

Electoral Politics and Dynamics of Party System in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract - Political parties and elections play an important role in the analysis of politics in democracy. Elections are the best method to test the legitimacy of a political system. Constitution of India makes it clear that legislature and executive authority of the federal system has been placed in the hands of representatives of the people chosen by means of free and fair elections. Indian politics represents the spectacle of a multiparty system on the surface; but for long periods of modern India's electoral history, it has been characterized by "one dominant party system" with congress occupying the center stage. Since 1970s Indian party system has become highly competitive at center as well as in the states and Himachal Pradesh is no exception to this. From 1948 to present time Himachal Pradesh state politics saw many changes. Present paper describes the performance of political parties in different assembly elections, voters' loyalty, bases of support of political parties, place of political leaders and Impact of caste and class on state politics in Himachal Pradesh and the study is based on secondary sources such as books, journal and election reports etc.

keywords - Bhartiya Janta Party, Congress, Legislative Assembly, Political party, Election

Introduction

In democracy political parties are considered as essential components for the formation and working of the government. It operates and seeks political power through constitutional means to translate its policies into practice. Sartori defined political party as a political group that is officially recognized as being part of the electoral process and who can support (put forth) candidates for elections (free or not) on a regular basis." According to Gettell "a political party consists of a group of citizens, more or less organized, who act as a political unit and who, by the use of their voting power, aim to control the government and carry out their general policies". The nature and dynamics of the party system in India are unique. Rajni Kothari has argued in 'Politics in India' that the party system evolved from an identifiable political center. This political center, carved during the nationalist movement, was comprised of the political elite sharing common socio-economic background i.e. educated, urban, upper-caste people belonging mainly to middle and upper classes.

Himachal is the third largest hill state of Indian Union, situated in the western Himalayas. It is surrounded by Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana and in the east, it forms international boundary with Tibet. Its proximity to the Tibet and states of plains influenced its culture and variety of terrain and climatic conditions resulted into tribal and non-tribal (area) of the state. Hence it is a pluralistic society. Before independence, Himachal consisted of 'Shimla Hills' and 'Punjab Hills' regions. Shimla hills regions were under the control of native rulers and the struggle for independence in these areas was inspired by the nationalist movement. 'Punjab Hills' were under the direct control of British government. The people in these areas fought for conquering the British rule.

Impact of Historical factors on political institutions and processes

Process of political consciousness began in the region in 1920s with formation of Prajamandals in the princely states. Purpose of these Prajamandals was to develop political consciousness among the people and to enlighten them against the repressive rule of Raja and Ranas. It was the first step up in the modern political history of the region when the people fought for their rights. Later on, the Prajamandal Movement changed into Congress in the region. Congress as political party came into existence in 1948. Praja Mandal movement was led by Brahmins and Vaisas, but with the emergence of congress Rajputs came into the forefront and they emerged as the leaders of the congress party. In social fabric of Himachal Rajputs enjoyed the elite status and they were accepted by the masses as leaders due to their ascribed status. Since those times Himachal politics is dominated by the higher castes in which Rajputs are more important as compare to the Brahmins and Vaisas. Himachal came into existence on 15th April 1948 as part 'C' state consisting of four districts Chamba Mahasu, Mandi and Sirmour, in 1954 Bilaspur was also merged with Himachal. Later on in 1966 as a result of state reorganization certain parts of Punjab were transferred to Himachal under Punjab Reorganisation Act. These newly merged areas had cultural proximity to the Punjab. Due to their later addition in the Himachal these areas are called 'New Himachal' while area which was in Himachal before 1966 known 'as Old' Himachal. The concept of old and new Himachal became one of the important factor in deciding the electoral politics in the state. Besides this electoral politics of the state has been affected by numerous external and internal factors and events.

