CHAPTER 7

1978 - DAWN OF GRASS-ROOT EMPOWERMENT IN WEST BENGAL

INTRODUCTION

1978 was a momentous year in the political history of West Bengal. The grassroots of the state would for the first time participate in panchayat elections. It was projected as a political experience unlike the parliamentary electoral system prevalent in the country where the powers of the grassroots were mainly limited to voting. The political parties and political leaders considered the voters important for their votes. They were not part of the law making procedure; they merely followed the mandates imposed on them by the political system. It is true that in a big populated country like India only representative democracy is feasible. But the grassroots can be delegated with decision-making powers on matters concerning their own welfare at the local level. The three-tier panchayat system in the state proposed to do just that.

Panchayats were present in the country even in the colonial times. Post-independence, the Directive Principles of State Policy, an important part of the Constitution of India suggested the formation of panchayats to deal with local economic and social problems. But the question was whether these panchayats should be selected or elected. Traditionally, the panchayat members were selected from the village people. They comprised men of a certain social status and reputation. The British were in favor of some form of election but it was a partisan affair as voters were eligible subject to their income or wealth, tax liability or gender. The constitution makers were in favor of including all the people under a panchayat in the election process but political leaders including the Father of the Nation and later on the successive Governments of India was unsure of the role of political parties in the panchayat election. They felt that election fought on party tickets would destroy the camaraderie and unity required for implementing development programs at the local level. The 1978 panchayat elections held in West Bengal was an eye opener in this respect. Political parties actively participated in the election process and till this date, though questions of partisan attitude and nepotism crop up now and then, panchayat
members of different political parties work together to make and implement decision for the all round development of their community. The 1978 panchayat election was the beginning of grass-root participation in the decision-making process. The rural masses became conscious, aware and were able to voice their views and opinions in the gram sabha meetings. Earlier this was an improbable phenomenon.

The panchayat election was a new experience not only for the rural grassroots but also for the mass media like the newspapers covering the election. It is debatable whether the newspapers used their full potential to disseminate information and facts necessary for the grass-root voters to make an informed choice or actively participate in the new initiative. News on panchayat elections rarely focused on matters concerning grass-root involvement like their role in the newly elected panchayats, their expectation from the new system, subjects under the purview of the gram panchayats so that they could participate in the process actively and derive optimum benefit from it. The newspapers chose to specify the administrative measures, views of political leaders, cover political rallies, and vividly describe the incidents of political violence and strife that took place prior to the election. It is not suggested that such news items are not important but they could have been curtailed to include information which would have benefitted the people optimally. The relevance of newspapers in disseminating news for the welfare of the people cannot be lost in a developing country like India. It is only natural to expect that mass media instruments in developing countries will deliver content that is useful to execute procedures required for development and empowerment.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS’ CONTENT ON 1978 PANCHAYAT ELECTION

The newspaper coverage of the panchayat elections of 1978 is discussed in detail in this chapter. The election was held on 4th June, 1978 and the sample news reports were collected between 12th May, 1978 and 11th June, 1978. News items published on the subject of panchayat election in the four sample newspapers are mentioned in this chapter. The sample newspapers were four most circulated newspapers of 1978 - Anandabazar Patrika and Jugantar, Bengali dailies and The Statesman and Amrita Bazaar Patrika, English dailies.
Here we must mention about the coverage of the panchayat elections by the other mass media in 1978. In West Bengal mass media comprised the newspapers, and the State owned and managed local stations of All India Radio and Doordarshan. The programs transmitted by the radio were mostly cultural programs designed to entertain the listeners. There were also informative programs (like Krishi Darshan which provided inputs on agriculture) or social awareness programs. The objective of this medium was social and economic development. News related to the panchayat election was part of the regular news feed and current affairs program broadcast by the station. The dissemination of news by the radio followed the same linear, disconnected, homogenous pattern that was common to the newspapers. The coverage by the local network of Doordarshan was shoddier. The reasons being it was newly established and the hours of broadcast were really short. Whatever news and current affairs programs were broadcast during the short period adhered to the official line and lacked visual back up that is inherent to the television. So though it was an audio-visual medium and had great potential to incorporate the issues of grassroots participation in the local political bodies and in their own development in its news, current affairs programs and in features, the stranglehold of bureaucratic red-tape and apprehensions and misgivings of the political powers restricted its agenda. So the effectiveness of the electronic media was not evident to the grassroots in 1978.

NEWS ITEMS PUBLISHED BY THE SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS ON PANCHAYAT ELECTION DURING 12TH MAY, 1978 AND 8TH JUNE, 1978

12th May, 1978

Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 30 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 20 lines)

Headline: Order to allot reserved symbol / Order to grant reserved symbol to Congress (I) candidates

Reporter / Correspondent

Both news samples narrated that Calcutta High court has ordered the authority to allow the use of 'hand', the reserved symbol of the Congress to Congress (I) nominees too.
12th May, 1978
The Statesman (2 columns 48 lines)
Headline: Importance of Panchayat elections explained
Primary Source: Political Party leader

The article explained the importance of panchayat elections. It informed that elected panchayats at the village level will give the people the power to implement plans for village development and ensure the distribution of lands among the landless people. The news quoted the CPI (M) leader and Left Front Committee chairman Pramod Dasgupta “the panchayats will be capable to play their role only when poor people are politically active.” Dasgupta stressed on the need for political participation of the villages to precede the economic and social participation.

The article had the potential to motivate the voters and ensure their participation in the electoral as well as post-electoral process.

12th May, 1978
The Statesman (1 column 45 lines)
Headline: Lack of cohesion in Front
Reporter / Correspondent

The report gave instances of the lack of unity and seat adjustment between Left Front partners at the grass-root level. The report commented Front leaders expected that post election the coalition constituents will forget differences and work together.

This was, however, one important indication by the reporter about how the political leaders, unrelated to the panchayats, will try to interfere in the panchayat process and jeopardize grass-root empowerment.

12th May, 1978
Jugantar (2 column 47 line)
Headline: Delegation from Delhi for Panchayat election
Reporter / Correspondent

Though the news headline indicated that the news item would inform about the delegation from Delhi headed by the chairman of the Committee on Panchayats, Ashok Mehta the news item described about the bickering in the Janata Dal with one faction wanting the postponement of the impending panchayat election and the other wanting it on time.
12th May, 1978
Jugantar (2 column 110 line)
Headline: Vested interests fearing the outcome of Panchayat election
Primary Source: Political Party leader

The news item described the fervent campaigning by the ruling CPI (M) and the Left Front. The item referred to the manifesto of the CPI (M) party entitled 'Duty of the people' where party leader Pramod Dasgupta spoke about panchayat election, power of the panchayat bodies and the need to elect Front. He implored the people to be politically conscious and realize the full potential of the panchayats. He said the vested interests in the villages were afraid and therefore trying to stoke violence and disrupt the election process. Dasgupta said that the Left firmly believed in the decentralization of political power to the village level and therefore the endeavor to hold panchayat elections within a year of its coming to power. The report quoted him that the disunity in the Front over 6000 seats out of around 56000 seats was momentary and would be sorted out with time.

The news item gave elaborate information on the election details related to the 24 Parganas district.

13th May, 1978
Jugantar (2 column 110 line)
Headline: Congress meeting in Burdwan over panchayat election
Reporter / Correspondent

The report described the political meeting of the Congress workers in the Burdwan district and the analysis and resolutions in the meeting. There were references to the discussions and concerns of Congress leaders regarding the political situation before the panchayat election in the report.

13th May, 1978
The Statesman (1 column 120 lines)
Headline: Jalpaiguri Panchayat poll campaign
Primary Source: Local leaders of political parties

The news described the panchayat poll campaigning in the Jalpaiguri district. It is the prerogative of the journalist to decide on the perspective of a report. Here the
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reporter focuses on the political bickering in the district between the Left Front allies regarding seat adjustment.

The reporter does not illustrate the present condition in the panchayat areas in the district, expectations of voters post election, their forthcoming responsibilities and grassroots' participation in the electoral campaign. That kind of information would have helped voters in the district make informed choices and encouraged grassroots' empowerment rather than the conflict of the Left Front partners.

13th May, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 28 lines)
Headline: Face-off between the two big partners of the Left Front
Reporter / Correspondent

The news vividly described the situation in North 24 Parganas district where two Front partners, CPI (M) and Forward Bloc were contesting each other in the panchayat election despite mutual agreement. The report emphasized the difference of opinions between political parties who are allies at the State level but overlooked the important instance of exercise of free will by political workers at the grass-root level which is an essential step towards political empowerment.

13th May, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (Editorial)

The main issue of the editorial was the involvement of political parties in the panchayat election and its consequences. The editorial quoted the then Prime Minister Morarji Desai 'the Janata government intended to organize panchayats and municipalities on non-party lines'. But said the truth was that panchayat elections were being fought on party symbols in West Bengal and the state government had no intention to constitute panchayats without involving political parties. The editorial commented that the concept of panchayats without political parties as proposed by the Constituent Assembly did not fit Parliamentary democracy. The editorial insisted that panchayats can play a pivotal role in the implementation of development schemes but at the same time there was apprehension like that of the Prime Minister that involvement of political parties can lead to partisan development. The editorial ended with the forewarning that political panchayats may end up as miniature legislatures.
with the dominant party deciding all matters according to their ideology and convenience if spontaneous people participation is not ensured.

This article gives scope to the readers to weigh the pros and cons of participation of political parties in the panchayat election process.

14th May, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 17 lines)
Headline: Police arrangements during the Panchayat polls
Primary Source: Administration

Again this report gave detailed news on the police arrangement in the panchayat election. The information in the report is a repeat of the contents that appeared on 8th May and 11th May in the Amrita Bazaar Patrika.

