

## **2012 Assembly Elections in Punjab: Ascendance of a State Level Party**

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The 2012 Assembly Elections in Punjab received attention for being the first elections in post-1966 reorganised Punjab to witness return to power of an incumbent party regime. The elections also saw the emergence of a new set of political leadership, most notably the rise of Sukhbir Badal, the SAD President who led the campaign and crafted the Akali victory. The rise and fall of Manpreet Badal, the founder President of Punjab Peoples Party in the role of the 'challenger' was another notable feature. The social and spatial patterns of electoral outcome, as revealed in the CSDS post-poll survey data, showed that the consistent efforts of the Akali Dal to broaden its support base while retaining its core social constituency in order to shed/lessen its dependency over the BJP has started bearing fruits. The Congress suffered an unexpected defeat primarily due to its leadership failure.

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### **Rise of State Level Parties**

The newly acquired significance of states as the platforms where electoral politics unfold in varying forms in recent India can be attributed to the fact that political articulation and mobilization of the people for electoral purposes increasingly swerve around identities formed or invented along ethno-regional lines. As the ethnic categories are mostly confined to a particular region or regions of a state, so any form of mobilisation or assertion in the shape of collective claims making takes place invariably at regional level, giving primacy to 'region' over the 'nation.'<sup>1</sup> The political parties strive first to gain and consolidate a 'core constituency' in the form of the support of a single numerically and economically significant caste/ community or alternatively a cluster of castes/communities at state/regional level before they go to broaden their support base. Apart from the politicised/ particised social cleavages, the fragmented nature of party system in the 'post-Congress polity'<sup>2</sup> also encourages parties of different hues to adopt such a strategy in search of an assured electoral dividend under the single plurality electoral system.

The above explains as to why the state level parties catering 'openly' to their core social constituency, have scored over the national parties especially in the assembly as well as local elections as 'primordial interests and ties-usually expressed in caste or communal terms' over the years have become 'powerful determinants of political activity at the state level' (Wood 1984, p. 3). Polity-wide parties like the Congress (and now BJP also) have to play 'a coded ethnic card, invoking ethnic identities quietly in its selection of candidates but not openly in its identification of issues' seeking the support of

ascriptive categories through the 'distribution of patronage but never through the rhetoric of identity' (Chandra 2004, p. 26).

As the 'local' acquires much more significance than the 'national', the coalition-maker national parties are left with no choice but to depend over the state level parties in forming as well as running the government smoothly even at the federal level, more so at the state level. This emergent process of 'federalisation of party system' has been most visible in the states like Bihar, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu (Haryana and Orissa not long ago), where a state level party is the dominant partner in a bipolar coalitional arrangement with national parties remaining junior partners. In fact, this has been the 'route', BJP adopted to register its 'presence' with fair success in the states like Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa where it had to start from a scratch.<sup>3</sup>

Along with the ascendance of the state level parties, what also adds to the newly exalted position of the regional states in Indian federal polity is the considerable power and influence wielded by the state level political leadership.<sup>4</sup> Like in the case of the state level parties, what adds to the clout of the state 'leader' is having a steady support base among the numerically and economically powerful community or cluster of communities within a state/region with whom he/she is identified with.<sup>5</sup> With mode of democracy turning more and more 'patrimonial' in nature, politics of 'patronage' and 'clientalism' reigns supreme even after election times are over. It explains as to why castes/communities imagining themselves more as 'political' than 'social' categories more often than not cling to their 'own' leader as well as the party he/she belongs to in the 'realistic' hope of being the beneficiary of the direct and indirect transfer of public resources.<sup>6</sup>

As of now, it is the state level leadership, irrespective of being affiliated to a national or a state party, that has been mainly instrumental in shaping the form and content of the party agenda/manifesto, distribution of party tickets, tenor of election campaigns and also deciding about important matter of alliance-building and modes of distribution of direct patronage and protection along the community lines. Personalising and centralising mode of functioning of state units of national parties explains the emergence of several powerful state leaders on the political horizon, who exercises considerable autonomy in relation to their respective parties. The trend is, of course, much more visible in the case of the state level parties including the much older, cadre-based and ideologically rooted state parties like Akali Dal, DMK and National Conference. State party leaders like Lalu Yadav, Sharad Pawar, Nitish Kumar, Karunanidhi, Ramvilas Paswan, Ajit Singh or Mayawati have cultivated their personal social support base veering around their communities and loyalists and as such they seem far more secured in terms of their political survival than the national leaders.

### **2012 Elections**

Looking back in a comparative mode at the 2012 Punjab Assembly elections in all its details shows that the state is not much of an exception. Not only had the

elections seen the consolidation of a state-level party, but also the emergence of a 'new' crop of leaders within the party like Bikram Singh Majithia led by the 'new leader' Sukhbir Singh Badal. The elections also further underlined the increasing dominance of a state party in a long-standing coalition with a polity-wide party.<sup>7</sup> The elections also witnessed a most virulent form of competitive populism as the two contending 'relevant'/'effective' parties, both lacking in terms of ideological content and organisational presence, indulged in patronage, clientalism and hollow promises mainly targeting their core social constituencies without any programmatic efforts to back them for electoral gains.

