INDUSTRIALIZATION AND VILLAGE POLITY

The village community as a physical entity exhibits itself as a conglomerate of houses huddled together amidst surrounding fields, the residents knowing each other's characteristics and bound together over generations through the common sharing of events – normal, disastrous and hopeful. Such settlements form nucleated units with a concentration of population ranging from one to five thousand, as the village proper that has been termed vernacularly in Punjab as the gran, pind or gaon. At one time this collective habitat may have been self-sufficient and the potter, the weaver, the ironsmith and the brick layer all may have obtained gainful sustenance from these occupations at the village itself or they may have had business from some of the surrounding villages. However, the changes inflicted with time have taken their toll of the structure, character and function of the modern village in the Punjab of today. The character of a village is more a function of its location, chief occupation, development in agriculture and progress in industrialization. There is a race for obtaining the maximum out of the individual landholding as well as the efforts of the dwellers of these areas. The successive fragmentation of the landholding has further aggravated the situation.

The most abundant natural resources of Punjab are its fertile land and bountiful water. However, over the years there has been a marked decline in the level of these resources. Successive crops of paddy and wheat or the 'jirichhona' cycle, as it is known in rural areas, have taken their toll. The natural resources of land and water have been over exploited, and in some areas, beyond recall. These intensive agricultural practices were a fall out of the Green revolution and the have resulted in the present day situation whereby the

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agricultural soils are nutritionally exhausted and have attained an all time low in
the organic carbon estimates. Thus, whereas on the one hand more and more
cultivable areas were being pulled out of the cultivation job, they were
increasingly being subjected to non-agricultural activities i.e. being used in the
industrial sector for setting up of small, medium and large scale industries. The
misery of the farmer is compounded when his crop growing areas are further
decimated when the toxic and other waste that come from the factories in the
form of effluents and are contributory factors in laying the land waste and barren.
It is the objective of this study to examine the factors that have contributed to the
occurrence and perpetuation of this phenomenon and to determine the various
pressure groups and influential factors that are at play and that even sometimes
prove to be hurdles to the smooth running of the village. The views of the
respondents have been captured through in depth interviews and case studies.

**Industrialization and Village Polity**

The basic functional units for any rural area are the revenue village, which,
in all cases, has definite surveyed boundaries. This unit may compromise one or
more hamlets called *kalan, khurd, majra* etc., but the entire village will normally
be, seen as one cohesive unit for presentation of data. The definition of a village,
for the present study has been the one as adopted in the Census descriptions
wherein it is identified with that of 'Mauza' given under section 3 (l) of the
Punjab\(^{151}\) Land Revenue Act, 1887. It is a Revenue estate determined as such
for the purpose of levy and collection of land revenue. The Revenue estate is
defined in the Revenue Act as under:-

a) 'An area for which separate records of right exist, or

b) which has been separately assessed to land revenue or would have been so
assessed, if the land revenue had not been released compounded or
redeemed; or

\(^{151}\) Statistical Abstracts of India.2001. Punjab
c) which the state Government may by general rule or specific orders declare to be estate.  

The village is, thus, not merely the ‘Abadi deh’ (Red lined area in “Shajia Aks” or ‘latha’) for Census taking but it is the entire land coming within the fixed boundaries of each village in terms of the Acts as stated above. The village has often been considered by social anthropologists as a unit of study to give a better understanding of the total culture of which it is a part. The village is taken to be as a self-sufficient isolated unit. For the present study as well the village in itself is seen to be a composite whole of the economy, socio-cultural mores as well as the polity of the universe of study. In layman’s words, “a village is a small group of dwellings in a geographical area, usually ranking in size between a hamlet and town’. Years ago the village in Punjab was characterized by poverty, illiteracy, lack of electricity, tap water, largely kuchcha dwellings and the absence of a link with the outside world. But, in the last three decades there has been tremendous change in the outlook of these villages due to the broad-based agricultural prosperity and grater purchasing power of the farmers of Punjab. Roads and electricity came almost simultaneously and the rest followed. The products used in the town started reaching the village. The lifestyle began to change and the earlier reliance on the old cultural norms and mores were replaced gradually with the onset of education and literacy. However the bright inroads made by progress and development were darkened somewhat with unbalanced and unplanned strides made towards an economic boom, the fall out of which was never taken into consideration by the leaders of the land or the country.

