

CHANGING DYNAMICS OF PARTY POLITICS IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

*Dissertation Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of the Degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled 'CHANGING DYNAMICS OF PARTY POLITICS IN HIMACHAL PRADESH' submitted by me in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree of 'MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY' of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any degree of this university or any other university.

SHWETA RANA

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

PROF. PRALAY KANUNGO
(Chairperson)

PROF. PRALAY KANUNGO
(Supervisor)

Dedicated to my Parents...

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Changing Dynamics of Party Politics in Himachal Pradesh

Contents	Page No.
<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>i-ii</i>
<i>Tables</i>	<i>iii-iv</i>
<i>Maps</i>	<i>v-viii</i>
Introduction	1 - 11
Chapter I	12 - 42
Formation of Himachal Pradesh and Evolution of Party System	
Chapter II	43 - 74
Working of the Party System in Himachal Pradesh (1952 - 1985)	
Chapter III	75 – 109
Challenges to the Two-Party System: Emergence of Local, Regional and other National Parties (1990 – 2007)	
Conclusion	110 - 112
Bibliography	113 - 123

List of Abbreviations

AICC	:	All India Congress Committee
AISPC	:	All India People's Conference
BJP	:	Bharatiya Janata Party
BJS	:	All India Bharatiya Jana Sangh
CPI	:	Communist Party of India
CPM	:	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
HHSRC	:	Himalayan Hill States Regional Council
HHSSRC	:	Himalayan Hill States Sub Regional Conference
HJM	:	Himachal Jana Morcha
HKP	:	Himachal Kranti Party
HLM	:	Him Loktantrik Morcha
HLP	:	Himachal Lokhit Party
HVC	:	Himachal Vikas Congress
INC	:	Indian National Congress
INC(I)	:	Indian National Congress (Indira)
IND	:	Independent
JNP	:	Janata Party
KMPP	:	Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party
LKD	:	Lok Dal
MC	:	Municipal Corporation
MLA	:	Minister of Legislative Assembly
MLC	:	Member of Legislative Council
NCO	:	Indian National Congress (Organization)
NDA	:	National Democratic Alliance
OBC	:	Other Backward Classes
PCC	:	Pradesh Congress Committee
PSP	:	Praja Socialist Party
RPI	:	Republican Party
RSS	:	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SC	:	Scheduled Caste

SCF	:	Scheduled Castes Federation
SOC	:	Socialist Party
SSP	:	Samyukta Socialist Party
ST	:	Scheduled Tribes
SWA	:	Swatantra Part

List of Tables

Table No.	Title	Page No.
Table 1.1:	Share of Major Castes and Communities in the Population of Himachal Pradesh	39
Table 1.2:	Himachal Pradesh Leadership (Cabinet) Social Background (1948-72)	41
Table 2.1	House of the People 1 st General Elections – 1952 (Number and Percentage of Valid Votes Secured by Political Parties)	45
Table 2.2	House of the People 2 nd General Elections – 1957 (Number and Percentage of Valid Votes Secured by Political Parties)	45
Table 2.3	House of the People 3 rd General Elections – 1962 (Number and Percentage of Valid Votes Secured by Political Parties)	45
Table 2.4	Himachal Pradesh: Party-wise Distribution of Percent Votes Polled, Candidates Fielded, Elected, and Lost Deposits (Year of Election - 1967)	46
Table 2.5	Himachal Pradesh: Party-wise Distribution of Percent Votes Polled, Candidates Fielded, Elected and Lost Deposits (Year of Election - 1972)	47
Table 2.6	Himachal Pradesh: Party-wise Distribution of Percent Votes Polled, Candidates Fielded, Elected, and Lost Deposits (Year of Election - 1977)	49
Table 2.7	Himachal Pradesh: Party-wise Distribution of Percent Votes Polled, Candidates Fielded, Elected, and Lost Deposits (Year of Election - 1982)	51
Table 2.8	Himachal Pradesh: Party-wise Distribution of Percent Votes Polled, Candidates Fielded, Elected, and Lost Deposits (Year of Election - 1985)	51
Table 2.9	Himachal Pradesh Congress Party Position in Legislature and Parliament	52

Table 3.1	Division of Seats, HP Legislative Assembly; 1998	80
Table 3.2	Performance of Political Parties; 1998	81
Table 3.3	Loktantrik Morcha Himachal Pradesh, 2003	86
Table 3.4	Performance of Political Parties; 1990	90
Table 3.5	A Statistical Report on General Election to Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha, 2007 (Bahujan Samaj Party)	91
Table 3.6	Ward-Wise Results	93

‘If modernization is the central tendency of our times, it is politicization that provides its driving force’.¹ Implicit in this statement is the belief that there is a growing importance of government and politics in the contemporary times which has come to govern several aspects of human life. It should be noted that the involvement of a number of organizations becomes inevitable when it is government and politics we are talking about. These include; political parties, electoral machinery, interest groups and such other associations and the mass media for the expression of public opinion. Writing about Himachal Pradesh and trying to look into the political scenario of this state, the argument being made above clearly emerges. Right from the time when subjects of the princely states which made up Himachal started demanding responsible governments in their respective areas to the time of the 1977 general elections in India which marked a blow to the dominance of the Congress in the country and, till today when we wait for the 2012 assembly election in Himachal, the importance, which a government, the political party in power, the electoral trends and politics inclusive of all these factors has for people becomes evident. In other words, the importance of government and politics in human life cannot in any manner. Also, when looking at Himachal Pradesh, it is obvious that it is the politics of a state which is being looked at. Important to note here is the fact that, state politics was not always an autonomous discipline. It was seen as a part of Indian politics or national politics.

Mainly, three factors can be counted which were responsible for the lack of autonomy of this discipline. Firstly, the broad comparative analytic framework being used by the liberal schools of political modernization and political development in order to study the developing societies which were dominant of the ‘third world’ political theory were using the newly independent nation-states as the unit of analysis as they were being thought of playing the key role in terms of economy and politics.² The aim was to develop a general theory which would have universal application and in this endeavor the constituent units within the nation-states were ignored. Some of the Indian political theorists who were under the influence of the American Political

¹Rajni Kothari, ‘Theoretical Considerations’, in *Politics in India*, Delhi, Orient Longman, 1970, p. 1.

²Ashutosh Kumar, ed., ‘Introduction’, in *Rethinking State Politics in India: Regions within Regions*, New Delhi, Routledge, 2011, pp. 3-5.

Science Association also followed the same pattern. Marxist writing on Indian politics remained under the sway of neo-Marxist critique in the form of dependency world systems which took 'post-colonial state' as the unit of analysis. Secondly, it was due to the presence of the 'Congress system' at that time wherein the politics and economy at the state level were controlled and guided by the powerful center. State politics was nothing but a poor reflection of the politics which transpired at the national level. Thirdly, in the then 'Nehruvian era' the stress was on nation-building under the leadership of the nationalist elite. Hence, state politics was to be studied from the 'national perspective'. Greater level of recognition of state as the primary unit of analysis and a key player in the 'modern drama of development' has led to the emergence of state politics as an autonomous discipline, whose study is now being considered essential for a nuanced understanding of Indian politics.³

It was in the 1960s when the study of state politics started gaining the attention of political science scholars. It began to be realized that the study of state politics is important if the whole dynamics of political power in India is to be understood. This stemmed from the recognition that there is a linkage or relation between state politics on one hand and national politics on the other. Politics in states can be said to represent the politics in the whole country but these states have their own specificities which distinguish them from other states. Hence it may be pointed out that, 'there is something general about the nature of state politics yet there is something particular'.⁴

The crucial moment for the discipline of state politics came in the form of the general elections in 1967 when the states started to steer away from the Congress system.⁵ At the Centre, the Congress majority had been greatly reduced and at the state level, six non-Congress governments had been formed and in four more states, the Congress had to enter into coalitions. In Himachal Pradesh, it was the JanaSangh which gave an impressive performance in the 1967 elections. The Party's performance in the elections to the Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha was better than its performance in the

³Ibid.

⁴T.R. Sharma, ed., 'Introduction', in *New Challenges in Indian Politics*, New Delhi, Uppal Publishing House, 1986, p.2.

⁵John R. Wood, ed., 'Introduction', in *State Politics in Contemporary India: Crisis or Continuity?*, U.S.A., Westview Press Inc., 1984, p. 9.

elections to the Lok Sabha and this marked the beginning of the emergence of a two-party system in the State and beginning of the end of the hegemony of the Congress.

Iqbal Narain presented a three dimensional approach for the study of state politics. These dimensions are contextual, structural and operative. 'The contextual dimension influences the structural, and, more than that, the operative aspects of a political system. The structural and, more particularly the operational aspects, in turn, effect, modify and even change the context itself, though in a comparatively slow, halting and even imperceptible manner'.⁶Scholars like Ranbir Sharma have taken recourse to the contextual dimension while analyzing the politics of Himachal Pradesh. This dimension is inclusive of aspects like:

- a) Historical: The history of the state is to be considered in all its dimensions.⁷ Himachal had come into existence after the merger of 31 princely states and in 1954; another princely state had been merged with it. The reorganization of Punjab had also resulted in a few areas being merged with Himachal. The state had to undergo a long journey which started from it becoming a Chief Commissioner's Province, to a part C state, to a Union territory and finally a full-fledged state. The analysis of this historical context helps in understanding various aspects; for instance, the dominance of the Congress in the 'Old Areas' of the state and the BJP's hold in the 'New Areas'.
- b) Social: This aspect is inclusive of caste, class, religion, language and region and forms an important part of state politics.⁸ Linguistically and religiously, Himachal has not been hit by controversy with Hindus forming the majority. The state has always been ruled by the caste system on which the Hindu religion is based and this has impacted the politics of the state. The tussle for power between the Brahmins and the Rajputs is a case in point and has influenced the electoral politics of Himachal. It has also been a factor which has determined economic power in the state.

⁶SudhaPai, 'State Politics in 1990s: An Overview', in *State Politics: New Dimensions (Party System, Liberalisation and Politics of Identity)*, Delhi, Shipra Publications, 2000, p. 2.

⁷IqbalNarain, ed., 'State Politics in 1990s: An Overview', in *State Politics in India*, Meerut, MeenakshiPrakashan, 1976, p. 20.

⁸Ranbir Sharma, 'Politics of Himachal Pradesh', in T.R. Sharma, ed., *New Challenges of Politics in Indian States*, op. cit, p. 225.

- c) Economic: This is another important element of the contextual dimension. Himachal has traditionally been a state dominated by agriculture and the reconstruction of its agriculture based rural economy started after 1953 with the introduction of the Abolition of Big Landed Estates Bill. Various land reforms were introduced in the state which conferred proprietary rights over the tenants. This resulted in the tenants becoming owners of land entering into a direct relation with the state which contributed to social transformation. These reforms also brought relief to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in particular areas.

Yogendra Yadav contends that the beginning of an election season proves useful to look at the rise of state politics to the centre stage of Indian politics. Lok Sabha elections are seen as an aggregation of state – level elections. But this was not the case in the 1970s and 1980s when ‘national waves swept across state’ and electoral politics in state could be determined by the change of mood for or against a nationwide party.

Now when we talk about the autonomy of state, it implies that it is independent from the logic of national politics and runs on a rhythm of its own. A manifestation of this can be seen in the fact that states have become an effective arena of political choice. It also means that we are no longer trapped in the ‘Congress vs Opposition’⁹ scenario. Different party system exists in different states ranging from bipolar, triangular, four cornered or more fragmented. Also, the presence of regional parties or state-wide parties is more evident. These parties, in terms of issues and strategies have become more independent. The autonomy of the state also implicates itself when the changing fortune of political parties is not repeated in other states. Now governmental outcomes vary from state to state. Politics at the state level is freer from national politics. In this era ‘democratic politics has witnessed states as markers of political identity’.¹⁰ Each state has developed and defined its own distinctive culture and language of politics.

⁹YogendraYadav and SuhasPalshikar, ‘Ten Theses on State Politics in India’, in SandeepShastri, K.C. Suri, YogendraYadav, ed., *Electoral Politics in Indian States: LokSabha Elections in 2004 and Beyond*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 46.

¹⁰Ibid. , p. 47.

Just as the general elections of 1967 became a defining moment for the discipline of state politics, the study of electoral politics started with the first general elections in 1952 in India. Electoral politics in a modern democratic state provides the electorate a chance to influence the decision making of those in power. It is also helpful in giving an idea about the sociological and psychological currents that shape the choices of the people at the polls. The electoral politics of Himachal Pradesh has been analyzed to show that different patterns that have emerged in the politics of the state with its metamorphosis from a state with one party dominance to a state characterized by a two-party system and the possibility of the emergence of a third front. Hence, there has been a change in the dynamics of party politics in the state. The electoral politics in Himachal has acquired 'autonomy and a distinct rhythm of its own'.¹¹ Socio-economic factors together with historical experiences have shaped the electoral politics of Himachal Pradesh. These factors have resulted in the emergence of a two-party system since 1967. In the recent times it has not followed the electoral pattern exhibited in the country. The 2003 assembly elections in the state held after the 2002 assembly elections in Gujarat are a case in point. Therefore, it is through the study of the Vidhan Sabha elections and in some cases the Lok Sabha elections that an attempt can be made to understand the electoral politics and patterns of the state.

Literature Review

The other books and articles which have laid the base for this dissertation: The book by Maurice Duverger, 'Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State'¹² discusses what is a political party. The book before explaining all aspects and features of a political party, describes the meaning of a 'party'. It talks about a political party being a creature of modern and modernizing political systems. It describes the various functions of a political party and the way it emerges through the activity of the political system.

¹¹T.R. Sharma, 'Himachal Pradesh: Two-Party Competition in a Small State', *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy*, 15(1&2), 2003, pp. 173-188.

¹²Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*, translated by Barbara and Robert North, London, Methuen and Co Ltd, 1954.

LaPalombara, Joseph and Myron Weiner's 'Political Parties and Political Development'¹³ is the most comprehensive work done on political parties and has been taken recourse to by many scholars writing on this topic. This book tells us why political parties are crucial for the working of modern politics. It explains that a political party has its own local traditions and represents a philosophical past, consciously or unconsciously.

'Kishalay Banerjee's *Regional Political Parties in India*' talks about regional parties in depth. The reason behind this is that the social economic milieu of a particular society. The book talks about how socio economic changes along with other factors like exposure to mass media, increase in education, establishment of adult suffrage and the emergence of new political institutions which influence the patterns of social relationships and it is these changes in social relationships which in turn affect political behavior.

Y.S. Parmar's, 'Years of Challenge and Growth, Himachal Pradesh Forges Ahead'¹⁴ explains in details the birth of the state of Himachal Pradesh. It discusses the role played by the States' Reorganization Commission and the development of the state after 1948. After its formation in 1948, Himachal Pradesh came a long way in various fields of development. It describes the various programmes followed in the interest of making the state more developed and self-sufficient. The twenty-point program introduced by Mrs. Indira Gandhi has also been discussed in this book.

Ranbir Sharma's 'Party Politics in a Himalayan State'¹⁵ gives details of the Praja Mandal Movement in Himachal and the development of political parties in Himachal. Most importantly it discusses the rise of political consciousness in the state. It goes onto discussing the party membership, leadership and factionalism in the contexts of these parties in the state.

¹³Joseph LaPalombara and Myron Weiner, *Political Parties and Political Development*, ed., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966.

¹⁴Krishalay Banerjee, *Regional Political Parties in India*, Delhi, B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1984.

¹⁵Ranbir Sharma, *Party Politics in a Himalayan State*, New Delhi, National Publishing House, 1977.

Articles used in the dissertation include, T.R. Sharma's 'Himachal Pradesh: Two Party Competition in a Small State'.¹⁶ This article, with the help of election data in terms of vote-share and vote-percentage reflects on how electoral competition has mostly been between the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party. These two parties have drawn support from the old and new areas of Himachal, respectively and light has been thrown on this aspect. The birth of the regional party, the Himachal Vikas Congress, its performance and role in making or disturbing the balance of the two-party system has been discussed in detail. T.R. Sharma also writes about various issues, for instance BJP trying to float the Hindutva card in the state, and how they have proved to be fruitful or fateful for the two national parties. This article also takes into account the caste cleavages in Himachal, especially the divide between the Rajputs and Brahmins and its influence on the politics of the state.

Another article by T.R. Sharma used is, 'Local Configurations and National Parties in Himachal Pradesh'.¹⁷ This article also talks about the birth and evolution of the two-party system. It describes briefly the physiographic, demographic, historical and socio-economic factors which have determined the electoral politics of Himachal Pradesh. Great deal of stress has been laid on the election of 1998 to the Legislative Assembly of the state and a comparison has been made with elections of 1996 while stressing on the performance of the Congress Party. Congress's dismal performance during the 1998 elections has been attributed to several factors and these factors have been discussed in detail.

In Ramesh K. Chauhan and S.N. Ghosh's 'Bipolar Contest'¹⁸, the 2004 election to the Lok Sabha in Himachal Pradesh has been analyzed to show that the performance and evaluation of the party in power does determine the outcome of elections. It claims that the electorate voted in favour of the party which had performed better in comparison to the previous regime in the state. Issues like corruption, development, non-performance and casteism played an important role in this parliamentary election

¹⁶T.R. Sharma, 'Himachal Pradesh: Two-Party Competition in a Small State', *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy*, 15(1&2), 2003, pp. 173-188.

¹⁷T. R. Sharma, 'Local Configurations and National Parties in Himachal Pradesh', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(34/35), 1999, pp. 2465-2471.

¹⁸Ramesh K. Chauhan and S.N. Ghosh, 'Himachal Pradesh: Bipolar Contest', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39(51), 2004, pp. 5505-5507.

and factors like effective leadership, election campaign and the manner in which party dissidents were handled dictated the electoral verdict. By using data and tables, the writers have tried to give an idea about the preference of the electorate of Himachal in terms of; 'The most preferred choice for Chief Minister', satisfaction with 'The Performance of the Government over the Past One-and-a-Half years', the ability of the party in power to establish 'Control Over Corruption'. Other tables include; 'Opinion on Which Government was Better', 'Agewise Voting Pattern', 'Castewise Voting Pattern' and the 'Popularity of Leaders'. The source of these tables has been the National Election Study-2004.

Ramesh K. Chauhan and S.N. Ghosh's 'Himachal Pradesh: Pro-Incumbency Helps the BJP'¹⁹ studies the electoral verdict of the 2007 election to the Legislative Assembly of Himachal Pradesh. The BJP had performed well in this election in Himachal as compared to its performance in the rest of the country. The Congress on the other hand had done well at the national level but not in this state. What determined the good performance of the BJP in 2007 in Himachal has been explained in this article. A comparison of the 2004 Lok Sabha polls has been made with the election to the Lok Sabha in 2009 bringing to light certain trends, for example; 'Demographic Distribution of Support'. With the help of tables, the writers looked at how the electorate of Himachal has rated the Congress government at the centre and the BJP's performance in the state. Through this they tried to establish that the party in power at the state level is at a more advantageous position than the one at the national level.

Sanjay Kumar and Ramesh K. Chauhan's 'Elections 2003: Understanding Complex Choices'²⁰, a comparison has been made between the 1998 and 2003 elections to the Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly. A region-wise analysis has been made with respect to the seats won by different political parties in these elections. A survey which evaluated the performance of the BJP government in the state has been presented in this article. It also looks at the failures of the BJP in terms of corruption,

¹⁹Ramesh Kumar Chauhan and S. N.Ghosh, 'Himachal Pradesh: Pro-Incumbency Helps the BJP', *Economic and Political Review*, XLIV(39), 2009, pp. 180-182.

²⁰Sanjay Kumar and Ramesh Kumar Chauhan, 'Elections 2003: Understanding Complex Choices', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(28), 2003, pp. 2927-2934.

ill-treatment of government employees and mismanagement related to government jobs and if these failures benefitted the Congress in the state. The writers have also made a comparison between the different Chief Ministers of Himachal, belonging to the Congress and BJP and the people's preference in this respect. Lastly, the support base of the two main political parties of the state has been determined.

Javeed Alam's 'Political Necessity vs Lost Possibility'²¹ tries to reflect on the fact that it is not only the intentions or motives of a political party which determines electoral politics but also the ability of the party to provide a government and rule for a certain period of time. Looking at different elections in the state, the article establishes that for people of Himachal it is important that a political party lasts for the mandated period of time. The writer has also discussed about issues which have facilitated the victory or loss of the two national parties in the state. For instance, the alienation of orchadists by the BJP under Shanta Kumar proved fatal for the party. Other issues like development and privatization and the take of the two parties on them have also been included in this article.

Yogendra Yadav, Sanjay Kumar and Ramesh K. Chauhan's 'The Missing BJP wave'²² has tried to bring out the importance of 'State politics' in contemporary India. In this era it is not the 'nation-wide wave' of the 70s and 80s which influence electoral results in states. This argument has been facilitated by showing that the 'Hindutva wave of the BJP which swept the country did not ensure the success of the party in Himachal. Issues of employment and development were deemed important by the electorate of the state. This article also talks about the performance of parties like the Him Loktantrik Morcha and the possibility of a 'third space' in the politics of Himachal. The social profile of voting has been dealt with by doing a post-poll survey.

Hypotheses

Starting with the dominance of the Congress Party, the party system in Himachal Pradesh paved way for the emergence of the BJP leading to a competitive and vibrant

²¹JaveedAlam, 'Political Necessity vs Lost Possibilities', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31(2/3), 1996. pp. 105-110.

²²YogendraYadav, Sanjay Kumar and Ramesh K Chauhan's 'The Missing BJP wave', *Frontline*, 20(6), 2003, Online, www.frontline.in

two-party system; however, with the entry of a number of small local, regional and other national parties the dominance of the Congress and the BJP faces challenges and competition in electoral arena, bringing new dynamism and indicating a new pattern of party politics in the state.

Research Questions:

The main questions which this research entails are:

Is the party politics of Himachal Pradesh changing?

Whether the emergence of third front challenging the existing two-party system in Himachal Pradesh?

Has the emergence of regional parties affected the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party?

Objectives:

The objectives of this research have been to establish that in a state which witnessed the stronghold of one party moved on to a two-party system changing the dynamics of party politics in the state. Even today, despite of the two-party system being embedded in the state, there is no stagnancy. The local and national parties are trying to challenge the positions of the two parties and pose a third front which contributes to changing the dynamics of the party politics in Himachal Pradesh.

Methodology:

The research has been based on primary sources. Data has been collected from books published by the State Election Commission of Himachal Pradesh, namely, 'Report on General Elections to Vidhan Sabha - 1977, 1980, 1982, 1985, 1990, 1993, 2003 and 2007', 'Report on General Elections to Lok Sabha-1984-85, 1989, 1991, 1999, 2004 and 2009. Party documents have also been used to provide for material. These documents include, BJP's '4 Years of Good Governance'. Other primary sources used for the research include interviews with political leaders and important members of political parties, such as; Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, Mr. Prem Kumar Dhumal, the Mayor of Shimla, Mr. Sanjay Chauhan, the Former Mayor of Shimla, Mr. Narendra Kataria, the President of the Himachal Lokhit Party, Mr. Maheshwar Singh Thakur and the State Election coordinator of the BahujanSamaj Party, Mr.

Mann Singh Manhella. Secondary sources include reliance on books and journals to provide a theoretical framework. Newspapers articles have been referred to.

Chapterization

The first chapter introduces the state of Himachal Pradesh. It describes the geographical location of the state and looks at its demography. The division of Himachal in the upper and lower areas and other such cleavages is mentioned. This chapter traces the formation of the state and the role of the States' Reorganization Commission is discussed in detail. It looks at how the state has evolved constitutionally. It also discusses the emergence of the party system and the formation of various political parties in the state. For example, the Indian National Congress, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the Swatantra Party, etc.

The Second Chapter gives a theoretical explanation of what a political party is and the significance it holds. It discusses in details the two parties, the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party which make up for the two-party system in Himachal. The chapter has been divided into the three phases which give a picture of the working of the party system in Himachal from 1952 to 1985. The Congress party had been the dominant party in Himachal Pradesh since 1948 and this continued till 1985, excepting the short period from 1977-80 when the Janata party came to power and changed the dynamics of party politics in Himachal. The two-party started establishing itself in 1967.

The third chapter shows if there is the possibility of the emergence of a third front in the state. With the help of tables this chapter shows the performance of national, regional and local parties in the state. It looks at the recently held municipal corporation elections held in Shimla and the victory of the CPM being a possibility in challenging the two- party dominance in Himachal. This chapter also lays emphasis on the elections of 1990, 1998 and 2007 and the performance Janata Dal, Himachal Vikas Congress and the Bahujan Samaj Party in the state and if these parties are contributing to the change in party politics in Himachal Pradesh.

Chapter I Formation of Himachal Pradesh and Evolution of Party System

*'Of the great sages I am Bhrigu;
Of utterances, I am the single syllable Aum;
Of offerings, I am the offering of silent
meditation; and
Of unmovable things (I am) the Himalaya'¹
- (X.25 Gita)*

The objectives of this chapter are to introduce the state of Himachal Pradesh with respect to its location, physical attributes and demography and discuss the emergence of political parties and evolution of a party system. In the chapter, the condition of Himachal under the British rule and the princely order and the influence of the nationalist movement on the people of Himachal have been looked at. The birth of Himachal following constitutional developments and the role of the State's Reorganization Commission has been traced. The chapter also explains the formation and integration of Praja Mandals in the state. The old-new divide in the state and the demographic composition (affecting the politics of Himachal) has been mentioned.