As a significant exception to the emergent trend in electoral politics across most of the states witness to 'assertion from below',<sup>8</sup> the social basis of power in Punjab has, however, remained unchallenged despite one third of the state population belonging to the scheduled castes (Judge 2012, page 18).<sup>9</sup> Punjab is yet to experience what has been hailed as the 'silent revolution' sweeping across the Indian states through electoral route as lower caste based state parties thrive on the plank of 'social justice'.<sup>10</sup>

The 2012 Assembly elections received wide attention as it bucked the hitherto well established tradition of voting out the incumbent party in power - see Table 1 below for the election results.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 1: Elections Results, 2012 Assembly Election**

Name of Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Change from 2007	Vote (%)	% Change since 2007
INC	117	46	+2	40.09	-0.81
SAD (Badal)	97	56	+7	34.73	-2.36
BJP	23	12	-7	7.18	-1.10
BSP	117	0	0	4.29	+0.06
CPI	14	0	0	0.82	+0.06
CPM	9	0	0	0.16	-0.12
SAD (Mann)	57	0	0	0.28	-0.24
PPP	92	0	0	5.16	+5.16

Source: CSDS Data Unit

Besides banking on the electoral history of the state since its formation in 1966, the expectation of a victory for the Congress was also based on the 2009 elections results (see Table 2 below). Congress had taken a lead in as many as 65 Assembly constituency segments of the Lok Sabha constituencies, which were then being represented by the party legislators. The SAD on the other

hand had taken a lead in 50 constituencies segments. The BJP could take lead in only two constituencies.

**Table 2: Elections Results, 2004 and 2009 Lok Sabha Elections**

	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Change from 2004	Vote (Per Cent)	Change since 2004 (Per Cent)
Congress Party	13	8	+6	45.23	+11.06
SAD (Badal)	10	4	-4	33.85	-0.43
BJP	3	1	-2	10.06	-0.42
BSP	13	0	0	5.75	-1.92
CPI	2	0	0	.33	-2.22
CPM	1	0	0	.14	-1.67
SAD (Mann)	3	0	0	.36	-3.43

Source: CSDS Data Unit

While discerning the long trends as reflected in the elections, inherent in the ensuing discussion would be an analysis of the factors that mattered in a remarkable election registering largely unexpected results<sup>12</sup> in favour of the SAD-BJP combine across the three regions<sup>13</sup> - see Table 3 below on performance of the two main parties. Even after the lapse of nearly one year, state level party leadership has been facing an avalanche of dissident voices.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 3: Region wise Analysis of performance of the two main parties in the 2012 Assembly Election**

Regions	Total Seats	Turnout	Congress		BJP+SAD	
			Won	Votes (%)	Won	Votes (%)
MAJHA	25	75.0	9	41.2	16	47.2
DOABA	23	76.4	6	37.1	16	41.3
MALWA	69	80.6	31	40.6	36	40.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>78.6</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>40.1</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>41.9</b>

Source: CSDS Data Unit

For pursuing the above research agenda, present paper makes an attempt to analyse the 2012 elections in terms of nature of electoral participation, party manifestos, leadership style, and electoral campaigns.

### **Electoral Participation, Campaign and the Issues**

Punjab witnessed an unprecedented electoral participation at 78.6 percent of registered in these ‘normal’ elections, devoid of any ‘wave’.<sup>15</sup> Significantly, the female turnout at 79.1 percent was higher than male turnout at 78.1 percent.

What led to such a record turnout was the long-drawn intense campaigning by the parties. The elections also saw an all-time high number of contestants at 1,078 (418 independents). While the Punjab Peoples Party (PPP) led the *Sanjha Morcha* comprising of Communist Party of India (CPI), CPI (Marxist)<sup>16</sup> and Akali Dal (Barnala) launched the *Jago Punjab Yatra*, the Congress embarked on *Punjab Bachao Yatra* and the ruling Akali Dal undertook *Punjab Vikas Yatra*.

Extra efforts put in the campaigning by the two contending parties (especially the SAD) were primarily due to the emergence of PPP as the ‘third alternative’. Given the close nature of verdicts in the state in terms of voting percentages in the past elections, Congress and SAD leadership went all out with the intent to capture not only the ‘floating voters’ but also to hold their ground against possible encroachment in their ‘vote bank’ by the PPP led *Sanjha Morcha*. The media hype created at the state level and massive crowds mainly comprising of the state youth in the election rallies of PPP President Manpreet Singh Badal, a renegade Akali, prompted the Akali leadership to hit the road almost a year and half before the elections were due to take place.

Notwithstanding the intensity and the high stakes involved, the campaign stood out as one of the cleanest in recent times in terms of the positive note of the language used by the political class across the board. Symptomatic of being a ‘normal’ election, the SAD as well as the Congress not only devoted their manifestos to the issues of development and governance (besides, of course, promising freebies as usual) but more significantly, even during the campaigns, refrained *completely* from raising emotive issues bordering on ethnicity or indulging in ugly mudslinging at personal level. Campaign cutting across the party lines concentrated broadly over the performance (or lack of it) of the ruling Akali Dal-BJP combine at the state level and Congress led UPA at the centre. As a result, the substantive issues related to the ordinary masses which earlier found space in the manifestos but were hardly heard during the campaigns, like the issues of unemployment, corruption, farmer’s suicides, school education, cancer deaths in the cotton belt, massive indebtedness besides the omnipresent issue of *Bijli, Sadak and Pani*, this time very much dominated the proceedings. In the Akali Dal Manifesto, the panthic/emotive issues like justice for the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, protecting the river waters, inclusion of Chandigarh and Punjabi speaking areas, legal reviews of cases filed during the days of militancy figured only in half a page. The same page contained also the resolve of the party to preserve peace and communal

harmony in a 'futuristic Punjab' ('Development for All', SAD Election Manifesto 2012, p. 15).

