CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

Political Sociology refers to the relationship between society and politics. Social structures influence the political actors and vice versa. The social trends, movements/sects have deep relationship with political process. As far as the sect is concerned, it is relatively small religious group that is an offshoot of an established religion or denomination. It holds most beliefs in common with its religion of origin, but has a number of novel concepts which differentiate them from that religion. Synonym of religious sect in Punjabi is Dera (means monastery or convent). A dera may reject some norms existing in the mainstream religion and replace those obsolete elements with new practices.

A dera is headed by a person called guru (venerable) who is a charismatic leader, a guide, a religious or spiritual teacher. The guru confers the benefits of sacred learning on human beings through sermons and guidance and acts as an advisor to those who seek spiritual guidance. People seek and often find in their guru a nurturing and non-competitive figure whose spiritual superiority is unquestioned.

Though the followers of such deras mostly come from all sections of society but generally, most followers seem to be from marginal or poor classes. They were found to be mostly concerned to seek or attain a sense of stability and often of honour. Followers may feel a sense of security, good life after death by participating in satsangs, kirtans and religious workshops. A dera may also involve itself in different projects in the name of public welfare. For this, it expects and often demands charitable contributions and donations from followers and governmental agencies within and outside the country.
Modern gurus skilfully manipulate their gurudom, so that after attaining an advantageous position, some became potentates who believe in self aggrandisement. Television, print media and increasingly the internet are used to spread their teachings. Their functioning is often very impressive and they create hierarchical structures in which close confidants of the head form the top management. Competition among these managers for closeness with the guru is a frequent phenomenon and creates its own politics. Women, young people and old men are organised into different wings for preaching and mobilising the non-believers. They always strive to have more followers, as deras face competition from other deras seeking to increase their followers and political patronage.

Each dera has defined boundaries, techniques and methods of preaching and revolves around the charismatic leader, which strengthens social, economic and political recognition and turns the dera into an established institution. State patronage in various forms comes almost automatically. Since the large numbers of dera followers are considered a formidable vote bank. So no political party can dare to ignore them. They through refined methods, politicise themselves and their followers.

In India’s parliamentary democracy today, politicisation of religious groups is not only inevitable; it becomes functional as sects acquire a bargaining capacity and are able to enhance their strength vis-à-vis other religious groups. Once religion starts getting politicised, it is difficult to stop the process, because politics acquires a stake in religion to ensure political support and power. The danger lies in scenarios where religious leaders indulge in political interventions and use their followers for their own purposes and selfish agenda, including blatant profiteering from the devotees.
In Punjab, there is a close relationship of politics with religion. The politicians are eager to get blessings from the headmen of sects, especially at the time of elections. The deras from time to time instruct, openly or latently, their followers to cast their votes for a particular candidate or party. It is inevitable that the various political parties, especially the ruling party at the time, claim to take responsibility for safeguarding religious sects and thus seek to ensure their support in elections.

The present study examines the various aspects of political sociology of four sects namely Ahmadiyya, Neel-dhari, Bawa Lal and The Salvation Army sects. By knowing the socio-economic background of their followers, we can come to know that how sects are influencing the general public of different strata of society. The study entails the socio-economic standing of the followers in the society like gender, age, place of living, family type, education level, religion, castes including category, occupation, land ownership and income. As far as the outcomes are concerned, the sects always try to influence and capture into the fold the youngsters. It is also seen that both Ahmadiyya and Neel-dhari sects are male dominated sects. The number of higher percentage of female followers from the Bawa Lal sect shows that the followers live in the families which are giving equal status to the women. The researcher approached the female section of the Bawa Lal sect comfortably. Secondly, the number of female followers is more as compare to the male followers in the Bawa Lal sect. This is so because female section of society is psychologically more inclined towards sects as compare to their male counterpart.

Social profile shows that the Neel-dhari and Bawa Lal sects are open (secular) in nature because both Hindus and Sikhs are followers of these two. On the other hand, Ahmadiyya and The Salvation Army sects are
closed (sectarian) in nature, because they are followed by the people of their own religion from where the sect took its shape.

In the context of caste, The Salvation Army followers do not associate them with any caste group. That’s why people often describe them as Christian by caste. Actually, these Christians were converts of 19th century which were mainly from the Scheduled Castes and had almost an equal status. Secondly, the Christian population in the region was homogeneous and economic distinctions were not too great for a person to be granted as high or low. Thus, the observance of the caste system among the Christians of northern India does not exist. It was also found that both the Neel-dhari and the Bawa Lal sects have followers from various castes. From the caste category distribution, majority of the followers in the Neel-dhari sect are from Scheduled Caste whereas Bawa Lal sect contains general category followers as a major portion.

In the household profile, the analysis shows that majority of the people are living in joint family structure due to their community belongingness. Majority of them belong to rural areas in and around the sect headquarter. The analysis shows that number of sect followers from rural area is quite high except in case of The Ahmadiyya sect. Actually, half of the total respondents are literate up to Matriculation. Secondly, majority of the followers are either small/petty business persons, labourers or non workers (housewives, students, unemployed). On the other hand, the sect leaders strive in those places where there is possibility of getting mass joining the sect and this trend is continuing for centuries.

Ownership profile analysis shows that the sect followers are involved in menial professions, almost belong to land less class and lower income group. In this category, much of the respondents are from Bawa Lal and The Salvation Army sects. On the other hand, respondents belong to the Ahmadiyya and Neel-dhari sects are relatively better off than the other
two sects. The marginalization of the lower strata of the people in Punjabi society and following of such deras is structurally linked

The sects operating in Punjab have deep roots and the people are very much emotionally attached to these sects. They are not ready to give up their separate identity of the sect and join the mainstream religion. Some of the sects/sect heads have direct affiliations with political parties. They play an important role during and after elections in the state. The role of such sects is very important particularly at the grass roots level politica. As a result of this, symbiotic relationship between a sect and political parties has become a stark reality

Though religion in Punjab politics is not a new phenomenon, the trend these gurus have initiated is not a positive one in the long run. Punjabi society has always been known as a fertile ground for mushrooming new cults, but the present politicisation of religion is neither a good sign for religion nor for politics. Political parties should be more concerned with policy programs than with catching votes by hook or crook. In the sphere of religion, to diminish irrational fears and superstitions of people, scientific temper should be propagated. The activities of logical (tarksheel) societies are appreciable in this regard and much more work to promote secular values could be done.

It would require a long-term strategy of patience, education and social pressure from many different institutions to curtail the dangerous alliance of religion and politics and to control the negative aspects of the dera culture. Alternative ways need to be found to provide services that the deras currently offer and that their followers find attractive. While it may be illusory to wait for increased state intervention, the media, widely considered the right arm of these deras, could perform a more neutral and constructive role. But perhaps the main remedy lies in growing political maturity of the electorate to break the potentially dangerous nexus of religion and politics.