CHAPTER 9

COVERAGE OF 1988 PANCHAYAT ELECTION BY SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS

INTRODUCTION

The political scenario of West Bengal in 1988 was charged up in the literal sense. The volatile relationship between the Front partners, a vociferous opposition and an ambitious ruling party combined to ensure that the election to the panchayat bodies in the state was fraught with controversies, mudslinging, accusations and counter-accusations by the warring parties. The political scenario of West Bengal was marked by polarity between the Left Front and the Congress (I). It added to the tension, passion and interest in elections especially the Panchayat elections.

The 1988 Panchayat election was also defined by the alarming discord in the Left Front over seat-sharing. The Left Front alliance was formed with the objective of struggling for the marginal and poor sections of the society, giving them due representation and adequate political power and social clout for overall development. These objectives would have remained unfulfilled without participation in the political and administrative bodies at different levels and without the coalition remaining in power. The United Front government came to power in West Bengal in 1969 with the above objectives in mind but the lack of coordination and harmony broke the coalition and made way for the Congress government. The Front constituents understood the importance of holding the alliance together and despite resounding differences before every election the coalition survived. But this time from the representation in the sample newspapers it appeared the LF coalition was staring at a break-up. As one of the reports in one of the sample newspapers mentioned the difference regarding seat-sharing existed during the Assembly and Parliamentary elections too but it was not that intense. The bickering intensified during the local elections because the state leadership found it difficult to rein in the ambitions of the local leaders. The public rhetoric by the Front leaders against each other during the election campaign was vividly discussed by the sample newspapers to highlight their differences.
Another issue that occupied prominent news space in 1988 was the accusations by opposition Congress. The sample newspapers actually followed a pattern in giving prominence to these two issues. There was not much discussion on issues of public participation in the Panchayat system both during and after the election, or the development initiated by the Panchayati raj in the political, economic and social sphere during the last 10 years or the actual empowerment of the grassroots after the implementation of the Panchayat Act. The sample newspapers highlighted the issues put forth by the political parties and their leaders. There was no attempt to introduce an independent agenda on the part of the newspapers. The powerful sources indirectly decided the content of the sample newspapers. There is always a scope for the mass media (like the sample newspapers) to play an effective role in a democratic and developing society. But in the coverage of the 1988 Panchayat elections the sample newspapers gave adequate representation to the conflicting political parties but the emphasis on these issues and overlooking others especially those concerning the grassroots was adverse to their image of an independent, non-partisan channel of communication.

Grass-root voters, however, had access to other sources and gained information relevant to the electoral process from their community members. There is evidence that would confirm that the influence of the sample newspapers as mass media was limited. The CPI (M) candidates won in the majority of seats in the three tiers despite the newspapers’ assessment that the ruling party is staring at defeat in this panchayat election. The result indicated that the messages communicated by the mass media in this context had no effect on the voters. There were potential forces like local party organizations that contributed to CPI.(M)’s win. The influence of sample newspapers over the rural electorate was not significant especially when compared to the control exerted by political parties or their members. Maneuvering and coercion by the ruling party also cannot be ruled out in this process but it is evident that the rural electorate did not relate to the newspapers’ content.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS' CONTENT ON 1988 PANCHAYAT ELECTION

The 1988 Panchayat election was scheduled on the 28th February. The four sample newspapers whose coverage is studied in this chapter are The Statesman,
Amrita Bazaar Patrika, Jugantar and Anandabazar Patrika. The period of study was from the 8th February, 1988 to 6th March, 1988. The graphical analysis of the number of news items on the panchayat election in the sample newspapers [Table 9.1(a), (b), (c), (d) (e)] along with the analysis of the primary news sources of the reports (Table 9.2) are provided at the end of the chapter.

NEWS ITEMS PUBLISHED BY THE SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS ON PANCHAYAT ELECTION DURING 8TH FEBRUARY, 1988 AND 6TH MARCH, 1988

8th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 72 lines)
Headline: Pranab not yet in list of poll campaigners for the Congress
Reporter and Correspondent
The report informed that an important Congress (I) leader and Union Minister Pranab Mukherjee did not feature in the list of campaigners for the Congress in West Bengal Panchayat election. The report speculated on the chances of Mukherjee’s involvement in the campaigning process following his political status in the party. The report concluded that internal strife within the Congress party was responsible for Mukherjee’s exclusion from the campaigning.

8th February, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 18 lines)
Headline: Basu to campaign only for the CPI (M)
Primary source: Political party leader
It informed readers that chief minister Jyoti Basu will campaign for his party, CPI (M) and not for the Left Front (LF). The source of the news was Saroj Mukherjee, the chairman of the LF who clarified in the report that since there was no unity among Front constituents in the Panchayat polls, Basu will campaign for his own party. The report further informed that LF constituents had fielded 11000 additional candidates besides those officially approved by the Front.

8th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 81 lines)
Headline: Jharkhandis unite over the issue of Panchayat vote
Primary source: Political party spokesperson

The news informed that the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) was all set to participate in this Panchayat election to strengthen its claim for a separate Jharkhand state. The report quoted a leader of the JMM that his party would wrestle 50% of seats from the ruling party if the elections were free and fair. The report said the party spokesperson was apprehensive that the ruling party with the help of the police and administration would create terror and rig the elections.

8th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 93 lines)
Headline: Not much conflict between partners in Ranaghat
Reporter / Correspondent

The pre-election scenario in the Ranaghat block of Nadia district was described in this report. The report observed that though elsewhere in this district there was bickering among the Front partners, it was a relatively peaceful co-existence in this block with only reports of squabble within the CPI (M). The report also stated that the Congress was in shambles and lagged well behind the Left parties in the campaigning activity.

8th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 54 lines)
Headline: Santosh Mohan Deb may campaign for Congress in the panchayat election
Primary source: Political party leader

The news reported that Congress leader Manas Bhunia has demanded inquiry in West Bengal CPI (M) party offices just like in Tripura. He asserted a cache of arms would be recovered from these offices. The report informed there was a possibility that CPI (M)'s nemesis in Tripura, Congress leader Santosh Mohan Deb may campaign for the West Bengal Congress in the forthcoming panchayat elections.

8th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 98 lines)
Headline: West Dinajpur: RSP want people’s panchayat and not CPI (M) panchayat
Primary source: Political party leader

This news reported the pre-election scenario in the Dinajpur district. The report quoted a leader of the Republican Socialist Party (RSP) to state that there was no chance of Left Front unity in the panchayat election of this district owing to the non-cooperation and domineering attitude of the CPI (M) with regard to seat sharing. The local RSP leaders vehemently stated that they wanted people’s representation in the panchayats and not a Panchayat dominated by CPI (M) members. The CPI (M) leaders denied the allegations and claimed that they took initiative to nominate a united left Front candidate but it was unsuccessful due to the overtures of other left constituents.

9th February, 1988
The Statesman (3 columns 102 lines)
Headline: Nadia, Murshidabad: No cakewalk for CPI (M)
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that the elections in Nadia and Murshidabad will not be a cake walk for the CPI (M) despite the weak position of Congress in these two districts. It quoted unnamed political observers to come to this conclusion.

The sample newspapers in several reports related to 1988 Panchayat elections referred to such unidentified sources. This was undesirable as it affected the credibility of reports published and of the mass media in general.

The aforementioned news also commented on the nomination of candidates by the Left Front partners to the three tiers of the Panchayat in Nadia and Murshidabad. The news pointed out to the harrying nature of CPI (M). It stated that though the smaller Front constituent RSP had a large support base in Murshidabad it found difficulty in containing the ambitions of the dominant partner. The news stated that the other Left constituents had the unenviable task of winning over voters disgruntled with the performance of the previous CPI (M) panchayat functionaries. The report illustrated the differences between the various Front partners and mentioned the various allegation of non-performance against CPI (M) functionaries by the people.

9th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 176 lines)
Headline: Jalpaiguri: Allies cannot gather enough courage against CPI (M)
The report discussed the pre-election scenario, or more appropriately the internal strife within the LF, in the Jalpaiguri district. The report commented that the smaller partners of the Front were forced to retreat their steps and surrender to the bigger ally. The result was that the election war was between the LF and the Congress. The report commented that during the 10 years of the implementation of the Panchayati raj in West Bengal over 40 crores has been spent. The CPI (M) as the principal political party in the state had the privilege of allocating most of these funds and was set to reap the benefit of the allotment made through these years.

9th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 48 lines)
Headline: Priya warns CPI (M)
Primary source: Political party leader

The report elaborated on the allegations made by the Congress President Priya Ranjan Das Munshi against CPI (M) inflicted violence to intimidate Congress candidates. The content of this news item included the Congress President’s apprehension of rigging engineered by the CPI (M), his demand for fresh elections in the gram Panchayat seats where CPI (M) candidates have been elected unopposed and imposition of President’s rule in the State during the forthcoming Panchayat elections to ensure free and fair polls.

9th February, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 50 lines)
Headline: Stop violence: Priya to CPI (M)
Primary source: Political party leader

This report quoted Priya Ranjan Das Munshi that about 1000 Congress workers were murdered prior to this election and that the Congress could not field candidates in all the Panchayat seats as its supporters feared the worse and refused to contest election. A report on this particular issue appeared in the Anandabazar Patrika and Jugantar on 10th February. In these reports Das Munshi warned that the Congress would not let newly formed boards to function if there was no re-election in the seats where the Congress could not put up candidates due to CPI (M) terror. He urged the Centre to visit the state and witness the murder of democratic rights in villages.
was a reference to the abovementioned allegations and demands of Das Munshi in The Statesman too later on.

These comments of Das Munshi were repeated several times in the coverage by the sample newspapers as it is usual for political leaders to repeat their statements during campaigning to emphasize a point. The sample newspapers considered political leaders like Das Munshi important news sources and even repeated the messages and statements conveyed by him which led to homogenous content. The West Bengal Congress President repeatedly declared that the Panchayat elections had lost much of its significance due to the nonparticipation of the grassroots in the electoral process on account of violence. The sample newspapers did not investigate the allegations of repercussion on grass-root participation and involvement and limited their coverage to reporting the statements of the leader.

9th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 123 lines)
Headline: Panchayat: Abundant supporters of Congress in Asansol but no leader
Reporter / Correspondent
This news reported about the strong organization of CPI (M) in the Asansol area compared to the main opposition Congress who had many supporters but no leader to guide them and the party.

9th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 123 lines)
Headline: All parties against CPI (M) dominance in Coochbehar
Reporter / Correspondent
The news projected the party politics in Coochbehar district. The report informed that instead of fighting the Congress, the LF constituents were training their guns on CPI (M). The acrimony over seat adjustment provoked the other LF constituents to campaign against the bigger partner. The report observed that grass-root members in large numbers were switching party affiliations. It indicated that there was disillusionment and discontent among the grassroots regarding representation in the Panchayat bodies and the performance of the previous Panchayats but the report did not scrutinize these lacunae.
9th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 87 lines)
Headline: More expulsions in Malda CPI (M); ticket denied to zilla parishad member
Reporter / Correspondent
The news elaborated on the internal strife within the CPI (M) in Malda district.

10th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 62 lines)
Headline: Ballot Paper Printing
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed readers that the stalemate regarding printing of ballot papers for the Panchayat polls caused by the indefinite strike at the government press has been resolved.

10th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 36 lines)
Headline: We are the government of poor people: Basu
Primary source: Political party leader
The news elaborated on the statements made by Jyoti Basu in an election rally in the Purulia district. Basu the report stated alleged that the Congress was hand-in-glove with the separatist JMM in this district. He expressed confidence in the political consciousness of the grassroots and stated that they would resist any surreptitious attempt of the two parties.

10th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 171 lines)
Headline: Front may suffer losses due to internecine strife in Purulia
Reporter / Correspondent
The article described the political chaos in the Purulia district. The correspondent identified the problems of this underdeveloped district as poverty, malnutrition and starvation yet he chose to concentrate on the electoral battle between the political parties and not on the development work undertaken by the previous Panchayats or their failure to do so in the report. The report identified weak organization and internal strife in the Congress party as two reasons responsible for its
failure to field candidates in the Panchayat elections in this district. It indicated that
the Congress has entered into an alliance with the Jharkhand party on the sly in this
district. The report observed that RSP had fielded candidates in most seats against the
official Left candidates. A Forward Bloc (FB) representative asserted this district is a
Left bastion although they would prefer the LF fight elections democratically and win
it without coercion. The CPI (M) claimed that people would vote for it for security
reasons.

The report contained no information or observation about the plight of the
people; suggestions to improve their present circumstances and explore the
opportunities to improve their conditions through Panchayats.

10th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 41 lines)
Headline: Priya demands voting in seats won uncontested by the CPI (M)
Primary source: Political party leader

The report referred to an election rally of Congress President Priya Das
Munshi where he commented that the public support his party received during
campaigning would not translate into votes because of ‘red terror’.

10th February, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 14 lines) and (1 column 30 lines)
Headline: Empty ballot boxes / Meeting regarding ballot demanded
Source: Reporter / Correspondent in 1st news item / Political party leader in 2nd
news item

The first news informed the readers that empty ballot boxes were recovered
from the houses of CPI (M) candidates in two different areas of the North 24 Parganas
district. The other parties demanded postponement of elections in these areas and the
arrest of the culprits.

The second news item informed that Congress demanded an all party meeting
following the irregularities in ballot paper printing for the Panchayat votes. The party
expressed anguish at the news that ballot papers were being printed at private presses.
The Congress leaders also expressed their concern that in about 600 seats no
opposition candidates could file nominations. They demanded that the government
ensure that candidates of all parties were able to campaign for the elections without
intimidation from the ruling party workers. The report observed that LF constituents FB and RSP also made similar demands. The Congress leaders were quoted by the report that without the deployment of Central forces Panchayat elections were unlikely to be free and fair.

10th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 72 lines)
Headline: Bickering in the CPI (M) intense while Gani Khan reigns supreme in Malda
Reporter / Correspondent
The report said in Malda intra-party squabble within the CPI (M) was intense overshadowing its tussle with the other Front partners. The Congress depended on the Union Railways minister, Gani Khan Chowdhury to retain the Malda zilla parishad. The report emphasized the noteworthy feature of this district was the internal strife within the CPI (M) which trivialized the differences between the CPI (M) and RSP and CPI (M) and FB.

11th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 20 lines) Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 37 lines) / The Statesman (1 column 28 lines)
Headline: Ruckus over burnt ballot papers / Half-burnt ballot papers / Burnt ballot papers found, says Congress (I)
Source: Reporter / Correspondent in 1st & 2nd news items / Political party in 3rd news item
The reports informed that charred ballot papers for Panchayat elections were found outside a private printing press in the outskirts of Kolkata. The Congress claimed that the printing press was owned by a CPI (M) leader. The report informed that officials visited the site but refused to comment on the incident.

The Amrita Bazaar Patrika report included the demand of the Congress (I) leaders for an inquiry into how ballot papers were found outside a private press when the Panchayat ministry secretary had specifically stated the names of the government presses where they would be printed.

11th February, 1988
The Statesman (2 columns 32 lines)
Headline: Two ballot boxes found in Bongaon
Reporter / Correspondent

The item reported the finding of ballot boxes earmarked for the forthcoming Panchayat elections in an area in the North 24 Parganas district. The news reported the livid reaction of the opposition and their demand to suspend election in the affected area and conduct a detailed enquiry into the matter.

The newspapers appropriately highlighted the above two incidents as they indicated the possibility of duplicity in the election procedure.

11th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 135 lines)
Headline: In Bankura distrust, conflict and grouse in both parties
Reporter / Correspondent

The news described the electoral battle in the Bankura district. The headline as well as the content left no doubt that the correspondent would be discussing the bickering within the LF alliance and the Congress. The correspondent informed that in many seats the LF candidates had already won without contest but there was continuous squabble between the bigger partner CPI (M) and the smaller allies. The smaller parties alleged that the CPI (M) had fielded its own candidates against the official LF candidates, or had fielded independents as dummy candidates to defeat the official candidate. The Congress also suffered from internal wrangle. The local Congress leaders leveled charges of terror and intimidation against the CPI (M). The CPI (M) local spokespersons when contacted said the charges against it were false and efforts were on to dissipate the differences with the other partners.