### **Delimitation of Constituencies**

The intensity of the campaign and major electoral upsets<sup>17</sup> that marked the 2012 Assembly elections as well as the preceding 2009 Lok Sabha elections can be attributed to the fact that Punjab, like the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra, has witnessed major territorial changes in the constituencies' profiles due to the fourth delimitation exercise undertaken in 2008 by the Delimitation Commission, headed by Justice Kuldeep Singh. The changed electoral map in the state saw the number of reserved constituencies of Lok Sabha (for Scheduled Castes) going up from three to four in the 2009 elections. The number of Assembly constituencies reserved for the Scheduled Castes has increased from 29 to 34. An increase in the number of reserved constituencies and shifting of 4 assembly constituencies i.e. 2 each from Majha and Doaba to Malwa has in a significant way altered the power equilibrium in a state where the leaders across the parties are closely identified with the region they come from. Adding to the electoral volatility was the fact that quite a few sitting legislators who were 'victims' of the delimitation exercise, had to be adjusted in the neighbouring constituencies as 'parachuted' candidates much to the chagrin of the local party aspirants, some of whom went on to stand as independent candidate. An increase in the number of rebel candidates added further to the fiercely close nature of the electoral battles.<sup>18</sup>

### **Political Leadership**

The two youthful 'post-Bluestar' generation leaders who were put to 'litmus test' in these elections were Sukhbir Singh Badal and Manpreet Singh Badal, the estranged cousins.<sup>19</sup> They both led the campaigns of the SAD-BJP and PPP led Sanjha Morcha respectively. Typical of Punjab politics where along with caste, language and religion, kinship also remain a major determinant factor in electoral terms, it often looked like fratricidal war.

Arguably, the elections saw the emergence of Sukhbir Badal,<sup>20</sup> the Deputy Chief Minister, from the colossal shadow of his father and the five times Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal. In his capacity as the Party President, Badal junior played a decisive role for the second time in tickets distribution and also worked out the electoral strategy and led the campaign. Living up to his image of being an astute strategist, decisive and entrepreneurial politician, he chalked out constituency specific campaigns and candidates' selection. Following the SAD manifesto, media campaign (control over cable industry meant perennial 'Badal Darshan') as well as campaign speeches indicated the continued effort of the 'new leader/heir apparent' to broaden the party's social support base among the urban mostly Hindu voters while retaining its core support base of rural Sikhs.<sup>21</sup> Listing 'achievements' like building or planning to build expressways, metros, over-bridges, international airports, solid waste

management and drinking water projects in the cities of Punjab during the campaign underlined the electoral strategy of the SAD leadership to attract the support of the burgeoning urban voters. The strategy seemed to shed the dependence of the party over its long-standing ally i.e. BJP, a party with a traditional urban, upper-caste Hindu support base.<sup>22</sup> Conscious efforts to change the electorates' popular perception of the image of SAD from being a 'panthic' party of Jat-Sikhs to a party for 'Punjab, Punjabis and Punjabiat', as per the 1995 Moga declaration, was strengthened by the party's well publicised move to give tickets to as many as 11 Hindu candidates out of which 10 actually went on to win their seats.<sup>23</sup> The electoral outcome showed that the SAD succeeded in reaping the electoral dividend due to its 'social engineering'.<sup>24</sup> The SAD-BJP combine not only won 36 out of 62 Sikh majority constituencies as compared to 26 seats won by the Congress but also managed to win in 13 out of 19 Hindu majority constituencies as compared to only 4 seats won by the Congress.<sup>25</sup> In terms of locality specific outcomes, again the SAD-BJP combine had a head start over the Congress even in the urban constituencies winning 9 out of 17 urban constituencies as compared to Congress winning only in 6 constituencies. Again the SAD, considered a party of farmers, retained its traditional support base in rural Punjab by winning 42 out of 66 constituencies as compared to the Congress which could only win 23 seats (*EPW*, 2012, p. 72).

The elections also saw the arrival of another youthful leader in the form of Manpreet Badal, four times MLA from Gidderbaha and former finance minister of Punjab who was expelled by Akal Dal in October 2010 due to his differences with Sukhbir Badal, ostensibly over economic policy matters though the 'inheritance issue' was also there. Enjoying a clean image as a politician, a rarity in Punjab, Manpreet Badal drew attention of the youth as well as urban middle classes with his leadership style that drew heavily from symbolism and the 'saintly idioms'.<sup>26</sup> Presenting himself as a 'game changer' and invoking the 'Punjabi pride' to return to its lost glory, Manpreet Badal promised the electorate a reformist agenda, a promise that lacked credibility given the lack of organisational base of his party (Kumar, 2010). He failed to retain his key supporters. Sitting rebel Akali MLAs Kushaldeep Singh Dhillon and Jagbeer Singh Brar walked away from him to join the Congress on the eve of elections, raising a question mark about his ability to be a team-leader and an organization man unlike his cousin who has excelled as a 'machine man' despite his 'rough and ready' brand of real politics.<sup>27</sup> Lack of funds<sup>28</sup> along with lack of winnability factor also went against the PPP in a state that has had a stable bipolar party system for long. For a nascent party, however, receiving more than 5 per cent vote share in a state where all the parties except Congress, BJP and SAD have suffered over the period from a steady decline in terms of vote share does hold some promise for Manpreet Badal leadership provided he builds his party base. At the same time, his getting defeated badly even in the constituency (Gidderbaha) that he had represented since 1985 without a break, does raise a question mark.

