

## CHAPTER-1

### SOCIAL CLEAVAGE THEORY AND THE INDIAN PARTY SYSTEM: A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

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This chapter is designed as a general introduction to the thesis. It begins with a brief statement on the "social cleavage theory" of party systems as developed by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) in the context of the evolution of the European party systems. This theory has dominated electoral studies the world-over for the past three decades. It has provided a kind of universal model that has been widely followed in party analyses in the liberal democracies the world-over. The discussion is followed by the case study of India which is generally regarded by students of electoral politics as an exception to this general model.

#### **The Social Cleavage Theory**

The phrase "social cleavage theory" implies that societal cleavages are the essence of political party systems. The theory was first enunciated by Lipset and Rokkan (1967:1-61). Their study focused attention on the socio-economic dynamics through which the European countries had gone through, and their feudal regimes had given way to their multiparty democratic systems. The two authors identified four fundamental cleavages in European political systems--the various divisions in society which gave rise to conflicting interest groups, and rival political party

formations. These cleavages related to: (1) Subject v. dominant culture (2) Church v. government (3) Primary v. secondary economy (4) Workers v. employers.

As summarised by Dikshit (1994:262-263), the first two of these cleavages were the product of the National Revolution, representing the process whereby the modern nation-state system had emerged. In the historical process of the rise of the modern nation-state, there were frequent conflicts between rival interest groups seeking to build a new centralized state, on the one side, and local interest groups that were opposed either to the very idea of the state or to its basic principle--the *raison d'être*--or both, on the other. The net outcome was conflict between the nation-building elite, on the one side, and various ethnically, linguistically and religiously distinct subject populations--the peripheries--on the other. The nation-builders stood for a centralizing, standardizing, and mobilizing nation-state, in direct opposition to the historically established corporate privileges of the Church. Thus, the National Revolution had created two types of cleavages, which, with the passage of time, rose to occupy established positions in the structure and conduct of politics within each state.

The second group of cleavages was born as a result of the impact of Industrial Revolution, which represented the process whereby industrial capitalism became the dominant mode of production. The Industrial Revolution gave

rise to conflict between the landed interests on one side, and the new class of industrial entrepreneurs, on the other. Among the landed interests themselves there was conflict between land owners and tenants; among the industrial classes there was conflict between primary v. secondary economy (also referred to as town versus country) and secondly, between employers v. employees (generally referred to as class cleavage).

This historical cleavage formulation laid the foundation of the political party systems in Europe. However, the impact of these cleavages varied considerably from state to state, depending upon social, political and economic conditions of each country, and the timing of the introduction of universal suffrage (Dowse and Hughes, 1975:323-324).

On the basis of the aforementioned cleavages in European societies, Rokkan (1970) had identified eight basic types of "alliance-opposition structures"(Table 1.1). These represented the outcome of three dichotomous divisions in society. The first had occurred after the Reformation, a 16th century movement launched to reform the doctrines and practices of the Roman Church. As a result of this movement, either (as in England) the national church was under the state control or the state was allied to the Roman Catholic Church. The second occurred after the "Democratic" revolution by virtue of which, the first two types of party formations were further subdivided according to the strength of the established church in the respective country. The third

came after the Industrial Revolution. A further element in "alliance-opposition structures" was added as a result of the introduction of the system of universal suffrage.

According to Lipset and Rokkan these cleavage patterns were durable formation so that "the party systems of the 1960s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s" (Lipset and Rokkan, op.cit, p.50).

### **Social Cleavage Theory and the Indian Party System**

The social cleavage theory has provided the basic model for analysis of electoral behaviour and party systems all over the developed world. However, doubts have been raised in regard to its relevance to under-developed societies like India.

Chhibber and Petrocik (1989:194-210) in a major contribution to political party study in India noted that though the Indian society is divided into a series of ethnic and apparently conflicting groups based on language, religion, caste and community, cleavages in the Indian society do not appear to play any significant role at the national level electoral contests.