The hilly state of Himachal Pradesh is bordered by Jammu and Kashmir in the north², Punjab in the west and south-west, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana in the south, Uttarakhand in the south-east and Tibet in the east. Spread over an area of 55,673 square kilometres, the state has five rivers flowing through it, namely; Beas, Sutlej, Ravi, Yamuna and Chenab. Located at an altitude which ranges from 450 to 6,500 metres above sea level, the state is covered from the plains by the Shivalik range of mountains.³ In physiographic terms, Himachal Pradesh is mountainous and semi-mountainous. It can be said that it resembles the 'seven sisters' of north-east India and a small part of it is akin to the plains of Punjab. The mountainous region of the state is referred to as the 'upper area' and the semi-mountainous region is known as the 'lower area'. Demographically, 60 per cent of the state constitutes the non-tribal belt

¹V. Verma, 'The Land', in *The Emergence of Himachal Pradesh: A Survey of Constitutional Developments*, New Delhi, Indus Publishing Company, 1995, p. 17.

²Y.S. Parmar, 'Himachal Pradesh Forges Ahead', in *Years of Challenge and Growth*, New Delhi, Rubicon Publishing House, 1977, p. 11.

³Hari Krishan Mittoo, 'The Natural Setting', in *India - The Land and the People: Himachal Pradesh*, New Delhi, National Book Trust, 1978, p. 1.

and accounts for 96 per cent of its population; whereas the remaining 40 per cent area constitutes the tribal belt and accounts for only 4 per cent of the population of the state.⁴

It can also be said that the state is geographically divided into tribal (upper) areas and non-tribal (lower) areas. The tribal areas constitute an extensive horticulture belt which produces for the market while the non-tribal areas practice subsistence agriculture. Important to note is the fact that as opposed to an extremely strict demarcation one can notice that upper areas do constitute some non-tribal population although the converse does not hold true as the tribal belt does not extend to the lower areas. Hence an overlap is noticed in the two categories i.e., in terms of physiography and demography.

Politically, Himachal Pradesh is constitutive of 4 parliamentary constituencies; Shimla, Mandi, Kangra and Hamirpur, 12 districts and 68 constituencies in all.⁵

Himachal Pradesh in the Colonial Period

British Paramountcy and the Princes

The group of Hill States which constituted Himachal Pradesh in 1848 were under the protection of the British after the conclusion of the Anglo-Gurkha and Anglo-Sikh wars in 1814 and 1846 respectively.⁶ These States then came to be designated as Simla Hill States and Punjab Hill States. The Simla Hill States comprised of a group of 28 States including feudatories and Bushahar, Sirmur, Jubbal and Bilaspur were the important ones out of them. The Punjab Hill States consisted of Chamba, Mandi and Suket. Simla Hill States and Punjab Hill States were put under the supervision of Superintendent, Simla Hill States, Simla and Political Agent, Lahore respectively.⁷ The States were independent of each other but were under British paramountcy. This assured that in case of internal disturbance they would receive help from the British and security from an external attack. This aided in ending the tradition of continuous

⁴T.R. Sharma, 'Local Configurations and National Parties in Himachal Pradesh', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(34/35), 1999, pp. 2465-2471.

⁵ See Map I, Political Map of Himachal Pradesh.

⁶Ranbir Sharma, 'Growth of Political Consciousness', in *Party Politics in a Himalayan State*, New Delhi, National Publishing House, 1977, p. 12.

⁷ See Map II, Princely States of the Hills, Himachal before 1947.

and devastating warfare in the Hill States. In return for the protection offered by the British, the hill chiefs had to permit the free passage of British merchants and their goods from their regions, they had to provide a certain number of 'begar' labourers and the bigger states were to join the British army with their 'armed retainers and hill-porters', when asked to do so.⁸

The Simla Hill States were spread over an area of 4,800 sq. miles and the Punjab Hill States were spread over an area of 4,645 sq. miles. The population of Simla Hill States and Punjab Hill States was 5, 67,487 and 4, 19,408 respectively, according to the census of 1931. The smallest Hill State was Ratesh having an area of two square miles, a population of 558 and an annual income of 1,500 rupees. Such small Hill States which had a sparse population, possessed meagre resources and hence did not have a regular administrative apparatus. The larger Hill States were not in a very good condition too. They lacked development in all respects due to the provision of insufficient funds. Moving of the Government of India to Simla, its Summer Capital (which was 'like an oasis in the desert giving an impression of prosperity and progress')⁹ did not bring any relief to the misery of other states. Simla, where people enjoyed civil liberties of expression, association and press was in contrast to their absence in the Hill States. Hence, Simla, eventually served as the platform where activities for struggles against the despotic regimes of the 'Ranas' and 'Rajas' could be taken forward. In the process this contributed in the growth of political consciousness in the people of the Hill States.

The revenue system in the Hill States contributed to the despair of the people. But the revenue system wasn't deemed enough for a life of indulgence and maintenance the prestige of the 'Gaddi' or the throne. Other methods to raise money were resorted to. One such method was the practice of 'Begar' which included providing free services of various types. 'Begar' was also of certain types; the Athwara Begar under which compulsory and unpaid labour could be demanded from any person for any purpose on given days in a year; Ordinary Begar taken from people at the time of marriage or death in the ruling family; it also included 'Gaonsar' which required the carrying of

⁸Mian Goverdhan Singh, 'Hill States and British Paramountcy', in *History of Himachal Pradesh*, Delhi, Yugbodh Publishing House, 1982, p. 164.

⁹Ranbir Sharma, 'Growth of Political Consciousness', in *Party Politics in a Himalayan State*, op. cit., p. 14.

luggage and dak of political officers, State Officers, when on tour and 'Betrawal' which included repairing of roads; and Religious Begar which was to be given at the time of celebration of festivals. It was a 'labour of love'. The weight of 'Begar' system was mainly on those belonging to the low caste. Brahmans and some categories of Rajputs were exempted from it. Rich 'Bania' families were responsible for substituting 'Begar' for cash. The system was considered an important part of the economic system of the States but lost its relevance after sometime and was abolished by the guarantors of the system, the 'Paramount Power' on humanitarian grounds. People began to realize the unjustness of systems like begar and other such levies which reflected the growth of political consciousness among them.¹⁰ The abolition of such impositions was considered by people as a good enough reason to launch agitations against the rulers of the States. It, thus, contributed to the organisation of the Praja Mandals.

The society in the Hill States was deeply influenced by the norms laid down by the caste system. It determined the division of labour to a great extent and restricted the mobility of an individual in the social structure. The Hindu religion which gave grave importance to the caste system and the Hindus constituted ninety-eight per cent of the population in these States. This led to the retarded growth of political consciousness amongst the people. Even though, the presence of a traditional and authoritarian social structure, lack of education and absence of developments like transport and communication made the growth of political consciousness in these areas painfully slow, these factors could not prevent the growth overall.

After the British paramountcy had been recognized, the officers who were in-charge of the States assumed the role of controlling officers not remaining confined to the powers which had been given to them. The smaller States were completely under the dominance of the Political Agent whereas the larger States like Sirmur, Mandi, Chamba, Suket and Bilaspur were somewhat independent but could not go against the wishes of the Political Department. The Political Agents intervened at their own convenience.

¹⁰M.S. Ahluwalia, 'Geography, Source Material and Political History', in *Social, Cultural and Economic History of Himachal Pradesh*, New Delhi, Indus Publishing Company, 1998, p. 197.

There was a need to improve the administration in these States and the Paramount Power was well aware of this and it did tell the Princes that good governance was needed. In fact, the obligation which the hill chiefs came under to gain protection from the British also required them to encourage welfare of their people by improving living conditions in their respective countries and cultivation, to redress the grievances and to look after the safety of public roads.¹¹ However, nothing substantial was done and the British Government only intervened when its interest were affected. Hence, whenever the people in any of these States approached the Political Agents to intervene on their behalf and compel Princes to accept their legitimate demands, they were always disappointed. The British authorities expressed their inability to do anything as it would imply the breach of treaties with the native princes in spite of the fact that the treaties included a provision according to which aid of British power was conditional on the upkeep of good governance. The British rulers, in practice were insensitive and indifferent towards the people in the princely states and the petty rulers enjoyed absolute power in their states as long as they did not upset the Political Department. To keep the Paramount Power pleased and happy was an important matter for the Princes and were always making desperate attempts to impress them. During the First World War, every ruler tried to provide as many recruits as possible for the army. In the process apart from earning the goodwill of the officers of the Political Department, they also pleased their subjects who got an opportunity to gain employment. But something unexpected happened after the end of war and the return of these army men to their respective States. During their services these men came into contact with the outside world and people with different ideas which were new for them. They found out that the condition of other people was not the same as their own people or the 'hillmen'. This gave birth to discontent and contributed to the rise of political consciousness amongst these people. The Princes were aware of the dangers which this development would have to their positions and hence the Chamber of Princes stressed the need to 'hold upon the affections of their subjects.' The awakening of the people of the States made the Princes fear a violent turn and their inability to control such a situation. Hence they appealed to the Political Department of the Government of India to formulate and sponsor 'Co-operative Grouping and Attachment Schemes'. The Princes also made this move as the Indian

¹¹Mian Goverdhan Singh, 'Hill States and British Paramountcy', in *History of Himachal Pradesh*, op. cit., p. 164.

States were likely to join the Indian Federation and representation of small states would be difficult unless they were formed into bigger units by being grouped together. The Department actively worked in order to implement the scheme as there was hesitance on the part of democratically elected governments (which had gained control of the administration in British provinces in 1939) to provide support to the Princes so that they could curb the activities of the politically awakened people. The 'Co-operative Grouping Scheme' was to introduce reforms in the administration of the States and it was hoped that these reforms would satisfy the people. The working of the scheme was taken seriously. But these reforms failed to make the people happy and they carried on with the political agitation. This growing political awakening was dealt in an authoritative manner by many of the rulers of the Hill States.

Himachal Pradesh and the Nationalist Movement

It was in the year 1920-23 that the Congress movements had started gaining momentum in Simla. Pandit Gaianda Mal, Mohammed Nauni and Abdul Ghani, etc. were some leaders associated with the movement. The nationalist movement was successfully influencing the people of Kangra. As a result, many processions and conferences were organized in the villages. One such conference held in 1927 in Sujampur led to the merciless beating of leaders related to it. Thakur Hazara Singh and Baba Kanshi, referred to as 'Pahari Gandhi'¹² made immense contributions in these movements. A 'Bhoomi Bandobast Abhiyan'¹³ was organized in 1930 in Bilaspur which also led to the arrest of several important leaders. People in different regions started resorting to satyagrah. For example, the people in Sirmur which was witnessing unrest formed a Kisan Sabha to protect themselves from the tyranny of the state officials. This sabha then took to satyagrah and non-cooperation to ensure acceptance of their demands. In Suket State, a civil disobedience movement was started under the guidance of the Praja Mandals and it was popularly known as the Suket Satyagrah and demanded merger of Himachal Pradesh with the Indian Union.¹⁴ These developments were contributing to political awakening in the state.

¹²Ibid, p. 197.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴M.S. Ahluwalia, 'Popular Uprisings and Social Reform Movements', in *History of Himachal Pradesh*, New Delhi, Intellectual Publishing House, 1988, p. 191.

Mahatma Gandhi's efforts to transform the Indian National Congress into a mass liberation movement were also responsible for the awakening of people of the Hill States. Individual satyagrah which had been launched by Gandhi had been carried out in Kangra as well and had been very successful. A large number of Congress leaders were involved in this region. Even the quit India movement had received a very positive response from the people of Kangra.¹⁵ 'A large number of hillmen from Kangra working in British India came under the influence of the nationalist movement. On return to their villages they organised branches of the Congress, conferences and processions'.¹⁶ The activities at the national level had a trickle-down effect and the people of the hill started making attempts to form people's organisations. If this was not possible inside a State's territory due to the Prince's repression, politically conscious workers would work from the adjoining British territories and incite people of their States. For example, Pt. Padam Dev of Bushahar launched struggles against the Princes of Hill States by making Simla his headquarter. The Congress in the view of such developments called upon the Princes in 1920 to grant their people a responsible government.¹⁷ However, it decided that it would not interfere in the internal affairs of the States. Simultaneously the Praja Mandal Movement was gaining momentum. On seeing this, the Congress changed its attitude and it acknowledged the fact that the people of the Hills were determined to achieve democratisation of the administration in the States and for redressal of their grievances. This called for the Congress to reconsider its policy of 'benevolent neutrality' towards the States. This change in the policy of the Congress provided motivation to the people.

In 1945, the Congress in order to bring the people of the States under the ambit of the Congress organisation, appointed a sub-committee consisting of Nehru, Vallabhai Patel and J.B. Kriplani. The Committee recommended that there should be reservation of seats in the Provincial Congress Committee for the State's representatives on the basis of population. The implementation of this recommendation brought the State's people movement to the national movement and eventually it also made way for the

¹⁵Mian Goverdhan Singh, 'Popular Movements and Integration of Hill States', in *History of Himachal Pradesh*, op. cit., p. 199.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ranbir Sharma, 'Growth of Political Consciousness', in *Party Politics in a Himalayan State*, op. cit., p. 24.

final absorption of the Praja Mandals in the Hill States in the Indian National Congress (INC).

The appointment of the Indian States Committee under the Chairmanship of Sir Harcourt Butler on December 16, 1927 encouraged the leading workers to work for the cause of States' people to set up an all Indian body to provide guidance and help to various Praja Mandals in the Native States and to coordinate their activities. The first All India States People's Conference (AISPC) which was held on December 17, 1927 in Bombay was attended by 700 delegates from all over Indian States but there was no delegate from the Hill States who attended this session. The AISPC worked with the aim of influencing the States as a whole and to introduce necessary reforms in the administration of the States. Democratisation and liberalisation of administration was its aim. The abolition of Princely rule, however, was not an option for the leaders in those days. The AISPC did not receive positive reactions from the British Government and even some British Indian political parties such as the Muslim League. They were not supportive of its demands and questioned its right to speak on the behalf of the State's people but the AISPC continued with its efforts. A session of the AISPC was held in 1939 in Ludhiana where it was decided to form Praja Mandal in hill states so that special attention could be devoted towards these areas. This step contributed to the awaking among the hill people.¹⁸ A Himalayan Riasati Praja Mandal was also organised in December, 1939. Its work was to coordinate the work of the Praja Mandal and to look after the activities of political and social workers in numerous hill states. This was followed by the 'Bhai Do Na Pai' movement where people were asked neither to provide the British Government with recruits for the army nor to give money towards war funds. This was sort of a civil-disobedience movement and lead to the arrest of several Praja Mandal workers.¹⁹

In regard to the Hill States, the AISPC encountered several difficulties as the Princes adopted a hostile attitude towards the development of any kind of public opinion in their respective States. Lack of modern means of transport and communication also proved to be a hindrance. As a result of this, popular movements in the Hill States

¹⁸M.S. Ahluwalia, 'Geography, Source Material and Political History', in *Social, Cultural and Economic History of Himachal Pradesh*, op. cit., p. 197.

¹⁹Ibid.

remained weak and sporadic for a long time but this did not stop the growth of these movements.

The Praja Mandal Movement and the Integration of Praja Mandals

A network of Praja Mandals had been established in the Hill States of Himachal Pradesh by 1945. The political developments being witnessed in British India prompted the people to organise themselves into a single political organisation, in order to guard their rights and coordinate their activities to democratize the princely order. It began to be realized that such political goals could be realized only if the numerous Praja Mandals in different Hill States came together in a single and strong organisation. Workers of the Praja Mandals had been attending sessions of the AISPC and engaging themselves in discussing and reviewing the progress of movements in their states and also exchanging ideas to better deal with common problems. What emerged from these meeting along with the decision of the AISPC was the idea to set up a Regional Council.²⁰ Consequently, the Himalayan Hill States Regional Council (HHSRC) was set up at the Udaipur session of the AISPC. The office of the President of the HHSRC was to be at Mandi and that of the General Secretary at Simla. The elections for the office bearers and the executive committee of the HHSRC were held at Udaipur. After the Council was set up, a conference was held at Mandi from March 8 to March 1946 and several resolutions were passed. These resolutions included; establishment of a responsible government, provision of fundamental rights, abolition of unjust taxes and Begar, removal of constraints on the functioning of political organisations in the Hill States, return of confiscated property, release of political prisoners and permission to those in political exile to return to their states.

This move of the HHSRC was a huge indicator of political consciousness and the development of a political organisation of the Hill States. This session affected the Princes too as they now realized it was difficult to deprive their subjects of their rights.

The issue of fresh elections was raised at the Nahan Conference held on 31st August-1st September, 1946. With the exception of Chamba, Mandi and Tehri, electors from

²⁰Ranbir Sharma, 'Integration of Praja Mandals (1945-48): Development of Political Parties (1948-67)', in *Party Politics in a Himalayan State*, op. cit., p. 56.

all the Praja Mandals were present. The elections were postponed to ensure the participation of more members. These elections which had a controversial start remained marred by controversy throughout. One of the consequences which followed was that the work of the Regional Council came to a halt when the President of the HHSRC resigned. Keeping in mind the interests of the Region and in order to continue the work of the Praja Mandals, six members of the Simla and Punjab Hill States organised themselves into a Himalayan Hills States Sub-Regional Conference (HHSSRC). The workers of this organisation formed an ad-hoc committee which was to carry on working and dealing directly with AISPC and this arrangement was to go on till the HHSRC was constituted afresh. This body was to function as subordinate to the Regional Council and the fact that it was not parallel to it was made clear. The Sub-Regional Council was able to keep a track of the happening in the Hill States. It passed resolutions which rejected the administration being run in certain States and also condemned the attempts on the part of some rulers to keep authority safe in their hands through a scheme of confederation of States. However, the Sub-Regional Council supported the merger of all the States in one union of the Himalayan Hill States on similar lines as the Deccan States Union where all the powers rested with the People's Assembly and the Ruler's Board's work would be only to act as Advisory Body to lead and guide people.

The Standing Committee of the AISPC nominated the President of the Sub-Regional Council to a committee which would formulate the scheme for the amalgamation of States and grouping them in a manner that they could be included in the administrative structure of free and federated India. Dr. Y.S. Parmar brought to the front the view-point of people for a united Himalayan State. In a letter which was sent to the Praja Mandals, it was stated that, 'Our States are geographically contiguous with a common historical tradition and cultural homogeneity and linguistic unity and its administration as a composite unit under one of the Princes elected by the concerned electorate for the time being, as constitutional head, will be able to raise the social and economic standards of the people and to maintain modern and progressive standards of administration'.²¹ The scheme of confederation which had been proposed by the Princes had been criticised as it did not take into account for taking people into

²¹Ibid., p. 61.

confidence but the Congress and the AISPC appreciated the initiative taken by Princes and the Regional Council welcomed this move. They maintained that power was to be delegated to the people. The scheme of confederation was also being regarded as a 'trap to deceive the hill people.' The President of the Regional council declared that all power had to be conferred to the people and any obstacle in the way would have to be removed. The Rulers were requested to rise to the occasion and to come forward as public leaders. The Praja Mandals were asked to strengthen their activities for the fulfilment of the demand for a union of Himalayan States.

At this juncture the leadership of the HHSSRC and the Praja Mandal workers divided into groups. One group demanded the total elimination of Princes and the other group wanted their presence as advisors. For the former group, the accession of these States to India as a separate collective unit was the dream. They were sure that the interests of the Hill people were safe in the hands of leaders like Nehru and Sardar Patel. The pro-merger group was led by Y.S. Parmar pressed for the need for the States to be integrated into a Province and administered by the Centre like Delhi. On the other hand the pro-confederation group accepted the ministerships under the scheme of responsible government which had been sponsored by the Princes, in their respective States. It also had a positive role in bringing the Princes together to form a Confederation. This group adopted a resolution, in which it welcomed the adoption of the resolution on objectives by the 'Constituent Assembly' of the Union of Simla Hill States, at a session which was held at Solan from 26th to 28th of January, 1948. The objectives included, '(i) Vesting sovereignty, all power and authority in the people (ii) Abolishing territorial boundaries between the constituent states and making provisions for administering the Union, as a single unitary State to be known as 'Himachal Pradesh'.' Princes, who had not shown any desire of joining the Union of Himachal Pradesh, were asked to do so at the earliest to avoid merger with East Punjab. The pro-merger group who denied any kind of association with the Princes took a decision to set up 'Himalayan Prant Provisional Government which would have its Headquarter at Simla. The Praja Mandals in various States were forcing the Princes to set up a responsible government. The Princes who did not have the support of the British government and were deprived of the sympathetic attitude which the 'States Department' of the Government of India had towards the people's movement, ultimately had to set up responsible governments in their respective States.

The Princes finally began to plan the setting up of a Confederation of Hill States. At the meeting in New Delhi in January 1948, the rulers of Simla Hill States passed a resolution which stated, 'After detailed considerations and prolonged deliberation, the rulers unanimously decided to constitute a Simla Hill States Union for the greater good of the Himalayan States people.' This move made the pro-merger feel that the realization that their elimination was near made the Princes to consider the alternative of annihilation and a responsible government. The Constitution making body of the Simla Hill States was to be vested with sovereign powers. The rulers were to pool their resources as it was believed that in the context of administrative standards accepted in modern times, the small states in the Simla Hills would not be able to run all departments of a government. Certain representatives of the people expressed suspicion regarding the proposals of the Princes. Sh. Thakur Sen Negi felt that the question of merger should also come within the powers of the Constitution making body. According to him the idea of carving out an independent union out of the Simla Hill States may not be practical due to the lack of resources. After the decision to name the new province, 'Himachal Pradesh', the resolution including aims and objectives and the fundamental principles on the basis of which the new province was to be created was passed by the Constitution making body. Another resolution which was passed made it evident that the source of power and authority was to be derived from people, boundaries of different states was to be abolished and brought together under one administrative unit and all the resources were to be pooled. Yet another resolution demanded the Princes to overhaul the administrative machinery taking help from popular leaders so that the new constitution could be enforced without any difficulty. The merger of more States was also aimed at.

The formation of Himachal Pradesh was announced at a public meeting at Solan which was attended by several Praja Mandal members and it was declared that Himachal Pradesh would be an integral part of India and every citizen of India would have equal rights and claims in this part of the country. The Constitution making body set a deadline for the preparation of the Constitution and the fixed date was 15th March, 1948. Some important workers of the Praja Mandals considered the Constitution making conference at Solan a conspiracy to prevent the people of Hills of the legitimate share in fruits of freedom which they had achieved after making a lot of sacrifices.

Dr. Y.S. Parmar was worried about the economic sufficiency of a unit which comprised of three lacs of people with 50 lacs gross income. He also had his doubts about the possibility of States like Sirmur, Mandi, Bilaspurans Suket joining the new confederation. He also argued that a responsible government in such small states was nothing but a mockery. The Standing Committee of the AISPC had always maintained that a responsible government under the guidance of a ruler only applied to larger states. It therefore asked the Princes to make constitutional arrangements where there would be amalgamation of small states.

Attempts made by the Princes to save themselves did not prove to be successful and in a Conference convened by the ministry of States on 2nd March, 1948, the Princes of the Hill States were convinced to merge their states with India.²² This declaration was welcomed by the HHSRC. However, it opposed the inclusion of Rajas in the Advisory Council of the centrally administered area and also the naming of the area as Himachal Pradesh. Its suggestion was the Himalayan Prant but Himachal Pradesh stuck as the new name. This development was deeply reflective of the growth of political consciousness and a sense of identity.

The birth of the state of Himachal Pradesh

Constitutionally, the state of Himachal Pradesh has experienced different waves. Its journey on the democratic road has been rocky and unsmooth. It started as the chief commissioner's province in 1948 and became a part C state when the constitution came into force on 26th January, 1950. The legislative powers in the context of the Part 'C' States were given to the Central Government under the provisions of the Government of Part 'C' States Act, 1950.²³ Through the Government of Part 'C' States Act, 1951 a partial democratic set-up was introduced in Himachal Pradesh wherein the Lt. Governor would be aided and advised by the Council of Ministers but both of them were under the control of the President of India.²⁴ Hence, the legislature given to Himachal was not federal. After the first general elections, a popular government was installed in the state in 1952 but the democratic process in the state

²²See Map III, Himachal Pradesh after the merger of Princely States in 1948.

²³V. Verma, 'Political Jubilation', in *The Emergence of Himachal Pradesh: A Survey of Constitutional Developments*, op. cit., p. 147.

²⁴M.S. Ahluwalia, 'Geography, Source Material and Political History', in *Social, Cultural and Economic History of Himachal Pradesh*, op. cit., p. 35.

received a jolt when the status of Himachal Pradesh was downgraded to that of a union territory without a legislative assembly.²⁵ In 1954, another princely state, Bilaspur was merged with Himachal.²⁶

In 1956, the majority report of the States Reorganisation Commission recommended its merger with Punjab but the union government decided to retain it as a separate entity. The Pradesh became a union territory on November 1, 1956. After a seven year long campaign, the Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly was restored on July 1, 1963. In 1962 a demand had been made in the Territorial Council by Smt. Satya Vati Dang, M.P. of the Territorial Council for a legislature and Ministry for Himachal Pradesh by moving a resolution which was unanimously passed and the struggle for the same had been intensified by the Himachal Pradesh Congress committee. The Government of Union Territory Act was passed and a popular Ministry was once again formed in Himachal Pradesh and the territorial Council was upgraded to the Vidhan Sabha on 1st July, 1963.²⁷ Three years later, in November 1966, the hilly areas of Punjab were transferred to Himachal. Areas such as Kulu, Kangra, Lahaul-Spiti, Nalagarh, Una and many other enclaves were merged with Himachal as a consequence of the linguistic reorganisation of Punjab.²⁸ As a result of this transfer the population and the territory of the state nearly doubled. This transfer also resulted in laying the path for elevating the status of Himachal Pradesh from a union territory to a state in 1971.

The newly transferred areas which made up for the 'new areas' were added in 1966. They were politically and economically quite different from the 'old areas'. Since the new areas had been a part of the Punjab province since its annexation in the British Empire during the mid-nineteenth century, they had limited but continuous experience of democratic institutions during the British rule and more so after 1947. Hence the

²⁵T.R., Sharma, 'Local Configurations and National Parties in Himachal Pradesh', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(34/35), 1999, pp. 2465-2471.

