

Strategies and Techniques of Pressure Groups with special Reference to Bhartiya Kisan Union in Punjab

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Abstract

Whenever a body of individual group themselves organised together with shared attitudes to achieve an end or interest, promoting the interest of its members which requires the technique of pressure on government policies or authoritative allocation of values, without being to accept the responsibility of public office, it may be termed as pressure group. Pressure group may use any strategy, which serve their purpose effectively. They aim at producing the maximum desired result, so as to accomplish their target. Their prevailing strategies or techniques are; lobbying, propaganda, pressing the button, links with political parties and bureaucrats, strikes, bandhs, ghetto, dharna, picketing, civil disobedience, bribery, violence like riots or political murders etc. Pressure groups penetrate all branches of government viz. legislature, executive and judiciary. The activities of pressure groups at the time of election in terms of support rendered to the candidates to fight election battles with men and material are also a part of lobbying. Apart from above discussed strategies or techniques both, legitimate or illegitimate, noticed some other strategies of pressure groups. "Sometimes, pressure groups endeavor to secure the nomination and election of sympathetic legislator who may be used in the enactment of favourable laws." ¹⁰ Pressure groups influence policy makers to provide those accurate data and information's. The chances of pressure groups to secure their interests are brighter where the authorities are incompetent to deal with the matter under consideration. Even some times drafts of bills are prepared by pressure groups themselves and submitted to the legislators for legislation. Since its inception in 1972 the Bhartiya Kisan Union hereafter BKU had been shifting its political loyalty and party preferences. Even the two faction Bhartiya Kisan Union Lakhawal hereafter BKU (L) Bhartiya Kisan Union Rajewal hereafter BKU (R) converted its unions into political parties in 1996 and unsuccessfully contested the parliamentary elections and discarded its initial stance of being independent non-political/affiliated peasant organization. During the militancy period in Punjab BKU (L) took active part in Sikh fundamentalist politics than to concentrate on peasant's economic interests. The decision to convert union into a political party brought forth a split into the union. Newly created union Bhartiya Kisan Union Sidhupur hereafter BKU (S) had close relation with late S. Gurcharn Singh Tohra and it has close relations with peasant's organization dominated by left parties. The reasons of split have little ideological or principles differences but due to the prevailing iron law of oligarchy. The leaders who could not get the desired offices caused the split. All the groups have their different choices of agitational techniques and strategies to exert the pressure on Government.

KEYWORDS: pressure groups, interest group, advocacy group, organized interest group, lobbying.

Introduction:

Whenever a body of individual group themselves organised together with shared attitudes to achieve an end or interest, promoting the interest of its members which requires the technique of pressure on government policies or authoritative allocation of values, without

being to accept the responsibility of public office, it may be termed as pressure group. Thus a social group called pressure group only when (a) it has a clearly identifiable formal structure (b) its members are linked to each other in terms of their common attitudes and interests, and © it seeks influence the process of public decision-making. "Pressure groups forge different strategies to protect and promote their interests, taking into consideration the temperament of the people and legal and constitutional framework of the nation"¹. Pressure group may use any strategy, which serve their purpose effectively. They aim at producing the maximum desired result, so as to accomplish their target. Their prevailing strategies or techniques are; lobbying, propaganda, pressing the button, links with political parties and bureaucrats, strikes, bandhs, ghetto, dharna, picketing, civil disobedience, bribery, violence like riots or political murders etc. In spite of these strategies there is a peculiar strategy which was used under the leadership of Nanayna Swamy Naiad in Tamil Nadu in its 'Cart Agitation' i.e. imposition of curfew in the influential areas, in which ban is imposed on the entry of politicians or public servants and trespassers are prosecuted in the self made jails (wheat-shaff-store). This strategy is also being used by the pressure group under study.

Lobbying is a favorite strategy of pressure groups operating in every liberal or totalitarian political system. Even some scholar like Edgar Lane prefers the term lobbying than pressure groups. To Edgar Lane, "lobbying means men acting to influence the government decisions."² Lobby in its original meaning referred to the efforts of individuals to influence the votes of legislators, generally in the lobby, outside the legislature chamber. "In its broadest modern sense it means any attempt by individuals or groups to influence the decisions of government. It is most commonly associated with the activities of private interest groups, often called pressure groups, although even public officials may be said to lobby when they attempt to influence the making of public policy by other officials"³. Thus in brief, lobbying is a political strategy to influence the government and lobbyist is the key to intermediary between pressure group and the government. Lobby may take any form like personal meetings, delegations and deputations to the members of the decisions making body. As pressure groups have secured an institutional stud and the right of approach to legislators is widely recognised as a part of the constitutional right of citizens, lobbying has become a dominant feature of democratic politics.

