

Electoral Performance of Aam Aadmi Party in the 16th Lok Sabha and 2017 State Legislative Assembly Elections in Punjab: A Study

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Abstract

Aam Aadmi Party is emerged from a social movement and enables to capture a space of alternative politics. Recent electoral gain in the elections of Delhi and Punjab makes it a valuable player of contemporary competitive electoral politics. The political landscape of Punjab is very conducive to the APP politics. It is solely depends upon the leadership of APP that in what extent they address the issues of Punjab Politics and fulfill the demands of the peoples of Punjab

Keywords: Anti-establishment, Electoral Mobilization, India Against Corruption, Nepotism, Narrow Affiliations.

The formation of Aam Aadmi Party

Democracy is considered a social organization and our constitution is described as a social instrument¹. After the introduction of new economic policies in Indian society, the changes accrued rapidly and the political system also experienced new changes. The demand for greater participation in legislation and a corruption-free society was the main cause of the formation of *Aam Aadmi Party* in India. And in a short span of time, it acquires a considerable position amongst the political parties. *Aam Aadmi Party* is an Indian political party; that officially start on November 26, 2012. It came into existence following differences between the activists Arvind Kejriwal and Anna Hazare regarding whether or not to politicize popular India against corruption movement that

¹ Rodrigues, Valerian. 2002. *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar* (eds.). New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

had been demanding a *Jan Lokpal Bill* since 2011. In the difference of opinion, the whole movement was grouped between the two personalities; the Hazare group preferred that the movement should remain politically unaligned while Kejriwal and his companions felt the failure of the agitation route necessitated a direct political involvement. Anna Hazare and Arvind Kejriwal agreed on 19 September 2012 that their opinion regarding either obtaining direct political power or continuing their movement without any direct participation in politics was contradictory in nature. Kejriwal had support from some anti-corruption movement activists, such as Prashant Bhushan and Shanti Bhushan, but was opposed by others such as Kiran Bedi and Santosh Hegde. Kejriwal announced the formation of a political party and that he planned the formal launch to be on 26 November, coinciding with the anniversary of India's adoption of its constitution in 1949. The party's name reflects the phrase *Aam Aadmi*, or "common man", whose interests Kejriwal proposed to represent. A party constitution was adopted on 24 November 2012, when a National Council comprising 320 people and a National Executive of 23 were also formed. Both the Council and the Executive were expected to have more members in due course, with the intention being that all districts and all classes of people would have a voice. Various committees were to be formed to draft proposals for adoption by the party in a process that was expected to take several months. Although one aim was to limit nepotism, there were complaints at this initial meeting that the selection of people invited to attend was itself an example of such practices. The party was formally launched in Delhi on 26 November and in March 2013 it was registered as a political party by the Election Commission of India². This move changed the shape of pressure-group politics in India and also became a trendsetter in the popular social and political movements of the neoliberal era.

Issues of contemporary Punjab politics

A new era started after the partition of the country. Due to the lack of unanimity in the rule, the political development of Punjab was dissimilar in the regional context; geographical variations are also found in the state. Rural economy of Punjab is mostly based on agriculture so the method of irrigation and circle of crops also impacted on economic development. The course of rivers, lack of minerals, chows, and area under agriculture shaped the pace of development. Being landlocked state, the construction of the roads was so important in the development process. These things promote inequality among people. The patterns of the development of grassroots democracy were also different in the state after the 73rd constitutional amendment. Political beliefs were changed drastically and social leadership acquired new momentum. The green revolution made a huge gap in the income of people. Caste and class discourse attain a new way of speculation. A new type of feudal setup was developed started in the villages of Punjab. Factionalism in parties developed at the village level. The party politics damaged the harmony of village life. The *Naxalite* movement and *Khalistan*

² Kumar, Ashutosh. 2014. 'Parliamentary Elections in Punjab: Explaining the Electoral Success of Aam Aadmi Party', *Journal of Punjab Studies*, University of California, Santa Barbara, 21(1): 113-127.

