Chapter V

CONCLUSION AND OBSERVATIONS

Punjab, which is one of the smallest states of India, left far behind, in terms of progress, even the "Corn Revolution" of America. The credit for such an achievement, does not go alone to the scientific and technological breakthrough, but also to the adventurous, entreprenuering and hardworking peasants of Punjab.

For harvesting the gains of green revolution, the peasants went to the extent of mortgaging their personal properties, apart from raising loans from public and private credit agencies. Heavy investments and the sweat of their brows, earned them initial benefits which started declining after some time. The henceforth alien market orientation of agriculture brought them face to face with the people having different economic interests. The increasing rates of agricultural inputs and their short supply, caused them much concern. Moreover, the setting up of Agricultural Price Commission (APC) by the government further aggravated their anxiety. This growing concern caused the emergence of various peasant organisation.. in the form of unions, which consequently, became the mouthpiece of the peasants and played a substantial role in highlighting their agricultural problems.
After the reorganisation of Punjab in 1966, various peasant organisations popped up at the local levels. The prominent among them were Punjab Zamindara Union, Nabha, District Patiala (PZU) which further broadened its base by creating another sisterly peasant organisation, Zamindara Federation of India (ZFI). Initially, the agricultural problems, taken up by them were minor and localised, but later on they started toeing up the matters of greater importance. The off-spring of Punjab Zamindara Union (PZU), All India Zamindara Front (AIZF), Mandi Gobindgarh, District Patiala, helped in fortifying the peasant unions and these unions, by and large, were 'one-man show' only. The strategies adopted by them were such as personal influence, personal contacts and personal writings, apart from other routine tactics. From 1967-71, they had to deal with the Akali Party, which was in power most of the time during this period.

In 1972, when Congress party came into power and Giani Zail Singh was installed as the Chief Minister of Punjab, as a reaction a stronger peasant organisation emerged. The emergence of Punjab Khetibari Zamindara Union (PKZU), Ludhiana created a congenial atmosphere for the peasants to come up openly to protest against the anti-agriculturist policies of the Government. The issues taken up by this union were those which were of paramount importance for the peasants. PKZU had a direct confrontation with the government
through its more stiff and stern strategies and gave a tough time to the government.

Again, from 1977 to 1980, the unions had to deal with the Akali-Janata regime, but in 1980, when Congress Government regained power in the state, a larger peasant organisation, popularly known as Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) came into being. This union was having a broader base with better organisational capacity. BKU was almost the synonimous of PKZU, but it acted in a more sharp manner with definite planned programmes. The tactics adopted were more conspicuous and stringent. They strongly exhibited their numerical strength to pressurise the government.

It is observed that from 1966-71, the local peasant unions were operating in different parts of Punjab, particularly in the Malwa region which consequently became popular with the name of Punjab Zimindara Union (PZU); Zimindara Federation of India (ZFI); A'1 India Zimindara Front (AIZF) and Punjab Khetibari Zimindara Union (PKZU).

The PKZU dominated all others, but it could not get the whole hearted co-operation and co-ordination from the other unions which too had their say, in their own ways. Between 1980 and 1986 was a hay day period for BKU which proved its worth by organising larger Rallies and Gheraoes in a more planned way. With the passage of time BKU became so prominent that it overshadowed all other organisations.
Non-political peasant organisations stole the show of the political ones in the stipulated period. Peasant unions belonging to political parties always danced at the tune of their political leaders. For them, the interest of the party was above the interest of the peasants, but the peasant unions which were not directly and permanently attached to any one particular political party, kept the peasants' interest at the top and did not compromise on that account. PZU and ZFI remained active upto 1982-83 and maintained its apolitical character. Thereafter it became almost inoperative because of the death of their main leader Master Gurmukh Singh Sidhu.

Punjab Khetibari Zimindara Union (PKZU) stood for its apolitical principle for quite some time, but in 1977 and 1980, some of its leaders could not resist their vested interests and joined different political parties. Even the chief spokesman of All India Zimindara Front (AIZF) did not lag behind and joined hands with Chaudhary Charan Singh. The leaders of Bhartiya Kisan Union also tried to avail the political opportunity whenever an opportunity came in their way.

However, peasant unions could never see eye to eye with Congress and Janata Party. They considered them opportunists. Communists alleged these unions as the embodiment of rich peasantry and always remained reluctant to render its support. Akalis did support these unions
for the apparent reasons, as they themselves were mostly agriculturists, but peasants did not take them for granted and became their ardent critics whenever the situations demanded. They supported the Akalis till it suited to their interests.

Semi-official peasant organisations never came up openly to support the cause of the peasants. They always kept a low profile and intriguingly toed up the agricultural policies of the government. Virtually two types of pressure groups were operating in Punjab Agriculture: Political and Apolitical. Undoubtedly, apolitical pressure groups decimated the political ones, during the period under study.

