Chapter III

POLITICAL PARTIES AND POPULAR PARTICIPATION

1. Parties & Interest Articulation

The growth of political parties is a recent phenomenon in Himachal Pradesh. It was in the year 1948 that the Praja Mandal was converted into the Congress Committees, thereby widening the sphere of activities of the All-India Congress Party. The grant of universal adult franchise under the Constitution of India and the prospects of the First General Election (1951-1952) diverted the attention of the leaders of the other all-India political parties to this politically backward state. They set up new units and appointed their lieutenants for initiating a process of social mobilization. Thus, during a period of eighteen years, a mushroom growth

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of political parties was witnessed in Himachal Pradesh; from one in 1943 to seven in 1951 and ten in 1966, as is evident from Table I below:

**Table I**

Growth of Political Parties In Himachal Pradesh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Political Parties</th>
<th>1943</th>
<th>1951</th>
<th>1966</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Praja Socialist Party</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Jan Sangh</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>A.I.P.P.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Hindu Mahasabha</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Jan Mazya Parishad</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>S.C.F.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>C.P.I.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Communist (Marxist)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Swatantra Party.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>S.S.P.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Lok Raj Samiti.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A.I.P.P. = Aman Majdoor Praja Party.
S.C.F. = Scheduled Caste Federation.
C.P.I. = Communist Party of India.
S.S.P. = Samyukat Socialist Party.
But for three all-India political parties, viz., the Congress, the Jan Sangh and the Swatantra, the other political parties are mere non-entities and have little, if any, say in the body politic of the Pradeen. During a span of eighteen years, the Congress has emerged as the biggest political party monopolising the political arena of the state with a membership of more than 90,000. The other major parties, the Jan Sangh and the Swatantra, which may in future vie with the Congress have a membership not exceeding 9,000 and 3,000 respectively. The other political parties, such as, the C.P.I./Marxists, F.I.R./C.S.P., Republican, Hindu Mahasabha, Jan Rajya Sarisata, Scheduled Castes Federation and the newly-formed Lok Raj Samiti are merely in name. Their

1. Information collected by the author from the offices of the respective parties.
2. Ibid. The C.P.I./Marxists has 1,300 members; the F.I.R./C.S.P., 1,200; the Republican Party, 400. Other political parties do not have more than a score of members although they claim membership of 200-300 each.
membership is limited to a few hundred each. Their ineffectiveness in the political scene of the Pradesh can be attributed to their meager membership and weak ground organization. In general, however, political organization is hampered because of the genuine difficulties peculiar to this Pradesh. The "Na-Bang" tradition of the feudal rule has engendered a spirit of "Tikki" among the people, who look upon government rather than organized voluntary effort, for maximizing their special interests - economic, social and political. Further, the villages of Himachal Pradesh - unlike those of the plains - are like hamlets and are sparsely populated making it difficult, if not impossible, for the people to organize in an effective manner. Lack of means of communication and transport, coupled with mass illiteracy and poverty, account, in a large measure, for political apathy which, in turn, stands in the way of effective party work and popular
participation. No wonder, therefore, 77.51% of the total population still remains unorganized and inarticulate - in a sense not interests at all but may be termed as "POTENTIAL INTERESTS". In such a category may be included the poor cultivators (49.63%), the agricultural labourers (0.34%) and the scheduled castes (27.4%).¹ It has thus to be said that a considerable part of interest articulation in Himachal Pradesh occurs on an unorganized basis or what Gabriel Almond² has called non-associational interest groups. In the villages and small towns, for example,


the petty landlords (Zamindars and Jagirdars), the petty shopkeepers (Sudar and Handijans) and the petty officials (Patwari and Lambardar) articulate interests and wield power. The landlord exercises influence over his tenants or hired labourers and thus guess their vote in village elections. The shopkeeper (with his supply of credit and power to render monetary help) exercises influence in the village panchayat elections and other local organisations like the Co-operative Credit Societies, etc. The zamindars and businessmen exert influence upon local government officials, although the influence yielded at the village level does not always reach out to the higher levels of district and state administration, except in the case of big businessmen, orchardists and potato growers. Besides the above-mentioned influences, caste affiliations, class distinctions and occupational identities are other major forces to be reckoned with.
2. Elections & Popular Participation