**Punjab Village – The Dynamics of Structure**

Not a single village in Punjab is homogeneous. Every community has its own social customs which are different from others. Religion plays an important role in determining the mode of living of the villagers as well as their patterns of

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152 Handbook of Census of India (2001) : it is functionally integrated and representative of the region which was being studied.
interaction within and outside the village premises. Then also due to the various castes that are living in the same village, there are often some difference in the cultural traits within and outside a particular community. The village then is a composite whole of the many different streams of accepted behavior and ascribed norms at any given time. The social structure of the village is characterized by the caste system.\footnote{Victor S. D’Souza and Rajesh Gill. 1996. Commercialization of the Economy, and change and continuity of social structure in a small town in Pb. in 'Social structure and change: organization and urban communities (ed) A M Shah, BS. Baviskar and EA Ramasuramy. Vol 3. pp 192.93} In this system, while the members of a given caste derive their membership by birth, they have similar roles and positions corresponding to the position and role of their caste: social structure is based on the division of labor in society, which are in turn derived from the role and positions of individuals in the caste. The system in itself is a derivation of their occupation.

As a majority of the population is rural, the village is the unit that determines the socio-economic set up of Punjab. Every village is linked to the adjoining villages in one way or the other. Agriculture being the main occupation of the people, their economic dependence upon each other mainly pertains to agricultural activities. All the villagers are joined together in pursuing these major and other allied activities. Most of the villagers who are not farmers themselves tend to serve the needs of the farmers in one way or the other to earn their living. They may be carpenters and blacksmiths who make and repair agricultural implements for the farmers. The agricultural labor which may be permanent or temporary as per the season, lend a hand during the sowing or harvesting seasons. They are employed on contracts and have a settlement in wages and in kind. The resident labor tends to take the payment for their efforts in the form of grain while the labor employed from outside i.e., is the migrant gangs of laborers who go from farm holding to farm holding during the season are paid according to a preset contract. Along with their wages they are also paid in the form of provision of food, shelter and medical aid. At the end of the seasonal work they
may also be given some gifts like clothes, utensils etc. In Punjab the continued influx of the migrant labor has resulted in peculiar situations where the so-called outsider has become so well-entrenched in the local culture that they are now demanding a political presence. In fact within the study area tensions have been sensed on the issue [This aspect has been discussed further in detail]. The other workers in the village comprise the artisans, craftsmen, carpenters, blacksmiths and cobblers. There is a clear cut demarcation when it comes to the houses of the Scheduled castes and Backward classes which live on the outskirts of the village.

Various demarcations apart the villages of Punjab live quite harmoniously without conflict stemming from the ways of one community being subjected to the feudal attitude of the other. They have their own separate locality and identity. Although the villages of Punjab\textsuperscript{154} are inhabited by different castes, the people of one village do not marry into the same village and in many cases strict caste segregation is practiced in issues of marriage and relationships. The structure of the Punjab village however, has undergone much upheaval in the last century.

\textbf{Partition Aftermath}

After India attained Independence in 1947 which resulted in the Partition of the Punjab as a whole, the territory designated as Punjab on the Indian side of the Asian subcontinent underwent a sea change in its social and economic life especially in the villages. Village life was at one time almost devastated. The entire fabric of inter-dependence was disturbed. Millions of people migrated to their villages. As a result the character of the villages, the inter-community relationships, the old traditions of social solidarity and economic interdependence changed radically. The Partition brought about change in the occupational structures also. Caste hierarchy received a big blow. The low caste people who

till then had been continuing in their ancestral professions took to new ones. This brought about a new awakening among them and prompted them towards greater social mobility. They began to make a conscious effort to raise their status. The post independence period has been characterized by policy discussions that have pointed to the village being a template for nation building\textsuperscript{155}.

