

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO ELECTORAL POLITICS AND VOTING PREFERENCES IN HIMACHAL PRADESH : A SPATIAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT : This paper is based on the analysis of the outcome of the Assembly Elections from 1952 to 1993, but the spatial patterns of the Congress and the B.J.P. have been mapped from 1977 to 1993 elections due to consistency in the constituency boundaries. In Himachal Pradesh neither religion nor language have ever played any prominent key note of the state politics, but the impact of the caste system continues to be predominant on the state politics. In recent elections, region has become a more important factor which influences the voting choice of the electorate of Himachal Pradesh.

After Independence Himachal Pradesh came into existence on 15th April, 1948 as a consequence of the merger of 31 Princely hill states (Sharma, 1986). With the inauguration of the constitution on 26th January, 1950, Himachal Pradesh became a part C state (Khosla, 1975a). Election to the 36 members Vidhan Sabha created under the new act were held in November 1951. The Congress won 24 seats and the first popular ministry was sworn in on 24th March, 1952. Bilaspur which was also a part C state was merged with Himachal Pradesh on 1st July, 1954 (Khosla, 1975a). Himachal Pradesh became a Union Territory on 1st November, 1956. Under the constitution (Fourteenth Amendment) Act 1962, the Territorial Council elected in 1962 was turned into Vidhan Sabha. In Himachal Pradesh a three-men popular ministry was sworn in on 1st July, 1963 (Khosla 1975b).

As a result of the reorganisation of Punjab, the hill areas of this state such as Shimla, Kullu, Kangra, Lahaul & Spiti, Nalagarh, Una and many enclaves were merged with Himachal

Pradesh on November 1, 1966 (Sharma, 1986). On 31st July, 1970 the central Government decided to grant statehood to Himachal Pradesh. On 18th December 1970, the state of Himachal Pradesh. Act was passed and the new eighteenth state was inaugurated on 25th January, 1971 (Khosla, 1975b).

The Party system of Himachal Pradesh used to be described as a dominant party system. In recent elections the dominance of the Congress Party has been successfully challenged by the Bhartiya Janta Party (See Table-1). In addition to these two parties, the Janta Party, the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) have also contested elections from time to time. But the appeal of these parties is restricted to a few isolated regions and is practically ineffective. The performance of the two major parties in terms of the seats won in various assembly elections has been rather uneven. If the Congress swept the polls in 1972, the Janta Party won majority of the seats in 1977. In 1982, both the parties came to share more or less an even number of

Table 1.

Position of Various Parties in Legislative Assembly Election in H.P.

S. No.	Election Years	Total Seats	Cong.	BJS/ JNP/ BJP/	CPI	CPI (M)	LKD/ JP	JD	IND. & Others
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.	1952	36	24	-	-	-	-	-	12
2.	1957	41	22	-	-	-	-	-	19
3.	1962	41	34	-	-	-	-	-	7
4.	1967	60	34	7	2	-	-	-	17
5.	1972	68	53	5	-	1	-	-	9
6.	1977	68	9	53	-	-	-	-	6
7.	1982	68	31	29	-	-	2	-	6
8.	1985	68	55	7	-	-	1	-	5
9.	1990	68	9	46	1	-	-	11	1
10.	1993	68	52	8	-	1	-	-	7

Source : Reports on State Legislative Assembly Elections, Himachal Pradesh.

seats. But again, the position became highly tilted in favour of the Congress in the 1985 general elections. The position in terms of seats won was reversed by the B.J.P. in the general elections of 1990. Where as in 1993 general elections, the Congress again swept the polls. In the recent elections if one party won by landslide majority in one election, the same party lost elections in the next elections and vice-versa.

As Table-1 reveals, out of the ten elections, the Congress won majority of seats in eight elections, while the B.J.P. could form government on two occasions.

There is a perceptible decline in the Congress performance after the 1967 general elections. The congress did not get more than 50% votes in the remaining six elections except 1985 general elections (Table-2). The major cause in

Table 2.

Electoral Performance of the Congress Party in Vidhan Sabha Elections.

S. No.	Elections	Percent Votes polled	Seats won	Percent Seats won.	Total Seats in Vidhan Sabha
1.	1952	47.20	24	66.67	36
2.	1957	63.82	22	53.66	41
3.	1962	57.07	34	82.93	41
4.	1967	42.17	34	56.67	60
5.	1972	49.09	53	77.95	68
6.	1977	27.74	09	13.24	68
7.	1982	43/53	31	46.59	68
8.	1985	55.45	55	80.89	68
9.	1990	37.01	09	13.24	68
10.	1993	49.31	52	76.48	68

Source : Reports on State Legislative Assembly General Elections, Himachal Pradesh.

the decline of the electoral performance of the Congress is the strong emergence of the Bhartiya Janta Party.