15th May, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 100 lines)
Headline: Panchayat poll - ‘Aim is to reach power to the people’
Primary Source: Political Party leader

The report expansively reflected the views of the CPI (M) secretary and chairman of the Left Front Pramod Dasgupta. Dasgupta asserted that West Bengal panchayat election contest on 4th June is a struggle of the common man against the vested interest in villages. Dasgupta said the Left Front aimed to delegate real power and decentralize the administration. He said that the autonomous bodies in rural areas like union boards had been utilized as power centers by vested interests and exploited the masses. He alleged that previous governments did not involve common people in socioeconomic development. Dasgupta said panchayats would fulfill their long cherished dream of participation in the development process. He requested villagers to keep unity and peace during the election. He informed that the Left Front Committee has asked the Chief Minister to submit a report on police arrangement made by the state government.

The news has a prospect of motivating grass-root voters to participate in the election process but it read like the political manifesto of the ruling party. The imminent possibility of involvement in the development process could encourage them but coming from the mouth of the leader of a political party it loses the sheen of objective reporting and acceptability. It is evident from these reports that
correspondents depended on briefings and statements by prominent political leaders for their content rather than their own findings and enterprise.

15th May, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 39 lines)
Headline: Congress (I) is the main opponent: Pramod Dasgupta
Primary Source: Political Party leader

It was a report of a news briefing where Dasgupta acknowledged that the main opponent of the ruling Front in the West Bengal panchayat election is the Congress (I). In a meeting of the Left Front he asked his party workers and the common people to be wary of the intentions of the Congress party. He accused that the West Bengal Congress (I) president was guilty of conspiracy and inciting communal violence in rural areas. And like in the news report published in the Amrita Bazaar Patrika he requested the common people to cooperate with the State government to ensure a peaceful election.

This news further confirmed the penchant of news correspondents for armchair reporting. The reporter obtained content for his newspaper sitting in his office (if it is a news agency report then he only has to rewrite the story to suit the space provided) or at the most visit nearby offices of political parties for quotes. (See Table 7.2 for source-wise distribution of news items in the sample newspapers at the end of the chapter.) So the homogeneity of content or overlapping of news (as noted in Chapter 5) is not surprising. This news story also has an eye on readers looking out for sensational stuff but as the news reporter makes no attempt to substantiate the accusation made by Dasgupta it may cause unnecessary tension. Whatever the other implications this news item does not have any message for the panchayat voters with regard to their role in the election procedure or thereafter.

15th May, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 26 lines)
Headline: Same platform
Reporter / Correspondent

This item informed about the joint campaign of Prafulla Sen, the dissident Janata Dal leader with Congress leaders at various places in support of political panchayats.
15th May, 1978

The Statesman (6 columns 240 lines)

Headline: Stage set for panchayat election

Reporter / Correspondent

This report is a detailed description of the aspirations and expectations of the various political parties regarding the panchayat elections. The correspondent states at the beginning of the report that he is aware of the implication of panchayat elections to the common masses. But the focus was on the election campaigns of political parties - the CPI (M) leaders lecturing in meetings on the functions and responsibilities of panchayats and the necessity of people’s participation in it, the fear of Congress that if CPI (M) captures the gram panchayats then development work in the field of education, road construction and drainage and sanitation would be severely hampered.

15th May, 1978

The Statesman (1 column 34 lines)

Headline: Panchayat poll campaign

Source: Political party leaders

The report stated Left Front meeting heard out from Front candidates how few opposition candidates campaigned on communal lines in Malda, Nadia, Hooghly, Murshidabad and 24 Parganas. The report said the chief minister declared that satisfactory measures to maintain peace during campaigning, polling and counting have been taken. The report said the Front partners maintained by and large the situation was peaceful.

16th May, 1978

The Statesman (1 column 47 lines)

Headline: ‘Panchayats should be given more powers’

Primary Source: Reporter based on interaction with Ashok Mehta of Mehta Committee

The report discussed the visit of the Ashok Mehta Committee and his opinion on the function of the panchayat system and the panchayat election in West Bengal. The report said Mehta believed with development in agriculture and industry the old concept of panchayats must be changed and their role should not be confined to road or school development. The Mehta Committee gave a hearing to the suggestions
given by the chief minister, panchayat minister, and other ministers of the state and suggested to them that the Election Commission supervised the poll. The report said the state government on its part made it clear to Mehta that it was for greater delegation of power.

16th May, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 21 lines)
Headline: 20 candidates elected uncontested
Reporter
The uncontested win of 20 candidates at the various levels of the panchayat system was the subject of this article.

17th May, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 172 lines)
Headline: ‘Why again vote? Question in villages of Bankura’
Primary Source: Grass-root electorate
The report highlighted the situation in Bankura where the voters were unsure of the election procedure and the roles of the elected panchayats. The reporter informed that the rural voters were repeatedly putting forward these queries to the political parties’ campaigning in the district but the parties concerned had no relevant information on the matter.

17th May, 1978
Jugantar (4 columns 108 lines)
Headline: The picture of Panchayat election battle is unclear
Reporter / Correspondent
The news item gave a vivid description of the candidates’ profile and campaigning methods adopted by the various political parties. We come to know from this report that street meetings, door to door campaign and poster campaigning effectively reached the common people. The report said that grassroots preferred honest and educated social workers as their candidates and political parties are still searching for such candidates at the gram panchayat level. The selection of candidates at the zilla parishad level, according to the report was however, dependent on the political prowess of the candidate and usually the candidate was a former Member of the Legislature or had contested the Assembly elections. The report said this proved
detrimental to the common people as the zilla parishad candidates were established party leaders who may not have acceptance of the people. The report said it would not be an exaggeration to say that the grassroots required inspiration and motivation to actively participate in the panchayat election process.

The political parties' in a limited way tried to create awareness. Mobilization of the grassroots by the newspapers could have encouraged them to be actively involved in the panchayat election process and ensure political empowerment in the true sense.

17th May, 1978
Jugantar (2 columns 52 lines)
Headline: Many problems in implementing Panchayati Raj
Reporter / Correspondent

The news item underlined the difference of opinion between the West Bengal government and Ashok Mehta of the Mehta Committee on the success of panchayat elections under the supervision of the present government and also on the real functions and responsibilities of the panchayats. The newspaper revealed that in a meeting with the chairman of the Panchayati Raj Committee the Chief Minister and his cabinet ministers asserted that West Bengal was ready to accept the challenge of Panchayati Raj. They argued with Mehta that contrary to his opinion the panchayats can be involved in developmental work even in the agriculture and industry sector.

On 16th May, The Statesman (Headline: “Panchayats should be given more powers”) referred to Mehta’s view that with development in agriculture and industry the panchayat’s role is limited in these sectors.

The report stated that the state government thought that the panchayats can give employment to villagers in these two sectors as well. In fact since real development would involve the active participation of the people therefore the panchayats must involve people at all stages. Irrespective of the noble thoughts of the government, the Mehta Committee had doubts on the smooth completion of the election procedure. It recommended that the election should be conducted by the election commission. The news report like the one in The Statesman on the previous day reflected Mehta’s view that panchayats are not for establishing schools in villages and they need to be delegated more powers to enhance their worth.
18th May, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 59 lines)

Headline: Power of the Panchayat bodies to be determined after election
Primary Source: Political party

The report conveyed that the Left Front Committee has decided to select the powers of the panchayats after the completion of the election process. The correspondent elaborated on the other points of discussion in the Left Front meeting on the previous day like agreement between the allies at the grass-root level, the government’s confession that polling officials in some districts were inadequate and there was requirement for central police forces in sensitive booths. The problems of an election on such a large scale and the inexperience of the state administration in handling such a large election was reflected in the news report but the source of the report was deliberations in the Left Front meeting. The correspondent did not venture into the districts to throw light on the ground reality.

As it has been previously pointed out infighting among Front allies and the administrative arrangements for the election were subjects that dominated the newspaper reporting. And then if the source of administrative measures adopted for the elections is credited to information acquired from deliberations in the meeting of a political party then the credibility of the news suffers a body blow.

19th May, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 11 lines)

Headline: Holiday on the day of Panchayat election
Primary Source: Administration

The state government declared that the 4th June would be a holiday to avoid law and order problem.

19th May, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (2 column 24 lines)

Headline: Will win Panchayat election: Jyoti Basu
Primary Source: Political Party leader

The report covered an election campaign for the panchayat election by chief minister where he declared that his party will emerge victorious in the coming elections.
20th May, 1978

Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 74 lines)

Headline: Tripartite contest in 3 blocks in North 24 Parganas

Primary Source: Local leaders of political parties

The report described the triangle contest between two Left allies CPI (M) and Forward Bloc and the Congress (I) in three important blocks of North 24 Parganas district. Congress (I) was hoping to win as two left allies were contesting each other. The correspondent found the reason for the Congress’s hope was the preference of the Muslim voters for the Congress party over the Left. The reporter also pointed out that Left leaders were not campaigning at places where Left allies are contesting each other. The report interaction with the villagers revealed that the campaigning was on full swing and was just like during Assembly election.

20th May, 1978

The Jugantar (1 column 37 lines)

Headline: Fervent activity before Panchayat election

Reporter / Correspondent

The report gave description of the electoral contest at Dinhata subdivision. The enthusiasm among the people is depicted by the fact that 1706 candidates were contesting for 81 seats in the panchayat samiti and 22 candidates for the 6 zilla parishad seats. The good news was that participation of the grassroots was significant so there was a lack of unanimous candidates for various allies or different political parties at the block level or in the gram panchayats.

20th May, 1978

Jugantar (1 column 15 lines)

Headline: Congress’ letter to the Chief Minister

Primary Source: Political party

The report said Congress party secretary complained in writing to the chief minister about the torture inflicted on his party workers by the ruling party workers.

21st May, 1978

Jugantar (4 columns 174 lines)

125
Headline: Unlike Assembly members, elected members of panchayats to remain in villages

Reporter / Correspondent

The news item described the scenario in the Midnapore district which was like that of the Assembly elections. The item said the walls were full of political messages and not only the political parties but independent candidates too took the aid of posters and graffiti to spread their names among the voters. The report described the political battle between CPI (M), Congress (I) and the Janata Dal in the district. The report stated the candidates were facing queries on the functions of the panchayats post election and the source of revenue of the panchayats which would ultimately determine the autonomy of the local bodies. The report stated the political battle was more prominent at the panchayat samiti and the zilla parishad level as at the gram panchayat level the candidates of all parties were more or less familiar to the voters.