After the upheaval, the country focused on development. As a consequence the Five Year Plans, mainly community development projects and the national extension schemes, brought about far-reaching changes in the social, economic and political relationships at the village level. This was reflected in the changes in the village social structure that took place in the decades following Independence. The Community Development Programmes attempted to introduce reforms at the village level that focused on issues, such as primary health, education and agriculture\textsuperscript{156}.

Industrialization made its inroads into the traditional village settings soon after the Partition. As a result the self sufficiency of the villages was threatened and irrevocably disturbed. Earlier families were cohesive and interdependent and learning was passed from one generation to another. There was a strong influence of the outsider community as the waves of progress swept away all the basic rules of a village based community. Soon money began to be needed to live in villages whereas earlier no body who worked in the village setup ever went hungry. Manufactured goods were required from outside. People started relying more on machines than on each other. As a result of the outer influences, there occurred some larger changes in the authority structures of the villages. The first organized effort to tackle the problems of rural India was reflected in the Community Development Programme\textsuperscript{157} launched on 2\textsuperscript{nd} October, 1952. From

\textsuperscript{155} ibid, pp 167-176.
\textsuperscript{156} Vandana 2002. 'Introduction'. The Village is India. Oxford University Press. New Delhi
the very beginning the programme emphasized upon the importance of working through people’s institutions like the village Panchayats to ensure the villages’ involvement in the planning and implementation of development programmes. The fullest participation of the villages was sought to make the programme a large scale success.

As a result of democratic decentralization the Panchayati Raj was ushered into Punjab state in October 1961. The process for the setting up of Panchayat Samitis at the block level and Zila Parishads at the district level was introduced in the state. Accordingly, Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads were set up. The institution of Gram Panchayat in the state has been in the larger picture since 1912 when the First Punjab village Panchayat Act was passed. These village institutions were later strengthened by the passage of the Panchayati Raj Act. Hence, with the setting up of the Panchayat Samities and Zila parishads the three-tier system of governance was introduced here in 1961.

The 73rd Amendment

Under the Punjab Gram Panchayat Act it was made responsibility of Punjab Government to establish a Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat in each village. The panchayat is obviously for a village because it is a statutory body with a law framed to suit exact conditions in which it has to work. Thus, the Panchayati Raj institution had been in existence in the country for a long period, but it has been observed that these institutions have not been able to acquire the status and dignity of able and responsive people’s bodies due to a variety of reasons like the absence of regular elections, inadequate representation of weaker sections like the Schedule Castes and women, inefficient devolution of powers and lack of financial resources. On April 23rd, 1993 the institution of the

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Panchayati Raj was given constitutional status through the historic Seventy-third Amendment.

The Seventy Third Amendment made some fundamental changes in the Indian polity as also in the status of local institutions. Regarding the mandatory provisions of the Panchayati Raj Act the most critical are those that strengthen the structure of representative democracy and political representation at the local level. The key mandatory provisions are as follows:

- the establishment in every state (except those with population below 2 million) of rural local bodies (panchayats) at the village, intermediate and district levels (Article 243B)
- direct elections to all seats in the panchayats at all levels (Article 243C)
- compulsory elections to panchayats every five years with the elections being held before the end of the term of the incumbent panchayat. In the event that a panchayat is dissolved prematurely, elections must be held within six months, with the newly elected members serving out the remainder of the five years term (Article 243E)
- mandatory reservation of seats in all panchayats at all levels for Dalits and Adivasis in proportion to their share of the panchayat’s population (Article 243D)
- mandatory reservation of one-third of all seats in all panchayats at all levels for women, with the reservation for women applying to the seats for Dalits and Adivasis as well (Article 243D)
- indirect elections to the position of panchayat chairperson at the intermediate and district levels (Article 243C)
• mandatory reservation of the position of panchayat chairperson at all levels for Dalits and Adivasis in proportion to their share in the state population (Article 243D)

• mandatory reservation of one-third of the positions of panchayat chairperson at all three levels for women (Article 243D)

In addition, the Act also mandates the constitution of two state-level Commissions: firstly, an independent Election Commission to supervise and manage elections to local bodies, much as the Election Commission of India manages state assembly and parliamentary elections (Article 243K); and a State Finance Commission, established every five years, to review the finance position of local bodies and recommend the principles that should govern the allocation of funds and taxation authority to local bodies (Article 243I).