The above table reveals that, whenever, the Congress polls more than 42% votes per seat, it came into power, but when it score less than 38% votes per seat, it could not get more than 14% seats. The table also reveals that when the percentage of votes per seat for the Congress Party is around or more than 50%, it gets more than 76% seats.

The Bhartiya Jana Sangh became important in Himachal Pradesh only after the reorganisation of Punjab in 1966. Till 1966 it could not win a single seat in Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha and its percentage of votes per seat was very low. However, in 1967 it bagged 7 seats with a percentage of 13.88%. Again in 1972 its vote percentage per seat dropped to 5.03% and seats to only 2 out of the total 68 seats. But in 1977, it won the poll, first time, by winning 53 seats with a voting percentage of 49.02%. The electoral performance of the Bhartiya Janta Party (the new incarnation of the old Jana Sangh) declined in 1982 and 1985 general election. In the general elections of 1990, the B.J.P. again registered landslide victory and won 46 seats with a voting percentage of 42.05%. But in 1993 general elections the

B.J.P. again lost the poll by winning only 7 seats (see table-3). The Table also reveals that like the Congress Party, the B.J.P. also won the poll on two occasions by polling more than 42% votes. Whenever, the party score less than 36% votes, it could not get more than 43% seats.

VOTING CLEAVAGES IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

The local issues play a major role in shaping the choice of the voters. Himachal Pradesh has two distinct geographical regions, which may roughly be described as the agricultural region and the horticulture region (Sharma, T. R. 1986). The 'agricultural region' or the 'lower areas' include the districts of Kangra, Hamirpur, Una, Bilaspur and lower valleys of Mandi districts. The 'horticulture region' or the 'upper areas' include the districts of Sirmaur, Solan, Shimla, Kullu Chamba and upper reaches of the district of Mandi (Bhatnagar, 1986). Four decades ago, no such classification of the Pradesh was possible because of almost total absence of horticulture in the state.

Fig. 2 shows the distribution of the Congress strength over the five general elections from 1977 to 1993. The Congress is very strongly supported in the upper regions of Himachal

Table 3.

Electoral Performance of the B.J.P. in Vidhan Sabha Elections.

S. No.	Elections	Percent Votes polled	Seats won	Percent Seats won.	Total Seats in Vidhan Sabha
1.	1967	13.88	07	11.67	60
2.	1972	05.03	02	02.95	68
3.	1977	49.02	53	77.95	68
4.	1982	35.16	29	42.65	68
5.	1985	32.11	07	10.29	68
6.	1990	42.05	46	67.65	68
7.	1993	35.99	08	11.77	68

Source : Reports on State Legislative Assembly General Elections, Himachal Pradesh.