From the perspective of the social cleavage theory, the Indian parties, especially the Congress, are anomalous. Religion, language, caste, class and other societal differences have fragmented Indian society into groups which make relatively complete claims on individuals.

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**Table 1.1: A TYPOLOGY OF EUROPEAN PARTY SYSTEM**


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|    | Nation-Builder's Alliance                       | Periphery's Opposition   | Empirical Examples                                      |
|----|---|--|---|
| 1. | National Church and landed interests            | Dissenters and Urban interests   | Britain Con. v. Lib. celtic fringe.                     |
| 2. | National Church and Urban interests             | Dissenters and landed interests  | Scandinavian Con. v. Left agrarian christians Radicals. |
| 3. | National Church (D.S.C.M.) and landed interests | i) Secular and Urban interests<br>ii)Catholic                          | Germany Conservative. v. Liberal Bavarians              |
| 4. | National Church (D.S.C.M.) and Urban interests  | i) Dissenters and landed interests<br>ii)Catholic and landed interests | Netherland Lib. v. Calvinists Catholics                 |
| 5. | Secular and Landed interests                    | i) Urban interests<br>ii)Catholic                                      | Spain Liberal. v. Catalon Corbists                      |
| 6. | Secular and Urban interests                     | Catholic and Landed interests  | France, Itlay, Lib/ Radical v. Conservative             |
| 7. | Catholic and Landed interests                   | Secular and Urban interests  | Austria Christians v. Liberal Pan-German industry       |
| 8. | Catholic and Urban interests                    | Landed interests   | Belgium Christians/Lib v. Flemish Separatists.          |

D.S.C.M. = Despite strong Catholic Minority.

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Yet, one party--the Congress--wins the support of a large share of the electorate. Across four decades and eight general elections since 1952, both in terms of the percentage of the vote polled and the seats won, the Congress party has consistently dominated its political rivals. The party had lost control of national government

only twice, and each time only for brief period. The reason was that the parties in opposition never succeeded in forming effective anti-Congress alliance.

Most students of the structure and development of parties in other mass democracies would not have predicted, in the case of India, the dominance of the Congress. In the Western experience, religious, economic, ethnic, linguistic and regional differences provided social cleavages around which organizations, especially political ones, developed. In some cases social differences reinforced each other and provided demographic fault lines for the parties: a party's members and supporters were drawn from a few groups - sometimes only one group.

The Chhibber-Petrocik paper demonstrated that the social base of the Congress party conforms to the social cleavage theory of party systems. The congress is a coalition of state and local parties which differ substantially among themselves in the groups and interests they represent. In terms of its supporters, the Congress is several parties, with a social base in some parts of the country that is at odds with its social foundations in other regions. Looked at from the national level (as in Figure 1.1a), Congress supporters represent a variety of social classes, occupational groups, religions and languages. But community by community (and to a lesser extent state by state), the electoral support of the Congress is quite homogeneous.