11th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 129 lines)
Headline: Tripura’s effects in Sunder bans? CPI (M) not convinced
Reporter / Correspondent

This news item described the election campaign in the Sunder ban villages, at the southern tip of the state. The report commented that people doubted the existence of the Left coalition in view of the bickering among the partners. The report stated that the recent victory of the Congress in the Tripura elections boosted the confidence of its supporters. There was political tension between the CPI (M) and RSP regarding
seat sharing. The report quoted the local RSP leaders that they were stifled by the bigger partner and therefore fielded candidates against the official Left nominated CPI (M) candidates. The correspondent concluded that the Congress would not be able to take advantage of the situation because of its internal squabble.

11th February, 1988
The Statesman (2 columns 41 lines)
Headline: CM's address aimed at winning tribal voters
Primary source: Political party leader

The report narrated the chief minister’s campaign in the Purulia district. The chief minister scathingly criticized the Congress for supporting the demand for a separate Jharkhand state for the tribal community in West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The report elaborately recounted the chief minister’s speech aimed at wooing the tribal voters for the forthcoming Panchayat election.

11th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 152 lines)
Headline: FB resisting ‘red terror’ in the Burdwan district
Reporter / Correspondent

The report highlighted the pre-election scenario in the Burdwan district. The report pointed out that the Panchayati raj was referred as ‘CPI (M) raj’ in this district. The report commented that the functioning of the Panchayats was dictated by the local Committees of the ruling party and the members of other parties, including those of the other LF parties, were threatened with social boycott if they attempted to intervene. The other partners resented this and the Front was a divided house in this district too.

12th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 72 lines)
Headline: No unity in Front in Howrah beside Sankrail and Jagatballavpur blocks
Primary source: Political party

The report elaborated on the election battle in Howrah district. The report informed that barring two blocks, unity eluded the Front coalition throughout this district. The report pointed out that political graffiti on the walls proved the dissension
in the Front. The FB and RSP blamed the CPI (M)'s uncompromising approach for the failure to reach an understanding on seat adjustment. The two parties said that the CPI (M) would be responsible if the Congress gained from this infighting within the Front. The CPI (M) local leaders were not ready to heed to the complaints made by the FB or RSP and stated that without the CPI (M) these two parties were nonentities.

The report cited unnamed political observers to comment that this Panchayat election will mark the beginning of the end of Front.

12th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 47 lines)
Headline: Forward Bloc defied the Left Front norms: Basu
Primary source: Political party leader

The report covered one of the election meetings of chief minister Jyoti Basu where he criticized the Forward Bloc for defying the principles of the LF.

12th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 42 lines)
Headline: LF slogan: Turn Panchayats into your own institutions
Primary source: Political party

The news informed that the LF called upon the voters to transform the Panchayats into people's institutions where they would frame as well as implement plans for development. The report also informed that Left parties were keen to give more powers to the gram Panchayats. The report said the LF leaders stated that the Panchayats had brought a significant change in rural Bengal in the last 10 years. This report did not introspect whether the Panchayats failed to become a people's institution in the last 10 years when the LF was at the helm of the majority Panchayats and at the state.

12th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 32 lines)
Headline: State want 30 companies of police force from Centre in panchayat vote
Primary source: Administration

The news item informed that the state government has requested the Centre for 30 companies of reserved police force to conduct the Panchayat election in a peaceful
manner. The state government has also instructed the district administrations to call all party meetings to discuss the code of conduct for candidates during the elections.

12th February, 1988
The Statesman (3 columns 102 lines) / (3 columns 129 lines)
Headline: Forward Bloc at loggerheads with CPI (M) at Coochbehar / WB Congress invites Deb to campaign for Panchayat poll
Primary source: Political party
The first news item depicted the bickering between Front partners in Coochbehar. The news elaborately described the allegations of the smaller coalition partners against the CPI (M) on the issue of seat distribution in this district. The report quoted local leaders of smaller Front constituents who accused the bigger party of high-handedness. The newspaper became the medium for expressing political grudges and differences, of little importance to the voters. The news however did not present a one-sided picture and published the counter-accusations of the CPI (M) party too.
The other news item on the same day informed of the Congress’s decision to invite the recently victorious Tripura Congress chief to campaign in the Panchayat elections to boost the morale of its workers.

13th February, 1988
The Statesman (3 columns 213 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) wants truce with Birbhum Front partners
Primary source: Political parties / leaders
The news highlighted the political bickering between Front partners in the Birbhum district. The news informed of the attempt of local leaders to work out a truce to resurrect a broken Left Front in the district. The rivalry between the Front partners was depicted in great detail. The report was no different from the one on Coochbehar district that appeared the previous day.
The report and several other such reports wasted precious newsprint on an issue which made for interesting reading but had no efficacy for the grassroots. The report also included the Congress’ allegation of misappropriation of funds by CPI (M) Panchayat functionaries and the reticent reaction of the Front partners on this issue. The report did not substantiate or investigate the allegation.
13th February, 1988
The Statesman (1 column 37 lines)
Headline: State wants 30 companies of paramilitary
Primary source: Administration

The report communicated details of a meeting held by the chief minister with high level police and administrative officers to review the arrangements for the ensuing Panchayat elections. The news informed that the withdrawal of nominations on the previous day was relatively peaceful and the district authority’s decision to interact with the local leaders of political parties to implement a code of conduct to ensure a peaceful election was working well.

13th February, 1988
The Statesman (2 columns 30 lines)
Headline: Half of funds for Panchayat: CM
Primary source: Administration

The news item informed about an announcement by the chief minister that the state government has decided to spend half of the funds allocated for rural development through the Panchayats. This, he commented, would allow the grassroots to decide on their own development plans. The report stated the chief minister believed that this policy of the government would improve the rural economy and prevent grass-root exploitation and alienation. The correspondent did not elaborate on the grass-root participation in the development programs. It could have given a real picture of the relation between theory and practice.

13th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (3 columns 147 lines)
Headline: Naxalites join in a big way
Reporter / Correspondent

The report observed that naxalite candidates would be a formidable force in the 1988 Panchayat elections especially in the southern districts. The report gave details of the alliances forged by various naxal parties in the different districts. The implications of naxalite win in the gram Panchayats were not discussed.

13th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 column 189 lines)
Chapter 9

Headline: Three LF allies ready to fight each other in Jalpaiguri
Primary source: Local leadership of political parties

The news item described the internal strife between the Left parties in the Jalpaiguri district. The report commented that the relations between the CPI (M), and the RSP and the FB had become strained over lack of agreement on seat adjustment. The Congress, on the other hand, the report stated had gained confidence after its win in Tripura assembly elections. The report published the allegations of the Forward Bloc and RSP that the CPI (M) had betrayed the other partners with regard to seat sharing and was terrorizing candidates of other parties. The CPI (M)’s reaction that the smaller partners should not forget that it was the most powerful partner in the coalition was also recorded.

13th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 58 lines)
Headline: No Left Front unity in Panchayat vote cause for worry to security: CM
Primary source: Administration

The report informed that chief minister has warned the district administrations to be more cautious during the run-up to the Panchayat elections in the wake of a divided Left Front. The report said he advised them to remain impartial. He briefed the press representatives that the overall situation was peaceful though there was apprehension of trouble in some areas in the state. He rubbished the allegation of the Congress that at many places its candidates could not file nomination due to CPI (M) terror. The report repeated that state government has asked the Centre for additional police forces during the election to ensure peaceful polling.

13th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 148 lines)
Headline: Trend of uncontested wins dominate Hooghly
Primary source: Local leadership of Political parties

The report elaborated the pre-poll scenario in the Hooghly district. The most notable feature, according to the correspondent, was the uncontested win of numerous candidates in the three tiers. The Congress alleged terror and violence perpetrated on its candidates prevented them from contesting the elections. The report said the FB
also raised such an alarm after the failure of the Front to reach an understanding in this district.

14th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 28 lines) / (2 columns 35 lines)
Headline: Basu warns supporters that other LF partners may attempt to ally with Congress / Centre will investigate corruption in state panchayat bodies
Primary source for both news items: Political party leaders

The first report covered another election speech by Jyoti Basu where he warned voters and his party workers that the smaller Left partners had flouted the Left principle and joined hands with the Congress. The report said he countered that the Congress was making false allegations of terror in rural Bengal knowing that their defeat was certain in the Panchayat elections. The sample newspapers, as observed earlier, concentrated on the comments of prominent political leaders.

The other news item covered the election rally of the Congress President where he announced that the Centre would investigate the allegations of corruption against the zilla parishads in the state. The investigations, he said, would also find out whether the previous Panchayats have implemented development work as projected. The Congress leader said his party did not support the Jharkhand insurgency but will support all initiatives to fulfill the expectations of the tribal people of Bankura, Purulia and Midnapore.

14th February, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 10 lines)
Headline: About a lakh policemen for Panchayat vote
Primary source: Administration

The item reported the administration’s decision to deploy more than 1 lakh police force including home guards on the Election Day. It informed that special provisions would be made for the sensitive areas.

14th February, 1988
The Statesman (3 columns 183 lines)
Headline: Jalpaiguri to determine Front’s unity
The report reflected the hostility between Left Front partners in the Jalpaiguri district. The report claimed that political observers were closely following the proceedings in this district. There was fierce competition between the Front partners and the outcome of the polls, the report predicted, would have a far reaching impact on the state government. The report included the observation of the opposition Congress who were hopeful that the Left infighting would be advantageous from their perspective. The reporter concluded that what could have been a cakewalk for the ruling CPI (M) had turned into a stiff electoral battle with the dual onslaught from the Congress on one side and Left partners on the other. The report discussed in detail the acrimony between Front partners in this district.

14th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (4 columns 160 lines)
Headline: Uttarakhand in panchayat poll fray
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed readers that a new force in this year’s election fray is the Uttarkhand Dal. The party is not recognized by the election commission and so its members were fighting the gram Panchayat and Panchayat samiti seats as independent candidates. The report informed that the Uttarkhand party had been demanding for a separate Kamtapuri state for the tribal people of Coochbehar for a long time but they had not contested any election till date. This time, the report said, they were taking a serious interest in the local elections to strengthen their position amongst the tribal people of the region. The news report mentioned in the previous Panchayat elections there was never any Left unity in Coochbehar but RSP and FB did not pose a serious challenge to CPI (M) but this time the independents of Uttarkhand Dal could prove an intimidating force.

14th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 38 lines)
Headline: Basu fears Front partners might help Congress
Primary source: Political party leader
The report carried the statements of Jyoti Basu indicting the Front partners of helping the Congress against the CPI (M) in the forthcoming panchayat elections. He
alleged that the other partners did not abide by the principles agreed at the Front meeting with regard to seat sharing. He pointed out RSP and FB’s violation in Coochbehar. The newspaper conveyed Mr. Basu’s plea to the rural electorate made in an election meeting to vote for his party as the others had deviated from the LF policy.

14th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 154 lines)

Headline: Forward Bloc and RSP fight to maintain their existence in Birbhum
Primary source: Local leaders of political parties

The report discussed the pre-electoral scene in the Birbhum district. The report informed that in about one-third of the seats in all the three tiers there was direct confrontation between either the CPI (M) and the RSP or the CPI (M) and the FB. But the CPI (M) was confident of sweeping the elections because of their organizational strength in this district as well as for the work done by the previous Panchayats. The CPI (M) local leaders informed the correspondent that the Congress and not the RSP or FB was their main opposition. The local leaders of FB and RSP said they were fighting the election to maintain their political identity.

14th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 20 lines)

Headline: Petty interests prevented unity of Left Front in the panchayat elections: FB
Primary source: Political party

The FB leaders were quoted in the report that there was no unity among the Left Front partners due to narrow political interests. They indirectly indicated that the CPI (M)’s attempt to singlehandedly control and manage the Panchayats was responsible for the discord in the Left Front. They appealed to the rural electorate to vote for their candidates. The report said they apprehended that the crack in Left unity would affect the Left movement all over the country. The report also quoted Jyoti Basu who appealed for votes for his party. But amidst all these conflict, the Left Front’s election manifesto requested the electorate to ensure the victory of the Front candidates to strengthen the hands of the Left government. The Left Front announced 10 point program for the development of the people under Panchayats. The report
Chapter 9

stated that the government planned to spend at least half the allocated amount assigned for development of the rural people through Panchayats.

15th February, 1988

The Statesman (3 columns 225 lines)

Headline: Contradiction in Murshidabad scenario

Reporter / Correspondent

The report gave a significant evaluation of the Panchayat system in West Bengal. It insisted that all the political bickering and lapses in the performance of the Panchayats notwithstanding there was a general agreement among the political parties that the system marked the beginning of an upheaval in the socio-economic structure of the villages in West Bengal. Whether the grassroots felt similarly after 10 years in the existing system was something that the reporter did not consider or may be thought political parties were the voices of the grassroots at the Panchayat level. The report said political frictions, confusions and contradictions were a crude reflection of an evolving democratic process. The report discussed the poll scenario in the Murshidabad district which resembled that of any other district. Left Front unity was in shambles and all constituents participated in the blame game which the report elaborately described. The Left parties were united only on one account - that their main contender was the Congress and it stood to gain from their squabble. The report specified the profile of the candidates preferred by political parties - small farmers, primary school teachers, lawyers and other professionals. This information gave the voters an idea of the background of candidates in the election fray.

15th February, 1988

Jugantar (1 column 26 lines)

Headline: Congress dominated zilla parishad not dismantled

Primary source: Political party leader

The report recounted an election speech by Jyoti Basu where he commented that the local leaders of FB and RSP disregarded the orders of their respective state Committees. The report said he identified this as the reason for the break in Left unity. He added that such dissidence in the CPI (M) would have surely invoked punishment for the errant leaders. He warned voters not to vote for the Congress party with a history of injustice to the grassroots. He hoped that the only Congress
administered zilla parishad at Malda would be occupied by the Left in this election. The newspaper published a counter statement by the Congress President where he claimed that a peaceful election under the reign of the current chief minister was impossible. He alleged that there was no law and order in the state and the police and the administration was integral to the terror inflicted by the CPI (M).

15th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 106 lines)
Headline: Congress yet to wake up in Burdwan
Reporter / Correspondent
The news item covered the campaigning in the Burdwan district. The report stated that with two weeks remaining for the Panchayat elections the Congress was inactive while the CPI (M) has almost completed campaigning. Differences within the LF existed here too and there were direct confrontation between the Front partners in several seats. The correspondent observed that though Burdwan was a CPI (M) stronghold there was an anti-Left disposition in the district. The correspondent added that the Congress’s failure to organize any election meeting added to the despondency of its supporters in this district. The Congress workers blamed their leaders for lack of initiative and squandering the opportunity to win the elections here.

15th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 106 lines)
Headline: Keen contest likely in Malda
Reporter / Correspondent
The news item referred to the pre-poll campaigning in the Malda district. Malda has special significance according to the report as it was the only zilla parishad held by the Congress. The reporter remarked that this time the electoral battle in this district would be tough. The report quoted the opponents on their electoral chances.

The newspaper had covered several districts in the last few days to give its readers an idea of the ongoing election campaign but in no report is the grass-root aspiration from the Panchayat election reflected. The reports concentrated on the political ambitions and hopes of the political parties. The sample newspapers seemed least interested in integrating the grassroots to the process of political and social change.
15th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 8 lines)
Headline: 3 people including Congress Anchal Pradhan injured; police station surrounded
Reporter / Correspondent
The news item reported the attack on a Congress meeting by CPI (M) supporters. The report said that 3 Congress supporters including the Pradhan were injured in the attack. The report said that the police was informed about the possibility of such an attack but they did not take appropriate measure to prevent it.

