

Punjab Vidhan Sabha Election 2017: An Overview

Abstract

After the remarkable loss in 2014 Lok Sabha election, the Congress party has gain a big victory in 2017 Punjab Assembly poll. The study shows that the resurgence of Congress has started from Punjab assembly poll. Under the leadership of Capt. Amarinder Singh, Congress has set-aside the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal. The Aam Aadmi Party, which emerged as a regional party in Punjab during Lok Sabha polls in 2014, has captured the opposition Leadership as it is the second largest party with maximum margins. This paper also represents the comparative study of 2012 and 2017 Punjab assembly polls in all three regions; Majha, Malwa and Doaba through statistical reports of Election Commission of India on Punjab Legislative Assembly

Keywords: Punjab Vidhan Sabha Election, Democracy.

Introduction

In India, which is the largest democracy in the world in terms of vastness and population, governments both at the centre and in the constituent states are elected for five-year terms. The electorate of so many crores of people in this sub-continent participate in the election, held on the basis of universal adult franchise, and send their representatives to both the Parliament and the state legislatures, expecting that these representatives will safeguard their interests and work to attain the goal of progress, prosperity, unity and integrity of India as also to ensure rights and freedom of the people. In this indirect democracy the elections play the most important role in shaping the destiny of the people, and the people, while exercising their franchise, constitute the real source of power in the elections as they make their choice and elect only those in whom they have faith. Elections are important because the people participate in elections to choose their representatives. They should have the necessary education and wisdom to elect only the right kind of people. As it happens in many democracies, including India, the impostors and swindlers take advantage of the poverty and ignorance of the people and contest elections to cash in on the gullibility of them.¹

The Punjab Legislative Assembly has consisted over all 117 seats. Once a time when there was only one party dominance in India as well as Punjab. But after the reorganisation of Punjab, the new Punjab outlined by the centre government which was called Punjabi Suba had become a Sikh majority and Hindu minority state. Since re-organisation, there is bipolar competition between SAD and Congress. The SAD played a pivotal role in Punjab politics as a Sikh Political party and has been come in power in 7 legislative assembly elections since reorganisation. But on the other side, congress party had come in power for 5 times only. But a new dynamic has emerged in 2014 Punjab Lok Sabha elections when a third political force got 4 seats out of 13 which named Aam Aadmi Party. Now, there are three political forces in Punjab while the Punjab assembly polls 2017 was held and dual competition shifted into triangular competition. As results, In 2017 elections Congress got success again after a long break of ten years and people gave mandate to an old congress party and the SAD-BJP alliance had to lose with 18 seats only and new face of opposition party has emerged with AAP which captured 22 with its ally Lok Insaaf Party (2 seats).

Aim of the Study

The Aim of writing this paper is to analyse the Party wise Election performance in Punjab Legislative Assembly Election 2017.

Review of Literature

Punjab always remains the contesting place for power where two-party system has been existing since 1997. But now a days it is leading to multi- party system as the AAP has originated as second largest party in



Guriqbal Singh

Research Scholar,
Deptt.of Political Science,
Punjabi University,
Patiala, Punjab