As for the two ageing chief ministerial candidates for their respective parties in the fray, they both have been proven mass leaders with a state-wide support base. This is remarkable as in Punjab most of the leaders' power and influence hardly extend even to the region they belong to, and that too not for long.

Badal senior, long serving Chief Minister of the state,<sup>29</sup> and among the senior-most active politician of stature in the country, has been credited with bringing peace and stability in post-militancy Punjab by emphasising Hindu-Sikh unity.<sup>30</sup> As a 'reconciler' in 'Vajpayee mould' and as someone who has been a survivor in the volatile politics of the state, Badal senior has also been credited with pulling BJP along in a long-term alliance despite the ideological differences and different social support base. In the 1997 elections when despite having a majority of its own, Badal led Akali Dal had formed a coalition government with the BJP.

To his discredit, however, Badal senior may be held responsible for prioritising the party's electoral survival when contemplating policy options, even at the cost of the perceived long-term gains for the state that has been experiencing deceleration of growth for more than a decade now. There has been an unprecedented rise in '*Kunbaparasti*' in terms of ticket distribution in recent elections as well as in the composition of council of ministers, unusual for a cadre based ideologically rooted Akali Dal. To what extent Badal senior, given his 'control' over the official Akali Dal and also unmistakable 'influence' over the SGPC and the Akal Takht since the demise of Gurchanan Singh Tohra, can be held responsible for the degeneration of Akali Dal into a 'family party' is a moot question (Kumar, 2012).

As for the Congress whether in Punjab or elsewhere, it has now been more a trend than an aberration to promote 'family politics'.<sup>31</sup> Even by their own standards, however, state level Congress leaders overdid it this time.<sup>32</sup> They cornered tickets for their kinsmen and cronies. This resulted into the 'rebel factor', a huge factor in causing the party's defeat. Amrinder Singh, like other top leaders of the party such as Rajinder Kaur Bhattal and Jagmeet Brar to name a few, could not absolve himself from the responsibility as his son got the ticket.<sup>33</sup> As the anointed chief strategist and tallest leader of the party in the state for more than a decade, the Captain, a former Patiala royal, has often been accused, even by his own party men, for being 'inaccessible' and 'laidback' and also unable to rise over and above factional politics, a fact that showed in his inability in tackling the rebel factor which cost the party dearly in as many as 14 constituencies where the margin between victory and defeat was very narrow.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the perception that as a Chief Minister during 2002-2007, Captain had failed to provide an effective and clean government also blunted the charge against the SAD-BJP government non-performance.<sup>35</sup> The party apparently paid for the complacency shown during the campaign, having too much faith in the electoral tradition of the state. Congress was the last in announcing the names of party candidates, that too in instalments, and it also delayed releasing the party manifesto well after the dates of the elections



were announced thus giving a head start to the SAD-BJP combine in the run-up to elections.

### **Role of Deras**

The lopsided nature of the state polity was well illustrated in the way *Dera* episode was played out during the campaign with much fanfare by the political class cutting across the party lines. After *Dera Sacha Sauda*, with its open support for Congress reportedly playing an important role in the party winning as many as 37 seats in the Malwa region in the 2007 elections, *Deras* are now acknowledged as playing an important role in determining the electoral choices of their followers. Most of these belong to the socially and economically marginal groups, including the large chunk of migrant farm/industrial labourers from poorer states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Chhattisgarh.

In Punjab, the participation of the lower castes has remained confined to mere 'presence' in the party forums or in the state legislature and the actual political power, irrespective of the party in power, has remained firmly with the numerically strong land-owning Jat Sikh community.<sup>36</sup> Thus, unwilling to share power, leadership of the main parties has taken recourse to the 'softer' option of cultivating the *Deras* to 'deliver' *en bloc* the subaltern votes without the need to undertake any substantive efforts to democratise the social base of the power structure.<sup>37</sup> Top party leaders like Amrinder Singh, Rajinder Kaur Bhattal and Manpreet Badal, followed by hundreds of candidates in the fray, made their rounds of the influential *Deras*. Even some Akali candidates, in defiance of the SGPC directive, sought the blessings of the *Deras*.<sup>38</sup> Significantly, the SAD failed to issue a clear-cut directive in this regard.

Over the longer term, with religion finally beginning to recede into the background as an electoral factor, the sizable presence of dalits and other backward communities in the state is going to be a crucial determining factor in state electoral politics, with the caste factor likely to take over. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) top leadership based in Uttar Pradesh has not shown much inclination to consolidate what could have been its 'natural' support base in the state, as was apparent in the party gaining a 12 per cent vote share in the 1997 elections.<sup>39</sup> Caste-based regional/state level parties like the Begampura Party representing Ravidasias in the Doaba region, are likely to mark their presence in the coming years. Increasing entrenchment of political power in the hands of the wealthy and influential Jat Sikh political families, more often than not interrelated in prudent marriage alliances, explains why the Congress and the Akali Dal leadership has not shown any inclination to remove the 'representational blockage'.