²⁶Ranbir Sharma, 'Politics of Himachal Pradesh', in T.R. Sharma, ed., *New Challenges of Politics in Indian States*, New Delhi, Uppal Publishing House, 1986, p. 223.

²⁷Y.S. Parmar, *Himachal Pradesh: Area and Language*, Directorate of Public Relations, Simla, Himachal Pradesh Government, 1970. p. 4.

²⁸ See Map IV, Himachal Pradesh: After the Reorganization of States.

level of political consciousness of the new areas was much higher than that of the old areas.²⁹

The transfer brought together two sets of people who were not devoid of prejudices against each other. Culturally, they could be said to be somewhat similar but there was a gap when it came to their political culture. The dissimilarity in political culture of these two areas and the prejudices also influenced the politics of the state.

The emergence and preservation of Himachal Pradesh was the outcome of a long and persistent but peaceful struggle. The movement from a Chief Commissioner's province, to a part C state, to a Union Territory and finally to the status of a full-fledged democratic and constituent Sixteenth state was also the result of a hard, persistent and peaceful fight. Hence, the present shape and status of Himachal Pradesh is the result of a long and continuing process of political development.

Looking at the historical context one can identify the problem of integration and identity which the state of Himachal Pradesh had to face in the process of political development. During the time of its birth on 15th April, 1948 as a part C state of the Indian Union, Himachal Pradesh was consisted of about 30 Shimla Hills princely states. Each of the former princely state had a different personality. The political structure of the princely states of Himachal Pradesh was basically undemocratic and the society was highly feudal and the economy was primitive. People had to survive in abject poverty and lived a life of servitude. They faced oppression, as a result of which they became too passive and weak to free themselves from these chains. Their interaction with the outside world was practically zero except through soldiers supplied for the defence of the British rule during and between the two world wars.

There were historical rivalries among the princely houses and these rivalries seeped through to the subjects of each state. Hence, for a Bilaspuri, or a Chambial or a Kangri, it was difficult to acquire a loyalty to a new political entity; Himachal Pradesh and identify himself as a 'Himachali'.³⁰ This process of identification with a new identity was not only difficult but it required a process of psychological integration

²⁹T.R. Sharma, 'Local Configurations and National Parties in Himachal Pradesh', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(34/35), 1999, pp. 2465-2471.

³⁰Ranbir Sharma, 'Politics of Himachal Pradesh', in T.R. Sharma, ed., *New Challenges of Politics in Indian States*, op. cit., p. 224.

and development of a sense of personal group identity. The political integration of different hill areas into Himachal Pradesh deepened the sense of respective distinct identity. The step-motherly treatment meted out to areas such as Mandi, Bilaspur, Kangra and so on by the state government or the political group in that region was reflective of the problems which arose due to the identity crisis (after the political integration). This historical content gives an idea of the reason for the success or failure of a political party in striking roots in the state. For example, one of the reasons why the Swatantra Party failed in Himachal Pradesh might be the dominance of the Raja of Bilaspur over it. The other princes might have abstained from joining this party from the fear of being overshadowed and overloaded by the Raja of Bilaspur.

Towards the 1930s and early 1940s the Praja Mandal movement began for the liberation of these states from the feudal princely order. However, the movement could not acquire a mass character and was limited to a very small minority of political activists. It was only after the integration of princely states into Himachal Pradesh and the holding of the first general elections in 1952, that the people of the Shimla hills got their first representative government.

Himachal and the Reorganization Commission

It was under the Resolution of the Government of India in the Ministry of Home Affairs (No. 53/69/53 Public Dated 29th Dec, 1953) that the States Reorganisation Commission was appointed. The Commission was to evaluate in an objective and dispassionate manner the question of reorganisation of the states of the India Union so that the well being of the people of each constituent union and the nation as a whole could be promoted.³¹

The States Reorganization Commission came into being in 1955. The motive of appointing this commission was the reorganization of states on linguistic basis. K.M. Pannikar and H.N. Kunzru, two of the members of the commission made a recommendation for the merger of Himachal into Punjab. The decision was taken on the account of many considerations which included; the backward economy of the

³¹R.K. Kaushal, 'Union Territory', in *Himachal Pradesh: Socio-Economic, Geographical and Historical Survey*, New Delhi, Reliance Publishing House, 1988, p. 90.

State, the paucity of resources, lack of trained personnel and the lack of public support for a separate identity.³²

Fazl Ali, the chairman of the commission, however differed in opinion with the majority. He was adamant about keeping the Pradesh a separate unit which would be under the direct control of the central government. One of the reasons for this stand was the law and order and communal situation in Punjab, two problems which luckily Himachal Pradesh was not facing. Fortunately, Himachal was saved from the horror of language problem which was troubling administrators in Punjab. He was also aware that the merger with Punjab would be locally unpopular and it would prove to be a jolt to the new found enthusiasm and eagerness of the exploited people of the state. Fazl Ali contended that Himachal Pradesh should continue 'under central guardianship and tutelage³³.' The recommendations which were made by the commission were characterized by innumerable contradictions. It seemed as if the members of the commission had failed to recognize the cultural, linguistic and psychological makeup of the Himachalis. The major focus of the commission was economic viability, a brain-child of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, in accordance with which they had suggested the merger of Himachal with Punjab.

The report of the States Reorganisation Commission came under attack from the Congress, the Communists and the other parties. The issue was vigorously debated in the Parliament and the Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha. The separate existence of Himachal was also advocated by the Punjabi Suba from Punjab and the Patiala and East Punjab States Union and the members of the Parliament, with the exception of Raja Anand Chand of Bilaspur.

The States Reorganization Bill which was drafted in respect of Himachal in 1956 stated that:³⁴

³²M.S. Ahluwalia, 'Geography, Source Material and Political History', in *Social, Cultural and Economic History of Himachal Pradesh*, op. cit., pp. 35-36.

³³R.K. Kaushal, 'Union Territory', in *Himachal Pradesh: Socio-Economic, Geographical and Historical Survey*, op. cit., p. 92.

³⁴M.S. Ahluwalia, 'Geography, Source Material and Political History', in *Social, Cultural and Economic History of Himachal Pradesh*, op. cit., p. 36.

‘The Government of India has taken note of the sentiment in Himachal Pradesh in favour of its continuation as a separate administrative unit for the time being... While ultimately Himachal Pradesh has to form a part of the Punjab, it may for the present be continued as a centrally administered unit.’

As was obvious, the Himachal Vidhan Sabha debated the Commission’s Bill and moved a resolution reiterating its stand that, ‘Himachal Pradesh be retained as a separate State with the integration of therewith of the enclaves and contiguous hilly areas and not be merged with Punjab’.³⁵ The Legislative Assembly was dissolved in November, 1956 and Himachal Pradesh was made a territory, it came under category ‘C’ state which came directly under the central administration. The legislative assembly was replaced by a Territorial Council, elections to which were to be held in 1957. According to the new administrative set-up, Himachal Pradesh became a Union Territory on November 1, 1956. Raja Bajrang Bahadur took the charge as the Lt. Governor of the State and Thakur Karam Singh was elected as the chairman of the Territorial Council.

Development of the Party System and Political Parties in Himachal Pradesh

It was only after independence that the development of political parties took place in Himachal Pradesh.³⁶ Soon after the emergence of the new province, the HHSRC asked the Praja Mandals to adopt resolutions through which the Praja Mandals would cease to exist and would get converted into Congress Committees. Such a step was to be taken not only to get recognition from the committees but also for the formation of the Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) for the Province.

Along with this development, a case was prepared and placed in front of the AICC which required creation of a separate Provincial Committee. It was stressed that people inhabiting the hills had a different culture from those of Punjab and absorption with Punjab was not acceptable. The Indian government also concerned about the economic and educational backwardness of the people and in order to safeguard the

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ranbir Sharma, ‘Politics of Himachal Pradesh’, in T.R. Sharma, ed., *New Challenges of Politics in Indian States*, op. cit., p. 236.
p. 230.

culture of these hills agreed to form a small province of Himachal Pradesh which was to be administered by the Centre. After it was realized that people of Himachal did not have anything in common with East Punjab there was a need of a separate Provincial Congress Committee for this new Province. It was to be at the earliest so that it could start functioning with the inauguration of the new Province on 15th of April, 1948. The Praja Mandals were to be treated as Congress Committees and its workers as Congress workers by the AICC on signing the Congress pledge. The Congress was also in favour of extending its activities to the States. The AICC passed a resolution according to which the 'Working Committee' was to arrange for the inclusion of around thirty members in the AICC from the Indian States and was supposed to adopt all measures so that the Congress organisation could be extended into the States. The Praja Mandals were to be recognised as Congress Committees. A States Sub-Committee was appointed by the Working committee which was to prepare reports on the organisation of Congress in the States. But before its report was submitted, a Provisional Provincial Congress Committee was nominated for Himachal Pradesh in May, 1948 by the Congress Working Committee. Members were also nominated to the Himachal Pradesh Congress Committee including Dr. Y.S. Parmar who was elected as the President and was vested with the power to nominate other office bearers. It can be said that the Congress Party in Himachal had been established on the infrastructure which had been already constructed by the Praja Mandal and hence it began its career as an electoral party.³⁷

The Bharatiya Jana Sangh

The Bharatiya Jana Sangh(BJS) which was formed on 27th May, 1951 started functioning in Himachal Pradesh only five months before it was converted to an all India party. The organisational growth of the party here was slow and arrested. This was because the party had failed to establish an organisational network in rural areas and there was no independent unit for Himachal Pradesh. The Himachal Pradesh unit was linked to the Punjab unit from 1951 to 1966. The reason behind it was that the party leadership did not support the existence of Himachal as a separate entity and it worked for its merger with Maha Punjab. It was only in 1961 that there was development of consciousness among Himachali party workers for retaining

³⁷ Ibid, p. 231.

Himachal Pradesh as a separate unit. The change in the attitude of local leaders made the leadership wake up to the fact that there was a need to pay attention to the organisational matters of the party in the region.

As a consequence a two-day convention, only of the Himachal Jana Sangh workers was organised at Simla. This resulted in setting up of an ad-hoc committee which consisted of nine representatives from districts of Himachal Pradesh and the focus was the organisational aspects of the Himachal Jana Sangh. The party took a step forward to loosen itself from the Punjab unit. The resolutions which it adopted reflected the political, social and economic aspirations of the Himachalis. This attempt did not lead to much success as the party went back to its old stance and supported the merger of Himachal with Punjab. Finally in one of the sessions a decision to was taken to 'reconstitute the Punjab Jan Sangh and set up three ad-hoc committees pending the formal reorganisation...' It was on 1st November 1966 that an independent state unit of Jan Sangh was set up.

The Communist Party

The Communist Party was established in 1952 at an all India level with the aim of fighting the British. In Himachal Pradesh, the development of the party can be traced to the Political Conference which was held in April, 1951 and was organised by the Kisan Sabha at Bhangroto (Mandi).³⁸ The purpose of this conference was to express the grievances of the tenants. The party workers got a chance to reach out to trade union after there was unrest among factory workers in some parts of the region. This also laid the ground for the development of a separate unit and the Himachal Pradesh Communist Party came into being in January, 1953. This unit like the Jan Sangh was accorded the Status of a district party and was placed under the Punjab Communist Party and remained under it for nine years (1953-1961) However, the Himachal Communist Party carved out a policy which was in line with the sentiments of the people of Himachal on the issue of retentions of the state as a separate entity.³⁹

In April 1964 when the Communist party split into Communist Party (R) and Communist Party (Marxist), it had a negative effect on the party in Himachal Pradesh.

³⁸Ranbir Sharma, 'Integradation of Praja Mandals (1945-48): Development of Political Parties (1948-67)', in *Party Politics in a Himalayan State*, op. cit., p. 77.

³⁹Ranbir Sharma, 'Politics of Himachal Pradesh', in T.R. Sharma, ed., *New Challenges of Politics in Indian States*, op. cit., p. 236.

But it recovered in 1967 when it managed to increase its membership and seats in the Vidhan Sabha. Still, its growth in Himachal Pradesh was uneven.

The Swatantra Party

The Swatantra Party was formed in 1959 on the 4th June. It was organised in Himachal Pradesh by Raja Anand Chand of Bilaspur on 29th February, 1960. He strongly opposed the Himachal Pradesh Congress and his 'Swatantra Morcha', also called the 'Raja Party' had defeated the Congress in the election to the Himachal Vidhan Sabha from Bilaspur in 1955. 'Thus, as far as the battle to hook in the princes (who definitely have residual electoral appeal) is concerned, the Swatantra Party in Himachal did succeed in catching a big fish. But it remained the only fish; the others kept away or drifted towards the Congress. Therefore as in the case of Rajasthan, the Party could not get big princely houses like Mandi, Suket, Chamba and Bushahar to support it. A few leaders of the Praja Mandal joined the Swatantra Party but this did not make much impact. It banked on Himachal Samyukta Swatantra Morcha which had merged with Swatantra party, as its main base. The Party faced organisational difficulty because of the aristocratic attitude it had. The leadership of the Party tried to introduce feudal elements in the Party. It was believed to be a party which belonged to the Princes and big industrialists. The Party set up a Regional Committee on ad-hoc basis in its meeting. The Committee decided to set up units of the Party in Mandi, Chamba, Sunder Nagar, Bilaspur, Pampur, Solan and Nahan. But other than Bilaspur and Chamba did not do well in any other region and hence continued to remain a weak party. The founder of the Swatantra Party resigned in order to join the Congress and the Party withered away.

Praja Socialist Party

The Congress Socialist party which came into being in 1934 had quit its parent organisation, The Congress in 1948. This Party then joined hands with the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (KMPP) of Acharya Kriplani in 1952 and gave rise to the Praja Socialist Party (PSP). Since the members of PSP were those who had been with the Indian National Congress for a long time, it found it difficult to establish its own separate identity. An ad-hoc committee was formed by the PSP in 1952 (at the time when the KMPP and Socialist Party merged) in order to regularise the work of the Party. The members of the Committee could not do a very good job as they indulged

in accusations and the blame game, giving the Party an unsteady start. A few units were set up at Mandi, Nahan, Solan and Bilaspur but still there was not much progress. However, the PSP did hold some conventions and conferences where it emphasised the merger of the hill areas of Kangra, Una Tehsil of Hoshiarpur District, Kandaghat and Nalagarh of PEPSU and Tehri Garwhal of U.P. and some other adjoining areas with Himachal Pradesh. It also held a political conference to condemn the recommendations of the States Reorganisation Commission regarding Himachal Pradesh. The PSP shared similar views with the Congress on many social and economic issues and this became a hurdle for it in establishing a separate identity. In the 1957 elections to the Himachal Pradesh Territorial Council the PSP could manage just one seat and after a few years a group of members joined the Congress. The remaining faction merged with the Socialist Party led by Ram ManoharLohia and formed a unit of the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP) in 1964. In 1965 the PSP broke away from the PSP.

Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF)

The Scheduled Castes Federation was formed by B.R. Ambedkar in 1932 and a unit of the Party was set up in 1950 in Himachal Pradesh. Ram Dass was its General Secretary. The party had made nine candidates stand for the Vidhan Sabha elections in 1951 and had secured two seats. It was a Party purely based on caste lines but had not found a complimenting attitude in Himachal Pradesh. Ram Dass one of its important workers wanted to join the Congress and the party came under the Communist influence. The name of the Party was changed to Republican Party. The Party was absent in the 1962, 1967 and 1972 elections for the Vidhan Sabha.

Vishal Himachal Samiti

The main aim of the Samiti was the creation of Vishal Himachal in 1955. It included representatives from all parties excluding the Jana Sangh. The Congress left the Samiti and it formed its separate 'Negotiation Committee' to achieve its objective. Even though parties like the PSP, CPI, Swatantra Party and the SCF did carry on their association with the Samiti, it could not be established as a regular political party. An organisational structure of the Samiti could not be established as the parties associated

with it did not show much enthusiasm. Once Vishal Himachal turned into a reality, the Samiti ceased to exist on 1st November, 1966.⁴⁰

Lok Raj Samiti (Party)

The Lok Raj Samiti was formed right before the 1967 elections by some former Congressmen, former socialists and some retired government officials. It did not possess any constitution or programme and did not have a definite organisation. Its propaganda included opposition to the grant of statehood to Himachal Pradesh and the reduction of the size of the Congress Ministry in the State. After Himachal Pradesh was granted statehood, its existence was put to question and it did not survive after the 1972 elections⁴¹.

Regional Divide and Political Party

As said earlier the transfer of new areas which resulted in distinction between the political cultures of the two areas of the state influenced its politics as well. It was also characterised by other dimensions which affected the state politics. The new areas were on the periphery of Punjab not only in the physical sense but also in the politico-economic sense. After the merger these areas, according to their leadership, came to the centre stage. But it was soon realised that there was not enough political space which was available to these areas in the new set-up. This gave rise to the development of some tension between the political leadership of the two areas. What emerged were different and divergent perspectives and competing political aspirations. The leadership of the new areas took pride and boasted about its instrumental role in the freedom movement. And this was used as a justification for its desire for a domineering role in the politics of the state. On the other hand, the leadership of the old areas tried to capitalize on its entrenched position in the state's power structure and used this to keep the leadership of the new areas at bay. Consequently this gave rise to a feeling of 'relative deprivation' in the new areas. The

⁴⁰Ranbir Sharma, 'Integradation of Praja Mandals (1945-48): Development of Political Parties (1948-67)', in *Party Politics in a Himalayan State*, op. cit., p. 84.

⁴¹Ranbir Sharma, 'Politics of Himachal Pradesh', in T.R. Sharma, ed., *New Challenges of Politics in Indian States*, op. cit., p. 235.

result of such events was that the politics of the state came to be projected along the 'old-new' divide.⁴²

The 'old-new' divide which had become an important characteristic of the state was furthered by the economic factor. Himachal Pradesh comprises of two different agro-climatic zones; the horticultural and the agricultural. There is not much in common between the two. On one hand the new areas are primarily agricultural; on the other the old areas predominantly have an extensive horticultural belt.

The agricultural zone is suited only for subsistence farming. This is because of reasons of terrain and topography. Production in the horticulture belt is mainly for the market. The former is not able to generate much surplus and is more labour intensive while the latter produces in considerable and is therefore capital intensive. These differences in the two zones make their infrastructural needs quite different. The two economies have different priorities and generally are in competition for state patronage and resources. Over a period of time, the two economies have created 'sharp economic differentials between the two regions.' As a result, the horticultural belt has progressed as compared to the agricultural belt which has lagged behind. The gap between the two has widened as agriculture, in comparison to horticulture is not as remunerative. The economic cleavage of the horticultural and agricultural belts has contributed in reinforcing the old-new divide.

As oppose to the old-new divide, one cannot point out an urban-rural cleavage in Himachal Pradesh. This is because the state of Himachal Pradesh is predominantly a rural state. Interestingly it is also very hard to find a communal divide in the state. The reason being, that 96 per cent comprises of Hindus while the rest 4 per cent consists of Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists and others. It can be said that on the communal plane Himachal draws a distinction from the rest of the country.

As mentioned above Himachal is broadly divided into the agricultural region and the horticultural region. Kangra, Hamirpur, Una, Bilaspur and the lower valleys of the

⁴²T.R. Sharma, 'Local Configurations and National Parties in Himachal Pradesh', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(34/35), 1999, pp. 2465-2471.

district of Mandi (three constituencies of Bahl, Sunder Nagar and Karsog,) lie in the agricultural region. And the districts of Sirmour, Solan, Shimla, Kulu, Chamba and the upper reaches of the district of Mandi, fall within the horticultural region.⁴³

The pattern of land holdings in these two regions is quite different. In the agricultural region, the size of land holdings is more or less, small. But in constituencies like, Palampur and Nurpur where there are tea gardens and orchards, the size of the holdings is comparatively very large. The agriculture farms are smaller in size and they are owned individually, either by petty farmers or by absentee land owners. The former draw subsistence from the little yield of their farms and do not have any other source of income except for maybe daily casual labour. They comprise of the lower most stratum of the society. After the land legislation was implemented, their condition, however, became slightly better. As for the small petty absentee land owners who give their lands on the basis of share cropping to the petty farmers are also involved in various other types of small jobs. They constitute the middle stratum of the society. The lower valleys of the state are dominated by these two classes-middle and the lower. The upper exists too but its strength is comparatively less significant.

In the horticulture region, the class structure is different. The traditional Thakurs or the affluent families of the region own the large orchards. They are usually rich and earn handsomely throughout the year. Apart from them, there is a class of landless rural poor, who mostly work in the homes of the rich or at their orchards. The nature of land holdings and the pattern of land use do not facilitate the existence of a middle class. The region is therefore dominated by the upper class in economic terms and by the lower class, numerically.

The pattern of land use in the respective area and the economic composition arising out of that is closely linked and correlated to the voting pattern of the people of these areas. It has been observed that the upper and lower-most classes mostly vote for the Congress. This is so because the former need support for preserving their status quo

⁴³S. Bhatnagar, 'Electoral Politics of Himachal Pradesh: A study of its Correlation with the Nature of Land Use', in T.R. Sharma, ed., *New Challenges of Politics in Indian States*, p. 212.

and the latter sees hope in the programmes of the party which would help in the betterment of their conditions.

The Congress had fully entrenched itself in the horticulture region. This is evident from the elections of 1982 and 1985 where the Congress won 21 seats. Regarding the agricultural region, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had entrenched itself in 17 out of the 33 constituencies. It should be noted that in the agricultural region there are 2 constituencies, namely, Palampur and Nurpur which despite of having ideal conditions for agriculture witnessed the conversion of many agriculture farms into mango, litchi and citrus orchards. There already existed a number of tea plantations in Palampur. There was a fast moving shift in the land-use from agriculture to horticulture which explained why the Congress had been winning in these regions. A similar kind of trend was seen in the district of Hamirpur where the BJP had a stronghold. Its support base in this district eroded due to the choice of the people to shift to the horticulture industry.

The Caste Cleavage

Other than the old-new, agricultural-horticultural and tribal-nontribal divides, another cleavage which is reflected in the politics of the state is based on caste. But here too the caste character of Himachal is quite different from other states. As R.D. Sharma puts it, 'the politics of Himachal Pradesh is essentially a struggle for power between the two dominant castes-Rajputs and Brahmins'.⁴⁴

The majority of the state's population is made up of the two upper castes, the Rajputs and the Brahmins. Rajputs are the dominant caste, numerically as well as otherwise. The middle castes and the OBCs who play an instrumental role in the politics of many other states, are as good as non-existent in the politics of the 'apple state'. There is a small Ghirath community among the OBCs which is concentrated in Nagrota which does have some political importance but its overall influence in the politics of the state is negligible. Among the middle castes, the Khatri community has some political presence in Kangra and Chamba. But, the total population of the OBCs and middle

⁴⁴R.D. Sharma, 'Politics of an Apple State: Himachal Pradesh', *South Asia Politics*, 2(4), 2003, pp. 30-45.

castes if taken together would only come to 15 per cent. The scheduled castes and scheduled tribes make up for nearly 30 per cent of the population. Within each upper caste there is present a hierarchy of sub-castes. Himachal has not been touched by the sort of de-Sanskritisation which has affected other states, in a significant manner. However, demands have been made by the Gaddies of new areas and the Gujjars to get a scheduled tribe status. In conclusion, the struggle for power based on the lines caste has not been there in Himachal as it has been in other states. As mentioned earlier, whatever little struggle (on the basis of caste) exists is seen between the two upper-castes (Rajputs and Brahmins). It needs to be noticed that the Rajputs are at a definite advantage in the old areas. This is so because historically, they have been at a ruling position in the princely order. Khattris, is the other caste group which is in an advantageous position, relatively. Their economic standing has helped them in achieving a strong foothold in the politics of the state.

The following table (**Table 1.1**) gives a slight idea about the demographic composition in Himachal Pradesh:⁴⁵

Table 1.1: Share of Major Castes and Communities in the Population of Himachal Pradesh		
Name (1)	Per Cent Share (2)	Total (3)
Upper Caste		56.0
	Rajputs	28.0
	Brahmins	20.0
	Vaishyas/Khatris	8.0
OBC		10.5
	Ghiraths	6.5
	Gujjars	1.5
	Others	2.5
Scheduled Castes		25.3
	Chamars	15.0
	Balmikies	3.0
	Others	7.3
Scheduled Tribes		4.2
	Kinnaurs	1.7
	Lahaulas	1.0
	Gaddies/Pangwals	1.5
Muslims		1.7
Sikhs		1.0
Buddhists and others		1.3

Note: The above figures for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and for Religious communities are from Census of India 1991. Caste-wise break-up within different groups are not officially available.

Source:⁴¹ T.R. Sharma, Journal of Indian School of Political Economy.

⁴⁵T.R. Sharma., 'Himachal Pradesh: Two Party Competition in a Small State', *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy*, 15(1-2), 2003, pp. 173-188.

Dominant Castes in Himachal: The Tussle for Power between the Rajputs and Brahmins

As the politics of the state of Himachal Pradesh has been affected by the tug of war between the two dominant castes, it is pertinent to provide a background to how it all started.

The fight took off from the days of Pt. Padam Dev and Dr. Y.S. Parmar and was encouraged by the struggle between Shanta Kumar and Thakur Jagdev Chand. The same power struggle was carried on between Pt. Sukh Ram and Vir Bhadra Singh and Shanta Kumar – a Brahmin – and Prem Kumar Dhumal – a Rajput. But a strange phenomenon was witnessed in the Congress where the power centres shifted from Rajputs versus Brahmins to Rajputs versus Rajputs. Vir Bhadra Singh fought a deadly political battle against Vidya Stokes (Rajput) from the same district, Shimla.⁴⁶

In the BJP, the Brahmins had a slightly upper hand in the organization and also in the government when Dhumal entered the scenario and found none other than new comers, youth leaders J.P. Nadda and Praveen Sharma, who were defeated due to 'Rajput mechinations' within the party. In the ruling Congress (I) too, Brahmins were cut to size by the Rajput strongmen. Sukh Ram's political decisions had rooted out any possible threat which the Rajputs ascendancy (in HP politics) had from the Brahmins.