The single act, observe Card & Lustig, which contributes most to a sense of popular participation in politics is voting. That is true, at least, when the citizen is given an opportunity to state a preference among genuinely competing candidates, and when his action, combined with the actions of many other of his fellow voters, indeed determines who will hold public office. In this sense, an era of popular participation began in Himachal Pradesh with the grant of universal adult franchise under the Constitution of India (1951). The grant of adult franchise to people who had for centuries been ruled by the feudal lords, the Rajas and Ranas, constituted not only a significant step forward in the march of democracy in

Himachal Pradesh but also resulted in the political activation of the masses. As many as 5,31,018 persons\(^1\), out of a total population of 11,09,466\(^2\), were given the right to vote. The Pradesh was divided into 28 constituencies of which 20 were single-member and eight, double-member.

The first General election produced great enthusiasm among the masses of this Pradesh. It fired their imagination and aroused their aspirations. It brought about a new spirit among the people who were not now to be governed by the hereditary rulers, the rajas and thanas, but by their own elected representatives, belonging to their caste or community and coming from their area. They were now said to be

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the popular masters and were required to make a decision with regard to the future rulers. This was something novel, something new and something unique, happening for the first time in the history of Himachal Pradesh. Election, polling booths, ballot papers and ballot boxes were all new experiments. The political leaders went up and down this hilly terrain, stimulated interest in elections and raised new hopes and expectations in the mind of the simple, innocent hill folk. A new dawn had come and the people stood on the threshold of a new life. The politicians painted a colourful image of future prosperity in Himachal Pradesh under a democratic rule in fairs like 'Navi', 'Maha', 'Mela' and in a thousand such festive gatherings all over the Pradesh. The people stood there half-believing and half-unbelieving the rosette picture floated before them, and anxiously waited for the poll - a great 'Nari-Shakti' or 'Maha'. This may be said to be a 'romantic phase' of politics in Himachal Pradesh.

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1. A festive gathering.
The prospects of the First General Election (1951-1952) encouraged the neo-political leaders, often characterised as 'climbers' to use the democratic institutions as an outlet for their aspirations for power and status. This accounts for the mushroom growth of political parties, as already noted, in Himachal Pradesh. As many as 173 candidates jostled into the political arena for the 36 seats of the Legislative Assembly. A statement showing the seats contested, seats won and the security forfeited by the candidates of the various political parties as also the independents is given in Table I. No less encouraging was the response of the electorate. The voters - though illiterate and politically not very conscious - showed more enthusiasm than had perhaps been anticipated. As many as 1,79,783 persons, out of a total of 5,31,013 voters (i.e. 33.8% of the total electorate) cast their votes in the First General Election. (Table III).

1. See page 110 above.
The percentage of 33.8 is, by no means, unimpressive especially in the context of the hilly terrain of the Pradesh, mass illiteracy and the political backwardness of the people. However, in certain constituencies, these factors did not operate, perhaps due to their compact nature or the effort of the candidates to mobilise voters. In the Karsey single-member constituency, for instance, as high as 88.3% of votes were polled while in the Pacchad double-member constituency, the voting percentage was 85.6.¹ The total number of votes polled by the various political parties and the independents along with the percentage of votes polled and the percentage of seats won is given in Table III.

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A statement showing the seats contested, seats won and the security forfeited by the candidates of the various political parties as also the independents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Parties</th>
<th>Seats contested</th>
<th>Seats won</th>
<th>Security forfeited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sigmoid Nagdoor Braja Party</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Castes Federation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan Sangh</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialists</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu Mahasabha</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>133</strong></td>
<td><strong>36</strong></td>
<td><strong>61</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This included two uncontested returns.

TABLE III

A statement showing the total number of votes polled, percentage of votes polled and the percentage of seats won.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Parties</th>
<th>Valid votes polled</th>
<th>Percentage of votes polled</th>
<th>Percentage of seats won</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>85,073</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>47,473</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpan Hazdoor</td>
<td>26,471</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Castes Federation.</td>
<td>10,097</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan Sangh</td>
<td>6,212</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialists</td>
<td>2,564</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu Mahasabha</td>
<td>1,554</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ram Rajya Parish.</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTA.</strong></td>
<td>179,783</td>
<td><strong>99.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.9</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall picture thus emerging out of the First General Election was quite flattering to the Congress Party. It secured not only an overwhelming legislative victory in the legislature but also polled the highest number of votes, viz., 35,779 or 47.3% of the total votes polled. (Table III). Again, in both single-member and double-member constituencies, the Congress candidates polled the highest percentage of votes. Shri Rattan Singh, for instance, won 38.8% of votes in the Narsar single-member constituency while Dr. Y.S. Parmar, 33.6% of votes in the Pachchad double-member constituency. 1 The largest number of votes were also polled by the Congress candidates. Shri Ganesh Singh polled the highest votes, viz. 4,479 from the Nahan single-member constituency and Dr. Y.S. Parmar polled 3,644 votes from the Pachchad double-