### **Politics of Populism**

How then did the SAD manage to make a dent in the traditional support base of the Congress especially that of the rural poor with most of them of low-

caste origin? Arguably, it had much to do with the massive direct transfer of public resources to the rural poor in the form of *Atta-Dal*, *Shagun* (monetary help for girls' marriage), and *Mai-Bhago Vidya* (bicycles for girl students)<sup>40</sup> schemes alongside sops for the rich farmers like free power to tube wells. The schemes were operational on the ground despite the economic difficulties and helped the Akali cause. This was revealed clearly in the CSDS post-poll 2012 survey findings. Remarkably, 80 percent of the poor respondents interviewed had heard about the Atta-Dal scheme and 70 percent admitted to be beneficiaries. Likewise 85 percent of the farmers had heard about free power to tube wells (in existence since 1997) and 68 percent accepted to have benefited from the scheme. Further, 55 percent of the dalit families interviewed during the survey reported having benefited from free power whereas 78 percent of the respondents had heard about it (*EPW*, 2012, page 75). Success of populist schemes especially those targeted towards women bore fruit as the SAD-BJP recorded a significant lead of 5 percentage points over the Congress among the women voters as per the CSDS survey. 44 per cent of women respondents interviewed voted for SAD whereas only 39 per cent supported the Congress.<sup>41</sup>

The SAD, this time held out some really incredible promises like grant of free five Marla plots for all the landless poor in the state, free gas connections for all BPL families, generation of one million jobs in next five years out of which 200,000 jobs to be in the government sector, free laptops to all the higher secondary government schools (SAD Manifesto 2012, pages 20 and 29). The Congress, on the rebound, also indulged in some ludicrous promises like creating 10 lakh jobs, making a mockery of the sanctity of manifesto politics (*'Navi Soch Nava Punjab'*, Congress Manifesto 2012-2017, p. 23). The problem with the Congress was that the electorate showed more belief in the Akali Dal indulgence in fiscal profligacy. The Congress was in any case highlighting the precarious health of the state's economy and underlining the need to introduce urgent reformist measures. As also happened in the case of Uttar Pradesh, the Congress's belated attempt to remind the rural/urban poor of schemes such as NREGA, JNURM, Pradhanmantri Sadak Yojana, Indira Gandhi old age pension schemes, Sarv Sikhsha Abhiyan and also importantly that most of the welfarist and developmental schemes were being funded by the centre and not by the 'bankrupt' government, did not cut much ice with the electorate as delivery was undertaken by state functionaries.

### **Shift in Electoral Agenda?**

What about much celebrated shift in the electoral agenda, supposedly going on in the state since the 1997 elections. Over the years the panthic agenda has given away to the peace and developmental agenda by the mainstream parties as well as the electorates.<sup>42</sup> This shift has not been as straightforward or smooth and can't be merely be put down to the fact that identity issues were not raked up during the campaign, as the campaign and the positioning of the contending parties left much to be desired if one actually looks back at what

happened during the run-up to elections. In a state with ‘missing girl children’ and which is facing an environmental disaster due to the reckless use of mechanised irrigation and fertilisers, neither the Congress nor the Akali Dal during their campaign focused primarily on the issue of female foeticide, continuing loss of green cover, unplanned urban growth by the land mafia or pollution of rivers and ground water. The Akali Dal, which had way back undertaken a long-term initiative called ‘*Nanhi Chhan*’ (the little shade) to save the girl child from foeticide and also created awareness about the environment seemed to forget about it. The patriarchal character of political culture was also underlined by the insignificant presence of women as party candidates. Even over the drug menace that threatens to destroy an entire generation of Punjab youth, the parties failed to come out with a clear-cut roadmap to curb widely prevalent drug peddling. Organising sports events or building stadiums is certainly not going to be much helpful in keeping the drug mafia at bay, as the SAD seems to believe. And then, while the convergence of the electoral agenda towards ‘developmentalism’ was most welcome, even if at the rhetoric level, given the turbulent history of the borderland state, one still felt uneasiness about the ‘personalised’ mode of politics which encourages collusion between the state and political institutions for nefarious purposes (‘vendetta’) at the local level.<sup>43</sup> During the election campaigns when one heard ordinary people frequently complaining about ‘*dhakkashahi*’ (intimidation or violence), it was not only the 2008 Panchayat elections that saw appropriation of panchayat bodies by the ruling party functionaries allegedly using the strong arms tactics. The people suffered from rampant corruption.<sup>44</sup> The Congress supporters complained of day to day harassment and also the denial of access to the distributional welfarist schemes.

### **Looking Ahead**

Did the 2012 elections mark a discernible shift in terms of the nature of state’s electoral politics or was it just yet another ‘normal’ election in the sense that social basis of political power has remained intact or even getting reinforced in terms of its social basis? As is obvious from the above discussion, the polity remains lopsided. It is therefore imperative that the established parties’ leadership in the state make conscious efforts to democratise/institutionalise their party organs to curb the emerging personalising and centralising mode of politics and broaden the democratic base of their respective parties. Heavy dependence on direct patronage and opportunistic ‘social engineering’ without much care for democratic ethos or public ethics also needs to be reviewed. The leadership across the party lines needs to further remember that the lopsidedness and degeneration of the polity is bound to reflect adversely in the domain of substantive public policies initiatives and success. As the CSDS survey showed, for the electorate, economic issues like price rises, unemployment, development of the state and corruption remain of paramount concern.<sup>45</sup> Being one of the three most indebted states in the country, along with West Bengal and Kerala, with debt amounting to 78 thousand crores and

increasing every fiscal year and also having registered only a 5.90 percent economic growth rate against the national rate of 8.2 per cent during 11<sup>th</sup> five year plan, are sufficient indicators of poor fiscal health of the state for quite some time. The question is how can the state's economy recover its fiscal health if the SAD-BJP regime continues to indulge in direct transfer of public resources to the powerful landed peasantry as well as the electorate living in penury in the name of 'development/ performance'? It is difficult, for instance, to make sense of the appointment of as many as 31 chief parliamentary secretaries in a state only having an 18-member cabinet given the huge administrative expenditure this incurs and also considering the fact that they keep complaining of lack of work.

