

Captain Should Play a Higher Role Than High Command

- Prem Singh

I do not generally opine on the internal affairs of any political party. Hence, I have no comments on the machinations of leadership change in Punjab and the strength or potential of the new leadership. I will only say that Captain Amarinder Singh, a veteran leader of about 80 years, was punished by the Congress high command for not visiting Delhi time and again, and for treating two national Congress leaders - Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra – as 'children' and 'misguided'. Captain must have noted that the new chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi described Rahul Gandhi as a revolutionary leader. He must have also read the proclamations of some over-zealous political analysts that the sound of the bugle of a Punjab 'revolution' has reached Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh - the suggestion being, that in one master stroke, Rahul Gandhi has come into full form. In other than words, one should soon expect similar Punjab-like revolutions like in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh!

Captain must come out of his despondent mood of 'humiliation' and seen that the traditional Dalit vote-bank has started gravitating to the Congress kitty no sooner than he resigned! He might have also accepted the truth, told to him after nine and a half years of service as, that he was a useless Congress chief minister who kept away from the public and his task. Now Captain who has great self-esteem should understand the power of the high command which can convert a *raja* into *rank* and a *rank* into *raja*. The multi-talented Captain, who has seen many ups and downs in his 52-year political career, must also accept that the high command culture in India's democracy is acceptable not only to MLAs-MPs but also to most analysts and experts.

In this article the episode of leadership change in Punjab has been considered in the context of two issues. One issue is of long-term importance, and the other of immediate importance. Let us first consider the issue of immediate importance which is related to the ongoing peasant movement.

There is no need to forward further arguments to state that this movement originated from the womb of Punjab, and Captain Amarinder Singh as chief minister played an important role for its strength and longevity. Like the leaders of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), a constituent of National Democratic Alliance (NDA), Captain was also not particularly concerned about the agricultural laws at the time of their formulation. But when the movement against the laws arose

in Punjab, he played his part in favour of the movement with understanding, maturity and objectivity.

All opposition parties today are active in trying to take political advantage of the peasant movement. A large number of farmers in Punjab have been associated with the Akali Dal. Despite this, it was believed that the Congress could benefit the most from the farmers' agitation in the coming assembly elections in Punjab. The manner in which the high command has removed Captain in a humiliating manner by throwing in the hat for a graceless entertainer, may create confusion among the agitating farmers.

A distinct lack of commitment for ideology is the central character of contemporary corporate politics. Due to this, the distinctions in the houses of all political parties have gone hazy. Any number of times a leader or a wannabe can move in or out of any house. He can tamper with and subvert the Constitution and the basic values of humanity for the sake of power.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) formed by the children of the Ford Foundation is basically a party of corporate politics. Therefore, it naturally advocates openly for ideological manoeuvrability in politics. Navjot Singh Sidhu, who came from BJP to Congress, has links with AAP. When the high command was trying to make him the state president, Sidhu had loftily claimed that "Aam Aadmi Party understood his vision." It's obvious there is no place for farmers' movement in his 'vision'. Perhaps that is why the farmers opposed the decision of the high command to make Sidhu the state Congress president.

Right now, the battle raging in the Congress is about who will be the chief minister's face in the assembly elections. The way the high command has placed its hand on Sidhu's back, he is quite clearly the face of both the election campaign and the chief minister. It will be his endeavour that after the election results, he along with his supporters and AAP become the next chief minister. This situation fits the high command's objectives as well because Channi, who was made the chief minister in place of Captain, was not their first and direct choice. Channi was made the chief minister as a consensus candidate to tide over the moment. The task of formation of a new cabinet under his leadership has been performed by the high command in Delhi.

Always conscious of his dignity, Captain has repeatedly stated he will oppose Sidhu at any cost. Akali Dal and AAP will try to take full advantage of this confusion. Both support the peasant movement with a selfish motive. Whichever party wins or stays ahead in the assembly elections, there is always

a fear of setback for the peasant movement based on the axis of Punjab. The leadership of the peasant movement and its supporters should prepare to deal with such a danger.

Let us now turn to the issue of long-term importance which is related to security. It is important to note that while Punjab is a border state of the country, it needs to be noted more seriously that Punjab had been in the grip of extremist/separatist movement for almost a decade. Even though the ground for that movement was prepared here in the country by the mistakes of the leadership, a large base of its support and assistance is rooted abroad including Pakistan. That base remains strong to this day. The fundamentalist elements of the Sikh community settled in countries like America, Britain, Canada etc. are supportive of the demand for a separate Khalistan from India. From the beginning, some separatist leaders have been conducting their activities from Pakistan. There are intermittent reports of separatist activities and arrests from Punjab and other parts of the country. This shows that fundamentalist tendencies and elements do exist in Punjab, which are exploited by the extremists sitting abroad.

It is the perception of the separatists sitting abroad that the goal of Khalistan cannot be achieved without breaking the supremacy of Akali Dal and Congress in Punjab politics. During the last general or assembly elections, there have been reports in the media that separatists sitting abroad supported AAP in many ways. There are also frequent reports of AAP leaders colluding with the fundamentalist elements existing in Punjab. It is to be noted that the leaders of the separatist movement run in the name of Khalistan never faced any shortage of funds. On the contrary, they provide funds to break the Akali-Congress supremacy to power hungry elements in politics.

Some analysts called the statement of Captain a hasty one in which he has called Sidhu as pro-Pakistan. But in the context of Punjab's separatist movement, Captain has been naming Pakistan as a threat in the past as well. (Otherwise, he has been an advocate of cordial relations between East and West Punjab, divided between India and Pakistan. In his first chief minister tenure, he hosted the chief minister of Punjab in Pakistan.) In his congratulatory message to Channi on being made chief minister he drew his attention towards only one issue that is security. Captain served only three years in the army, but he is a graduate of the National Defence Academy (NDA) and the Indian Military Academy (IMA). The training and service of the Army has not only influenced his personality and style of functioning, but has also shaped his outlook on national security and

unity. The RSS/BJP leaders, including Narendra Modi, admire Captain's nationalist allegiance. But while doing so they forget that Captain is a secular nationalist.

The RSS/BJP government and leaders have repeatedly accused those participating in the farmers' movement of being Khalistani. This is a very sensitive and emotional issue. In the politics of the country, the game of playing with the sentiments of the people for power is going on shamelessly. In the midst of all this, the supporters of Khalistan are waiting for the opportunity. Due to the Khalistan movement, the countrymen have suffered terribly in Punjab and beyond. It should not be repeated, it is the responsibility of the sensitive leaders of all the parties including Captain to guard against this.

Captain once said that he would write a book on the experience of that dreadful dark decade. He is a leader of stature. Instead of wasting his energies fighting the dwarves, if he focuses on the security of the nation and Punjab, he will do a yeoman's service to his commitment towards the country.

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