16th February, 1988
The Statesman (2 columns 22 lines)
Headline: Fillip to Congress campaign
Reporter / Correspondent
The report said the Congress campaign in Burdwan received a fillip when its party President Priya Das Munshi addressed gatherings at 11 places. The report said the main thrust of his speech was LF’s misrule and terrorism. The report said Das Munshi claimed that the CPI (M)’s claims of panchayat’s achievements were nothing substantial and the party was hoodwinking the people by campaigning that all projects were funded by the zilla parishad headed by it.

16th February, 1988
The Statesman (2 columns 90 lines) / Amrita Bazaar Patrika (3 columns 90 lines) / Jugantar (2 columns 68 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 90 lines)
Headline: Forward Bloc criticizes Basu’s campaign / Congress will do worse in polls: Ashok Ghosh / Why blame us only? Forward Bloc / CPI (M) in its campaign is identifying Forward Bloc and RSP as its opponent rather than the Congress
Primary sources: Political party leaders
The Statesman report highlighted Forward Bloc’s criticism against the campaigning of chief minister Jyoti Basu. Party leader Ashok Ghosh condemned the use of Basu for the electoral gains of the CPI (M) as Basu was the leader of the entire Left Front and the chief minister of the LF government. The report said he cited examples to show that the chief minister’s speeches at various meetings instigated the CPI (M) workers against other Left parties. The differences between the CPI (M) and the other Left constituents were elaborately described in the report through statements
from the leaders of the allies. The report did not take the viewpoint of any CPI (M)
leader. The report read like propaganda of the smaller Left parties against the CPI
(M). It is inexplicable why the accusations of a political party against another found
such prominence in a mass medium and to an extent that almost blurred the
distinction between a general interest newspaper and a party mouthpiece.

In the Amrita Bazaar Patrika the version of Ghosh was different. The Forward
Bloc leader appealed to the CPI (M) to stop its tirade against the other Front partners
for the sake of Front unity and concentrate its efforts on defeating the Congress.
Ghosh stated that the Congress’s failure to organize effective campaigning for the
forthcoming polls would adversely affect its chances but the lack of unity among the
Front constituents may prove disastrous for the Front too.

The Jugantar reported the response of Ashok Ghosh against the comments
made by the chief minister. It included Ghosh’s comments that the FB has abided by
the Front principle in all the districts except Coochbehar but the CPI (M) was
primarily responsible for lack of agreement on seat sharing. He alleged that CPI (M)
leaders as well as grass-root workers were campaigning against the FB and RSP
instead of the Congress. The report, however, specified that Ghosh believed despite
the divided house, LF would win handsomely.

In the Anandabazar Patrika report the FB leader accused the chief minister
was engaged in false campaigning against his party. He commented that this was
harming Left unity. This report informed that RSP spokesperson Makhan Pal stated
that all Left constituents should maintain the rules and regulations of the Front and no
ally was singly responsible for the friction. He also said that though there was no
unity between the Front partners they must not forget the need or importance of the
Front to fight the Congress. The report commented that the stark differences in the
Front at a time when the Left was emerging as an alternative to the Congress in the
national political arena was an unfortunate development. The comments of Ghosh and
Pal were repeated in the Anandabazar Patrika again on the next day. This proved that
mainstream newspapers had an inclination to publish content that aroused the interest
of the potential audience.

16th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 26 lines)
Headline: We are crestfallen at the chief minister’s words: Jatin
Chapter 9

Primary source: Political party leader

The report documented the comments of the RSP leader and state minister Jatin Chakrabarti. He was quoted in this report that his party was saddened by the way Jyoti Basu campaigned against it at various public meetings when it was also a part of the government. He added this would adversely affect the image of the LF government. The report said he clarified no individual party could be blamed for the unfortunate discord over seat adjustment in the Panchayat election.

It is important to note here that the content of the coverage was till then confined to the comments and opinions of the political parties and their leaders, without taking account of the views of the grassroots. (See Table 9.2 for news sources invoked by the sample newspapers at the end of this chapter.) There was rarely a mention of any other source other than the political parties or their leaders nor was there any attempt on the reporters’ part to investigate the gram remote villages. The news items mostly emanated from the district headquarters or the political party offices or the press meets or the election meetings. There was no representation of the street meetings or processions or the interaction between candidates and voters in the coverage of Panchayat elections by the mainstream press. The only silver lining of the 1988 panchayat election coverage was the dominantly district based news reports against the Calcutta based news reports of 1978. The extensive coverage (see Table 9.1 (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) for the quantity of news items in the sample newspapers on the subject at the end of this chapter) ensured a broader picture of the ground reality though the picture was constricted by party politics and uninterrupted blame game.

16th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 99 lines)

Headline: Many independents in the fray in Jalpaiguri
Reporter / Correspondent

The report was a pre-poll coverage of Jalpaiguri district. The newspaper gave detailed figures of the number of candidates fielded by the various political parties. It mentioned the lack of unity among the Front constituents and the fact that several LF constituents fielded candidates for the same seat. There were numerous independent candidates in all the three tiers of the Panchayat.
Headline: Samsergunj: CPI (M) claims all others are united against it
Reporter / Correspondent

The news item reported the murder of a CPI (M) candidate in the Murshidabad district. The Anandabazar Patrika referred to this incident of violence on the 14th February. Its report mentioned that both the Congress and the CPI (M) candidates were grievously injured when they got involved in a fight while campaigning. The Jugantar report elaborated on the disunity among the LF partners in Murshidabad. It commented that the Congress was without a leader and the CPI (M) was at loggerheads with all its political allies. The CPI (M) local leaders were quoted that other LF allies would be wiped out from the district. The allies responded that they would compel the CPI (M) to retrace its steps in several areas.

16th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 117 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)-CPI alliance in Midnapore is news in this district
Reporter / Correspondent

The report discussed the pre-poll scenario in the Midnapore district. The most significant feature of Panchayat elections in this district, according to the report, was the alliance between the CPI (M) and the CPI in all three tiers after the breakup of the Communist party about 24 years ago. Setting aside their past acrimony, the two sides were ready to compromise. The CPI (M) offered more seats to the CPI and the CPI happily accepted the proposal. The FB and RSP were, however, left outside the pact of these two parties.

16th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 70 lines)
Headline: Pre-poll violence in various districts
Reporter / Correspondent

This item reported the several incidents of violence related to Panchayat elections in the last few days. The incidents of violence ranged from clashes between political rivals to setting fire on the houses of opponent members. Several people were injured in these incidents.

17th February, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 24 lines)
Chapter 9

Headline: They have allied with the Congress: Basu
Primary source: Political party leader

In this news item the chief minister alleged that the FB and RSP has joined hands with the principal opposition of the Left Front - the Congress - in a few gram Panchayat seats. He urged voters to boycott these parties along with the Congress wherever they have fielded candidates against the official Left candidate.

17th February, 1988

Jugantar (2 columns 70 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 86 lines) / The Statesman (5 columns 105 lines)

Headline: FB blaming Basu without reason: Saroj / According to Saroj Mukherjee allies' criticism of Jyoti Basu unfortunate / Basu's speeches distorted: Saroj
Primary sources: Political party leader

The reports quoted the CPI (M) leader Saroj Mukherjee that FB leaders were campaigning against the CPI (M) and criticizing the chief minister at various public meetings. Mukherjee termed the event as unfortunate and hoped that the unity of the LF would remain intact even under such circumstances. Mukherjee was quoted in the report that internal wrangling within the LF was nothing new but public attack on the chief minister by allies have never occurred in previous elections. Mukherjee added all attempts were being made to maintain unity. He clarified that the chief minister had appealed to the voters to vote for the CPI (M) wherever the allies had contravened the Left principle, at other places he requested voters to vote for the official Left candidate. The report informed Mukherjee complained allies were not campaigning for the Left nominated CPI (M) candidate.

The Anandabazar Patrika report besides Mukherjee’s statement that the criticism of Basu by RSP and FB was unfortunate also included his claim that the CPI (M) did not contravene the Front’s policy on seat adjustment and blamed the FB and RSP for the fiasco. Mukherjee said there was no reason to believe that the Front would break up in this context as it is not an electoral alliance. It would rather be strengthened at the end of this election. (These comments of Mukherjee were also highlighted in an editorial in the Jugantar on 18th February.) He was quoted in the report that differences in the Front cropped up before every election and settled down thereafter.
The Statesman report said that Mukherjee’s comment that there was a trend among partners to distort the messages of Basu would provide a new twist to the vitriol within the Left Front during the panchayat polls.

17th February, 1988 / 18th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 102 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 85 lines) / The Statesman on 18th February, (2 columns 88 lines)
Headline: Everybody afraid of CPI (M) terror: Kamal Guha / FB apprehend CPI (M) rigging / Kamal Guha accuses CPI (M) of terror in Coochbehar
Primary source: Political party leader

In these reports FB leader and state cabinet minister Kamal Guha complained that several FB candidates were not allowed to file their nominations by CPI (M) workers but the police and administration refused to take actions. He demanded proper investigations into the numerous uncontested wins of CPI (M). The reports said he alleged that CPI (M) workers were preventing his party candidates from campaigning. He blamed the CPI (M)’s arrogance for the break in Left unity. He also alleged that the CPI (M) was planning to resort to booth capturing and rigging on the Election Day.

The reports stated that the FB leader criticized the chief minister for delivering instigating speeches during the election campaign and accused the CPI (M) of alienating the people. He said the FB was there in the Front out of the necessity of the people. He claimed that the Left Front would have lost many supporters in Coochbehar if not for his party.

That the sample newspapers attached much importance to the Left Front bickering was evident from their coverage.

17th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 74 lines)
Headline: Will ring the death knell of CPI (M) in this state like in Tripura: Priya
Primary source: Political party leader

The news item covered one of the election meetings of Priya Das Munshi where he predicted that the manner in which Jyoti Basu’s government is functioning in West Bengal will soon lead to its downfall like the Left Front’s defeat in Tripura. The coverage said he alleged rules were not being followed in the conduct of the
Panchayat elections. He said that the Congress may demand the imposition of Article 356 in the state to restore law and order.

17th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 153 lines)
Headline: In Uluberia FB united with Congress to defeat CPI (M)
Reporter / Correspondent
The news item described the pre-election scenario in the Howrah district. The report repeated the lack of unity among the Left Front constituents. The report said FB and RSP vigorously campaigned against the CPI (M) through graffiti and posters and were locked in direct contests with the bigger partner in several seats. The report observed that this time the squabble over seat sharing in the Panchayat elections was much more severe than the last time. It commented that the district headquarters at Uluberia is set to witness the most severe electoral fight. The report stated that FB has joined hands with the Congress to defeat the CPI (M) candidate.

It is seen that news related to alliance, alignment and conflict were reported by all sample newspapers with special regularity and emphasis.

17th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 40 lines)
Headline: CM distorting facts says Kamal Guha
Primary source: Political party leader
The news item reported the accusation of FB leader Kamal Guha against chief minister Jyoti Basu for distorting facts. He refuted Basu’s claim that his party was helping the Congress in the forthcoming Panchayat elections and was responsible for crack in Left unity. The FB leader alleged, like the Congress President, that CPI (M) supporters forced FB candidates to withdraw nominations in a number of seats in Coochbehar and got themselves elected unopposed. He emphasized that fair elections were impossible under such circumstances.

17th February, 1988 / 19th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 64 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 55 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)-CPI closing ranks for Panchayat polls / CPI (M), CPI withdrawing candidates fielded against each other
The reports informed the readers that CPI (M) and CPI had reached an understanding for the Panchayat polls. The report pointed out there were no significant differences between these two LF constituents.

The news about truce between the CPI and the CPI (M) featured in the Anandabazar Patrika on the 19th February. The report confirmed that both parties resolved to withdraw all unofficial nominations in favor of the official candidate of the two parties. This report also informed that the other Front partners were unhappy at the pact between these two parties and they called this attempt 'an effort to establish a Front within the Front'.

The Amrita Bazaar Patrika report quoted unidentified political observers to remark that FB and RSP’s expectation that the strength of CPI (M) and CPI would be eroded in the Panchayat elections was an exaggerated expectation.

17th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 64 lines)
Headline: Congress workers posing as LF candidates

The report revealed that in some seats Congress workers posed as LF candidates to contest the elections. This, the reporter concluded was an attempt to disillusion the voters and further erode Left unity and it stemmed from desperation to participate in the election process. The report emphasized the supremacy of the Left Front by stating that despite the contest among the partners in about 11000 seats the Congress would not be able to make any appreciable gain. A balanced and independent mass media should ideally refrain from such comments and emphasize on empirical data and evidence. The report observed that the FB and RSP were not campaigning for the CPI (M) candidate although the CPI (M) is urging voters to vote for the other LF partners wherever it has not fielded any candidate.

17th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 75 lines)
Headline: Favorable attitude of CPI (M) towards CPI cause of rift in the Front (Editorial)

The editorial harped on the bickering in the Left Front between the CPI (M) and the FB and RSP and its causes. It informed that the Left allies were contesting
each other in about 13000 seats which were twice the amount in 1983. The editorial identified the CPI (M)'s sympathy and patronization of the CPI as the main reason for its rift with the other Front partners. It observed that the renewed importance to CPI would change the equilibrium in the Front alliance. The report said the Front partners resented the uncontested win of the 'big brother' in about 3000 panchayat seats. The dominant reason for the bitterness in the relationship between LF allies, according to the editorial was the rampant defiance of rules on seat allocation set out in the Left Front meeting.

17th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 116 lines)
Headline: Polling agent of CM fighting as independent against CPI (M) 'corruption'
Reporter / Correspondent

The report gave an idea of the pre-election scenario in the South 24 Parganas. The news informed that an election agent for CPI (M) during the Assembly election was fighting the panchayat election as an independent candidate to protest corruption in the Panchayats. The report did not, however, focus on the allegation of corruption or its investigation but on the political tiff. The report said the local CPI (M) leaders rubbed the allegations and claimed that the concerned agent was ousted from the party due to abuse of power. The report stated that besides the squabble within the CPI (M) and between the Front partners, there was a strong buzz among the people on the terror created by CPI (M) workers. The report informed in the Bhangar block the opposition Congress has boycotted the election in protest of CPI (M) inflicted terror and woes. The report commented that in the South 24 Parganas district the difference between promise made by political parties before elections and the reality have become clear to the electorate and people were expressing their resentment in various ways. The political issues in the forthcoming election relevant to the South 24 Parganas district were illustrated by the report.

17th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 64 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)'s attack on the personal level: Prison Minister
Primary source: Political party leader

The report quoted the minister for prison that attack by Left constituents has denigrated from the political to the personal level not only at the local level but also among the state ministers.

17th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 116 lines)
Headline: New episode in conflict between coalition partners in Left Front (Editorial)

The editorial took note of the fact that instead of the deluge of promises and pledges made by the political leaders before any election, the focus of the political parties in this Panchayat election was on allegations, accusations and counter-blames. The editorial elaborately discussed the bickering in the Left Front and the lack of understanding in seat distribution, the direct contests between the allies in all the three tiers, the public accusations by the chief minister against the FB and RSP and the public tirade of these smaller allies against the ‘big brother’. The editorial then went on to discuss the changing equation within the Front - the diminished status of the RSP and FB and the improved stature of the CPI - and the consequent tension between the partners. The editorial elaborated on the reasons for the hostile attitude of the CPI (M) towards the smaller partners, the RSP and FB, its probable implications on the Left coalition and the effect on Left movement in the state and the country. The editorial gave no indication of the extent of grass-root participation in the Panchayat process through the political parties or the change witnessed in the villages of Bengal after the introduction of the Panchayats.

18th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 18 lines)
Headline: Panchayat poll clashes

Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported clashes between Congress and CPI (M) supporters during campaigning and the injury of several people in the process.