There are certain kinds of lobbying among them 'mass body', 'social lobbying', 'pressing-the-button', 'propaganda' etc. Mass lobby means objective is to persuade legislators to desist from supporting a bill unfavorable to their cause by expressing their feelings and by advancing arguments against it. Social lobbying when pressure groups lavishly entertain the legislators and his family in order to create in him a sense of indebtedness or obligation which largely will control his legislative behavior towards promoting their objectives, "As a matter of fact, social lobbying amounts to simple bribery."⁴ Another technique of bringing pressure to bear upon legislators is phrased 'pressing-the-button'. If a legislative measure is found to be adversely affecting interest of pressure groups, an avalanche of letters, telegrams and a spate of telephone calls moves to the legislator pleading their cause that he might take or alter his stand in, defense of their cause. Signature campaign and submission of mass petitions are another version of pressing-the-button tactics. "A strongest weapon in the hands of pressure groups is propaganda which include any attempt by the manipulation of words and word substitutes to control the attitude and consequently the behavior of number of individual concerning controversial matter."⁵

Pressure groups penetrate all branches of government viz. legislature, executive and judiciary. "The activities of pressure groups at the time of election in terms of support rendered to the candidates to fight election battles with men and material are also a part of lobbying".⁶ Pressure groups also resort to influencing the legislators through his friends and associates often at the instance of their attention to the sphere of legislation but legislation is largely dependent on the manner or method of its enforcement and the interpretation it receive from the Courts.

Executive is the most powerful organ of the government by virtue of its policy making and policy implementing powers and as such lobbyist have their eyes in real executive, weather to be the president in presidential form of government or prime minister in the countries having the parliamentary system of government. Apart from the routine activities for getting or denying the real executives approval for legislative measures, groups, also interact with administrative organs of government. "The constitution of committee for the purpose of advice and consolation convenient channel for such interacts."⁷ Help of judiciary is to be taken by pressure groups when they suffer defeat at the hands of legislative and executive, "Pressure groups also, use the strategy of alliances and logrolling for mutual assistance or benefits."⁸ An alliance normally involves the development of a common strategy in pursuit of a policy, which bears some substantive relation to their interests. Logrolling is the technique of rendering mutual assistance in terms of their struggle organised for fluttering their interests or realising their demands. Apart from the lobbying pressure groups also used some peaceful and agitational strategies to achieve their interest. Usually pressure groups used agitational means when the other peaceful means failed to bring fruits. But it is the matter of consideration or choice to decide which strategy will serve the purpose affectively.

Strikes are most common technique in the hands of pressure groups. Strike attempts a temporary stoppage of work with the expectation of getting their legitimate or illegitimate demands fulfilled. It may be non-violent or at time it may turn violent depending upon the success or failure in meeting out their demands. The phenomenon of strike is more common in labour circle as result of confrontation between the interest of the labourers and capitalists.

Bandh implies the closure linked to a general strike of all offices, shops, markets, transports and others. It said to be a blind revolt staged by pressure groups to obstruct, weaken or over throw the established order. As a constructive activity it may help to strengthen the democratic norms by opposing exploitive relationships and by forcing the establishment to concede the just demands.

Gherao is another Indian term; it implies the encirclement or confinement of the employers or the governmental bodies for forcing to meet their demands to their own satisfaction. It is described as most unpalatable technique in agitation politics, and one might say it cannot even be justified method by any norms of expediency. J.C Johri⁹ described this strategy as 'Un-Gandhian' yet the justice and legitimacy of the ghetto or even other worst means, is drawn by the fact that it is restored in such situation where the establishment against whom this action is undertaken has violated the given norms of justice. The lack of justice, in the action of establishment therefore justifies the action. Dharna is also an Indian term, t implies to sit in front of the office of concerning authority for forcing them to meet their demands. Picketing means group of workers stationed at the gates of factory or dockyard etc during strike to try to persuade others not to go to work.