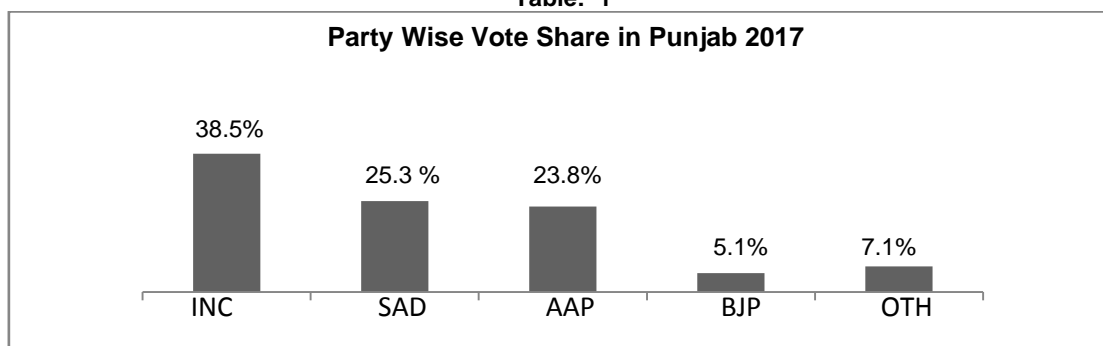
2017 elections in Punjab. Elections are the backbone of Indian Democracy. As Ankita Mitra in her article "What is the Importance of Elections in Democracy?" defined the term Democracy especially in the perspective of Indian polity. She has written about the face of Indian politicians how they manipulate the Indian people for their political interest. But as the democracy exist in India the people have right to change the power from one hand to other through their right to adult franchise. It can be also studied in Ashutosh Kumar article "SAD Loss: The Endemic Decline of Akalis" in which he emphasized on the main issues responsible for the decline of the SAD party in Punjab verdict 2017. He described how the second oldest party in Punjab has to sit out of Power because of its interference in Sikh religious issues. The majority of the Sikh has elected congress party as ruling Part in Punjab Vidhan Sabha Election 2017. Now SAD has become second opposition party in Punjab. Sachi Chawla's Article, "Electoral Politics in Punjab" (2007) gives us information about the formation of Akali Dal in 1920 for Gurdawara reform movement and role of Akali Dal in Punjab politics since its formation to 2007. This article also emphasized on the need of alliance formation of Akali Dal with BJP in Punjab. The author examined the various aspects of 2007 assembly elections and also discusses the main issues which were raised by different political parties. This article provides information about the use of money and muscle power in elections at a very higher level.

Electoral Performance of Congress Party in Punjab Assembly Elections 2017

Congress party got 2/3 majority under the leadership of Captain Amrinder Singh who has become 16th Chief Minister of Punjab State. Congress has come into Power with full majority in Punjab state

after a long period of ten years. The congress won 77 out of 117 assembly seats. The congress put up its second best performance in the state- it had won 87 seats in 1992. The 2017 mandate clearly enjoins the congress to give Punjab a firm and fair government. The congress did best in all three regions; Majha, Malwa and Doaba. The congress victory in the Malwa region, even bigger than the Party's own calculations as stated by PPCC (Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee) President Capt. Amrinder Singh, has dealt a severe blow to the Akali Dal. The Congress won 8 out of 14 seats in Ludhiana district, seven of eight in Patiala and all three segments in Fatehgarh Sahib. The congress victory eclipsed by the defeat suffered by its senior leaders Sunil Jhakar from Abohar and Rajinder Kaur Bhattal from Lehra Ganga. The congress almost clean-swept Majha winning 22 of the 25 seats. The congress bagged 10 seats in Amritsar district, six in Gurdaspur, four in Tarantaran and two in Pathankot. Cricketer- turned -Politician Navjot Singh Sidhu who contested on the congress ticket from Amritsar East, defeated BJP's Rajesh Honey by 42,661 votes. Four time congress MLA Om Parkash Soni (51,242 seats) won the fifth consecutive term by defeating BJP's national executive member Tarun Chugh by 21,105 votes. Besides these candidates, Aruna choudhary (Dinanagar), GS Babehali (Gurdaspur), Fatehjang Singh Bajwa (Qadian) etc also won their given seats by congress Party. Making a Strong comeback in Doaba, the congress bagged 15 of the 23 seats in this region. The congress which had won only six seats in Doaba in 2012 (Table .2) and four in 2007, fell short of its 2002 tally (17 out of 25, prior to delimitation). The major gains for the party came from Hoshiarpur, where it won six of the seven seats, and Jalandhar, where five of the nine seats each from Nawashahr and Kapurthala districts.²

Table: 1



Source: Data collected from the website of Election Commission of India

Table 1.2

Party Wise Changes in Majha Malwa and Doaba Regions 2017 Assembly Elections

Party	MAJHA			DOABA			MALWA		
	2012	2017	change	2012	2017	change	2012	2017	change
CONGRESS	08	22	+14	06	15	+09	32	40	+08
SAD	12	02	-10	11	05	-06	33	08	-25
BJP	05	01	-04	05	01	-04	02	01	-01
AAP	---	00	00	---	02	---	---	20	---
INDEPENDENT	00	00	00	01	00	-01	02	00	-02
TOTAL	25	25	18	23	23	20	69	69	37

Source: Statistical Reports of Election commission of India on Punjab Assembly Elections