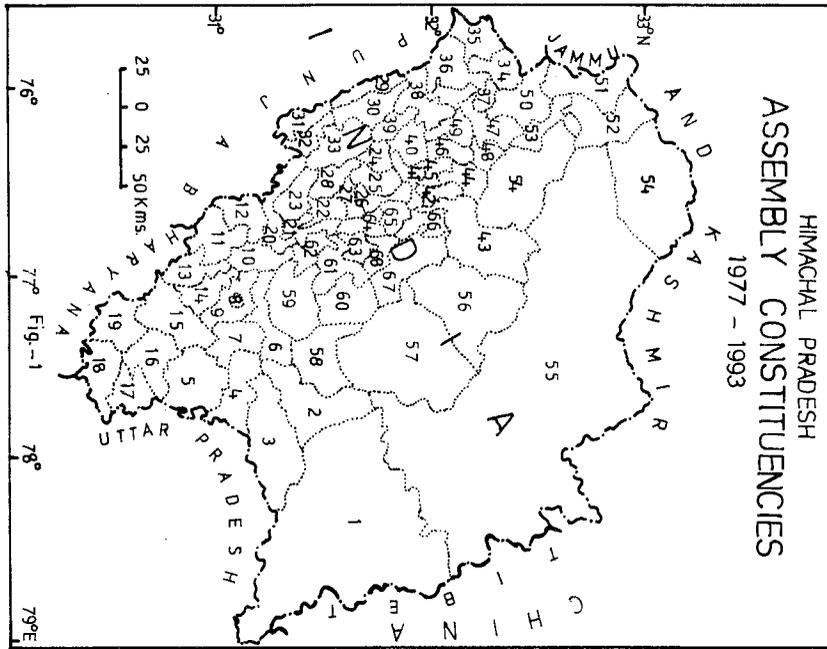


Fig. No. 1

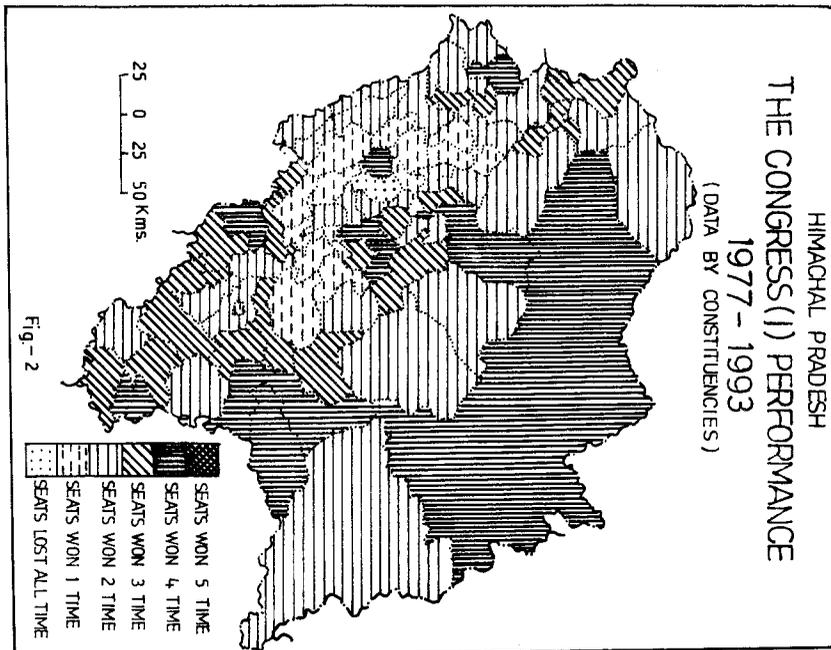
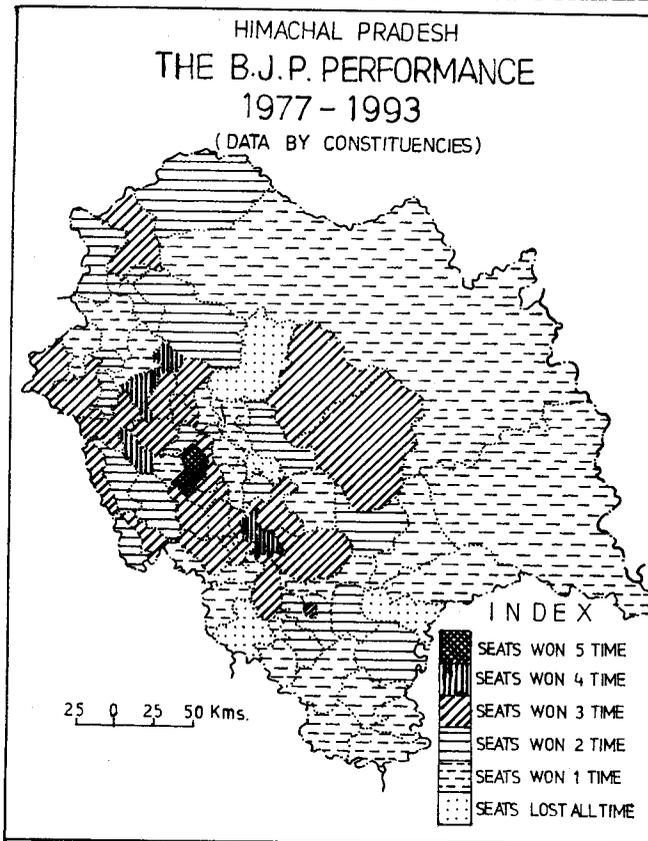


Fig. No. 2



Pradesh especially in Lahaul & Spiti and Shimla districts. It also won the same seats four times in Shillai Constituency of Sirmour district, Nadaun constituency of Hamirpur district, Mandi and Gopalpur constituencies of Mandi district and the Baijnath and Nurpur constituencies of Kangra district. But the Congress failed to win any seat five times in the five successive elections. The Congress is strongly supported in Northern and southern parts of Sirmour, North-Western parts of Shimla, Southern parts of Solan, Kullu, Bilaspur North-Western and Southern parts of Mandi, Guler and Rajgir constituencies of Kangra and Western parts of Chamba districts and has medium support in Kinnaur, Kullu, Kangra, Hamirpur Una, rest of Solan, Shimla, Sirmour districts. The Congress has Weak support in southern parts of Mandi, Bilaspur and central parts of Kangra and Shimla constituency of Shimla districts. Hamirpur is

the only constituency, where the Congress is defeated in all the five general elections.