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member constituency. The opposition parties (leaving out the Independents), on the other hand, secured an insignificant number of seats, viz., four in a House of thirty-six.

The Congress party did top the poll in the first General election but the total number of votes against it (i.e. 94,794 votes), divided among several parties and independents, would appear to be lesser than that for it (i.e. 35,979 votes). The discrepancy in the proportion of votes polled and the seats won by the various political parties and the independents may be attributed to factors like the method of single-member constituencies, division of opposition parties into several groups and the large


2. This party position continued during the period 1952-1954. After the merger of Bilsapur and by-elections in three of the constituencies of Solan, Shinla and Bilsapur, the strength of opposition increased to eight in a House of forty-one.
number of independents. It has, therefore, to be
conceded that the Congress victory at the polls was
not so much an indication of its popularity in the
province as to the lack of a well-organized and united
opposition. The opposition parties, as already noted,1
sprang into life just before the election. They did
not have a sizeable membership, much less proper
organisational set-up in the province. Consequently,
the opposition parties could not evoke a sufficient
response from the masses. Hence the insignificant
number of seats that the opposition could muster in
the legislative assembly.

1. See pages 110-111 above.
What considerations actually motivated the voters in the exercise of their democratic right of franchise, it is not easy to say. However, in a backward area like Himachal Pradesh, caste and community played an important part and affected the judgment of many voters—and still do. It could not be otherwise, for they are rooted in an ancient social structure and cultural tradition. "Would it not be awful," said one respondent, "if a KOLI (a scheduled caste candidate) were to represent the upper classes in the legislative assembly?" Class prejudices are so strong in Himachal Pradesh that not a single scheduled caste member was elected to the state assembly from a general seat! But for

1. Based on author's interview in Upper Sahaan (Himachal Pradesh).
reservation of seats, it is doubtful if any scheduled caste member could have been elected to the Assembly. Personality also played a key role and will continue to do so as long as the bulk of the electorate can acquire knowledge only through the spoken word. The candidates put up by the Congress Party were the well-known workers of the Praja Mandel movement and so had greater influence with the electorate than those of the other political parties or groups. This also accounts for the victory of the Independents who contested the election in large number and came next only to the Congress both in respect of the votes polled and the seats won.1 Equally important was the role of the local 'DHIS' and 'DHARS'.2 In Sinnar

1. See Tables II and III at pp. 120-121 above.
2. Indigenous name for deities.
District, it was brought to the notice of the author, the people could not decide about their candidate and so the elders thought it best for gods to make this difficult decision for them. They went to the local temple, drew lots and selected the candidate! SHOLI devotees in Upper Mahasu, VAISINGH in Podra Kesar, SHIV in Panii and KILASH in Kinnuar played an important part in the election. In these areas, the people voted not according to their best judgement or that of their elders but according to the dictates of their 'DEVIS' and 'DEVAS' as manifested through their priest.

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1. Based on author's interview in upper Mahasu, Kinnuar District and Ghoda District.
There are yet other reasons which seem to have weighed with the electorate of Himachal Pradesh. The vote for Congress, apart from being a 'vote of thanks' for past stories, was also a vote for the only party that could look for a moment capable of forming a stable government. Again, the multiplicity of opposition parties divided strength so that a good number of voters are said to have come to the Congress Party just out of distrust that none but the Congress candidates had the chance of winning. Finally, the Congress symbol – a pair of bullocks with yoke on – suggested all kinds of favourable connotations. Many voters, especially the farmers, could be persuaded not to vote against bullocks, which symbolised the source of their livelihood, their main source of power and transportation. In the interior of Jorindernagar constituency in Mandi District, some of the voters, said a Presiding Officer, wanted to give their votes

1. Based on author's interview at Jorindernagar (District Mandi).
to the 'bullocks', 'Gandhi' and 'Nehru': Some of the voters, said another respondent\(^1\), folded their ballots and placed them before the ballot boxes (having a symbol of a pair of bullocks) together with floral offerings and the suspicious "3A RUPEE" (one rupee and a quarter). Such episodes were, however, merely amusing deviations from more and, in numbers, infinitesimal when set against the total electorate. 