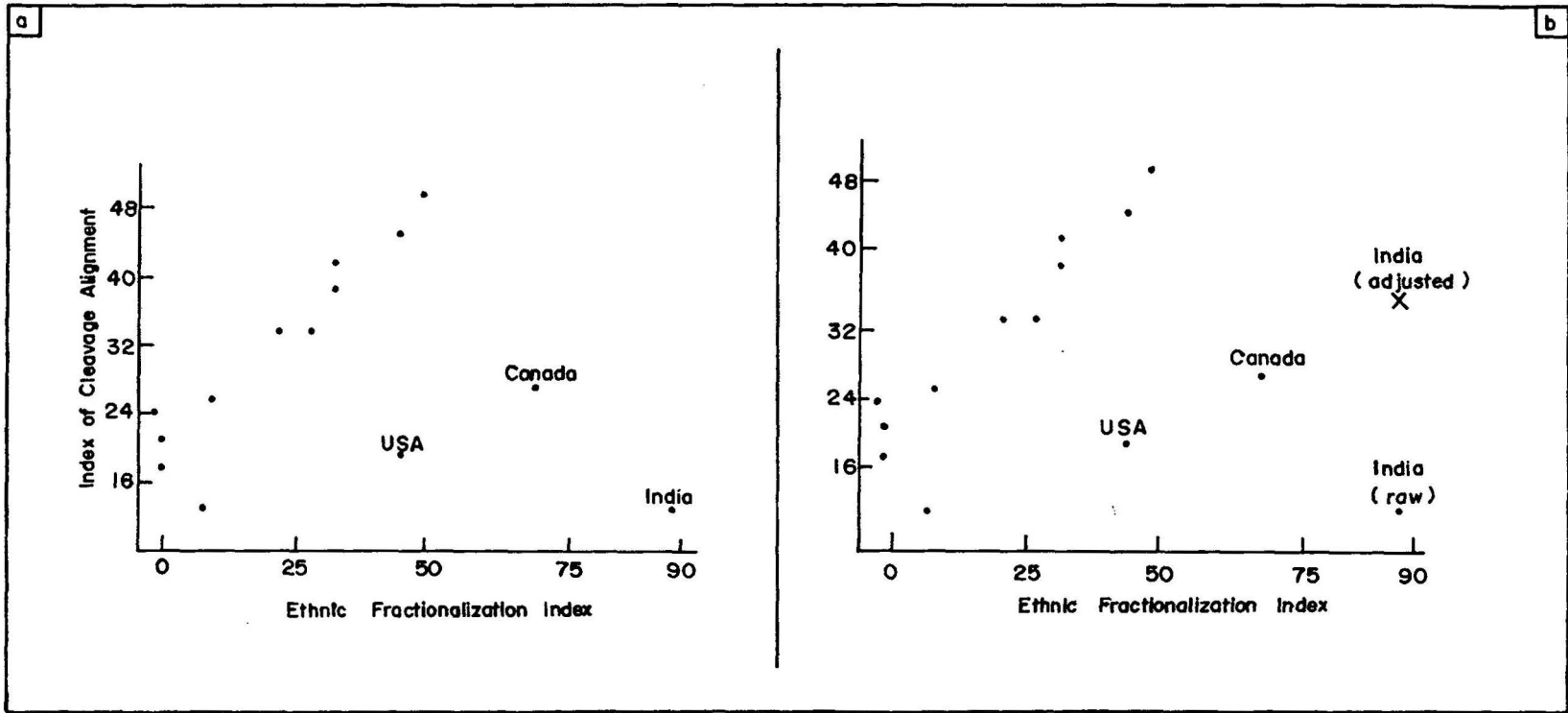


Fig.1.1

Adapted from: Chhibber and Petrocik (1989: 194 and 206).

As the two authors noted "To describe the Congress as a heterogeneous, national party of consensus, representing all groups, is formally accurate but substantively misleading. A more accurate description comes from Sisson, who found that the national Congress is organized into mutually exclusive factional coalitions which tend to nucleate around a dominant leader or faction which has its own regional base of political support. The key to identifying the Congress's support is to look below the level of the nation. The divisions of Indian society are clearly evident only at that scale. It is at this scale that mass political mobilization occurs, whereas, they remain concealed at the national level, thus allowing the Congress to appear (inaccurately) as a heterogeneous centre, "party of consensus" (Sisson, 1972).

One of the keys to the "anomaly" of Congress's heterogeneity is the territorial organization of the Indian political system. The Indian parties, like those of the United States, Canada, Switzerland and other federal systems which build parties *up to the nation* rather than extend them *down to* localities are likely to be heterogeneous coalitions when viewed from the national level but much more homogeneous when examined at the local level, where the social cleavages represented by the parties are salient. The difference between the national and local level will vary with the geographic concentration of the groups and the parties. The federal structure will not mask a strong link between social groups and parties where both the groups and

the parties are geographically concentrated. But, the federal structure can confound the group-party linkage when a party crosses geographical lines and represents different groups in different areas. This is precisely the situation in India, where conflicts are geographically specific, but the Congress rallies support across the nation. Because of the possession of "historical homelands" under the 1956 linguistic reorganization of the states, language has given geographical boundaries to religious, caste and ethnic divisions so that intergroup conflicts, across the country, became more geographically specific. Not surprisingly, both the identity of social groups and the intensity with which these groups oppose each other varies by state and community.