Apart from above discussed strategies or techniques both, legitimate or illegitimate, noticed some other strategies of pressure groups. "Sometimes, pressure groups endeavor to secure the nomination and election of sympathetic legislator who may be used in the

enactment of favourable laws." ¹⁰ Pressure groups influence policy makers to provide those accurate data and information's. The chances of pressure groups to secure their interests are brighter where the authorities are incompetent to deal with the matter under consideration. Even some times drafts of bills are prepared by pressure groups themselves and submitted to the legislators for legislation. Pressure groups also create a favourable climate for their particular cause by appealing to public opinion through speeches, books, pamphlets, special articles, news releases, radio and motion pictures. "It is also, alleged that pressure groups are using wine and women vehemently".¹¹ It is well known that everything that the group demands, or pressurizes for, is not conceded. Some groups sometimes get what they want with little efforts and sometime they fail to alter the decision with best efforts by using all the resources at their command.

The effectiveness of groups in the sphere of politics depends on a number of factors. It depends on the nature and size of the group, its cohesiveness and informal unity, the degree to which it speaks for all interested in a particular function, activity or issue, the degree of its sustained organisation, and the amount of interest its members have in issues that affect them. The behaviour and impact of groups will depend on the political culture of the community. In a unified system pressure groups tend to be nationwide and disciplined as are the political parties.

The effectiveness of the group also depends upon the political activeness of the members. But success of the groups may also depend on the opportunities available to them to articulate their interests, the degree of permitted freedom and tolerance in a society, and their ability to use the media of communication.

Another important variable effecting group effectiveness is the quality of leadership, the nature and background of leaders and their relationship with government personnel. If the leaders of a group come from similar economic and cultural backgrounds, educational institutions, or occupational bodies, or mix in the same social world as members of the political elite, they are likely to have an easy entree into the avenues of power.

Another factor of effectiveness of a group's success is the willingness of political parties to respond to the declared interests of groups by proposing policies and choosing personal acceptance to them. Group effectiveness is contingent of making decisions. Where the locus of power is the regime is in the executive, group concentrate more on influencing the executive than legislature.

The key to understand the varying influence of group is to be found in the nature of group and attitude of the government "The effectiveness of pressure groups depends upon the resources of a group such as money, organisation, votes, prestige, control over jobs and experts "¹².Harry Ekstein¹³ categorised the determinants of group activities under the following headings (1) The form of their activities (2) Their intensity and scope (3) Their effectiveness. He further notes that the groups tend to articulate themselves on the pattern of the governmental institutions with they have dealings knowledge etc. and target of a pressure group. Different groups command different resources and varying degree. Business groups may have resources like money, control over jobs and some expert knowledge. The trade union and peasant union may command greater number of votes and capacity to launch successful agitation. The professional organisation like those of teachers, doctors, engineers and scientists have more expert knowledge. Wooten cautions a group endowments represents only potential use. However, the groups with similar resources may differ in allocation of these resources to exert pressure for getting varying fruits. The intensity and efficiency are also of significance to understand the group influence or determinants. The efficiency use her significances (1) the identification or

determinants (2) the choice of the best path to the target. But Harry Eckstein classifies the factors determining the effectiveness under three headings:

- (1) A tributes of the pressure groups themselves;
- (2) A tributes of the activities of government;
- (3) A tributes of the governmental decision making structure

To him perhaps the operative attributes constitutes a forth category, since the ability of a group to mobilise public opinion certainly enhances its chances of success in any political system.

The nature of pressure groups state relationship is different from the one which prevails in Western democracies. To Rajni Kothari "there is no place for interest groups except when they are mediated through agencies that have a claim to the government attention, namely parties."¹⁴ To Weiner, another factor, though an intangible one, the reluctance of government officials to be responsive to any demand coming through unsympathetic and hostile channel. A militant attitude a tactless entrance into the government office, or the failure of a petitioner to present his case through a respectable intermediary may cause the government official whether elected or appointed or nominated to be unsympathetic an unresponsive. The style of presentation is thus an important factor.¹⁵

In India, apart from above mentioned determinants there are some other factors, such as violence, party linkage and the style of presentation of demands. In India Kochanek argues that "inter relationship between the interest group and political process is more complex than the western societies."¹⁶ Hardgrove observes that, "officials in India regard pressure group activity with distrust. Rational policy maker, argues that the policy should be unaffected by the narrow demands of pressure groups."¹⁷ Myron Weiner argues that violence and mass movements have proved more effective in India than the normal bargaining method. Only when public order is endangered by a mass movement the government willing to make concession not because they consider the demands legitimate, but because they, then recognise the strength of the group making the demand and its capacity for destructiveness.¹⁸ Although pressure groups have to salute every government yet pressure groups aligned with ruling party has more affective ness than the others. As J.C. Johari believes that, "it depends upon the capacity of a group to take as many rewards as possible by revolving around the ruling party."¹⁹

A pressure group in Indian politics is more likely to succeed in influencing policies in terms of its demands, when it communicates its demands in clear and unambiguous manner. The effectiveness of a pressure group is further conditioned by its ability to successfully identify its sectional interest with general public interest.