The period following the First General Election was a period of chequered politics in Himachal Pradesh. This is a period of political jubilation (the grant of responsible government in 1952); political recession (withdrawal of responsible government and its substitution by a Territorial Council with more circumscribed powers and functions in 1957); and political advancement (re-introduction of responsible government in 1963 and the enlargement of the Pradesh in 1966). It is also a period of expansion of

\(^1\) Based on author's interviews at Jorindernagar in Mandi District.
governmental activities (the launching of the three Five Year Plans), the "high noon of early independence", to borrow the words of Hugh Tinker, and the holding of the four General Elections (1952, 1957, 1962 and 1967).

The grant of responsible government in Himachal Pradesh in 1952 brought about a new awakening among the people. A New Dawn had come and the people looked forward to a prosperous Himachal under democratic rule, which meant different things to different people. To the peasantry, for instance, it provided hope for land reform and a better standard of living. To the business community, it offered prospects of profit and influence on a scale hitherto unknown. To the depressed classes (the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes), it signified the triumph of right over might and provided hope for a better

future. To the westernised intelligentsia, it provided an opportunity to realise their aspirations for power and status. To the neo-politicians (especially the old patriots among them with a record of work in the Praja Mandal Movement), it meant the reward for their service in the 'cause' and offered a chance to fulfil their 'promise of plenty' — to eradicate the many ills that beset the people: poverty, illiteracy, disease, famine and fear. All these aspirations were sought to be realised within the framework of democratic institutions.

The initial effect of expansion of governmental activities was the intensification of political activity, especially in the rural areas. The ruling Congress Party, with its relatively better mass base, had the initial benefit. The launching of the Five Year Plans enabled the party in power to spread its network of patronage to the remotest corners of the Pradesha. The heightened expectations of the people (brought about in the wake of the establishment of responsible govt.) and the
awareness of a better life (brought about in the wake of the implementation of the Five Year Plans) whetted the desires of the status-hungry people and introduced an element of competition not only for better social and economic gains but also for better amenities: more schools, more hospitals, more scholarships, better wages, better houses and so on. With the growth of political consciousness, the socio-economic conflict has increased among the various castes and classes (lower castes vs. upper castes, agriculturists vs. non-agriculturists, landlords vs. tenants, workers vs. employers and so on), giving rise to the multiplication of the Interest Groups and associations. This is evident from the increase in the number of political parties, voluntary organisations and trade unions. The number of political parties has increased
from one in 1948 to 10 in 1966 and that of voluntary organisations from one to nine during the same period. The number of Trade Unions has likewise increased from two in 1952 to twenty-nine in 1966. Greater organised effort in the political life of the Pradesh has led to a gradual increase in voters' participation as would appear from the results of the four General Elections. (Table IV).

1. See page 110 above.

2. The Voluntary Organisations in Himachal Pradesh are: The Harijan Sewak Sangh, Parvartiya Adimjuti Sewak Sangh, Bharat SevakSamaj, Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, the Scheduled Castes Welfare Association (Chamba), Bharat Dalit Jati Sewak Sangh (Solan), Red Cross Society, Social and Moral Hygiene Association and the State Social Welfare Advisory Board.

3. The oldest Trade Unions are the Byer Meakin Breweries Labour Union and the Himachal Transport Workers Union. The other important Trade Unions include the P.V.D. Employees Union, the Agricultural Workers Union, the Himachal Truck Operators Union, the Co-operative Employees Union, the Hydro-Electrical Hazdoor Union, the P.V.D. Labour Union, etc. (For details, see Statistical Outline of Himachal Pradesh, 1965, pp.113-114).
### Table IV

