Changing Social Values and Political Culture in Punjab:
With special emphasis on the period since 1966

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An Overview

• Methodology: 3 aspects
  – Domains; Values; Determination;

• Analysis

• Future scenarios
  – Emerging trends; Prospects;
Methodology: 3 aspects

1. **DOMAINS** - Economy - Society - Culture - Politics - are interlinked
   - Economy is the most important determining force but works through mediations and itself influenced by social change, moral-political values and political institutions.
   - Each - economy, society, culture and politics - has a degree of autonomy of its own and its own internal logic of development.
   - The internal logic of political change and the relatively autonomous nature of politics (leadership, organisation, accidental factors) are assumed even if not developed here.
Methodology: Values

2. VALUES:
   - At any point of time, there is no single value
   - There are competing values
   - In the matrix of these competing values, one set of values tends to acquire hegemonic position in the Gramscian sense.
     - (For elaboration of Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, see Pritam Singh Gill 1974)
Methodology: Determination

3. **DETERMINATION** of social values and their impact on political changes involves:
   - the recognition that global and national (India) changes are implicated in the region (Punjab)
   - even while acknowledging the relative autonomy of the region and
   - the internal dynamics of the region.
Analysis:
Turning points in Punjabi Society, Culture and Politics pre-1947

- British annexation and colonisation of Punjab (integration of Punjabi economy and society into global market network)
- Canal colonies and Punjabi recruitment into British army
- Higher role of material incentives/motives in comparison with the higher role of moral incentives/motives during the pre-British period (pre-Ranjit Singh era and Ranjit Singh era)
  - (video clip from minutes 23.59 to 30.26)
  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZKdYO0Sz_Q
Analysis:
Turning points - 1947

- Partition violence and moral degradation
- Independent India - hopes, frustrations and the movement for a Punjabi speaking state
Analysis:
Major turning points since 1966

- Creation of a Punjabi speaking state
  - Sense of Sikh security
- Green revolution
  - Capitalism, new technology, spread of education, modernisation
- The rise of Sikh intelligentsia from rural background
  - (role of PAU, law colleges, engineering and medical colleges)
- Change in leadership from urban based leadership to rural-background leadership
  - Akalis: Master Tara Singh to Sant Fateh Singh
  - Congress: Bhargava/Sachar to Kairon
- Akali led coalition coming to power in 1967
  - completing the process of the rise of rural-based leadership, trend continuing later on.
Analysis:
Major turning points since 1966 (contd.)

- Modernisation (two responses):
  - Secularisation/ rise of scientific ideas/values; Spread of Marxism and the rise of Naxalite movement (its suppression and practice of ‘encounter’ killings)
  - Moral degeneration provoking religious revivalism

- Rise of Bhinderanwale (as a social-cultural process)

- Emergency (1975) and resistance
  - Akali role: the importance of non-violent resistance

- Escalating confrontation and 1984
Analysis:
Main trends post-1984

Extreme polarisation of values and politics

- Sikh militants
  - highest level of commitment bearing torture, suffering and death
  - moral degeneration - killing innocents, violence against animals (e.g. dogs), betrayal and surrender

- Security forces
  - the culture of disregard for human life
  - material gains; moral degradation

Overall social stress, culture of violence and moral decline
Analysis:
From 1991 onwards, neo-liberal era, and since 1995, the end of armed opposition

➢ Economic:
  o Rural to urban migration,
  o urbanisation, decline of public sector, job insecurity
  o out migration, especially, overseas.

➢ Social and cultural:
  o No larger overarching trend in terms of social values and culture
  o Several competing values with no one particularly hegemonic
  o social turmoil, a society highly at unease with itself, increasing confrontation
  o culture of personal material advancement, cracking of families and vulnerability of old people
  o Commodification of education, medical profession, religious preachers (coexisting with urge for honesty and respect for moral integrity)
Analysis:
neo-liberal era *(socio-cultural)*

- **Consumerism**, especially, competitive consumerism

- Absence of inspiring social dream - *escapism* (drugs, migration, suicides).