R. D. Sharma writes that the electoral battles in Himachal Pradesh were fought on ideological basis rather than on the basis of caste but after the elections, the struggle for Chief Ministership was fought by the representative of the two dominant castes.

Even if we look at the Himachal Pradesh leadership in the context of the cabinet, the dominance of the Rajputs and Brahmins becomes evident. The Scheduled Castes or tribes were not represented in the first two council of ministers (1952-57; 1963-67), neither did they occupy the important post of the President or the General Secretary of the Congress, Communist or Jana Sangh Party in the legislative assembly. It was only

⁴⁶R.D. Sharma, 'Politics of an Apple State: Himachal Pradesh', *South Asia Politics*, 2(4), 2003, pp. 30-45.

because of the constitutional provision that they occupied one third of the total seats.⁴⁷ Till 1967, not one Dalit MLA or MLC found place in the council of ministers. After the first ministry was set-up (1967) after the transfer of hilly areas of Punjab to Himachal Pradesh two Dalits were appointed as Deputy Ministers. And in 1972 one Dalit became Minister of State. In 1977 when the first non-Congress government was formed a Dalit, Bachhiter Singh became a Cabinet Minister.⁴⁸

This reflected that the upper classes and those who belonged to the better off sections of the society had greater access to the position of power in the party and the government. The following table (**Table 1.2**) represents this trend:

Table 1.2: Himachal Pradesh Leadership (Cabinet) Social Background (1948-72)					
	Chief Commissioner's Advisory Council 1948-51	First Ministry 1952-57	Second Ministry 1963-67	Third Ministry 1967-72	Fourth Ministry 1972-
Brahmin	1	2	-	4	2
Rajput	4	1	3	6	3
Khatri/Bania/Ghirt	4	-	-	1	3
Scheduled Caste/ Scheduled Tribe	-	-	-	3	1
Total	9	3	3	14	9

Note: Two Parliamentary Secretaries were added in 1970.

Source:⁴⁹ Ranbir Sharma, *The Indian Journal of Political Science*.

It needs to be noted that the Dalits, despite their numerical strength continue to be on the edges of the politics of Himachal Pradesh. The political space assigned to them in

⁴⁷Ranbir Sharma, 'Recruitment and Styles of Democratic Leadership: A Case Study of Himachal Pradesh', *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 35(3), 1947, pp. 257-276.

⁴⁸T.R. Sharma, 'Lack of Dalit Mobilisation in Himachal Pradesh', in M.P. Dube and Munni Padalia, eds., *Decentralisation and Panchayati Raj in India*, New Delhi, Anamika Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd., 2002, p. 136.

⁴⁹Ranbir Sharma, 'Recruitment and Styles of Democratic Leadership: A Case Study of Himachal Pradesh', *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 35(3), 1947, pp. 257-276.

the political scenario of the state is not in tune with their numbers. There had been no strong effort made to mobilize the Dalits. The Scheduled Castes Federation which appeared in the State in the first general elections in 1952 had won seats in the 36 member Vidhan Sabha polling 10097 votes but in the 1957 general elections it could not increase its number of votes. After the rise of the rightist Swatantra Party, its votes declined to 2527 in 1962 elections and it could not win any seat. This trend was seen in the 1967 general elections as well where it polled only 3806 votes despite the fact that the size of the electorate increased by then (doubled due to the transfer of Kangra and other areas from Punjab because of the linguistic reorganization). There was no political organization of the Dalits, example, the BSP, which could emerge in the State at that time. No organization of Dalit students or youth or women or employees existed in the State. Now in some university campuses in Chandigarh and Shimla, tribal students had started becoming conscious of their identity.⁵⁰

⁵⁰T.R. Sharma, 'Lack of Dalit Mobilisation in Himachal Pradesh', in M.P. Dube and Munni Padalia, eds., *Decentralisation and Panchayati Raj in India*, op. cit., p. 135.

This chapter talks about the dominance of the Congress party in Himachal Pradesh right from the time when the right to vote was extended to all the adults in 1952 till the elections to the Vidhan Sabha of Himachal Pradesh in 1985. It was in 1967 that the two-party system started emerging in the state. This development along with an emphasis on the two main parties, the Congress and the Bhartiya Janata Party has been systematically traced. The politics of the state has been divided into three phases; 1952 to 1977, 1977 to 1982 and 1982 to 1985.

‘Party is organized opinion’, argued Disraeli,¹ an idea which is very similar to that of Benjamin Constant who said, ‘A party is a group of men professing the same political doctrine’.² The Political Party can be called a creature of modern and modernizing political systems. Whether we talk of democracies or totalitarian regimes, ‘the political party in one form or the other is omnipresent’.³ The political party, wherever it has emerged performs certain common functions in a variety of political systems at different stages of social, political and economic development. The organization known as the political party, either existing in a free society or under a totalitarian regime has to organize public opinion and in turn communicate demands to the centre of governmental power and decision. The party has to make its followers understand the meaning and concept of the broader community even if its aim is to modify deeply or destroy the broader community and replace it with something else. Whether in a democracy or in an undemocratic state or in a totalitarian state, the party is involved in ‘political recruitment- the selection of the political leadership in whose hands power and decisions will in large measure reside’.⁴

Political party emerges when the activities of a political system reach a certain level of complexity, or when the idea that the mass public should participate or be controlled is included in the notion of political power. In the same way as bureaucracy

¹Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*, Translated by Barbara and Robert North, London, Methuen and Co Ltd, 1954, p. V.

²Ibid, p. xiv.

³Joseph LaPalombara and Myron Weiner, ed., *Political Parties and Political Development*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966, p. 3.

⁴Ibid., p. 3.

emerged when public administration could not be properly handled by the prince's household, the political party came into being when the tasks of recruiting political leadership and formulating public could no longer be taken care of by a small group of men unconcerned with public sentiments.

A political party coming into existence implies that the masses must be taken into account by the political elite, either because of the commitment to the idea that the masses have the right to participate in order to determine public policy or the selection of political leadership or 'out of the realization that even a rigidly dictatorial elite must find the organizational means of assuring stable conformance and control'.⁵

Political parties are crucial to the working of modern politics. Political parties become means for the expression of National consensus on basic issues. They are also a reflection of divisions and dissensions, crisis and conflicts in a body-politic. In this process, political parties become practicable vehicles of institutionalizing the loyalty and support of the mass of citizens.

Each political party has its own 'local traditions' and consciously or unconsciously represents a 'philosophical past'. A political party is also known to give representation to the different 'cultural needs' of its members.

Party Politics in Himachal Pradesh: Congress Hegemony (1952-1977)

This phase saw the dominance of the Congress Party over the electoral scene of Himachal Pradesh but this Congress system experienced breaks in 1967 and 1977 and the two-party system struck a chord in the state. Himachal Pradesh with this development started witnessing a different pattern of party politics and the evolution of different dynamics (of party politics).

Talking about the party system in Himachal Pradesh, Ranbir Sharma has designated it as a dominant party system. He provided a rough quantitative formula to determine whether a party system is a dominant party system or not. The criterion was, if a party obtains about 55 per cent of seats but less than 90 per cent, it would be a dominant

⁵Ibid, p. 4

party and the party system could be characterized as a dominant party system.⁶ When we observe the electoral data of Himachal from the year 1952 till 1985, the fact that the politics of the state was commanded by the Congress emerges clearly. The following tables depict the trend which is being discussed here:

Table 2.1: House of the People 1st General Elections – 1952 (Number and Percentage of Valid Votes Secured by Political Parties)						
Total Valid Votes	Congress	Socialist Party	K.M.P.P.	Jana Sangh	S.C.F.	Independent
2,23,189	1,17,036 (52.4%)	16,780 (7.5%)	27,368 (12.3%)	23,918 (10.7%)	18,988 (8.4%)	19,099 (8.5%)

Source: A Statistical Analysis of General Elections to the House of the People/State Legislative Assembly 1977 (with detailed results of General Election 1952-1972).

Table 2.2: House of the People 2nd General Elections – 1957 (Number and Percentage of Valid Votes Secured by Political Parties)				
Total Valid Votes	Congress	P.S.P.	Communist	Other Parties and Independents
3,62,641	1,17,591 (47.30%)	42,838 (11.80%)	9,912 (2.80%)	1,38,300 (38.10%)

Source: A Statistical Analysis of General Elections to the House of the People/State Legislative Assembly 1977 (with detailed results of General Election 1952-1972).

Table 2.3: House of the People 3rd General Elections – 1962 (Number and Percentage of Valid Votes Secured by Political Parties)					
Total Valid Votes	Congress	Swatantra	Jana Sangh	Republican	Independents
2,42,908	1,66,749 (68.65%)	31,049 (12.78%)	10,896 (4.49%)	15,941 (6.56%)	18,273 (7.52%)

Source: A Statistical Analysis of General Elections to the House of the People/State Legislative Assembly 1977 (with detailed results of General Election 1952-1972).

Before we move on to the next table which presents the data for the elections to the Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha in 1967, it is important to talk about the turning point in the electoral history of the state which included the beginning of the appearance of the **two-party system**. The fourth general elections, going by its results

⁶Ranbir Sharma, 'Politics of Himachal Pradesh', in T.R. Sharma ed., *New Challenges of Politics in Indian States*, New Delhi, Uppal publishing House, 1986, p. 228.

can be said to be the first truly contested election not only in this state but the whole of India.⁷ For the very first time, the Jana Sangh put up a striking performance. It did not win any seat to the Lok Sabha but polled 19.1 per cent vote. This was higher than the percentage of votes polled by any other political party apart from the Congress. Jana Sangh's performance was even better in the Vidhan Sabha elections. It was able to capture seven seats in a house of 68 with just 13.9 per cent vote. Interestingly and incidentally, this was the first election after the transfer of the new areas and the five out of the seven seats won by the party were from these new areas. The position of the Jana Sangh can be seen in **Table 4**.

Table 2.4: Himachal Pradesh: Party-wise Distribution of Percent Votes Polled, Candidates Fielded, Elected, and Lost Deposits (Year of Election - 1967)										
	INC INCI	CPI	CPM	SSP	PSP	BJS	SWA	RPI	IND	Total
Votes Polled (%)	42.2	2.9	0.4	0.1	*	13.9	1.9	0.5	38.1	100
Candidates	60	11	6	1	2	33	5	4	147	269
Elected	34	2	-	-	-	7	1	-	16	60
Elected by 50%	16	1	-	-	-	5	-	-	9	31
Lost Deposit	2	7	6	1	2	13	1	4	103	139
No. of seats = 60										
*Percentage of votes polled by the party is less than 0.1%										

Source: V.B. Singh and Shankar Bose- State election in India, Data Handbook on Vidhan Sabha Elections, 1952-85, Vol. I.

The Jana Sangh, after 1967, was successful in consolidating its position and the two-party system announced its arrival in Himachal.⁸ There have been no simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha since 1967. Vidhan Sabha elections have been held at an interval after the parliamentary elections. And important to note is that at this juncture the result of the parliamentary elections had considerably influenced the outcome of the Vidhan Sabha elections. This was because Himachal Pradesh, a small state relied heavily on the assistance of the central

⁷K.D. Gupta, 'Himachal Pradesh: Politics of Split Level Modernisation', in Iqbal Narain, ed., *State Politics in India*, Meerut, Meenakshi Prakashan, 1976, p. 122.

⁸T.R. Sharma, 'Himachal Pradesh: Two Part Competition in a Small State', *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy*, 15(1&2), 2003, pp. 173-188.

government. It can be said that the general tendency of the electorate was to bring that party in power in the state which is the ruling party in the centre.

The 1972 elections to the Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha followed after 1971 Lok Sabha election in the country. In these elections a strong pro-Congress wave was seen. Himachal had been accorded statehood in January 1971. As a consequence of this the Congress polled a remarkable 75.5 per cent vote. The size of Jana Sangh's vote at this time went down to 10.6 per cent. The upsurge in Congress's popularity was due to its India's role in the liberation of Bangladesh in late 1971. In 1972 Vidhan Sabha poll, the vote share of the Jana Sangh reduced further and came down to 7.7 per cent. However, it was able to win five seats in the assembly, including the three seats which belonged to the new areas and which it had won in 1967. By 1972 the Jana Sangh succeeded in establishing a strong presence in some assembly segments and hence began to acquire a foothold in the Congress system. But it needs to be noted that the party was not in a position to destabilize the Congress or to displace it from its position. If it was not for the emergency, the Congress could have gone a long way in the state of Himachal Pradesh. The result of the 1972 elections can be seen in **Table 2.5**.

Table 2.5: Himachal Pradesh: Party-wise Distribution of Percent Votes Polled, Candidates Fielded, Elected and Lost Deposits (Year of Election - 1972)									
	INC INCI	NCO	CPI	CPM	SOC	BJS	State Parties	IND	Total
Votes Polled (%)	53.2	2.1	2.4	1.1	0.1	7.7	5.0	28.3	99.9
Candidates	68	18	10	4	2	31	16	148	297
Elected	53	-	-	1	-	5	2	7	68
Elected by 50%	38	-	-	1	-	1	1	3	44
Lost Deposit	2	14	5	3	2	21	9	109	165
No. of seats = 68									

Source: V.B. Singh and Shankar Bose - State election in India, Data Handbook on Vidhan Sabha Elections, 1952-85, Vol. I.

Congress Loses Monopoly: Emergence of the Janata Party (1977-82)

The 1977 elections in Himachal Pradesh proved to be a shock for the Congress party as was the case in the rest of North India. The opening of the path to a two-party system was witnessed in the elections post the emergency. The Congress in Himachal saw its vote falling to a 38.6 per cent, its lowest till date.⁹ The party lost all the Lok Sabha seats to the Janata party. The Vidhan Sabha elections which were held a few months later saw the dismissal of the Congress. It won only nine seats in a house of 68 (Refer to table 6). The Janata party grabbed a majority after winning 53 seats. The Janata Sangh faction dominated the Janata party in Himachal Pradesh. Constituents like the Congress (O) and the Congress For Democracy were only minor partners.¹⁰ As a consequence, Shanta Kumar of the erstwhile Jana Sangh became the Chief Minister. But, his election as the leader of the Janata legislative party did not happen without a contest. There was bitterness between the Jana Sangh and the non-Jana Sangh factions of the party due to this contest. The Janata Party, henceforth, remained highly faction-ridden and the chief minister was repeatedly forced to seek a vote of confidence.

The period of Janata rule, that is the two years were pretty eventful, politically. This period was used by the Jana Sangh to consolidate its support base and this was done at the cost of the other constituents of the alliance. The strategy which it adopted involved portraying itself as the dispenser of justice to the new areas. The argument provided by them to support this action was that the new areas had suffered from discrimination by the Congress governments. The second part of the strategy consisted of including all the important members of the Jana Sangh in the council of ministers and assigning them important portfolios. On the other hand, only the not-so important members of the non-Jana Sangh components found places in ministry and were accorded with less significant departments.

The Janata Party finally split up in 1979 due to internal dissensions. Consequently, the BJP walked away with most of the organizational network in the state. But it was not able to retain more than 23 of the 53 party legislators and was therefore reduced to a

⁹T.R Sharma, 'Local Configuration and National Parties in Himachal Pradesh', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(34/35), 1999, pp. 2465-2471.

¹⁰T.R. Sharma, 'Himachal Pradesh: Two Party Competition in a Small State', *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy*, 15(1&2), 2003, pp. 173-188.

minority in the assembly. In the mid-term polls to the Lok Sabha, the Congress gained all four seats back with 52.1 per cent votes. However it did not mean the return of the Congress system. The newly emerged 'BJP' was able to poll 35.4 per cent votes. This characterized a turning point in the history of the party system. With the Congress polling 52.1 per cent vote, the two main political parties accounted for 88.5 per cent of the votes being polled. 'A two-party system had arrived in Himachal Pradesh'.¹¹

The Janata Party's performance was extremely poor and its vote share was just 5.3 per cent. The BJP was able to capture the Janata Party's electoral base as it did in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. But the failure of the BJP to win any seat to the Lok Sabha in the parliamentary elections from the state, along with the return of Indira Gandhi to power in the Centre created problems in state politics and the Shanta Kumar government had to bow out. Eventually, the Congress was successful in forming its government and from merely nine seats that it had originally acquired, it managed to secure a majority by admitting large number of Janata Party legislators, especially those belonging to the non-Jana Sangh constituents. The Congress managed to rule the state for the next two years successfully without having to dissolve the assembly (which is what happened in most other north Indian states).

Table 2.6: Himachal Pradesh: Party-wise Distribution of Percent Votes Polled, Candidates Fielded, Elected, and Lost Deposits (Year of Election - 1977)						
	INC INCI	CPI	CPM	JNP	IND	Total
Votes Polled (%)	27.7	2.4	0.2	49.0	20.7	100
Candidates	57	8	3	68	194	330
Elected	9	-	-	53	6	68
Elected by 50%	5	-	-	34	2	41
Lost Deposit	7	4	3	2	167	183
Seats Won	9	-	-	53	6	68
No. of seats = 68						

Source: V.B. Singh and Shankar Bose - State election in India, Data Handbook on Vidhan Sabha Elections, 1952-85, Vol. I.

A Statistical Analysis of General Elections to House of the People/State Legislative Assembly, 1977 (with detailed results of General Elections 1952 to 1972), Election Department, Government of Himachal Pradesh.

¹¹Ibid.

In 1982, when the Vidhan Sabha elections were held, the Congress grabbed 31 seats and BJP was able to bag 29. Even though it was short of a clear majority, the Congress formed the government taking the help of independents. The BJP's vote share was 35.2 per cent while the Congress's vote share was 42.5 per cent. As for the Janata Party, it was almost wiped out and was able to win only two seats and a demeaning 4.8 per cent votes. It is important to note the fact that 20 out of the 29 seats won by the BJP were from the new areas. Whereas only 10 out of the 31 seats won by the Congress, belonged to the new areas. The remaining 21 seats belonged to the old areas. 'The thin regional cracks that appeared in 1972 had now become a clear political division'.

Restoration of Congress Dominance (1982-1985)

This phase witnessed the restoration of Congress hegemony but the Bharatiya Janata Party could not be ignored and the two-party system could not be taken for granted.

The Vidhan Sabha elections of 1982 brought to the front, very clearly, the fact that the BJP was able to make its argument work, that is, the new areas had been receiving step-motherly treatment and suffering discrimination at the hands of the Congress government and it was only BJP which could safeguard the legitimate interests of this region.

The Lok Sabha elections of 1984 and the Vidhan Sabha elections of 1985 were held after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. There was a strong wave of sympathy in favour of the Congress. As a result, in the parliamentary polls, the Congress Party's vote in the state swelled to 67.6 per cent. On the other hand, the BJP's vote fell to 23.3 per cent. Fortunately it recovered some of the ground it had lost in the Vidhan Sabha elections which took place shortly after the Lok Sabha polls. Its vote share went up to 30.6 per cent, while the Congress's share fell to 55.4 per cent. Still, it was enough to ensure a massive majority for the Congress. It won 58 seats which was an all-time high. The BJP was able to win just seven seats. 30 out of the 31 seats which the Congress had won in 1982 were retained by it. Not only that, it also took away the 22 constituencies where the BJP had won in 1982. It looked as if the Congress would recover the loss it had faced, to the BJP in 1977 and 1982 but the 'structure of the competition had already changed. Every electoral cycle was now accompanied by a change in state government. The following tables represent the performance of both

the parties in the elections to the Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha in 1982 and 1985, respectively:

Table 2.7: Himachal Pradesh: Party-wise Distribution of Percent Votes Polled, Candidates Fielded, Elected, and Lost Deposits (Year of Election - 1982)								
	INC INC I	CPI	CPM	BJP	JNP	LKD	IND	Total
Votes Polled (%)	42.5	1.7	0.2	35.2	4.8	1.5	14.2	100.1
Candidates	67	20	3	67	50	30	204	441
Elected	31	-	-	29	2	-	6	68
Elected by 50%	18	-	-	13	1	-	1	33
Lost Deposit	1	18	3	11	44	28	184	289
Seats Won	31	-	-	29	2	-	6	68
No. of seats = 68								

Source: V.B. Singh and Shankar Bose- State election in India, Data Handbook on Vidhan Sabha Elections, 1952-85, Vol. I

Report on State Legislative Assembly: General Elections – 1982, Election Department, Government of Himachal Pradesh.

Table 2.8: Himachal Pradesh: Party-wise Distribution of Percent Votes Polled, Candidates Fielded, Elected, and Lost Deposits (Year of Election - 1985)								
	INC INC I	CPI	CPM	BJP	JNP	LKD	IND	Total
Votes Polled (%)	55.5	1.6	0.5	30.6	2.1	1.4	8.3	100
Candidates	68	16	7	57	7	3	136	294
Elected	58	-	-	7	-	1	2	68
Elected by 50%	45	-	-	5	-	1	1	52
Lost Deposit	-	14	6	8	4	-	127	159
Seats Won	58	-	-	7	-	1	2	
No. of seats = 68								

Source: V.B. Singh and Shankar Bose- State election in India, Data Handbook on Vidhan Sabha Elections, 1952-85, Vol. I

Statistical Report on General Election, 1985 to the Legislative Assembly of Himachal Pradesh, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

If we are to look at the dominant party system in Himachal, table 9 becomes helpful as it gives figures exclusively for the Congress Party:

Table 2.9: Himachal Pradesh Congress Party Position in Legislature and Parliament					
Legislature				Parliament	
Years	Total Seats	Congress	Percentage	Total Seats	Congress
1952-57	41	28	68.3	4	4
1957-62	41	22	53.7	4	4
1962-67	41	34	83.0	4	4
1967-72	60	34	56.6	4	4
1972-77	68	53	77.9	4	4
1977-82	68	9	13.2	4	-
1982-85	68	31	45.6	4	4
1985	65	55	84.6	4	4

Source: Ranbir Sharma (Politics of Himachal Pradesh in T.R. Sharma, *ed.* Uppal Publication, New Delhi, 1986, p. 229)

Party System in Himachal Pradesh: A Critical Analysis of the Congress and the BJP

The Congress Party's stronghold in the state could be attributed to the part it had played not only in the national movement but the Praja Mandal movements in hill states. Aiding the economic development of Himachal was also a major reason for the position it held in the state. The BJP on the other hand contributed to the strengthening of the two-party system. It started by acquiring the electoral support of the Janata Party and gradually established as the second major party of the Himachal Pradesh.

After having traced the performance of the Congress and its hegemony over the party system of Himachal, we can now move on to the factors which could be attributed to such a status of the party in the state.

The Congress Party

The success of the Congress in Himachal Pradesh and its dominance, making the party system of the state a dominant party system is evident when we understand the growth of the party in the context of the Princely States and by tracing the Praja Mandal Movements. The Congress had a better mass base in Himachal and therefore enjoyed initial benefit¹². It had extended governmental activities to the rural areas and the five year plans which it had launched helped in spreading its network of patronage to the remotest corners of the state.

The Punjab Hill States and the Shimla Hill states were twenty-two with nine feudatories. These states were being ruled by the Ranas and the 'people of these states had to work hard in the difficult terrain.' In 1937, the Himalayan States' Peoples' Federation was formed in order to voice the grievances of these states. In some of the states, Praja Mandals came into existence. The Indian National Congress provided support to these Praja Mandals and encouraged the Himalayan States' peoples' Federation to forward the struggle to establish responsible governments in these states and for the removal of economic grievances.

The Sirmur Praja Mandal was very active among the Praja Mandals. It had organised agitations against the agrarian policy of the state. In 1939, a list of grievances had been presented to the Rana but it was reported that there was firing at the mob. As a result of the firing several people were injured and four were killed in the incident. A judicial inquiry into the matter was demanded by Gandhiji.¹³

Many of these states were facing agrarian problems. The Praja Mandals had to take into account these agrarian problems. People were forced to fight in order to address their economic grievances and the Indian National Congress took a keen interest the removal of grievances of these people. Pittabhi Sitaramayya, the Congress leader, personally visited Sirmur state to have a look at things there.

¹²K.D. Gupta, 'Himachal Pradesh: Politics of Split Level Modernisation', in Iqbal Narain, ed., *State Politics in India*, op. cit., p. 119.

¹³S.H. Patil, 'Congress Policy Towards the States in Various Regions', in *The Congress Party and Princely States*, Bombay, Himalaya Publishing House, 1981, pp. 76-77.

This compelled rulers to bow down and provide better economic facilities to people and in 1945; they put forward a proposal to provide services like education and public which helped in nation building.

The sudden expansion in adult franchise, which was in sharp contrast to the development in the British ruled states where the extension of franchise was a gradual phenomenon, quickened the development of political parties in Himachal Pradesh. The relatively underdeveloped party system had to cope up with enormous increase in mass participation. Political parties were called upon to perform a crucial role in a traditional society undergoing rapid transformation.

The leaders of Praja Mandals who joined the Congress Party were Padam Dev, Daulat Ram Sankhyam, Dr. Y.S. Paramar, etc. All leaders came from upper stratum of the hill society who led Praja Mandals in the national movement.¹⁴ They subsequently became prominent Congress leaders at the state levels, thus the Congress was strengthened by its association and identification with the Praja Mandal Movements which popularly helped the party to represent popular interests. This accounts for the dominance of the Congress Party in the State Assembly for several decades. But the feudal elements retained their influence in party machinery. There was very little representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the first decade of responsible government in Himachal Pradesh. With the emergence of democratic institutions in Himachal Pradesh the feudal lords had no alternative but to join the Congress Party to remain in power. The Congress Party emerged in the state largely on the grounds provided by Praja Mandals and this made its position very strong in the region. The changes in land tenure, establishment of new pattern of local government, the expansion of developmental administration brought further changes in the relationship between social groups and the institutional structure. Particularly important was the Congress demand for statehood of Himachal Pradesh with continued struggle and support which enabled Congress to enlarge its domains of support.