Among the discretionary provisions there are two central ones. These in the opinion of many observers, are at the very core of the amendment. They call upon the States to:

• endow the Gram Sabha- the electorate of a village panchayat- with powers and functions at the village level (Article 243A)

• devolve powers and authority to panchayats so as to enable them to function as institutions of self-government. In particular, the provision calls for devolution of powers and responsibilities for the preparation of plans and impressively wide range of items, which are listed in a new Schedule, Schedule XI, of the Constitution (Article 243G)

A further discretionary provision (Article 243H) authorizes states to pass legislation aimed at increasing the financial resources available to rural local
bodies by increasing the latter’s statutory taxation powers and by providing for grants-in-aid from the State government.

The newly introduced Schedule XI of the Constitution (shown in Table 1) contains a comprehensive list of functional items, ranging from agricultural extension, implementation of land reforms, poverty alleviation, and family welfare. In fact there is considerable overlap between Schedule XI and the State List of Schedule VII of the constitution, with one of the notable omissions in Schedule XI being law and order. Various subjects covered the Schedule can be listed as drinking water, rural housing, family welfare, women and child development, public distribution system and the maintenance of community assets.

According to the Constitution of India, the Gram Sabha is a body of persons registered in the electoral rolls of a village within the area of a Panchayat. Thus it is an institution which has been given the constitutional status and some specific functions are ascribed to the Gram Sabha. Examination of the different Acts concerning the Gram Sabhas reveal that the Sabha is empowered to mobilize voluntary labor for community welfare programmes, and promote harmony in the village situation.

Role of Polity in Industrialization

Industrialization of the area under study began in the mid seventies. Case studies reveal that the setting up of the industrial houses in the vicinity resulted in breaking up the well established dynamics of the social character of the villages. As a result the traditional social set up was disturbed. It was found out during the study that the political systems in the villages continued to be dominated by the leaders from the large families belonging to the higher Castes, as also from

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educated families which belonged to the economically well-off sections of society. These influential people enjoyed tremendous social prestige and had the advantage of having comparatively lived for a much longer period in that particular village. Though the traditional factors like age and sheer numerical strength of the family are losing their significance but caste still continue to be a pre-dominating factor in securing an important position at the grass-root level.

In fact there are newer entrants into the fray. There is the ever-increasing presence of the migrant labor looming large over the political horizon of Punjab. On the basis of sheer numerical strength they can outnumber the other inhabitants in some localities. There are often rumblings of discontent at their lack of involvement in the political presence to redress their basic needs of food, shelter and clothing. It was found out during the study that most of the villagers had their relatives/family friends as members of Panchayats. This led them to exercise some influence and control over aspects of their day to day life.

To obtain an idea of the presence of the panchayats and their role in the life and times of the respondents it was thought prudent to pose some pertinent queries to understand better the involvement of the people with the panchayat and vice versa.

Table 7.1: Are you satisfied with the work of your Panchayats.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>No. of Agricultural workers</th>
<th>Number of industrial workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>278 (88.25%)</td>
<td>202 (79.84%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>37 (11.74%)</td>
<td>51 (20.15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though majority of the respondents (88.25% of agricultural workers and 79.84% of industrial workers) replied positively, yet they were not fully satisfied. Most of them suggested that working or functioning can be improved remarkably if government gave them greater financial aid for developmental projects. Most of the industrial workers who responded negatively, were openly critical of the
panchayat. They blamed it for being inactive especially about the working conditions of the dwelling places of the industrial workers. Another of their complaints was that the panchayats remained silent whenever there was some kind of tension between the industrial workers and the factory managers. Some of the agricultural workers were of the view that there was too much of political fragmentation in the village panchayats. Every decision and activity these panchayats was open to the respondents.