Though the problems of the peasants had been common, yet both political and apolitical peasant unions rarely joined hands together to fight against the government. Whenever they stood together, they proved more effective. But mostly they had been fighting separately and as a result they could never earn major concessions. They never tried to resolve their basic differences. That is why the fate of the peasants remained hanging for want of some solid and consolidated peasant union at the national level.

The experience of the unions was that Akalis were more sympathetic and considerate towards their demands as compared to the Congress. The interest and the inclination
of the Akalis was quite understandable. It was also noticed that they gave open support to these unions, when they were out of power, but whenever they were installed in the power, they also could not come up to the expectations of the peasants. For instance, in 1977, not to speak of remunerative prices even the bare reasonable prices for cotton and sugarcane could not be given to the farmers. The potato and sugarcane episodes earned them a bad name.

However, these unions always tried to derive the maximum concessions from the government irrespective of the party in power. In 1984 when no popular government was in power, they did not hesitate to gherao even the Punjab Governor in Chandigarh. They did not lift up the gherao till the state government conceded to some of their demands. The notable fact is that the government always tried to keep their major demands pending and diffused the situation by granting them minor concessions. Their demands at times were a tall order for the government to concede. The Congress government sometimes played delaying tactics to fizzle out the agitations. Often, demands used to get politicised and some political parties availed themselves of the opportunities by harvesting a good political dividend out of the given situation.

Out of all the strategies adopted by the unions 'Gherao' and 'Bandhs' had been quite successful. Their
unique style just as captivating the 'recovery officers' in 'Tooriwala Kothas' (Shabby rustic rooms where animal fodder is stored), was so strange and stringent that it horrified the government officials. This style helped them in earning temporary, if not permanent concessions from the government. The strategies to work against political party by influencing the elections have been more workable because these pressure groups had attained such a position that no political party could ever afford to ignore their existence.

The rate of success of various peasant organisations always varied in degrees but not in kind. To begin with from 1966-72, the unions had a higher rate of success as compared to the later ones. (See Table No. 4.1). This may be due to the reason that most of the time during this period Akali party was in power. Moreover at that time the government had the policy to encourage the farmers due to Green Revolution.

During Congress regime from 1972-77 in the state, most of their agitations remained pending, but the moment Janata Party took over they started giving relief. The rate of success from 1977 to 1980 was quite encouraging. There was an extensive exhibition of the peasant power by BKU from 1980 to 1986 but the rate of its success was not impressive, rather it fell down considerably (See Table No. 4.6). This may be due to the fact that the state had to
face certain undesirable circumstances and it remained under President rule for a considerable time.

For the purpose of mobilisation, the unions had been conditioning the farmers through religious fervor. Most of the agricultural agitations were monitored by the union from religious places (Gurdwaras) to take maximum support from the peasants. Such techniques made the peasants more responsive to the calls of the unions. Needless to say that they also kept their economic interests on priority and joined hands with those who stood for their economic interests. The unions always kept in mind the sowing and the harvesting times of the conventional crops of the state, before giving them a call and whenever they ignored this fact, they had to regret.

The other method of mobilising the peasants was the publication of various vernacular periodicals such as 'Zimindar Di Dunia' (PKU); 'Wahikar Yug' (AIZF); 'Kisan Masley' (PKZU) and 'Kisan' (BKU). These periodicals proved a special boon in mobilising the peasants on one hand and pressurising the government on the other.

The maximum representation in various peasant unions had been from the Malwa region of Punjab. Almost all the major peasant organisations emerged from this part of the state. The basic reason attributed to this fact was that the 'landlord lobby' belonged to this area. Though
these people never dominated the peasant unions by coming in the fore-front, yet they had been using these unions vicariously for presenting their viewpoint. Keeping in view their own economic and political interests they have been supporting these unions from behind. They had been using these unions to ascend the ladder of power politics. Thus they had been killing two birds with one stone. One by becoming the 'Masihas' of the peasants and the other by grabbing the major chunk of the economic benefits emerging out of the major agitations of the unions. They demonstrated their political strength through the large rallies of the peasants and encashed it whenever and wherever the opportunity arose. On the other hand, the peasants supported these unions because they saw in them the foot-falls of the coming good time for them.

Gradually the feudal class was replaced by the middle class peasantry which came forward to organise the peasants. Most of the peasant leaders were from middle, peasantry and did not hesitate to accept the personal and political bonanzas whenever they could avail themselves of the opportunity. The commercialisation of agriculture, strengthened their socio-economic base in the agricultural sector. Apparently the peasantry and their unions were used as means and not ends.

Some leaders of the peasants' unions were quite vigilant and well educated. They led the unions in a very
calculative manner. Some of them were put on the various committees, formed by the government to look into the various agricultural problems of the peasants.