¹⁴Ranbir Sharma, 'Requirements and Shifts of a Democratic Leadership: A case study of Himachal Pradesh', *Indian Journal of Political Science*, 35(3), 1974, pp. 257-276.

The Congress Party had drawn its major support from the rural areas, especially the agriculturalists and horticulturalists were its leading supporters. Rajputs who generally shied away from participation in the Praja Mandals and freedom movement in these areas flocked to the Congress. Dr. Y.S. Parmar, a Rajput leader of the Congress, boosted their support as they recognized that their interests were safe in the hands of a leader drawn from their community. He became a popular leader of Himachal Pradesh, and this is evident from the slogans at the Himachal Pradesh Day held in Shimla on 15th April, 1967 – ‘Himachal Ka Gandhi – Dr. Y.S. Parmar’.¹⁵ This provided Rajputs a psychological boost as they could regain some influence in the politics of new democratic framework through their leader.

The congress party maintained its primacy owing to the continuous support it secured from various sections of the hill society. The main support for this party came from the big landlords – the Thakurs, Ranas and Zamindars, who entered politics in order to retain power. They in turn mobilized the support of the masses who were their subjects in the erstwhile states. These landlords became the leaders of the masses in the state by joining the Congress Party. In this process the power of these feudal lords was legitimized albeit, in a different form. In the pre-independence period, they were the ruling class, after independence their power was legitimized by the people through the new system itself. The people, who had been obeying the orders of the *Maliks* for centuries, now started working under the direction of their past rulers. These landlords were now in the Congress Party and drew considerable power from their subjects.

The populist i.e., the pro-poor image of the Congress Party helped the Party to gain the support of the weaker sections of the society such as Halis, Kolis, Domer, Chamars, Girth etc. They were averse to the idea of an alternative to the Congress because they found that their interests were safe in the hands of the Congress leaders. This can be seen when the Congress Party’s General Secretary called upon the workers not to ignore the weaker sections of the society as they were the main strength of the Congress.¹⁶ Thus it is not surprising that the Congress Party has been

¹⁵A.R. Tyagi, ‘General Elections in Himachal Pradesh: A case study of Feudal Politics’, *Political Science Review*, 6(3and 4-7), 1968, pp. 221-234.

¹⁶*The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 25th December, 1974.

recognized by the poorer sections as the only party which worked for their welfare. Its image as a secular national party also helped the party to maintain its dominance in state politics. The policy of reservation for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in various governmental departments was another important factor that helped the party to mobilize the support of the backward classes.

The land distribution system played a very important part in the determination of political power. The extent of land tenancy was very high in the districts of Kangra, Hamirpur, Una and Bilaspur. The tenant class was mobilized by the communists and the CPI secured two seats in the Legislative Assembly in 1967. However, because of weak organisation and the split in the Party, the Communists lost support among the tenants. The fact that between the two communist parties, only CPI (M) could secure just one seat in the 1972 elections proves the point. The tenant class in this election shifted their support to the Congress Party when the party promised that it would improve their conditions through legislation. Hence, the Congress enjoyed not only the support of the upper classes but of the tenants as well. The small landlords and the rich peasantry supported the BJS.

The upper regions of the state were already in Himachal Pradesh at the time of its emergence as a separate identity. Popular movements were led by Padam Dev, Bhagmal Southa and Yashwant Singh Parmar who were associated with the Congress Party in these areas. The linkage of the Congress Party with these leaders enabled the Party to establish its presence in this region.

Kullu district was merged with Himachal Pradesh in 1966. Because of similar socio-economic and geographical attributes of this district it mixed with other districts in the old Himachal region such as Simla, Solan, Kinnaur and Chamba. As a democratic set up evolved, the people who owned large tracts of land started growing potatoes and apples. The income from these crops was quite high. For instance, whereas in Punjab one acre of land growing wheat yielded an income of Rs 400, that figure in Himachal Pradesh for apples was about Rs 14,000, that is, 35 times more than that of Punjab. The horticulturalists of Himachal Pradesh required certain infrastructural facilities like transportation and communications, markets, seed potatoes, pesticides, fertilizers and so on. These could be obtained only through an access to the government. Hence

there was an emergence of pressure groups such as Fruit Grower's Association, Himachal Pradesh Cooperative Marketing and State Cooperative Union¹⁷. These associations were established by the people of the upper regions and gradually became powerful lobbies in the state politics. The apple and potato growers strengthened their influence by controlling various semi-governmental agencies which had been created to supply inputs and support services to the rural population. All Chief Ministers except Shanta Kumar (1977-80) belonged to this region. Much of the support of the Congress Party was drawn from the rich apple and potato growing classes of Himachal Pradesh.

Caste also played an important role in the electoral politics of the state. As the three Chief Ministers of the upper regions namely Yashwant Singh Parmar, Thakur Ram Lal and Vir Bhadra Singhj belonged to the Rajput caste, the most influential and dominant caste. The Rajputs supported the Congress in the belief that their interests would be safeguarded by the Party.

The politics of the Congress Party was the monopoly of men which in turn was the reflection of the feudal characteristics of the region. The female legislators, such as Asha Kumari (MLA of Chamba), Vidya Stokes (who became the speaker of Vidhan Sabha), Chandresh Kumari (M.P. of Kangra) and Shyama Sharma (MLA from Bilaspur) belonged to the former ruling families indicating the influence of erstwhile princely classes.¹⁸

At the time of the first general elections only the Congress Party had a strong organisation which led to the securing of two seats even without a contest. However the period before the elections of 1967 was a period of political turmoil as the people were struggling to achieve statehood for Himachal Pradesh. By the time of the first general elections Himachal Pradesh was a full-fledged state with an end to the uncertainty that engulfed the various regions of Himachal which were scattered in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. The mountainous regions of the North-West

¹⁷T.R. Sharma, 'Oligopoly of Power in Himachal Pradesh', in T.R. Sharma, ed., *New Challenges in Indian Politics*, op. cit., p. 276.

¹⁸A.R. Tyagi, 'General Elections in Himachal Pradesh: A case study of Feudal Politics', *Political Science Review*, 6(3and 4-7), 1968, pp. 221-234.

Himalayas which were until then spread across Punjab and Himachal Pradesh were integrated into a single state in November 1966.

The election campaign of 1967 and 1971 brought one fact into sharp focus namely that the party performance or the public issues were completely ignored while personal, feudal and caste influences were fully exploited. In most of the constituencies, the Thakurs and the Ranas retained their seats.

The congress party had well - oiled machinery for mobilizing the people. The President of the Congress Party stressed direct contacts of the party workers with the masses. Emphasis was laid on building contacts with the rural masses that made up the real strength of the Congress and weren't to be ignored. Proper link between the office bearers and the party members of the legislative assembly and the Ministry were sought to be established as this would help the party to meet the challenges posed by the different forces particularly the movement led by Jai Prakash Narain¹⁹. The congress by way of raising issues like the provision of water supply, electricity, employment facilities, reduction in the prices of commodities, etc. touched on the sentiments of some specific segments of the hill society including the lower strata, minorities and other groups. Local issues were also raised in the assembly elections. Propaganda work included the projection of images of Jawahar Lal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. Personal contacts were established with the local Thakurs and Ranas, orchardists, Mahajans and the newly created Sarpanches and the Pradhans. In the towns the candidates had contacts with the Villas and Kothis.

Inspite of the very substantial mass base of the party, the Congress suffered a defeat in the elections of 1977 at the hands of the Janata Party. Various factors contributed in the defeat of the Congress Party. Most important factors contributing to the decline of this party were the blatant exploitation of the hill people by resort to authoritarian methods. Coercions and suppression which were selective in the past became more general and constant and were directed at large sections of the society. The government did not interfere with the domestic life of the people in a clearly political form as it did during the nineteen months of emergency. The oppressive nature of the

¹⁹*The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 25th December, 1974.

family planning programme and the attendant crimes uprooted the people from their daily routine and gave a severe jolt to their sense of dignity as human beings.²⁰ The disgust, hatred and alienation of the common man was evident everywhere. The key element was this attack on the dignity and self-respect of the people. In other words the rural people found that the traditional pattern of sporadic violence perpetuated by the landlords against them became a generalized pattern for the entire people through methods of direct intervention of the state under the guise of the state, for instance; through programmes like the family planning programme.

The twin effects of the Congress oppression was, firstly, the alienation of large sections of ruling classes from the own established leadership, and secondly the loss of mass base of the political leaders. The two were interrelated in such a way so as to transform the political upsurge into new electoral verdict for the Janata Party. The aggressiveness of the family planning programme made the situation ripe for revolt and the elections provided an opportunity to inflict a defeat on the Congress for the excess committed by it during emergency.

The sudden emergence of the Youth Congress created more problems for the people. The overall assessment was that the Youth Congress reinforced and strengthened the hold of unscrupulous elements which consisted of the politicians and bureaucrats and the local leaders who committed atrocities on the people. People generally referred to the growth of this force in very derogatory terms – a group of idiots, disaster for the Congress and so on.

Another reason for the Congress's defeat was the poor implementation of the Land Acquisition Acts of 1953 and 1972. The distribution of land was very inadequate and minimal. Even where the land reforms were implemented, among the beneficiaries the influential Pradhans were prominent. For instance, in Chopal of the Simla district, the Congress distributed surplus land not to the landless but to the owners of land.

All these resulted in the defeat of the Congress and it secured only 9 seats in 1977 against 53 which it had won in 1973 in the Legislative Assembly (Tables 5, 6). It lost

²⁰ Javeed Alam, 'The Issues and Themes of Politics: People's Perceptions', in *Domination and Dissent*, Calcutta, Mandira, 1985, p. 85.

all 4 seats for the Lok Sabha (Table 9). But soon after the short political tenure of the Janata Party, the Congress was restored to power in 1980. This resulted in the Centre's increase of public investment and grants to Himachal Pradesh.

The way the 35 day long strike of the NGO was handled by the Chief Minister Ram Lal was praised by the Congress Leadership which attributed this strike as a political controversy by the BJP whose object was to topple the Congress government.

Several steps were taken by the Congress government to expedite the development of the region and to implement public policies including Land Reforms. The Himachal Pradesh Village Common Lands Vesting and Utilisation Acts of 1974 was implemented which brought relief to nearly eighteen thousand landless people. Under this the Shamlat (the land which is not occupied by anyone and which is under the control of the state) was vested under the state government. Tenants were given some parts of the land they were cultivating previously. The landless people were provided about five bighas of land each. Thus these measures benefitted lakhs of people.

As for the weaker sections and the minorities who were resisted by the upper caste in the implementation of the land reform measures, the Congress launched certain programmes like loans for the poor, employment generating assets, subsidies to establish cottage industries, etc. to ameliorate their condition of life. There were some significant changes in the administration also. Ram Lal was replaced by Vir Bhadra Singh as the C.M. as the former was accused of selling trees worth crores to the Tumker mafia. This process of change was continued in the 1985 elections as most of the sitting MLAs were replaced by politicians who owed their allegiance to Vir Bhadra Singh.

Personal rule was the form of leadership that had developed in the state of politics. To curb corruption the institution of the Lokayukta (from whose purview the Chief Minister also wasn't exempted) was established. The prevention of Specific Corrupt practices Act was passed and the enforcement of the vigilance machinery of the government was activated. All these measures had an impact on the public life of Himachal Pradesh and boosted the image of the Congress Party. Thus under the

leadership of Vir Bhadra Singh the Congress Party emerged as a well-knit, united and strong organization. Vir Bhadra Singh's clean public image commanded the respect of the people though sometimes there were accusations of functioning in an authoritative style.

The Scheduled castes and the Scheduled Tribes regarded the Congress as the only party which supported their interests and promoted them in the legislative assemblies, the Parliament and government services. This helped them to gain entry into educational institutions and provided them opportunities for economic advancement. All this helped them to achieve dignity after centuries of oppression and injustice. Many among the Schedules castes and Scheduled Tribes were beholden to the Congress for extending equal treatment to them. The way the Congress workers treated the lower caste people can be well illustrated by the comment of a Scheduled caste person from Siel in the Chamba district who said that the Congress people had gone to their homes and eaten with them whereas those belonging to the Bhartiya Jana Sangh had shown reluctance in even shaking hands.

In contrast to this attitude, other political parties were not always willing to provide representation to the lower castes. The major opposition party, the BJS was dominated by Hindu high castes that did not interact with the depressed classes and were thus deprived of their support.

The success of the Congress could also be attributed to its contribution in the economic development of state. After its formation in 1948, Himachal Pradesh came a long way in various fields of development. Indeed, it exploded the myth that hills were destined to remain poor. It was able to achieve self-sufficiency within four years of becoming a state of the union. Mrs Indira Gandhi introduced a 20-point programme in the interest of Himachal and it was carried out with speed and efficiency in the state. The programme gave hope to the weaker and backward sections of the society²¹.

²¹Y.S. Parmar, 'Himachal Pradesh Forges Ahead', in *Years of Challenge and Growth*, New Delhi, Rubicon Publishing House, 1977, pp. 12-17.

Welfare measures by the state government included giving of house-sites to houseless people and giving of land to landless persons. Private debts of the poor were written off and the recovery of loans of marginal farmers was postponed for a year. The prices of essential commodities registered a gradual fall which ranged from 3 to 20 per cent. This was the outcome of the various steps taken by the state administration and the strict enforcement of the Himachal Pradesh Hoarding and Profiteering Prevention Order, 1974 and the Himachal Pradesh Price Marketing and Display Order, 1975. The Congress worked to ensure the allotment of land to landless persons. The development of handlooms and handicrafts was also looked at. The government introduced a scheme for supplying essential goods at controlled rates in the hostels of the Himachal Pradesh University, colleges and schools. In conclusion, the state government tried to pay attention to all aspects of the people of Himachal.

Price control committees had been set up at the district, sub division and tehsil levels. The general secretaries of district Congress committees and block Congress committees and MLAs and MPs were associated with these committees.

The state government had taken several measures to ensure strict economy in government expenditure. For instance, a ban on the creation of non-plan posts and filling up of vacant posts had been imposed. A cut of 10 per cent had been imposed on sanctioned allotment of travelling allowance and a 15 per cent cut in sanctioned allotment in respect of contingent expenditure. A 10 per cent cut was also introduced on the allotment of wages and 25 per cent cut on sanctioned allotment for maintenance of buildings, both residential and non-residential.

The Bharatiya Janata Party

The literature present on Indian politics, political parties and party-system in Indian had described the Bharatiya Jana Sangh as 'reactionary', 'communal', 'Hindu revivalist', 'ultra-rightist' and 'militant nationalist' in its ideological orientation and organizational behavior.²² These kinds of categorizations and characterizations were denied by the theoreticians and leaders of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. They claimed that such categorizations reflected an influence of Western ideas and analysis. One of

²²Geeta Puri, 'The Bhartiya Jana Sangh - An overview', in *Bhartiya Jana Sangh, Organization and Ideology, Delhi: A Case Study*, New Delhi, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1980, p. 5.

the ideologues of the Jana Sangh talked about the West stating that terms like 'Rightist' and 'Leftist' were generally used there and such terminology was becoming a growing trend in India too. He felt that this kind of categorization gave a wrong idea of the politics of India. This was not only because there were parties which represented different positions between the extreme Right and extreme Left but also because the programmes which these parties adhered to defied any kind of classification on orthodox basis.

The Jana Sangh, he clarified might be called 'rightist' as it did not believe in 'doctrinaire socialism' but its programme reflected that it was more radical than any other radical party of the country. Mr. L.K. Advani also in one of his interviews had clarified that the Jana Sangh was not any economicism and terms such as 'Left' and 'Right' were not practical for the India scenario.

Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee in his presidential address at Bhagalpur in 1972 talked about the Left-Right controversy and declared that the Sangh was neither moving Left nor Right but it was moving forward in order to provide the right alternative to the nation.

'The Bharatiya Jana Sangh stood for the rebuilding of India on the basis of Bharatiya 'smaskriti' and 'maryada' (culture and tradition)'.²³ The Jana Sangh was in favour of preserving the age-old values of Indian life without clinging to custom and traditions which had lost their strength. The Sangh desired to reform the society in order to meet the challenge of modern times but it wanted to be cautious of the intrusion of westernism in the guise of modernism.

The Jana Sangh considered itself to be an extension of the social and intellectual movements which were led by many figures of the 19th century, such as; Swami Dayanand, Swami Vivekananda, Lokmanya Tilak, Dr. Hedgewar, Madan Mohan Malviya and Mahatama Gandhi. It did not call itself a new movement.

²³Ibid, p. 6.

An introduction to the Bharatiya Jana Sangh

The Rashtriya Swyamsevak (RSS) which was banned by the government after the assassination of Mahatama Gandhi (On 30 January 1948)²⁴ was successful in its efforts to revive itself and after a year the ban was lifted. During the period when it was banned, there were some who were in favour of converting it into a political party with its organizational apparatus and its ideological trapping. Guru Golwalkar, the Sarsanghchalak of the RSS²⁵, had assured the government of the non-political character of the R.S.S. and this did not allow for its conversion to a political party. Golwalkar wanted an alliance of the Sangh (a cultural organisation) and the Congress (a political organisation). For this he started a dialogue with the Congress. Sardar Patel was in favour of this alliance and got a resolution passed from the All India Congress Committee, Working Committee (AICC) while Nehru was away from the country. But it was discarded after the resolution met with stiff opposition from Nehru. This resulted in a search for an alternative. Around this time, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee had resigned from the cabinet and was looking to form an Opposition party which would contest the rule of the Congress. In the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, he found a partner to achieve this purpose. An agreement was reached between Mookherjee and Golwalkar. 'The latter picked up his staunch and tried workers, who could respectfully and unflinchingly shoulder the burden of founding the new local party and who had the ability to lay broad, unshakable foundations for its rise to the status of a popular, respectable all-India, political party'.²⁶

Following this agreement, negotiations were made between Mookerjee and Golwalkar which resulted in units of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh being organised in Punjab (later merged with PEPSU), **Himachal Pradesh** and Delhi. The All India Party, known as Bharatiya Jana Sangh was inaugurated on the 21st of October, 1951 with Shyama Prasad Mookherjee as its founder.

²⁴ Pralay Kanungo, 'Origin and Evolution of the RSS: Hedgewar to Golwalkar (1925-1973)', in *RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Golwalkar*, Delhi, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2003, p. 55.

²⁵ Craig Baxter, 'The Ideological and Organizational Ancestor: The RSS', in *The Jana Sangh: A Biography of an Indian Political Party*, Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania, 1969, p. 29.

²⁶ Geeta Puri, 'Introduction', in *Bhartiya Jana Sangh, Organization and Ideology, Delhi: A Case Study*, op. cit., p. 10.

It had been observed that the Bhartiya Jana Sangh enjoyed a unique position as compared to other national political parties of India. It was the only party which successfully increased its percentage of popular votes and its share in parliamentary as well as assembly seats in each successive election from 1952-67. The party after the 1967 elections emerged as a strong force on the political scene of India, in the parliament and legislatures of many Indian states.²⁷

The Bharatiya Janata Party in Himachal Pradesh

The authoritarian rule during the emergency had filled the people with disgust and fear. They were anxious to overthrow the Congress Party and when Indira Gandhi called general elections in 1977 the people of India including those from Himachal took their chance to remove the Congress from power. The establishment of the Janata Party offered a viable alternative to the Congress Party. The Party came to power on the basis of massive mandate. According to L.K. Advani, 'The Janata Party is a child of struggle waged against the Emergency'²⁸ He also said that, 'For the Jana Sangh, formation of the Janata Party in 1977 was the natural culmination of steps it had been taking since 1974 towards Opposition unity'.²⁹

The Janata Party in Himachal was dominated by the Jana Sangh and the RSS. The Party consisted of members belonging to the RSS which was an influential force in the state for many years. The RSS supported the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1953 as a result of the decision taken at the Ludhiana Convention of RSS in 1953. In 1977 Bharatiya Jana Sangh joined the newly formed Janata Party to oust the Congress.

In Himachal Pradesh the situation was quite different because as the major opposition party was the Bharatiya Jana Sangh which had the support of the RSS. The leaders of the party were staunch workers of the RSS. Important leaders of the party were Shanta Kumar, Kishori Lal and Kanwer Durga Chand.

²⁷Craig Baxter, 'Introduction', in *The Jana Sangh: A Biography of an Indian Political Party*, op. cit., p. 1.

²⁸L.K. Advani, 'From the World Go', in *People Betrayed*, New Delhi, Vision Books Private Limited, 1979, p. 15.

²⁹Ibid., p. 62.

To understand the mass support of the Janata Party we need to look at the regional factors which played a significant role in party building. The Janata Party support was based mainly in the newly merged areas of Himachal Pradesh, i.e., Kangra, Una, Hamirpur, Kulu and other lower reaches of the state. No doubt, the Janata Party gained considerable support from the anti- Congress move in the 1977 elections from old Himachal. Barring Shanta Kumar all the Chief Ministers were from old Himachal. This alienated the people of the new Himachal as they felt that they were being discriminated against by the people of the old Himachal.

The integration of hill areas of Punjab with Himachal Pradesh had opened up new avenues for development of the region. If the rich agriculture, forest and hydel potential were harnessed properly it would help the state in taking a big leap forward. After the merger of districts of Kangra, Simla, Kulu and Lahaul and Spiti on November 1, 1966, the land revenue doubled.³⁰ The biggest advantage the new areas bought was in the field of food production and the government which had been focusing on development of horticulture now turned its attention to increasing food production. Another benefit of the merger was that it brought to Himachal almost all the major tourist resorts in North West India which included Shimla, Kulu, Dalhousie, Kasauli and Dharmsala.

Even though the people of this region had been provided with such great avenues of development, the fact that their region had only 31 seats in the 60 member Legislative Assembly in which out of seven cabinet ministers and five deputy ministers only two ministers of cabinet rank and two deputy ministers were from the newly merged areas after the 1967 elections, pinched them and hence made their cause of dissatisfaction political.³¹ According to critics, since the new areas had not been given their deserved share in political power made them believe that their demands were not being met. A certain imbalance had been created since the ministry was expanded in 1968 and all the three incumbents belonged to the old areas. Yashwant Singh Parmar who had a strong hold over the Congress, the chief minister hailed from the old areas and had a strong decision making authority. As a result of this the newly merged areas felt even

³⁰*The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 22nd February, 1968.

³¹Ibid

more neglected³² and gave way to an anti-Congress feeling and made the Janata Party a viable alternative.

In 1977 the Bharatiya Jana Sangh joined the Janata Party. When in 1980 the Janata Party disintegrated, it gave birth to the Bharatiya Janata Party. Janata Party received its support from the rich peasantry, the Baniyas, Mahajans, teachers, lawyers and N.G.Os, etc. The leadership of the party still remained with the RSS people who usually came from the towns, example; Shanta Kumar of Palampur and Kishori Lal of Chamba.

There were a number of factors which helped the Janata Party emerge victorious in the elections of 1977. The message of the party against oppression by the Congress was carried by different sections of the society and brought to the masses in order to mobilize them. Here the role played by the intelligentsia was remarkable. The Janata party also gained from the involvement of students who carried its message from urban centres to the remotest villages. In spreading the Janata wave, the trade unions, peasant organizations and business organizations were quite instrumental.

The Janata Party consisted of political groups who were inclined towards putting an end to one-party domination in the country. The creators of the party believed that for democracy to function in its truest sense there was a need of other parties which could contribute to the politics in the country and the continuation of one-party rule was a negation of democracy.³³ They thought of their attempts at party building as something historic because it was being done in order to save democracy.³⁴

The electoral disaster of the Congress party in many states in 1967 and the split in 1969 gave a push to the formation of a united Front of Opposition parties. But the electoral victories of the Congress in 1971 and 1972, in Parliamentary and State Assembly elections gave a blow to the unity of opposition parties.³⁵ The Bharatiya Jana Sangh, in the pre emergency period had wanted a consolidation of all nationalist

³²*The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 19th September, 1988.

³³K.D. Gupta, 'Himachal Pradesh: Politics of Split Level Modernisation', in Iqbal Narain, ed., *State Politics in India*, op. cit., p. 120.

³⁴C.P., Bhambri, *The Janata Party- A Profile*, New Delhi, National Publishing House, 1980, p. 3.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 5.

and democratic forces in order to form a United Opposition against the Congress Party.

On January 18, 1977, it was announced by Indira Gandhi that elections to the Lok Sabha would be held in March. This announcement rekindled the attempt to merge parties against the Congress and in January 20, 1977, four non-communist parties namely, the Congress³⁶, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the Bharatiya Lok Dal and the socialists agreed to come together as a single party and work for the forthcoming elections. The new party was to be called the Janata Party and it decided to contest elections under one flag and one programme.³⁷

The emergency had made the opposition parties realize that their existence might be in danger and the elections of 1977 were their last chance to challenge the dominance of the Congress. Hence it can be said that the formation of the Janata Party had also been motivated by an instinct of survival of the opposition parties. After its victory in the Lok Sabha elections, the Janata Party asked its state legislators to assemble in the state capitals on June 21, 1977 so that leaders could be elected on the basis election and consensus. Hence, formal elections were held in the states. In Himachal Pradesh, Shanta Kumar was elected the chief minister after he defeated Ranjeet Singh by 28 to 25 votes. As a result Shanta Kumar took over as chief minister and the Janata party government started functioning on June 24, 1977 in Himachal Pradesh.³⁸

The state policy followed during the tenure of Shanta Kumar as Chief Minister included focus on provision of rural water supply and various other programmes for the upliftment of the poor.³⁹ Before 1977 only 3,271 villages had the facility of potable drinking water but within two years of its coming to power, the Janata government provided drinking water to as many as 1850 villages with an aim of covering all the villages by 1984.⁴⁰

³⁶C.P. Bhambri, *The Janata Party- A Profile*, op. cit., p.16.

³⁷*The Statesman*, New Delhi, 25th October, 1979.

³⁸*The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 15th August, 1977.