18th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 22 lines) / Jugantar (2 column 26 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)-Congress pact in Panchayat polls: SUCI / CPI (M)-Congress pact
Primary source: Political party leader

The newspapers reported that SUCI, 'a lesser known political outfit' felt it was difficult to ensure free and fair polls considering the violence unleashed by the two main political parties of the state.

Intermittent violence was a cause of concern to grass-root participants and disturbed the democratic process, the sample newspapers was content to merely report incidents or statements of other political interests like in the aforementioned item.

18th February, 1988
The Statesman (2 columns 36 lines)

Headline: CPI (M) treating FB and RSP as minor ‘irritants’
Primary source: Political parties

The report described the election scenario in the Birbhum district. The tussle between the Left Front partners was intense though the CPI (M) and the Congress (I) were the main adversaries. The Front partners were training guns on each other and the rest of the content focused on that squabble. The report said the CPI (M) was not ready to give importance to the 'minor' partners.

18th February, 1988
The Statesman (1 column 30 lines) / Jugantar (1 column 45 lines)

Headline: Front inviting President's rule: Das Munshi / Do not fear the CPI (M): Priya
Primary source: Political party leader

The reports covered one of the campaign speeches given by Priya Das Munshi, the Congress President, where he claimed that a democratic system like the Panchayat election cannot be successful under the tyrannical Left regime and demanded President’s rule in the state for the purpose. The Jugantar report included his appeal to the people to vote against terror and for the collapse of the Left government. The report said he urged Congress supporters to unite and give a fitting reply to the CPI (M) and the 'arrogant' chief minister.

18th February, 1988
The Statesman (3 columns 189 lines)
Headline: Commanding position for CPI (M) in Burdwan

Reporter / Correspondent

The news item gave an account of the election scenario in the Burdwan district. The report informed that there was no significant squabble between Left partners in this district and only the Forward Bloc has gone into direct confrontation against the CPI (M) in some seats. The reactions of the Forward Bloc and the CPI (M) leaders were enumerated. The report also commented on the unorganized campaigning by the Congress. Such information was not indispensable from the voter’s perspective of selecting the right candidate yet it was repeatedly displayed in the newspapers.

18th February, 1988

The Statesman (3 columns 153 lines) / Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 60 lines) / Jugantar (3 columns 66 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 80 lines)

Headline: FB and RSP resent CPI (M) charge / FB denies CPI (M)’s charge of taking Congress’s help / Better to accept defeat than win with Congress’ help: FB / Allegation false claims FB and RSP but tone gentler

Primary source: Political parties

The items reflected the deepening of the Left Front imbroglio. The Forward Bloc and the RSP protested the insinuation by chief minister and his party’s secretary that they had joined hands with the Congress. The reports emphasized the smaller allies denied the allegation regarding seat sharing and claimed that the bigger party has flouted LF rules and nominated candidates in seats they had won in the last Panchayat election. The report said the smaller parties also expressed anguish at the chief minister’s request to the voters not to cast vote in their favor.

The Amrita Bazaar Patrika’s content specified that FB leader Ashok Ghosh described the chief minister’s accusation against the two allies as ‘malicious’. The Jugantar also reported the angry response of Ghosh to the chief minister’s allegation.

There was not only repetition but also overlapping of content in the sample newspapers. For example parts of these news items were reported in the previous day’s edition of the Jugantar.

In the Anandabazar Patrika report on this issue the tone of the two partners were termed as conciliatory with the FB leader quoted as stating that his party would refrain from any other comments on the issue before the election while the RSP spokesperson said realizing the importance and necessity of the Left Front alliance all
partners should be cautious while issuing public statements. The report concluded that the spokesperson of both the parties Ashok Ghosh (FB) and Makhan Pal (RSP) clarified that they would not have issued statements if the chief minister did not call upon people to vote for CPI (M) only and boycott their parties. The report said they urged all constituents to abide by the Front principles.

18th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 98 lines)
Headline: Conflict yet to resolve but efforts on for reconciliation between Front partners
Primary source: Political parties

The report commented that the reconciliatory statements by the partners were an indication that the differences between the Front partners were about to end before the election. But it also added that the CPI (M) leaders were still livid with the Front partners because of their attack against the chief minister. The report said CPI (M) leaders were of the opinion that the constituents were aware of the circumstances under which the CM had commented against them and therefore there was no need for the unnecessary storm against a leader of his stature.

18th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 67 lines)
Headline: Impossible to conduct free and fair polls: Bhakti Bhusan Mondal
Primary source: Political party leader

The possibility of quick reconciliation between the Front partners was contradicted in this report. Mondal, a FB minister made specific allegations against the CPI (M) that its workers were intimidating the FB workers during campaigning. The state minister commented that the voters would be unable to exercise their rights independently under these circumstances.

18th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 82 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 48 lines)
Headline: Congress to demand President's rule in the state / Front has broken up: Subrata Primary source: Political party / Political leader

The reports covered the press meet of Congress leader Subrata Mukherjee where he announced that the party representatives would meet the President to
demand President’s rule in the state. He claimed that the Left Front ceased to exist and therefore had no moral right to rule the state. The Congress leader claimed that several LF ministers have openly expressed their no-confidence in the chief minister and thus had no constitutional validity to continue in their ministerial offices. He claimed that Front partners have provided incriminating evidence against the malpractices of CPI (M) to the Congress district leaders. He also said that the Front partners trivialized the Panchayat elections through their comments against each other. These statements of the Congress leader appeared repeatedly in the press coverage related to the Panchayat elections not only in 1988 but also in the preceding election of 1983 and as the following chapters will reveal in the following elections as well. The frustrated and desperate comments of the main opposition party who remained unsuccessful over the years only serve to represent conflicting point of view and not the alternative viewpoint.

18th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 67 lines)
Headline: Work held up at Writers as campaigning for Panchayat polls gain momentum
Reporter / Correspondent
The item conveyed the effect of the Panchayat elections on the state government employees at the Writers Building, epicenter of the state administration. The report said that the departments wore a deserted look as with the approach of the elections the ministers left for campaigning in the districts and the employees left to themselves, did not take any initiative to work.

18th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 45 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 20 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 21 lines)
Headline: Don’t vote for Left Front parties who have not adhered to norms / Basu repeats: FB and RSP are responsible for the lack of unity in the Front / CPI (M) attacks other allies
Primary source: Political party leaders
The Jugantar report said the chief minister once again appealed to the people not to vote for the Front constituents who have not followed the LF principle on seat sharing and the Congress, who he referred to as ‘the people’s enemy’.
The two Anandabazar Patrika reports repeated the statements of Basu and added the views of CPI (M) secretary Saroj Mukherjee on the issue of responsibility of the other Front constituents for the lack of agreement in case of panchayat election.

The first Anandabazar Patrika report referred to the direct attack of the chief minister against the FB and RSP for LF’s failure to reach an understanding and for breach of the Front principle in an election rally. The report mentioned he appealed for votes for the CPI (M) candidates and Front candidates only in the absence of the CPI (M) candidates.

The second report repeated the contents of the first with both the chief minister and the CPI (M) secretary Saroj Mukherjee urging the people to boycott LF partners who have defied the Front principle and indirectly helped the cause of the Congress. The report added that the appeal of both leaders was published in a leaflet and circulated through CPI (M) party offices throughout the state.

18th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 186 lines)
Headline: The main battle in Howrah sadar is between CPI (M) and Congress
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported the pre-poll scenario in the five blocks within the Howrah Sadar zilla parishad. The report informed there was direct confrontation between the CPI (M) and the Congress in 4 blocks and CPI (M) and FB in the fifth. The Congress campaigned against the terror and non-performance of the CPI (M) and the inaction of the police. The FB said that a divided Left Front would inadvertently help the Congress’ chances. The report described the reaction of the grassroots in this district as indifferent contrary to the actively involved political parties.

18th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 96 lines)
Headline: Worry over clashes between LF partners in Jalpaiguri
Reporter / Correspondent

The news informed that increasing clashes between the LF constituents in the Jalpaiguri district has kept the district administration tense. There was no seat adjustment between the Front partners in this district and the report stated with the approach of the election the relationship became more strained. There were
intermittent clashes between the CPI (M) and Congress supporters too. The report commented that the Front partners as well as Congress were victims of CPI (M) terror. The CPI (M), however, denied all charges against it and said it wanted peaceful elections in this district.

18th February, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 72 lines)
Headline: Division in the Left Front (Editorial)

The editorial focused on the internal differences within the Left Front prior to the Panchayat election. The editorial repeated what has been said before in the news reports of the sample newspapers during the coverage in the past few days. It commented that the previous Panchayat elections had also witnessed a divided Left Front but the public spats were limited and there was a conscious effort to dissolve the tension. In 1983 the differences between the partners were more distinct at the lower levels. But this time the bickering between the CPI (M) and the RSP and FB was not restrained to the lower levels. The leaders including the chief minister blamed each other publicly in election meetings and issued statements against each other to the media. The editorial added that the rivalry was not limited to verbal duels and there were frequent clashes between the supporters of the various LF constituents. The editorial informed that the chief minister has warned the district administrations that clashes between LF partners could pose law and order problem during the Panchayat elections. It discussed the repercussions of the chief minister’s campaign against the Left allies. It opined that it derided the status of the partners and instigated the lower level CPI (M) supporters against the allies. The editorial pointed out that the CPI (M) secretary and LF chairman also supported Basu as he found that the allies were not campaigning for CPI (M) anywhere. The editorial was of the opinion that this acrimony would not be over before the Panchayat election and there were serious doubts on peaceful elections because of this reason. The editorial took note of the statements of Saroj Mukherjee that the Front would not break because of this bickering but rather would emerge stronger. The editorial commented that the survival of the Front was more essential for the smaller allies than the CPI (M) as they knew that their futures in the Assembly elections were bleak outside the Front. The CPI has already reached a tacit understanding with the CPI (M) but FB and RSP were desperate to capture as many Panchayat seats as possible to gain a stronger foothold in
the coalition before the Assembly polls. The editorial concluded that electoral politics may jeopardize the future of the LF alliance.

19th February, 1988

The Statesman (1 column 51 lines) / Jugantar (3 columns 65 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 66 lines) / Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 14 lines)

Headline: FB candidate’s father killed / FB candidate injured, father killed / FB nominee injured in Murshidabad, father killed / FB candidate’s father killed by CPI (M) men

Reporter / Correspondent

The items reported an incident of violence in the Murshidabad district which killed the father of a FB candidate and injured the candidate. It was certainly a matter of concern for those associated with the Panchayat election process but the newspapers highlighted only the allegation of the Forward Bloc that it was perpetrated by CPI (M) workers. It is sacrilegious for a mass media to publish accusations without verifying its authenticity but there seemed to be regular contravention of this principle. This news was also published in the Jugantar, Anandabazar Patrika and Amrita Bazaar Patrika as referred above.

19th February, 1988

The Statesman (3 columns 144 lines)

Headline: Last moment distribution of grants in West Dinajpur

Reporter / Correspondent

The newspaper pointed out irregularity in the panchayat bodies of West Dinajpur with relation to disbursement of house building grant equivalent to two crores just before the Panchayat elections. The newspaper reported there was disgruntlement among other political parties against the ‘election dole’ meted by the ruling party.

19th February, 1988

The Statesman (3 columns 116 lines)

Headline: Back to 1972 (Editorial)

The editorial said that the 1988 Panchayat election marked the worst confrontation in the Left coalition. The lack of rapport, the vitriolic attack on coalition partners and a breakdown of understanding between the allies were distinct features of
Chapter 9

this Panchayat election. The editorial apprehended that such an extent of internecine squabble could lead to the collapse of the Left government. It observed that the animosities will not subside even after the election and it may result in the reduction of seats for the Left Front in the Panchayat elections as well. The editorial predicted this would give the faction-ridden, unorganized Congress party an opportunity to scramble back to power in the state. The editorial concluded that the Left Front partners can continue their conflict at their own peril.

The editorial is often considered to be a tool for the newspapers to identify and set the public agenda. It seems that the sample newspapers had a single agenda of highlighting the strife in the Left Front. The editorial hinted that this strife will lead to the fall of the state government and predicted the defeat of the Left Front in the forthcoming Panchayat polls. Such speculation by mass media can misguide voters during the elections. And if the newspaper wanted to warn the voters that their specific electoral preference at the local elections would lead to fall of a government and they should therefore refrain from such a move then that interfered with the democratic process. The opinions of the newspapers in the editorial and op-ed pages are valued by the readers but opinions without facts are inconsistent in a democratic set-up.

19th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika 1 column 42 lines)
Headline: Seeds of discord
Reporter / Correspondent

This was an elaborate report on the dissension within the Left Front over the division of seats, its implications on the Panchayat poll results and the consequences on the Left government in the state. The report mentioned that the conflict had set off speculations regarding the collapse of the Front government. The report commented that the fall of the LF government was imminent due to the mudslinging by the Front leaders. Contradictorily, the report also mentioned that such disagreements were common in the previous Panchayat elections too and this time also the Front may survive such rivalries as it had done earlier.

The newspapers' attempt to convince the readers of the lack of Left Front unity or concern to avert the fall of LF government in the aftermath of the Panchayat elections was totally uncalled for in a democratic set up. The report expressed concern
at the unethical duality of a Left Front ministry and members of the same ministry including the chief minister campaigning against other Front partners. The correspondent indicated two reasons for the tremendous bickering in the LF. The first reason mentioned was the bonhomie between the CPI (M) and the latest entrant to the Front, the CPI which was resented by FB and RSP as the CPI gained seats and importance at their cost. The second reason pointed out was the recent defeat of the LF in Tripura. The seats lost by the Left Front there were those contested by the CPI (M) candidates. The correspondent observed that this setback has pushed the CPI (M) against the wall and the FB and RSP wanted to capitalize on this situation and gain utmost benefit. The internal strife in the Front had little connection with grass-root participation in the panchayat election and development process yet it was the most prominent issue in the coverage of 1988 Panchayat elections by the sample newspapers.

19th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 48 lines)
Headline: CPI’s reaction on CPI (M)’s allegation against other Front partners mild
Primary source: Political party

The news item mentioned that CPI was hurt by the allegations leveled by Saroj Mukherjee that it had fielded candidates against the CPI (M) in few seats disregarding the LF principle. The party said that the CPI (M) was guilty of the same offence but the CPI did not complain publicly. The party said it believed in strengthening Left unity and did not want to issue counter statements to aggravate tension. It hoped that since there was agreement with the CPI (M) it would withdraw dummy candidates through the circulation of handbills. The reporter indicated to the readers to mark the moderate tone of the CPI compared to the FB and RSP.

19th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 55 lines)
Headline: CPI (M), CPI withdrawing candidates in favor of each other
Primary source: Political parties

The report informed that the CPI (M) and CPI have agreed to withdraw the unofficial candidates in favor of the official candidates of both parties at most place.
The report stated that the other members of the Front were disillusioned by the CPI (M)'s separate adjustment with the CPI.

19th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 81 lines)
Headline: This time the electoral battle is keen
Reporter / Correspondent
The report depicted the pre-poll scenario in the Bhatar block in the South 24 Parganas district. The report informed that the Congress which was in a relatively better position in the last Panchayat elections failed to nominate candidates in about 100 gram Panchayat seats this time. The report commented that CPI (M) atrocities have created both resentment and terror in the minds of Congress workers. It also said that Congress leaders were involved in bitter bickering ruining the party's chances.

19th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 132 lines)
Headline: Communal overtones in campaigning in Deganga
Reporter / Correspondent
The report concerned the campaigning in the Deganga block. The report quoted a local CPI (M) leader that communal statements were being used in the campaigning to influence voters. The report observed that Muslim voters would decide the fate of candidates.