Fig. 3 shows the performance of the B.J.P. over the five general elections from 1977 to 1993. The very strong areas of the B.J.P. are found in the lower regions of Himachal Pradesh. The B.J.P. won Hamirpur constituency in all the five elections. The B.J.P. is very strongly supported in central parts of Kangra, and eastern parts of Bilaspur districts and is strong in Hamirpur, southern parts of Mandi, eastern parts of Solan and Una districts. The medium areas of support for the B.J.P. are in Kullu and eastern and western parts of Kangra, Una and Chamba, and some parts of Mandi. The weak areas of support for the B.J.P. are in Lahaul & Spiti, Kinnaur, Upper parts of Shimla, Sirmour, Mandi, Solan, Nadaun constituency of Hamirpur district. The B.J.P. is defeated in all the five elections in Baijnath, Balh, Doon constituencies of Kangra, Mandi and Solan

Table 4.

Socio-economic complexion of district

S. No.	District	Urban Popu. (%)	Literates (%)	Household Industries, manufacturing & Servicing (%)	S.C. Popu. (%)	S.T. Popu. (%)	Agricultural Labours	Marginal Farmers (%)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.	Bilaspur	4.68	44.69	0.78	25.99	2.66	0.44	9.85
2.	Chamba	2.75	23.94	0.34	19.74	31.55	0.37	13.66
3.	Hamirpur	4.98	52.53	0.73	23.60	0.01	0.13	8.77
4.	Kangra	4.86	49.15	0.73	20.21	0.06	1.34	8.00
5.	Kullu	7.08	31.73	0.34	28.41	2.23	0.68	12.19
6.	Kinnaur	0.00	36.80	1.28	10.63	74.86	2.90	2.59
7.	Lahaul & Spiti	0.00	31.34	0.13	2.25	74.03	1.46	7.74
8.	Mandi	8.13	37.26	0.61	28.17	1.26	0.31	8.80
9.	Solan	7.68	40.95	0.67	31.78	0.40	0.58	7.23
10.	Shimla	14.38	41.85	0.33	26.76	0.71	1.40	5.36
11.	Sirmour	8.63	33.71	0.65	30.02	1.55	0.78	6.07
12.	Una	7.32	50.89	0.70	22.45	0.01	1.54	4.35

Source : Data compeled from Census of India-1981, Series 7. H.P. Part II-B. Primary Census Abstract.

districts respectively.

The Congress is dominant in horticulture region, where as B.J.P. is dominant in agricultural region. The pattern of the land holding in the two regions is markedly different. In the agricultural region the size of the land holding is small, where as in the horticulture region the size is very large (Bhatnagar, 1986).

Table-4 shows the socio-economic complexion of the districts of Himachal Pradesh. Shimla is highly urbanised district followed by Sirmour and Mandi. Kinnaur and Lahaul & Spiti are the two districts which have no urban population. Urban population is more concentrated in the lower region than the Upper region. Hamirpur ranks first in literacy followed by Una and Kangra districts. Chamba has the lowest literacy rate. Household industries, manufacturing & servicing is highest in Kinnaur followed by Bilaspur, Hamirpur & Kangra districts and lowest in Lahaul & Spiti district. Scheduled

Caste population is highest in Solan followed by Sirmour, Kullu and Mandi districts and lowest in Lahaul & Spiti district. Scheduled Tribe population is highest in Kinnaur and Lahaul & Spiti followed by Chamba and lowest in Hamirpur and Una districts. Agricultural labours are more in Kinnaur followed by Una, Lahaul & Spiti and Shimla districts and lowest in Mandi district. Marginal farmers are highest in Chamba followed by Kullu and lowest in Kinnaur district.

It is clear from the table-4 that the urban population and literacy are more in agricultural region than in horticulture region. On the other hand more persons are engaged in secondary activities in kinnaur, Bilaspur Hamirpur and Kangra, which are also (except Kinnaur) the core areas of support for the B.J.P. The district with more Scheduled Caste and Tribe population and agricultural labours and less

Table 5.
Comparative statement of seats won or lost
by the two parties in the two regions.