21st May, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 74 lines)
Headline: Confusion over Panchayati Raj

Primary Source: Political party

The news elaborated on the apprehensions of a political party - the SUCI, regarding the success of panchayati raj as it believed that the Left Front alliance is working for the land owners and not the poor landless farmers. Their tenet was that many Left candidates who are land owners and rich farmers are winning without even contesting so the purpose of panchayat elections is defeated and the success of the panchayat system may be implausible.

22nd May, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 75 lines)
Headline: 3000 breakaway Marxists in fray

Reporter / Correspondent

The electoral alliance between breakaway members of the ruling coalition and other political parties including the naxalites was the subject of this news report. The news informed the dissidents are contesting the panchayat polls under the banner of locally formed political parties. The report said the main objective of these breakaway leaders was democratization and restructuring of panchayats which, they claimed, was
overlooked by their erstwhile party. The report said the dissidents wanted the panchayats to control the local banks and the local police and establish absolute local governance in the panchayat areas. They believed this and not elections will lead to the change in rural structure and result in real empowerment.

The panchayat elections certainly augured well for the rural grassroots. It promised them political empowerment, a decisive power in their own development and a general political consciousness of the grassroots which evaded them till then. But instead of focusing on the aspect of participation, development and the benefits of self governance the newspapers chose to deliberate on the election process, election campaign and the electoral alliances. I have pointed out in this chapter earlier the flaw of the sample newspapers in concentrating heavily on electoral news and ignoring news’ related to the political empowerment of the rural people, participation of the villagers in the development process and the establishment of a self-sufficient local government. All political parties in the contest were preoccupied with the electoral gain from the panchayat elections rather than the issue of active participation of the grassroots, their political empowerment, and the relation of decentralization and development. All that seemed to matter was the votes of the people to ensure political victory over the opponent. It there are questions on the responsibility of the mass media (newspapers etc), their task and function with relation to gratifying the needs of the readers and the voters it would be pertinent to point out the role of the political parties too. If the political parties played a more constructive role, the newspapers would have reflected it. Mass media is part of the society and the social structure. It is not independent of the social set-up and circumstances and is influenced by the forces of the society. The news content on the panchayat elections only reflected the actual situation in the society and was not outside the influence of its forces (read political parties).

22nd May, 1978
The Statesman (2 column 125 lines)
Headline: Panchayat Poll - A Struggle for Supremacy
Reporter / Correspondent

The reporter Sudhin Dey from Jalpaiguri set out to assess the political battle in North Bengal. The reporter disclosed that the existing influential section unable to unite under the banner of a single political party is trying to fight the election on a
non-political basis. The report emphasized that the voters in this part like the peasantry was well aware of the importance of the panchayat elections and the opportunity provided by it. The report highlighted the interest of the villagers to know the extent of power to be delegated to them after the panchayat election. The report further stated the chief opposition party Congress (I) considered the panchayat elections as a struggle for supremacy. It alleged the ruling party was resorting to violence to spread terror among the grassroots and entrench their supremacy. The report informed the Congress party concentrated on small meetings rather than public meetings and processions. The reporter commented that a divided Congress is a weak opposition to the ruling CPI (M) and it seemed that the Congress was participating in the forthcoming election to strengthen its organization rather than winning it. The reporter said the Left Front feared that infighting among the local units of the coalition partners may jeopardize the political supremacy it achieved in the legislative elections. It is relying on the politically conscious rural voters for retaining its power base. The silver lining of this political battle, according to the correspondent, was the realization of the voters of the importance of the panchayat elections and the leadership opportunity it provided them after 18 long years. One interesting feature according to the reporter was the participation of some naxalite outfits in the electoral contest. The integration of one time outlaws into the democratic process and participation in the democratic activities was certainly an important achievement. The reporter pointed out to the failure of the government and political parties to provide adequate information to the people regarding the panchayat elections, the panchayat system and its functioning.

22nd May, 1978

Jugantar (2 columns 78 lines)

Headline: Panchayat elections to empower rural people

Primary Source: Political Party leader

The news article said chief minister Jyoti Basu complemented his government and the ruling Left coalition for the renewal of the panchayat election process after 18 long years. He added that the villagers can now participate in their own development and benefit from power distribution which was not possible in the absence of panchayats during the Congress rule. The report said he urged the people to vote for the Left candidates to ensure peace and development.
22nd May, 1978
Jugantar (1 column 12 lines)
Headline: Don’t vote for political parties
Primary Source: Political leader

The news said erstwhile Janata Dal leader Prafulla Sen urged voters to cast their votes in favor of independent candidates instead of members of political parties.

22nd May, 1978
Jugantar (1 column 70 lines)
Editorial: Ensuing Panchayat elections (Editorial)

The editorial pointed out that this was the first time that a concrete step was initiated in West Bengal for decentralization of political powers and autonomy at the grass-root level. The editorial said that though there were several amendments to the Panchayat Act and several governments had expressed their intentions to hold elections to the Panchayat nothing materialized. The editorial felt as the existing Central government wanted to relate the democratic decentralization and village development process and the Left Front government at the state also made clear its intention to demarcate administrative powers from the Union to the panchayat level. The editorial said people are yet to be familiarized with the concept of Panchayat elections and there was uncertainty about the conduct of the election, the result of the election and its implications and about the powers and functions of the newly elected panchayats. The editorial discussed about the scope of the panchayat within the financial constraints set out for them. The editorial concluded that the political parties perceived the panchayats as ladder to their electoral success in the rural areas and therefore the ruling party in the state was not willing to commit on the power to be delegated to the panchayats before it is sure that the same power could be enjoyed for their own political gains.

23rd May, 1978
The Statesman (1 column 46 lines)
Headline: 25000 Panchayat Poll candidates
Reporter / Correspondent

The report gave a factual summary of the nitty-gritty of panchayat elections to be held on 4 June 1978. The report informed that the main contenders are the Left
Front and the Congress (I) and gave details of total candidates, total seats and strength of polling and security personnel.

Details of the same nature have been repeated earlier. The homogeneity of the content in the several newspapers is not surprising considering their limited resource and lack of worthy objective. There is no doubt that the news of the main contending political parties as well as the data on the intricacies of the election is important but where news space is limited the newspaper should have explored the other perspectives of the subject as well.

23rd May, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 60 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 64 lines)
Headline: Cong (I) main Front rival: Dasgupta / Front meeting on Panchayat election
Primary Source: Political party / Political party leaders

The reports elaborated on the proceedings in a Left Front meeting. Left Front Chairman Pramod Dasgupta alleged Congress (I) was spreading communalism to win the panchayat elections. Dasgupta admitted of disunity in the lower rungs and blamed it on the inability of the party organization to maintain party whip lower down the line. Another reason for the clash between the coalition partners was the many non-party members who were given nominations in the elections but who were not bound to the party decisions like the party members. The reports said the Left Front hoped that panchayat elections would bring changes in the villages for the better and pressed for adequate distribution of financial powers and administrative authority to the panchayats. The aspirations and intentions of a political party would not help voters to form an informed decision. Moreover the contents were a repetition in terms of Dasgupta’s statements on Left unity and electoral chances reflected in the early editions of the sample newspapers.

23rd May, 1978
Jugantar (1 column 44 lines)
Headline: All CPI (M) candidates are not party members
Reporter / Correspondent

The article described the varied profiles of the panchayat candidates especially their occupational diversity. The news identified the bickering within various political
parties and the contest given by dissident members to party nominees. The newspaper reported the difficulty of political parties in persuading the grassroots to toe the party decision regarding nomination of candidates. While the news highlighted the problem of the political parties it did not evaluate the positive outcome of increased participation and opinion of the grassroots.

23rd May, 1978
Jugantar (3 columns 69 lines)
Headline: The strange picture of Panchayat election
Reporter / Correspondent

The report described the political as well as the electoral scenario in several districts. The report pointed out in Nadia the confrontation between the coalition partners of the LF and the two factions of the Congress made the situation strange and interesting. The picture of the electoral contest from the perspective of the political parties is given in the report. The electoral scenario in the districts of Hooghly, Coochbehar, West Dinajpur, Burdwan, Birbhum and Bankura is also described in the report. The report sometimes described the battle between the political parties in a district, sometimes gave the number of candidates in the three tiers of a particular district, and sometimes gave details of the district’s candidates, their occupation and profile.

24th May, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 160 lines)
Headline: New king to be selected after panchayat election but no significant change in the status of commoners.
Reporter / Correspondent

The report elaborated on the political atmosphere in the Hooghly district. According to the report there was an increased participation of masses without political background in the panchayat election as they could not rely on the existing political parties to change their lives. The report said antisocial elements were found contesting the panchayat election for the main opponents – the Left Front and the Congress (I) as well as the other political parties. The main fight was between the CPI (M) and Congress (I) nominees. The main slogan in the election was ‘break the stranglehold of vested interests’ but there was tension as the sharecroppers, tortured
by the landed peasantry, was out to revenge their earlier situation. The report said the friction in the Left coalition was evident and it would benefit the opponents.

24th May, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 12 lines)
Headline: Home guards to be deployed
Primary Source: Administration

The news item informed 9000 home guards would be deployed to upgrade the security of the state and ensure peaceful elections on 4th June.

24th May, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 35 lines)
Headline: Dasgupta’s appeal to Panchayat poll voters
Primary Source: Political party leader

This item echoed the appeal made by Pramod Dasgupta to the voters to abstain from voting for the Congress (I) and Janata Dal candidates.

24th May, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (4 column 100 lines)
Headline: Panchayat elections – I
Reporter / Correspondent

This was an elaborate feature on the panchayat elections, its significance and consequences. The news described the tremendous upsurge of public emotion and enthusiasm in rural areas all over the state for this election. At the same time it pointed out the confusion amidst the villagers regarding the role of the newly formed panchayats. The newspaper report seconded the observation of the West Bengal panchayat minister that the main aim of the panchayat election was to provide institutional leadership to rural development. The report underlined the financial powers to be delegated to the panchayats and the scope of the villagers to participate in the formulation and execution of development programs. The reporter was convinced that a huge section of the masses viewed the panchayat election as a battle for the ballot boxes in which their responsibility would cease with the casting of votes. The report stated there were little signs of clear understanding of democratic
rights and little indication that villagers would assert the rights guaranteed by the Constitutional Act on Panchayats.