movement explore the class and communal realities of the land. In this period, the developments of different *Deras* and their socio-political role also impacted the politics of the village in Punjab. One of the important factors is caste and many castes are living in the villages of Punjab. Furthermore, the *Dalits* population (29%) is residing in villages. Further, the *Dalits* in Punjab failed to recognize them as a political force and accept the leadership of the general castes. Rural-urban gaps, and Punjabi Diasporas, all are significant in the emergence of AAP in Punjab. A study of the patterns of electoral mobilization in Punjab in the 1997s elections and onward is regarded as, significant on two grounds, it helps us to know the demands of the people of Punjab from the state government and secondly, it helps to throw light on a significant research question that what is the response of ruling parties of the state to fulfill the demands of the people after two decades violence. The question is of some importance considering that 'normalcy' was restored to the state without a single demand of the *Anandpur Sahib Resolution* being met. That is the Akali Dal, which had set out to confront the central government in and through the adoption of the Resolution, had not achieved any of the objectives laid out in the resolution, least of all the objective of recasting centre-state relations. On the other hand, the Congress which controlled the central government for much of the period of militancy was largely identified as the very party that had sanctioned the use of massive force to suppress militancy. It was also identified in the popular eye as the party whose leaders had directed the anti-Sikh pogrom in Delhi after the assassination of P.M Indira Gandhi in 1984. . The riots also rendered thousand of Sikhs dispossessed as their homes and their properties were burnt by marauding hordes in November 1984. The *Aam Aadmi Party* (AAP) has emerged to highlight the neglected issues in Punjab Politics. In forty-nine days of the chief ministership of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal set up a special investigation team (SIT) to probe the 1984 genocide laid a solid foundation to connect with the Sikhs. This move popularized him among the Sikhs in Punjab. Previous to them, the political class in Punjab which is in power or in opposition, only exploits the emotions of the electorates but failed to establish themselves that they are pro-people of Punjab. The election result shows that AAP's successful attempt to overturn politics from above by mobilization of people from below, not just on a pro-people agenda but by using methods which will entrench democratic citizenship in Punjab Politics. Exploring the background and the rise of the *Aam Aadmi Party* in Punjab, a new anti-establishment political party that has acquired considerable social and political support in its opening venture into the electoral arena, this paper is an attempt to analyze the major cause of success and the futuristic opportunities for AAP.

AAP as guardian of alternative politics

The *Aam Aadmi Party*, popularized as the AAP, has risen as the catalyst for, and for the time being is also the sole guardian of, this New Alternative in the political arena. But, it is just the first political party of this genre. In all likelihood, in a few years (or, could be decades as well) a number of political outfits spawned by this New Alternative will flesh out into a Front that will challenge the conventional parties. It is also to be noted that this New Alternative political force is a product of a New Alternative

movement that was active earlier at different levels of society. Now it has spilled over to the political arena, the real seat of power. It has assumed the peculiar characteristic of 'snatching the initiative'. In other words, instead of compelling political parties to concede ground inch by inch, it has come up as a political alternative"³.

Emergence of AAP in Punjab

"The AAP performed much better than expected across age groups, classes, castes and communities and localities and its performance is particularly noteworthy among some sections. Among the Hindu Other Backward Classes, four of every 10 voted for the newcomer. Upper class, youth, college educated and urban voters also gave the AAP a strong advantage over its opponents"⁴. Punjab is an exceptional state of the Indian federation which has its own set of culture and politics with different socio-political and economic problems. Due to the historical affiliation of people with two mainstream political parties, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and Indian National Congress (INC), these problems were never part of the election manifestos of the traditional parties till the last election. Usually seen as politically inactive even during the elections, the people of Punjab have given a tough lesson to the leaders contesting the Lok Sabha elections this time around. In Punjab, the anti-incumbency was at two points. People were against the Congress party at the centre, and in the state, they were against the SAD-BJP government, particularly Akalis because of their high-handed behaviour against peasants, workers and other working classes.

People believed that the Drug mafia was patronized by Akali party bosses themselves. a 2011 survey by the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment concluded that 40% of those in the age group of 15-25 years in the state are addicts, as are 48 percent of farmers and agricultural labourers. The drug menace spread by the Drug mafia made Punjab common people angrier with Akalis, The hard-to-define hope AAP holds out in the misery sweeping the 'land of plenty' is the inspiration behind the catchy slogan that has become extremely popular: "Na bhukki ko, na daaru ko, vote denge jhaddu ko." (Bhukki is the local name for opium husk.) After the election, the SAD-BJP government start action against the responsible for widespread drug abuse in the state but people do not recognise these actions. The AAP's image and the hope of the people of Punjab create history to recognize the third alternative in the recent Lok Sabha Elections.

The position of law and order in Punjab is also miserable in the state. The gun culture in Punjab, "A series of violent incidents involving supporters and activists of the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in Punjab have made headlines in the national media. Police officers, revenue staff, tax officials, hoteliers, teenage girls, political opponents, and the common people have been victims in these incidents. In two prominent episodes in 2012, the victims were young girls. In the first case, a 15-year-old girl was abducted

³ Raychaudhuri, Diptendra.2014. AAP in Perspective: Birth of the 'New Alternative', *Mainstream*, VOL LII No 5, January 25, Republic Day Special.