19th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 144 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) least interested in LF unity: RSP zilla parishad member in Jalpaiguri
Primary source: Political party member
The news item reported the allegation of RSP Deputy Chairman of the Jalpaiguri zilla parishad that he was never called to the zilla parishad meeting in the last five years. The report quoted him that his party doubted the CPI (M)'s commitment to Front unity under such circumstances. The report said district CPI (M) denied the charge and stated that though LF was not united in this district, the Congress remained the main opposition.
19th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 39 lines)
**Headline:** If allies don’t agree to abide by the norms there is no need for a Front: Basu

**Primary source:** Political party leader

The news covered one of the election rallies of Jyoti Basu where he declared if the LF coalition partners did not adhere to the LF policies then the Front should cease to exist. The report said Basu blamed the FB and RSP of contravening the Front policy. He said he would request voters to vote for those allies who had abided by the principle.

19th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 52 lines)
**Headline:** CPI (M) aim to corner FB?

**Reporter / Correspondent**

The news item questioned whether the CPI (M) aimed to alienate the FB. It opined despite the dominant partner’s stance the FB resolved to stay within the Front. The report said there was direct confrontation between these two LF constituents in about 1500 seats. The report informed that the CPI (M) would support Jyoti Basu’s stance on other Front partners throughout the election campaign.

19th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 64 lines)
**Headline:** Jyoti Basu and Saroj Mukherjee failed to lead Front: Mondal

**Primary source:** Political party leader

In this item Bhakti Bhushan Mondol, a Forward Bloc minister in the state government alleged that several CPI (M) leaders exploited their political power for personal gains and disrupted the peace and development process in the villages. He said that the FB was contesting the election to stave off these undesirable people. The FB leader was quoted in the report that chief minister Jyoti Basu and the Left Front chairman, Saroj Mukherjee has failed to lead the Front and blamed them for the disunity in the Front as well as for the deplorable plight of the people. He alleged that the CPI (M) was sheltering corrupt Panchayat functionaries who stifled development of the Panchayat areas. He declared that the FB would fight these corrupt
functionaries through democratic processes. He also alleged that CPI (M) had announced the names of candidates for some seats even before the discussions on seat adjustment commenced within the Left Front for a united LF nominee and for some other seats even after an agreement on seat sharing was reached in the LF meeting it allowed its own supporters to stand as independents.

20th February, 1988

The Statesman (3 columns 60 lines) / Amrita Bazaar Patrika (3 columns 66 lines) / Jugantar (2 columns 94 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 112 lines)

Headline: Congress (I) interests have joined CPI (M): RSP minister / Fascist trends in CPI (M) / CPI (M) attitude fascist / CPI (M) wants to muzzle others in a fascist way

Primary source: Political party leader

The reports pointed out the verbal offensive between the Left allies. In these reports RSP minister Debabrata Bandopadhyay accused that CPI (M) had fascist intention of annihilating all opposition voices in the Panchayat elections. This, he felt, affected the unity of the Left Front. The report said he alleged that the reactionary rich landowners who opposed development of the poor have switched allegiance to the CPI (M) from the Congress. He stated that these candidates with vested interest, if they win, would make the Panchayats dependent on officialdom and the objective of grass-root empowerment and involvement of the common people in the development process would not be realized.

The Amrita Bazaar Patrika, Anandabazar Patrika and Jugantar also published this news as referred above. None of the sample newspaper investigated the profile of the candidates which would have indicated actual grass-root participation in the election process. Amrita Bazaar Patrika stated Bandopadhyay demanded freedom for the Panchayats from bureaucratic clutches and equitable distribution of agricultural loans. The Statesman observed that the accusations of the RSP minister was surprising as the RSP was restrained in its criticism of the CPI (M) compared to that of the Forward Bloc till then.

20th February, 1988

The Statesman (3 columns 210 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 24 lines)

Headline: Panchayat polls watershed in Front unity / FB engaged in anti-CPI (M) activity
The content of this item informed the readers that bickering between the CPI (M) and Forward Bloc continued unabated. The report said the latest provocation was two leaflets that the CPI (M) alleged was published by the FB to disparage it. The FB claimed the pamphlet was fabricated by the CPI (M) to misrepresent it.

In the Anandabazar Patrika report FB's Ashok Ghosh held political enemies responsible for the conspiracy against his party. The Anandabazar Patrika credited the news to the CPI (M) mouthpiece, Ganashakti.

20th February, 1988
The Statesman (3 columns 69 lines)
Headline: No sign of CPI (M)-FB bickering abating

The news harped on the bitter relation between the Front partners before the Panchayat elections. The report observed that although in the past agreement on seat adjustment eluded the Front partners and relationship between the allies took a nosedive, there has never been such acrimony and vengeance between the allies. The report identified the root of the current dispute as the stubborn determination of all partners to hold on to their rural power base and expand it by capturing more Panchayat bodies. It pointed out that an unparalleled feature of the political fight in this election was controversy surrounding a leader of the stature of Jyoti Basu, who was the target of political attacks by fellow Front leaders. The report reiterated that Forward Bloc and recently the RSP has accused him of turning a blind eye to the flouting of Front rules by his own party while accusing them of violating rules. This has, the report commented, effectively harmed his image as the Chief Minister of the state and the undisputed leader of the Left Front. The newspaper concluded that the Panchayat elections will be a watershed in the relations between the Left Front partners.

20th February, 1988
The Statesman (1 column 168 lines)
Headline: Electorate playing it safe in Nadia
Primary source: Grass-root voters

The report informed that majority voters in Nadia district has decided to cast their votes in favor of the ruling Left coalition whatever better prospect assured by the opposition Congress. The reason, according to the report, was that the voters assumed as long as the Left Front ruled in West Bengal, contrary result in the local elections will limit the scope of their development. The newspaper categorically stated that development along partisan lines have become common in West Bengal Panchayat areas.

The implications of this news were far reaching. The newspaper indicated that though decentralization of political and administrative power was the primary objective behind the formation of Panchayats, it had not led to grass-root empowerment. It also indicated that grass-root participation in Panchayat elections was limited to voting and participation in the policy making process was controlled and guided by the political parties and their leaders. The news also suggested that though the state government allocated funds and resources to the gram Panchayats for rural development, the execution of those projects depended solely on its discretion. The grass-root voters therefore had to oblige the state government or more bluntly show allegiance to the political party/parties at the helm of power to ensure development. This is an indictment against the Left Front government and the Left parties considering their claims of encouraging grass-root empowerment and participation in the decision-making process through the political Panchayats. The report did not suggest that if the government made provisions for the Panchayats to generate their own funds then such dependency on political parties at the helm would not have arisen.

The mainstream newspapers of my survey somewhat followed the agenda set by the political parties instead of framing an independent agenda. The recurring news reports on the political bickering within the ruling coalition and the repeated allegations of the opposition against the ruling party were the only issues for public consumption. The objective of the West Bengal Panchayat system was to hasten the process of local development, motivate grass-root participation in the local administration and achieve political and social empowerment for the rural poor and marginalized sections in the villages. The newspapers as responsible mass media showed no inclination to highlight the issues of development, participation and empowerment. The political parties were interested in the votes of the grassroots and
thereafter their subjugation to the political system and political agenda of the victorious political party/parties. The mass media (sample newspapers) followed their agenda rather than crusading for grass-root participation in local government and local development. It is not that the newspapers did not give adequate coverage to the Panchayat elections. For example, four news items on Panchayat election related issues was published in The Statesman on 20th February, 1988. But of the four, three repeated the accounts of the Left Front infighting from diverse perspectives.

Many political observers, especially with Leftist inclinations and the Front leaders themselves felt that the news reports persistently harped on the conflict in the Left ranks and the discord within the Left leadership to tarnish the image of the Left parties and the Left government in the public minds. They alleged that the mass media (newspapers et al) conspired with the Congress to end the Left domination of the Panchayats for the last two terms. These sympathizers felt that the objective behind the focus of mainstream newspapers on the friction in the Left coalition was part of their agenda to unsettle the Left government which has had an uninterrupted run for the last 11 years.

We can conclude that whatever the objective behind focusing on the LF bickering, the mass media’s potential with regard to setting constructive public agenda remained largely unutilized in the coverage of the Panchayat elections by the sample newspapers. The sample newspapers communicated the perspectives of powerful political parties, leaders and the government. This was the consequence of over-dependence of these newspapers on these sources (see Table 9.2) easily accessible to the reporters when compared to the unidentified grassroots.

20th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 196 lines)
Headline: Terror? Don’t know but would not fight the Panchayat elections
Reporter / Correspondent

The report published specific allegations of terror against the CPI (M). It reported that in Khanakul block in Hooghly district most gram panchayats held by the Congress in the last tenure was won without contest by the CPI (M) this time. The Congress has already announced its decision to boycott polling in this block as its candidates were forced to withdraw nominations by CPI (M) supporters. The report
said though the chief minister claimed that all allegations of CPI (M) inflicted violence were false propaganda the grassroots lived in the fear of repercussion.

20th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 21 lines)
Headline: Obstacle in the way of election campaign
Primary source: Political parties

This report stated that both the CPI (M) and Congress leveled allegations against each other for hindering campaigning for the ensuing polls. The CPI (M) alleged that Congress leaders were instigating violence while the Congress alleged that the CPI (M) workers were attacking their candidates.

20th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 20 lines)
Headlines: Chances of trouble in 386 booths in Howrah
Primary source: Administration

The report informed that the district administration of Howrah apprehended trouble in about one-third of the booths in the zilla and specified the places where elections can take an ugly turn.

20th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 54 lines)
Headline: Left constituents have given tickets in 10% seats at their will
Reporter / Correspondent

This report informed that in almost 10% of total seats in the three tiers, Front constituents have nominated candidates without caring for the LF principle to either snatch the seat from the other constituents or minimize their chances of win. The report obviously wanted to reflect on the strained relationship between the Front partners.

20th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1column 37 lines)
Headline: Congress manifesto published
Primary source: Political party manifesto

The report informed that the Congress has promised in its election manifesto that if it won the Panchayat election it would utilize all Central government funds allocated for rural development. It promised if necessary the Congress government at the Centre would increase the funds for this purpose. The party alleged most of the funds allotted for the implementation of the Central government schemes in the rural areas of the state remained unused and development of the rural areas was stagnated. The Congress demanded more power for the gram Panchayats in this term.

20th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (3 columns 108 lines) / Jugantar (2 columns 70 lines)
Headline: Anti-CM actions to be reviewed / Ministers’ conduct to be reviewed: Saroj

Primary source: Political party leader

The reports informed CPI (M) leader Saroj Mukherjee has said that activities of LF ministers who have commented against the chief minister during the campaigning and tarnished the image of the government would be reviewed after the Panchayat election. The report elaborated on the public campaign of the Left Front constituents against each other at various districts of North Bengal. This, the report added, further embittered relations within the Front and damaged Front unity.

20th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 24 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) is attacking its allies too

Primary source: Political party leader

The report said that Congress leader Priya Das Munshi alleged the CPI (M) supporters were attacking workers of other Front partners too. The report said he warned the government that the Central government was contemplating imposing Article 356 due to the law and order problem in the state before the Panchayat elections.

20th February, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 16 lines) and (3 columns 81 lines)
Headline: There may be adjustment in Coochbehar / RSP and FB were hoping for conciliation at the last moment too in Coochbehar
Primary source: Political party leader (s)

The first item reported that there may be understanding between FB and CPI (M) in Coochbehur. The source of this news was CPI (M) leader and Panchayat minister, Binoy Chowdhury. The other news item reported that LF allies RSP and FB had hoped for conciliation but the chief minister’s plea to the voters to vote for CPI (M) only and no other allies have belied their hopes. Basu had also warned the voters that since the partners had not abided by the LF principle, the gram Panchayats where they win would not function efficiently. The report informed that the district leaders of the smaller allies decided to openly campaign against the CPI (M) after Basu’s declaration.

21st February, 1988
The Statesman (2 columns 65 lines)
Headline: Congress (I) workers allege coercion
Primary source: Political party members

The report informed the readers that the state Congress has briefed the Central leadership on the several instances of coercion and intimidation of party workers by the CPI (M) in West Bengal in the run-up to the Panchayat election. The Congress leaders said, the report specified, that in the prevailing fearful situation in rural areas, the democratic rights of the people were bound to be trampled on the Election Day. The report stated Congress leaders demanded re-election in seats where the party’s candidates could not submit nominations because of ‘threats’ by the CPI (M) workers and the ruling party candidates were elected unopposed.

21st February, 1988
The Statesman (1 column 37 lines) / Jugantar (2 columns 36 lines)
Headline: RSP embarrassed at minister’s tirade / CPI (M) wants to annihilate allies
Primary source: Political parties and their members

The Statesman report highlighted the ‘reconciliatory’ statement of RSP spokesperson against the previous day’s verbal attack by Debabrata Bandopadhyay branding the CPI (M) a fascist party. The spokesperson clarified that the minister intended to say that only a section of the CPI (M) sought to muffle the voices of other Left partners in a fascist manner.
Whatever the implications of the statement to the Left Front partners, the political exchanges related to this controversy had little relevance to the Panchayat election process or to the grass-root voters yet it found repeated mention in the sample newspapers.

The Jugantar report quoted RSP leader Tridib Chowdhury that CPI (M) planned to eliminate the smaller partners wherever they had a strong foothold and under such circumstances it was difficult to resolve the LF crisis. The report said Chowdhury opined that disagreement over nomination was nothing new to the Front but never was there an attempt to annihilate the smaller parties.

21st February, 1988
The Statesman (3 columns 213 lines)
Headline: Future of Front unity in Barasat bleak
Reporter / Correspondent
The report highlighted the bleak prospect of Front unity in the North 24 Parganas district. The news vividly described the infighting between the CPI (M) on the one hand and the RSP and FB on the other regarding the allotment of seats. The news report stated that the CPI (M) made a futile effort to bring unity among the Front partners at the village level for collective movement at the district level. The detailed description of the strife within the coalition and the charges and counter charges were no different from those found in the previous reports.

21st February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 39 lines)
Headline: Basu silent against allies in election rally in Malda
Primary source: Political party leader
The news item reported the change in stance of Jyoti Basu. In an election meeting at Malda he remained silent on the issue of discord within the Left Front. As the report pointed out he trained his guns on the opposition Congress and its leader Das Munshi instead.

21st February, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 23 lines)
Headline: Is infighting among Left partners on the decline?
The next news item speculated that the bickering between LF partners may have reduced due to the call for harmony in the LF meeting. But the details in this report contradicted the possibility. The report noted that the CPI (M) mouthpiece Ganashakti continued its tirade against the other partners.

21st February, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 50 lines)
Headline: Ashok Sen Starts campaigning
Primary source: Political party leader

The report covered the election meeting of Congress leader and Union minister Ashok Sen who questioned the utilization of funds in the Panchayat areas as the overall development in these areas has remained stagnated. The report pointed out Sen admitted that not only the Left, his own party was also plagued by internal squabbles.

21st February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 31 lines)
Headline: Report incidents of terror directly to Buta
Primary source: Political party leader

The report elaborated on a press meeting by the state Congress secretary where he informed that all incidents of violence by the CPI (M) during panchayat elections can be directly reported to the Union Home minister Buta Singh who has instituted a special cell for the purpose. He commented the law and order scenario in this state is such that without central forces the election will be a farce.

21st February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 147 lines) / (2 columns 110 lines)
Headline: Congress happy with conflict between Left Front partners at Basirhat / CPI (M) relatively at ease in Nadia
Reporters / Correspondents

The reports described the political scenario in Bashirhat in North 24 Parganas and Nadia district respectively. A significant feature of the Panchayat polls in Bashirhat was the presence of several independent candidates, many of whom were members of the smaller Left parties and stood in the election failing to secure
nominations. The Congress refrained from fielding candidates in these seats to help these defiant candidates against the CPI (M).

The CPI (M) had a good opportunity in Nadia, according to the other report. The internal struggle within the LF was irrelevant to the big partner in the district. The reporter remarked that it was injudicious to speculate on the election results but the campaigning by various political parties in this district confirmed that CPI (M) had an edge over the others.