Some of the respondents were of the view that only those were satisfied with the working of the panchayats, who were either in the Panchayat themselves or were related to those who were members. While some of the other respondent’s reason for dissatisfaction was that the panchayat leaders were not capable. Most of the dissatisfied respondents mentioned that economically panchayats were very weak and they suffered more so because the cooperation and coordination among the office-bearers was much less than the required degree. Few of the agricultural workers suggested that panchayats should actively spearhead the protest with the industrial houses to force them to take steps in order to reduce pollution in the area.

Table 7.2: Distribution of Panchayats on Political Affiliations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Political party</th>
<th>Number of candidates in study area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akali Dal</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above indicates the political affiliation of Sarpanches though the rural population had least interest in political affiliations or political activities of various political parties. Some of the rural leaders said that they had political affiliations with one or other political party operating in the region.
Villagers often use the English word 'politics' to refer to factions and cliques among themselves; in this sense the term has a somewhat derogatory connotation. At the village level the forms that political activity takes range from participation in regional or national politics to local factionalism and the upholding of traditional values. Today the significance that politics has at the village level has required a redefinition of the village, as a political community.

The actual powers of the Sarpanch in the case of the lady sarpanches is [in case of Rail] vested in the hands of male members of their families. The Rail Sarpanch is supported by an MLA [Nand Lal of the BJP]. The Bannah Sarpanch is supported by a Congressman. However it is the Gujjars who really wield the actual power in the area.

Table 7.3: Effects of Industrial Pollution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answers</th>
<th>Awareness of representative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of the four Sarpanches only one complained about the pollution causing industries. She told the respondents that the chemical industries – Ranbaxy Laboratories and DSM. Anti-Infectives Private Limited were the worst culprits. These industries outpoured maximum of pollutants. Despite mandatory rulings both these units neither of them had adequate waste treatment facilities as per the prescribed norms.

The distribution of the sarpanches in the panchayats of the study area on the basis of sex, education level, caste affiliation and age is depicted below:
Table 7.4: Distribution of Sarpanches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Panchayats</th>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Asron</td>
<td>Scheduled Caste</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>35  yrs</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Bannah</td>
<td>Gujjar</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>42  yrs</td>
<td>matric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Rail Majra</td>
<td>Scheduled Caste</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>31  yrs</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Taunsa</td>
<td>Scheduled Caste</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>60  yrs</td>
<td>matric</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- both the women are elected on the reserved seats (2)

The women Sarpanches in the villages of the area under study wield the power as mere titular heads. It is actually the male members in the family who hold the baton of power. In the case of Rail it was the father-in-law of the Sarpanch who actually held the reigns and in Bannah it was the husband of the Sarpanch who exercised control over all decisions. The women are visible only on official work for purely decorative reasons. The representation of the people also lay with the men-folk rather than the women themselves. The women representatives were in place only because of the reserved seats.

The dominant caste in these villages is that of the Gujjars and they wield a lot of influence in the political set up of the area. All the Sarpanches enjoy the blessings of the Gujjars. The Rajputs, though they have larger landholdings, have less influence on the passages of political proficiency in the villages. Thus out of the four Sarpanches in the study area, a majority i.e. three enjoyed full support of the Gujar population while there was only one who had been supported by the Rajputs.

In the most recent elections, there was witnessed a newer trend that is slowly and steadily becoming a much criticized though much prophesied political occurrence. The large presence of the migrant labor from the states of Bihar and
Uttar Pradesh has begun to make its own demands and needs voiced in the electoral process. They are a large enough vote bank to have many of the politicians pandering to their needs. This phenomenon was visible in the study area as well. The agricultural and industrial labor that is settled on one bank of the Bist Doab nadi or mand has made its opinion clear that they shall vote for those who are willing to address their basic needs. It is a matter of time before they have their own representative. This could portend the beginning of a newer emergence on the political face of the state.

The role of the polity during the onset of the processes of industrialization as also during the first experiences of the after effects of the pollutants having made a permanent place in the lives of the inhabitants as also the damage suffered to land and crops besides the quality of life of the inhabitants have been charted in the Case studies that were taken on the spot and at random. Some of the older respondents were queried in depth about the quality of life then and now as also the variations that were being experienced after the industrial houses made their presence in the area.