³⁹*The Statesman*, New Delhi, 25th October, 1979.

⁴⁰Ibid.

In the field of education, the establishment of the Agriculture University in Palampur and a Sainik school in Sujampur Tihra were major achievements of this government. The government also took over the management of the Ayurvedic College at Paprola. In the Kangra district a number of chemical laboratories were set up for tea processing. Immediately after the Janata Party was ousted in 1980, the tea industry fell under the tea crisis. K.K. Sood, the President of the Kangra Valley Tea Planters Association made a statement which explains this situation. He said, 'The tea planters found it very difficult to maintain their gardens due to lack of infrastructural facilities'⁴¹ Some tea planters said that no steps had been taken by the Congress government to improve the tea industry. They felt that it was on the other hand providing the orchardists of old Himachal with a great sum of money and extra facilities. Shanta Kumar had given special attention to the tea industry.

The Janata Party government had also started with a programme called Antodaya⁴² for the poor and this had been appreciated by the masses. It included providing the downtrodden with subsidies and employment generating assets so that they would be able to meet their basic needs. This programme had covered around two lakhs of people by January 1980.⁴³

Another feather in the Janata government's hat was the Thein Dam Agreement according to which the state would earn Rs. 82.5 lakhs per annum of the total power generated by it Himachal Pradesh would receive 4.6% of it cost free.⁴⁴

Himachal Pradesh suffered from a perennial food deficit and had to import food grains from neighbouring states but with the coming of the Janata government, attention was paid to resolve this problem. There was greater stress on agriculture, provision of high yielding variety seeds, encouraging greater use of fertilizers and instructing farmers in cropping techniques which helped in somewhat achievement in sufficiency of food grains.⁴⁵

⁴¹*The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 3rd Novemeber, 1986.

⁴²*The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 15th August, 1977.

⁴³*The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 25th January, 1980.

⁴⁴*The Statesman*, New Delhi, 25th October, 1979.

⁴⁵*The Times of India*, New Delhi, 26th July, 1978.

Other measures which the government took in the welfare front included the introduction of passenger insurance scheme where the family of the road transport traveller would get Rs. 15,000 compensation in case of a fatal accident as against Rs. 5,000 under the Congress rule with Thakur Ram Lal as the Chief Minister.⁴⁶

Abolition of land revenue and surcharge on irrigated land holdings of up to one hectare was another measure which was implemented by the new government which was being led by a Chief Minister belonging to the new areas.⁴⁷ This measure was highly appreciated by the people. A West German aided project to cover treeless mountaining with suitable trees was yet another achievement of the government.

It could be safely concluded that the people of Himachal Pradesh were more or less satisfied with the schemes which had been launched by Shanta Kumar and they came as a relief after the authoritarian rule of the Congress government.

The downfall of the Janata Party in Himachal Pradesh

One major reason which led to the downfall of the Janata Party was its dominance by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The Bharatiya Jana Sangh was the large group in the Janata Party and it had its leanings towards the RSS. Certain people in Himachal felt that the Janata party in the state was taking the shape of an RSS government. The fact that Shanta Kumar was elected the leader of the legislative assembly after he defeated Ranjeet Singh who was a non- RSS M.L.A. provided support to this belief. Shanta Kumar had also been vocal about his pride which stemmed from him being a member of the RSS. The decision of the state government to provide for grants of assistance on a priority basis to members of organizations (banned during emergency) to re-establish their business centres also made the RSS leanings obvious (this announcement referred to the RSS and the AnandMarg). The criterion to avail this grant was six months of jail yatra during the time of emergency. Such assistance was to be provided to political party workers who had been to jail but it also benefitted some hoarders, black marketers and profiteers who had been detained under the 'Maintenance of Internal Security Act', legitimately.

⁴⁶*The Times of India*, 10th January, 1978.

⁴⁷*The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 25th January, 1979.

After the elections of 1977, Himachal, for the first time came under the influence of the RSS. It was observed that Janata Party workers were forced to join the RSS shakhas if they desired jobs, transfers or other facilities. The RSS which claimed it was a cultural organization assumed the role of guiding Janata government and the policies it adopted.⁴⁸ The RSS was influencing the policy making process of the government. There was one such instance which reflected the authority which the RSS possessed. Shyama Sharma, the food minister was attacked on the Mall Road of Shimla by RSS cadres as he had not functioned in accordance with the dictates of the RSS and had insisted that shopkeepers (RSS supporters) display their price list, to refrain from increasing the price of essential commodities and had issued several warnings to them. The fact that Shanta Kumar adopted a policy where pro-RSS people were appointed to the high offices of the state government was a manifestation of his pro-RSS stand. For example, the Himachal Pradesh Advocate General belonged to the

RSS, the Vice Chancellor of Himachal Pradesh University was a supporter of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, etc. Certain leaders of the Janata Party, namely, Hari Das, Nikku Ram, Sri Ram Zakhmi, Ramesh Gupta, Surendra Lal Verma were supporters of RSS. However there were a few legislators who were in favour of cutting links with this organization or the party would suffer. A prominent party legislator, Daulat Ram Sankhya, warned the party against the motive of the RSS which was political establishment by adopting a fascist, sectarian and dogmatic approach.⁴⁹

Many other organizations such as the trade unions of workers and employees opposed the presence of RSS elements in the politics of Himachal Pradesh. They expressed their concern regarding RSS leaders trying to rope in teachers, employees and the working class. There was a council meeting which was held and attended by twenty two organizations of workers and employees of banks, transport, P.W.D., N.G.O., electricity, forest, hospitals, tourism, peasants, etc where the concern was the steps taken by the government to deal with the struggles and agitations of the trade unions and employees. The patronage given to the RSS under Shanta Kumar was

⁴⁸*The Statesman*, New Delhi, 2nd September, 1977.

⁴⁹Ibid.

unacceptable to these organizations. The Communist Party of India accused the Janata Party giving supremacy to the RSS (in a meeting held from the 15th of March to the 17th of March).

The inclusion of RSS elements in the party gave way to factionalism and intra-party conflicts. A consequence of this was the collapse of the Janata Party on 14th February, 1980. This was followed by the Congress re-emerging as the ruling party in the state. The conflicts in the Janata Party had increased. Unbalanced representation and a discriminatory attitude became major causes for the downfall of the Janata Party. A number of people who belonged to the Congress and were holding posts were removed, for example; Satyawati Parmar, wife of former Chief Minister, Y.S. Parmar was removed from the chairmanship of Himachal Pradesh Handicrafts and Handloom Corporation. Kewal Ram Chauhan and Sunder Singh were removed from the Board of Directors of the Himachal Pradesh State Cooperative Bank Limited⁵⁰.

The conflict within the party had started as early as 1977 which led to political instability in the state and the people were victimized due to the power struggle within the party. Though the party had a number of achievements to its credit but the power struggle hindered the development of the state.

The crisis within the party reached a new scale when the P.W.D Minister, Kishori Lal quit and this was the first time a Minister had quit ever since the first popular ministry led by Y.S. Parmar had been installed in 1952. The only incident which had occurred was when Salig Ram had been dismissed by Y.S. Parmar.⁵¹ Shanta Kumar had his suspicion that Kishori Lal had shifted his loyalty towards another Janata Party leader and conspiring with dissidents to topple him. Satya Dev Bushashri wanted to oust Shanta Kumar from power by seeking help from Kanvar Durga Chand and Ranjeet Singh⁵². Shanta Kumar used the issue of corruption in the recruitment of 200 clerks in the State Electricity Board which involved Kishori Lal and took away the portfolio of P.W.D which he had held since the formation of the Janata government. This was a

⁵⁰*The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 8th September, 1977.

⁵¹*The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 30th March, 1979.

⁵²*The Times of India*, New Delhi, 10th January, 1981.

matter of humiliation for Kishori Lal who submitted his resignation on March 17, 1979.⁵³

Chief Minister, Shanta Kumar decided to expand his ministry after he won the vote of confidence on April 19, 1979 as against the changes being suggested by the dissidents. Some of his supporters who could not be given a place in the ministry were made chairmen of various autonomous organizations. This reduced considerably the chances of his supporters joining the other side. Right after the collapse of the Janata Party in 1980, a number of its MLAs joined the Congress Party and Thakur Ram Lal of the Congress became the Chief Minister of the state⁵⁴.

It can be concluded that the infighting in the party became a major reason for its downfall. The instability which had resulted from factionalism within the party made the people of the state search for a stable government. The goodwill which the party had earned by making contributions to the development of the state and for implementing policies beneficial to the poor was washed away by its leanings towards the RSS.

A number of political parties emerged over the years but none of them were able to stand up to the image and resources of the Congress. Though there was Janata experiment of 1977-80 but that party too splintered away in 1980. Since then a number of parties were founded and then quietly went in to the oblivion. But the latest trends seemed to show a shift from the Congress. In the general elections of 1989 the Bharatiya Janata Party won three out of four Parliamentary seats in the state of Himachal Pradesh.

The two Communist Parties - the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India, Marxist (CPM) were important though their electoral influence was limited. But it is to be noted that it was popular among the peasants, labourers, students and employees. This was an expansion of Communists' influence with the increasing rate of literacy and political awareness. As mentioned earlier, the

⁵³*The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 30th March, 1979.

⁵⁴*The Times of India*, New Delhi, 15th February, 1980.

development of the CPI can be traced to the political conference organized by the Kisan Sabha at Bhangrotu, Mandi in April 1951.

It should be noted that the data presented in this chapter makes it evident that the presence of parties other than the Congress and the Jana Sangh in the politics of Himachal was negligible. It emerges that the electoral politics of Himachal Pradesh was dominated by two political parties, the Congress and the BJP. There also existed the Janata, the CPI and the CPI(M) but their influence was restricted to some isolated areas or was ineffective. The performance of the two main parties had been uneven in the various assembly elections. For example, if the Congress emerged victorious in the elections of 1972, it was the Janata (in a way the BJP) which swept the polls in 1977. In 1982, both the parties sort of shared an even number of seats. But there was not much presence of other parties or a third force.

After we have looked at the Dominant Party System in Himachal and the emergence of the two-party system which has gained a strong foothold in the state, it is time to talk about the emergence of a third force challenging this two-party system and how it is playing its role in changing the dynamics of the party politics in the state.

*Challenges to the Two-Party System: Emergence of
Local, Regional and other National Parties
(1990 – 2007)*

Chapter III

This chapter looks at emergence of regional or state parties in the state which have in some manner affected the two-party system in the state. It was only in the elections of 1990 that a party, the Janata Dal performed better than one of the major parties which is a part of the two-party system of Himachal, the Congress. This resulted in the loss to the Congress. The period from 1990 to 2007 in the electoral history of the state has been taken into account for this purpose. An analysis has been provided at the end of the chapter which sees whether a third force has been able to impact the Congress or the BJP and in turn the two-party system. The municipal corporation elections held in Shimla recently have also been considered to see if a change is coming about in the party politics of the state.

The pattern of party system is different from state to state. This is so because it is mainly shaped by the socio-economic milieu of a particular society. Socio-economic changes accompanied by other factors or other sort of changes, such as, exposure to mass media, increase in education, the establishment of adult suffrage and the creation of new political institutions deeply affect the patterns of social relationships and it is these changes in social relationships which affect political behavior.¹ It is therefore the structure of society which determines the emergence and functioning of political parties.

‘The essence of politics is understood to be the management of conflict, that is, the ability of a political system to manage constantly shifting kinds and degrees of demands that are made on it’.² Cultural and ethnic diversities often divide societies and result in deep cleavages therein. The forces of tribalism, traditionalism and regionalism result in fragmentation and proliferation of parties in the developing countries. It can be said that the consequence of basic societal cleavages is the creation of ideological or sectional parties within a particular political system.

¹Kishalay Banerjee, ‘Preface’, in *Regional Political Parties in India*, Delhi, B.R. Publications, 1984, p. 9.

²Ibid., p. 10.

The example of India depicts the existence of such deep cleavages and the resultant rise of political parties which are related to the fragmented cultures of the Indian society. Such political groups often seek to reinforce the sub-culture with which they are identified. It needs to be mentioned here that factional conflicts and struggle between the opposing factions within the Congress organization in the post-independence period accentuated the process of fragmentation in Indian politics. The birth of splinter parties, especially in state politics was also a result of the conflict and controversy associated with these factions. In an attempt to capture power in states these splinter parties championed regional issues and hence became regional parties.

The birth of regional parties in the post independence era has been a complex phenomenon accompanied by many dimensions. For K.R Bombwall, regional parties have become a prominent feature of Indian politics and their development is natural in this country which is 'pre-eminently a country of regions'.³ The rise of regional parties should not be seen only as a by-product of regionalism but a phenomenon possessing its own right and implications.⁴ The growth of these parties was a consequence of varied and inter-related factors. There was no uniform pattern of politics in states where regional parties appeared.⁵ They can be seen as end results of a complex interplay between regional awareness (consciousness which developed in the 19th century) and social, economic and political development which began at the time of the independence of the country.⁶ Regional parties reflect social change.⁷

What makes a Political Party Regional?

We can find an indirect reference of a regional party made in the works of Maurice Duverger where he gives the concept of 'Minor Party'.⁸ According to Duverger, a party 'which is minority minded' is a minor party. The concept given by him is based

³S S. Bhatnagar and Pradeep Kumar, eds., 'Regional Political Parties in India: A Preview', in *Regional Political Parties in India*, , New Delhi, Ess Ess Publications, 1988, p.1.

⁴Teginder, 'Theoretical Framework: Regional Political Parties', in *Regional Parties in National Politics*, Delhi, KK Publications, 2008, p.61.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Sudha Pai, 'Regional Parties and Emerging Pattern of Politics in India', *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 51(5), 1990, p.394.

⁷G. Gopa Kumar, 'Party System and Regional Parties', in *Regional Political Parties and State Politics*, New Delhi, Deep and Deep Publications, 1986, p. 40.

⁸Kishalay Banerjee, 'Introduction', in *Regional Political Parties in India*, op.cit, p.3.

on the differentiation which he makes between a minor party and a 'party which has a majority bent'. Parties with majority bent, he clarifies are those which either have a majority in the parliament, if not, at least have the ability to attain a majority. It is in a multi-party system rather than a two-party system that the difference between a minor party and a majority becomes more evident. The term minor party points to those parties which are minority minded and it also includes smaller parties which are formed on the basis of linguistic, cultural, regional and ethnic interests. Such parties on the basis of this definition can be classified as regional parties.

A few characteristics can be pointed out which make a political party a regional party. Firstly, a regional party by its very nature limits its area of action to a particular region, which in the case of India is a state. If the organizational network and electoral concerns of such a party extends to other states, it becomes cross regional and its regional commitments get diluted. Secondly, a regional party seeks to defend a regionally based ethnic or religio-cultural identity. Thirdly, a regional party seeks to exploit local sources of discontent focusing on demands based on language, caste, community or religion.⁹

The Importance of Regional Parties

The birth of regional parties impacts the politics of a democratic state depending upon the right of the dissent and the diversity in life in the body politic of the state in question. In western democracies the number of minor political parties existing is very few and their existence depends on the kind of system prevailing in these countries. For example, the number of minor parties has gone down in the United States of America due to the programme adopted by the major parties and due to reasons like paucity of funds. But the multiplication of minor parties in a political system cannot be prevented as there is an on-going struggle between various social groups.

Talking about a country characterized by vast diversity, India, minority parties which are local or regional in origin and are deeply submerged in local issues have

⁹S.S. Bhatnagar and Pradeep Kumar, eds., 'Regional Political Parties in India: A Preview', in *Regional Political Parties in India*, op.cit, pp. 5-6.

dominated the political scene since independence. The emergence of such parties has made the transition from traditional class politics to the democratic mass politics.

It was after the constitutional process was started in India that regionalization along primordial lines started. After independence there emerged linguistic and sub-cultural groups which made a demand for their own regional identity. The Pan-Indian forces which had taken shape under the British rule were integrated with the national movement. The growth of regional parties comprising of various groups began after independence.

In India, regional parties have been called parochial or particularistic parties as they have largely particularly represented interests of only certain sections rather than general welfare of the nation.

Regional and Local Parties of Himachal Pradesh, 1967-1990: A Brief Political History

Observers, academic and political analysts categorize political parties in India on the basis of their territorial or geographic representation, for example; All India parties, Regional parties and Local Parties or State Parties. But this is done only for convenience, to make arguments from a particular point or to identify them in a particular manner. It is not reflective of any classification which is recognized by the government of India or by the election commission. Para 6(b) of the election symbols (reservation and symbols) order, 1968 lays down the criteria for a recognized state party other than a national party. On the basis of this criterion, the party should secure at least six per cent valid votes in the state or should have returned two members to the state legislative assembly or it should have at least won three per cent of seats in the assembly. Political parties which are not able to achieve these criteria are termed as local parties by academicians and political analysts.¹⁰ This stands true for many in Himachal where parties like the Him Loktantrik Morcha can be termed as a local party and not a regional party but the Himachal Vikas Congress can be called a regional party.

¹⁰Saroj Kumar Jena, 'Power Play of Regional Parties in India- An Assessment', in Dasarathi Bhuyan, *Role of Regional Political Parties in India*, op. cit., p. 145.

The Indian National Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party have assigned the two-party system tag to the politics of Himachal Pradesh. Power has shifted alternately between the two since 1967 when the two-party system struck roots in the State. Apart from these two National parties, other parties of National character have made appearances in the political scenario of Himachal Pradesh. But this trend is strongly observed since the elections of 1990 to the legislative assembly of the state. If one looks at the phase from 1967 to 1990 the presence of regional parties has been disappointing and discouraging. Even T.R. Sharma has described the existence of third parties as negligible.¹¹ After the Praja Mandals ceased to exist, a few parties like the Swatantra Party, Vishal Himachal Samiti and Lok Raj Party were formed in the state. But these parties did not survive for long. Some of them had been formed with the motto of achieving statehood for Himachal Pradesh and as soon as this goal was fulfilled, they were out of existence. Some parties faced organizational challenges and could not systematically set up the party in the state. Congress being immensely popular in the state, they could not build up a strong support base. These parties either withered away or merged with the Congress. A reason behind their merger with the Congress was that a few of these parties had been formed by ex-Congressmen who on realizing the pathetic condition of parties other than the Congress went back to the parent party. With the transfer of new areas, the Jana Sangh (later the BJP) made a considerable appearance in the political and electoral scenario of the state but no regional or local party could replicate this. For that matter parties like CPI, CPI(M) or SCF which had units in Himachal could not do much either. Perhaps, they were not able to take advantage of the transfer the way Jana Sangh did by adopting a strategy wherein the discrimination against the new areas was highlighted. Hence, the vote share of the Congress was divided in Himachal but these parties could not take advantage of this fact. If we look at the elections from 1967 to 1990, the dismal show of not only state parties but national parties in Himachal becomes apparent. In the 1967 elections to the Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha, the percentage of votes polled by parties such as the Swatantra Party, PSP, RPI, CPI, CPI(M) was ranged between less than 0.1 per cent to 2.9 per cent. In the next elections in 1972, state parties polled 5 per cent votes in all and in the elections of 1977, 1982 and 1985 (legislative assembly) they did not even find mention in the electoral tables of Himachal Pradesh.

¹¹T.R. Sharma, 'Himachal Pradesh: Two Part Competition in a Small State', *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy*, 15(1&2), 2003, pp. 173-188.

However, the Communist parties did not perform well but continued to exist in the electoral scene, nonetheless.

From the year 1990, party system in Himachal has reflected a trend which includes; parties which are formed by the coming together of other national parties and those parties which are formed by independent leaders who have broken away from the parent party (defectors from the mainstream). They have not acquired a very strong support base in the State. After functioning for a short period of time, these parties have merged with either the Congress or the BJP. They have not been able to pose a big enough threat to the two-party system. One of the reasons for this failure is also that these parties are not able to capitalize on the failures of the Congress or the BJP. As a result votes shift from one party to another instead of going to other regional or small parties. But this does not mean that no significant changes have come in the party politics of Himachal in this phase (1990-2007). Parties other than the two principal parties have also performed well and in turn affected the dominance of the two-party system. In this respect, we can start by talking about the regional parties of the state.

It might be said that the HVC was the first regional party of the state which was capable of affecting its politics.¹² It was formed by Sukh Ram who before forming this party belonged to the Indian National Congress and was the union communication minister. He had held a portfolio in P.V. Narasimha Rao's cabinet. A member of the Lok Sabha from the Mandi constituency, Sukh Ram had won the Vidhan Sabha elections five times and the Lok Sabha elections three times. However, he was abruptly removed from the Indian National Congress on account of a telecom scam after he was convicted in a 1993 graft case. The former minister along with others had been found guilty of 'being part of a criminal conspiracy to defraud the exchequer by awarding a telecom equipment supply contract to Hyderabad-based Advanced Radio Masts (ARM) which had supplied inferior goods at a higher rate to the DoT'.¹³

¹²T.R Sharma, 'Local Configuration and National Parties in Himachal Pradesh', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(34/35), 1999, pp. 2465-2471.

¹³'1993 Telecom Scam: SC asks Sukh Ram, accomplices to surrender: North News', *India Today*, Jan 6, 2012, Online, www.indiatoday.in.

The Himachal Vikas Congress was formed in 1998 and in the Assembly elections in the same year it won 12 percent seats which helped the BJP come to power. The HVC ‘gave’ two of its legislators to the winning party in a move to prevent the Congress from coming to power under the leadership of former Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh.¹⁴ A year before his term ended, Virbhadra Singh recommended the dissolution of the Assembly so that the Assembly polls could be aligned with the Lok Sabha elections. Elections to the Assembly were held for 65 seats that year. The result was as follows (**Table 3.1**):

Table 3.1: Division of Seats, HP Legislative Assembly; 1998				
Total Seats	Congress (I)	BJP	HVC	Independents
65	31	29	4	1

¹⁴‘A Rough Ride for the BJP’, *Frontline*, 20(3), February 01-14, 2003, Online, www.frontline.in.

The detailed result of these elections has been given in the following table (Table 3.2):

Table 3.2: Performance of Political Parties; 1998						
Party	Seats			Votes Polled		Vote % in Seats Conteste d
	Contested	Won	FD	Votes	%	
National Parties						
BJP	68	31	3	995,482	39.02	39.02
BSP	28	0	26	35,866	1.41	3.28
CPI	14	0	14	11,088	0.43	2.02
CPM	11	0	11	13,508	0.53	3.21
INC	68	31	2	1,110,055	43.51	43.51
JD	21	0	19	19,155	0.75	2.50
Total:	210	62	75	2,185,154	85.65	
States Parties						
AIRJP	21	0	21	6,275	0.25	0.78
HVC	62	5	48	6,275	0.25	0.78
SHS	62	0	48	245,584	9.63	10.51
SJP(R)	1	0	6	2,827	0.11	1.29
SP	14	0	14	3,176	0.12	0.61
Total:	104	5	90	257,953	10.11	
REGISTERED (Unrecognised) PARTIES						
RJP	3	0	3	1,498	0.06	1.18
	3	0	3	1,498	0.06	
INDEPENDENTS						
IND	52	1	44	106,764	4.18	5.50
	52	1	44	106,764	4.18	
Grand Total	369	68	212	2,551,369		

Source: Statistical Report on General Election, 1998 to the Legislative Assembly of Himachal Pradesh, Election Commission of India.

Sukh Ram spilt the HVC and 'merged the two member breakaway Himachal Kranti Morcha with the BJP'.¹⁵ As a result of this development BJP's strength went up to 31. But before the oath taking ceremony could take place, due to the death of a member of the BJP, its strength came down to 30 and Congress (I) received the support of an independent candidate, who had initially belonged to a faction of the BJP which had been led by former Chief Minister Shanta Kumar. The Congress (I) came to power in the state with the support of 32 members and Virbhadra Singh was sworn in as Chief Minister on 9th March, 1998. There was a major shift in this situation when the independent candidate following intervention by BJP's central leadership withdrew his support to the Congress (I) and the remaining two legislators of the HVC lent their support to the BJP. The result was the falling of the strength of the Congress (I) to 30 and Prem Kumar Dhumal assuming office on 24th March 1998. This was the first time since 1982 that the BJP governments completed four years in office in Himachal Pradesh. The governments which had been led by Shanta Kumar in 1982 and 1990 had not lasted long.

The Himachal Vikas Congress had successfully made its presence felt and had made it evident to the two parties¹⁶ i.e. the Congress and the BJP that its support to either of them was an important factor in determining victory in the Assembly elections of Himachal Pradesh. It sent out the indication that its contribution in the politics of the state had to be recognized. As T.R. Sharma observed that it was capable of 'tilting scales'¹⁷ in anyone's favour. Making its position clear, the HVC sent out a signal that it could not be taken for granted. This became obvious when two HVC legislators who had joined the BJP government resigned from the Cabinet and joined the parent party.

The coalition government of the BJP and HVC was manifested with dissidence. Following this, in 2000, five BJP legislators including four ministers pressed charges of corruption on the government. As a result Chief Minister Dhumal removed them but because of the intervention by the Central leadership he took them back. The issue of corruption was something the Opposition, the Congress harped on and was not too

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶'An Uphill Task', *Frontline*, 19 (9), 27 April – 10 May, 2012, Online, www.frontline.in.

¹⁷T.R. Sharma, 'Himachal Pradesh: Two Party Competition in a Small State', *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy*, 15(1&2), 2003, pp. 173-188.

keen to join hands with the HVC (a party whose leader was related to the telecommunication scandal). Virbhadra Singh was especially not in favour of an alliance with the HVC because of the event which had transpired in the Assembly elections of 1998 but Vidya Stokes, an active member of the Indian National Congress since 1970 and of the Pradesh Congress Committee since 1974, argued that the HVC should not be ruled out as an ally to prevent the division of secular vote. Sukh Ram, agreed to this, showing an interest in allying with the Congress (I). He said, 'secular forces should come together'.¹⁸ He described the main agenda of his party as focusing on uplifting the state from financial difficulty. In his view neither the Congress (I) nor the BJP had a feasible fiscal policy. He expressed dissatisfaction with the BJP blaming it of never consulting the members of the HVC in important matters and the central leadership never intervening to rectify the situation. In one of the statements which he made, Sukh Ram explicitly said, 'No party can form the government without the help of the HVC'¹⁹.