25th May, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 70 lines)
Headline: Panchayat Act and Rules challenged
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed that a writ petition was filed by two sitting Assembly members challenging the validity of the amended West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 framed by the Left Front government.

25th May, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 40 lines)
Headline: June 3rd a public holiday
Primary Source: Administration
The report informed that all the administrative machinery has been geared up for the election but the day before the election was declared a holiday to facilitate polling arrangements for the next day. The report also pointed out that Naren Sarkar, President of Congress (O) faction has alleged that the Left Front was trying to woe voters by threats, money and show of muscle power. The report also quoted Dr Motahar Hossain, general secretary of West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee that the CPI (M) has taken recourse to undemocratic and violent means to win the forthcoming Panchayat election. The report said Hossain alleged that his party members were particularly singled out for attack and torture by CPI (M) supporters and complaints to the chief minister in this matter has yielded little result.

26th May, 1978
The Statesman (1 column 47 lines)
Headline: Basu’s allegation against Congress (I)
Primary Source: Political party leader
The report wrote about the allegation of chief minister Jyoti Basu against the Congress (I) for campaigning on communal lines. The chief minister, the report said, condemned their stance and expressed confidence that the people of the State would not allow such campaigns to affect peace. In the same report Pramod Dasgupta was
quoted that the state was witnessing ‘an enthusiasm never seen before’. The general secretary of West Bengal Youth Congress Biswanath Bose alleged that a Congress candidate was assaulted and claimed that if the elections were ‘free and fair’ his party would get clear majority.

26th May, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 70 lines)
Headline: Panchayat polls law defended
Reporter/ Correspondent
The report described how the state advocate defended the panchayat election laws.

26th May, 1978
Jugantar (2 columns 152 lines)
Headline: Unrest and hostility plague Panchayat elections
Reporter / Correspondent
The report stated there were uncertainty, disturbance and enthusiasm over the impending Panchayat election. The report elaborated that the writ petition filed challenging the legality of some clauses of Panchayat Act and the ongoing judicial case have thrown uncertainty over the scheduled election. There were several complaints of aggression and intimation and violence. The report said Congress (I) has alleged that the CPI (M) continued with its terror tactics to remove its candidates from the electoral fray. The report said allegations and counter allegations dominated the election campaigning for the ensuing panchayat election. The report said Congress (I) has also alleged that the ruling CPI (M) is resorting to violence to spread terror and limit participation of the rural masses. The report added that about one lakh security personnel have been pressed into service to restrain political violence in the run-up to the panchayat elections.

26th May, 1993
Jugantar (1 column 8 lines)
Headline: More powers in the hands of villagers
Primary Source: Political party leader
The report stated chief minister assured the rural electorate in a public meeting that more political and financial power would be delegated to the gram panchayats.
The news item informed of discussions between the panchayat minister and his colleagues in the ministry regarding the functions and responsibilities of the newly formed panchayats at the three levels. The report stated the panchayat minister informed that about two lakh officers would be required to run the three-tier panchayat system smoothly and they are already undergoing training for this purpose.

26th May, 1978
Jugantar (3 columns 45 lines)
**Headline: Howrah excited about panchayat elections**

**Reporter / Correspondent**

The report said the political atmosphere of Howrah was scorching before the panchayat election. The report informed the contesting political parties were campaigning fervently but the general perception was that the main fight would be between CPI (M) and Congress. The report gave details about the total number of contesting candidates in each tier of the district. The report commented the people of the district are politically conscious and have already decided on their candidate. The report described the political bickering between the Left Front allies and the political strategy of the opponents.

27th May, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 45 lines)
**Headline: Panchayat poll laws defended**

**Reporter / Correspondent**

The report informed that the hearing pertaining to the writ petition filed by the two members of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly challenging the validity of the West Bengal Panchayat Act came to an end. The report said the judgment of the court was pending.

27th May, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (4 columns 260 lines)
**Headline: Panchayat elections – 2**

**Primary Source: Grass-root voters**

The reporter of this news item Subhas Bose focused on Burdwan district. The relatively peaceful election campaign in the State was marred by some incidents of violence in this district. There was enthusiasm evident among the rural voters for the
forthcoming panchayat elections and the reporter gathered the opinion of the villagers to understand their expectation from the election. Though some were skeptical about the ability of the election to change their plight most expressed hope that their lot would now witness some positive changes. This feature was interactive, investigative and insightful.

27th May, 1978

Amrita Bazaar Patrika (4 columns 34 lines)

Headline: Posters change face of South 24 Parganas

Reporter / Correspondent

The news item reflected the campaigning in South 24 Parganas. The walls of the villages in this district were infested with posters of every kind, canvases and festoons appeared often with names and symbols of the warring parties or candidates. The report construed that such enthusiasm in the panchayat polls was not surprising as people anticipated that elected panchayat bodies would be given powers to develop rural areas. The second observation in the report was that the CPI (M) was in an advantageous position.

27th May, 1978

The Statesman (1 column 13 lines) and (1 column 30 lines)

Headline: CPI (M-L) faction call for poll boycott / 'Highest' Panchayat polling station

Reporter / Correspondent

The first item was a call for boycott of the panchayat elections by a Naxalite outfit. The news had significance for people residing in areas where the Naxalite faction was dominant.

The second news was an interesting snippet, on the highest polling station in the State in Darjeeling district.

27th May, 1978

Jugantar (2 columns 93 lines)

Headline: Excitement in South 24 Parganas over panchayat election

Reporter / Correspondent

The report gave a vivid description of panchayat election campaigning in South 24 parganas. The report informed about the total seats at the various levels in
the district, the main contenders and described the campaigning techniques of the various political parties. It mentioned in most cases the contest in the district was between CPI (M) and dissident CPI (M) members. The report also mentioned of the many independent candidates there were several who did not get approval from the CPI (M) or were members of the Indira Congress who failed to secure symbol of the party.

27th May, 1993
Jugantar (3 columns 225 lines)
Headline: Is the political picture of the villages on the verge of change? (Editorial)

The editorial’s focus was on the political change awaiting the villages post panchayat elections. The editorial commented the political parties can play a positive role in motivating villagers to participate in the panchayat elections with the promise that the panchayats would be responsible for development of the village in the near future. The report said Ashok Mehta Committee also recommended implementation of ‘development work in villages only through panchayats after their formation. But the report added political parties were confused about how much power to provide to the panchayats. The report commented most leaders selected through the panchayat elections would be new to the political set-up. So it is important to familiarize them with the powers to be bestowed on them. The report commented if their powers remain undefined or vague then the purpose of participation and empowerment in the political process will be defeated.

28th May, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 21 lines)
Headline: Counting to start on 4th June
Primary Source: Administration

The report informed counting would start soon after polling gets over on 4th June itself.

29th May, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 87 lines) / Jugantar (1 column 86 lines)
Headline: Kolkata leaderless on the last Sunday before the panchayat election / All leaders busy in rural interiors

Reporters / Correspondents

The reports informed about the enthusiastic campaigning in the villages in the wake of the panchayat elections. Both newspapers said political leaders of prominence of both the ruling and opposition parties were not to be found in Calcutta as most of them were busy campaigning in the rural areas or were camping in the districts to observe the polling on 4th June. The CPI (M) secretary and the chairman of the Left Front summed up the mood of the political leaders. He said it was a new and exciting experience for politicians and was more challenging than either the Lok Sabha (Parliamentary) or the Bidhan Sabha (State Assembly) elections as it gave an opportunity to witness grass-root reactions from close quarters.

30th May, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 80 lines)
Headline: Challenge to Panchayat poll rejected
Reporter / Correspondent

The report briefed on the decision of the Calcutta High Court regarding the writ petition challenging the validity of the provisions of the panchayat elections. The rejection of the petition appeared to be significant news.

30th May, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 60 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 32 lines) / The Statesman (1 column 25 lines)
Headline: 124 elected unopposed / Elected 124 / 66 elected unopposed to gram panchayats
Reporters

The news items informed 66 gram panchayat members and 58 panchayat samiti members were elected unopposed. This trend was most noticeable in Burdwan district. The pros and cons of such unopposed, unilateral selection of candidates were discussed in the reports. This type of positive agenda setting by newspapers gives fillip to democratic principles.

The Amrita Bazaar Patrika and The Statesman reports quoted panchayat minister Debabrata Bandopadhyay that Congress was campaigning on communal lines in the border districts of Malda and Murshidabad and the district administration
has been warned against impending trouble. He informed the Left supporters were also cautioned about the attempts of the Congress to foment trouble.

The minister also informed the security and transport arrangements for the forthcoming panchayat election.

The Amrita Bazaar Patrika report said as election was drawing near complaints about assaults on candidates was on the rise and the reports of such incidents were pouring in to the headquarters of the state police almost every day. It cited two such incidents in its column.

30th May, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 22 lines)
Headline: Panchayat poll for people’s benefit: Basu
Primary Source: Political party leader

The report carried briefings from the chief minister’s campaign for the panchayat elections. Mr. Jyoti Basu encouraged the people to participate in the elections, reiterating that panchayat election offered an opportunity to the rural people a scope to build the village economy from the grass-root level and participate in the growth efforts.

31st May, 1978
The Statesman (5 columns 225 lines)
Headline: Infighting between two Left parties
Reporter / Correspondent

The reporter Ranjit Roy gave a chilling report on how politics over panchayat elections caused turmoil in the lives of innocent villagers. The report informed in Kulbaria in Murshidabad district the farmers were not allowed to plough their land because they refused to take sides in the infighting between two front partners – CPI (M) and the RSP. Several families were dependent on the cultivation from their land. The political parties have taken the panchayat election as a prestige fight to prove their strength in the district. So when the cultivators refused to take a political stance they resorted to disrupt their livelihood. The reporter observed that the task of selecting the eligible candidate in such circumstances was difficult. He informed landowners were trying to keep control over the villagers by getting their representatives elected to the zilla parishad through political parties. There were many
independents in the fray which, the reporter said, proved that vested interests were keen to grab opportunities to dominate the local bodies. The challenges faced by the new system were illustrated in the report. The participation in the panchayat election process will not ensure the participation of the villagers in their own development planning and implementation is well understood from this report. The report is an insightful investigation into the panchayat election and indicates its disastrous aftermath to the villagers if not judiciously exercised.