**Voters' Participation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Parties</th>
<th>1952</th>
<th>1957</th>
<th>1962</th>
<th>1967</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Congress.</td>
<td>45,979</td>
<td>97,733</td>
<td>1,48,106</td>
<td>3,33,247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Independents.</td>
<td>47,433</td>
<td>69,018</td>
<td>53,427</td>
<td>2,91,890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. R.S.P.</td>
<td>26,471</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. S.C.P.</td>
<td>10,937</td>
<td>11,419</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Jan Sangh.</td>
<td>6,212</td>
<td>13,629</td>
<td>5,456</td>
<td>1,06,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Socialists.</td>
<td>2,664</td>
<td>15,012</td>
<td>4,904</td>
<td>962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. R.K.P.</td>
<td>1,554</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. R.I.P.</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Communists.</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>1,997</td>
<td>4,959</td>
<td>25,192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Swatantras.</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>39,475</td>
<td>14,767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Republicans.</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>2,527</td>
<td>3,806</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL.**

|      | 1,79,723 | 2,05,778 | 2,45,954 | 7,66,125* |

*Figures for 1967 include the figures in respect of the newly-merged areas.

R.S.P. = Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.
R.I.P. = Rashtriya Jana Sangh.
S.C.P. = Swatantra.
P.C.P. = Janata Party.
R.S.P. = Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

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1. Information collected from the Election Branch, Himachal Pradesh Secretariat, Simla.
It will appear from Table IV that there has been unilinear advance, from one election to the other, in the voters' participation. More and more voters are getting involved in the election process. Apparently, it is a sign of increased political interest among the people, though there may be other contributory factors towards greater political involvement. Positively, the party in power sustained political interest by consistently working not only for maintaining the separate entity of Himachal Pradesh (despite the recommendations of the States Reorganisation Commission to the contrary) but also for its enlargement by the merger of the hilly areas of the erstwhile Punjab. By a fortunate combination of forces on the eve of the Fourth General Election, the party in power achieved both these objectives and

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1. See Chapter II, p.100.
has now capped it with a demand for a full-fledged state.¹ The positive success of the party in power (i.e. retention of Himachal Pradesh as a separate entity and its enlargement by the inclusion of the hilly areas of the erstwhile Punjab), together with a move for a full-fledged state were important factors conducive to greater political participation. Negatively, increased popular participation was the cumulative effect of two main factors, viz., general mass resentment against the administration and the virulent anti-Congress propaganda by the opposition parties. The period between the third and the fourth

¹ Dr. Y.S. Parmar, Chief Minister, Himachal Pradesh, makes a strong case for STATEHOOD. (See "Himachal looks ahead towards Statehood" in the Tribune, Reorganisation of States (Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh) Supplement, 1.11.66, p.5, cols. 1-3); also the Republic Day Supplement, 26.1.67, p.3, cols. 3-5); The Members of Legislative Assembly, Himachal Pradesh, strongly urge upon the Union Government to concede Statehood (See The Tribune, 29.3.67, p.3, cols. 3-4); The Parliament supports Himachal demand for Statehood. (See the Tribune, 17.2.68, p.8, col.7 and 27.7.68, p.1, cols. 4-7).
General Election was full of stresses and strains for the Congress Party. The continuing rising prices, the recurring shortage of essential commodities, the near-famine conditions in the Pradesh and an uneasy outlook for the future bred resentment and hostility among the various sections of the society (the producers, the consumers and the housewives), leading to an erosion of Congress image and prestige. Two months prior to the holding of the election, there was an acute shortage of food supply. Even the regular quantum of food grains and rice to the consumers in the statutory rationing areas, including the capital of Himachal Pradesh, was not available, although these commodities were available in the open market at exhorbitant prices. Thus, the common man was hit where it hurt most, in the stomach. However, this situation was not peculiar to Himachal Pradesh but was a part of the all-India phenomenon of scarcity and high prices.

1. During this period, the prices rose to an unprecedented height. In 1965 and 1966, for instance, the price index shot up by 45 points as against a rise of 47 points over a period of 15 years, i.e. 1949-64! (See Tribune, 6.2.67, p.4, col.3).

