

# 1998 Lok Sabha Elections: Shiromani Akali Dal Sustaining Power in Punjab

**Dr. Satnam Singh,**

Assistant Professor in Political Science & HEAD,

P.G. Department of Political Science,

Mata Gujri College (An Autonomous College)

Fatehgarh Sahib (Punjab) Pin-140407.

## **Abstract**

In the 11<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections were held in the state of Punjab in April 1996 the Congress party lost these elections by a big margin. The Congress secured only 2 out of 13 Lok Sabha seats from Punjab. The Shiromani Akali Dal had contested these elections in alliance with BSP and got 8 seats. The BSP got 3 seats out of 4 it contested. Approximately after ten months of these elections, the Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections were held in the month of February 1997. This time the SAD contested election in alliance with BJP. In this election, the SAD repeated its electoral performance by winning seventy-five Vidhan Sabha seats. The BJP, its electoral ally got eighteen Vidhan Sabha seats. The Congress was completely routed out and could win only fourteen seats. It was its worst performance in the electoral history of the state. Consequently the SAD-BJP coalition government under the Chief Minister-ship of Parkash Singh Badal was formed. Again in 1998 Lok Sabha elections the SAD-BJP were able to gain 8 and 3 seats respectively and sustained its power in the state.

**Key Words: SAD-BJP, INC, BSP, CPI, CPI (M), Janata Dal**

The thirteen parties coalition government at the centre under the Prime Minister-ship of H. D. Devegowda which was formed after the resign of 13 days of Atal Behari Vajpayee government on May 29, 1996 could not last long because of the external support by the Congress party. The Congress party withdrew its support over the issue to change the Prime Minister and as a result the government was reduced to minority. The Prime Minister Devegowda had to resign. Ultimately, the Congress party agreed to support Inder Kumar Gujral of the Janata Dal, who was appointed Prime-Minister in April 1997. But this coalition government also could not last long as the Congress party withdrew its support to Inder Kumar Gujral ministry also over Jain report regarding the assassination of Late Prime-Minister Rajive Gandhi. The Jain report pointed out some DMK leaders who were involved in Rajive Gandhi murder case. The Congress party took the stand to shunt out these DMK leaders from the ministry. The Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral refused and resigned from the Prime Minister-ship. As a result, the country was pushed to mid-term Lok Sabha elections, which were held in February-March 1998.<sup>1</sup>

The 12<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections in Punjab were held on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1998 in all 13 Lok Sabha constituencies along with the rest of the country. The result in respect of all the Lok Sabha constituencies of the state was declared on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1998.

The total number of voters in this election was 1, 53, 44, 540.<sup>2</sup> In this election 9217434 voters out of the total of 1, 53, 44, 540 voters exercised their franchise. Thus, the polling percentage was 60.07 in this election.<sup>3</sup>

A total 147 candidates had field their nominations for 13 Lok Sabha constituencies in Punjab. The constituency-wise break up of the candidates was : Gurdaspur 14, Amritsar 10, Tarn Taran 8, Jalandhar 11, Phillaur 11, Hoshiarpur 13, Ropar 6, Patiala 16, Ludhiana 22, Sangrur 9, Bathinda 8, Faridkot 8 and Ferozepur 11.<sup>4</sup> Out of these nominations of 27 candidates were rejected and 18 candidates withdrew their nomination. As a consequence of this 102 candidates were left in the fray.

Six national political parties - the Congress, the BJP, the CPI, the CPI (M), the Janata Dal, and the BSP and one state party the SAD and thirteen registered (unrecognized) parties participated in this election. The SAD-BJP decided to continue the alliance which they had formed during 1997 Punjab Vidhan Sabha election and contested this election together. The Congress, the CPI and the BSP formed an alliance to contest this election. However, despite these alliances and adjustments the main contest remained confined to the SAD and the Congress party.

The Badal led SAD-BJP coalition which took over the reigns of the government in the state after 1997 assembly elections showed very impressive performance in 1998 Lok Sabha elections because of its pro-people programmes like abolition of Octroi and free power to the farmers. This was the reason that the Congress party could not win even a single seat in this Lok Sabha election in Punjab and was totally “white washed.”<sup>5</sup> The SAD-BJP and its alliance partners swept this poll by capturing all the 13 Lok Sabha seats located in the state of Punjab.