Case study-1

Name : Kuldeep Singh
Age : 43 Years
Caste : Gujjar
Occupation : Agriculturalist
Education : Illiterate
Village : Rail Majra

According to Kuldeep, an agriculturalist from village Rail, in his response to one of the queries of the researcher confirmed that there had once been a

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162 Now also Jharkhand and Uttanchal
large scale and sustained protest from the villagers in 1996-97. This was concentrated against the Ranbaxy Laboratories Limited.

The villagers had launched a serious protest against the pharmaceutical giant's industrial presence in the area as they were being severely hit by the adverse effects of the pollutants being released from the factories. The pollution had caused extensive damage. Its effluents had badly hit the crops which had become spoiled and which had totally decreased the crop yield. The impact of the contamination was felt by approximately 200 hectares of land.

This agitation and protest consequently forced the factory to give compensation to the affected villagers of Rail Majra, Bholewal, Tajowal etc. Further, the factory assured employment to those who had been very badly hit. During these settlement overtures the factory authorities had also promised to resort to take anti-pollution measures so that such mishaps were avoided in the future. But, according to Kuldeep there is large-scale feeling that those earlier assurances were merely lip service and the industrial pollution continues unabated. It contaminates the air, water and soil of the area. The screening and detoxification methods if any were probably not up to the mark and were surreptitiously endangering the flora and fauna of the area to say nothing of the long term damage to human life.

He stressed that the village panchayat was not at all active in this area. They are also not taking the problem seriously. They are more attracted towards the benefits and opportunities the villagers are getting from the industries like health care, financial help for construction of school buildings, employment etc. The study observations bring out that the Panchayati Raj institution had become weak and ineffective owing to a variety of reasons, which included illiteracy, ignorance of rural masses, inadequate representation of the selected members from the scheduled Castes and women, lack of financial resources and inadequate devolution of powers and authority. Moreover, the panchayat
members themselves were unaware and uninformed about the environmental costs the villages had to pay for the presence of the industries. They are more interested in developing the infrastructure of the villages. It has been observed during the study that still the caste dominance is there in the rural communities. The changes in the social life of the villagers which were expected because of the industrialization were found to be very less and almost negligible when compared with the heavy toll they had taken in terms of land, water and air systems. It was observed that the higher castes like the Rajputs and Gujjars in the area had access to better facilities on the basis of their higher social status and economic level. They had better educational levels as well and hold better jobs, larger land holdings, higher income and improved living standards as compared to the other villagers who ranked lower in the caste hierarchy. They command more power in the rural society, irrespective of who-so-ever may be the Sarpanch.

Kuldeep further reiterated that the decisions of the Panchayat are generally influenced by these persons. These higher castes have relatively early access to the socio-economic development changes taking place in the community. Industrial jobs are also offered on the reference of some influential person of the area or offered to the relatives of the influential persons. The Sarpanches tend to maintain a cooperative attitude towards the industrial managers as it proves fruitful for them. Consequently they turn a blind eye towards the harmful effects of the pollution caused by their units.

The investigator was surprised and shocked to find out that most of the villagers or Panchayat members were not interested in realizing and giving credence to the harmful impact of the industrial pollution. Very few have been ccme forward with their complaints. They are just suffering at their personal levels. It was observed during the study that outside interventions from some non-government agency was required. During a survey carried out by some government agency during the conclusion of the research work it was observed
that none of the villagers were willing to voice their concern about the pollution and even on much coaxing from the investigators they maintained a tight-lipped silence on pollution and its impact on their lives.

According to Kuldeep they were all afraid to loose the jobs the especially those being given some compensation by the factories. Also the Panchayat seemed to have come to some sort of an understanding with the factory owners who honored them at their own social functions and plied them with lavish gifts.

Case Study-2

Name : Harkanwal Singh
Age : 78 years
Education : Illiterate
Occupation : Agriculturalist
Caste : Rajput
Landholding: Earlier 35 acres

He was one of the most influential landlords of the area prior to the setting of the industries. Gradually he ended up giving some portion of land to almost every industry that was set up in the area. DCM had been given land by him in 1976 measuring 3 acres. He had been enthusiastic in giving the land because there were many promises of improved lifestyle which made him hopeful for a better future for his progeny. These promises were for roads, tap water [earlier there was no tap water] and improved health and educational facilities.

