

Party politics in Himachal Pradesh with reference to Vidhan Sabha Election -1952-2012

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The people of Himachal Pradesh were completely ignorant of the democratic system of government because they were under the rule of the Feudal lords, Ranas and Rajas for a number of centuries. They got the right to participate in the elections under the new constitution and exercised this right for the first time in 1952 during the first election. In November, 1951, for the first time elections were held for Vidhan Sabha in Himachal Pradesh. There were 28 constituencies and 36 seats, 8 constituencies consist of 2 members which are Solan, Theog, Rampur, Chachiot, Sandhol, Churrah, Prchahad and Renuka. From 1952 to 1967 Congress Party able to win a clear majority in the Vidhan Sabha/ Territorial Council. In 1957 and 1962 election were held for Territorial Council.

Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha was converted into territorial Council in 1957 and remained into existence till to 1962. In spite of having a congress party dominance position in the State Politics, their minor political parties i.e. Kissan Mazdoor Praja Party; Swantantra Party, Praja Socialist Party and Scheduled Party Federation made their some presence in there election. Kissan Mazdoor Party got 3 seat in 1952 and Swantantra Party got 4 seat in 1962 state assembly elections.

These political parties could not perform their strategic role in the state politics. Besides, Independent candidate won a large number of seats as compare to their political parties except of congress. Independent Candidate made their strong presence as in 1952 won 8 seats, in 1957 won 16 seats, in 1967 won 16 seats and 1972 won 7 seats. It has been shown in the table that in Himachal Pradesh Congress had remained 'one party dominant system', since 1952-1972 and other political parties had performed their role from outside. Their role rule had been of critical importance for the operation of the system. The opposition parties acted as the "Party of Pressure" so as to influence the internal balance of the party in power. For the first time, Jan Sangh won 7 seats out of 68 seats in the state assembly elections 1967. After this election, it was successful in consolidating its position and two party systems made their presence in the state politics of Himachal Pradesh. The Period past election of 1967 can be

identified as a main competition for power between two major political parties i.e. congress and Jan Singh (Leader BJP).

In 1972 Vidhan Sabha election Congress won 53 seat out of 68 seats due to some radical measures initiated by Indira Gandhi at national level-one of them was the issue of the state hood and one of the national issues was the India's role in the liberation of Bangladesh. Jan Sangh won only 5 seats in these elections consequently in the 1972 Vidhan Sabha Poll, the Jan Sangh is vote share decline to 7.7 percent. One can say that the 1972, some assembly segments had clearly become strong holds of Jan Sangh. However the party was yet in no position to displace the congress from its ruling position.

The era of one party dominance remained in Himachal Pradesh till 1977. Although so many political parties took part in the elections and manage to grab some seats, it is equally true that they could hardly share fruit of power. So for it was one party alone; the congress that had an effective network by virtue of which it remained it power. All opposition parties put together were no match to the organization and power of this party. Till 1972, election the position of the Congress Party in Himachal Pradesh was unchallenged.

The very first month of the New Year saw the new Chief Minister of the Pradesh. In January of 1977, Dr.Y.S.Parmar's long Chief Minister Ship ended. The result all over the country changed the ruling party at the centre. The main cause of the failure of the congress at the centre was it emergency policies and over this issue the congress lost the election. The cause for the failure of the congress government in the state was similar to that at the national level. Janata Party came into power with flying colours in the state. Jan Sangh constituted the core of newly formed Janata Party because the main or biggest opposition was obviously the Jan Singh. The important political leadership of congress men of the merged area was held responsible for the neglected state of affairs by the people of merged area. It was under the leadership of Shanta Kumar that the Janata Party set for the development of merged area, generating a feeling of Justice among the people of merged area.

In 1977, Vidhan Sabha elections congress 1st time lost the power in the state. The factor responsible for the congress washing in 1977. Parliamentary and Vidhan Sabha election were the total revolution movement of J.P. Narayan and enforcement emergency by Indra Ghandhi which is resulted a strong wave against the Congress Party at the centre as well as states including Himachal Pradesh.

Janata Party alliance won 53 seats out of 68 assembly seats and congress won just 9 seats. Independent captured 6 seats. Shanta Kumar became the Chief Minister of state for the first time but this government does not survive for full tenure and it was dissolved in 1980. Congress formed the government after the dismissal of Shanta Kumar government. The congress continued to rule the state for about two years through this makeshift arrangement.