Pressure Techniques

Different pressure groups employ diverse methods and technique to impress upon the decision makers to concede their demands. Harry Eckstein has analyzed the various method, techniques and factors which influence the channel of pressure groups activity. To him some important factors are the nature of governmental structure, the activity of the government and the ethos of political system insofar as it is favorable or inimical to pressure group activity as such. Graham Wooten has given the following list of immediate determinants of pressure groups such as:

1. The nature of actor(or group) and its claims (goals)

2. The nature and distribution of the authoritative public groups that provide the target and the nature of the electoral system by which they are provided and legitimized.
3. The nature of the political parties as organizations and as configurations (i.e. one party, bi-party, multi-party)
4. The nature and distribution of the other private (secondary) groups within the total matrix and
5. The political culture
6. Samuel Theodore Melbrith develops a resource exchange model of political strategies of different pressure groups. He suggests the following would be almost invariably included in the list such as :
 - a) Money and credit (b) some properties of bureaucratic organizations (c) control over groups (d) control of supply expert knowledge (e) control of supply of votes (f) prestige.

In the Indian context we have already discussed the factors by which Indian pressure groups could achieve their interest such as:

We could sum up at that the effectiveness of a pressure group in India depends upon the following factors.

- I. Whether a group is aligned to a political party or not.
- II. Whether a group is aligned to ruling party or an opposition party.
- III. Whether a group can lavishly contribute to party decision or not.
- IV. The size of membership and the list of elite members also increase the bargaining power of a group.
- V. Whether a group can 'purchase' eminent leaders, writers and politicians or not.
- VI. Whether a group can recruit a very competent staff on whose services governmental agencies have to rely on, before taking any final decision.
- VII. Whether a group can maintain liaison officer at decision making level and places for manipulative activities.
- VIII. Whether a group can indirectly oblige bureaucracy, ministers and legislators or not
- IX. Whether a group can organize a mass movement to have the attentions of government and society.
- X. Whether a group can attract a large number of people by raising populist demands and slogans.
- XI. Whether a ruling political party have absolute or thin majority.

Among these determinants of effectiveness BKU have the determinants like its vast membership, its vast voting power, its massive organizational structure, strong agitational spirit, innovative in new agitational techniques, waging mass movements which could produce peasant's revolt, revolving around the ruling party, supporting a dominant political party in election fray, protection through courts, expert knowledge etc.

In Punjab, Congress (I), Akali Dal (Badal), SAD (M), BJP, Lok Bhalai Party, CPI, CPI (M) etc are the major political parties which are operating in Punjab politics. In its initial phase the BKU had close relations with SAD and its members were supporting then SAD in election fray. Akali Dal being a political party having good support base among Sikh peasantry, is sympathetic to the union. In its initial years BKU considered Congress (I) its number one enemy of peasants. Because of this reason the BKU could achieve its goals well during Akali regimes.

Since its inception in 1972 the Bhartiya Kisan Union hereafter BKU had been shifting its political loyalty and party preferences. Even the two faction Bhartiya Kisan Union Lakhawal hereafter BKU (L) Bhartiya Kisan Union Rajewal hereafter BKU (R) converted its unions into political parties in 1996 and unsuccessfully contested the parliamentary elections and discarded its initial stance of being independent non-political/affiliated peasant organization. During the militancy period in Punjab BKU (L) took active part in Sikh fundamentalist politics than to concentrate on peasants economic interests.

The decision to convert union into a political party brought forth a split into the union. Newly created union Bhartiya Kisan Union Sidhupur hereafter BKU (S) had close relation with late S. Gurcharn Singh Tohra and it has close relations with peasant's organization dominated by left parties. The reasons of split have little ideological or principles differences but due to the prevailing iron law of oligarchy. The leaders who could not get the desired offices caused the split.

Due to the prevailing iron law of oligarchy in BKU (S) which resulted into a further split in 2002 and new union known as Bhartiya Kisan Union hereafter BKU (U) came into being. The BKU (U) representing the small peasantry operating lesser like a pressure group than to organize mass movements. This faction attracted a number of women activists too who took very active part in the agitations. BKU (S) met with another split in 2004 which resulted into the formation of a new faction known as BKU Krantikari headed by S. Surjit Singh Phool.