2. The rate of 'atta' in the open market was Rs.190 per quintal and that of rice, Rs.300 per quintal, as against Rs.65 and Rs.115 respectively at the ration depots!
As the Fourth General Election (1967) approached, the opposition parties made an all-out effort to cash in on the failings of the Congress Government. They raised the slogan that if the Congress was not voted out of power, there was no future for democracy and individual liberty. They also propagated that the continued one-party rule was a negation of democracy and that it was the time to put an end to "one-party dominance". The general pattern of electioneering was much the same as before - mass rallies, meetings, processions, posters and leaflets - though there was some shift in emphasis. The candidates, for example, relied more on smaller meetings and personal appeals on the basis of caste, class and community identifications. The opposition parties under the leadership of Shikur Ben Nezi\(^1\) forged a grand strategy which sought to consolidate the non-Congress votes and defeat the

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1. Mr. Nezi was the former Chief Secretary of Himachal Pradesh. He is the leader of the newly-formed Lok Raj Samiti and of the opposition in the legislature.
ruling party candidates by ensuring them, as far as possible, in straight contests. The excellent electioneering of the newly-raised Lok Raj Samiti was equally an important factor in the united front success. The party held conferences in every district and every important place in the state, on the eve of the election and thus maintained that 'mass contact' which the Congress party had coolly forgotten to develop. The personalities of the former top civil servants (like the former Chief Secretary, the Inspector-General of Police and the Superintendent of Police who were contestants in the Fourth General Election to the State Assembly) were no less significant factors in opposition success.
No doubt, the Congress was in an advantageous position vis-a-vis the opposition parties. It had been in the saddle for a decade and a half. It had a hold over the media of mass communication. It was the party in power having considerable patronage, financial and administrative. It could appease the various sections of the electorate on the eve of the election. In fact, it did so. Favour. big and small, were promised and, in some cases, bestowed. In some areas, the Congress candidates promised villagers more schools, roads, drains, loans and subsidies while in others, they associated themselves with the successful implementation of the developmental plans and projects in their areas. In some areas, they used the official developmental machinery to further their electoral chances while in others, the tempo of developmental expenditure was increased by the party in power on the eve of the election.¹ Applications

1. Based on author’s interview in the interior of Mahasu District.
2. Ibid.
for TECCHI loans and agricultural subsidies sent through Congress candidates, it is alleged, were promptly attended while others were given a cold treatment. It was also not uncommon for officials to be transferred from one area to another on the recommendations/complaints of the Congress candidates. Despite all this, the circumstances in which the Pradesh went to the polls were certainly not in favour of the ruling party. Though in general, the Congress party did profit from developmental activities - and perhaps in the main does so - large scale expenditure on the eve of the election did not necessarily further the prospects of the party in power as would appear from heavy reverses that it faced in some of the 'prestige' constituencies. In the arki constituency, for instance, the opposition parties avoided multi-cornered contest to prevent the split of non-Congress voter. There was a straight fight between the

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1. Based on author's interview with a member of the opposition in the assembly.
Development Minister and a dissident Congress M.L.A., who, having been denied party ticket, contested the election as an independent. The Congress had thus to fight not only the combined opposition parties but also the challenge of internal sabotage by the warring Congressmen. The straight contest between the dissident Congress M.L.A. and the Development Minister cost the organisation dearly as one of its pillars fell by a margin of 7,708 votes in his home constituency.\(^1\) The new election strategy was adopted, with advantage, in other Congress 'prestige' constituencies as well, viz., Kangra, Simla, Kinnaur, Chopal and Lahul-Spiti. In Kangra, out of the ten sitting Congress M.L.A.s., one did not contest while seven were defeated at the polls including the former revenue Minister.\(^2\) The defeat of the former Chief

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1. The Tribune, February 27, 1967, p.3, cols. 5-6.

2. Ibid.
Parliamentary Secretary and the retired Chairman, Punjab Public Service Commission, was no less disappointing. Paradoxical as it may seem, it was more disappointing to the opposition parties than to the party in power: The Congress faced another disappointment in the Simla District where it could bag only one seat out of four. Two of its strong candidates - a sitting M.L.A. and the former Deputy Minister and the District Congress President -

1. Mr. Bhagat Ram was a very influential member from the newly-merged area of Kangra and was considered to be a potential candidate for party leadership in the State Legislature. The ruling faction, it is alleged, sabotaged from within the electoral chances of the official candidate by helping, though secretly, his rival, a Communist! The other major reverses in the Kangra District (as in the rest of Himachal Pradesh) are also said to be the result of internal sabotage as would appear from some of the press reports. (See, for instance, the Tribune, 21.5.68, p.6, Col.7; Also 22.5.68, p.3, Col.3).
were not returned. In Chamba District also, the Congress had to face reverses. It was the only area in old Himachal Pradesh to return two Jan Sangh candidates (one of them, the former Inspector-General of Police, Himachal Pradesh) against an equal number of Congressmen. In Chopal, Kinnaur and Lahul-Spiti – the most backward areas of Himachal Pradesh – the Congress suffered cent per cent defeats, one after the other, thereby suggesting that its expedient generosity on the eve of the General Election had misfired – nay, even backfired!