31st May, 1978
The Statesman (2 columns 22 lines)
Headline: Basu confident of peaceful polling
Primary Source: Administration

The disorders and disturbances stirred by political parties notwithstanding, the chief minister expressed confidence that the 4th June panchayat election would be a peaceful affair. This report stated he assured the voters that the police arrangements would be full proof on the Election Day and the voters can assuredly cast their ballot.

31st May, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 22 lines)
Headline: Das Munshi’s Allegations
Primary Source: Political party leader

The report was based on the complaint made by Congress (I) leader Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi alleging gross irregularities in the conduct of the panchayat elections. He claimed that the ballot papers have been printed in private printing presses managed by CPI (M) workers and supporters. The report said he accused the home guards and other volunteers of threatening the villagers instead of protecting them. The lack of authentication of such a sensational comment by the report speaks of shoddy journalism.

31st May, 1978
Jugantar (2 columns 144 lines)
Headline: Direct contest at many places in Birbhum
Reporter / Correspondent

The news described the pre-poll situation in Birbhum district. The report said the majority voters in this district were from the deprived Adivasi and Harijan
community. The electoral equation is highlighted. The report stated that there was electoral alliance of the Left Front partners in most areas of this district and so local leaders of the Front are expecting that voters will cast their vote in favor of the Left candidate. There is also an elaborate description of the poll arrangements made by the administration in this report.

31st May, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 164 lines)
Headline: Many erstwhile CPI (M) supporters now RSP candidates
Reporter / Correspondent
The report described the electoral scenario at various districts. But as the headline hints the description mostly comprised of details of political alliances and squabbles. The opinion of the grassroots or their viewpoint does not find mention in the report. The report said there was anguish over the discrimination in the distribution of relief material and people would not vote following promises of permit or relief. The report then described the electoral politics in the Nadia district where the fight was mainly against the CPI (M) and the report stated that the division in the Left Front was due to CPI (M) members deserting it for RSP. The political scenario in Birbhum and Midnapore; fights between ‘friends’ and foes were also described vividly in the report.

31st May, 1978
Jugantar (5 columns 230 lines)
Headline: Panchayat election: Party changing, situation remain the same
Reporter / Correspondent
The report observed the panchayat election may after all not bring about overwhelming changes in the existing class structure of the villages. The report said all political parties are asserting that voters should not see the candidate but political affiliations of the nominee. The report came to the conclusion that voters were also not willing to waste their vote on an independent candidate as they were aware that the influence of a party was more effective in electoral politics. The report illustrated the political contest in some blocks where the number of contestants were many times more than seats and pointed out that most nominees were teachers and did not represent the downtrodden yet their acceptability in the society and political
consciousness made them preferred candidates for political parties. They report said teachers were becoming important decision-makers and leaders and it remains to be seen whether they stand up to the challenge of bringing development to the subjugated.

1st June, 1978
Jugantar (2 columns 120 lines)
Headline: Leaders return to Kolkata after campaigning
Reporter / Correspondent

The news item reported the return of the leaders of various parties to Kolkata after the end of campaigning. This report repeated the allegations of Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi published in the Amrita Bazaar Patrika on 31st May against the conspiracy of the ruling party, government and the security forces.

1st June, 1978
Jugantar (2 columns 70 lines) / Amrita Bazaar Patrika (3 columns 30 lines)
Headline: Assault on Left Front supporters alleged / LF body for more power to panchayats
Primary source: Political party/ political party leader

The Jugantar report stated CPI (M) leader Pramod Dasgupta alleged that the Congress (I) workers in desperation were attacking Left supporters in different districts. He said in spite of the trouble created by the opponents election will be held peacefully and Left would emerge victorious. The report said he advised the government to distribute more money through the Zilla parishad to the newly elected gram panchayats for development of the rural areas.

The Amrita Bazaar Patrika report said the Left Front has recommended delegation of more financial powers to the panchayats. The report said Dasgupta was in favor of entrusting the panchayats with land distribution and recording names of sharecroppers. The report said he was of the opinion that more development activities like running of primary schools or arrangements of bank loans for small farmers should be implemented by the panchayat bodies.
Chapter 7

Headline: Howrah agog with poll activities
Primary source: Local leaders of political parties

The report described the poll activities in the rural areas of Howrah district. The reporter vividly illustrated the interest of the villagers in the gram panchayats elections. The aspirations, allegations and the apprehension of the contesting parties were projected in the report. While the ruling front was worried that violence would mar the panchayat elections, the opposition dreaded manipulation by the ruling party would reduce participation of genuine voters. The report quoted the district heads of both the CPI (M) and the Congress.

1st June, 1978
The Statesman (1 column 35 lines)
Headline: Poll arrangements almost complete
Primary source: Administration

The news informed the readers that the poll arrangements involving distribution of ballot papers, selection of staff and location of booths for the panchayat polls were complete. It also informed that the government has asked the police and its own employees to ensure a free and fair poll. The report said the chief minister hoped that full proof security arrangements would ensure a peaceful election. Such repetition of news content continued throughout the sample period.

1st June, 1978
The Statesman (2 columns 114 lines)
Headline: Wider powers for state panchayats urged
Primary source: Political party

The report stated though the LF claimed they would be victorious in the forthcoming panchayat election they were a little doubtful on two accounts. First, the failure of the Front partners to put up a consensus candidate at many places and second the understanding between opposition forces. The report quoted LF chairman that in Bankura, Purulia and Midnapore the 2 Congress parties, Janata Dal and SUCI have jointly campaigned against the LF and have also issued joint statements urging the electorate to vote against the Front. The news said Dasgupta alleged as the election drew near the Congress was becoming desperate and indulging in acts of violence. Dasgupta gave example to substantiate his allegation. Dasgupta was also
quoted in the report that each gram panchayat would be given 50000 for development works but the planning of the development program would be done at the zilla parishad level. The panchayat samiti would be the bridge between the highest and lowest bodies in the three tier structure. The report like that in the Amrita Bazaar Patrika on that day quoted Dasgupta on what wider powers could be given to the panchayats.

2nd June, 1978
The Statesman (1 column 11 lines)
Headline: P. C. Sen’s charge against CPI (M)
Primary source: Political leader

The report said Janata Dal leader P C Sen has accused the CPI (M) workers of resorting to violence in Burdwan district.

2nd June, 1978
The Statesman (3 columns 30 lines)
Headline: Panchayat election in West Bengal: Governor’s appeal to the people
Primary source: Administration

The newspaper published the state’s Governor plea to the people to maintain peace during the panchayat elections. He ensured the rural electorate that all possible efforts have been made to ensure peaceful election. He quipped that the election was a significant moment in the democratic history of the state and the country.

2nd June, 1978
The Statesman (2 columns 250 lines)
Headline: Panchayat poll: Keen interest in rural areas
Reporter / Correspondent

The reporter Mihir Mukherjee while describing the pre-poll situation in Bankura and Burdwan districts of the state stated that the electorate was taking keen interest in the election process. The reporter said besides the festoons, posters and meetings of political parties the animated discussions and debates on panchayat poll candidates and issues among the villagers everywhere (some of which featured in the report) announced the onset of elections. The reporter said the main reasons for the interest in the panchayat election was familiarity with the candidate and the belief that
after the formation of panchayat bodies everyday problems would not have to be taken to the district headquarters.

The reporter went on to inform that in Burdwan the local problems have been overshadowed by ideological debates. The CPI (M) district secretary said that the party was up against vested interests while the Congress secretary pointed out that it was a battle between CPI (M) and anti-CPI (M) forces. The report said the campaign for ‘party-less local democracy’ was also strong. Janata Dal members who supported apolitical approach at the local level were of the opinion that this system would ensure the election of the best candidate and better service to the electorate. The report described the political contest in the Burdwan district and opined that the Left was in a better position throughout despite some bickering between the partners as the opposition was in disarray. The CPI (M) sources said that most of its candidates were new and from the lower middle class and several were landless farmers. The report pointed out that CPI (M) accused the Congress and Janata Dal of campaigning along communal lines while those two parties accused the ruling party of using strong arm tactics. They alleged assault, disruption of election campaign and forcible withdrawal of nominees which the CPI (M) representative denied.

The reporter said after an interaction with locals it was clear that in Bankura local issues and economic grievances would determine the voting pattern. The reporter said the contest was between anti-Left forces and the Left Front. The reporter highlighted the bickering in the Left Front as well as the condition of the opposition parties in the district.

2 June, 1978

Jugantar (2 columns 78 lines)
Headline: Grand affair for the panchayat election
Primary source: Administration

The report said ‘pompous’ security arrangements were made by the state administration on the occasion of three-tier panchayat elections. The arrangements by the State Election Commission and the state administration in terms of resource and fund allocation were elaborately narrated.

2 June, 1978

Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 56 lines)
Headline: 31 clashes in one month preceding panchayat election
Reporter / Correspondent

The report highlighted the various incidents of violence before the panchayat election. The correspondent recounted the apprehensions of the people regarding violence on the day of election and after the declaration of the results. The report described how the counting for the different tiers would proceed and what will be the system of result declaration. The report also mentioned that the Left Front will hold a meeting on the distribution of power to the panchayats on 6th June.

2 June, 1978
Jugantar (1 column 20 lines)
Headline: Nadia tense about panchayat election
Reporter / Correspondent

The report stated there was tension among the various political parties as well as the candidates. The report stated the administration was anxious. The campaigning was on full swing and the independents were no less active than political nominees. The report said the voters predicted stiff contest between Indira Congress and CPI (M) with CPI (M) dissidents and other Left Front constituents also in the fray against the ruling party. The report concluded that there were chances of trouble on the Election Day and some sources said security arrangements were not adequate.