In the 1982, Vidhan Sabha election, both the parties make a serious bid for power. The election verdict was unclear. It was a hung assembly. Both the parties were almost evenly, balanced while the congress bagged 31 seats, the BJP got 29 seats. The vote share of the congress was 42.5 percent while that of the BJP was 32.5 percent. The Janata Party was virtually wiped out and could win only two seats. Independent won 6 seats. In this election it is interesting that 20 out of the BJP's 29 seats came from the new areas while only nine came from old areas. On the other hand out of 31 seats won by the congress only 10 were from the new area. The remaining 21 came from the old areas. The 1982 Vidhan Sabha clearly established the fact that the BJP had been able to sell the argument that the new areas were getting a step-motherly treatment from the congress government and only the BJP could protect the legitimate interests of the regions.

1985 Vidhan Sabha elections were held following the assassination of Indira Gandhi, which caused a strong sympathy wave in favor of congress. Consequently, in the parliamentary poll, the congress party's vote in state swelled to 67.6 percent, while that of the BJP fell to 23.3 percent. Interestingly, in the Vidhan Sabha elections which came close on the heels of Lok Sabha poll, the BJP recovered some of the lost ground and its vote share rose to 30.6 percent, while that of the congress fell to 55.4 percent. However, it was enough to ensure massive majority for the congress. The BJP could win only seven seats while congress won 58- in all time high. The party retained 30 of the 31 seats that it had won in 1982 and snatched 22 seats from where BJP had won in 1982. It appeared that by 1985, the congress fully recovered the ground that it had lost in 1977 and 1982 to the Janata Party and the BJP. Yet, as we noted above, the structure of the competition had already changed. Each electoral cycle was now accompanied by a change in state government.

The electorate of the Himachal Pradesh stuck to the two-party system from the very beginning and did not allow a third force to emerge. So for only two parties survived in the state the Congress and Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP). Although, other parties have also contested elections but their appeal was restricted only to a few isolated pockets of the state.

The performance of the Janata Dal was equally impressive. The party increased its vote share to 10.8 percent and captured 11 of 17 seats contested. The congress could not win a majority in the Vidhan Shabha. The party was reduced to 9 seats out of 68 seats with an average 37.64 percent vote.

Having won a massive majority, the BJP significantly affected the future of JD, the emerging third force in the state. The BJP's decision left it neither a part of the government nor a part of the opposition. The JD remained a float for a while but gradually most of its legislators gravitated towards the congress. They fully realized that they could exist only by aligning with one of the two principal parties of the state. The BJP, being a Cadre - based party and sitting party with a massive majority in the House, was not in a mood to oblige them. On the other hand, the congress was ready to admit them and to enhance the party's electoral chances and partially to ensure that the third rival did not stay on the scene. Thus, the BJP as well as congress protected the two party systems in the state by ensuring that the JD did not gain any footholds.

Having gone several political changes in the leadership at the centre, the congress party in Himachal was going well. Nevertheless, Himachal as a small state always do get affected from political changes at the centre. After won a massive majority in the elections, Shanta Kumar was sworn in Chief Minister of the state second time on 5th March 1990. The vital political change at the centre did not troubled BJP government in Himachal Pradesh. However due to dismantling of Babri Masjid at Ram Janam Bhumi, Ayodhya on the pretext of Kar Seva ultimately led to the ouster of the 3 BJP ruled state government including Himachal Pradesh on 15th December, 1992 while the fourth (UP) had resigned on its own. After the BJP governments dismissal President's rule was promulgated. Thus the BJP government of Himachal Pradesh could continue for only two and a half years. This resulted in mid-term elections in the year 1993.

Congress return back in Mid Term Elections:- Of the states went to the polls in November 1993, Himachal Pradesh had most uncomplicated elections. First from the beginning it was a straight contest between the BJP and the Congress. Though the BJP was fighting with its back to the wall, it hoped to win on strength of its "Hindutva" platform which it believed to have been buttressed by the illegal dismissal of its government. Secondly, the election was an unexpected rout for the BJP. Even the most optimistic of the congress for casts could not have imagined a victory of this magnitude. The BJP cadre was simply stunned and was nowhere to be seen for quite some time after the elections, and thirdly, unlike in other state the

shift of votes from the **BJP** to the Congress was more or less, even across the different regions of Himachal Pradesh and across different strata of the Population.

The mid-term elections were forced due to the dissolution of assembly and dismissal of **BJP** government in December 1992 in the wake of the demolition of the Babri Mosque like U.P, Delhi and Madhya Pradesh, the **BJP** failed to regain power.

In 1993 assembly election witnessed a wave against the former **BJP** government, which was reflected in decline of the **BJP** support and the party could manage to get only 8 seats out of 68 seats. The average vote share per seat for the party came down to 36.14percent. The congress returned back to power in 1993 assembly elections with strong majority, because the party had won 52 seats out of the total 68 seats.

