge in the comedy/laughter shows after retiring from test cricket and commentary.

¹⁹ Since then the AAP has released the third list comprising of names of 29 more candidates adding to 32 names finalized earlier. It includes the names of the party's prominent faces like Sukhpal Khaira, Kanwar Sandhu. There has not been any protest within the party over the nominations this time, which is a good omen for the party. See

<http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/aap-names-29-more-candidates/306562.html>

²⁰ Chhotepur claimed that he took the money for the party and not for himself. [See <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/aap-leader-stung-caught-taking-cash/story-nCANBE7pE06UpMechecOSP.html/>]

²¹ Continuing in the footsteps of its contenders, the AAP has also made seemingly unachievable promises in its youth manifestos like providing 25 lakh jobs in five years. For the purpose, the party has promised to start Skill University, establish foreign employment youth board to train and make the youth employable in foreign countries, open 147 entrepreneurship and skilling centers, one in each block of the state. To further generate employment and growth, the party has put special emphasis on agriculture and allied industries, including food processing, dairy farming and horticulture. Significantly, the party has promised to come out with a separate manifesto for the urban sector. See

<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/arvind-kejriwal-releases-51-point-youth-manifesto-to-entice-youth-in-punjab/articleshow/53033756.cms/>

²² The Party has planned to come out with separate manifestos for the youth, farmers, industries and then after receiving comments and suggestions on them the party plans to come out with the general manifesto of the party

²³ Sidhu, realizing the futility of expecting success for what would have been a three-month-old party at the time of 2017 elections, has now decided that the Awaaz-E- Punjab shall remain a political forum but would not turn into a party to contest the election in 2017. He justified it on the basis that he would not like the forum/fourth front to play the role of spoiler, taking away the anti-Akali-BJP and anti-Congress vote and thus helping them. 'Sidhu won't form party, doesn't want to play 'spoilsport' in Punjab polls'.

²⁴ A survey, conducted jointly by Punjab Agricultural University (Ludhiana), Guru Nanak Dev University (Amritsar), and Punjabi University (Patiala) between April 2010 and March 2013 revealed that there has been an increase in the number of farmers' suicides in the state, especially in the Malwa region as compared to the period between 2000 to 2010. Earlier, the average number of suicides per day due to agrarian distress was two. Also, refer Ashutosh Kumar, 'A Model State at Crossroads'.

²⁵ The Akali Dal was founded in 1920 as the political arm of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee. The Committee was formed to spearhead the Gurdwara Reform Movement. It later launched Punjabi Suba movement for the creation of Punjabi speaking majority state within the Indian Union. The party also launched Dharam Yudh Morcha in 1981 for the fulfillment of the forty-five demands raised in the Anandpur Sahib resolutions, 1973 and 1978.

²⁶ Sarbat Khalsa is an assembly of (all) Sikhs. 'Sarbat' means 'all' in Punjabi. The first Sarbat Khalsa was convened in the 18th century, after the death of the 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. Sikh misls (military units) used this as a platform to discuss political, social and religious issues of extreme importance to the community. At the Sarbat Khalsa held in Chabba village in 2015, speeches were made against the Akali Dal's firm control over the Akal Takht,

²⁷ The AAP has also promised to implement the recommendations of the Swaminathan Committee on crop pricing, and compensation to farmers for the loss of crops, if voted to power. However, the party's main emphasis has been on adhering to the anti-reform populist agenda of waiving off the loans of marginal farmers making them debt free by 2018, providing 12 hours free electricity to farmers, continuation of Ata-Dal Scheme, etc. Questions have been raised about the ability of the AAP to raise the required funds to waive the entire farmers' loans as the state has an outstanding debt of Rs 1.75 Lakh Crore and all its boards and corporations are in red. Unfortunately, the manifesto does not put emphasis on making the economy viable and debt free.

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