

Chapter 17

VISION OF PUNJAB 2020 – PRESENT, FUTURE AND THE PAST

Dr K Venkatasubramanian, Member, Planning Commission and Chairman of the project, State Development Report (SDR), from the very beginning has been persistently putting forward the idea of the projection of 'Vision 2020' as part of the report on Punjab. He has also personally expressed the view that the Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID) as an Institution, and I in my individual capacity, must ensure that the report has a distinct character very different from many others he might have come across. Actually, the chapters in the SDR for Punjab and also my own contribution do present a kind of long-term perspective reflecting the perceptive views of the scholars at CRRID, who have been responsible for this report. A 'Vision', however, is a different matter. It is the domain of a highly sensitive, discerning, far-sighted and intellectually superior mind. It is no modesty on my part to say that I do not match up to this challenge of discerning the future of Punjab, particularly in the context of the senseless violence, that this state has gone through in the not too distant past and the environment of uncertainties prevailing in the world today, caught in the process of unprecedented change.

The SDR has systematically dealt with each issue and area that requires priority in accelerating the process of development and social transformation of Punjab, in these challenging times. Such a perception is being considered within the framework of the opportunities released as a result of the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution. This has opened up the possibility of setting the masses of this country in motion, as they participate in the development process through their elected representatives from the grassroots upwards. This brings into play the folk wisdom, which is the heritage of our ancient civilization and the source of our enduring strength.

This is particularly true of Punjab, which has always been a border territory. Through this land have come into our country people from other lands, other civilizations. They have brought with them different customs and traditions. The sturdy Punjabi peasant, as he defended his land, absorbed the best that was in the new culture into his own. This gave him a vitality that has helped him emerge as a major contributor to the process of nation-building, based on plurality and humanism. This found its finest expression in the fusion of 'Sufism' and the traditional culture of the country, creating over a period of few centuries, new spiritual concepts of the Bhakti movement on the one hand and Sikhism on the other. It is this universality of perceptions that has given a distinctive character to the people of Punjab, irrespective of their religious persuasions. It is this rich tradition that has made this part of India a laboratory of the process of economic, social and cultural transformation, through the participation of the people in building their own destiny.

The people of Punjab have proved their courage and resilience by restructuring democracy and strengthening democratic institutions from out of the chaos and anarchy of a decade of political violence and instability. This has once again proved the enduring strength of the spiritual and cultural heritage of Punjab, which is not only the pride of its people, but also of the people of India. It is the collective experience of these people, the knowledge they have acquired over centuries and their imagination and innovativeness, which can conjure up the 'Vision of Punjab 2020'. What follows is a summary of the

'Vision of Punjab – 2020', as conceived by my colleagues. It constitutes the essence of their perception, born in the process of their preparation of this report.

Development of strong inter-relationships and interdependence of Punjab with the neighbouring states of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir will ensure sustainability and conservation of natural resources of all the states, viz., land, water and bio-diversity. Scientific afforestation, forest management and efficient use of water resources of the neighbouring hill states will benefit not only these states but also Punjab and other states in terms of additional hydro-power, reduced floods, drought and soil erosion, recharge of depleting underground water table and stabilization of the climate. Strong inter-state linkages will ensure effective conservation of natural resources and mutual and long-term benefit for the people of the region. As a consequence, the nation has a whole would proper.

Looking towards 2020 one sees the landscape of Punjab dotted with high yielding, remunerative, market-oriented crops, supported by technologies that ensure efficient use of inputs, land and water resources for optimum production per unit area. Modern cultivation procedures will be in position with the use of aqua-culture, poly-houses, drip and sprinkler irrigation, bio-fertilizers and bio-pesticides, vermiculture, bio-technology, etc., which are cost effective and help increase quality production.

The corporate sector will be involved in farm services, marketing, establishing of processing and value addition units and developing direct forward-backward linkages between the cultivators and the factory. Strong pro-active agri-research and extension programmes will be attuned to present and future requirements, coupled with government policies in favour of farmers, farming and agro-industry.

Based on experiences and concerns perceived from primary as well as secondary information, the vision for rural development must be viewed as an integral part of the development process. It will be reflected in a positive change in rural areas, both in a quantitative and a qualitative sense. There will be diversified agriculture with value addition, cent per cent literacy, universal access to health services, higher skills for employment for all, the widest dissemination of knowledge through Information Technology, closer rural-urban standards in social, economic, human and physical infrastructure, a rural society sensitive to gender equality, cent per cent coverage and access to safe drinking water, easy access to micro-finances for underprivileged sections of the society, transfer of funds, functions and functionaries to PRIs, empowerment of Panchayati Raj Institutions for good governance, and the environment will be protected.