21st February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 54 lines)
Headline: Congress has deliberately fielded fewer candidates this time
Primary source: Political party leader

The report quoted LF chairman Saroj Mukherjee that Congress has fielded fewer candidates this time to capitalize on the discord of the Left Front. The report said Mukherjee was of the opinion that the statements and method of campaigning of some of the Front leaders would benefit the Congress.

21st February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 60 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)'s inner squabble would affect vote result in North 24 parganas
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that the intra-party squabble within the CPI (M) in the North 24 Parganas would affect the voting pattern in the district. The suspension of some local CPI (M) leaders has created a stir among the party workers and supporters in this district. The report, however said the district leadership of the ruling party denied there was any such suspension order.

21st February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 140 lines)
Headline: Congress to take advantage of conflict in LF? Little chance with a poor organization
Reporter / Correspondent

The report opined the expectation that Congress would fare well due to the dissidence in the LF rank would be belied shortly due to the weak organization of the
party. The report said ‘some Front partners expressed doubt over the existence of the opposition party in the state’ seeing Congress’ nonchalance.

21st February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 103 lines)
Headline: No opposition or excitement over panchayat vote in Bhangar
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed in the Bhangar block in South 24 Parganas there was no activity related to campaigning as there was little or no opposition in the elections there. The report indicated there was fear among the opposition members as CPI (M) has won over many seats uncontested.

22nd February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 112 lines)
Headline: Terror? CPI (M) forced to withdraw candidate from Binpur
Reporter / Correspondent

The item reported there was a reversal of fortune for the ruling party in the Binpur area. While there were several reports of CPI (M) inflicted terror and violence which forced candidates of other parties to withdraw nominations, in this block the terror created by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha has forced several CPI (M) candidates to back out from the forthcoming election.

22nd February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 34 lines)
Headline: FB wants CRPF posting at Coochbehar
Reporter / Correspondent

The report said FB has asked the government to deploy Central police forces in Coochbehar to ensure peaceful polling. The party alleged that the CPI (M) was planning to create tension in the district to prevent the voters from exercising their rights. The report stated amidst all the fear, apprehension and allegation, the election campaign reached a fever pitch in the last week before polling. The report also stated that political leaders of all hues were busy with campaigning. There were meetings, processions and rallies throughout the state. The villages were covered with banners, festoons, flags and posters of various political parties and their candidates.
22nd February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 46 lines)
Headline: Left Front exists and will survive: Jyoti Basu
Primary source: Political party leader

The report covered an election rally of Jyoti Basu where he emphasized that irrespective of the tension in the coalition, the Left Front will survive. The report said he urged people to vote for the CPI (M) as the party was experienced in efficiently running the Panchayats.

22nd February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 42 lines)
Headline: Skeletons of Left unity left in Burdwan
Reporter / Correspondent

The news item reported the election scenario in the Burdwan district. The confrontation between the Left partners reached a tumultuous level. The allegations were similar to what was reported in the other districts. The CPI (M) blamed the FB for straying from the Front principles and the official candidate list while the FB blamed the CPI (M) for its overbearing attitude. The political contest, acrimony and accusations dominated the report.

22nd February, 1988
The Statesman (2 columns 52 lines) / Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 26 lines) / Jugantar (2 columns 28 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 64 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) must stop slander campaign, says Ashok Ghosh / CPI (M) won’t be able to wipe out FB / CPI (M) taking others for granted / Jyoti Basu lying, repeats Ashok Ghosh
Primary source: Political party leader

The news items reported a blistering attack by FB leader Ashok Ghosh against the ‘arrogant’ attitude of the CPI (M) in an election rally. The reports said he slammed both the chief minister as well as the Left Front chairman for initiating a slander campaign against his party and blamed them for the crack in Left unity. In the elaborate reports the FB leader also alleged that the police were protecting the interests of the CPI (M) workers.

According to the Amrita Bazaar Patrika Ghosh said that the CPI (M) would not be able to wipe out FB from the state as it was there out of political necessity of
the people and not for its own gains. The Jugantar and Anandabazar Patrika also reported these statements of FB leader Ashok Ghosh.

The repetitive statements of the political leaders find mention in the sample newspapers again and again. Similar statements made by Ashok Ghosh were reported by these same newspapers on the 17th and 18th February. Political leaders are bound to repeat themselves during election campaigning to emphasize their points but the mass media should evaluate whether the statements hold significance for the potential audience to guarantee such repetition.

22nd February, 1988
The Statesman (4 columns 180 lines)
Headline: Politics hangs heavy in rural areas of South 24 Parganas
Reporter / Correspondent
The news described the pre-election scenario in the South 24 Parganas district. The report vividly depicted the political background in this district. It indicated the CPI (M) will maintain its dominant position in all the three tiers of the Panchayat. This was predicted by the reporter seeing the number of seats the party had already won uncontested in the district. The report quoted local CPI (M) leaders who emphasized that the success of the party in the Panchayat elections was the result of fielding rural poor and lower middle class as Panchayat candidates. The report attributed the supremacy of the ruling party in this district to its role in land struggle. The report informed that the Congress may boycott the elections because of the terror unleashed by the CPI (M). Then there was the usual elaboration on the Left Front squabble involving the CPI (M) and RSP in this case.

22nd February, 1988
The Statesman (1 column 12 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 24 lines)
Headline: Poll clashes continue / Pre-poll clashes in West Dinajpur
Reporter / Correspondent
The news items reported pre-poll clashes between Congress and CPI (M) supporters. The Anandabazar Patrika report informed about a series of pre-poll clashes between the CPI (M) and RSP supporters in West Dinajpur district.
22nd February, 1988
The Statesman (1 column 29 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 29 lines)
Headline: Priya to complain to Buta / Meeting between Priya and Buta on the issue of terror before elections
Primary source: Political party leader

Both reports repeated Congress leader Priya Das Munshi's decision to apprise the Central leadership and the Union Home minister about the continued violence and terror in the villages of the state. The reports said Das Munshi reiterated his demand for the imposition of President's rule. In the Anandabazar Patrika report Das Munshi was quoted as saying that the chief minister himself was instigating terror and violence through his speeches in the election rallies.

23rd February, 1988
The Statesman (4 columns 56 lines)
Headline: Congress (I) hatching new conspiracy
Primary source: Political party leader

The report said that the Left Front chairman has alleged that the tales of violence and terror published in the mainstream newspapers were fabricated and was part of the conspiracy by the Congress to create tension and chaos in the rural areas before the Panchayat elections. The news also informed that intermittent clashes between the Left Front partners were reported from various districts.

23rd February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 140 lines)
Headline: Terror? In Keshpur Congress has almost given walkover to CPI (M)
Reporter / Correspondent

The report referred to the situation in Keshpur block in the Midnapore district where a Congress zilla parishad candidate had to withdraw nomination after threats from the local CPI (M) leaders and workers. The report mentioned that the candidate was forced to abandon his house and village too. The report commented that the Congress was forced to withdraw candidates from about 300 seats in the three tiers of the Panchayats in the district. The Congress supporters alleged that from the day of declaration of the election the CPI (M) inflicted violence continued unabated. They reported intimidation, social boycott, burning of houses and looting of property as
well as murder which prompted the Congress candidates to back off and give the CPI (M) candidates walk over in many seats.

23rd February, 1988
The Statesman (1 column 15 lines)
Headline: Congress (I) candidate murdered
Reporter / Correspondent
It reported the murder of a Congress supporter in a clash with the CPI (M) supporters during campaigning for the Panchayat polls.

23rd February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 40 lines)
Headline: Congress trying to create tension: Saroj
Primary source: Political party leader
The report quoted Saroj Mukherjee that the Congress intended to spread terror in the state before the election with the help of a section of the bureaucrats.

23rd February
The Statesman (4 columns 120 lines)
Headline: Secret Congress (I) - Jharkhand Mukti Morcha pact in Midnapore
Reporter / Correspondent
The report described the poll scenario in the Midnapore district. The report revealed there was a secret electoral pact between the Congress and the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha. It informed that the Congress did not field any candidate for the Panchayat elections in the Jhargram block in favor of the Morcha candidates. The correspondent interrogated the local Congress leaders on the matter who denied such an occurrence and claimed that Congress has fielded candidates in at least half the gram Panchayat seats in the district. The reporter showed data that contradicted this claim. The report said the JMM was not a registered party in West Bengal and so its candidates have filed nominations as independents. The report informed the voters about the dubious nature of political parties whether it was a clandestine understanding or disguised affiliation. The correspondent also mentioned the squabble in the Left Front ranks in this district.
There was no endeavor to explore the development works undertaken by the Panchayat bodies or the qualitative participation by the grassroots.

23rd February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (3 columns 72 lines)
Headline: CPI (M), Congress weak in Jharkhand bastion
Reporter / Correspondent

The report described the election scenario in Jhargram and the adjoining tribal areas. The reporter informed that the contest was between the CPI (M) and the alliance of the JMM and CPI (ML), a naxal outfit. The alliance had already won 21 gram Panchayats and 2 Panchayat samitis uncontested. The CPI (M) and the Congress, the two main political outfits in West Bengal failed to put up candidates in these seats. The report specified that in the campaigning the alliance matched the strength of the ruling CPI (M).

23rd February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 36 lines) / Jugantar ((2 columns 42 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) men beat up RSP worker / 3 RSP leaders beaten up by CPI (M)
Reporter / Correspondent

The news informed about a clash between RSP and CPI (M) workers in South 24 Parganas and injury sustained by 3 RSP workers. The report commented that despite the intermittent violence between the supporters of various LF parties and the public accusation by the leaders of the various LF constituents against each other, the Front leaders made no attempt to dissolve the tension before the polls. In the Jugantar report on the same subject, the RSP alleged that its workers were assaulted by the CPI (M) supporters which the CPI (M) denied.

The Statesman referred to this attack in its 25th February edition. In that report the CPI (M) leader Saroj Mukherjee termed the attack ‘regretful’ and stressed on a united Front to avoid such incidents.

23rd February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 30 lines)
Headline: State Congress to chalk out Union Minister Pranab Mukherjee’s campaign plans
Chapter 9

Reporter / Correspondent

The report gave details of the campaign schedule of Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee.

23rd February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 36 lines)
Headline: Time to wipe out CPI (M)
Primary source: Political party leader

The item reported that Congress leader Gani Khan Chowdhury in an election rally announced 15000 Congress supporters were killed during the 10 years of LF reign and called upon the Congress workers to take up guns to counter CPI (M) attack.

23rd February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 33 lines)
Headline: Clash between partners on Election Day may induce trouble in LF
Reporter / Correspondent

The news report warned about the dangers of clashes between the Front partners on the day of election. The report stated that if the elections were peaceful then post elections the Front partners may not engage in any controversy but if the police and administration supported the CPI (M) inflicted violence and terror then the FB may think anew and though the RSP did not specify what it would do it said it would not leave the Front unless asked by the CPI (M).

23rd February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 189 lines)
Headline: Congress would put up keen fight in Contai and Tamluk blocks of Midnapore
Reporter / Correspondent

The report covered the election campaigning in the Midnapore district. The report informed that in the Contai and Tamluk blocks the Congress had a strong presence and the contest would be tough. In the tribal dominated Jhargram block several naxal parties were set to participate in the election war. The reporter observed that the Congress was unorganized in its campaigning compared to the CPI (M).
report described how the state and district leaders of the Left parties vigorously campaigned in this district.

23rd February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 150 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)-FB contest in Goghat and Dhaniakhali blocks of Hooghly
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reflected the electoral scenario in the Hooghly district. In many seats the CPI (M) and FB were involved in direct contest and the Front partners openly campaigned against each other. The report said the Left parties asked voters to vote for their respective candidates and not for the LF nominated candidate.

23rd February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 54 lines)
Headline: Corruption Allegation against CPI (M) panchayat by two of its own leaders
Primary source: Political party members

The news reported that two veteran CPI (M) leaders of Howrah alleged corruption and nepotism in the Panchayat bodies run by the party. The report informed that they have complained to the district CPI (M) secretary along with relevant evidence. The reporter met the district leadership who said that the allegations leveled by these leaders were false.

23rd February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 37 lines)
Headline: Union Home Minister would visit violence affected areas in the states
Primary source: Political party leader

The report quoted the West Bengal Congress President that the Union Home minister would himself visit the state if there were reports of violence on the Election Day. He opined that the political situation in the state was such that if paramilitary forces were not deployed in all booths it would be impossible to conduct a peaceful and fair election. He added this was not only the Congress' opinion but also that of the smaller Left constituents. He referred to the comments of FB minister Kamal Guha (as reported in the Anandabazar Patrika on the 23rd February itself and discussed in the following news item) that the CPI (M) planned to rig the elections.
Das Munshi categorically said that in the present political scenario in the state there is bound to be mockery in the name of elections but he added that if the elections were free and fair the rural electorate would surely shun the ruling party.

23rd February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 144 lines)
Headline: I dare CPI (M) to throw me out of Front: Kamal Guha
Primary source: Political party leader

The report quoted FB leader Kamal Guha that the CPI (M) planned to capture booths and rig the elections just like it did in 1983. He urged voters to arrive at the booths early on the polling day to thwart the malpractices of the CPI (M). The report said the statements of leader indicated that the differences between the Front partners were loud and clear.

The sample newspapers undoubtedly wanted to emphasize on the contradiction and controversy and create sensational content to keep alive the interest of the readers.

24th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 68 lines) / Amrita Bazaar Patrika (3 columns 87 lines)
Headline: Terror! Basanti observes Bandh to protest assault on 3 RSP leaders / CPI (M) attack: Protest bandh at Basanti
Reporter / Correspondent

The intensity of the differences between the Left partners was emphasized in the reports. They said RSP supporters observed bandh against 'CPI (M) atrocity' in some areas of South 24 Parganas. The party alleged that the CPI (M) supporters were terrorizing voters. The report said local CPI (M) leaders, however, termed these allegations as false and confusing. The reports also included the comments of Jyoti Basu that differences over seat sharing was common in the last Panchayat polls too but that did not create any difficulty for Left Front unity after the polls. He hoped this time too it would not be any different.

24th February, 1988
The Statesman (4 columns 92 lines) / Jugantar (2 columns 49 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 51 lines)
Headline: Left Front not to break up: Biman Bose / Debabrata have no right to comment on Panchayats: Biman / “Panchayats failed”, was an unwanted comment from Debabrata Bandopadhyay: Biman

Primary source: Political party leader

The above reports carried the statements made by CPI (M) leader Biman Bose. He declared that Left Front would not break up at the instigation of vested interests or due to political differences in the Panchayat election. In the reports Bose condemned Debabrata Bandopadhyay, a RSP minister in the Front government. The report specified that Bandopadhyay had said earlier in an election rally that he was removed from the Panchayat ministry as he had announced investigations into the corrupted Panchayats. Bose countered that the Panchayats had done phenomenal work in rural development during the Left Front rule and a former minister of the department should have refrained from such irresponsible comment as his party was also part of this Panchayat process. The reports concluded with the comment of Bose that the bitterness among Left allies with regard to the Panchayat elections would soon be over.

24th February, 1988

The Statesman (3 columns 57 lines)

Headline: Zilla parishads corrupt: Janata Dal

Primary source: Political party / political party spokesperson

The news reported the criticism of Janata Dal spokesperson against the two main political parties in West Bengal for failing to raise the issues which have hindered the proper functioning of the Panchayats in West Bengal. He complained that these political parties have re-nominated zilla parishad members who had controlled the Panchayats with political and personal intention in the last term. The report was, however, restricted to the comments by the spokesperson and did not investigate the charges levied by him that affected Panchayats and defied the purpose of Panchayat formation through election.