As mass parties came to represent groups and appealed to voters in terms which evoked genuine concerns, segmental divisions such as caste acquired a partisan significance. They were--and remain--the natural basis for mobilizing votes. Every party, whether avowedly communal or ideologically opposed to such vertical segmentation (such as the Communists), turned to segmental cleavages, such as caste, to mobilize electoral support. Inter-state differences in the nature of cleavages created inter-state differences in the social group constituency of the same party. In Rajasthan, for example, the Congress draws more support from the Jats while the Rajputs have supported

opposition parties. As contrasted to this, in neighbouring Haryana the Lok Dal depended for its electoral successes largely on the Jats while the Congress drew support from Punjabi Hindus and upper castes.

Given the territorial nature of social cleavages in India, Chhibber and Petrocik put forward the following hypotheses:

1. At the national level, where a voter lives--his or her state--should be a far stronger predictor of the vote than such social factors as caste, religion or social class observed nationally.
  2. However, because caste, class and religion are major points of conflict within India, each will have a strong correlation with party support when examined at the level at which the social factors are politically significant; that is within each state.
  3. The political significance of group conflicts shall vary at the state level so that the strength of the link between particular social cleavages and parties should vary across the states.
  4. The heterogeneity of the Congress reflects variation among the states in commitments of the Congress party to the inter-group conflicts. Consequently, there will be considerable state by state variation in the social groups which are aligned with the Congress party.
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Chhibber and Petrocik concluded that a nation-wide political party like the Congress appears to have an exceptionally heterogeneous social base from the perspective of the nation; but, when looked at state by state (or lower levels), the party has a well definable, and more homogeneous clientele (Fig.1.1b). As such the social cleavage theory is in reality operative in the case of India also, the only thing to remember is that at the national level the social divisions of society get levelled down and apparently neelefied. The Chhibber-Petrocik model, therefore, has thrown the general hypothesis that lower down we go in the geographical scale of analysis, the greater is the role of social cleavages in determining electoral performance.

#### **Objective of the Study**

The objective of this thesis, is to test the Chhibber-Petrocik hypothesis with special reference to two all-India parties; the Indian National Congress (Congress) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (B.J.P.). For this purpose, study of electoral behaviour in the states of Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in the three elections held in the 1980's have been taken up.

#### **The Choice of the Study Area and Unit of Analysis:**

The choice of the two states for indepth study has been made because in both of them the Congress and the BJP are the main rivals in electoral battles and both the

parties receive support across the geographical territory of the respective states i.e., both in the urban as well as in rural areas. The general impression regarding political bases of the two parties, at the national level, is aggregative in nature. Whereas the Congress has a secular image, the BJP is identified with a pro-Hindu image. At the state level, however, in case of both the parties, the electoral support base is largely determined by the pattern of societal cleavages in the electorate, so that factors such as caste, language, religion and other ethnic cleavages play a dominant role. The role of these factors is still more visible at the levels of the constituent regions and localities. The analysis is based on electoral data for state level elections for the sets of three electoral contest for the state assemblies held in the 1980s. These were held in the years 1982, 1985 and 1990 in the case of Himachal Pradesh and in the years 1980, 1985 and 1990 in the case of Madhya Pradesh.

The choice of the three elections is determined by two factors: One, analysis of electoral performance in all the three elections can be made on the basis of a single set of (1981) census data. This is a significant advantage in terms of research strategy, and Secondly, the data for the three elections and two leading political parties provides us a total of six sets of election data for comparative analysis which is a reasonable number for indepth study of the problem.

The entire analysis is done on the constituency level data for the two states.

The matching of election and socio-economic data follows the technique developed by Dikshit and Sharma (1981:1-15).