The electoral performance of political parties in terms of seats won and votes polled in 1998 Lok Sabha election has been shown in table nos. 1

**Table: 1****Performance of Political Parties in 1998 Lok Sabha Elections in Punjab in Terms of Seats and Votes**

Party	1996			1998			Gain/Loss Seats	Swing %
	Seats Contested	Seats Won	% of Votes	Seats Contested	Seats Won	% of Votes		
SAD	09	08	28.72	08	08	32.93	0	+4.21
BJP	06	0	6.48	03	03	11.67	+3	+5.19
Janata Dal	01	0	2.66	01	01	4.18	+1	+1.52
INC	13	02	35.10	08	0	25.85	-2	-9.25
BSP	04	03	9.35	04	0	12.65	-3	+3.30
CPI	03	0	1.60	01	0	3.40	0	+1.80
CPI(M)	03	0	2.68	03	0	1.06	0	-1.62
SAD(M)	07	0	3.85	04	0	2.73	0	-1.12
IND and Others	213	0	9.56	70	01	5.53	+1	-4.03

**Source :- Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Punjab, Chandigarh, 1996 and 1998 Lok Sabha Elections of Punjab.**

The table no. 1 reveals that in terms of seats the SAD alone got 8 Lok Sabha seats contested by it in this election. The SAD also won 8 Lok Sabha seats out of 9 it had contested in previous Lok Sabha election which was held in 1996. The BJP which could not win even a single seat in 1996 Lok Sabha election won 3 Lok Sabha seats contested by it in this election. The Janata Dal candidate Inder Kumar Gujral who had contested with the help of the SAD and Satnam Singh Kainth an independent supported also by the SAD won from Jalandhar and Phillaur Lok Sabha seats respectively. The Congress which got 2 Lok Sabha seats in 1996 Lok Sabha election could not win even a single seat in this election and was completely routed. All the other political parties either national or state level like the BSP, the CPI, the CPI (M) and the SAD (M) could not open their account in terms of seats in this election.

In terms of percentage of votes the SAD-BJP alliance secured 44.60% votes in this election. The SAD secured 32.93% votes in this Lok Sabha election, while it had secured only 28.72% votes in 1996 Lok Sabha election. The BJP secured 11.67% votes in this Lok Sabha election while it had secured only 6.48% votes in 1996 Lok Sabha election. The Congress party secured 25.85% votes in this election although it had obtained 35.10% votes in 1996 Lok Sabha election. The Janata Dal obtained 4.18% votes in this election while it had secured only 2.66% votes 1996 Lok Sabha election. The BSP secured 12.65% votes in this election although it had obtained

9.35% votes in 1996 Lok Sabha election. The CPI, the CPI (M) and SAD (M) secured 3.40%, 1.06% and 2.73% votes respectively in this election while they had secured 1.60%, 2.61% and 3.85% votes respectively in 1996 Lok Sabha election. The independents and others secured 5.53% votes in this election while they had secured 9.56% votes in 1996 Lok Sabha election.

### Assembly Segment – Wise Performance of Political Parties

Punjab has 13 Lok Sabha constituencies. Each Lok Sabha constituency has 9 assembly segments. Thus, there are 117 (9 x 13) assembly segments out of which 88 are general and 29 are reserved. The assembly segment-wise performance of political parties in this election has been shown in table no.2.

**Table: 2**

#### Assembly Segment-Wise Performance of Political Parties in 1998 Lok Sabha Elections in Punjab

Name of the Parties	Lok Sabha Seats Won	Assembly Segments won
SAD	08	54
BJP	03	27
Janata Dal	01	08
INC	-	12
BSP	-	06
CPI	-	02
SAD (MANN)	-	02
Independents	01	06
Total	13	117

**Source:- Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Punjab, Chandigarh, 1998 Lok Sabha Elections of Punjab.**

The table no. 2 indicates that the SAD won 8 Lok Sabha seats and led in 54 assembly segments, the BJP won 3 Lok Sabha seats and led in 27 assembly segments, the Janata Dal won 1 Lok Sabha seat and led in 8 assembly segments and an independent Satnam Singh Kainth won 1 Lok Sabha seats and led in 6 assembly segments. Though the INC, the BSP, the CPI and the SAD (M) could not win any Lok Sabha seat but they led in 12, 6, 2 and 2 assembly segments respectively.