1. The Tribune, February 27, 1967, p.3.
2. ibid.
An analysis of the Fourth General Election and its comparison with the past three elections reveal some striking features. The first feature that stands out in bold relief is the debacle of the party in power (especially in the 'prestige' constituencies) despite its deeper penetration into the constituencies and the larger patronage network. True, the Congress secured 56.64% of seats (34 out of 60) but this is a far cry from the streamroller majority of 82.9% (34 out of 41) in the outgoing House. Disillusionment with the Congress, effectively exploited by opposition parties and the desire for a change evidently prompted the voters to reject nominees of the party in power in large number. Intra-party factionalism and internal sabotage contributed, to a large extent, to the unexpected poor performance of the Congress at the polls. The effect of the mounting discontent against the ruling party in the entire country was no less a factor in Congress defeat in Himachal Pradesh.

1. See Table V, p.146.
TABLE V

Total number of seats won by different political parties and independents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Political Parties</th>
<th>1952</th>
<th>1957</th>
<th>1962</th>
<th>1967</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Jan Sangh</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>S.S.P.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Hindu Mahasabha.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Ram Rajya Parishad.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>N.I.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>K.P.P.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>C.I.I.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Swatantra</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Communist (Marxist)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>C.S.P.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total**         | 35   | 41   | 41   | 60   |

P.S.P. = Praja Socialist Party.
S.S.P. = Scheduled Castes Federation.
K.P.P. = Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party.
C.S.P. = Samparka Socialist Party.

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1. Information collected from the Election Branch, Himachal Pradesh Secretariat, Simla.
The second striking feature of the Fourth General Election is the spectacular advance made by the Jan Sangh in terms of votes polled and the seats won. Whereas the party had no success in the previous three General Elections, it has been able to secure, for the first time, as many as seven seats (11.7% of the total), thereby constituting the only opposition party of note in the Legislative Assembly, the Communists having two seats, the Swatantra, one, and the other parties having drawn blank. The most prominent among the latter is the Swatantra party which won four seats in the 1967 election could now only one now. With its attenuated strength, the Congress is now up against the combined strength of the Jan Sangh and the Independents. At one time in July 1967, as discussed elsewhere, they

1. See Chapter V, pp. 251-252.
had posed a serious threat to the party in power by bringing in a Motion of No-Confidence against the Ministry and, if the Haryana brand of dissident politics had been adopted here, the Congress Government would have fallen. 2

The third striking feature is the continuance of a very large number of Independents (Himachal, of course, the Third General Election) in the Himachal politics. In the Fourth General Election, the percentage of Independents has increased to 26.7 as against 22.2 in the First General Election. The continuance of a large number of Independents in the Assembly is not only a symptom of political immaturity but is also inconsistent with the true


2. In the opinion of the author, such a situation can happen in this state only if the leadership of the dissident group in the Congress falls into the hands of the traditional Rajput leaders. At present, it is in the hands of the leaders of the Praja Mandal Movement in the Pradesh who have greater commitment to the Congress.
concept of parliamentary democracy. It suggests that various traditional influences — namely, personal, caste, religious and wealth — still play a considerable part in the body politic. This is not surprising because the electorate, by and large, is illiterate and dissatisfaction with the party in power has not yet crystallised in support of any other political party, capable of giving an alternative government. No wonder, therefore, the voters prefer a popular independent to a party candidate.

Finally, the Fourth General Election, judged in the light of its results, is the first truly contested election that Himachal Pradesh — nay, India as a whole — has witnessed. Non-Congress parties forged united fronts with the main object of ousting the Congress. Despite expedient generosity shown by the party in power on the eve of the election.
the voters do not seem to have allowed these too obvious concessions to affect their judgement. In this sense also, this is the first election in which the voters, by and large, have exercised their own judgement. It has proved that the masses, especially in the countryside, are no longer the "dumb-driven cattle" but constitute a potential force in the making or unmaking of political leaders. It has also suggested that the voters have now begun to think for themselves and choose their representatives not according to their propaganda or material strength but according to their performance. "Himachal voters", comments a newspaper ¹, "even though backward, largely illiterate and living in far-flung areas, cannot, like those elsewhere, be taken for granted. The wind of change has begun to affect them too. With the increasing political awareness, names no longer matter. It is the performance that counts".