He lamented that a water tank had to be constructed [these days] to feed the basic needs of drinking water for the village and yet after testing it was found that the only suitable drinking water could be found at about a little distance from Rail village. There was no suitable water within the village precincts. He rued the day that the industries had been set up.
He said that this trend of selling land to the factories and imagining them to be sincere in keeping to their promises was a great fallacy. One of his relatives, almost a family member had sold land for Rs 40 to 50 lac. On the promise of employment he had built a large house, bought car and tractor even though he had been left with only a small land holding comprising a mere 3 acres. He has no work now. The factory did not provide him with the promised job.

There is no community effort directed towards the redressal of this vital issue of pollution and contamination of the environment. A recent survey saw once again a tightlipped silence on issues of pollution. People do not want to open up lest they loose their jobs.

He remembered wistfully that earlier there was much space around. Now there is too much congestion as the area has become very populated. Earlier all the Rajputs occupied Rail village and the Gujjars were settled around it. Later with the development of the industry, Rail Majra saw a large scale influx of habitation especially migrants who set settlements proximal to the industrial units. Soon the migrant settlements ended up in an overall congestion in the entire living space of the villagers.

He confided that the Montari industries in the vicinity were manufacturing industrial gases which were probably as toxic as the Bhopal United Carbide industries that were the seat of such mayhem in the lives of thousands. It is suspected that when they have to get the relevant licenses and papers for setting up their industries usually it is the corrupt practices and lies that rule and the reality is never taken into consideration. The factory owners have the license givers virtually in their pockets, he said.
Earlier the people welcomed the industries and there were no doubts or second thoughts on the fall out. People are still silent on the subject as they are afraid of losing out on the jobs.

Case Study-3

Name : Rakesh Kumar  
Age : 32 years  
Education : +2  
Occupation : Working in Max India [one of the pharmaceutical firms in the area]  
Landholding : 8 acres

When asked about the Panchayat’s role in the settlement of the pollution issue that was cause for grave concern in the villages, he informed that the present Sarpanch had been very vehement during his election campaign before the elections and had threatened stringent action against the factory owners. He had made many tall promises of taking up the cause of pollution in the mandate, but after coming to power he seems to have totally forgotten his promises or has become attuned to the dictates of the influential factory owners lobby. Harneke continued that now it is suspected that the Sarpanch may have been given some compensation for his silence. The DSM have contributed a room to the village school and have also bought swings and other entertainment articles for the children. It is suspected that they keep the Panchayat mollified by making some small contribution every now and then. They often give some financial help. Every year there is a massive Jagran organized by the villagers in which the factories contribute lavishly.

Thus the factories keep the panchayat on their side and ensure that there is no protest on their stay in the area. Harneke reaffirmed that they call the
Sarpanches and give them gifts [it is rumored that the present lady Sarpanch’s father-in-law was gifted a scooter by the factory owners] during their own functions as well. He elaborated that there is a well established hierarchy on who gets jobs in these factories. Members of the Panchayat, their close associates and then those who wield influence over the sustenance of the Panchayat and the Sarpanch are likely to get jobs.

He pointed out that the industrial belt was supposed to have added to the prosperity of the region. But none of the factories use raw material from the surrounding area. None of the products are useful for the people living in the area or are of immediate use to them. Also the people were loosing their landholdings to the factories because of rampant pollution of the soil and the surface and sub-surface water systems. Instead of the boon they were being promoted as the factories were more a bane to the health and well being of the villagers. Yet the political clout and high powered money circles of influence of the factory owners played a major role in their continued sustenance and gradual degradation of the rural areas.

He was quick to point out that none of the industries is agro-based. Thus none of the produce of the farmers could be utilized commercially. On the whole it was a loosing proposition for the farmers of the area. He was emphatic in putting across that the political clout and big money had played a vital role in the present state of affairs.