Performance of Political Parties in State Legislature from 1952-2017

Year	Vote %Age	Name of Legislative Body			
			Congress	Independent.	BJP & Other Parties
1952	25%	State Legislative	24	08 (26.6%)	
1957	61.33%	Territorial Council	18	13	05
1962	35.51%	-do-	33	03	05
1967	51.22%		34	15	11
1972	49.95%	State Assembly	53	07	08
1977	58.57%	-do-	09	06	Janta Party (53)
1982	71.06%	-do-	31	06	02(BJP)(29)
1985	70.36%	-do-	58	2	BJP (7)
1990	67.74%	-do-	09	01	12(46) BJP
1993	71.72%	-do-	52		(9) BJP
1998	71.23%	-do-	31	1(4) HVC	(29) BJP
2003	74.51%	-do-	43	6 BSP	2(16) BJP
2007	71.61%	-do-	23	(1)	3(41) BJP
2012	73.5	-do-	36	6	26(BJP)
2017	74%	-do-	21	2	44(BJP)

Source: Reports on General Elections, Election Department Shimla

From 1952 to 1971 average 1/3 seats were captured by the independents and other parties (Jan Sangh, Communist, Praja Socialist Party, Swatantrata Party). These parties failed to pose any challenge to ruling congress because congress was better organized as compare to the rest of the parties in the state and led by the leaders (Y.S. Parmar and Padam Dev) who were known for their contribution to Praja Mandal movements in the area. Thus, like other parts of the country in Himachal also there was one dominant party system till 1977. Emergency proved fatal to the congress in 1977 Janta Party was organized at the national level with help of leaders from Jan Sangh, Lok Dal etc. In the state also party wing was organized with the support of independents and Jan Sangh which had 11% share in the 1952 election (Ranbir Sharma 1977). In 1977 election Janta Party won with the thumping majority and 49.01% of valid votes also increased this time 41.26%, election results of 1977 indicate two developments of the H.P. politics. One that the national politics always affected the state electoral politics. Second organized opposition proved challenge to the one dominant party system. 1977 can also be considered as landmark period in the political history of Himachal when one dominant party system came to an end and two competitive party system emerged. From 1977 to 1982 Janta Party remained in the power in the state. For the first time Chief Minister (Shanta Kumar) came from the merged areas of Himachal and it was perceived by the political community that he was representative of the interests of the merged areas. This perception created a feeling of regionalism in the people of old and new Himachal. During the Shanta Kumar period riots held in different areas of the state due to this perception. For the next two decades regional issue remained one of the dominant factors in state politics. As congress leadership always came from Shimla district. Congress was considered as the party of old Himachalis, BJP was considered to be the party of new Himachalis. Both the parties exploited regional sentiments of the masses and tried to consolidate their position in their areas. Besides regional factors national scenario always affected the electoral politics. Between (1977-1982) parliamentary elections held in 1980 due to disintegration of Janta Party Congress again came into the power at the Centre. BJP was formed in 1980. Both the events affected the 1982 election. 1982 election held in normal circumstances and both the parties won almost equal seats and vote percentage also. In this election the conditions were different from 1977 when there was very strong anti-congress wave. But congress was ruling at the centre still congress bagged only thirty one seats, while new formed BJP had twenty nine seats. Congress formed the government with the help of the independents and BJP emerged as strong opposition party in the state. Besides the fact that from 1977 to 1982 Janta Government led by Shanta Kumar but anti-incumbency factor was not much effective. And the rise in the votes polled (58.75%) also indicates that political mobility increased in the state and people became aware about their rights as electoral and they discarded the one dominant party system in the state and they wanted better government with effective opposition. In 1985, state legislative elections congress came into power. Trend of 1985 indicates that people in the state always remained highly sensitive to the national developments. Assassination of Mrs. Gandhi resulted into emotional wave in favour of Rajiv Gandhi in parliamentary and state assembly elections it was the main factor of the congress's success. Votes polled were 70.65 percent.