Electoral Performance of SAD-BJP Alliance in Punjab Assembly 2017

The Akali Dal in Punjab is an illustration of a party trapped at the crossroads of region and religion. The policies and political positions of the Akali Dal are always constrained by this peculiar location of the party. Electoral politics also frequently forces the Akali Dal to look beyond the regional- sectarian interests and projects it as a party of the ordinary 'people' of Punjab. Similarly, the party has also to live with the fact that even after state reorganisation and the creation of a Sikh majority state; the party has to take into consideration the interests of the non-Sikh population of the state.³ But in Punjab assembly verdict of 2017 SAD has failed to get perception and support of not only the non-Sikh - population but also Sikh population. The stunning verdict of Punjab voters in favour of the congress is a historic rebuke to the Shiromani Akali Dal and a humiliating end of 10 years rule of the SAD-BJP alliance in the State. This hammering of the Akalis at the hustings -with 15 seats in its kitty, down from 56 in 2012 is significant as this is for the first time the party suffered the debacle of this size and scale.⁴

The 'Majhalis' people belonging to the Majha region –true to their ready to fight persona, gave a bleeding blow to the ruling SAD –BJP combine by giving 22 seats to the congress. The region comprising four districts Pathankot, Amritsar, Tarantaran and gurdaspur – has 25 assembly seats. In Majha region, Majitha (Bikramjit Singh Majithia) and Batala seat (Lakhbir Lodhinangal) won by SAD individually. The BJP which had won 5 seats (see table 2) from Majha region in 2012 poll, could just win one only this time with deputy speaker Dinesh Babbu from Sujampur retaining his pocket borough by 18,701 votes. In the Panthic belt of Tarantaran district all the SAD candidates were defeated. In the 2012 polls, the BJP had won five seats in Majha and SAD 11 and the congress as given in table 2.⁵

Causes of the Defeat of SAD

In recent elections, SAD has to face very poor mandate by people due to many shortcomings in party leadership and decisions. First, the party leaving behind its core agenda and refusing to take up substantial issues that affected its core social constituency has not helped. Second, the party leadership in order to monopolise political power systematically weakened the others two important institutions of Sikh political life i.e. Akal Takhat and SGPC in the last two decades. This has led to the erosion of the traditional Panthic support for the party. Third, the SAD also suffered from the stigma of destroying the youth in Punjab due to its failure to check drug trade, especially in rural Punjab. Fourth, the Akali leadership has also been instrumental in weakening the BJP in order to lessen its dependence over it by encroaching in its urban constituency. The strategy has not only earned the party the wrath of the highly influential Modi leadership but also shift of the traditional BJP Hindu vote to the congress. The 2017 verdict is to be viewed as the popular rejection of the politics of the SAD, and this defeat is not a one-time routine loss, but is indicative of the endemic decline of

the second oldest party of India in an over-arching terms.⁶ The party's failure to punish the culprits who desecrated the holy Guru Granth Sahib has been another reason. This was compounded by the party openly hobnobbing with the various Deras including the controversial Dera Sacha Sauda and seeking their support in search of the sizeable Dalit vote.

Electoral Performance of AAP (Aam Admi Party) Alliance in Punjab Assembly 2017

AAP which emerged as regional party in previous Lok Sabha elections in Punjab and Legislative assembly elections in Delhi. It got 4 seats in last Punjab Lok Sabha elections and also contested the Punjab Assembly elections 2017 in February but it could get only 22 at this time but it could capture more than the SAD. This party had very poor performance if it compared to exit polls. In these elections, it has sit as a main opposition party in Punjab Vidhan Sabha. The main leadership of Opposition was also given to H.S Phoolka who is the most senior leader of Aam Aadmi Party.

The AAP, which had pinned hopes on Malwa to register a win in the Punjab Assembly elections, could win only 18 out of the total 69 seats in the region (see table:1.1). In 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the party, then a rookie, was able to record a lead on 31 assembly segments in Malwa region. Instead of gaining ground after setting up an organisational structure, the party only met with a disappointing defeat. In the end, all the predictions about how the rural vote, concentrated in Malwa, was solidly behind AAP proved wrong. It could win its 18 seats from the region where it seemed going strong ahead of polls, a close look at the results reveals it did not gain the traction it had hoped for since even in constituencies where it finished second, it trailed the winner by a huge margin. of the 69 constituencies in Malwa, AAP came second in 21 constituencies. However, data shows it trailed the winner by a small margin only in four seats of Ludhiana (East), Bhucho Mandi, Moga and Dhuri. In all other seats where AAP came second, it lost by huge margins.