24th February, 1988

The Statesman (5 columns 285 lines)

Headline: Fear is the key in Hooghly
The report referred to intimidation and boycott by the CPI (M) against its adversaries. The correspondent observed that this district was an example of how muscle power dominated rural politics. The report supported the accusations levied by the West Bengal Congress President in the earlier reports that many candidates of his party failed to file nominations for the fear of social ostracism and open threats to them and consequently many CPI (M) candidates were elected unopposed to the gram Panchayat seats. The correspondent specified that the CPI (M) was successful in ensuring the support of the agricultural laborers because of the power wielded by the CPI (M) panchayat bodies over the implementation of developmental programs. The report gave a detailed picture of the divided house of the Hooghly Left Front that included the intense bickering between CPI (M) and FB. The report pointed out blame and counter blame for the stalemate in seat adjustment continued to dog the Left Front. The FB leaders blamed the big brotherly attitude of the CPI (M) for the rift while the CPI (M) blamed the FB for unrealistic claims of seats.

24th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 9 lines)
Headline: Congress would benefit: Buddha
Primary source: Political party leader
The report highlighted the comments of the state information and cultural affairs minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya. He said FB’s opposition of the CPI (M) will harm the political interest of the Left Front and strengthen the Congress. He said that competition amongst the partners would ruin the electoral chances of the Front.

24th February, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 56 lines)
Headline: 23 people killed in the Panchayat battle in the past one month
Reporter / Correspondent
The news reported the murder of 23 people in the past one month before the Panchayat election due to political conflict. The report said unofficial reports claimed more lives were lost on this account. The most obvious reason for this loss, according to the newspaper, was fighting amongst the supporters of the Left partners. The report added that the rhetoric of the state level leaders aggravated the tension.
24th February, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 29 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 55 lines)
Headline: Split in Left Front imminent: Pranab
Primary source: Political party leader

The news items highlighted the statements made by Union Finance minister Pranab Mukherjee at different election rallies. He insisted that the Left alliance would soon split because of the overbearing attitude of CPI (M). He requested people to vote fearlessly to save democratic institutions.

24th February, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 41 lines)
Headline: Priya warns Police
Primary source: Political party leader

This news item covered the election rally of another Congress leader Priya Das Munshi who spoke along the same line as Mukherjee. He advised the police force to remain impartial.

24th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 117 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) urges people in Barasat to not vote for the ‘Congress-lion’
Primary source: Political parties

The report gave a detailed description of infighting among the Front partners in the Barasat block. The CPI (M) accused the FB of collaborating with the Congress. The FB, on the other hand, accused the CPI (M) of attempting to capture the Panchayats by spreading terror and through false campaigning against it.

24th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 195 lines)
Headline: Several Congress candidates failed to acquire the party symbol
Primary source: Political parties’ members

The news item described the election scenario in the South 24 Parganas district where several Congress candidates failed to secure the party symbol and were forced to support the independent candidates. The report said the district witnessed fervent campaigning by the CPI (M) through posters and graffiti. The Congress
supporters said they were intimidated by the CPI (M) workers and feared rigging. The CPI (M) claimed the Congress was maligning its candidates on the personal level instead of campaigning politically. The enthusiasm and fervent participation of the political parties in the campaigning was evident from the press reporting. But there was no indication about the response and interest of the grassroots in this report.

24th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 93 lines)
Headline: 53 crores granted towards relief and teachers’ salary before Panchayat vote
Reporter / Correspondent
The news item reported that the state government ‘inappropriately’ granted relief worth Rs. 20 crores and pay hike to state government teachers and non-teaching staff just five days before the Panchayat elections.

25th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 20 lines)
Headline: Left Front leaders meet
Primary source: Political party leader
The news item informed about a meeting of the LF leaders to dissolve the crisis emanating from the lack of seat adjustment, prevent inter-party clashes among supporters and verbal attacks on each other. The meeting, the reporter concluded, was not successful as the convener did not place an appeal before the party leaders to stop the tirade. He instead appealed to the people to maintain peace during the election and foil the attempt of the Congress to create disturbances and blame the Left for the same.

25th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 62 lines)
Headline: 3 Naxalite factions pact on Panchayat polls
Reporter / Correspondent
The news item reported the formation of an unofficial alliance by three revolutionary factions for contesting the Panchayat election. The report informed though the alliance did not field a common candidate, it ensured that there was only one candidate from the 3 parties contesting for a single seat. The report informed that
these parties have also held district level talks with the RSP, FB and the CPI (M) for post-poll pact. The report commented this poll alliance could be a significant landmark in the socio-political scenario of West Bengal as these were nonconformist outfits and their participation in the mainstream political and social set-up would involve the participation of several grass-root members too.

25th February, 1988
The Statesman (6 columns 192 lines)
Headline: Both Left Front and Congress (I) divided in Bankura
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported the poll scenario in the Bankura district. The correspondent commented that decentralization of political power does not find prominence in the electoral campaign in this district and the focus was on the power struggle within the Left Front and the conflict in the Congress. It is not clear whether this was the view of the grassroots or the correspondent’s own observation. In the latter case the correspondent degraded the importance of grass-root participation in the Panchayat process and focused on the interests, objectives and grievances of the political parties. The correspondent remarked that the Panchayat election was crucial for the smaller Front partners FB and RSP as it would decide whether the LF was synonymous with the CPI (M) or it actually represented the collective Left forces. The news report included the opinions of the LF partners on the causes of disunity in the Left ranks in this district though the CPI (M) leadership’s view was not taken into account. The FB alleged attacks by the CPI (M) on its workers though it dismissed Congress’ allegation that candidates of opposition parties failed to file nominations for the CPI (M)’s attack. The elaborate report then described the divided house of the district Congress and the uncontested wins by CPI (M) in gram Panchayat and Panchayat samiti seats.

As discussed in the preceding paragraphs, political parties were out to achieve their electoral objectives and mainstream newspapers adopted their agenda.

25th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 33 lines)
Headline: Why was there no election to the Panchayats during the Congress reign: Basu
Primary source: Political party leader

The news item covered another election meeting of the chief minister where he asked people not to vote for the reactionary Congress party.

25th February, 1988

Jugantar (1 column 30 lines)

Headline: Clashes growing in Siliguri

Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that the administration was anxious about increased political clashes between supporters of the two main parties in the areas around Siliguri before the Panchayat election. The Congress and the CPI (M) blamed each other for unleashing a reign of terror. The CPI (M) said the Congress was spreading terror in frustration of its impending defeat while the Congress said that the CPI (M) was threatening its workers and terrorizing voters to rig and win the elections.

25th February, 1988

Jugantar (3 columns 84 lines)

Headline: Congress is banking on the conflict between Front partners in Burdwan

Reporter / Correspondent

The news item depicted the election scenario in Burdwan. The report informed there were rumors of CPI (M) sponsored terror throughout the district but the police remained a silent spectator. The Congress hoped that the Left infighting would help them win some seats but some supporters pointed out that the disorganized, leaderless party had little chance. The report said the conflict between the two main allies, FB and CPI (M) showed no signs of dying. The state level leaders of both parties addressed a joint rally in the district but the gram Panchayat members were defiant. The report was informed about intra-party squabble within the CPI (M).

25th February, 1988

Jugantar (3 columns 159 lines)

Headline: CPI (M) was not so keen during the Assembly elections

Reporter / Correspondent

The news item reported the election scenario in Coochbehar district. The report emphasized how the CPI (M) and the FB was campaigning separately for the
election and the Congress was trying to capitalize on this difference. The news described the squabble between the local units of Left Front partners and their stance in the forthcoming election in detail.

25th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 10 lines)
Headline: Congress MLA attacked
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed a Congress member of the Assembly was attacked by CPI (M) supporters while addressing an election rally. A few Congress workers were also injured in the incident.

25th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 23 lines)
Headline: This time the conflict is less: Saroj
Primary source: Political party leader

This report said Saroj Mukherjee has remarked that poll related violence was much less this time barring a few small incidents and held Congress responsible for those incidents. He asked voters and Left supporters to remain careful and upstage any effort to create trouble in the state.

26th February, 1988
The Statesman (3 columns 117 lines)
Headline: When Congress (I) leaders forgot their differences
Reporter / Correspondent

The news item discussed about the improved electoral prospects of a cohesive and resurrected Congress party. The report mentioned that the 1988 Panchayat election will be remembered on two accounts – for the worsening relation between the LF partners and the near absenteeism of factionalism within the Congress. The Congress leaders, the report said, admitted that the strained relations within the LF had effectively helped them stage a comeback from the earlier state of inactivity. The Congress leaders also claimed that the hostility in the Front has left many of its supporters confused and they were able to convince these supporters through vigorous campaigning.
26th February, 1988
The Statesman (6 columns 168 lines) / Anandabazar (1 column 40 lines)
Headline: Congress (I) prospects brighter in Howrah / Congress cannot enter the villages in Howrah
Reporters / Correspondents

The Statesman report covered the campaigning in the Howrah district. The correspondent noted that meetings, processions, door-to-door campaigns, charges and counter charges marked the Panchayat election preparations in this district. The correspondent predicted a keen electoral battle between the Congress and two important Front constituents – CPI (M) and FB but the infighting between the Front constituents overshadowed the poll battle. The report emphasized the CPI (M) was determined to maintain its supremacy in the district and the FB would attempt to undermine that effort. The report informed there was direct confrontation between the Front partners in almost half the gram Panchayat seats in this district. The correspondent concluded the Congress could gain from this disunity. The report also commented that in Uluberia II block, a predominantly industrial area, the CPI (M) was unfavorably placed according to the locals.

The Anandabazar Patrika report informed Congress supporters cannot enter many villages in the Howrah district due to the violence inflicted by the CPI (M) supporters. The district administration was quoted no specific complaint was lodged by the Congress in this regard. The CPI (M) local leadership said that before every election the Congress raised the specter of terror but in reality they create terror and blame the CPI (M) for it.

26th February, 1988
The Statesman (2 columns 60 lines) / Jugantar (2 columns 32 lines)
Headline: President's rule likely: Das Munshi / CPI (M)'s pretense is exposed
Primary source: Political party leader

The news quoted Priya Das Munshi that President's rule was imminent in West Bengal. He held the Left Front responsible for this predicament. He blamed the CPI (M) for politicizing the police force and said that incidents like desisting candidates of opposition parties from filing nominations did not happen during the Congress regime. The Congress President lauded the FB and RSP for speaking out against manipulation in elections by the CPI (M).

The Jugantar report said the Congress President requested voters to cast their ballot without fear. He was quoted the Left Front did not exist as the chief minister
was campaigning for the CPI (M) and several Front ministers openly expressed their no confidence on him.

It was clear that the participation of grassroots in the Panchayats or in the development process was not the primary concern of the sample newspapers. The political parties sought to consolidate their vote bank through the Panchayat election and the newspapers disregarded their social responsibility as watchdog of democratic rights and advocate of public participation in the political and social process and communicated information provided by select sources - political parties, their leaders and the administrative authorities. The information thus provided was partial and thereby inadequate as it was controlled by the few and filtered by the messengers as well as the media channels.

It is true that mainstream mass media face some obstacles which are discussed in Chapter 5 of this study. Perhaps there is a need for a community media, owned and managed by the community members, whose content would be based on the interaction with the grass-root members rather than posting the perspectives of the socially and politically privileged. The top-down dissemination mode of the sample newspapers found little use in the process of mobilizing grass-root participation and ensuring grass-root empowerment.

26th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 54 lines)
Headline: Front will do well: Basu
Primary source: Political party leader

The news conveyed the hope of the chief minister that the LF would do well in the Panchayat elections despite infighting among the partners. Again the aspirations and opinions of a political leader find news space in a report.

26th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 32 lines)
Headline: Reign of terror by CPI (M)
Reporter / Correspondent

The news informed that the CPI (M) was intimidating and killing Congress workers in Nadia and continued its 'reign of terror' in the Howrah district. Though these type of reports were usually based on the allegations of rival political parties and
their leaders, this time no source was quoted and it was not clear whether the allegations were imposed by the newspaper and if so what was the validation of such a claim.

26th February, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 23 lines)
Headline: Terror everywhere: Ashok Sen
Primary source: Political party leader

The news item highlighted the apprehensions of Congress leader Ashok Sen that the shadow of terror may loom large on the polling day. He asked the state government to make adequate police arrangements for peaceful election.

26th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 72 lines)
Headline: Congress-Jharkhand party in a pact: Basu
Primary source: Political party leader

The news reported that the chief minister in an election meeting criticized the Congress for aligning with the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM). (This comment of Basu reappeared many times in the coverage by sample newspapers.) The report said Basu alleged in this meeting that JMM’s objective was to alienate the tribal population from the mainstream society. Basu stated that the aim of his party was social and economic independence of the tribal people.

26th February, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 24 lines)
Headline: Gorkha Front taking part in Congress campaign
Primary source: Political party members

The item informed that the local CPI (M) leaders of the Dooars region in North Bengal alleged that Gorkha Front, a separatist outfit in Darjeeling was campaigning for the Congress and there was tacit understanding between the two regarding seat sharing.
Headline: Congress candidate fled for his life
Reporter / Correspondent
The news referred to the case of the Congress candidate in Canning Block I Panchayat samiti who fled after filing his nomination due to intimidation by CPI (M) workers. The report suggested that not only opposition candidates but even common voters leveled charges of terror against the CPI (M) and doubted the conduct of free and fair elections. The reporter did not quote any grass-root member but wrote that many voters feared the worst on the polling day and indicated that without adequate security arrangements the election would be a sham.

26th February, 1988
Jugantar (4 columns 116 lines)
Headline: FB fighting the elections in Murshidabad keeping in mind the defeat of Chaya Ghosh
Reporter / Correspondent
The news reported the pre-election campaigning in the Murshidabad district. The report specified that LF constituents were fighting each other in this district to maintain their individual entity and decide their future course of action. The report mentioned that too much excitement of political party supporters sometimes led to clashes among them. It said that the Congress party also suffered from internal strife in this district. The CPI (M) claimed that the Congress and the FB has struck an alliance. The reporter concluded that no political party was in a position to form the zilla parishad single handedly.

26th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 171 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) slogan, ‘Expose the traitors; Congress’ slogan, ‘Come and devour them lion (the symbol of FB)
Reporter / Correspondent
The report focused on the various forms of campaigning like songs and rhymes and on the catchy slogans coined by political parties to draw the attention of the voters and project the relevant issues of the election.
Headline: Detective Department Report

Primary source: Administration

The source of this report was referred to as the state detective department. This report specified that though initially the Congress gave a walk over, after its win in the Tripura Assembly elections, Congress leaders and supporters have jumped into the election fray with renewed strength and vigor. The report predicted that the outcome of this Panchayat election could be better for the Congress. It observed that the allegations of violence and terror by the Congress and smaller Front constituents were mostly baseless. Congress could not nominate candidates in several seats because of the organizational weakness of the party. The report concluded there was no reason to fear violence during the elections.

26th February, 1988

Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 68 lines)

Headline: Congress may gain few more seats: Jyoti Basu

Primary source: Political party leader

The chief minister was quoted by this report that the Congress could win more seats this time due to the deviation by RSP and FB. He hoped, however, that the differences within the Front would be ironed out after the elections. He urged the polling personnel to maintain honesty and integrity during the polling.

26th February, 1988

Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 108 lines)

Headline: CPI (M) has put up dummy candidates with different symbols in Basanti

Reporter / Correspondent

The report gave a picture of the pre-electoral scenario in the various blocks of South 24 Parganas district. The focus of the report was on the rivalry between the Left constituents. The RSP alleged that the CPI (M) had put up dummy candidates against the official nominations of the LF. These dummy candidates stood in the election as independents but they were supported by the CPI (M) as evident from the posters and writings on the wall. The CPI (M) retorted to these allegations levied by the RSP and said it was false and baseless and the result of loss of control over the people. The report or analysis of the pre-election scenario was bereft of any substantial
information on the participation of the common people or the benefits and efficacy of the Panchayat system. The only focus of the pre-election coverage was to reflect the political tension, struggle and equation related to the pursuit of power and control over the local bodies.

27th February, 1988

The reports of the English dailies carried the chief minister's appeal to the people to maintain peace during the Panchayat election. He warned of stern action against miscreants who disrupted polling. He claimed that the performances of the Panchayats in West Bengal had been exceptional and pointed out that decentralization of power has not been so successful in the Congress ruled states.