Elections	Horticulture Region		Agricultural Region	
	Congres	B.J.P.	Congres	B.J.P.
1977	5	24	4	29
1982	20	9	11	20
1985	30	1	25	6
1990	6	18	3	28
1993	24	1	28	7

Source : Data compiled from state Legislative Assembly General Elections, Himachal Pradesh.

literacy and urban population is dominated by the Congress. The districts with moderate marginal farmers are dominated by the B.J.P.

The middle and lower class is predominant in the agricultural region. The upper class also exists but its strength is comparatively insignificant. The class structure in the horticulture region is however, different. The large orchards are owned by either the traditional Thakurs or by other newly affluent persons of the area. They are very rich, earning in lakhs every years. In addition, there is the class of the landless rural poor, who mostly work in the homes and the orchards of the affluent class. The region, therefore, is dominated economically by upper class and numerically by the lower class (Bhatnagar, 1986). The Congress Party has been drawing its major support from the rural areas and the agriculturists and horticulturists are its main stay.

Himachal Pradesh is linguistically and religiously a compact region. Although the local dialects change after a geographical distance of a few kilometers. Language controversy has never rocked this state. Hindu constitute 96.08% of the population. Sikhs,

Muslims and Buddhists are 1.30%, 1.45% and 1.04% respectively. Thus, neither religion nor language has ever played any prominent role in the state politics. Of course, Hindu religion is the basis of the caste system whose impact on the politics continues to be predominant. The upper and the lower most classes predominantly vote for the Congress. Traditionally the upper class vote for the Congress for maintaining their status, while lower classes vote for the Congress for the betterment of their conditions in the programme of the party. On the other hand, the middle class lends its support to the B.J.P. (Sharma 1986).

In recent elections, 'region' has become a more important factor which influences the voting choice of electorate of Himachal Pradesh (see Table 5.) The three Chief Ministers of the Congress Party came from the horticulture region and the only one Chief Minister of the B.J.P. came from the agricultural region.

It is also a general feeling that the upper region has always enjoyed an edge over the lower one in every field because the Congress, whose influential leaders belong to the old area, has ruled the state for most of the time. According to records the state governments kept on following different sets of rules for both the areas and did very little to extend the same facilities to the people of lower parts which they did for the people of the upper belt. For example, the Gaddis and Gujjars in the lower region have still not been given the status of Scheduled Tribes at par with their counterparts in the rest of Himachal. There are also allegations of favouritism by the governments in the matter of employment to the youths of old Himachal. These factors have worked towards widening of the chasm between two regions over the years, which leads to the politics of regionalism.

APPENDIX

LIST OF ASSEMBLY CONSTITUENCIES IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

S. No.	Name of Assembly Const.	S. No.	Name of Assembly Const.
1.	Kinnaur (ST)	35.	Gangath (SC)
2.	Rampur (SC)	36.	Jawali
3.	Rohru	37.	Guler
4.	Jubbal-Kotkhai	38.	Jaswan
5.	Chopal	39.	Pragpur (SC)
6.	Kumarsain	40.	Jawalamukhi
7.	Theog	41.	Thural
8.	Shimla	42.	Rajgir (SC)
9.	Kasumpti (SC)	43.	Baijnath
10.	Arki	44.	Palampur
11.	Doon	45.	Sulah
12.	Nalagarh	46.	Nagrota
13.	Kasauli (SC)	47.	Shahpur
14.	Solan	48.	Dharamsala
15.	Pachhad (SC)	49.	Kangra
16.	Rainuka (SC)	50.	Bhttiyat
17.	Shillai	51.	Banikhet
18.	Paonta - Doon	52.	Rajnagar (SC)
19.	Nahan	53.	Chamba
20.	Kot-Kehloor	54.	Bharmour (ST)
21.	Bilaspur	55.	Lahaul-Spiti (ST)
22.	Ghumarwin	56.	Kullu
23.	Geharwin	57.	Banjar
24.	Nadaun	58.	Ani (SC)
25.	Hamirpur	59.	Karsog (SC)
26.	Bamsan	60.	Chachiot
27.	Mewa (SC)	61.	Nacahan (SC)
28.	Nadaunta	62.	Sunder Nagar
29.	Gagret (SC)	63.	Balh (SC)
30.	Chintpurni	64.	Gopalpur
31.	Santokhgarh	65.	Dharampur
32.	Una	66.	Joginder nagar
33.	Kutlehar	67.	Darang
34.	Nurpur	68.	Mandi

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