In the sphere of the development of industries, Punjab will focus on value-added agro-food processing, light engineering, hosiery and knowledge-based industries, such as bio-technology, pharmaceutical and electronics, attain a position of leadership and excellence in producing quality products and emerge as a major exporter by 2020, The SSI sector will be helped to bridge the technological and management gaps with the advanced world. It will acquire the culture of continuing innovation, upgradation and modernization and achieve a competitive edge in the global market and thus accelerate growth and promote employment and exports. An industrial Infrastructure of international standards will be created by setting up industrial clusters, parks and zones with the state-of-the-art technology. Government will only be an effective facilitator and enabler in all these activities.

Punjab's future is urban. By 2020, Punjab will have about 45 per cent urban population or even more. Well managed 'urbanization' will facilitate and sustain economic growth, improve service delivery and develop environmental infrastructure to improve quality of life. The 'urban development strategy' will promote good governance, provide 100% coverage of basic civic services and adequate housing to the shelterless urban poor, reduce urban poverty and ensure efficient management of municipal assets and development of municipal lands for income generation.

In addition, there will be protection of urban environment, involving the private sector for low cost and efficient delivery of services, offloading functional and fiscal responsibilities; and people's participation in urban affairs and a change of current policies and practices, including legal and administrative reforms. The vision is of a sustainable development of urban areas of Punjab by 2020 or even earlier. In the short term, there will be full coverage of the population with infrastructure and services, and in the long term, a qualitative improvement of urban basic civic services, environment and governance.

Poverty will be substantially reduced to make cities productive. ULBs will create poverty alleviation funds to provide employment, security and opportunity - goals envisaged in the *World Development Report 2000-01* - to create 'cities without slums' and protect urban environment in the long run. The people will be active participants in municipal affairs and thus ensure the sustainability of cities. They will be involved in the preparation of the development plans to meet the challenges and the growing needs of urban population.

People are at center of any vision. In this context, the demographic status is not an independent entity and inseparable from the past. In one spectrum, it flows from the current demographic reality in the state, while at the other it is inseparably linked to the overall standards of living and facets of welfare. Agricultural growth, industrial development, urbanization pattern, educational attainment, health status, infrastructure position, rural development and provision of basic amenities in the country in general, and in the state and its surroundings in particular, are key factors that shape the vision of the demographics-dynamics of Punjab. While approaches may vary, the vision of demography for any region depends on securing integration of opportunities, achieving convergence of interests, respecting critical social and cultural diversities, removing economic barriers of poverty and disparity, appropriating technology and building capacity in the society.

From the perspective of population, the vision for Punjab-2020 is woven around a demographic regime that encompasses achievement of replacement level of fertility, control of under-five mortality particularly excess infant deaths, making population less masculine in its composition, reduction of maternal mortality, meeting the unmet need of contraception, promotion of participation of men in family planning, encouragement of responsible parenthood, raising the levels of institutional births, creation of avenues for healthy and productive ageing, dovetailing the Scheduled Caste population profile into wider demographic contours, mainstreaming the in-migrants and stemming the zest for international outflow, removal of gender disparity, etc. However, achieving these demographic goals will not be easy, given the way the Punjabi society is undergoing rapid sectoral transformations. New circumstances are likely to pose fresh challenges. Population reduction and decline in average family size may exacerbate some of the distortions already visible in the society, and may worsen the deep-rooted son-

preference of Punjabi society. Narrowing down gender differences is an extremely complicated mission, as gender disparity is going to be very persistent in future, in spite of rise in education, urbanization and prosperity levels. Hence, the vision looks forward to a strong political will to bring about and devise new methods to usher in community participation at all levels.

Punjab is likely to face newer morbidity patterns emerging because of rising population, in-migration, urbanization and industrialization. The vision of Punjab, for us, goes a step further than the Government of India's goal of 'Health for All'. A distinct vision of health aspires for a generally healthy population, free from the impact of communicable and non-communicable diseases, with client-friendly services at health and family welfare centres. Besides the continuation of the usual preventive health care measures, the state will ensure provisions for the availability of quality health care services (including secondary and tertiary health care services) to everyone, including the underprivileged. The health care system of the future will be more scientific and technologically advanced, with a computerized health management information system in position.

Education in Punjab will encourage the child to grow into an independent, self-confident, enterprising human being, ready to cope with the socio-economic and cultural transformations being brought about by advancements in science, technology and the process of globalisation. Education will be child-centred, focusing on the total development of the child's personality, i.e., expanding the mental agility, physical dexterity and ethical integrity. Education will be joyful, relevant, creative, inventive, enterprising and satisfying learning activity, which inculcates a coherent and a viable value-system based on a scientific, democratic and moral approach to life. This will ultimately lead to a society, which is harmonious, value-oriented, secular, non-dogmatic and economically productive.

Higher education will see opportunities for left-out youths (17-23). Information Technology will be part of graduate and post-graduate level courses. Higher education will be practical, relevant to self-employment, jobs- and market-oriented. Degrees will be linked with industry and market needs. The rural higher educational institutional base will be able to respond to rural development.