There has been a critical need of long-term reforms in the key economic sectors. While there has been persistent talk of the 'second green revolution' and also of the need to bring in investment for much needed industrial development, to make the state surplus in terms of power, nothing much has been achieved on the ground so far. Central grants for development have been diverted in the past, and there is no guarantee that it won't happen again. The much publicised administrative reforms, including e-governance and the Right to Service Act have also not made much headway. Elections raised expectations of the gullible ordinary electorate looking for more state largesse. As of now most of the promises made in the SAD-BJP manifesto have remained largely on paper,<sup>46</sup> given the precarious state of economy and lack of political will to take tough measures. The continued non-performance may allow the Congress to reap the benefits in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections but whether it would bring a much awaited turnaround in the fate of the beleaguered state is a moot question.

[The paper refers to the findings of a post-poll survey conducted in Punjab by the CSDS, Delhi. A total of 3,250 respondents, selected randomly from the electoral roll, were interviewed face to face in randomly sampled 45 constituencies covering 4 polling stations from each constituency. The fieldwork was coordinated jointly by Ashutosh Kumar and Jagrup Singh Sekhon. The survey team comprising of Masters Degree students was affiliated to Panjab University, Chandigarh and Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. Some of the survey findings have been published in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 7 April, 2012, pp. 71-75]

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> While asked to prioritise their loyalty in the National Election Studies conducted by CSDS-Lokniti in 1996 and 1999, 53 and 51 per cent of the respondents respectively expressed their first loyalty to region they belonged to rather than to India whereas only 21 per cent in both post-poll surveys put their loyalty first to India.

<sup>2</sup> Yadav (1996, p. 95) has referred to the verdicts in the assembly elections held in sixteen states between 1993-95 as ushering in 'a new era in the country's politics' marking the 'reconfiguration of the party system' in the form of a 'competitive multi-party system which no longer be defined with reference to the Congress'. In the process Congress also learnt to 'transform itself from the dominant party in a dominant party system to a competitive party in a multi-party system' (Rudolph and Rudolph 2008, p. 36).

<sup>3</sup> On their part, the state level parties like the SAD got 'locked-in' to the BJP either due to 'mutual electoral interdependence' or to avoid 'splitting of the vote against their common rival, the Congress party'. 'Territorial compatibility' and not the 'ideological compatibility' has been the key to most of the long-term coalitional arrangements as in the case of Punjab (Sridharan 2012, p. 328).

<sup>4</sup> Leadership as a subject has remained inexplicably under-researched especially when it comes to the state level leadership. Price and Rudd (2010, p. XVI) have attributed it to three factors: first, focus on the national leaders who are 'seen to have shaped India's post-colonial future'; second, 'dominance of nationalist narrative...undervalues the importance of 'regional' (and by implication somehow less important) leaders; third, 'the strident assertion of identity politics in the electoral arena' encompasses 'any discussions of individual leaders as part of ...wider group phenomenon'.

<sup>5</sup> One can see Supriya Sule, single child of Maratha strongman Sharad Pawar, emerging as the 'natural inheritor' of her father's legacy bypassing Ajit Pawar, the nephew of Pawar senior. Pawar family in this sense is like Thakre and Badal families in Maharashtra and Punjab respectively where the 'leader' has preferred his child over the nephew.

<sup>6</sup> Along with the practice of direct patronage and protection based on ethno-regional loyalties, decline of organisational presence as well as ideology ('convergence' of electoral agenda) across the party lines has also brought to fore the criticality of local leadership factor in electoral battle.

<sup>7</sup> The pattern of party competition in the two neighbouring states i.e. Punjab and Haryana resemble each other in the sense that both states have a bipolar party system with the Congress party facing a state level party in alliance with a national party. However, in contrast to Punjab, the identity of the main anti-Congress party in Haryana has been changing i.e. Haryana Vikas Party was replaced by the Indian National Lok Dal in 2000. In another similarity, the BJP, a polity-wide party has played the role of a junior partner, as to SAD in Punjab, to a state party in Haryana over the years (refer BJP alliance with Haryana Vikas Party, followed by INLD to Haryana Janhit Congress at present) (Nikolenyi, 2010, p. 135).

<sup>8</sup> 'India's electoral system has in recent years become increasingly subaltern friendly' as it has 'given the members of subaltern groups a point of entry into ruling elite and a share of state resources', (Chandra, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> The Scheduled Castes constitute about 30 per cent of the state's population, highest in the country. However, the Scheduled Castes are divided not only along caste lines but also religious lines that result in 'an absence of any visible pattern in their voting behaviour' (Judge, 2012, p. 18).

<sup>10</sup> India is depicted as experimenting with 'a silent revolution' as political power is 'being transferred, on the whole peacefully, from the upper caste elites to various subaltern groups... The relative calm of the Indian experience is primarily due to the fact the whole process is incremental', (Jaffrelot, 2003, p. 494).

<sup>11</sup> In recent years the ruling parties in Gujarat, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh have managed to defy the anti-incumbency factor mainly due to the state level leadership factor.

