CHAPTER 6

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Mass media is an essential element in modern democratic politics. It can contribute to the participatory ethos and empowerment process of democratic societies by circulating information that enables the citizens to make informed choices. Mass media like the press has another important role in democratic polity: to help realize the full potentiality of democratic institutions like the Panchayat system and the Panchayat election.

The study of the newspaper coverage of the panchayat elections in West Bengal during 1978 to 2003, a span of 25 years, would help analyze the role of press in the panchayat election process, more specifically in promoting grassroots political empowerment and social transformation. The coverage pattern of the panchayat elections in the sample newspapers would ascertain mass media’s real and apparent location in the democratic process.

The study of the press coverage of the panchayat elections in West Bengal from 1978 to 2003 and the appraisal of the role of the press in grassroots empowerment has been pursued with the help of an elaborate survey of the news reports on panchayat election in sample general-interest dailies that had prominent circulation and readership during the survey period. The exploration of the subject of Grassroots empowerment and the role of the Press include two questionnaire-based interviews of randomly selected samples of two sections integral to this study - panchayat functionaries and members of the press. The study of the press reports would give insight into the role and function of the administration, political parties, their leaders and their nominees contesting the election, the existing panchayat members, and the voters during the panchayat election process. The study of the press reports and news items would confirm whether the perspectives of the sample newspapers was inclined towards a particular group (like local political leaders or political parties who were immensely powerful) and overlooked the intended beneficiaries of the panchayat system (the grassroots people) or retained an objective balance.

It is to be noted here that before the beginning of the 20th century, mass media channels like the television had little reach in the state of West Bengal (television was
virtually an elite instrument and restrained by political control over its content and therefore had limited accessibility). The press reporting on the panchayat elections, its analysis and implications was significant from this angle. This does not, however, ascertain the influence of the press over the rural voters. The reasons are varied from the obvious that there were other more potent sources of influence like political party leaders or panchayat functionaries who had a formidable presence in the rural interiors to the speculative like doubt of the rural audience over the probity of the sample newspapers on political issues. It was not uncommon for the mass media to hold viewpoints which did not qualify as neutral and objective. Mass media at times subscribe to political ideals and outlook and their observations would become skewed under the above circumstances. Again the newspaper content may not be biased in favor of a particular viewpoint but the perspective adopted (like preference to a particular group as news source) can make the content biased. The study would enquire whether the newspaper reports gave a comprehensive idea of the panchayat election scenario and contributed to the process of grassroots empowerment or political and social awareness or gave one-sided viewpoints of some like the political organizations.

PROCEDURES OF DATA COLLECTION AND TECHNIQUE OF DATA ANALYSIS

In the study, chapters 7 to 12 comprise detailed description, discussion and analysis of news reports on panchayat elections held in 1978, 1983, 1988, 1993, 1998 and 2003 respectively. News reports were documented from four general-interest dailies published in West Bengal, two of them in Bengali, the vernacular language in use in the state, and two in English. The Anandabazar Patrika was part of all the survey years. The other Bengali daily studied was Jugantar in 1978, 1983, 1988 and 1993 and Aajkal in 1998 and 2003 as the Jugantar had downed shutters. The English dailies in the survey were Statesman, which was referred to in all the survey years, Amrita Bazar Patrika Patrika in 1978, 1983, 1988, and 1993 and Telegraph in 1998 and 2003 as the Amrita Bazar Patrika suffered a similar fate as the Jugantar. A brief introduction to the sample newspapers is provided in the table below (Table 6.1).
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<tr>
<th>Name of the Newspaper</th>
<th>Year of Initiation</th>
<th>Salient Characteristic</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aajkal</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>The newspaper was started by Abhik Kumar Ghosh and has a niche readers created by its leftist perspective and focus on sports news. It is one of the very few Indian dailies which do not publish astrological predictions. The first editor of the newspaper was the legendary journalist Gour Kishore Ghosh. The present editor is Ashok Dasgupta, a renowned sports journalist.</td>
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<td>Amrita Bazaar Patrika</td>
<td>17th January, 1868</td>
<td>The newspaper was one of the oldest newspapers in India and the oldest Indian-owned English daily. The Amrita Bazaar was started by two brothers, Sisir Ghosh and Moti Lal Ghosh as a weekly Bengali publication. Sisir Kumar Ghosh was its first editor. In 1871, the Patrika moved to Calcutta (now Kolkata) where it began to function as a bilingual weekly publishing news and views in English and Bengali. Its anti-government views and vast influence among the people was a thorn in the flesh of the British government. Sisir Kumar Ghosh launched vigorous campaigns against economic exploitation and in support of civil liberties. Lord Lytton, the Viceroy of India promulgated the Vernacular Press Act in 1878 mainly to gag the Amrita Bazaar. The Patrika became a</td>
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English newspaper overnight. It became a daily in 1891. The newspaper’s nationalist fervor was also evident when Moti Lal Ghosh succeeded Sisir Kumar Ghosh as editor – vehement opposition to the judgment ruling Bal Gangadhar Tilak guilty of sedition, intense criticism of Lord Curzon for the partition of Bengal, for which the paper was charged with sedition, opposition to the expulsion of Subhas Chandra Bose and other students from the Presidency college. After the death of Moti Lal Ghosh in 1922, Sisir Kumar Ghosh’s son Tushar Kanti Ghosh took over as the editor of the newspaper. The Patrika kept up its nationalist spirit and contributed to the crusade for Indian freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and suffered for its stance at the hands of the British rulers. The newspaper discontinued publication in 1996 due to labor problems.