BKU (S), BKU (U) and BKU (K) have been agitating with the collaboration of other peasant organizations affiliated to CPI, CPI (M), and CPI (ML). On number of occasions they formed a common bigger platform to demonstrate a good show against the Government.

Earlier we have discussed the determinants of effectiveness of a pressure group in Indian politics and we should analyze these determinants in the different factions of union. Among these determinants of effectiveness BKU have the determinants like its vast membership, its vast voting power, its massive organizational structure, strong agitational spirit, innovative in new agitational techniques, waging mass movements which could produce peasant's revolt, revolving around the ruling party, supporting a dominant political party in election fray, protection through courts, expert knowledge, having mature leadership, capacity to form bigger common platform, capacity to form unity with other peasant organization etc.

The union leaders and members have faith in peaceful agitational means like submitting memorandums or meeting officials in deputations. They adopted repressive agitational means like Bandh and Gherao in compulsion when other peaceful means proved ineffective. The members preferred Civil Disobedience, Rail Roko, Chaka Jam and imposition of curfew in villages only as last resort.

We can conclude that the unions adopt the extreme agitational means in compulsion only. To examine these extreme means, whether legitimate or not one must examine their demands whether the demands are just or not. As we have examined the pitiable condition of the peasants of Punjab. S. Nirmal Singh Azad concluded that, "capitalist mode of Production in Punjab agriculture is transferring the small peasants into a marginal community."

The justice and legitimacy of the repressive agitational means, drawn by the fact that it is resorted in such situation where the establishment against whom these actions undertaken has violated the norms of justice. The lack of justice in the actions of establishment, therefore justify this action. There is no denying the fact that peasant had not been getting justice since long. Take the example of 'union government's support price of wheat of 1986, which was rupee five (3%) more than the previous year's support price, whereas the government admitted inflation of 4.3% in Indian economy, from the previous year. At the same time the cost of fertilizer was increased by 13% from the computed year. In 1984, Johal committee, appointed by' Punjab Governor, computer the cost of wheat, production at Rs.192 per quintal. Whereas the support price of wheat in 1984 was Rs.152. One can easily judge the arbitrarily functioning of the commission for Agriculture Costs and Prices. So by these facts we can justify the agitational means of the union, however, repressive they are.

Since the Indian government accepted the Dunkel proposal and signed WTO which caused far reaching effects on peasantry. Since then the subsidies already meant for agricultural had been with drawing causing miseries to the peasants. Indian government has no agrarian policy which could take care of the miseries and problems being faced by the peasants. Even no crop insurance has been implemented and agriculture is considered to be depending on fate during the natural calamities. So by these facts we can justify the agitational means of union, however, repressive they are.

On the recommendations of Sen Committee government is going to scrap Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices. The remunerative prices of wheat, paddy, and sugarcane are virtually jammed with a meager increase. Whereas government have very little control on the rates of agriculture inputs like seeds, fertilizers, insecticides, weedicides, petroleum products, electricity charges, agricultural implements and other necessities of social life. No control on the interest rates of Ahrtiyas.

Due to these policies of the government peasants are reeling under heavy debts and not in a position to repay the loans of Ahrtiyas, money lenders, land developments banks, co-operative societies, commercial banks. This gloomy situation compelled the peasants of number states like Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Orissa, Punjab etc. to commit mass suicide. So by these facts we can justify the agitational means of the union, however, repressive they are.

A few years ago in many different parts of rural India including Punjab was witnessed an unprecedented phenomenon which may be well described as murder by suicide of thousands of farmers, some of them known for their relatively better economic performance in conventional terms. It shaken the conscience of the nation, but without any perceptible impact on and response from the government, either at the union level or at the level of Punjab, dead-set upon persisting with the new found of liberalization, globalization and privatization.

Due to these economic policies peasants are reeling under heavy debts. Perhaps M.L. Darling described the fate of Indian farmers a decade ago." That they are born in debt, live in debt and leave the burden of debt for their progeny". Tell now agriculture has been a gamble in monsoon and other natural calamities. The condition of peasant is unbearable and un-repayable burden of debt, denial of loan by co-operative societies, loot of Ahrtiyas, successive failure of crops, inability to come out of financial crunch are reported to be the cause which drove these God-fearing honest farmers to utter despair and frustration with

life itself. Perhaps Hobsbawm in his History of the twentieth Century rightly maintained that the peasantry is one of the two groups of the people (the other being housewives) that can no longer be found in the rich, industrialized countries of the west. But surely suicides and defeatism of those who used to be peasants are not in any sense a factor responsible for this redefinition of the occupational profile minus peasantry.