One reason for this unprecedented recovery by the congress was the fact that the party was ruling at the centre and this fact tilted the balance in its favor in the state. But more important than this, it was due to wrong and unimaginative policies of the Shanta Kumar government that the **BJP** had to face the Voter's wrath. Two powerful lobbies which the **BJP** government had annoyed during its rule were horticulturists and government employees. The **BJP** withdrew apple support price which the congress government had all along given to the growers. Instead, it came out with a market intervention Scheme. This led to huge losses to the orchardists. The **BJP** government was also lukewarm on the issue of supply of various inputs to the fruit growers and softened the provision of infrastructure support to them. When the orchardists agitated, there was police firing which resulted in some casualties. Therefore the what fruit growers lobby turned against the **BJP**. Secondly, When the state government employee went on strike in support of their demands, the **BJP** government invoked the 'No work No Pay' rule. Some employee leaders were dismissed terminated and a large number were transferred to punishment stations. The **BJP** became so unpopular that Shanta Kumar and several of his Ministers had to face a humiliating defeat in 1993.

After coming to power in 1993, the congress had followed a single point programmed. It succeeded in trying to weaken the **BJP** strong holds in the new area. It initiated several measures to squarely meet the charge of discrimination. Special attention was paid to undertake development Programmes in these areas. Farmers in the new areas were persuaded to take to cultivation of fruit and vegetables. Attempts were also made to project. Dharamshala, which falls in the new area as the winter capital of the state. Several government departments were asked to open their zonal office

there. Two new radio stations, one at Dharamshala and the other at Hamirpur, have been commissioned. In matters of opening and upgrading educational institutions the new areas are being given preference.

The ruling party has also been trying to undo the injustice meted out to the employees by the previous BJP government. Dismissal and termination order to some of them have been revoked. The strike period has been adjusted against leave. In the old areas the grievances of the apple orchardists have been suitably removed. All these measures have pushed the BJP to the wall. There is no issue on which it may mobilize the electorate against the congress government.

The performance of the congress party in the 1998 Vidhan Sabha Poll was equally unimpressive. While the party's tally of seats decline from 52 to 31, its vote share dropped from 49.4 percent to 43.5 percent. Constituency wise analysis shows that out of 52 wins in 1993, 22 of which were in the new areas and 30 in the old, the party could retain only 27 (seven in the new areas and 20 in the old). The party lost 25 (15 in the new areas and 10 in the old). It won another four seats, which it had lost in 1993. Three of these were won in 1993 by independents and one by the BJP. On the other hand, the BJP retained seven out of eight seats that it has won in 1993. The BJP which had been groping for a substantive issue on which it could challenge the ruling party. Suddenly rose to the occasion and made an impressive showing at the hustings. Though, the number of seats won by the two main political parties were 31 each, but the congress vote percentage was higher than the BJP with also most a five percent margin i.e. 43.5% and 39% respectively. The congress game play was spoiled by the HVC, led by Sukh Ram, as the party was able to win five seats with 9.6% vote share.

The former union communication minister, Sukh Ram after his ouster from the congress party in the wake of telecom and after scams floated a local political outfit called the Himachal Vikas Congress. Its presence made the electoral contest in the state virtually triangular in several constituencies. It was able to split the congress support base. Although, it could win only five seats it let to the defeat of congress candidate in at least nine other assembly constituencies falling in three different parliamentary constituencies.

Later on Sukh Ram split the HVC and merged the two members 'breakaway' Himachal Kranti Morcha with the BJP. As a result, the BJP's strength went up to 31. However the death of a member before the oath-taking ceremony brought down its tally to 30. Mean while, the congress managed to win the support of the independent member, who originally was a member of the BJP faction led by former Chief Minister Shanta Kumar.

With the support of 32 members. Virbhadra Singh was sworn in Chief Minister on 9th March 1998.

The situation changed drastically when the independent member withdrew his support to the congress following the intervention of BJP's central leadership. The two remaining legislators of the HVC lent their support to the BJP, which managed to wean away a congress legislator by appointing as speaker and reducing the congress party's strength to 30. The Dhumal government assumed office on 24th March, 1998 and the BJP proved its majority in the house with the HVC's support. Thus the post election developments resulted in the formation of BJP. HVC's post poll alliance and ousted congress from office. In a way the 1998 mandate was a fractured one but still Dhumal managed to complete his five year term amidst troubles and turbulences from within and outside. The credit for Dhumal goes for the simple reason that he was the first non-congress government in the state to complete in full term and stigma on the BJP was removed. Because the Shanta Kumar led government could not complete the full term in office (1977-80 and 1990-92).