Another notable factor was that the peasant unions, at first, emerged in Punjab rather than in its neighbouring states. This may be attributed to the fact that the developing society is more prone to pressure groups than the under-developed one. Punjab, being an agricultural state was marching rapidly on the path of progress as compared to the other states. That is why the agricultural pressure groups, at first, developed in Punjab and they propounded the idea of having the peasant unions in the neighbouring states also.

The style of their demonstrations and the exhibition of their numerical strength attracted the attention of various political parties. They had been a constant cause of concern for the ruling parties. However, these unions had been a constant source of inspiration for the peasants and from time to time boosted up their morale. Thus, such unions as pressure groups had been functioning as catalytic agents in resolving the agricultural problems of the peasants.
SUMMING UP

1. The pressure groups in Punjab agriculture emerged after the arrival of Green Revolution in Punjab, particularly after 1966.

2. Market orientation in agriculture, unremunerative prices for agricultural products and the non-availability of agricultural inputs at reasonable rates were the reasons for the emergence of the agricultural pressure groups. Some political reasons also contributed in this context.

3. Pressure groups played various tactics to pressurise the government for the economic demands of the peasants. Out of all the tactics 'Gherao', 'Bandh' and 'Ceasing of supply to grain-markets and the sugar mills' proved more effective in strengthening their position. Courting arrests had become a useful strategy. The threat to 'influence the elections' also helped the unions in making their way through.

4. Non-political peasant organisations had been dominating during the period under study. They maintained their 'apolitical' character from 1966 to 1977, partly if not fully. After this span some peasant leaders started contesting elections from one political party ticket or the other. Their
affiliation towards Bhartiya Lok Dal (B.L.D.) did not bring them any fruitful results. Recapturing of political power by the Congress party in 1980 re-activated them to oppose the policies of the Congress government.

5. Almost all the non-political peasant organisations, at one time or the other, had romance with the Akali Dal. However, these peasant organisations were more active as opposing pressure groups during Congress party rule in the state. It has also been observed that Punjab Khetibari Zimindara Union (P.K.Z.U.) and Bhartiya Kisan Union (B.K.U.) emerged when Congress Party had just snatched the political power from the Akalis, for instance in 1972 and 1980.

6. Landlord lobby of Punjab, particularly from Malwa Region had always been dominating in these peasant unions. They made these unions as their mouthpiece. Majha region also participated substantially but Doaba remained comparatively silent (See Table No. 3.1).

7. The concessions earned by these unions were more or less minor in nature as the Congress government in the state played a delaying tactics. As a result there were no immediate gains of the agitations during Congress party rule in the state.
8. Congress has the capacity to organise the combined front of the peasants, particularly when it is out of power. The Sanji Sangharsh Samiti, during 1977-80, worked quite successfully. The moment Congress came to power, things changed.

9. The activities of B.K.U. were at climax in 1984-85, but after that they had to keep a low profile due to the circumstances prevailing in the state. There was an apparent diversification in their activities.

10. The peasant leaders used these unions as the launching pads to achieve the power-politics. Personal and political gains had been the weaknesses of some of these leaders.

11. The unions had, at times, been using judicial channels to pressurise the government.

12. The union was more particular about a few specific demands and did not bother about those general demands which otherwise they had included in their charter of demands. (See Table No. 3.3). This may be the reason that they could not always get whole hearted support from the general agricultural masses.

Right from 1966 onwards, the major strife and struggle of the various pressure groups in Punjab Agriculture had been, either against the Punjab State Electricity Board (PSEB) or against the Agricultural Price Commission, now
known as the Commission for Agricultural Cost and Price (CACP). Most of the agitations had been launched either for remunerative prices for agricultural commodities or for the cheap rates of electricity tariffs. These issues are such which will never die down and the struggle of farmers in the shape of pressure groups in Punjab Agriculture would continue for all times to come - unless some specific agricultural policy is made to the satisfaction of the agriculturists, which is not possible in any developing country like India.

Such is the story of the organisation and fruitfulness of pressure groups of Agriculture in Punjab. There is no doubt that the actions of these groups have been spasmodic and there have been ups and downs in the pattern of their working. There are apparent symptoms of their frustration, hopes, desires and upsurge of activity leading to frustrations again. The successive governments have been at times responsive as well as insensitive and have been changing their policies quite frequently. These groups have always felt that any effort is better than none. One lives to learn and these unions have learnt to follow a futuristic approach which may hopefully pay them rich dividends in the years to come.

In the fast changing economic scenario, the economic problems are likely to multiply. There is every possibility
that the growth rate of pressure groups may also augment. So the peasant leaders from agricultural sector should rise above the vested interests and organise the agriculturists at the gross root level by breaking the conventional barriers. They should consider the demands of all the agriculturists and should be more radical and innovative in their outlook.