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
  - Turning points: pre-1947; 1947; 1966; 1984; post-1991; post-1995;
- Future scenarios
  - Emerging trends; Prospects;

Methodology: 3 aspects

1. DOMAINS - Economy- Society- Culture- Politics - are interlinked

    o Economy is the most important determining force but works through mediations and itself influenced by social change, moral-political values and political institutions.

    o Each - economy, society, culture and politics- has a degree of autonomy of its own and its own internal logic of development.

    o 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:

- o the recognition that global and national (India) changes are implicated in the region (Punjab)
- o even while acknowledging the relative autonomy of the region and
- o 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)
  - o (video clip from minutes 23.59 to 30.26)
  - o 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):

  o Secularisation/ rise of scientific ideas/values; Spread of Marxism and the rise of Naxalite movement (its suppression and practice of 'encounter' killings)

  o Moral degeneration provoking religious revivalism

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

➢ Emergency (1975) and resistance

  o 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

- o highest level of commitment bearing torture, suffering and death

- o moral degeneration - killing innocents, violence against animals (e.g. dogs), betrayal and surrender

➢ Security forces

- o the culture of disregard for human life

- o 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

- o 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

  o in spite of some degree of admiration for Manpreet's and Left's honesty

  o Amarinder's courage on river water issue

➤ Badal in tune with Sikh sentiment

  o gets majority Sikh vote

  o in spite of an average Sikh being unhappy with his continuous practice to promote dynastic control of Sikh politics

➤ Simranjit Mann unsuccessful

  o 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

  o Constant source of conflict with emerging issues;

  o Operation Blue star memorial;

  o Honouring killers of Indira Gandhi and Gen Vaidya;

  o Attacks (violent and non-violent) on those involved with Operation Blue star (e.g. Brar in London);

  o Refusal to do *ardaas* in Gurdwara for Gen Dyal;

  o Impending decision on death sentence of Rajoana, Bhullar and others,

  o 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
- o The disintegration of the Congress (a very high possibility if Congress is defeated in 2014)
- o 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
- o If some one with moral stature (a more modern version of Bhinderanwale);
- o critical of Centre and respectful of Sikh institutions;
- o but not sectarian towards Hindus;
- o With a modern agenda ;
- o Emerges to bring non-Congress tendencies together on one platform.

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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.

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