⁴ The Punjab verdict is bad news for the two mainstream alliances in the State and signals the rise of a third alternative, *The Hindu*, May 25, 2014.

during the day from her house in Faridkot town. Her parents were injured and the neighbours were kept at bay by firing guns in the air. In the second case, the daughter of an assistant sub-inspector (ASI) of police was harassed by an armed group of youth in a car in Amritsar. When the ASI, who was in uniform, tried to stop the delinquents, he was injured. With their ammunition running out, they went to the house of a member of the group to fetch a gun and shot the ASI dead in full view of his young daughter and a crowd. In another incident, an assistant inspector general (AIG) police was assaulted in Ludhiana, fracturing his leg. Earlier, a tehsildar was assaulted in his office in Ludhiana in the presence of a crowd, and a hotelier was killed in Jalandhar⁵. People were very frustrated with this violence in society. So they cast their vote for change. The new concept of *Halqa incharge* was the big cause of the delay. The direct political interference in the working police administration, control over the functioning of the revenue department, sand mining, and construction industries make ease the life of the common people of Punjab. They show this anger during the poll and the AAP was the best option to teach the lesson to the ruling class.

Punjabi Diaspora also plays a very crucial role in the victory of AAP in Punjab. The NRIs were consciously watching the socio-political conditions of Punjab. They also compare the quality of ruling with their resident country. During the election campaign, they fully use social media, and telephonic talk to motivate their near and dear in favour of AAP, and pay monetary and emotional support to the candidate to openly campaign for change, even if they openly explore and criticize the suppressive policies of the ruling class.

The candidate of AAP, in the election, was popular among the common masses of Punjab. The renounced doctor of Amritsar, Dr Daljit Singh, Social Doctor and Worker Dr Dharmeer Gandhi, comedian of the common people of Punjabi people Bhagwant Maan, student leader and activist and popular, Sardar Harinder Singh Khalsa, Social worker and college professor Sardar Sadhu Singh, 84 anti-Sikh Riots activist H.S. Phulka Advocate, Himat Singh Shergill from Anandpur sahib a social worker and advocate, Student leader honest leader and activist Sardar Sucha Singh Shotepur From Gurdaspur, Artist Jassi Jasraj from Bathinda, Satnaam Paul Kamboj an activist and advocate from Ferozepur, were all popular name in Punjab or their respective constituencies. According to Prof Manjit Singh, who looks after AAP affairs in Punjab, there were 400 AAP ticket aspirants of which 250 were shortlisted. "The panel was prepared and the main criterion was the person's social capital."⁶

Manpreet Badal, who had formed the People's Party of Punjab during assembly elections in 2012, had raised several such issues; it failed to grab people's attention and was seen as anti-poor instead. But Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP not just brought the issues of corruption, drugs and poor quality-high cost-higher education back into the limelight but has also been successful in grabbing people's attention⁷.

⁵ Gill, Sucha Singh. 2013. 'Gun Culture in Punjab', *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVIII, (8): 16-18.

⁶ <http://sikhsangat.org/2014/aap-banking-on-social-capital-to-pick-candidates/>

⁷ <http://www.governancenow.com/news/regular-story/last-real-issues-punjab-find-mention-polls>

In this ambience of deliberate inaction, AAP's astonishing performance in the Delhi Assembly election stirred the beleaguered state. What also inspired its people is the AAP government's crackdown on corruption and its decision to institute the SIT probe in the anti-Sikh riots of 1984. For those accustomed to the betrayal of the political class, AAP appeared as an outfit willing to walk the talk.

The socio-cultural and economic realities in Punjab became adverse to the Dalits and marginal peasantry, small traders and employees in the public sector which were the major proportion of electorates. The universal decline of political parties was also found in the recent Punjab election. People make distance themselves from leftists because of their anti-religious approach and past alliances with major political parties. But for the first time, all sections of the society of Punjab voted for AAP and cross the line of religion, caste and any other narrow affiliations.

The electoral performance of the AAP

“Then there is the unusual campaign theme of AAP founder Arvind Kejriwal that whoever wins, be it Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or the Congress, the result will be the same, that is, the rule of corporates and continuance of corruption, which only AAP can put an end to. Finally, AAP got into the 2014 general elections knowing it was not going to form the government at the centre. The fight has been for something less tangible”⁸. Aam Aadmi Party put up candidates for almost all seats in Punjab but was successful in four constituencies. It was close to victory in two other constituencies as well. Akali-BJP (NDA) combine could secure a respectable victory only in the case of Vinod Khanna and Ranjit Singh Brahmura, whose lead crossed one lakh votes in Gurdaspur and Khadoor Sahib. From the Congress side, only Amrinder Singh could have a lead of one lakh votes against Arun Jaitley of the BJP. In the other ten seats-AAP scored the highest lead of 2 lakh plus votes in Sangrur constituency from where Bhagwant Mann won against veteran Akali leader Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa, relegating Congress MP Vijay Inder Singla to third position. Prof. Sadhu Singh of AAP again scored an impressive victory with the second highest margin of one lakh and seven thousand plus votes against Akali candidate Paramjit Kaur Gulshan. Akali Dal's victory in the Bathinda constituency of now minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal, daughter-in-law of the chief minister is not only shallow by just 19 thousand votes, but this victory has a shadow of muscle and money used in abundance. The highest no. of complaints of buying votes have come from the Bathinda constituency and many polling and presiding officers have in private confirmed so. In many villages, voters did not come to vote till late in the evening and they came only after they were able to secure a big price of their votes from the ruling party candidate's agents around. Had the elections been free and fair from money and state power/muscle power use, the nephew of Chief Minister Manpreet Singh Badal would have comfortably won. Manpreet Badal made a political miscalculation also in choosing Congress party support and not acceding to his own Punjab People's Party (PPP) request to go with