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The Fourth General Election may thus be regarded as the harbinger of a New Era - an era of political awakening of the masses in the countryside. The increased strength of the opposition now constitutes a serious threat to the "one-party dominance" and has introduced a definite trend towards democratisation of state politics. Whether the party system will continue to perform the same useful role - providing stability without stagnation and integrating the political community while restricting the area of issues open to sectional manoeuvring - will depend largely on the Congress Party's capacity to hold together its heterodox elements and assimilate new claimants to status and power, while at the same time supporting a structure of administration and public policy which will enable the people to achieve an acceptable degree of economic development and social change.¹

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3. Impact of Periodic Elections

The periodic elections in Himachal Pradesh have had three main effects. They have stimulated political interest among the masses, led to the politicization of castes and communities and given rise to a new leadership. The universal adult franchise has enhanced the importance of each individual. It has given rise to an unprecedented political awakening among the masses. It has resulted in the extension and intensification of political activities, especially in the rural areas. It has stimulated organized effort, made the people conscious of their rights (political, social and economic) and accelerated the process of social mobilisation. The increase in the number of political parties, trade unions and voluntary associations, as already noted¹, amply illustrates the tempo of political awakening among the people. Classes and communities hitherto ignored have been encouraged

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¹. See pages 132-133 above.
by political processes, no less than by economic policies, to look forward to better conditions of life. The realization of a better life among the less privileged sections of the people may be slow but it is undoubtedly gaining momentum. The people are gradually casting off their 'pathetic contentment'. The greater the development, the greater are the expectations of the people. Not only in urban but also in rural areas, the people are rapidly waking up to their rights with the spread of education and the means of communication. More and more people are taking interest in their own welfare and the affairs of state. This may sound familiar to the younger generation but it is a happy and healthy development for those who were brought up amidst the drone of British complaint about the apathy of the Indian mind. This mind has now been disturbed by the new influences that it has been exposed to. Whereas in the past, there was a lack of desire for change on the part of the traditional person (especially the depressed one) due to the fact
that he was never confronted with the possibility, much less the probability, of change, he has now become aware of the possibilities of change. Lerner has aptly characterised this trend from the past to the future in developing countries in terms of difference in the degree of 'empathy' of individuals.¹ The desire for change would steadily, but surely, increase the number of what Lerner calls 'traditionalists' into 'transitionalists' and gradually into 'modernists'.

Secondly, the periodic elections have carried the political process to the remotest areas in the Pradesh and have brought 48.4% of the voters in the political vortex, as the results of the Fourth General Election would indicate.² Interests have now begun to be articulated by secondary organisations (like the political parties, trade unions, voluntary associations, and so on), though particularistic interest groups still

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1. Lerner, Daniel, The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East, the Free Press Glencoe, Ill, 1958.

2. See Table IV, p.134 above. In the Fourth General Election, 7,66,125 voters participated out of the total electorate of 15,87,103.
persist. The political parties and the politicians have become conscious of the possibility of seizing political power through the ballot box and have found it advantageous to exploit particularistic-traditional loyalties (of caste, class and community) to propel themselves into positions of prominence.¹

Thirdly, the periodic elections have marked a beginning of a shift in influence from the urban to rural areas and have given rise to a new rural leadership. The pattern of rural leadership, as it is emerging, reflects a transition from individual to collective, from hereditary to elective and from ascendant to functional type of leadership. The traditional village leaders are either undertaking new functions or adjusting themselves to the emerging patterns or are being replaced after being rendered ineffective. In this way, the traditional pattern of social hierarchy with upper caste supremacy, though

still retaining some of its force, is gradually weakening. As the forces of democratization and egalitarianism are striking deeper roots, new claims for power are emerging at every level. Competition between the caste groups has thus acquired a new dimension with the rising tide of political aspirations. The new leaders are turning political parties into the villages and in the process turning them into instruments of their own power at the local level. The political parties are thus beginning to acquire an odd combination of features, as instruments of power in the hands of local leaders, of group manipulation in the hands of state leaders and of political integration in the hands of national leaders.¹