In as many as 30 seats in Malwa, AAP candidates finished a poor third. In Fazilka, the party came fourth, polling less votes than the independent candidate. The seat was narrowly won by Davinder Singh Ghubaya of congress who polled 39,276 votes, while BJP's Surjit Jyani got 39,011 votes, AAP got only 16,404 votes while more than 20,000 votes went to the independent candidate. In constituencies like Farikot, Bhatinda urban, Sangrur, Patiala rural, Patiala urban, Rajpura, Nabha and Payal, AAP candidates finished second, but were way behind the winner with victory margins varying from 10,000 to 20,000 votes. AAP fared particularly poorly in Majha Region where it was third in 23 of the total of 25 constituencies in the region.

Lack of A CM Face

While the Congress had a strong chief ministerial candidate in Amrinder and the SAD-BJP alliance banked on the tested leadership of Parkash Singh Badal, the AAP refused to project a name. The Congress and SAD-BJP played upon the fears of Panthic Sikh voters by claiming that AAP would bring

an outsider if it won — Arvind Kejriwal or even Sanjay Singh, who played a key role in the campaign but belongs to UP. By the time, Kejriwal clarified in the middle of the campaign that he would not shift to Punjab, it was too late.

Focus on Malwa

With 69 seats at stake in Malwa, AAP took a huge gamble by channelizing most of its resources and energy in the state’s biggest region. Its campaign in the other two regions – Doaba and Majha — remained a non-starter, except for the high-decibel campaign in Majitha, the home turf of SAD leader Bikram Singh Majithia, whom the AAP accuses of being behind the illegal drug trade. The party had hoped that its Majitha campaign would have a ripple effect in the Majha region, with 25 constituencies. And that support from NRIs, mostly from the Doaba region (23 seats), would help it form the next government. But AAP got only 18 seats from Malwa, two from Doaba and none from Majha.

Candidate Selection

Most AAP candidates were fresher’s with no previous voter connect. By the time their names were announced and the campaign picked up, there was little time left to establish their base. The party’s strategy of projecting Kejriwal as the face while keeping its candidates in the background did not work. It didn’t help that there were allegations of sale of tickets, too.

Infighting, Chhotepur Exit

Last August, AAP decided to throw out Sucha Singh Chhotepur, the man responsible for building the parties in the state, on what many said were trumped up charges. But it only reinforced the rivals’ allegation that Kejriwal would not let any other leader in the party become popular. Even though Chhotepur got only 1,740 votes in the Gurdaspur constituency, contesting on his Aapna Punjab Party symbol, his ouster along with some of his followers added to the anti-AAP sentiment among voters. Besides, two of the four AAP MPs who won from Punjab in 2014 were suspended over minor differences with the leadership.

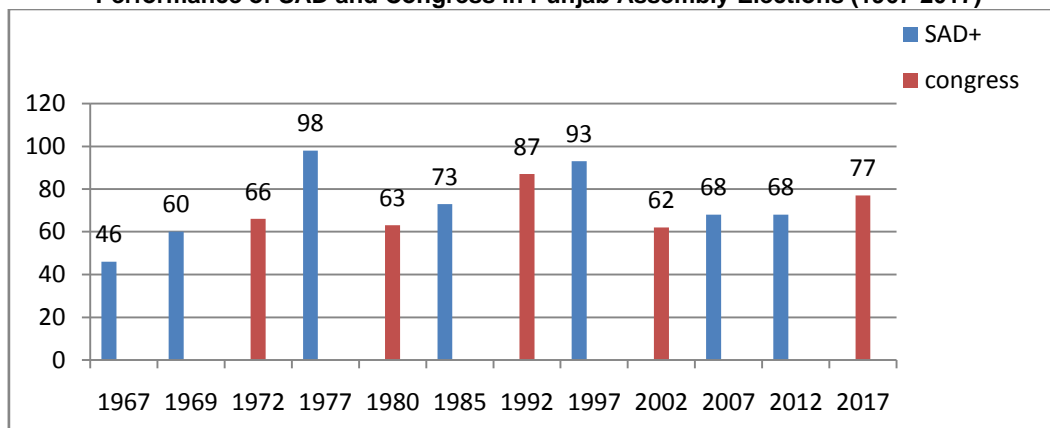
Over-Confidence

The AAP may have miscalculated its support based on the huge crowds that came to listen to Kejriwal and comedian-turned-MP Bhagwant Mann at their rallies. Mann lost by 18,500 votes to Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Singh Badal. There was also the general perception that the AAP campaign had peaked in the middle of last year and that it was destined to go downhill once other parties pitched their poll tents.