⁸ Punwani, Jyoti. 2014. ‘Emerging Hope Among Muslim Youth: The Aam Aadmi Party’, *Economic and Political weekly*, Vol - XLIX (20).

Aam Aadmi Party, which could have gotten him tremendous goodwill and support and neutralized the money/muscle power impact of Akalis. The victory margin of Prem Singh Chandumajra (Akali), and Vijay Sampla (BJP-the lowest margin of 13 thousand) was almost on the losing side. So was Ravneet Bittu(Congress)'s victory margin from Ludhiana against H S Phoolka of AAP, of just 19 thousand plus. The only AAP candidate with less victory margin was Dr Dharamveer Gandhi from Patiala, who defeated Parneet Kaur-three-time MP and two-time minister by 20 thousand plus votes. But Dr Gandhi's victory was historic in the sense that he won from a seat, considered fully safe for the Patiala royal family as was Bathinda seat considered safe for neo royal family of Badals. The AAP had not only surprised the political pundits but upset the mainline political parties in Punjab, by bagging four out of the 13 seats. Its vote share went up to nearly 25 percent, close to the Akali Dal's a little over 26 percent, which could manage to retain its 2009 tally of four seats. The Congress, which was reduced from eight to three seats saw an almost 10 percent reduction in their vote share as compared to the last Lok Sabha polls⁹.

State Legislative elections 2017

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) frittered away gains from the 2014 parliamentary polls in Punjab. The AAP finished second with 20 legislators, behind the Congress, and just two seats above the ruling alliance of the Shiromani Akali Dal and BJP. Data from the latest elections threw up thought-provoking facts and figures such as the stagnation of AAP's support in Punjab, where the party was making its assembly debut after winning four Lok Sabha seats during the peak of a BJP wave in 2014. But Assembly election 2017, Two dozen AAP candidates lost their deposit. Between 2014 and 2017, the AAP vote share remained more or less identical at 23.6%. The AAP led in 33 assembly segments in 2014, fighting alone. It won four Lok Sabha seats, and the Congress managed just three. The AAP retained its 27% vote share from 2014 in Malwa that sends 69 lawmakers to the 117-member assembly. AAP national convener and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal concentrated his campaign in this region. All but two seats in the party's kitty came from Malwa, but its performance in the other two regions was abysmally poor. In the Doaba region, which has 23 seats, the party's vote share decreased by 0.5% and it won just two constituencies. The party polled 24% of the votes in 2014 from this region. In Majha, a region with 25 seats, the AAP's vote share went up marginally from 12.3% to 13.7%. But it drew a blank. The Malwa region has traditionally been the key to power in the state. The AAP's decision to focus its efforts in the region proved costly as its attention to the Majha and Doaba faltered. The AAP had a house in mess. It has suspended two of its MPs — Dharamvira Gandhi and HS Khalsa — for being at odds with the party leadership. The party's Punjab convener, Sucha Singh Chhotepur, was shown the door too over differences last September. Chhotepur formed the Apna Punjab Party, contested 78 seats, and polled 0.36% of the votes that could have gone to the AAP. More than his exit, Chhotepur's

⁹ 6The Hindu, June 2, 2014, Badal, Amarinder attack AAP.

allegation that the AAP is run by outsiders — a reference to its central leadership based in New Delhi — has hurt the party gravely.

Conclusion

Post-election data shows that AAP gained votes from all regions of the state including Majha, Malwa and Doaba in 2014 and marginally loose in 2017. The established political parties in Punjab are in crisis, the newly formed AAP get a respectable share of total polling. Failure of BSP, Leftist, Under performance of the SAD-BJP ruling alliance and INC worried them because their traditional vote bank goes with AAP. The future of AAP in Punjab depends that what role they play role in Legislative Assembly as an opposition party and to what extent their leaders maintain faith in the minds of the people.