3rd June, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 131 lines)
Headline: ‘If we vote, will there be a government in the village?’
Reporter / Correspondent

The article featured the pre-election scenario in Murshidabad district. The report had the usual details of bickering among the political parties and infighting among the Left allies but had no mention of the grass-root perspective or predicament. The report stated people in the villages understood little about democratic decentralization yet were enthusiastic about the panchayat election process as they would not have to run to the leaders or the bureaucrats for little things and their development would be decided by them.

3rd June, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 68 lines)
Headline: Campaigning for panchayat election comes to an end
Reporter / Correspondent

The news elaborated on the total number of seats in each of the three tiers, the total number of polling booths, and the number of polling and security personnel employed and other nitty-gritty. The report also contained the political statements of the two principal opponents. It said the opposition leaders ranted about the lack of law and order and expressed concern over the impending terror on the Election Day while the ruling party leaders accused the opposition of fomenting trouble to disturb the election process. The report wrote Indira Congress leader Subrata Mukherjee claimed CPI (M) workers were attacking opposition members in various areas and threatening villagers to vote for them or face dire consequences.

3rd June, 1993
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 120 lines)
Headline: Stage set for panchayat elections
Reporter / Correspondent

The content of this item was no different from that of the Anandabazar Patrika referred in the last paragraph. The state Information Secretary was quoted that all related information regarding the panchayat election results will be available to the people. The report said police has made stringent arrangements for peaceful elections in Naxalbari area of Darjeeling district where extremists have threatened to disrupt polling. The report elaborated on the contest in the Darjeeling in the three tiers and pointed out that CPI (M-L) [a naxalist party] contestants were in the fray and there was fervent campaigning in their favor.

3rd June, 1978
The Statesman (1 column 28 lines) / Jugantar (2 columns 88 lines)
Headline: Party-less men would do well / Work of Gana Panchayat Parishad ends
Primary source: Political leader / Political party

The reports carried the message of Janata Dal leader P C Sen who asserted that candidates without party affiliations would fare well in the gram panchayat elections. He predicted that in the panchayat samitis too the party-less candidates would do well.
The Statesman report said Sen alleged that all political parties were spending lavishly on the election campaign.

Both reports said Sen announced the Gana Panchayat Parishad formed to campaign and supervise the activities of the party-less candidates will be dissolved on 5th June after the end of the election process.

3rd June, 1978
The Statesman (1 column 19 lines)
Headline: Strict security at Naxalbari
Primary source: Administration

The news referred to the security measures adopted in the naxal infested areas where the naxal parties had warned of serious repercussions to attempts to hold elections.

3rd June, 1978
Jugantar (1 column 77 lines)
Headline: Election tomorrow
Reporter / Correspondent

The report included various details of panchayat elections like the total number of seats in the three tiers, the administrative arrangements and the announcement of results on the 6th June.

4th June, 1978
Jugantar (3 columns 149 lines)
Headline: Tension everywhere; Counting in the evening
Reporter / Correspondent

The report depicted the overall election scenario in the state. The report emphasized the enormity of the election process by enumerating details like two core voters was set to decide the fate of 56,000 candidates in about 1.75 lakh seats. The report stated it was the first time that party-based panchayat election would be held in the state. The report remarked there was lot of enthusiasm and preparation over the panchayat election but the voters were relatively quiet as after 1964 this was the first panchayat election in a different political scenario and the contestants were well known to the voters. The report said there was confusion in the minds of the voters.
regarding the complex voting pattern. The report observed that the keen contest, 
polarization of the Left Front on one side and the non-Left parties on the other and 
internecine clashes have made the election process uncertain. The report elaborated on 
the structures of the 3 tiers of the panchayat along with their constituent members. It 
informed that candidates ranged from doctors, teachers, social workers, lawyers to 
jotdars (land owners), mahajans (money lenders), landless laborers and share-
croppers. The report observed there were few women candidates in the fray.

4th June, 1978

Jugantar (1 column 66 lines) / The Statesman (2 columns 100 lines) / Amrita 
Bazaar Patrika ((3 columns 150 lines) and (1 column 80 lines) / Anandabazar 
Patrika (1 column 62 lines)

Headline: Government alert / Panchayat polls in West Bengal today / West 
Bengal goes to panchayat polls today / Dasgupta call for peaceful polling / Vote 
for panchayats today

Reporters

Political party leader in case of item headlined ‘Dasgupta call for peaceful 
polling’

The news items informed the readers there were several small skirmishes and 
the incidences of violence in the districts during the campaign period though no lives 
were lost. The report said the state government hoped there would not be any major 
trouble over panchayat election and it has kept hawk’s eye over the situation and 
instructed all district administration to act tough to avoid any untoward incident.

The Left Front chairman was quoted in the report that vested interests in the 
villages would attempt to create trouble out of despair. The report said he urged all 
Left Front workers to remain alert and cooperate with the government machinery for a 
peaceful and successful election. The report quoted erstwhile Janata Dal leader P C 
Sen that the Left Front workers were creating trouble. Congress leader Pradip 
Bhattacharya was also cited by the report as saying the same thing. Congress leader 
Priya Das Munshi feared the whole election process was likely to be a farcical 
process. The report said the intelligence also indicated possibility of political fights in 
the aftermath of panchayat elections and the possibility would increase with the 
victory or defeat of specific political parties.

The Statesman report is expectedly similar to the one in Jugantar emphasizing 
the implications of the panchayat elections. The special emphasis of the report was on
police arrangements for the polling day. The report said the Left Front government was attaching special importance to the elections as it wished to make local bodies effective bodies for formulating and implementing development projects in villages. The Statesman report included the information on the contest in Midnapore and Howrah as well. The report mentioned that the information was filed by the district correspondents there and elaborated on the details of the election process in the two districts like number of polling personnel, voters, seats in the various tiers and security deployed in the polling stations. The Howrah correspondent gave a list of the political leaders who campaigned in the district.

The report in the Amrita Bazaar Patrika said though there were allegations by the Congress and Janata Dal against the CPI (M) it cannot be said that the law and order situation in the state was in danger. The report pointed out that the outcome of the panchayat election will have an important bearing on the political future of the state as the party who will dominate the results will get an opportunity to consolidate its position at the grass-root level. The Panchayat minister was quoted that the panchayat election would provide institutional leadership to rural development. The report projected the minister’s comments on the development initiatives planned by the government under the aegis of the new panchayats.

The Anandabazar Patrika report contained the same factual details about the election. This report contained the forecast that Left would win the majority of seats in all three tiers. The speculation was either based on the correspondent’s prejudice as no opinion poll was held or relevant data compiled for the purpose. This was improper as mass media should not influence voters by predicting results before the actual polling process.

5th June, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 10 lines)
Headline: Firing at polling booth
Reporter / Correspondent
The item reported offended voters in Joynagar, South 24 Parganas attacked a polling booth and the police personnel on duty snatching away their rifle. The report said the police had to fire to bring the mob under control. This temporarily stalled voting in the booth.
5th June, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 144 lines) / Jugantar (3 columns 165 lines) / Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 150 lines) and (1 column 22 lines) / The Statesman (4 columns 100 lines)

Headline: Chief Minister congratulates rural voters, opposition alleges farce / Polling stalled in 20 places, trouble in Amta, firing in Joynagar, rifle looted / Enthusiastic panchayat polls and CM hails people / Heavy polling in Panchayat elections

Reporters / Correspondents

The Anandabazar Patrika report reflected the contradictory views of the ruling and the opposition parties regarding elections. While the leaders of CPI (M) and its allies including the chief minister claimed it was a peaceful election and a sign of the political awareness of the grass-root voters, the opposition led by the Congress (I) and Janata Dal pointed out that at many places the election was rigged by the CPI (M) and the grassroots could not participate in the election process due to threats and intimation by the ruling party members. The report said Congress leaders Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and Pradip Bhattacharya and Indira Congress leader Subrata Mukherjee alleged that the election was a farce and the people were restricted from exercising their voting right. The report said that FB’s Ashok Ghosh said the response to the election proved that people were politically conscious and it was possible for them to take part in development projects. RSP’s Makhan Pal said that if there was understanding between the Front partners then LF’s result would have been better. The report quoted the panchayat minister that soon after the declaration of the results the powers to be delegated to the panchayat bodies would be announced. The report gave information on the polling procedure in the various districts with emphasis on the incidents of violence and conflict. The report from Phalta in 24 Parganas was that voting had to be stopped for an hour due to clash between Congress (I) and CPI (M) supporters. The report said there was tough contest between these two parties in Bongaon and Barasat. In Nadia a polling officer and a woman voter was shot while in Amta Howrah voting had to be stopped for an hour due to the trouble over used ballot papers. The report informed in Midnapore too there was news of clashes between CPI and CPI (M) supporters. The report said 60% ballots were cast in the state. The report concluded that the Left was ahead of the other contenders in majority seats when the last information came in.
The Jugantar report repeated the contents published in the other reports of the day in the other sample newspapers. It said several incidents of violence related to polling claimed 4 lives in the state including 3 polling officers and a woman voter who succumbed to the tremendous heat in the queue in Polba, Hooghly. The report said there was tremendous excitement and tension involving the panchayat election in the villages.

The first Amrita Bazaar Patrika report commented on the tremendous enthusiasm of the voters and described the eagerness of the voters standing in the queue. The report included the chief minister’s and panchayat minister’s statements on the political consciousness of the rural voters leading to a more or less peaceful election except a few stray incidents of violence. The report also narrated the polling experience in the districts with the help of information provided by the state administration. The report said though places nearer to Kolkata, the state capital, was brimming with excitement of the party workers and there was more visible decoration with festoons and banners outside the polling booths, the buzz around the polling booths in the interiors was not less. There the ‘untrained’ voters stood in long queues and discussed about the prospects of the political parties in the fray. The news said elaborate security arrangements by the state government including the setting up of control rooms at district headquarters ensured more or less peaceful polling. This report then described the polling in South 24 Parganas which it said witnessed peaceful polling except some sporadic incidents of violence. The report by a staff reporter elaborated on the number of voters, polling booths, average rate of casting votes and the expenditure incurred thereof. The report included similar accounts from North 24 Parganas, Siliguri, Howrah, Hooghly, Midnapore and Darjeeling. The staff reporters or correspondents in each case described the long queues, the slow pace of polling and extended polling hours, the enthusiasm of the voters even in the scorching heat, and the small skirmishes between political parties or untoward incidents like snatching of ballot boxes, burning of ballot boxes, or allegations of rigging.