Sad Retained Core Voters

AAP projected severe erosion in the core vote bank of the SAD and hoped that a majority of that would come its way. But despite the defeat, SAD held on to its core, netting 25.2 per cent votes, which was more than that of AAP (23.7 per cent). As for the anti-incumbency and floating vote factors, the results show that most of these went to the Congress.

Table: 1.3
Performance of SAD and Congress in Punjab Assembly Elections (1967-2017)



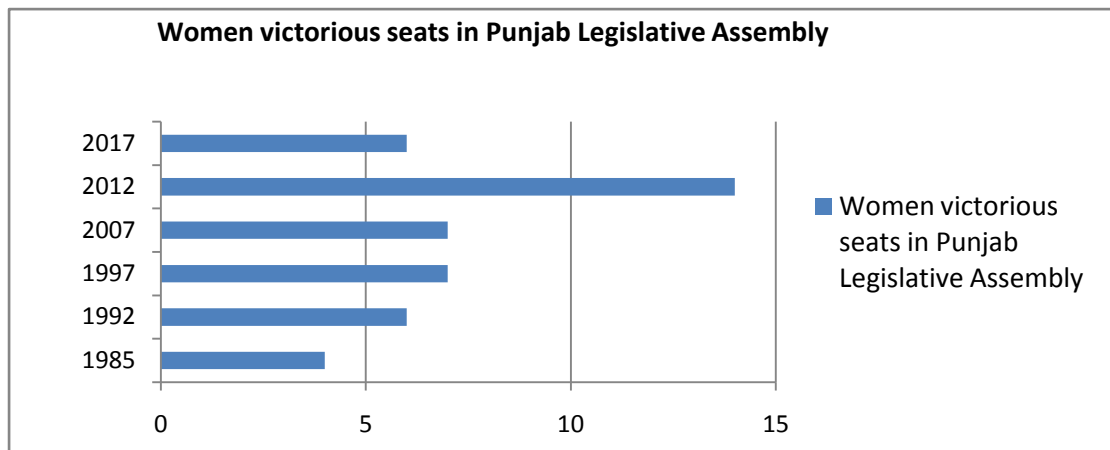
Source: Statistical Reports of Election commission of India on Punjab Assembly Elections

A New Phase of Opposition in Punjab Vidhan Sabha

For the first time, the new Punjab assembly will have a two- pronged Opposition with the Aam Aadmi Party sharing the benches with their bete noir, the Shiromani Akali Dal. Since the AAP and its allies have four seats more than SAD- BJP alliance, the joint 40 member Opposition will be led by an AAP leader .This is the first time since 1997, that Akali Leader Parkash Singh Badal will not be the leader of

Opposition in the Assembly .AAP leader H.S phoolka has appointed as the leader of opposition party in the Punjab assembly. With the two opposition parties almost hating one another not much co-ordination is expected over issues to keeping the congress on its toes but the two parties could find common ground on Panthic issues, construction of SYL canal, Farmers and welfare schemes.⁷