**Anandabazar Patrika**  
13th March, 1922  
It is a Bengali daily newspaper founded by Prafulla Chandra Sarkar. It started off as an evening daily and was published as a morning daily from 1923. The newspaper’s landmark coverage included Rabindranath Tagore’s death, Netaji’s miraculous escape from detention, and Mahatma Gandhi’s death. In 1954, the Press Commission report declared it as the largest circulated newspaper in the
According to the report of Audit Bureau of Circulations July-December 2008, the newspaper recorded a circulation of 1.28 million making it the largest circulation for a single-edition, regional language newspaper in the country. According to *Indian Readership Survey (IRS)* 2012 – Quarter 2, it is the most widely read Bengali newspaper in India with a readership of 58.59 lakhs.

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<th>Jugantar Patrika</th>
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<td>Tushar Kanti Ghosh, the proprietor and editor of Amrita Bazaar Patrika launched Jugantar, a Bengali daily, with Jatin Bhattacharya as the editor. There is an interesting story about how Tushar Kanti Ghosh acquired the name Jugantar for his Bengali daily newspaper as there was already a newspaper named Jugantar run by the revolutionaries of Bengal. In fact, this newspaper was the mouthpiece of the revolutionary organization, Anushilan Samiti. By the time Tushar Kanti intended to publish a Bengali daily, almost all the revolutionaries including the editor of Jugantar, Upendra Nath Bandyopadhyay were arrested and Sivaram Chakravorty, a humorist writer of the time was entrusted with the job of running the newspaper including its editing. But Sivaram found it very difficult to publish the newspaper. Tushar</td>
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Kanti came to know the situation and took advantage of it. He offered Rs. 500 to buy the title of the newspaper which Sivaram readily accepted and sold the title to Tushar Kanti. Some years later however, he himself took over the editorship of Jugantar. The newspaper closed publication in 1996 like the Amrita Bazaar.

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<tr>
<th>The Statesman</th>
<th>15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; January, 1875</th>
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| This English-Language broadsheet daily newspaper was founded by Robert Knight. It directly descended from *The Friend of India* (founded in 1818). *The Englishman* (founded in 1821) was merged with it in 1934. The newspaper was first named *The Statesman and New Friend of India*. Soon after it was shortened to the present The Statesman. During the British era, it was run and managed, by Englishmen but after independence, control passed to Indians. Its first Indian editor was Pran Chopra. The daily is known for its independent, anti-establishment stance. The newspaper is characterized by its terse reporting style. Its average weekday circulation was 1,80000 while Sunday circulation was 2,30000 (source: Worldpress.org retrieved on 30<sup>th</sup> December, 2006). The current editor is Ravindra Kumar. From once being the most widely read English daily in West Bengal, the Statesman has
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lost ground to The Times of India and The Telegraph in the state in the recent years.

The Telegraph is published by the ABP Group and vies with the Times of India for having the widest circulation of any newspaper in eastern India. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations July-December, 2008 its circulation was 484,971 copies. The newspaper is the fourth most-widely read English newspaper in India (after Times of India, Hindustan Times and The Hindu) with a readership of 12.75 lakhs according to Indian Readership Survey (IRS) 2012. The first editor of the newspaper was M. J. Akbar.

Table 6.1: Brief Introduction to the Sample Newspapers used in the Study

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Telegraph</td>
<td>7th July, 1982</td>
<td>The Telegraph is published by the ABP Group and vies with the Times of India for having the widest circulation of any newspaper in eastern India. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations July-December, 2008 its circulation was 484,971 copies. The newspaper is the fourth most-widely read English newspaper in India (after Times of India, Hindustan Times and The Hindu) with a readership of 12.75 lakhs according to Indian Readership Survey (IRS) 2012. The first editor of the newspaper was M. J. Akbar.</td>
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The size of the sample reports is provided along with the date of their publication and headline before the summary of each sample report provided the hard copy was available. This procedure was not possible if the Internet edition was referred (in few cases in 2003) as it did not depict the column / line space occupied in the original edition. The size of the reports include the column (s) and lines occupied by the report where each column is equivalent to 4 cms and the number of lines refers to the total number of lines in the report.

The following table gives information about the sample period for each survey year, date of the election and the total number of days included in the sample period which is usually equivalent to 4 weeks with approximately 3 weeks prior to the election and 1 week after.

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The newspapers were accessed from the Archives in the National Library, Kolkata. The news items explored ranged from routine reports, to coverage by special correspondents, observations by political observers to editorials, and press briefs and government orders and circulars. Graphical analysis of the total number of news items in each sample newspaper both during the span of a single week as well as during the entire sample period of a specific year is provided at the end of all Chapters 7 to 12. There is also data on the primary news sources of the news items discussed in the aforementioned chapters. Thus the study includes both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the news and information provided by the sample newspapers on the subject of Panchayat elections.

The study on the role of the press in grassroots empowerment would be incomplete without the viewpoints of the press members and the panchayat members on the topic. Two different questionnaires were circulated among randomly selected members of these two sections. The study adopted Questionnaire-based interview as a method for gathering information because questionnaires can be quickly completed and data analysis can begin promptly. The questionnaire method is free from interviewer bias, guiding, and cues that can impact the validity and reliability of data collection. The response quality is better because respondents can instantly consult resources needed to respond well. The disadvantage of the method is that response
rates are low even after repeated follow-ups. The interviews can be regarded as qualitative interviews which look like ordinary conversations on some specific problem area with the results usually expressed in non-numerical terms. The first questionnaire was circulated to 50 members of the press and the second questionnaire was circulated to 20 panchayat members from different tiers of the panchayat administration. The questionnaires included both open ended and close ended questions because of their distinctive advantages keeping in mind the objective of the research to extract opinion from the two vital components in the study – the press media members and the panchayat functionaries.

REFERENCES