<sup>12</sup> The SAD-BJP combine, with a lead of less than two percent in terms of vote share (it actually suffered from a negative vote swing) achieved a lead of 22 seats over Congress.

<sup>13</sup> In 25 constituencies of the Majha region, Congress polled 41.2 per cent of votes cast registering victories in 9 constituencies as compared to the SAD-BJP combine receiving 47.2 per cent of the vote and winning in 16 constituencies. In 23 constituencies of Doaba region, the Congress received 37.1 percent of votes polled winning in 6 seats as compared to SAD getting 41.6 percent of the vote share and winning in 16 seats. In the crucial Malwa region, the Congress received 40.6 per cent of votes polled and won in 31 seats as compared to SAD-BJP combine which secured victory in 30 constituencies though having less vote share at 40.3 per cent (*EPW*, 2012, p. 71).

<sup>14</sup> Rajinder Kaur Bhattal, the former Congress legislative party leader has been replaced by Sunil Jakhar.

<sup>15</sup> Voting percentage in the assembly elections in the post-1966 reorganized Punjab has been 71.18, 72.27, 68.63, 65.36, 64.33, 67.47, 23.82, 68.73, 62.14 and 75.36 respectively in 1967, 1969, 1972, 1977, 1980, 1985, 1992, 1997, 2002 and 2007. The 1992 elections saw exceptionally low participation due to boycott by the Akalis and also due to threats made by militants. In the 2012 elections, total number of eligible voters were 1,76,82,363 out of whom 1,38,92,749 actually voted.

<sup>16</sup> The CPI and the CPI (M) contested from 14 and 9 seats respectively. All the CPM candidates lost their deposits. Refer to (Singh, 2012, pp. 22-23) for an analysis of the decline of the Left parties who in the 1997 and 2002 elections had an electoral alliance with the Congress.

<sup>17</sup> As many as 7 cabinet ministers lost the elections, many of them victims of delimitation exercise as either they lost their constituencies forcing them to look for new constituencies or because their constituencies underwent major territorial/demographic changes.

<sup>18</sup> Congress suffered the most in the process as adjusting the sitting legislators in the neighbouring constituencies needed non-partisan deft handling, which was not possible in the faction ridden Congress where party bosses decided

among their favourites. By way of an estimate, due to the 'rebel factor' as many as 14 Congress candidates lost elections with less than a margin of 2000 votes including 4 with less than five hundred votes (Judge, 2012, p. 17). Akali leadership, with the exception of Bains brothers in the two Ludhiana constituencies, were able to win back the rebels within the party fold while 'encouraging' the Congress rebel candidates to remain in the fray.

<sup>19</sup> For comparison, one can refer to the politically powerful Thakre family in Maharashtra where Udhav Thakre, President of Shiv Sena, is pitted against his estranged cousin Raj Thakre, the latter forming his own party Maharashtra Navnirman Sena.

<sup>20</sup> Symbolic of changing times, in the election Manifesto released by SAD in 2012, Sukhbir Badal also figured along with his father, unlike the 2007 Manifesto.

<sup>21</sup> CSDS survey data reveals that in comparison to 2007, this time SAD-BJP lost 8 percent of the Jat Sikh vote. Even then 52 per cent of the Jat voters interviewed during the survey supported the SAD-BJP combine in comparison to only 31 per cent voting for the congress. As per the respective survey data the significant gain for the combine was in terms of the dalit vote as 33 per cent of the dalit respondents interviewed reported voting for the SAD-BSP in the 2012 survey contrast to only 14 per cent in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections.

<sup>22</sup> Among the urban voters, especially the upper caste Hindus, considered the traditional voters of BJP, the SAD-BJP lost up to 10 and 9 percent of votes respectively, as compared to the 2007 CSDS-NES figures.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Sukhbir Singh Badal, (*Frontline*, April 6, 2012, p. 19). Significantly, the Congress fielded 41 Jat Sikhs candidates, which was higher than the SAD, traditionally known as Jat Sikh party. Notably in most seats that saw a Jat Sikh versus Hindu candidate fight, the latter won (*Indian Express*, May 13, 2012, p. 4).

<sup>24</sup> Despite having ideological differences SAD-BJP alliance has remained intact because of the following factors: the two parties have complementary social support base, the pattern of sharing of power between the self-anointed representatives of the two communities in the state does help in striking a much valued social balance given the troubled past. However, most important factor has been the realization by the Akali leadership that based on its past electoral performance; the party cannot win power on its own given the fact that Congress has always enjoyed a decent support base among the Sikh community (Kumar, 2004, p. 1516).

<sup>25</sup> Social engineering' apparently took 'defection route' as the SAD leadership gave party ticket to Joginder Pal Jain to fight the assembly by-election from Moga constituency after he resigned from the Congress and the assembly seat in January 2013.

<sup>26</sup> The challenge put up by his estranged cousin galvanized Sukhbir Badal and led the SAD-BJP government to go for corrective measures like e-governance

and more importantly to ensure that the populist pro-poor schemes became operational.

<sup>27</sup> In the 2009 CSDS-NES survey data relating to the question regarding the respondents' choice about Chief Minister for Punjab; merely 2 per cent had preferred Badal junior, the heir apparent in waiting, over his father who was preferred by 27 per cent. In the CSDS-NES Exit Poll, 2007 the trends were similar as 39 per cent of the respondents had then preferred Badal senior over his son who could get the approval of only 1.8 per cent respondents. The fact that over the years the situation has remained unchanged was also evident in the 2012 survey as only 5 per cent of voters preferred Sukhbir Badal as Chief Minister whereas Badal senior, now five times Chief Minister of Punjab received 38 per cent approval.