A reputed psychologist Ashish Nandi argues that there are millions of poor in this world; they all have not committed suicide. In normal times, the rate of suicide is not higher amongst the poor.....So suicides and other forces of self-destructiveness have other sources of origin..... What you see amongst the farmers of India is a sense of desperation and despair, and that is to do with the fact that while they were previously poor they had control over their lives... profession... work. They might have been poor but they were poor with a minimum amount of dignity, a minimum sense of control, some pride in their work, in their own profession and their lifestyle. Now changing times have taken away this pride, taken away their control. They are being reduced to machines that produce agricultural commodities for the sake of the markets which they cannot understand and utilize, and are taking decisions which are not really their own, where there are no options. It is a controlled world where you do not know who controls you, and when that world collapses, you do not know how to handle it, how to cope with it. That sends a sense of despair and that leads to suicide.... Under such adverse circumstances, some farmers feel totally alienated and estranged and their acute anomie takes the extreme form of suicides. The phenomenon of farmers' suicides in India in these days of dominance of global markets and their cronies is a phenomenon of anomic suicides and not that of either egotistic or altruistic suicides that Durkheim spoke of. Its roots cannot be tackled by superficial financial and administrative packages. The financial condition of the members is very poor and 85% peasants are reeling under debts.

When the members were inquired whether they are the defaulter? The 18.20% member replied in yes and narrated how and when article 67A and 63C was invoked against them. Faction wise BKU (L) has 14.66% defaulters and BKU (R) 15.47% has defaulter members BKU (S) its 9.33% members are defaulter and highest 33.33% of defaulters in BKU (U).

When the respondents were asked why the peasants commit suicides, they replied that due to faulty agrarian policies peasants are reeling under debt and their deteriorated financial condition is the sole cause of suicides of peasants. Almost 80% peasants recorded their instances of suicides of peasants in their respective villages, blocks and districts.

The farmers of the Punjab had debt of Rs.5701 crores in the year 1998-99. At present debt had been reached to 12500 crores. All the classes of peasant's viz, small lower middle, upper middle and rich peasants had debt like highest percentage 29.72 having the upper middle class followed by lower middle class 28, 97%, small peasants 21.57 and 19.47% by the rich peasants. The strange feature of this huge debts that 46.32% share of these debts was of commission agents (Ahrtiyas). The commission agents had been charging a very high rate of interest varying from 18% to 60% per annum. This high rate of interest became compound in nature. Because these loans are becomes term loans and if peasant could not pay his due in a season, the due also becomes the part of principal amount for the next season. Due to the loan from the commission agents with lesser formalities and with short period is available and peasants prefer to have loans from them. Number of times the peasants were asked to sign, on blank pernotes to which commission agents could misused and mortgaged their land. Even the peasants have to pay 'dammi' (Commission in a form of fine). If a peasant sells his crops with a commission agents is lesser quantity than the

previous season, he has to pay the commission for the deficit part of the crop. The other strange feature of these debts is long term non-productive loans.

In Punjab, average agriculture units below ten acres of lands are 90% and below five acres of lands are 75% and peasants upto 10 acre had the debts almost 50%. The capacity of peasants to repay the loans is lesser and they were compelled by the circumstances to commit suicides. As estimate 478 peasants committed suicides in Punjab and large number of these peasants were small peasants and lower middle class peasants. Number of surveys was conducted by governmental officials and private members such as Hardev Singh Arshi and Inderjit Singh Jaijee, Gopal Krishan Iyer and Mehar Singh Manik, Sucha Singh Gill, Government Official Mr. Bhalla and press reporters of leading newspaper like The Tribune, Indian Express, The Hindustan Times, Business standard, and The Hindu etc. These studies focused the issue and provided awareness to the public. The issue became subject of debate in political circles of the state and cause of mobilization of peasants by peasant's organization.