An analysis of the assembly segment-wise performance of political parties in 1998 Lok Sabha elections shows that the Congress party won as many as 12 assembly segments which was even lower than the 1997 assembly elections when it was able to win 14 seats. The SAD and its allies had won 93 assembly segments in

1997 Vidhan Sabha election, however in 1998 Lok Sabha election they increased in as many as 2 assembly segments.

### **Region - Wise Electoral Performance of Political Parties**

Punjab comprises of three distinct geographical regions- Majha (Districts of Amritsar and Gurdaspur), Doaba (Districts of, Jalandhar, Kapurthala, Nawanshar and Hoshiarpur) and Malwa (Districts of Patiala, Ludhiana, Fatehgarh Sahib, Faridkot, Ferozepur, Moga, Muktsar, Sangrur, Ropar, Bathinda, Mansa and Mohali).<sup>7</sup> Out of 13 Lok Sabha seats located in Punjab, 3 Lok Sabha seats (Amritsar, Tarn Taran and Gurdaspur) fall in Majha region, 3 Lok Sabha seats (Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar and Phillaur) fall in Doaba region and the remaining 7 Lok Sabha seats (Patiala, Ropar, Ludhiana, Sangrur, Bathinda, Faridkot and Ferozepur) are located in Malwa region.

The Majha region, which lies sandwiched between the Indo-Pak border in the north and river Beas in the south, contains 27 assembly segments. It is a mixture of Hindu, Sikh and Dalit population. The demographic character of this region made it a traditional stronghold of the Congress party.

The north eastern part of Punjab, Doaba which literally means the land between two rivers, accounts for 27 assembly segments, is traditionally a strong hold of the BSP and the Congress party because of its large concentration of Dalit population.

The southern part of Punjab, Malwa, is geographically the biggest and politically the most significant region of the state which accounts for 63 out of 117 assembly segments of Punjab. Though it has some pockets of Hindu population but it has traditionally remained a stronghold of the Akalis. Since 1966 all the Chief Ministers of the state except Darbara Singh hailed from Malwa region.

The region-wise electoral performance of political parties in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections of Punjab is recorded in table no. 3

**Table: 3****Region-Wise Electoral Performance of Political Parties in 1998 Lok Sabha Elections in Punjab**

Political Parties	Majha		Doaba		Malwa	
	Lok Sabha Seats Won	Assembly Segments Won	Lok Sabha Seats Won	Assembly Segments Won	Lok Sabha Seats Won	Assembly Segments Won
SAD	01	09	-	-	07	45
BJP	02	18	01	09	-	-
Janata Dal	-	-	01	08	-	-
INC	-	-	-	01	-	11
BSP	-	-	-	03	-	03
CPI	-	-	-	-	-	02
SAD(M)	-	-	-	-	-	02
IND	-	-	01	06	-	-
Total	03	27	03	27	07	63

**SOURCE :- Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Punjab, Chandigarh, 1998 Lok Sabha Elections of Punjab.**

The table no. 3 indicates that in the Majha region, the BJP won two Lok Sabha seats Gurdaspur and Amritsar and led in 18 assembly segments, the SAD won remaining 1 Lok Sabha seat Tran Taran and led in 9 assembly segments from this region. All the other political parties could not win any Lok Sabha seats and also failed to lead in any assembly segment from this region. In the Doaba region, the BJP, the Janata Dal and an independent won 1 Lok Sabha seat each. The BJP won Hoshiarpur Lok Sabha seat and led in 9 assembly segments, the Janata Dal won Jalandhar Lok Sabha seat and led in 8 assembly segments and an independent supported by SAD won Phillaur Lok Sabha seat and led in 6 assembly segments from this region. Though the INC and the BSP could not win even a single Lok Sabha seat from this region but they led in 1 and 3 assembly segments respectively.

In Malwa region the SAD won all the 7 Lok Sabha seats located in this region and led in 45 assembly segments. The Congress, the BSP, the CPI and the SAD (M) failed to win even

a single Lok Sabha seat but they led in 11, 3, 2 and 2 assembly segments respectively from this region.