The Voice of a Movement

In the first decade following 1947, high priority accorded to the rehabilitation of displaced persons because of the relocation of refugees from the newly created Pakistan. This resulted in a wide-swept mass-based degradation of the environmental on a very large-scale as entire forests began to be cut down and the existing towns and cities underwent expansion every which way. New habitations and settlements were formed and new townships were established. In the subsequent years almost upto the 70s the major development programmes
were focused on poverty alleviation and employment generation for the same. Roads were built, greater connectivity ensured and then industries were set up. Similarly agriculture was developed and more and more water resources were tapped. The rapid population growth, urbanization, increasing industrial and agricultural output all took place at a very rapid place with little, if at all, consideration for the increasing environmental degradation.

The next phase of development gave rise to the second phase of degradation of the environment. The discharge of untreated sewage into the rivers was the major reason for the degradation of the waters for which Punjab was renowned [as the Land of the Five Rivers]. As per the fairly recent reports, long stretches of the Yamuna in Haryana and the Satluj in Punjab have been identified by the Central Pollution Control Board [CPCB] as highly polluted river stretches. To make the Yamuna pollution-free, a Rs 2000-crore scheme was initiated. Out of this sum about Rs 400 crore was spent and no worthy report could be tabled stated any marked improvement in the quality of water in the Yamuna even then. Similarly another programme for cleaning up the Satluj was also mooted under a national river conservation plan in Ludhiana, Jalandhar and Phillaur. The media has consistently been carrying reports of the Satluj being the most polluted of the five abs or rivers of the Punjab.

In Punjab, it has been often reported that 18 out of a total of 45 industries have not complied with the prescribed standards, whereas in Haryana there are 8 industries out of 43 that fall in this category. Keeping in view, the serious levels of water and air pollution, the Ministry of Environment and Forest has identified four critical polluted areas\textsuperscript{163} in the region. These are Parwnoo and Kala Amb (Himachal Pradesh) Mandi Gobindgarh (Punjab) and Najafgarh in Delhi. The environmental epidemiological studies to study the distribution and determinants of diseases as a resultant of prolonged exposures to the pollution are being carried out in Mandi Gobindgarh and Najafgarh.

\textsuperscript{163} http://www.tribuneindia.com/environ.htm.
The role of the polity in highlighting these issues as the representative voice of the people has been rather dormant. The issues, as is shown in the case studies and was repeatedly brought up in the focus group discussions, were sidelined in favor of transient gains in the form of employment, monetary doles and minimal developmental works to appease the population. The political will and the need to be aware, informed and educated on the issues of hazards of pro-longed exposure to contamination of land and water seemed to have been the least concerns of the political representatives. Even though they may have surfaced as electoral mandates in the campaign for gaining a seat they were soon brushed under the proverbial carpet to be aired again when the need arose. The representatives of the people were playing to the tune of the money barons who held the clout politically and financially to exercise their opinion on what was beneficial or not for the people of the area.

On the one hand the will of the people, the combined sufferings of the landholders and the landless as also the aspirations of the migrants are issues that await translation into the voicing of specific concerns for redressal. On the other the might of the industrial houses runs rough shod over the concerns of environment and people specificity while keeping a long term focus on profits, gains and circles of power. Every now and then there is a wave of awakening to the issues of pollution and contamination which is translated into various forms of highlighting at the level of the people, the factory authorities, and the actual victims who have lost access to healthy land and water as also the generations that are to come. Over and above these are the vested interests like some of the politicians who realize the points of vulnerability of the population and their constituency. They tend to play the pollution and contamination cards to suit their election campaigns and then clam up once they have attained their objective.

The many ramifications of the politics – socio-cultural and economic nexus that is being created in the region - are many and varied. They need to be studied deeply and further to understand the dynamics of the situation that is
going to arise in the coming times when the migrant labor seeks a mandate of its own and the land owning local population is faced with the rising problems of land and water contamination while the landless and the youth begin opting for greener pastures in the nearby urban conglomerates. The problems of the region are emerging and in the near future shall threaten to become a hydra-headed monster too complex and multi-channeled to be successfully conquered.