The study by Bhalla ET Al examined the 53 confirmed cases of suicides spread over 14 villages (11 in Sangrur district and one each in Amritsar, Nawanshahar and Ludhiana district). The report brought out that 45.20 per cent victims were landless labourers, 24.50 per cent small and marginal farmers (0-5 acre land holding), 18.80 per cent lower middle farmers (5-10 acre land holding), 5.60 per cent upper middle farmers and 5.60 per cent rich farmers (15 and above acres of land holdings). This study showed that agricultural labourers and poor peasants/farmers accounted for 69.70 per cent of the suicides from the confirmed cases in the villages. It further brought out that the majority of the Victims i.e. (60.30 per cent belonged to young persons in the age group of 15-29 year and another 30.20 per cent belonged to the age group of 30-44 years. The aged victims, 45 years and above constituted the remaining 9.50 per cent of the cases. In terms of educational attainment 58.50 per cent of the cases belonged to illiterates, 11.30 per cent primary level, 11.30 per cent middle level of schooling and matric and above constituted 18.90 per cent of the total cases. The study reported that the largest cause of suicides was family discord accounting for 35.79 per cent of the suicides, alcohol and illicit drug use caused 17.89 per cent of the suicides. The economic causes such as indebtedness (17.89 per cent), loss of status (16.84%), lack of resources (6.32%) and crop failure (1.05%) accounted for 42.10 per cent of the suicides. The rest of the suicide was caused by death in the family (3.16%) quarrel with in laws (1.05%) and impotency (1.05%). Compared to this, the study by Iyer and Manick (200) based on suicide cases of 80 victims from 7 villages of three blocks of (Lehragaga, Andana and Barnala) of Sangrur district has confirmed the findings of Bhalla etc. study in the matter of age group, educational level and socio-economic background but different widely in the matter of causes of suicides. It has been brought out that economic factors/distress have been primarily responsible for (78.75%) suicides among the confirmed 80 cases. It is reported that pauperization and marginalization led to 32.50% per cent of the suicides. This was followed by crop failure and social factor (26.25%) poverty and unemployment (20.00%). Alcoholism and drug addiction caused another 10% of the suicides and marital tension was responsible for remaining 11.25% of the suicides.

Another study (Gill, et. al., 2000) based on 79 cases of confirmed suicides in 29 villages in the districts of Patiala, Sangrur, Mansa and Bathinda brought our findings in terms of age group, educational background, socio economic background including class and caste families of agricultural labour and poor cultivators, lacked education or had low level of schooling, were young in age and poor in terms of resource endowment. This study brought out not only primacy of economic distress among the weaker sections (poor

peasants and agricultural labourers) but also explained the multiplicity of economic causes (more than one cause combining with other) leading to suicide. At the same it linked economic and non-economic factors to each other working to the disadvantage of the victim. According to this study 83.6% of the suicides were caused by purely economic factors namely economic hardship (19.0%) crop failure (5.1%) indebtedness 15.2%, economic hardship, indebtedness and crop failure (16.5%) and indebtedness and crop failure (10.0%). Addiction of drugs caused only one suicide (1.3%) and individual reasons/family tension led to 5 suicides (6.3%). The remaining suicides were caused by economic hardship, indebtedness and drug/alcohol addiction (3.8%), economic hardship and drug/alcohol addiction (3.8%), indebtedness and drug/alcohol addiction (1.3%). Out of the 12 causes of suicide listed by the relative of the victims 7 causes related to economic factors individually or in combination. There were only 2 causes which were purely non-economic. In the remaining three causes, economic and noneconomic (mainly addiction) factors worked together to cause suicides accounting for 89% of the suicides cases. In most of the cases economic hardship and indebtedness independently or in combination with other factors led to suicide of the victims. Thus, this study establishes as linkage between economic hardship, indebtedness and suicide. It is further brought out those economic hardship/poor economic condition led to indebtedness and indebtedness (high interest rate) led to economic distress causing suicide. The study examined the immediate incidents that prompted the victim to take the extreme step. In 59.5% of the cases it was the quarrel within the family members caused, by indebtedness and economic hardship. The pressure of commission agents or banks for return of loan and fear of being arrested and consequently loss of social status led to 21.6% of the suicides. The treat of land, auction/notice caused 1.3% of the suicides in the study area. The largest source, of credit has been by non-institutional sources such as commission agents and landlords separately or in combination with commercial banks and cooperative. The high interest rate charged on loans and diversion of loans for non productive purposes or crop failure had trapped them into debt trap creating pressure for suicides through a variety factors mentioned earlier.

These studies bring out that the suicide cases among poor peasants and agricultural labourers are spread in all three regions of Punjab i.e. Majha, Malwa and Doaba. But there is high concentration of such cases in the districts of Malwa. These districts are Sangrur, Mansa and Bathinda. These cases are predominantly caused by economic distress and indebtedness. "The highly commercialized agriculture accompanied by spirit of individualism and decline of traditional social support mechanism and non-existence of formal safety system have pushed several rural poor into suicides when faced with acute economic hardship and indebtedness along with social and family pressures associated with them.