The result of the 2003 assembly elections in Himachal Pradesh look very different from those of the 1998 election. While the 1998 assembly was hung assembly, with no political party getting the majority in the 2003 assembly election, the congress party emerged as the clear cut winning 43 of the 68 assembly seats for which elections were held. The BJP won only 16 assembly seats and suffered a loss of 13 seats compared to the 1998 assembly election. The HVC was completely wiped out in this assembly election. While the party won five assembly seats during the 1998 assembly elections and played an important role in government formation in 2003 election, the HVC could retain one assembly seat. The Lok Jan Sakthi Party (LJSP) and Himachal Loktantrik Morcha (LMHP), won one seat each. As many as six independent candidates got elected to the 1998 assembly. Other political parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) Communist Party of India (CPI) and Communist Party of India Marxist (CPIM), could not make their presence felt in this assembly election. If we look at results in terms of the support base of different political parties, there has been a negative swing of nearly 3 percent for all three main political parties, the congress, the BJP and the HVC. The vote for the congress went down to 41.00 percent in these elections compared to 43.9 percent vote the party during the 1998 assembly elections. Similarly, the vote for the BJP went down to 35.4 percent in the 2003 assembly election compared to its 39.9 percent vote during the 1998 assembly elections. The HVC polled only 5.8 percent vote during 2003 assembly elections while it had polled 9.6 percent

vote during the 1998 assembly elections. But the similarity between these two assembly elections had been that in both the assembly elections the gap between congress and the BJP had been same. During the 1998 elections also the congress polled nearly 5 percent more vote than the BJP, but could win 31 assembly seats only. During the 2003 assembly elections also, the congress polled nearly 5 percent more vote than the BJP, but the difference in term of the number of seats had been too big.

The predominance of the two party system remained in the electoral politics of Himachal Pradesh. Both congress and BJP have a stable political support base and a marginal swing can tilt the scales either way. Hence, effective leadership, election campaign and handling of party dissidents can decide the final outcome. Secondly, Himachal being a highly literate state the people, though economically backward are quite aware of and take a keen interest in the political affairs of their areas and evaluate the performance of the government objectively. The BJP and congress being voted alternatively to power can be attributed to this fact.

The 2007 assembly election showed that the speculation of most political analysts and media, particularly about the Emergence as the third force or performance of Bahujan Samaj Party were proven false.

The 2007 results, however, had more to do with and overall disaffection with the congress government in the state than the specific political character of the government at the centre. The highly literate and politically conscious people of the state voted on concrete issues, many of which were the outcome of policies pursued by the central government. However, the congress vote share went down only marginally from 40.7 percent in 2003 to 38.7 in 2007. The BJP's vote share on the other hand, went up significantly from 35.4 percent in 2003 to 43.8 percent in 2007. The BSP increased its vote share this time compared with previous election. But it managed to win just one seat despite contesting all the 68 seats. The Lok Jan Shakti Party led by Ram Vilas Paswan, was not able to hold on to the single seat it had won in the last elections. The party contested 39 seats this time. The Samajwadi Party contested 10 seats, the Nationalist Congress Party Four, the Communist Party of India (CPI) 8, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) seven, but all drew a blank.

The BJP has gone on to claim that the national mood was turning in the party's favour and against the ruling coalition in the centre. The congress on the other hand, has dismissed the electoral loss as heaving no impact at the national level and has blamed the anti-incumbency factor for the loss. The party had hoped to break this trend by trying to announce welfare schemes in the later stages of the Virbhadra Singh led government just

before the election schedule was to be announced. The game plan came a cropper with the election commission announcing the poll schedule ahead of the expected date due to reason of logistic view.

A web factors such as intra-party dissidence, anti-incumbency linked to poor performance and a better organized BJP, were responsible for the congress defeat in this assembly election in Himachal Pradesh. This election was also proved that the political party system in Himachal remains predominantly a two party system.

The Himachal Pradesh legislative assembly election was held in 2012. The five year term of the incumbent state legislature and government expired following the assembly election of 2007. The well established two party rotation of power was once again proved as per the past norms.

Congress was successful in Securing 36 out of 68 seats in the state elections. BJP that won 41 seats in the 2007 Vidhan Sabha elections dropped down and was able to win just 26 seats. Six independents including the rebels of BJP also won in the state elections in Himachal Pradesh. Himachal Lokhit Party (HLP) a breakaway group of the BJP managed to win one seats from Kullu assembly segment. In this election like 1998, a new regional party lead by Maheshwar Singh emerged, but could not make a strategic role.

Conclusion

Congress party gained absolute majority in general elections which were held in 1951. There was one party dominance system from 1952-1972. The one party dominance of Congress finally came to an end in 1977 assembly elections. No government has been repeated for the second term in the state since 1985. Today, both Congress and BJP draw their organizational strength from all part of state. Based on the different assembly elections it is clearly evident that the two party competitive politics is a well established fact about the dynamics of the state politics.

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