The region based analysis of 1998 Lok Sabha election shows that even in its own citadel Majha the Congress party could not win any seat and was completely routed. So far as the BJP is concerned not only in the Majha the pocket borough of the Congress but in Doaba the stronghold of the BSP, the BJP got an overwhelming response in 1998 Lok Sabha election.

### **Reasons for Performance of Political Parties in 1998 Lok Sabha Election in Punjab**

The main reasons for this performance of political parties were as under:-

1. Inter party tussle and acute factionalism in the Congress party became the major reason for its defeat in 1998 Lok Sabha elections.<sup>6</sup>
2. Lackluster and directionless campaign, organizational deficiencies and solvency in principles became also the reasons of the poor performance of the Congress party in these elections. On the other hand organized campaigning by the candidates of SAD-BJP alliance proved successful in these elections.
3. Lack of proper leadership was also a reason for the poor performance of the Congress party. After the assassination of Beant Singh (former Chief Minister of Punjab) neither Harcharn Singh Brar nor Rajinder Kaur Bhattal could give proper leadership to Punjab Congress. Because of this reason the Congress party did not perform well in 1996 Lok Sabha as well as 1997 Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections. This factor also influenced the results of the 1998 Lok Sabha elections.
4. After forming the coalition government in Punjab 1997, Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal implemented the party promises such as abolition of Octroi in Punjab, free power for farm sector and provided free traveling facility to the senior citizens in government run buses. The implementation of these promises by Badal government helped in creating a favorable environment for the SAD during 1998 Lok Sabha elections. The people were satisfied with the performance of Badal led ministry in Punjab, so they gave verdict to the SAD in 1998 Lok Sabha elections. Therefore the SAD retained its performance for third time.
5. Because of the electoral adjustment with the SAD, the BJP actively campaigned for the success of the SAD candidates in these elections. Most prominent leaders of the BJP i.e. Atal Behari Vajpayee, Lal Krishan Advani, and Murli Manohar Joshi addressed the public meetings in the favour of SAD candidates. Consequently a large size of the urban voters extended their support to the SAD candidates in this election.
6. Split in the BSP on the eve of 1998 Lok Sabha elections were a reason for its poor performance in these elections. Satnam Singh Kainth deserted the BSP and formed the BSM and contested the 1998 Lok Sabha elections in alliance with SAD-BJP combine. The BSP, which had won three seats in 1996 Lok Sabha elections could not win even a single seat due to this split. The SAD taking advantage of this split, entered into an electoral adjustment with Satnam Singh Kainth's party, the BSM. Because of

this development a large number of Scheduled Castes voted in favour of the SAD candidates in these elections.

7. Last but not the least we can say that at the time of 1998 Lok Sabha elections the people were not in favour of the Congress party because the Congress party withdrew its support from two coalition governments at the centre i.e. H. D. Devegowda and Inder Kumar Gujral governments for the lust of political power at the Centre. This political opportunism shown by the Congress made the voters to turn away from this party at these polls. The voters realized that the Congress party was responsible for the instability of two coalition governments at the Centre. This attitude weighed heavily on the voters in Punjab for voting the non-Congress combine in these elections.

In conclusion it may be stated that the 1998 Lok Sabha elections in Punjab were won and lost on the bases of electoral alliances between the major political parties as well as impact of the Badal led state government's pro people policies. The Congress lost as its state leadership lacked the will to act as a united team. Moreover, the Congress as a national party had lost the credibility due to its role in destabilizing two coalition governments at the centre in quick succession.

#### References and Notes

1. Kuldeep Kaur, Akali Dal in Punjab Politics: Split and Merger, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1999, p. 157.
2. Statistical Report on 1998 Lok Sabha Elections of Punjab, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Punjab, Chandigarh, 1998, p. 11.
3. Ibid., p. 17.
4. Ibid., p. 13.
5. Meenu Roy, Elections 1998: A Continuity in Coalition, National Publishing House, Jaipur, 1999, p.90.
6. For details see S.C.Bhatt (ed), The Encyclopedia District Gazetteers of India, Vol. 4, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 579-733.
7. M.L.Ahuja, Electoral Politics and General Election in India, 1952-1998, Icon Publication, New Delhi, 1998, p. 150.