The second report in the Amrita Bazaar Patrika referred above highlighted the chief minister’s statement congratulating the people for peaceful polling. The Left Front chairman was quoted that peaceful polling strengthened the democratic tradition of the state.

The Statesman report elaborately described the polling procedure on the Election Day including the excitement of the voters, long queues even after scheduled time, and the incidents of adjournment or abandonment of polling. The report said
trouble in most places was over the debate whether polling should continue after the scheduled time or not. The report reflected the relieved statement of the chief minister that the rural people whole-heartedly co-operated in the election process. The report quoted Janata Dal leader P C Sen that there was more enthusiasm among the voters than in the Parliamentary or Assembly elections, especially among the women voters. He attributed the long queues to complicated voting procedure. CPI (M) leader Saroj Mukherjee was quoted by the report that polling was free and fair. Congress President Purabi Mukherjee was, however, quoted that the polling arrangements led to rigging. She said the voter list was faulty and polling officers were biased towards the ruling party. The Congress leader Subrata Mukherjee alleged rigging in Burdwan and Hooghly while the CPI, the report said, commented that the election was free and fair. (The Jugantar in a report headlined: “Congratulation, Allegation”, with a space of 1 column 45 lines also highlighted the comments of Saroj and Subrata Mukherjee pointed out in this report.) The report also pointed out the nature of polling in the various areas of the state and at various polling booths in Hooghly, Jalpaiguri, Midnapore, the two 24 Parganas and Siliguri.

5th June, 1978

Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 120 lines)
Headline: Ballot boxes snatched away at Onda
Reportor / Correspondent

The news item quoted the information secretary that ‘the only incidence of violence’ that marred the otherwise peaceful election took place at a polling booth in Onda, Bankura where ballot boxes were snatched away by voters who were standing in the queue after the schedule time of polling. He said polling had to be abandoned here. He said there were no complaints on rigging from anywhere and about 15 people were injured in skirmishes. The information secretary said polling was adjourned or countermanded in 13 places. The report gave detailed description of the incidents causing adjournment or postponement of polling. The report also described the incidents of violence in various districts.

5th June, 1978

Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 10 lines)
Headline: Nadia votes night-long
The item informed that in Nadia polling continued well past midnight in many booths due to the late arrival of ballot boxes or ballot papers.

**5th June, 1978**

*Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 65 lines) / The Statesman (2 columns 60 lines)*

**Headline: Big Change in Panchayat act hinted / Role of Panchayats to be formulated**

**Primary Source: State Panchayat Minister**

The reports said the panchayat Minister informed that the Left Front government would shortly introduce drastic amendments to the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 and the panchayat bodies were set to play a meaningful role in the State's development plans at the grass-root level. The duties and responsibilities of the newly elected panchayat bodies was the subject of this item. The report said the minister emphasized on the need for the transfer of resources along with responsibilities from the various state government departments to make the panchayat bodies self-sufficient.

The Statesman report said the minister assured that the new panchayat bodies would have funds allocated for rural development in the state budget made available to them. The report said the minister assured a proactive role for the panchayats in the rural areas and their development as centers of rural power.

**5th June, 1978**

*Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 21 lines)*

**Headline: Hope of Front leaders**

**Primary source: Political party**

The report said the Front leaders were hoping to lead in 15 zilla parishads in the recently held panchayat elections. The report said the Front leaders were discussing on the post of chairman in these zilla parishads. The report also said the Front leaders wanted to resolve the differences between CPI (M), RSP and FB before the panchayat election to work together for village development.

**6th June, 1978**

*The Statesman (2 column 140 lines) / Jugantar (3 columns 174 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 47 lines)*

**Headline: Front maintains lead in Panchayat polls / CPI (M) on top / Extensive rigging happened**
Reporters / Correspondents

Political party spokesperson in case of item headlined ‘Extensive rigging happened’

The reports informed the Left Front constituents especially the CPI (M) continued to lead the election results. The newspaper reported that the Left Front secured 70% of the total votes cast. The CPI (M) West Bengal unit greeted the people for their support to the Left Front. The report said the CPI (M) was particularly successful in most districts except Darjeeling and Birbhum where the independents led the seat count.

The Statesman report said that Congress leader Priya Das Munshi said it was surprising that while the polling percentage was 30-40% at the time of the official close of polling it rose to 90% after the scheduled time.

The above news was published in the Anandabazar Patrika too. It included besides the accusation leveled by Priya Das Munshi, Congress (I) leader Subrata Mukherjee’s allegation that the Left Front constituents including especially the CPI (M) carried out attacks on other parties’ supporters and forced the administration to side with it in the election. The report also said Congress’ Saugata Roy was of the opinion that if the opposition votes were not divided then it would have dealt a body blow to the CPI (M).

The chief minister was quoted in The Statesman report though the CPI (M) fared well the result of the other two Left constituents RSP and FB failed to shine. The report stated that Saugata Ray of the Congress said there were many victorious independents who were Congress supporters and their win proved CPI (M) had lost trust of the people.

The Jugantar discussed in detail the progress of the political parties and contestants in the three tiers in various districts.

6th June, 1978

Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 100 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 164 lines)

Headline: CPI (M) set for massive win in panchayat / CPI (M) racing ahead, tug-of-war for independents

Reporters / Correspondents

The news items reported that CPI (M) was set for a massive win in the panchayat elections and was extending its sphere of influence in every nook and corner of the state, strengthening its mass base in rural areas. The CPI (M), the reports
observed was set to win in all the three tiers handsomely though its win would not be very convincing in North Bengal states like Malda and Murshidabad as in the south Bengal states.

The Amrita Bazaar Patrika report said the second largest force that emerged from the election was that of the independents. The report said the Congress’ result was disdainful though it was second largest party after the CPI (M) in the result tally. The report added Congress held a press meeting to reveal the various irregularities in the panchayat election.

The Anandabazar Patrika report said the independents were not truly independents but either dissident members of recognized political parties or candidates who failed to secure their party symbol.

6th June, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 90 lines)
Headline: LF reviews results today
Primary Source: Political party

The report wrote the Left Front parties were set to meet later that day to review the results of the panchayat elections and discuss the powers to be delegated to the newly elected panchayat bodies.

6th June, 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 80 lines)
Headline: Panchayat poll results
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported hectic lobbying to capture power at the Darjeeling Zilla Parishad as no single party emerged clear winner. The report pointed out in the three tier panchayat system though there was an opportunity for actual empowerment at the gram panchayat level, political wrangle and power hankering by the political parties and their leaders were prominent at the block and the district level. Therefore the squabble over the Darjeeling zilla parishad seat was inevitable. The report described the political battle and the status of the political parties in the various tiers in the district.

6th June, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 10 lines)
Headline: Division begins
Reporter / Correspondent

The report said all political parties claimed that independents, who were the second largest force in the result tally, originally belonged to their fold. The Janata Dal claimed that most independents were their party workers who had filed nominations as independents responding to the call for ‘party-less panchayat’ by P C Sen. Congress President Purabi Mukherjee claimed most independents were Congress members who failed to get the party symbol while Subrata Mukherjee of Congress (I) also made a similar claim.

6th June, 1978
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 10 lines) / Jugantar (2 columns 105 lines)
Headline: The communal call of Congress (I) has harmed the interests of the minority / Results could have been better if there was no difference among constituents
Primary Source: Political party / Political leader

The Anandabazar Patrika report said chief minister Jyoti Basu blamed the Congress (I) for harming the interests of the minority people through communal campaigning during the panchayat election. He said in Malda, Murshidabad and West Dinajpur such campaigning was rampant but the result of the election showed that minority voters were not influenced by the slanderous campaign. The report said he rubbished the allegation of rigging made by the Congress (I) leaders and said the party was trying to put up an excuse for defeat. The report said Basu admitted that differences between Front partners led to the win of the Congress and independent candidates at places but the CPI (M)’s overall performance was good despite the odds.

The Jugantar report said difference between constituents in 6000 panchayat seats was blamed by Basu as the reason why the LF tally was not huge. This report also said Congress leaders were regretting the fact if the opposition fought together then the CPI (M) and the LF would have faced a stiff challenge.

7th June, 1993
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 90 lines) / Jugantar (2 columns 96 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 165 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) on to a thumping victory / LF victorious everywhere / CPI (M) may get all zilla parishads
Chapter 7

Reporters / Correspondents

The news reports underlined the commanding position of the Left Front in all three tiers. The reports gave details of the result in the gram panchayats, panchayat samitis and zilla parishad seats in the districts. The reports said the CPI (M) was not as impressive in the North Bengal districts as the South but it managed to emerge as the single largest party in all the districts except Darjeeling where the independents formed the largest group.

The Amrita Bazaar Patrika report added political analysts were of the opinion that panchayat elections have proved that the rural voters relied on the Marxists leadership for their development and had faith on the LF state government’s policies of welfare and amelioration of poverty. The report observed the CPI (M) was successful in making inroads in places where it was not dominant in the Assembly elections.

The Anandabazar Patrika report added the success of CPI (M) at the zilla parishad level was more than the two lower levels. The report said the situation till now was such that CPI (M) may emerge as the dominant party in all the zilla parishes except Darjeeling. The FB was the second political party in the zilla parishad tally though the independents together were second to the CPI (M). The report observed the panchayat election results prove that the CPI (M)’s influence has increased manifold. The report also discussed the comparative results of the various parties at the gram panchayat and panchayat samiti level.