When, the members were asked to give their preference pressure techniques in sequence. The preferred agitational techniques were memorandum, demonstrations, dharnas bandhs, civil disobedience, rail roko or chaka jam, imposition of curfew. 62 percent peasants preferred memorandum at number one, demonstration on number two, dharna on number three, bandh on number four, civil disobedience on number five and rail roko at number six. Memorandum was preferred at number one by 27 percent peasants, dharna at two, demonstration at number three, rail roko at four and civil disobedience at number five. 11 percent peasants preferred memorandum at number one, bandh on two, civil disobedience at number three, rail roko and imposition of curfew at number five.

Faction wise BKU (L) its 20% members participated in agitations launched by political parties. BKU (R) its 23.80% members took part in such agitations. BKU (S) its 26.66% members participated in the agitations launched by political party. BKU (U) it's only, 8.88% members took part in such agitations.

When inquired about the impacts of WTO regime on agriculture and peasantry, 75.92% members feels that by signing WTO India sacrificed the interests of the peasants. Faction wise BKU (L) its 74.66% members replied positively BKU (R) only 29.76% members agree with the contention. This faction supported the Dunkel proposals and WTO regime. BKU (S) and BKU (U) its 100% members replied positively.

When the members were asked did the union raise populist demands to get cheap popularity. Only 2.77% members replied in yes and 97.22% members feel that union raise only realistic demands of the peasants.

When it was inquire about the fear of 'Some critic that the agitational means of the union and its obtained results do not benefit the small peasants only 10.18% members replied positively. When further inquired that did the rich peasants dominate the union, only 1.85% members agreed with the assumption.

When the fear of some critic realized to the members that union's agitational means and pressure technique are undemocratic and unconstitutional, and agitational means are against the interest of small, peasants. Only 1.23% members replied in yes and 98.76% members rejected the contention.

When the members were inquired about their preferences about pressure techniques the members rejected the techniques likes' bribery, use of violence, lobbying and strikes. They were required to give their preference in ascending order. At number one they preferred to memorandum and at number two 60% members prefer demonstration and 40% members prefer dharna. At number three, if the demand is not accepted by the earlier two pressure techniques 78% members prefer bandhs and at number four 88% members prefer Rail Roko and Chakajam. A large number of 58% members prefer Civil-disobedience and they prefer Rail Roko at number five. Thirty percent members prefer the imposition of curfew in village by the union as last resort to impress upon for the acceptance of demands.

Faction wise the BKU (L) and BKU (R) have faith in slight moderate pressure techniques where as BKU (S) and BKU (U) prefer harsh pressure techniques. But the most favorite pressure technique to have the attraction of government and press is rail Roko and Chakkajarn.

Foot Notes:

1. J. C. Johari, Comparative Politics, Sterling Publisher Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2nd Edition, 1976, P 392
2. Edgar Lane, op. cit., PP 8-9
3. Encyclopedia of Britannica, London, Vol. 14, P 175
4. David B. Truman, op. cit., PP 340-342
5. Ibid, P 327
6. J.D. Stewart, 'British Pressure Groups- The Role in Relation to the House of Common's, Oxford University Press, 1958, P 223
7. Ibid, P 327
8. David B. Truman, op. cit., P 263

9. J.C. Johari, 'Gherao: An - Un- Gandhian Technique of Agitational Politics', Vol. 11, No.2, 1975, P 84
10. B.L. Fadia, Pressure Group in Indian Politics, New Delhi, Radiant, 1980,P 18
11. Ibid, PP 17-18
12. Graham Wooten, Interest Group, New Jersey, Engaward Elittis, 1970, P 83
13. Harry Eckstein, op.cit. P 34
14. Rajni Kothari, Politics in India, Orient Longmans Ltd., New Delhi, 1970, P 218
15. Myron Weiner, op. cit., P. 215
16. Stanley, A. Kochanek, Business and Politics in India, Barkley, University of California Press, 1974, P 12
17. Robert L. Hardgrove, Indian: Government and politics in Developing Nation, Delhi Freeman Book Co. 1979, P113
18. Myron Weiner, The politics of Scarcity: Public Pressure and Political Response, Bombay, Asia Publications, 10963, P 215
19. J.C. Johari, Indian Politics, Delhi, Vishal Publication, 1984, P 514