- Increasing appreciation of the value of *education*
  - this clashes with increasing privatisation and expensiveness of education

- Rise of younger generation with modern education (in politics and business)
Analysis:
Neo-liberal era (socio-cultural)

- Greater awareness of gender rights and assertion by young educated women even in villages
  - increasing protest against son preference and female foeticide
- Some evidence of weakening of caste barriers
  - inter caste marriages/run away marriages (Dhanda 2012)
- Increasing challenge and decreasing fear of authority
  - daring to attack police and govt officials
- Increasing awareness of environmental degradation (both in rural and urban areas) but also a feeling of helplessness and being trapped (especially farming).
Analysis:
Main Political trends since 1991, neo-liberal era, and since 1995 the end of armed opposition

- A failed insurgency but denial of moral victory to the victors/Indian state
  - Rajoana protest and re-emergence of Bhinderanwale images, (Singh and Purewal 2013)
- Grudge against the Centre
  - feeling of injustice very deep rooted, not easily visible
  - manifests itself sporadically (e.g. protest against Rajoana hanging)
- An ambivalent sense of collective defeat among Sikhs
  - depression and suicides, especially, Sikh farmer suicides
- Decline in Hindu-Sikh polarisation
- Trend towards communal (Akali-BJP) and caste (Akali-Dalit) alliances with inherent tensions
Analysis: Current

- Hesitant and unsure signs of unified Punjabi identity
  - Punjabi Hindus joining Akalis
  - Largest number of Dalit MLAs elected as Akalis (Kumar 2013)

- Rise of money culture as a hegemonic value
  - ‘development’ over identity,
  - assimilation of Hindus and Dalits into Akali leadership

- Decline of Khalistan politics but continuing distance from Indian nationalism.

- Uninspiring Congress leadership
  - except Amarinder Singh who has his own problems

- Tired Left leadership (CPI and CPM)
  - although some spark in pro-Naxalite elements
Analysis: Current

- Congress, Left and PPP/Manpreet Badal not in tune with the mass Sikh sentiment since 1984
  - in spite of some degree of admiration for Manpreet’s and Left’s honesty
  - Amarinder’s courage on river water issue

- Badal in tune with Sikh sentiment
  - gets majority Sikh vote
  - in spite of an average Sikh being unhappy with his continuous practice to promote dynastic control of Sikh politics

- Simranjit Mann unsuccessful
  - in spite of his honest image
    - due to dogmatism and lack of capacity to engage with material concerns of the Sikh population (e.g. water, electricity, price of agricultural commodities etc)
Analysis: Current

- Leadership lacking vision
  - even the idea of development is limited,
- Dynastic, nepotistic tendencies; corruption;
  - signs of absence of larger vision and hope;

- Aware electorate with high mass literacy, but resorts to personal gains and networking;

- Political leadership encourages clientelism;
Future Scenario: Emerging trends - 1

- Permanent fault lines after Blue Star
  - Constant source of conflict with emerging issues;
  - Operation Blue star memorial;
  - Honouring killers of Indira Gandhi and Gen Vaidya;
  - Attacks (violent and non-violent) on those involved with Operation Blue star (e.g. Brar in London);
  - Refusal to do ardaas in Gurdwara for Gen Dyal;
  - Impending decision on death sentence of Rajoana, Bhullar and others;
  - Possible memorials for Bhinderanwale.
Future Scenario: Emerging trends 2

- Political trends towards egalitarianism
  - more women, Dalit, youth participation,
  - questioning authority

- Greater awareness of personal rights
- Ecological initiatives (Seechewal, Khadoor Sahib, Kheti Virasat, Pingalwara)
Future Scenario: Prospects 1

- **Electoral politics**: Akali hegemony unthreatened at least in the near future.
  - Inclusive coalition of urban Hindu elite, dalit leadership and activists especially of the Balmiki and Mazhbi Sikh,
  - Huge money power;
  - Excellent organisation network;
  - Most astute in learning the tricks of electoral politics in developing capitalist societies.

- **Electoral success without moral victory and moral admiration**
  - Hidden challenges to moral authority
Future Scenario: Prospects 2

- Congress on the path to decline
  - The disintegration of the Congress (a very high possibility if Congress is defeated in 2014)
  - Realignment with Manpreet might lead to a centrist party without being very successful because of lack of understanding of Sikh/Punjab relationship of tension with the Centre.

- The Badal Akali hegemony can be questioned
  - If some one with moral stature (a more modern version of Bhinderanwale);
  - critical of Centre and respectful of Sikh institutions;
  - but not sectarian towards Hindus;
  - With a modern agenda;
  - Emerges to bring non-Congress tendencies together on one platform.
Future Scenario: Prospects in conclusion

- Although anti-Centre stance will remain key component of any successful political tendency in Sikh politics, mere anti-Centrism will not be sufficient; it is necessary but not sufficient to succeed in Akali/Sikh politics (example is Mann).

- Any anti-Centre stance also needs to engage with material needs of the rural but also urban Sikh population.

- To succeed in Punjab politics, and not only in Sikh politics, an inclusive politics is required that embraces upper caste urban Hindus as well as dalits and smaller religious minorities such as Radhaswamis, Namdharis, Ravidassia community as well as Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and Jains.
REFERENCES


• Kumar, Pramod (2013) Chair, Punjab Governance Reforms Commission (personal correspondence)