7th June, 1993

Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 60 lines) / The Statesman (2 columns 30 lines) / Jugantar (1 column 56 lines)

Headline: Panchayats will execute plans / LF’s views on rural development / All power in the hands of villagers /

Primary Source: Political party

The reports were reproduction of the statement by the CPI (M) leader Pramod Dasgupta that all administrative cooperation would be extended to the panchayat bodies at the lowest level and that the panchayat bodies would be encouraged to actively involve the grassroots in panchayat activities. The report pointed out Dasgupta said though the LF partners were happy at the outcome; they knew it would have been better if the constituents fought the election together. Dasgupta said the
election result was the people's response to the praiseworthy attempts of the LF government. He said the partners were of the opinion that the Panchayat Act would have to be amended to delegate more powers to the gram panchayats and involve them in the development projects in the villages like irrigation and primary schools for making the panchayat bodies effective.

In the Jugantar report it was stated that Dasgupta asserted that all administrative powers in the villages would be vested in the hands of the elected gram panchayat members instead of the bureaucrats so that the bureaucrats do not gain an upper hand.

7th June, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (2 column 104 lines)
Headline: Congress (I) benefitted because of differences in the Left Front
Primary Source: Political party

The report stated that LF leader Pramod Dasgupta was of the opinion that Congress (I) benefitted due to the differences in the Left Front. Dasgupta said that the competition of the Left Front at the lower level was with the Congress (I). The report said he stated that there was 'tug-of-war' for the independents among the political parties. The report said there was discussion in the Left Front meeting on the powers and responsibilities of the newly inducted panchayats. The report said he was of the opinion that the growth of the districts be entrusted with the zilla parishads. He also said the LF intends to place the bureaucrats below the elected representatives and reverse the previous status.

7th June, 1978 / 8th June, 1978
The Statesman (1 column 20 lines) and (1 column 38 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 15 lines) Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 18 lines)
Headline: 3500 independent winners Janata men and Re-polling to be held in 58 centres / Re-poll in 58 centers / Re-polling in 58 centres on June 18
Reporters and Correspondents

The reports said the Janata party leader Bimal Mitra claimed about 3500 independent candidates who won the elections were actually Janata party members. He said these people were forced to file their nominations as independents as they failed to secure party symbol.
Chapter 7

The other news in all the three newspapers informed that re-polling in about 58 seats where the election was either postponed or adjourned would be held on 18th June. The reports gave the details of places where the re-polling was scheduled to be held.

The Amrita Bazaar Patrika gave the above news on 8th June.

7th June, 1978

Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 104 lines) and (1 column 32 lines)
Headline: Congress (I) gained due to the differences between Front partners / View of the LF partners
Primary Source: Political party / leader

The first report quoted LF chairman Pramod Dasgupta that if the unity of the Front partners was intact in all the seats of the panchayat then the Congress could have been cornered further. The report quoted Dasgupta that disunity was prominent at the grass-root level where the main contest was against the Congress. He said there was an attempt among all parties to win over the independents to facilitate the formation of panchayat boards. The report said the LF meeting held in the day discussed about the functions and responsibilities to be invested with the panchayat bodies. It said the zilla parishad would be entrusted with planning development plans for the district and the gram panchayats would implement those plans while the panchayat samitis would co-ordinate between the upper and lower bodies. The report stated Dasgupta said LF’s aim was to make the bureaucracy subservient to the elected panchayat representatives and change the prevalent practice of bureaucracy controlling the panchayat members.

The second report said the RSP and FB were of the opinion that if they fielded candidates at all levels then they would have benefitted like the CPI (M) as the voters would not be confused. The two parties admitted the CPI (M) had strengthened its organization keeping in mind the panchayat election.

7th June, 1978

Jugantar (1 column 80 lines)
Headline: Result of the Panchayat elections (Editorial)

The editorial analyzed the implications of the panchayat elections for the political parties in the state. It said the CPI (M) and the Left Front had reason to feel
satisfied as the result, in spite of bickering between the partners, was good. The editorial said the LF did not expect the opposition parties to fare so badly in the elections. The editorial commented the presence of the opposition was almost insignificant. It said though there were several independent victors still it was not considerable and the voters have generally discarded the party-less candidates. The editorial commented everybody was relieved that the election was completed peacefully. The editorial said the LF government would hopefully empower the panchayats with financial resources for their effective functioning. The editorial said there was need to keep a check on the new bodies to resist corruption without hampering their autonomy. There was apprehension over the matter how the political parties would keep a check on the panchayat members elected as their representatives. The editorial made a pertinent question would the gram panchayat members be considered as party representatives in the village or panchayat representatives in the party. The editorial concluded whatever the uncertainties and doubts, the experiment on decentralization of power must continue.

8th June 1978
Amrita Bazaar (3 columns 35 lines) / The Statesman (1 column 120 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 65 lines)
Headline: Results in gram panchayat / CPI (M) gains in polls / CPI (M) first in all three tiers
Reporters and Correspondents
The Amrita Bazaar Patrika reported the results in the gram panchayat seats elaborately.

The Statesman report on the other hand elaborately wrote on the zilla parishad wins and defeats of the Left Front constituents in various districts. The report said the CPI (M) has gained ground and the FB maintained its traditional bases but RSP lost influence in places where it was a force to be reckoned with.

The Anandabazar Patrika report added that not only was the CPI (M) first in all the tiers but it headed all zilla parishads except Darjeeling and won over 2/3rd seats at the panchayat samiti level.

8th June 1978
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 32 lines)
Headline: Gani Khan refutes allegation
Primary Source: Political party leader

The report informed Congress leader Gani Khan Choudhury refuted the charges of spreading communalism to win votes of the minority community leveled against him by the chief minister and CPI (M) party. The report said he claimed the allegations were false and politically motivated.

8th June, 1978
The Statesman (2 columns 150 lines)
Headline: Power through panchayats (Editorial)

The editorial wrote that though the CPI (M) was expected to win the panchayat election its extent may have even surprised the party. It said the Front's result as a whole was disappointing and quoted Jyoti Basu that the FB and RSP's poor performance was a result of the "Front's failure to achieve unity throughout the state." The editorial commented the strain created among the Left partners over selection of candidates may be accentuated by the results but since the differences were at the local level the party leaders would be able to restore unity quickly. The editorial said the only other party to make a significant show in the panchayat election was Congress (I). The editorial said the Marxists have gained an overall control of the entire local self-government in the state. The editorial said this would be used to consolidate political power but at the same time there is an expectation that the CPI (M) will use the panchayats for radical social and economic change. The editorial stated the panchayats can be successfully utilized for land reforms and other institutional changes in rural society. The editorial also said the CPI (M) has seen the effectiveness of peaceful elections and would hopefully rely on peaceful coexistence of different forces for furthering its own as well as the objectives of the rural bodies.

8th June, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 58 lines)
Headline: Ministerial Committee to be formed for panchayat administration

Primary Source: Panchayat minister

The news reported that panchayat administration and policy for panchayats would be formulated by a Committee of state ministers with the chief minister as the coordinator. The news also stated that to maintain coordination between Front partners at all three tiers there would be a Committee of members of the LF partners
at the district level. The report said the government wanted the panchayats not to be dependent on it and create different sources for its income.

CONCLUSION

The preceding section contains a detailed description of the news items reported in the sample newspapers related to the panchayat election in 1978. The newspapers gave news that mostly emanated from a common pool like news agencies or press meetings, handouts or briefs circulated by political parties or quoted big, small leaders of political parties of different hues. There was not much inclination to report information outside this domain (see Table 7.2 below). Perhaps the lack of both human and financial resources is to be somewhat blamed but the main onus lay with the policy of the newspapers who were reluctant to venture outside their familiar, 'credible' sources and known issues. Questionnaire I discussed in Chapter 13 to assess the response of the reporters, correspondents and editors categorically ask them about their reluctance to explore unknown sources. The answer is expectedly one of denial. But there can be no doubt that the sample newspapers of 1978 chose to publish content that aroused the interest of the public (readers) rather than serve 'public interest' or promote grass-root empowerment. In the virtual absence of television (there was only the state run Doordarshan in 1978 and its transmission was not widely available in the remote villages) or the internet, the newspapers were the sole mainstream mass media of the time. The people had no access to any comparative media of information but the newspapers lacked content to gratify the democratic interests of the people. Perhaps it was the complacency of the sole mass media or it was the reluctance to delve into the other perspectives of the panchayat elections that deterred them from setting any independent agenda other than those already chosen by the opinion leaders the political parties and their leaders, government spokesperson or administrative authority. It remains to be seen in the following chapters on the coverage of successive panchayat elections whether this condition is reversed.
WEEKLY ANALYSIS OF NEWS ITEMS IN SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS (1978)

Table 7.1 (a): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 12.05.1978-18.05.1978

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Newspaper</th>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Amrita Bazaar Patrika</td>
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Figure 7.1 (a): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 12.05.1978-18.05.1978

Table 7.1 (b): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 19.05.1978-25.05.1978

<table>
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Figure 7.1 (b): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 19.05.1978-25.05.1978

Table 7.1 (c): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 26.05.1978-01.06.1978

Figure 7.1 (c): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 26.05.1978-01.06.1978
Table 7.1 (d): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 02.06.1978-08.06.1978

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Figure 7.1 (d): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 02.06.1978-08.06.1978
TOTAL NEWS ITEMS IN SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS ON PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS DURING 12.05.1978 - 08.06.1978

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Table 7.1 (e): Total News Items in Sample Newspapers on Panchayat Elections during 12.05.1978 - 08.06.1978

Figure 7.1 (e): Total News Items in Sample Newspapers on Panchayat Elections during 12.05.1978 - 08.06.1978
SOURCE-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF NEWS ITEMS ON PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS DURING 12.05.1978 - 08.06.1978

Table 7.2: Source-Wise Distribution of News Items on Panchayat Elections during 12.05.1978 - 08.06.1978

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News Sources</th>
<th>Reporters / Correspondents / News Agencies</th>
<th>Political Party Leaders / Spokespersons / Party briefs, manifesto etc.</th>
<th>Administration including Ministers, Police, Officials</th>
<th>Grass-root members / voters / candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anandabazar Patrika</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jugantar</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Statesman</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amrita Bazaar Patrika</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Figure 7.2: Source-Wise Distribution of News Items on Panchayat Elections during 12.05.1978 - 08.06.1978

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