Another fact about the HVC is that since it formed a coalition government in March 1998, the party had remained persistent and after the alliance it won all the tribal constituencies in June 1998 followed by its victory in three Assembly bye-elections in Pragpur, Baijnath and Solan and; in one of the four Lok Sabha constituencies in September 1999.

The alliance of which the HVC was an important part had registered a definite victory in the Panchayati Raj and Urban Local Bodies polls. According to the sources of the BJP, the result of the elections to the Panchayati Raj and Urban Local Bodies were a clear commendation of the policies and programmes which had been adopted by the coalition government and simultaneously a rejection of the policies and programmes of the opposition whose senior leaders had launched a campaign of vilification against the BJP-HVC coalition government ever since it assumed office in March 1998.

The Congress (I) had made desperate attempts in order to win the support of Sukh Ram but the latter did not oblige since his demand was the removal of Virbhadra Singh from the leadership of the party. He made such a demand because he suspected

¹⁸ 'A Rough Ride for the BJP', *Frontline*, 20(3), 1-14 February, 2003, Online, www.frontline.in

¹⁹ Ibid.

that Virbhadra Singh was responsible for the cases of corruption against him. The Congress also persistently wooed the independent MLA, Ramesh Chand who was from Jwalamukhi and had previously been a BJP activist. This happened in the week following the formation of the government.²⁰ To win his support, the Congress (I) offered Ramesh Chand a place in the seven-member Ministry of Virbhadra Singh. Ramesh Chand, in view of the political climate moved under high security. He had once been a strong supporter of the BJP and the former Chief Minister Shanta Kumar. His main reason for not supporting the BJP came from his opposition of Prem Kumar Dhumal's leadership of the party.

Himachal Kranti Party

Himachal Kranti Party, was formed after the 1998 state assembly elections, when two members of the Himachal Vikas Congress, Mansa Ram and Prakash Chaudhary, split to form HKP. HKP merged with the Bharatiya Janata Party in 1999.

Him Loktantrik Morcha

A political front in the state of Himachal Pradesh was formed ahead of the Shimla Municipal Corporation elections on 6th February, 2002. It was aimed to be an alternative to the Indian National Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party, the pillars of the two-party system in the state.²¹ The convenor of the Him Loktantrik Morcha, Mohinder Singh Choudhary, an independent candidate of the Legislative Assembly was earlier a member of the Himachal Vikas Congress. He held portfolios of Public Works and Excise in the Ministry of Prem Kumar Dhumal. After BJP Ministers leveled charges of corruption against him, Mohinder Singh Choudhary quit the Ministry. Soon after he was expelled from HVC, he joined the Lok Jan Shakti Party which was a constituent of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) which was ruling at the centre at that time. Important to note is that the Lok Jan Shakti Party was organizing agitations against the BJP-HVC government. In fact the non-BJP constituents of the NDA in Himachal Pradesh took contradictory positions on several positions vis-à-vis the BJP.

²⁰'Fractured Verdict', *Frontline*, 15(7), 4-17 April, Online, www.frontline.in.

²¹*The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 29th March, 2004.

The Him Loktantrik Morcha was a product of the initiative taken by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and it was determined to ensure that an end can be put to the polarization of votes between the two parties, i.e. the Congress and the BJP.²² It was made up of the CPI (M), the Janata Dal (Secular), the Lok Jan Shakti Party, the Samajwadi Party and some regional secular parties. Writing about the Morcha, a leading magazine said that the HLM's viability would be tested on the basis of how successfully it would be able to launch joint struggles in the state. The emergence of the HLM had become inevitable considering the anti-incumbency factor which was working against the BJP-HVC at the state level and the Congress at the municipal level.

The HLM comprising of all the mentioned parties was not hesitant in openly criticizing the economic policies of the Dhumal government. It campaigned against the BJP-HVC and the Congress attacking them mainly on economic issues. The BJP and the Congress's discomfort on the emergence of the HLM consisting of all important parties became evident when they labeled it as a party of 'frustrated individuals'.²³ However a majority of Congress rebels joined the Morcha including a former Mayor and two former Councillors.

A year after the Assembly elections in 2003, the Him Loktantrik Morcha merged with the BJP. The merger was announced at a joint press conference by Mr. Suresh Bhardwaj, the state BJP chief and Mr. Mohinder Singh at which other senior leaders of the BJP were also present. The Morcha had contested the assembly election of 2003 and had polled 2.17 votes. Mr Mohinder was the only one from the morcha to have entered the Vidhan Sabha. The party had significant presence in Mandi, Solan, Sirmaur districts. It possessed units in seven out of the ten constituencies in the Mandi district (**Table 3.3**) which falls in the old areas, a stronghold of the Congress.

²²'An Uphill Task', *Frontline*, 19 (9), 27 April – 10 May, 2012, Online, www.frontline.in.

²³Ibid.

Kinnaur	-	-	-	35,064
Shimla	1	-	1,621	331,337
Solan	2	-	16,453	225,008
Sirmour	1	-	16,785	217,550
Bilaspur	-	-	-	185,206
Hamirpur	-	-	-	226,601
Una	-	-	-	234,838
Kangra	1	-	421	712,381
Chanba	-	-	-	213,618
Lahaul-Spiti	1	-	122	16,682
Kullu	1	-	2,207	181,331
Mandi	7	1	28,493	472,386
Total	14	1	66,102	3,052,002

Source: Government of Himachal Pradesh 'Election Department' Report on General Elections to the Vidhan Sabha-2003, Himachal Pradesh.

The Himachal Jan Morcha

The Himachal Jan Morcha was formed in October 2002 just before the time of the Assembly elections in Himachal Pradesh in 2003. Leaders from the Janata Dal, the Samajwadi Janata Party and the Samajwadi Party in order to bring the non-NDA and non-Congress parties under one umbrella formed the Himachal Jan Morcha (HJM). A non-political organisation, the Theog Vikas Manch also joined the Morcha. Former MP, Mr Ranjit Singh was unanimously elected as the convener of the Morcha. A committee comprising of heads of all constituent parties was also set up. A common minimum programme was to be drawn by the committee. The CPI and the CPM appreciated the formation of the Morcha. Unlike the Him Loktantrik Morcha which was registered as a political party, the constituents in the HJM were free to retain their separate identity.²⁴ Though this party was formed just before the 2003 assembly, it does not appear anywhere if one looks at the elections of 2003. It might be concluded that the party withered away.

²⁴*The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 7 October, 2002.

Himachal Lokhit Party

Himachal Lokhit Party, a new political outfit initiated (recently) by certain senior but displeased leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party has created ripples in the political sphere of the state of Himachal Pradesh⁹. The Congress and the BJP, without doubt were the two most affected parties and this development made these two parties fear turmoil in their own ranks and profile.

A number of senior leaders in Hamirpur which is also the hometown of the Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister left the party to join the newly formed Himachal Lokhit Party. They leveled serious charges of corruption and nepotism and attacked the government. The supporters of this newly formed political outfit were of the opinion that the honest workers of the BJP were feeling suffocated in the party and there would be an organizational exodus in the days to come. Prakash Thakur, the president of the new Hamirpur district said that the BJP had come to be associated with the landed mafia, education networkers and contractors of all sorts. He said that the aim of this party was to teach the BJP 'a lesson' in the Vidhan Sabha elections.²⁵

Even though no third political force has formed a government in the state but has been able to upset the applecart of both the parties in the past. The split in the Congress Party which had taken place in the V.P. Singh era and the formation of the Janata Dal which harmed the political interests of the party would be a case in point. Virbhadra Singh who was the Chief Minister at that time had lost a seat to Ram Lal Thakur, a former Congress member who at that time had joined the Janata Dal, in one of the constituencies of the state. The Janata Dal had won eleven seats whereas the Congress could only win nine in the 68 member Assembly of Himachal Pradesh.

The formation of the Himachal Vikas Congress in 1998 had also ruined the game plan of the Congress and had led to the formation of government by the BJP and the HVC. This coalition had made the Congress sit in opposition for five years. No non-Congress government had completed tenure of five years before this.

²⁵*The Hindu*, New Delhi, 8 February, 2012.

Other National Parties in Himachal Pradesh

Apart from the Congress and the BJP, there exists in the state other national parties and their role in the politics of the state must be looked at.

The appearance of the Janata Dal has been minimal in Himachal Pradesh. However, it should be mentioned because of its performance in the 1990 elections to the assembly of Himachal Pradesh. The BJP's lead fell marginally to 46 in 1990 while that of the Congress went down to 8. The Janata Dal at this time was leading in 11. But the appearance of the Janata Dal was only transitory as the balance again shifted in favour of the Congress in the 1991 Lok Sabha elections where its lead expanded to 34 segments, whereas that of the BJP contracted to 32, and the Janata Dal led in the remaining two segments. In the year 1990, the BJP had to enter into an alliance with the Janata Dal though it managed to form the government on its own. This government continued for two and a half years before the Babri Masjid demolition. The Chief Minister of Himachal made objectionable statements regarding the incident and was forced to resign. This resulted in mid-term elections in the year 1993. The performance of the Janata Dal is shown in the following table (**Table 3.4**):

Table 3.4: Performance of Political Parties; 1990						
Party	Seats			Votes Polled		Vote % in Seats Contested
	Contested	Won	FD	Votes	%	
National Parties						
BJP	51	46	1	858518	41.78	55.78
CPI	18	1	16	42393	2.06	7.78
CPM	7	0	6	11949	0.58	5.52
ICS (SCS)	13	0	13	12984	0.63	2.89
INC	66	9	0	750885	36.54	37.64
JD	17	11	2	222542	10.83	43.15
JNP (JP)	19	0	19	3769	0.18	0.65
	191	67	57	1,903,040	92.61	
STATES PARTIES						
BSP	35	0	35	190230	0.94	1.76
	35	0	35	19230	0.94	
REGISTERED (Unrecognised) PARTIES						
DDP	32	0	32	6722	0.33	0.66
HMS	1	0	1	43	0.00	0.15
PBI	2	0	2	442	0.02	0.79
	35	0	35	7207	0.35	
INDEPENDENTS						
IND	193	1	185	125421	6.10	6.74
	193	1	185	125421	6.10	
Grand Total	454	68	312	2054898		

Source: Statistical Report on General Election, 1990 to the Legislative Assembly of Himachal Pradesh

The 2007 elections to the legislative assembly of Himachal also saw the rise of a third political outfit, the Bahujan Samaj Party. For the first time the BSP made a mark in

the electoral politics of the state. In these elections, the Congress's vote share fell marginally from 40.7 per cent in 2003 to 38.7 per cent. The BJP's share on the other hand shot up significantly from 35.4 per cent in 2003 to 46.5 per cent. The BSP saw an increase in its vote share as compared to the previous elections. The BSP contested from all 68 seats and even though it could win only one seat, it harmed the Congress and the BJP's share of votes in certain areas. For example in Kullu, the presence of a BSP candidate pushed the Congress to a third place. The Congress's votes got divided and the BJP candidate won by 5,033 votes.²⁶ In the Kangra region, the BSP managed to defeat Shanta Kumar of the BJP to win this seat. BSP's Sanjay Chaudhary left his Congress rival behind by a margin of 1,309 votes. It was able to cut through the BJP and Congress's votes in this region. Its performance is given in table (Table 3.5).

Table 3.5: A Statistical Report on General Election to Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha, 2007 (Bahujan Samaj Party)					
Name of District	Contested	Winner	Party Votes Polled	Total Valid Votes	%
Kinnaur	1	0	1,009	34,731	2.91
Shimla	8	0	9,476	355,137	2.67
Solan	5	0	13,003	238,821	5.44
Sirmour	5	0	11,596	240,770	4.82
Bilaspur	3	0	5,222	194,230	2.69
Hamirpur	5	0	18,867	234,072	8.06
Una	5	0	15,798	261,712	6.04
Kangra	16	1	80,562	761,313	10.58
Chamba	5	0	6,444	236,484	2.72
Lahaul-Spiti	1	0	726	16,794	4.32
Kullu	3	0	45,030	201,513	22.35
Mandi	10	0	31,226	516,089	6.05
Total	67	1	238,959	3,291,666	7.26

Source: Govt. of Himachal Pradesh, Election Department. Report on General Election to Vidhan Sabha-2007 and Lok Sabha Bye-Election 2007-2008, Himachal Pradesh.

²⁶Frontline, 25 (1), 5-18 January, 2008, Online, www.frontline.in.

CPI (M) in Himachal Pradesh: Party Politics in Urban Local Body

The communist parties have not been able to perform well in the electoral politics of Himachal, be it the Vidhan Sabha or the Lok Sabha. They have small pockets of influence but this has not made any considerable difference for them. The CPM appeared on the electoral scene of the state in 1967 and its votes share and has remained between 0.1 to 1.1 per cent. But in the recently held municipal corporation elections in Shimla, the Communist Party (Marxist) has shocked the two principal parties of the state. The municipal elections might not always influence the politics of the state in a big way but scholars and politicians maintain that they do reflect the electoral politics of the state, somewhat.²⁷

‘Lal Salaam to the Queen of Hills’²⁸

In the recently held municipal elections to the Shimla Municipal Corporation (SMC), the CPM has created history of sorts by grabbing the posts of Mayor and Deputy Mayor, who were elected directly for the first time. This victory in the capital of Himachal Pradesh has come after a year of the CPM’s loss to the Trinamool Congress which ended their 34-year-rule in West Bengal.

Elections to the civic body in Shimla were held on the 27th of May, 2012 and the results were declared on the 28th of May, 2012. The body consists of 25 wards. Out of the 25 seats, the BJP bagged 12 seats while the opposition party, the Congress had to be content with 10 seats. The CPM did not fare well in the ward poll as its tally went up from two (in the previous elections) to three in the current one. The ward-wise result is given in the table (**Table 3.6**) below:

²⁷The Municipal Corporation elections are a local affair but despite of this, they are looked at as a referendum on the performance of the State government, in political circles. In fact, it is the only corporation in the state and is considered to be a microcosm of the State’s polity. The electorate which constitutes mainly the State and Central government employees and considering the high literacy rates, it is an informed public that goes to the polls.

²⁸*The Times of India*, Chandigarh, 29th May, 2012.

Table 3.6: Ward-Wise Results*				
Nos.	Ward	Winner	Party	Margin
1	Bharari	Kala Sharma	BJP	118
2	Ruldubhatta	Saroj Thakur	BJP	472
3	Kaithu	Kanta Suyal	CPM	311
4	Annandale	Lakshmi	BJP	346
5	Summmer Hill	Diksha Thakur	CPM	567
6	Totu	Nirmala Chauhan	BJP	407
7	Boileauganj	Usha Lakhanpal	Cong.	292
8	Tutikandi	Uma Kaushal	Cong.	657
9	Nabha	Shashi Shekhar	Cong.	2
10	Phagli	Kalyan Chand	BJP	655
11	Krishnanagar	Rajni Singh	BJP	189
12	Ram Bazar	Sushma Kuthiala	Cong.	49
13	Lower Bazar	Bharti Sood	BJP	321
14	Jakhu	Manoj Kuthiala	BJP	7
15	Benmore	Anup Vaid	BJP	180
16	Engine Ghar	Sushant Kapret	Cong.	304
17	Sanjauli Chowk	Satya Kaundal	BJP	85
18	Dhali	Shailender	BJP	313
19	Chamyana	Narender	CPM	133
20	Malyana	Kuldeep Thakur	Cong.	56
21	Kasumpti	Kusum Thakur	BJP	354
22	Chotta Shimla	Surender Chauhan	Cong.	1,087
23	Patyog	Deepak Rohal	Cong.	832
24	Khalini	Praveen Kumar	Cong.	166
25	Kanlog	Alok Pathania	Cong.	286

*Total wards = 25, BJP = 12, Cong = 10, CPM = 3
Source: Hindustan times, 29 May, 2012.

This election is also significant as it has put an end to the 26-year rule of the Congress party over the local Municipal Corporation since 1986.²⁹ As reported by a leading newspaper it has sent warning bells to the Congress which has been waiting to displace the BJP from power by winning the Assembly elections which are going to be held shortly in the State. The party has not only failed in securing a clear majority in the corporation on which it has had a hold for the past 26 years but have suffered crushing defeats in the contest for the posts of Mayor and Deputy Mayor. Unfortunately for the party, the worst is that it has lost the top two posts to the CPM and not to its main rival, the BJP. Another embarrassing thing for the party is that it has ended up in third position after the CPM and BJP.

The CPM and the Himachal Lokhit party have alleged that the two main parties in the State were involved in 'political match-fixing' which influenced the electorate and it voted tactically in order to 'teach them a lesson'. The Congress did not capitalize on the issues of corruption, rise of land-mafia, discrepancies in private universities and affairs of the state cricket association which had been raised against the Dhumal-government by the CPM.

The result of this election comes as a lesson for the Congress to 'put its house in order' before the State goes to polls this year. Lack of organization and weak coordination at the grassroots coupled with ego hassles between the top leaders of the party has badly affected the party. With Assembly polls which might be held in October the leaders of the party cannot afford to indulge in the blame game. The increase in petrol prices may have also hurt the party's prospects. It is up to the party high command to step up and take effective measures to revamp the party and welcome leaders which have a good public support at all levels, irrespective of the factional-loyalties.

The Congress and the BJP have taken advantage of the anti-incumbency factor over the past two decades and have taken turns in ruling the State. The Congress can no longer hope to simply acquire power here. The chief of the Pradesh Congress Committee, Kaul Singh needs to look into the poor performance of the party which

²⁹*Hindustan Times*, Chandigarh, 29th May, 1012.

has made the task of bringing the Congress back to power even more difficult. The General Secretary of the party in Himachal Pradesh, Kuldeep Rathore said that results were unexpected and there was need to analyse the reasons for its defeat.

BJP's dreams shattered?

The BJP's dream of capturing the posts of Mayor and Deputy Mayor have been crushed in the first ever direct elections for these two posts as the CPM candidates emerged as the people's choice as they emerged with a resounding victory. Sanjay Chauhan defeated the closest BJP candidate Dr. S.S. Minhas by a margin of 7,868 votes as he polled a total of 21,903 votes.

CPM's allegation that the BJP and the Congress have indulged in political fixing in the elections was also reiterated by Lok Sabha MP and suspended BJP leader Rajan Sushant. He made a very important observation about the two-party system dominating the state in a press conference where he said that the fact that the CPM candidates had won the posts of Mayor and Deputy Mayor clearly signified that the electorate of Himachal Pradesh was in favour of a third political front in the state. He said 'The electorate of Shimla has rejected BJP candidates because of the corrupt and arrogant image of the Dhumal government.' Regarding the performance of the Congress, he blamed the rejection of the party's candidates on account of the hike in prices and corruption in the country. Sushant stressed that the results of these elections have paved the path for the emergence of a third force in the state.

Contrary to such a belief and what was being claimed by certain quarters, Chief Minister P.K. Dhumal said that the Shimla Municipal Corporation elections have not been a trendsetter and do not determine the result of the Assembly election in the state. He gave instances to substantiate his argument. In 1997, the BJP had won just two seats in the Municipal Corporation but formed the government in the state in 1998. He also gave the example of the 2007 elections when the Congress had won the elections of the Municipal Corporation; the BJP won the Assembly elections. Dhumal in his verdict on the elections said that the results were a reflection of the rejection of the Congress which had ruled since 1986. The BJP strength went up from an eight in the last elections to a twelve in these ones and for this he thanked the electorate for extending its support to the electorate.

What Sanjay Chauhan had to say about the victory of the CPM also echoed the sentiment about the rejection of the two parties and the electorate supporting a third front in Himachal Pradesh. He said, 'It is the victory of the people and a mandate for the development of the town. People chose the CPM as an alternative to the BJP and the Congress after being fed up with their policies of crushing the common man. We will ensure the development of the town where people will not have to come to the MC office, but the entire paraphernalia, including the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, the commissioner, councillors and others will be available on doorstep every three months when the ward sabhas are held. We want to restore the lost glory of this historic town'.

The Deputy Mayor, Tikender held a similar view when he said, 'It is a positive vote in favour of the CPM for development. People were fed up with the neo-liberal policies being pursued by the BJP and the Congress where the burden was being shifted on the common man. Our promise of decentralising power through a democratisation process by holding ward sabhas and preparing a 'people's charter' seems to have clicked with the electorate. Our endeavour will now be to create a team so that the basic facilities under the ambit of the MC reach the people.'

The CPM virtually painted the town red after its candidates Sanjay Chauhan and Tikender Panwar won with impressive margins of 7,868 and 4,778, respectively. Following the victory people saw red flags fluttering everywhere as its activists took out victory processions. The CPM's success was major shock for the BJP and a matter of humiliation for the Congress. Sanjay Chauhan, also a popular face in the town trounced the BJP's Dr Satinder Singh Minhas while incumbent Mayor who belongs to the Congress was pushed to the third spot. Chauhan secured 21,903 votes out of the 51,115 votes polled (electorate: 79,956) and Minhas could bag only 14,035 votes. Fielding Minhas, a non-politician and popular surgeon has been called a trick by the BJP but this move of the party did not work as the party cadres did not support him wholeheartedly. Congress's Dr. Sood could only manage 13,278 votes.

For the deputy mayor's post the CPM's Tikender Panwar defeated Digvijay Chauhan of the BJP by a margin of 4,768 votes. Panwar received 21,176 votes; Digvijay secured 16,418 votes; and Congress's Devender Chauhan, 13,205 votes.

As for the campaigning, the BJP had left no stone unturned to snatch the control of the Shimla MC from the Congress. Chief Minister Dhumal was the star campaigner for the party but his rival Shanta Kumar was conspicuous by his absence. Dhumal had deputed a set of his cabinet colleagues to stir up the campaign of the party. The Congress's campaign was dull and disjointed Union Minister for trade, commerce and textiles Anand Sharma visited only for a day. Kaul Singh Thakur, the president of the Pradesh Congress Committee, Vidya Stokes, the Congress Legislature Party leader, campaigned together with the union minister for micro, small and medium enterprises Virbhadra Singh. As for the CPM, apart from a day's visit by CPM national Politiburo member Sitaram Yechury, the party benefitted from its dedicated cadres, local leaders who organized the campaign despite of the meager resources. The CPM candidate's rapport with the public did the magic for the party. By raising issues of public importance like water supply, transport and its fight against the land mafia and corruption, the CPM successfully turned the tide in its favour. These candidates demanded redressal on various issues from the state government, for example; the inconvenience caused due to the shifting of the new inter-state bus terminus, impending unit area tax and apple crop issues, etc. The public which was happy about the CPM's victory said that both the candidates of the party had stood by them providing support whenever it was needed and it was their duty to do the same.

The Congress can blame its loss not only on its lackluster campaign but also on the wrong selection of candidates, lack of strategy and division among rank and file. Rival factions lobbied hard only for their favourites for tickets. The party instead of fielding candidates, who had public support, gave importance to personal choices. Merit was completely ignored in this case. A lot of time was wasted in taking decisions about candidates for the posts of mayor and deputy mayor. While Virbhadra Singh lobbied hard to get ticket for Harish Janartha, his loyalist and incumbent deputy mayor, the rival faction backed the incumbent mayor Madhu Sood who in the end emerged as the final choice. The leaders of the party ignored the fact that she would need to do some explaining to voters since she had remained saddled on the mayor's post for five years. Since Sood enjoyed the support of Kaul Singh, she did not have the backing of the rival faction. Anand Sharma did not let go off the 'elite' style and did not address a single rally. Even though Virbhadra Singh addressed joint rallies with Kaul Singh and Vidya Stokes, his arch rivals, he could not really connect with

the voters. The Congress lost in all the wards where Singh had campaigned. Even in his home ward, Jhaku Virbhadra Singh lost to the BJP. Similarly Anand Sharma's Home ward, Bharari also fell to the BJP.

Interestingly the BJP which had amended the rules for direct elections could not groom candidates for the two main posts. There was indecisiveness in the BJP camp over the appointment of candidates for these posts and this led to utter confusion. SS Minhas was fielded only at the last moment and the organisation fretted over the choice. The party leaders were unhappy with Minhas's candidature. Overconfidence might also have led the party down. Dhumal had claimed that the BJP would create history by winning all the seats in the corporation. The deputy mayoral nominee, Digvijay Chauhan also had to bear the brunt because of division of regional votes as Devender Chauhan, the Congress candidate also hailed from Kotkhai.

Himachal Lokhit Party on the Municipal Corporation Election

The Himachal Lokhit Party president Maheshwar Singh Thakur claimed that the verdict was a mandate against the corrupt policies of the BJP government. He openly alleged that ministers and high rank officials in the state government were deeply involved in corruption. For him, by voting in favour of the CPM, the people of Shimla made clear their intentions against the BJP government in the state. Important to note is that the HLP requested the voters to cast their votes in favour of the CPM so that a third alternative could emerge in the state.

Take on the CPM's Victory and Emergence of a Third Front

An interview with Sanjay Chauhan is reflective of the fact that the CPM is extremely positive on the emergence of a third front which will challenge the existing two-party system in Himachal Pradesh. According to him the assembly elections of 2012 might not be a smooth ride for either the BJP or the Congress. This argument is heavily based on the results of the Municipal Corporation elections where the electorate of Shimla has openly supported the third alternative presented to them. Contrary to what Dhumal had to say about these elections not determining the results of the assembly elections, the CPM believes that the politics of the state can expect a U-turn similar to the one seen in the MC elections. People of Himachal, says Mr. Chauhan are 'fed up' of the neo-liberal policies being adopted in the state. Issues which drove the currently

held elections, such as; unemployment, price rise, lack of basic amenities and corruption, will also continue to be highlighted in the assembly elections³⁰.