<sup>28</sup> Sukhbir Badal, allegedly not only 'bankrolled party nominees but also generously backed Bahujan Samaj Party candidates and Congress rebels to cut into Congress vote.' See 'The MBA Programme for Electoral History', *India Today*, April 9, 2012, p. 42.

<sup>29</sup> Punjab's previous Chief Ministers have been Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir (1966), Justice Gurnam Singh (1967), Lachhman Singh Gill (1967), Giani Jail Singh (1972), Darbara Singh (1980), Surjit Singh Barnala (1985), Beant Singh (1992), Harcharan Singh Brar (1995), Rajinder Kaur Bhattal (1996), Amrinder Singh (2002), Prakash Singh Badal (1970, 1977, 1997, 2007, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Hardliners represented by the Akali Dal (Amritsar) led by Simaranjit Singh Mann and Dal Khalsa have been on the margin of Punjab politics. After the debacle in 2002 and 2007 elections, this time there was no effort to form a Panthic Morcha by the hardliners.

<sup>31</sup> During the survey it was observed that virtually every Punjab village has been witness to politics being defined in terms of '*Gharebandi*' as family based loyalties get prioritized over any other consideration in determining the electoral choices.

<sup>32</sup> The Congress had appointed Gulchain Singh Charak, a Jammu based Congress leader, as the Congress observer for Punjab but the important issues like ticket distribution were mostly decided by the leaders belonging to the state.

<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, Amrinder Singh's own brother Malwinder Singh rebelled and joined the Akali Dal. However, in January, 2013 he returned to the Congress.

<sup>34</sup> There were in total eight constituencies where the candidates getting the second largest number of votes polled were Congress rebels turned independents. The SAD-BJP combine won from as many as seven constituencies leaving one for the Congress (Judge 2012, page 17). One can infer clearly that Congress was done in by internal dissension that was mainly due to the denial of tickets to the deserving candidates either due to the patronage based factional politics within party as well as *Kunbaparasti*.

<sup>35</sup> In terms of the electorate's choice as Chief Minister in the CSDS-NES post-poll survey, Amrinder Singh received approval of 33 per cent of the



respondents whereas Prakash Singh Badal was the most preferred choice for Chief Minister for 38 per cent of the respondents interviewed (*EPW*, 2012, p. 74).

<sup>36</sup>That the social basis of political power in the state remained unchallenged received empirical evidence in the social profile of the winning candidates. As per an estimate, as many as 50 legislators in the newly constituted Assembly belong to the dominant Jat Sikh community and among other winning candidates were eight upper caste Khatri/Arora, six Banias and five Brahmins whereas only seven backward castes candidates have emerged victorious (Judge, 2012, p. 19).

<sup>37</sup>Deras this time reportedly supported individual candidates rather than the parties. The significance accorded to the Dera factor may appear to be overplayed as Harminder Jassi, sitting legislator from Bhatinda whose daughter is married to the *Dera Sacha Sauda* chief, lost this time.

<sup>38</sup>Besides Dera Sacha Sauda, other influential Deras much in demand among the politicians are *Dera Sachkhand Ballan*, *Piar Singh Bhanjarawala Dera* and *Divya Jyoti Jagriti Sansthan*.

<sup>39</sup>The BSP's vote share in 34 reserved (SC) constituencies in the 2012 elections was merely 6.1 percent. Unlike the past elections, Congress could not make much gain from BSP failure and could win only in 10 constituencies polling 40.1 percent of votes polled. Riding on the politics of populism, SAD-BJP combine managed to win an impressive 24 seats with 42.3 percent of the votes polled in these constituencies (*EPW*, 2012, page 72). Apparently the BSP fighting on all 117 seats managed to wean away the crucial dalit vote which would have otherwise gone to the Congress, giving rise to insinuation of 'a deal' between the SAD and BSP.

<sup>40</sup>Women voters showed distinct preference for the SAD-BJP combine as revealed in the CSDS survey. Arguably more in the case of the poor among women voters as they might have been more concerned about the continuation of the populist schemes that helped their family members, as one young woman voter put it during the interview. As per the survey findings, however, electorates belonging to the lower and very poor classes preferred Congress over the SAD-BJP.

<sup>41</sup>Badal senior's popularity among the women voters was an added factor. Significantly, in the past CSDS surveys, Congress had the lead.

<sup>42</sup>Panethnic issues were recognised as being the most important election issue by merely 2 percent of the respondents in the 2012 CSDS survey.

<sup>43</sup>The local police officers are directed to report to the local ruling party legislators/ministers thereby undermining the professionalism of the police force. There have been allegations against police of registering false cases against the Congress supporters.

<sup>44</sup>The Agriculture Minister Tota Singh was indicted and sentenced for misuse of official vehicles during his earlier tenure as Minister during 1997-2002.

<sup>45</sup> During the survey, the most important election issues identified by the respondents were price rise (41 percent), unemployment (22 percent), development of state (12 percent) and corruption (9 percent). Apparently, on the issue of price rise and corruption, the UPA government's non-performance cost Congress in the state.

<sup>46</sup> Nearly 16 lakh families which were provided blue cards by the SAD-BJP government, entitling them to Atta- Dal scheme, had not received subsidized Atta and Dal since the elections (*Indian Express*, May 18, 2012).

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