After 1985 drastic change took place in the national politics which affected equations in the states also. Regional parties which were confined to the states since 1969 became strong force in determining the national politics. In 1989 National Front's Government was formed at the Centre with the help of the regional parties. Congress lost its past glory. Its vote share fallen in parliamentary elections. These developments affected the Himachal also. In 1990 for the first time BJP came into power after Janta Government in 1977. BJP was not able to complete its term because Centre government proclaimed emergency under article 356 and dissolved the assembly. In 1993 congress was ruling at the Centre, in state election congress won clear majority. In 1998 election BJP won twenty-nine seats and with the help of Himachal Vikas Congress, which was formed by dissident leader of the Congress was able to form the non-congress government in the state third time. BJP leadership changed in the state. Mr. Prem Kumar Dhumal became the Chief Minister of the state. The main reason for the change of leadership was the caste factor. Shanta Kumar was Brahmin and in Himachal political leadership always remained with the Rajputs because total Rajput population of the state is approximately 40% and the other reason is social acceptability

of Rajputs as leaders in Himachal. In five years, BJP made best efforts to develop infrastructure in the entire state. Per capita investment in ninth plan (1998-2003) was 2638 which indicates that infrastructure expanded in the state. State elections from (1998-2007) indicates that people in Himachal people want change in the government after every five years for the betterment. In 2003 they voted for congress and in December 2007 again they voted for BJP. Vote percentage indicates that after 1977 there is consistency in votes polled and that is to higher side as compare to the other states. Rise of the vote percentage and change in party position also indicates that percentage of floating votes has been increased from 7% to 16% and it is one of the major causes of changing party system in Himachal. Hence, in state alternative party system has evolved since the last decade. Third force (HVC in 1998) and BSP (2007) was not able to affect the alternative system although it was able to manage 4 to 5 percent votes of the main parties. Mainly it affected congress because HVC was party of congress dissident and BSP's base is in the lower caste which is mainly vote bank of the congress. (SC 25% and OBC 25.34% and ST 5%) In 2007, BJP made history by winning 41 seats on its own, and it was an over 8 per cent swing of votes in party favor from 35.38 per cent in 2003 to over 43 per cent in 2007. In this election vote share of the Congress coming down by about 2 per cent, from 41 per cent to 39 per cent. Once again it has been proved that the state has a stable bi-party system. But in 2012 assembly election BJP fail to break the myth of repeat the govt and lost ruling power to Congress. Congress won 36 seats and made the govt in the leadership of Virbhadra Singh who become forth time Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh. Himachal Pradesh Assembly election was held on November 2017 with recorded a 74 per cent voter turnout in assembly elections, higher than the 73.5 per cent last election. Keeping with the last three decades-long anti-establishment convention, voters of Himachal gave a clear mandate to BJP for power with a majority of 44 seats (48.50% votes) and Jai Ram Thakur became the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh.

Conclusion

Party system in state is evolutionary, evolution began before the independence. Gradually it reached the alternative party system. Leadership pattern is the legacy of the Praja Mandal Movement in which upper castes and classes dominated. Present alternative party system would a stable system in near future. This system would be a step towards the good governance in which accountability and responsiveness of ruling party can be ensured. But in the organization of party's caste has little role. All the castes are well adjusted within the parties. But in the selection of the candidates and deciding the voting pattern caste and class are important factors. Along these two factors modern determinants (development and literacy) has also strong impact on the electoral process of the state. Religion has no role in the politics of Himachal. Women and the marginalized groups of the society are not stiff effective due to social traditions of the society. At the grassroots level women representation has increased besides the hurdles created by existing social set up they try their best to fulfill their duties as local leaders. Hence Himachal is a small state having its own distinct dynamic set-up. Analysis of the past assembly elections indicates that both the parties have mass base in the society. Due to lack of third-party people vote in favor of either BJP or Congress. Literacy refined their voting behaviors, now people expect more from the government, every time they change the government for the better. Thus, it is the development which has become more important than regional issues.

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