The problems of unemployment and underemployment in the state are cause of concern. They might have serious implications for the future if not properly taken care of. In the circumstances the vision-2020 in the area is a Punjab with employment opportunities to accommodate the surplus labourforce adequately. The serious challenge of liberalization, with higher use of capital-intensive technology, will have been met with the growth of employment commensurate with the growth of the economy itself creating higher employment opportunities in the long run. There will be sufficient employment opportunities to achieve near full employment with about eight per cent growth rate of the economy per annum consistently. Levels of investment and savings rates in the economy will be high. Financial, human and material resources will be efficiently used, and in the process augment themselves. There will be accountability and exemplary punishment for any lapses in this respect. Grassroots organizations will be increasingly involved and the people will participate at the local level in decision-making for rational use of resources.

Every worker, whether in the organized, or the unorganized sector, will be provided with the bare minimum basic needs of Roti, Kapra and Makan, health and education.

Necessary conditions will have been created to end child labour. Labour in the unorganized sectors, especially in agriculture, will be covered by social security. Strikes and lockouts will be reduced to the minimum, despite every worker being a member of the trade union, one in each factory. Its aim will be to raise the level of productivity, production, while looking after the welfare of the workers. Collective bargaining and conciliation will be the main methods for the resolution of conflicts between the employer and employees. An environment of mutual understanding and harmony between the employer and employees will prevail. Punjab in 2020 will be a model state for industrial relations.

Vision 2020 for Punjab demands the achievement of a Knowledge Based Society through extensive use of Information technology. It will be fully developed and bring structural changes in the fabric of the society. A super-highway infrastructure up to the village level will be in place by 2020, for an integrated and holistic development for the masses at large. Quality human resource will be available for a knowledge-based society and knowledge-based industry. Information Technology industry in Punjab will have a significant share of the total IT industry of India, through world class IT city-centres and STPs. Collaborative efforts of the industry, government and the academia will ensure rapid growth and their continuous innovation and change is important to remain competitive in the global environment. Government efforts will go far beyond the mere computerization of the government sector and introduce linkages for improving delivery channels, information flows and processes, accessibility and quality of interaction with citizens, business and the third tier of democracy.

The ultimate vision of Punjab in 2020 is of an integrated, peaceful society, well set on the path of once again leading the nation towards new levels of quality of life of its people. A state which interacts creatively and productively with its neighbours and works with the rest of the people of the country as a whole, to build a new India which can face the world with economic strength, political stability, self confidence and pride. Punjab of the dreams of its people is an integral part of their dreams for India.

Striking a personal note, my vision of the future of my land is rooted in my experiences, as history was made on this soil. It began when I was only 11 and had to leave a well-provided for comfortable life. Then followed uncertain days, months, even years of distress caused by the partition of India.

The images of bombing, burning of houses, rape, looting, and mass murders, in the wake of a fratricidal war of brother killing brother, have been seared into my mind. These horrifying images were brought to agonizing life in my mind by the heart-rending repetition of the same barbarism in the name of religion in Gujarat, after more than five decades of building a polity, in which people of all religions are equal.

My vision is born of the experience of the sectarian militancy of religion-based nationalism that rocked Punjab in the mid-eighties, with senseless violence. Like the situation in Jammu and Kashmir today, which is equally painful for me, the experience of Punjab too was a continuing backlash of problems created and left unresolved by our foreign rulers. Similar, in a sense, is the trifurcation of Punjab in 1966 into three separate states and union territory, which has left unresolved the issues which led to this reorganization.

My 'Vision of Punjab 2020' transcends national boundaries. We live in an integrated world. Today, humanity is our concern, whether buildings interconnections across national boundaries or new political, economic, cultural and social structures at the grass-roots at home. There can be no vision, which is not inspired by societal concerns.

My 'Vision of Punjab 2020' is a socio-political and economic transition for social transformation, based on a common national will, and hence without violence. Economic development measured in statistical numbers cannot constitute a vision. It has to translate into the restoration to the people their cultural roots, from which they have been uprooted by the complex process of development, usually imposed from the top. Our strength has been and continues to be the unifying character of our village culture. The technological revolution, while opening up opportunities of a wider interaction with diverse cultures of the world, cannot transcend the roots of our very being. The reality of the global village has to be seen from this small point on the world map.

This demands a shift of focus from mere gathering of information to acquisition of knowledge and its dissemination on a massive scale, never possible before. This is the process to bridge the gulf between the nation and the state that has developed over the years. This is of vital importance for Punjab today, in search of its own destiny in a new world of mind-boggling change. In such a situation the present must draw its strength from the past to build the future. Then alone can be ensured a balanced overall development of Punjab, contributing to the emergence of a society at peace with itself and carrying forward the rich tradition of a plural, integrated, secular, democratic society, which, to my way of thinking, constitute the 'Vision of Punjab 2020'.

Laughing children glowing with health, happy mothers, fields rippling with golden corn, wires surging with energy strung across towers of steel stabbing into the blue sky, the music of wheels of industry, the rhythm of human labour creating plenty, a festival of the triumph of human endeavour. Such is my 'Vision 2020' of Punjab.

Chandigarh

Rashpal Malhotra