Table: 1.4



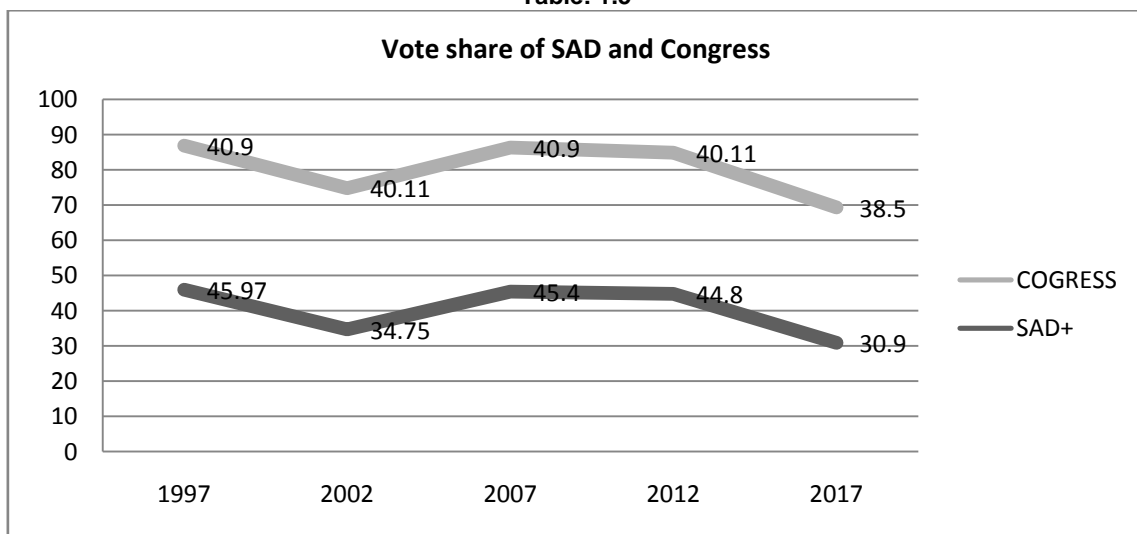
Source: Data collected from Election Commission Statistical Reports on Punjab Legislative Assembly

Women Candidates in Punjab Legislative Assembly

Punjab assembly will be represented by just 6 women members this time against 14 in the outgoing assembly, the highest in the state electoral history. Among the candidates 27 were women. Congress had fielded 11 women followed by AAP 9, while the SAD and BJP fielded five and two respectively. Out of them, six women candidates got victory. Out of six, three are from AAP who's name Baljinder kaur, Rupinder Rubby and Sarvjit kaur

Manuke and three others are from congress including Razia Sulatana. The number of women in the Punjab Legislative Assembly has always remained low. For the first time in 2012, the figure touched double digits when out of 93 women 14 emerged victorious (table 1.4). In 2007, out of 56 women who contested, seven won, while in 1997 there were seven and in 1992 the number stood at six and in 1985 the count was four. The most abysmal performance was in 1969 when no women candidate got elected.⁸

Table: 1.5



Source: Statistical Report of ECI on Punjab Legislative Assembly

Changes in the Vote Share of SAD and Congress

As far as the question of vote share of both parties is concerned it can be said that the congress has been maintained its vote share equal in Punjab since 1997 to 2012 but decreased in 2017 polls which may be happened because of the trend NOTA (None of the above) in recent elections. But on the other side, the Shiromani Akali Dal failed to maintain its vote share in 2002 as well as in 2017 (see table 1.5) assembly polls.

Findings

The Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections 2017 has become a historical moment in Punjab Politics for

all three parties SAD, AAP and congress. These polls of Punjab have proved resurgence of Indian National Congress Party in Punjab after the long break of ten years. The ruling alliance of SAD- BJP has get out of power in these elections of Punjab. The congress party captured full majority with 77 seats out of 117. The congress party got more than its prediction as declared by PPCC president in pre and post poll survey. Actually, the people wanted some change due to lack of working of the alliance parties. It seemed in surveys AAP will make government with majority because the people wanted to bring a new ruling party and that was only AAP which is latest political party

with young and educated leadership. But there are so many shortcomings in AAP leadership like the exit of Sucha Singh Chotepur who was senior leader of party and dictator policies of Arwind Kejriwal, lack of the candidate as CM face etc. On the other side, SAD and BJP both are responsible for their defeat in 2017 elections. There are so many factors responsible for their defeat; No arrest on the Beadbi of Guru Granth Sahib, gundaraj of Halka incharges, drug smuggling etc. As result, SAD –BJP had to satisfy on people mandate with 18 seats only even SAD is not able to get Opposition Leadership as it got only 15 which are less than AAP with 22 seats. So, Akali Dal will have to make its own policies and plan in future and try to remove the shortcomings in its leadership.

References

1. Ankita Mitra, *What is the Importance of Elections in Democracy?* , 2014
2. *The Tribune, Chandigarh, 12 March, 2017*
3. Ashutosh Kumar, *Electoral Politics in Punjab: Study of Akali Dal, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 39, No. 14/15 (Apr. 3-16, 2004), p. 1515*
4. *Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 13 March, 2017*
5. *Hindustan Times, March 12, 2017*
6. Ashutosh Kumar, *SAD Loss: The Endemic Decline of the Akalis, Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 13 March, 2017*
7. *Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 12 March, 2017*
8. *The Indian Express, 12 March, 2017*