He maintains that the CPM has not had a very strong presence in the state and that any party alone might not be able to erode the strong hold which has been established by the two national parties. However, the CPM in alliance with other parties who aim to challenge the hold of these parties can create difficulty for the BJP and the Congress. Mr. Chauhan talks about the Himachal Lokhit Party in this context which will possibly be an ally of the CPM in the upcoming elections. Factionalism in the BJP and the Congress which is proving to have damaging effects for them has given a reason to be hopeful to the CPM. The Himachal Lokhit Party is a case in point. Mr Chauhan also talks about the HVC and Shanta Kumar (which proved to be troublesome for the Congress) in this respect.

The CPM claims that its struggles in the past five years in the state have started to pay off. It counts on a strong base among students as its support base. The student organization of the party, the SFI (Students' Federation of India) has been doing a good job, winning in the Himachal Pradesh University elections for the last few years. CPM is also banking on the support it has from the workers in the hotel industry in the state who are a part of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions. As for other regions of the state and parliamentary constituencies, the party is organizing the peasantry. Since Himachal Pradesh is a state which relies deeply on agriculture, the CPM stresses on organizing the marginal farmers and making them a part of their support base. The farmers, according to the party are also unhappy with the neo-liberal policies of the BJP and the Congress and this is where the CPM can provide relief to them as well as benefit from it.

Gaining public support is the main strategy being adopted by the party. It is sure that by doing so it will be able to influence the assembly elections where people will keep in mind the third alternative. The CPM will not hesitate in welcoming any party and making it an ally to form a third front, as said by Mr. Chauhan.

³⁰Based on an interview with Sanjay Chauhan, CPM, Mayor, Shimla.

When asked about the viability of a third front, Chief Minister Dhumal absolutely denies such a development which will affect his party or the Congress³¹. For him, it is only during the elections when one can ‘hear a lot of voices’, meaning the emerging of new parties with the purpose of bringing in a force which will disturb the two-party system in the state, but in the end it all boils down to the two national parties.

Talking about the CPM, he says that it is present only in a few pockets of Himachal Pradesh and hence it is very unlikely that its presence can deeply affect either of the two parties. On the other hand the BJP, he says is very well entrenched at the grass root level that it is not easy to uproot it. According to him, the CPM not only has a marginal presence in the state but has dirt on it too. In 1992, some of its MLAs were convicted for murder. For Mr Dhumal CPM’s victory in Shimla in the MC elections also does not come as a threat. This is so as the parliamentary seat of Shimla at present belongs to the BJP and Virender Kashyap is the party’s member from this constituency.

Regarding the BSP which managed to win a 7.5 per cent vote in the 2007 assembly elections and the Kangra reserved seat, Mr. Dhumal points out that Sanjay Chaudhary, the BSP legislator joined the BJP. He also mentions Major Vijay Singh Mankotia, the BSP state convener who left the party and joined the Congress (Mankotia left the party before Sanjay Chaudhary did). This resulted in drastically diminishing the presence of the BSP, which was already struggling to make a mark. He gives these examples in order to substantiate his argument that political space in the state is polarized between the BJP and the Congress and it is not easy to make a dent in their position. Also, Mr Dhumal is sure that the BSP cannot be much of a threat in the areas which consist of the Dalit or tribal population. He openly claims that the BJP is popular with these sections and the reason is the work which the party has been doing for them. The Chief Minister stresses on various schemes the BJP government has come up with to support the dalits and the tribal population. He also mentions certain schemes which will find recognition with the public and help the BJP in getting support of the electorate. These include; a grant of 10 lakhs to every ward in the panchayats, provision of school uniform to every student (under the

³¹Based on an interview with Prem Kumar Dhumal, BJP, Chief Minister, Himachal Pradesh.

School Uniform Yojana) twice a year irrespective of the family being above or below poverty line³², provision of Rs 100 to meet the cost of tailoring the uniform, availability of an ambulance at the doorstep, electricity at a cheaper rate and the Matri Seva Yojana providing pregnant women in the state the facility of free institutional delivery in all the government health institutions in the State.³³

About the parties which try and emerge as regional parties in Himachal Pradesh, Mr. Dhumal takes the view that these parties are factions which generally break away from the two main parties and eventually merge with either the BJP or the Congress. Maheshwar Singh from the Himachal Lokhit Party was with the BJP earlier and being a member of the party had won twice from Mandi and had been a member of the Rajya Sabha. Efforts have been made to bring about a third force in the state and it started in 1967 when TS Negi from the BJP and Heera Singh Pal Khachi from the Congress had started the Lok Raj Party but it later disappeared. In 1990, the Jan Kranti Party came up but merged with the Janata Dal and the HVC which came up in 1998 too disintegrated.

Mr. Narendra Kataria of the Congress, former mayor of Shimla also holds the view that it is extremely difficult for strong third front challenging the Congress and the BJP to emerge in the state. He stresses more on the reasons why the CPM could win in Shimla this time. For him, factionalism is the main cause which is having a damaging effect on both the parties³⁴. The national parties in Himachal are scarred by resentment among the leaders in the respective parties. Unfortunately it is also determining the candidature for important posts. One faction is turning against the other within the same party and supporting different candidates. He says that sycophancy has gone up to a new level and money is playing a major role in determining candidates for elections. Such development he concludes has turned the people against both the parties.

³²Chief Minister Dhumal claims that Himachal Pradesh is the first state to take and implement this initiative.

³³4 Years of Good Governance, Bharatiya Janata Party.

³⁴Based on an interview with Narendra Kataria, Congress, Ex-Mayor, Shimla.

The Himachal Lokhit Party (HLP) on the Third Front

Whether the Shimla Municipal Corporation elections would in any manner affect the upcoming Assembly election this year is answered by the President of the HLP, Maheshwar Singh Thakur with an argument that Shimla is a cosmopolitan city, it comprises of people from all regions of Himachal Pradesh and hence, winning in Shimla implies that a party has been able to make a mark in different regions influencing a large number of people all over and not just in Shimla. The Third Front, he said, appealed to the people to vote for 'the honest' in the MC elections and will have the same message to give for the Assembly elections. The people in turn have sent out a note that the parties looking to challenge the Congress and the BJP should unite and they will be voted for. The Himachal Lokhit Party in collaboration with other parties does not want to divide the Congress or BJP vote but wants to be successful on the basis of a 'Common Minimum Programme'³⁵.

A new regional party by the name of Him Swabhimaan Party is taking birth in Himachal Pradesh and it is in the process of registration. This party along with other parties including the CPM will be allies of the Himachal Lokhit Party for the upcoming elections. Mr. Thakur said that the HLP welcomed all parties who are ready to oppose the Congress and the BJP. His party and the CPM are continuously involved in talks in preparing a Third Front which would put up a fight against the two-party system. A lot of 'dals' exist in Himachal but for him, people have more expectations from the HLP and it looks to fulfil these hopes.

'Apna daur aa raha hai' (Our time is coming) is what Mr. Thakur has to say when asked about the position of Regional Parties in the State. He alleges that statements like in Himachal Pradesh which is dominated by a two-party system, it is very difficult for a Third Front to emerge, smell of unnecessary pride. Stress is laid on how in states like Punjab and Orissa regional parties are doing so well. It is because people have started accepting and moving towards accepting parties other than the two principal parties to run a government. Himachal in comparison to these states is a small state and therefore, there are fewer regional parties in comparison but they are on the rise.

³⁵Based on an interview with Maheshwar Singh Thakur, President, HLP.

It has been observed that factions which have broken away from the Congress or the BJP to form a regional party in Himachal Pradesh have eventually merged with either. The President of the HLP assures that this will not take place in its case. M.S. Thakur argues that he has always been opposing the Congress and so there is no question of joining hands with it. As for the BJP, he says that after leaving a party with which he was for 35 years, it does not make sense going back to it. Secondly, the present BJP party is not 'Atal Bihari Vajpayee's BJP'. Now it belongs to those who do not care about democracy. Now BJP is a party where no importance is given to the karyakartas and they are not given the respect they deserve. Only those at high positions in the party are considered significant.

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) on its prospects and the Third Front

Looking at the recent developments in the politics of Himachal Pradesh the BSP has a positive outlook towards the emergence of a strong third front in the State. For the upcoming elections this year (2012) to the Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha, the BSP is planning to field candidates from all 68 constituencies of the State. But unlike the CMP and the Himachal Lokhit Party, the BSP will not be forming an alliance with any party, regional or national. The party has expressed confidence in the electorate of Himachal seeing the results of the recently held Municipal corporation elections in Shimla. The leaders of the party argue that the people of the State are looking for an alternative. It is not just about a third force but an alternative which will enable them to free themselves from the rule of the Congress and the BJP.

The changes which are coming in the political scenario of Himachal are being treated as an alternative, 'Himachal ki janata badlaav ko vikalp ke roop mein dekh rahi hai.'³⁶ And this is what the BSP is banking on for the soon to be held assembly elections. Another reason which the party believes might be responsible for success of a third force in Himachal is factionalism which is proving cancerous for the Congress as well as the BJP. The differences between Virbhadra Singh and Vidya Stokes of the Congress make the presence of rival groups within the same organization obvious. The recent resignation of Virbhadra Singh is a reflection of the downfall of 'his

³⁶Based on an interview with Man Singh Manhella, State Election Co-ordinator, BSP.

politics' in the State. As for the BJP, the breaking away of Maheshwar Singh Thakur and the birth of HLP is being considered a negative development for the BJP.

The BSP along with its decision of not entering into an alliance with any party in Himachal is also adopting the technique of 'Social Engineering'. This implies that the party is not merely concentrating on the presence of the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) in the State. According to the party the population of SCs, STs and OBCs are 29%, 5% and 20% respectively. But the BSP being a national party is not focusing on them but is looking to represent all castes, classes and religions of Himachal Pradesh. The party believes in 'an alliance with the whole society rather than with some party.' Even though the BSP has been in existence in Himachal since 1966, it agrees that with respect to winning seats and polling votes, it has experienced a negative graph. The highlight for the party in this context has been the assembly election of 2007 in Himachal where it polled 8% votes.

Himachal is exhibiting such an atmosphere today where the electorate can see through the failures of the Congress and the BJP. Mr. Manhella supports his argument by talking about the position of Himachal in the employment sector. Himachal, he says is at the top when it comes to unemployment. There are ten lakh seventy thousand unemployed people in Himachal and for this figure he quotes the records of the Employment Exchange. Such issues will be highlighted in the coming elections and the BSP will surely capitalize on them.

The BSP is looking to tap the youth power of Himachal which accounts for 75% of the populations of the State. For the post of the Chief Minister also the party is willing to field a candidate who represents the youth of the State.

An Analysis

Broadly speaking, it can be said that the two-party system, right from 1967 when it started making its mark till the present day when Himachal Pradesh waits for the 2012 elections to the legislative assembly, maintains a stronghold in the state. The electoral data which has been presented also points to this fact. But one cannot really turn a blind eye towards some trends which the politics of the state has witnessed since

1990. The year 1990 is being taken as a benchmark here as it was in the elections held in this year (to the legislative assembly of Himachal) that one of the major parties in the state, the Congress suffered a setback when its vote share drastically declined and resulted in an embarrassing defeat due to the appearance of a third party on the electoral scene of Himachal. The 1989 Lok Sabha elections in the country helps to understand what resulted in such a situation. During the time of these elections the Congress had been submerged in extreme factionalism within the party. The Bofors deal also hampered the image the party. The Janata Dal at this time was emerging as a national party on the electoral scene of the country.³⁷ As a consequence of these factors, the Congress performed poorly in the parliamentary elections in Himachal. It managed to retain the reserved seat of Shimla falling in the old areas but lost the other three seats to the BJP. Mandi, one of these seats was also a part of the old areas. This loss in Mandi could be attributed to the discontent which had arisen following the scarcity and rise in price of sugar. Sukh Ram, the minister of civil supplies and represented the constituency was blamed for this issue. The BJP on the other hand, following its performance in the parliamentary elections in the state in 1989 was encouraged to make a serious bid for power in the 1990 Vidhan Sabha elections in Himachal.³⁸ It entered into an electoral alliance with the Janata Dal. This step was taken in order to avoid the division of the non-Congress vote. The strategy adopted worked positively for the party. Even though the BJP had entered into an alliance with the Janata Dal, it formed the government on its own. A coalition government was not formed in the state. The Janata Dal showing an impressive performance by winning 11 seats (whereas the Congress was reduced to a single digit) seemed to be appearing as the third force in the politics of Himachal. But this possibility did not materialise as after the elections, the party was neither a part of the government and being an electoral ally of the BJP, nor was it a part of the opposition. Eventually, the members of the Janata Dal joined the Congress. They realized that their political future could be ensured only if they aligned with either of the two parties. The Congress welcomed them with the view that this would enhance its electoral chances but the BJP did not oblige them. And the two-party system was kept intact by both the Congress and the BJP. The 11 constituencies in which the Janata Dal (out of the 17 it had contested

³⁷Prem R. Bhardwaj, 'Himachal Pradesh Elections: An Analysis', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43 (2), 2008, pp. 13-16.

³⁸Ibid.

from) had won 5 were from the old areas and had been won by the Congress in the Vidhan Sabha elections of Himachal in 1985. The other constituencies where the Janata Dal emerged victorious, namely; Doon, Nalagarh, Rainka, Shillai, Nahan, Kot-Kehloor, Nadaun, Kutlehar, Nurpur, Jwalamukhi, Shahpur and Bhattiyat had been won by the Congress in 1985. Hence, the support base of the Congress was eroded and it could not retain even one of these constituencies. This was seen as a blow to the two-party system as one of the parties of this system could not even give a decent performance in these elections.

1998 elections to the Vidhan Sabha of Himachal Pradesh saw the emergence of a regional party, the Himachal Vikas Congress (HVC). The BJP entered into an electoral alliance with this party. The BJP-HVC combine proved to be a jolt for the Congress. But it wasn't in only in these elections that the emergence of a third force had shaken the two-party system. Important to note is that while the appearance of the Janata Dal had made a dent in the party system of Himachal (two-party), the emergence of the HVC proved to be a bigger challenge to it. This can be said as the HVC unlike the Janata Dal which could not even sit in opposition, formed a part of the government after the 1998 elections. The HVC was successful in making the electoral competition in Himachal triangular.³⁹ This was because it managed to split the Congress support base. Even though it won only five seats, it resulted to the defeat of the Congress in nine other assembly constituencies. Interestingly the five seats won by the HVC in the 1998 elections to the assembly of the state had been won by the Congress if we look at the 1993 elections (Vidhan Sabha). Two of these seats belonged to the constituencies of Karsog and Balh which were Scheduled Caste areas, one was from Lahaul and Spiti, a Scheduled Tribe area and the remaining two were Dharampur and Mandi. This reflected that the support base of the Congress with respect to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes shifted and was owned by the new regional party, the HVC in the 1998 elections. Following these elections were the Lok Sabha elections of 1999. These elections proved to be one of the best performances for the BJP in Himachal Pradesh. But, again, these elections were a setback to the two-party system of the state. The most shocking development and

³⁹T.R. Sharma, 'Voters' Apathy Costs Congress Dear', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34 (50), 1999, pp. 3495-3497.

outcome of these elections was that not only the Congress lost all four parliamentary seats, it lost the Shimla seat as well which had always been its stronghold. The Congress had emerged victorious in Shimla in the 1998 elections to the Lok Sabha but it could not even retain this seat in 1999. The seat was lost to Dhani Ram Shandil of the HVC. It needs to be noted that Shimla form a part of the old areas, fortress of the Congress and is also Scheduled Caste constituency.⁴⁰ Therefore, it can be said that due to the presence of a third force, the Congress not only lost in constituencies belonging to the old areas, Shimla and Mandi (1999) but its support base consisting of the Scheduled Castes (1999) and Scheduled Tribes also shifted. In the elections of 1999, a trend was witnessed in the parliamentary constituencies of Shimla, Kangra and Hamirpur wherein the voter turnout in 1999 was less than the voter turnout in 1998. This meant a decline in the votes of the BP-HVC combine and of the Congress as well. For example, in Kangra, in 1999 the turnout was 5,56,926 as compared to 6,41,802 in 1998. The BJP-HVC combine's vote dropped from 3,50,458 in 1998 to 3,25,066 in 1999. Despite of this, the BJP and HVC managed to win all three constituencies. It was only in Mandi that there was an increase in voter turnout but here too, the Congress could not manage a win. Basically, the Congress suffered in both ways. Where there was a decrease in voter turnout, there was a decline in the pro-Congress vote as compared to the BJP-HVC combine and where the voter turnout increased, the increase in the vote-share was not enough to tilt the outcome in its favour.

The HVC split in 2002 when one out of its three legislators broke away from it to form a new political outfit which accommodated with the BJP. This resulted in the souring of relations between the BJP and the HVC. It was alleged that Chief Minister, Dhumal was behind this split and the BJP wanted to weaken its coalition partner. Before the assembly elections of 2003, the HVC tried to enter into an alliance with the Congress but this did not work for the former. However, finally the HVC merged with the Congress in 2004 and the only regional party which had emerged as a strong force could not continue in the same manner.

⁴⁰Alam, Javeed, 'Political Necessity vs Lost Possibilities', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31 (2/3), Jan 13-20 1996, pp. 105-110.

In 2007, there was no such force which could challenge the two-party system in the state. The Bahujan Samaj Party did acquire 7 per cent vote for the first time but it could not emerge as a force to reckon with. As it happened in 1998, the emergence of a third force did sensitize the political scenario of the state. Political analysts and the media speculated that the performance of the BSP in these elections would introduce 'new permutations and combinations' but nothing of this sort happened and it was rejected as a third alternative.⁴¹ The BSP did not have an organized political cadre in Himachal and could not form a solid social base. The sensitization of the dalits through the 'Mayawati phenomenon' did not help in the formation of a vote bank which could alter the political structure of the state. The reason behind this was that the leadership of the BSP did not emerge from a dalit movement but the party tried to build a vote bank with the help of dissidents. The BSP did improve its performance from 0.3 per cent votes in 2003 to 7 per cent in 2007 but this number was not exactly the BSP vote bank. It belonged to the dissidents from the Congress of the BJP. In Kangra from where Vijay Singh Mankotia (the state convenor of the BSP) hailed the party won just one seat. In Kullu, it polled 16.67 per cent votes but this could be attributed to the personality factor. Mankotia previously belonged to the Congress and had won the Kangra seat for the party in 2003.

It should be pointed out that be it national parties or state or regional parties, factionalism and dissidence within the Congress and BJP have proved beneficial for any party posing to be a third front. This was seen in the case of the HVC which resulted in the loss of the Congress and in 2003 in the case of BJP where the party lost the Kangra seat. At present it is the HLP which has broken away from the BJP. The HLP in the municipal corporation elections urged the electorate to vote for the CPM. In the upcoming elections, the HLP might play the role played by the HVC in the 1998 assembly elections. Maheshwar Singh Thakur (previously from the BJP) of the HLP might prove to be a curse for the BJP in the 2012 assembly elections.

In conclusion it can be said that even though the two-party system remains intact, the dynamics of party politics has certainly changed in Himachal Pradesh. There no

⁴¹Prem R. Bhardwaj, 'Himachal Pradesh Elections: An Analysis', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43 (2), 2008, pp. 13-16.

longer exists the unchallenged hegemony of the Congress. Even the phase where a regional or national party was practically non-existent in the political scenario of the state allowing for the smooth functioning of the two-party system has changed. Other parties in the state including regional and national parties are trying their best to pose a challenge to the principal parties. New parties are being formed, urging the electorate to allow for a third front to emerge. Efforts in this direction are stronger than ever.

Regarding the question, if a third force is emerging in Himachal and if it is affecting the BJP or the Congress in anyway, it can be said that the third force has remained on the edge of political space, it keeps coming on the political scene but has not been able to destroy the two-party system of Himachal Pradesh. This is also because regional parties or other small parties are formed but eventually merge with either the Congress or the BJP. The HVC is a case in point and if it will be the same with the HLP is yet to be seen. Even though the two-party system has not been erased but the data and analysis provided above does show that the third front has sometimes made a difference in the position of these two parties. Factionalism and dissidence have had a negative impact on the two principal parties of the state and it can prove to be a big benefit for the emergence of the third force. There is no one party which might prove to be a big enough threat for the two-party system but if there is the merger of dissidents from these two parties with other regional and national parties, a considerable challenge might be posed to this system in Himachal Pradesh.

Himachal Pradesh has had a history of being ruled by feudal elements for decades. It was only after the integration of the East Punjab Hill States or protected hill states as they were referred to originally into one centrally administered unit which was placed under the charge of the Chief Commissioner that this state was brought into main stream of Indian democracy. The establishment of a responsible government in 1952 in Himachal, after the adoption of a democratic constitution on 26th January, 1950 was a major step in her political life. But the democratic journey of the state was an unsmooth one. Its legislative assembly was replaced by a territorial council and in the process of the reorganization of states in 1956 its status was downgraded to that of a union territory. This had threatened the very existence of Himachal as a distinct political identity. In 1963, the legislature was restored and in 1966 during the period of the linguistic reorganization of Punjab, the hilly areas of this state, namely, Kangra, Lahaul-Spiti, Kullu, etc. were added to Himachal. This transfer brought about many changes, not only in the respect of the geography of the state but its population was also doubled. The transfer also gave birth to many cleavages in the state which had an impact on the politics of the state. The most important one out of them was the division of Himachal into the old areas and the new areas. The state was also got divided into the horticulture belt and the agriculture belt. It can be said that these two divisions were inter-linked. The old areas were inclusive of the horticulture belt and the new areas consisted of the agriculture belt. Once these divisions became apparent, it was observed that the two main parties dictating the electoral politics of Himachal, i.e. the Congress and the Jana Sangh (later the Bharatiya Janata Party) developed a hold in the old areas or the horticulture belt and the new areas or the agriculture belt, respectively. This can also be seen as an enforcement of the two-party system in the state. One can identify factors which were responsible of such a trend. As mentioned earlier, the Congress Party was already popular in the state which initially comprised of the old areas due to its role in the National Movement and the PrajaMandal Movements. Leaders like Y.S. Parmar, who was also the first Chief Minister of the state, were associated with the Congress and had majorly contributed in making the state more democratic and helping it achieve statehood. On the other hand, the Janata Party after coming into the political scene of Himachal capitalized on the feeling of

discrimination by the state government which was prevalent in the new areas. In the process, it increased its popularity in these regions. Another cleavage which existed in Himachal and impacted its politics was the tussle for power between the Rajputs and the Brahmins. Scholars maintain that a theory of electoral behaviour in the state on the basis of the saying that caste plays a major role in the voting behaviour in India but was only in some constituencies in Himachal that it was a determining factor.

Today when we talk about Himachal Pradesh, it must not be forgotten that Himachal as we see it today, a full-fledged democratic state of the Republic of India, was a result of long struggles which its people and the early leaders had undertaken. Its people, before they could get a taste of democracy, development, responsible government and the right to vote, were ruled by feudal lords. They witnessed atrocities and some of the most unjust forms of levies. First, it was the Princes who were responsible for their pathetic condition and later the British also contributed to this situation. Nothing substantial was done to introduce democratic elements which would benefit the people. The people after realizing their misery and something needed to be done started to rise against the monstrous powers. The Praja Mandal Movement followed after this and played a major role in the rise of political consciousness in the state. They also formed the base for the emergence of political parties in the state and it was these Praja Mandals in the Hill State which were turned into Congress Committees. This was not the only struggle witnessed by the state. The emergence of Himachal as a full-fledged state in 1971 had not come easy. The people as well as the political leadership were adamant about this demand and their efforts paid off.

Ever since the time the state started experiencing democratic elements, the Congress Party dominated the electoral scene of Himachal. Its association with the struggle for independence not only in the country but in the state and along with other factors and its contribution to the economic development of Himachal was responsible for its status.

The economic development of the state included the 20 point program introduced by Indira Gandhi and also the launching of five year plans. The Congress also undertook issues like road constructions, land reforms and allocation of funds for the

development of backward areas. This also made the Congress popular in the state. Even though its hegemony continued from 1952 to 1985, the Jana Sangh started acquiring a hold in the electoral scene of Himachal. The 1967 elections to the legislative assembly of Himachal Pradesh witnessed the impressive performance of this party. Eventually in the 1977 elections to the legislative assembly of Himachal Pradesh the Congress party was routed. These were the elections after The Emergency and Himachal Pradesh followed the same trend as was prevalent in the rest of North India. In 1979 there was a split in Janata Party and newly born Bhartiya Janata Party managed to do well in the next Vidhan Sabha elections in 1982. Hence the two-party systems marked its arrival in Himachal Pradesh. The two-party system became dominant in the state and this continues to be the case even today when we wait for 2012 assembly election in Himachal Pradesh. Even then the party politics of the state cannot be said to be stagnant. The year 1990 saw the Janata Dal performing better than the Congress which gave birth to the debate of the possibility of the emergence of a third front in the state. But after the elections in 1990 the Janata Dal could not hold on to its performance. A regional party, the Himachal Vikas Congress shook the electoral scene of the state. The BJP entered into an alliance with this party and prevented the Congress from coming to power. But as was expected like other small parties the HVC withered away and merged with the Congress in 2004.

Many parties with a local character are born in Himachal Pradesh but till date they have not been able to threaten the existing two-party system in the state. The Municipal Corporation elections held in Shimla in 2012 have seen the Communist Party emerge victorious and if leaders of this party and several other parties, for example the Himachal Lokhit Party are to be believed the assembly election this year will see the rise of a third front and the decline of the two-party system in the state.

Whether this belief or assumption will come true will be seen when the assembly elections to the legislative assembly of Himachal Pradesh are held this year, 2012. But seen in totality one thing emerges clearly. Even though the two-party system has been continuing in Himachal Pradesh for a very long time, the party politics of the state has not become monotonous. The dominant system was and is facing challenges by the possibility of the emergence of a third front, contributing to the changing dynamics of party politics in Himachal Pradesh.

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