#### **Methodology:**

This thesis is based on social-ecological analysis of the voter support for the Congress and the BJP in the three sets of elections to the state assemblies in Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in the 1980s. For this purpose electoral performance of each party is related with a set of selected socio-economic variables.

The list of variables used in the analysis is as follows:

i) Party electoral performance, which is measured as percentage of votes polled by a particular party in relation to the total valid votes in a given constituency or ward.

ii) The list of socio-economic variables is as follows:

1. Density of population as persons per square kilometer.
2. Per cent Urban population.
3. Sex Ratio as females per 1000 males.
4. Per cent Scheduled Castes population.
5. Per cent Scheduled Tribes population.
6. Per cent Literate population.
7. Per cent Female Literate population.

8. Per cent Workers population.
9. Per cent Cultivators.
10. Per cent Agricultural labourers.
11. Per cent Workers engaged in manufacturing activities.
12. Per cent Workers engaged in other activities.
13. Net Area Sown as per cent to total area.
14. Irrigated Area as per cent to total net area sown.
15. Per cent Hindu population.
16. Per cent Muslim population.
17. Per cent Sikh population.
18. Per cent Christian population.
19. Per cent Buddhist population.

Variables from serial number one to three and six to fourteen may be grouped as secular variables and the rest as non-secular variables.

Besides techniques of cartographic representation (Choropleth, line-graph, bars), the analysis of data has used statistical techniques of mean, standard deviation, Z-scores, co-efficient of variation, skewness, kurtosis, and regression analysis.

*Mean* has been used for measuring the average vote share of political parties so that the vote-seat relationship in respect of both the Congress and the BJP can be compared. *Co-efficient of variation* has been applied for measuring uniformity in the electoral performance of the two parties. Higher the value of co-efficient of variability, lesser will be the uniformity and vice-versa.

*Skewness* is used to measure the degree of departure of voting distribution from the normal position. If the frequency curve of voting distribution has a longer tail to the right of the central maximum than to the left, the distribution is described as positive skewness, otherwise, it is the case of negative skewness. *Kurtosis* is employed to measure the degree of peakedness of the voting distribution. *Z-scores* which are simply the distance of a value from the mean of a distribution, as measured in standard deviation units, have been used to compare dissimilar variables, because they represent unit free values. *Regression analysis* has been employed to measure the rate and nature of change in party votes in relation to the spatial variation in the distribution of the selected variables. *Co-efficient of determination* has been employed since the statistical interpretation of  $r^2$  is clearly of interest to spatial analysts as a means of assessing the degree of variation of one spatial distribution that can be accounted for by another.

#### **Organization of the thesis**

The present thesis is organized into eight chapters. The Introductory chapter deals with the Statement of the Problem, Objective of the Study, Choice of study area, Unit of analysis and Methodology. The rest of the thesis is divided into three parts. Part-I, consisting of Chapters 2 to 4, is devoted to analysis on Himachal Pradesh. Chapter 2 gives a general historical background of the state

politics and also a brief introduction on history and nature of the Congress party and Bharatiya Janata Party. Chapter 3 provides a discussion on the geography, society and economy of the state. In Chapter 4, explanation of the electoral performance of the Congress and the BJP are analyzed in relation to the list of socio-economic variables. Influence of social cleavages including secular and non-secular variables on both the parties have also been analyzed.

Part II is devoted to Madhya Pradesh. It comprises chapters 5 to 7. Chapter 5 provides a general historical background to electoral politics in the state. A brief analysis on the history and nature of the Congress and the BJP is also included. Chapter 6 is devoted to general introduction to the geography, society and economy of Madhya Pradesh. Chapter 7, explains the electoral performance of the two selected parties in relation to the selected set of socio-economic variables. Influence of social cleavages including secular and non-secular factors has also been discussed. Part-III, Chapter 8 presents the overall conclusions and hypotheses developed in the context of our analyses in chapters 4 and 7. It also includes a sample study of the Shimla Assembly segment in order further to test the central hypothesis of the thesis--i.e., the lower down one goes in the geographical scale, the more pronounced is the influence of social cleavages in explaining party performance.