The Jugantar report said the chief minister appealed for peaceful elections and did not comment on the Left allies. He pointed out that people from various professions – farmers, industrial laborers, and teachers gained political experience from the Panchayats and the alternatively the Panchayats were also enriched by the inputs from these people. The report said he criticized the Congress and said it was not interested in Panchayats and therefore held no elections to the local bodies for a long period.

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Primary source: Political party leader

The reports published apprehensions of the West Bengal Congress President regarding rigging in the Panchayat polls. He claimed that ballot papers for the polls had reached the Block officers well before the stipulated time. He warned the government of dire consequences in the event of failure to ensure a free and fair poll.

The Jugantar report said Das Munshi alleged that government employees would be involved in the rigging procedure. In The Statesman report Das Munshi strongly criticized the chief minister for failing to investigate the allegation that several candidates were prevented from filing nominations while several others were forced to withdraw their nominations due to ‘red terror’.

The Amrita Bazaar Patrika report added Das Munshi has submitted a list containing description of incidents in which his party’s candidates were intimidated during campaigning to the Congress leadership at the Centre and the chief minister. Das Munshi claimed that some Left constituents corroborated his allegations of terror and violence and voiced their apprehensions of rigging and booth capturing during the election.

In the Anandabazar Patrika report Munshi warned that the West Bengal CPI (M) would face a fate like Tripura CPI (M) if the reign of terror continued unabated. Das Munshi advised the police to maintain an independent stance. The newspapers repeatedly published the allegations of Das Munshi but never carried out an independent probe on the affected Congress workers and candidates.

27th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (4 columns 132 lines)
Headline: Left Front infighting wounds may not heal soon
Reporter / Correspondent

The news focused on the ‘unprecedented’ animosity between the LF partners including their failure to hold a joint election rally before the Panchayat elections. The report informed that with two days remaining for the election, the state leaders have stopped issuing statements against each other but local leaders continued to be at loggerheads with each other. The main resentment of the FB and RSP was that the chief minister has openly called for the defeat of their party candidates along with those of the Congress in seats where the CPI (M) has fielded a candidate. The report
added that though the Congress failed to field candidates in 10% of seats, the party was more systematic in contesting the elections this time.

27th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 62 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) inflicted terror on the rise
Reporter / Correspondent

The news emphasized the increase in CPI (M) inflicted terror with the approach of the election. The report did not attribute the observations to any source but it made serious allegations against the ruling party like other political parties were barred by the ruling party from campaigning and voters were threatened with dire consequences if they cast their votes in favor of the opposition parties. If the observations of the sample newspapers on the atrocities and highhandedness of the ruling party was true it was not substantiated by data or examples by visit to the affected areas or interaction with the people affected by these acts. The accusations and allegations against the ruling party published by the sample newspapers therefore read like propaganda.

27th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 105 lines)
Headline: Jalpaiguri: Everyone is confused
Reporter / Correspondent

The news item was a description of the pre-poll scenario in the Jalpaiguri district. The report stated that people were confused and annoyed with the Left infighting and public exchanges of invectives by the Left leaders. The report said even in such circumstances the Congress would not fare well as the CPI (M) planned to rig the elections according to the Congress workers as well as other Left allies. The report specified that voters had no confidence in the administration because of bitter experiences in the past.

27th February, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 156 lines)
Headline: Bankura: Bhuteshwar village is the center of conflict in the district
Primary source: Grass-root members

The news item discussed the pre-election scenario in one of the villages in Bankura district. This is one of the rare instances when sample newspapers actually focused on the political scenario in a gram Panchayat before the Panchayat election instead of concentrating on the blocks or the district as a whole. The report included the local issues and local sentiments besides information on the local contest.

27th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 128 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)'s weapon “success”, Congress’ “terror”

Reporter / Correspondent

The report reviewed the overall situation in the state a day before the Panchayat election. The report informed the readers that about 2.63 crore voters in 15 districts (barring Darjeeling) would decide the fate of approximately 62000 candidates (though 5000 amongst them had already won uncontested) in the forthcoming Panchayat elections. The report remarked that this time the internal strife within the Left Front have added to the excitement of the election. The report commented that the Congress was much more organized this time and factionalism within the party was not apparent. The focal point of CPI (M)'s campaign was the successful functioning of the Panchayats while that of the Congress was corruption charges against the CPI (M) controlled Panchayats and their functionaries as well as charge of terror and violence during campaigning.

27th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 139 lines)
Headline: Do not vote for the party which wants President’s rule: Basu

Primary source: Political party leader

The report repeated the chief minister’s plea to the voters to ignore Congress which wanted President’s rule in the state. He said that the government would not tolerate any aberration in the conduct of peaceful elections or during counting. According to the report he stated that LF has always believed in value-based politics and would not give it up for anything.

27th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 14 lines)
Headline: Meeting cancelled at gun point
Reporter / Correspondent
The news reported that a FB candidate had to cancel an election meeting in Malda due to intimidation by the CPI (M) workers.

28th February, 1988
The Statesman (2 columns 74 lines)
Headline: Poll results to be a pointer
Reporter / Correspondent
The report predicted the results of the three-tier Panchayat elections would greatly influence the future of West Bengal politics particularly Left politics. The article commented that since the most notable feature of this election has been the internecine squabble in the Left Front, the poll interest is concentrated on the performances of the LF constituents. The article asserted this Panchayat poll was critical for the CPI (M) as it would decide whether it is able to hold on to its political supremacy in rural Bengal by retaining and enlarging its power base. The outcome of the Panchayat polls was more crucial for the party as it encountered open hostilities from its allies, the FB and the RSP. This article elaborated on the political implications of the Panchayat election to the ruling party.

28th February, 1988
The Statesman (2 columns 80 lines)
Headline: 7 poll murders in West Bengal
Reporter / Correspondent
This news item reported the death of 7 people during campaigning due to clashes between political parties at various parts of the state. The report also informed that 148 people were injured in poll related rivalry.

28th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 74 lines)
Headline: News of intermittent violence and conflict even on the day before elections
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed that there were reports of skirmishes between political party supporters from various districts even on the day before the election. The report
informed that 11 people were killed in pre-election clashes and the total number of violent incidents was 67. The report said Congress was of the opinion that the CPI (M) knew that if polling was fair and peaceful it would lose the election and therefore resorted to violence before the elections. The CPI (M) retorted that the Congress was instigating people to divert attention from the main issues of the Panchayat election and claimed that pre-election violence was much less this time.

28th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 82 lines)
Headline: Free and fair elections impossible in Murshidabad: Debabrata
Primary source: Political party / leaders

This report projected the apprehensions of the various political leaders and parties regarding fair and peaceful elections in the mentioned district. RSP leader and minister in the LF government, Debabrata Bandopadhyay feared that peaceful elections was impossible in Murshidabad as the CPI (M) had plans to disrupt the poll proceedings. The report further informed that the bickering amongst the Left allies has reached a fever pitch here. The FB alleged that many of its supporters have fled their homes and could not participate in the elections. The Congress supported the accusations of the RSP minister and the FB, but the CPI (M) denied it. The administration, the report informed, has taken adequate measures to ensure independent elections in the district.

28th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 64 lines)
Headline: 300 polling centres in Coochbehar sensitive
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that there was tension in Coochbehar district due to the terror and intimidation by CPI (M) supporters. The report informed that Congress has alleged that people were allured with relief materials by CPI (M) to secure votes. The report also informed that about one-fourth of the booths in this district were identified as sensitive by the district administration.
Headline: Conflict between Left partners over terror before the poll day
Reporter / Correspondent

The report observed that the atmosphere in the state before the elections was charged up due to the blame game of the Front constituents over violence in the panchayat elections. This report also informed that after the winding up campaigning the Congress leaders were certain that the party would increase its tally this time.

28th February, 1988

Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 66 lines) / Jugantar (1 column 47 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 44 lines) The Statesman (3 columns 144 lines)

Headline: Priya dig at Left Front / 'Can this ministry run smoothly?' Priya to ask Governor / Comments of three ministers likely to create 'political problem' / Basu to meet Governor following Priya's complain
Primary source: Political party leader

The reports informed readers that the West Bengal Congress President would meet the Governor to apprise him about the political situation before the panchayat elections. The Congress leader would complain to the Governor that three members of Basu's cabinet had made public accusations against him and declared that the ruling party would indulge in terror and rig the Panchayat election with the help of a section of the police force. He said a constitutional crisis has evolved as the council of ministers failed to maintain a uniform stand. Das Munshi also reported two specific irregularities concerning the ballot papers to be used in the Panchayat polls.

The Anandabazar Patrika report stated Basu admitted that the comments of the three ministers would create 'political problem'. The Statesman said Basu will meet the Governor and apprise him of the political situation in the state.

28th February, 1988

Amrita Bazaar Patrika (3 columns 215 lines)

Headline: Peace prevails prior to Panchayat poll
Reporter / Correspondent

The report stated that the rural areas of West Bengal were relatively peaceful before the Panchayat polls. It gave details of the administrative preparations for the election as well as details of candidates elected unopposed to the three tiers of the Panchayats. The item also reported details like the total number of candidates contesting in each of the three tiers, the number of candidates contesting for the
various political parties as well as number of independent candidates etc. The report concluded that a clear demarcation between the CPI (M) on one side and the Congress and other Front constituents on the other emerged from the month-long campaign in the state.

28th February, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 17 lines)
Headline: Panchayat poll boycott call
Primary source: Political outfit

The report stated that though several naxal outfits were contesting the Panchayat elections, one influential naxal party has called for the boycott of polls. This outfit viewed Panchayats as powerless structures, dependent on the bureaucracy. The report specified that the outfit acknowledged that a large section of the rural population pinned their hopes on elected Panchayats.

28th February, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 21 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 27 lines)
Headline: Biman Bose travelling to North Bengal with ballot papers: Subrata Mukherjee / Allegation of duplicate ballots travelling to districts
Primary source: Political party leader

The reports echoed the Congress allegation that CPI (M) leader Biman Bose has carried duplicate ballot papers to North Bengal before polling. The party warned polling officials if ballot was cast in these false papers then its workers would resist the attempt.

28th February, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 38 lines)
Headline: Priya visits villages in Hooghly a day before elections.
Reporter / Correspondent

The news informed that the Congress President visited Hooghly a day before the elections. The CPI (M) leaders protested his visit a day before polling.

28th February, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 7 lines)
Headline: Saroj Mukherjee hopes there wouldn’t be any untoward incident
Primary source: Political party leader

The news item reported that Left chairman Saroj Mukherjee hoped that the Panchayat election would be free and fair. He requested the public to cooperate in the electoral process.

28th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 40 lines)
Headline: 2 Forward Bloc workers injured in Barasat
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that in a village in Barasat, North 24 Parganas district, two FB supporters were injured in an attack by the CPI (M). That report commented that such attacks on FB supporters were common throughout the North 24 Parganas district. The report briefed about the atrocities on the FB workers, the attack on FB candidates and campaign against them by the CPI (M). The report did not refer to any other source in this news item.

28th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika / Jugantar (2 columns 24 lines)
Headline: An overview of Panchayat elections / Counting to start after polling; precaution everywhere
Reporter / Correspondent

The news items gave a general overview on the Panchayat election in the state. The reports included details like the poll timings, the total number of polling booths, the total number of voters in the three tiers of the Panchayats and the number of security personnel employed. The reports also included details like total number of seats in each of the tiers and the number of candidates nominated by the various political parties and also the number of candidates elected unopposed from various political parties. The concerned reports also informed that counting would begin for the gram Panchayat seats immediately after polling and the results would be available from late night.

28th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 53 lines)
Headline: Poll results from tonight
The news explained the counting procedure and the method to be followed in declaration of results of the different tiers.

The coverage by the sample newspapers on the day after the election (29th February) was in-depth and exhaustive but they mostly included messages and opinions of the political parties and their leaders.

29th February, 1988

Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 65 lines) / The Statesman (3 columns 186 lines) / Jugantar (2 columns 64 lines)

Headline: Basu claims there was no rigging or violence during the elections (i) / Early gains for CPI (M) in Panchayat poll (ii) / Rural people have given a fitting reply to all threats: Basu (iii)

Primary source: Political party leader in case of news items (i) and (iii)

Reporters / Correspondents in case of news item (ii)

The Anandabazar Patrika report said the chief minister congratulated the voters for peaceful conduct during election. He said that the Congress ministers at the Centre had accused and warned the Front government many times during campaigning but the people gave a fitting reply to the accusations. He commented that the charges of terror and electoral malpractice by the opposition have been proved wrong. The report said Basu commented that clashes before the Panchayat elections were much less this time than in 1983.

The Statesman report also contained the reactions of Basu similar to those already mentioned.

The Jugantar report said Basu congratulated the rural people for upholding the reputation of the state in spite of the insinuations of Congress ministers.

Both Bengali newspapers included the remarks of the CPI (M) leader Biman Bose who said it is proved that the claims of terror and violence on the polling day were figments of imagination.

29th February, 1988

The Statesman (3 columns 186 lines) / Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 31 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 30 lines) / Jugantar (1 column 11 lines)

Headline: Early gains for CPI (M) in Panchayat poll / Left Front congratulates people / Saroj congratulates people / Efforts to create trouble failed: Saroj
Primary source: Political party leader

The reports said the Left Front chairman lauded the people for foiling the attempts of the Congress to create trouble on the Election Day. He requested the people to maintain peace during counting. In the Statesman report the reactions of the other Left constituents like RSP and FB were also projected. While the RSP was satisfied with the polling, the FB cited cases of rigging and violence in various booths that marred peaceful elections.

In the Amrita Bazaar Patrika report the LF leader congratulated the people for peaceful participation despite the provocation by the Congress workers in some areas. The Left chairman alleged that evil designs of the Congress workers to foment trouble were foiled by the huge turnout of the voters. The FB was quoted in this report that large scale participation in the Panchayat polls indicated the growing political consciousness of the rural grassroots.

The Anandabazar Patrika quoted the Left Front chairman that people of the state once again proved that they were capable of peaceful elections.

29th February, 1988

The Statesman (3 columns 108 lines) / Amrita Bazaar Patrika (4 columns 122 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 50 lines) / Jugantar (3 columns 66 lines)

Headline: Booth-capturing and rigging by CPI (M) / Terrorism, rigging by CPI (M) during Panchayat poll / We want re-election in captured booths: Priya Ranjan / Booth-capture, rigging, CPI (M) throttles democracy

Primary source: Political party leader

The news items listed the response of the main opposition Congress. The Statesman report said the Congress alleged massive rigging and booth capturing throughout the state in the Panchayat election. The Congress President was quoted that irrespective of the result it can be concluded that constitutional and democratic rights were flouted on the polling day. He alleged that the police were involved in the odious incidents. He demanded re-election in booths where there were allegations of malpractice within a month or else he warned the Congress would not cooperate in the functioning of the newly elected Panchayats.

This warning of Das Munshi appeared time and again in the sample newspapers. The implication of Das Munshi’s comment was widespread. Panchayats were administrative and development bodies at the village to district level. If political parties compelled their members to distance themselves from this process and
rendered the bodies ineffectual then it would hinder development and people’s participation in the political and social process would be stalled. The sample newspapers did not point out this repercussion following Das Munshi’s warning.

The news report in the Amrita Bazaar Patrika repeated the demands and allegations of the Congress leader published in the other sample newspapers. The report said that the party commented that its analysis of the polling trend revealed 35% turnout till noon and the dramatic increase in polling thereafter was a result of false voting in the latter half.

The reaction of the Congress was also documented in the Anandabazar Patrika where it was alleged that the CPI (M) nominees were declared winners even before the start of counting. The Congress alleged attacks on its polling agents intensified after the start of counting. It warned that it would initiate state-wide agitation for imposition of President’s rule to protest beating of its candidates and booths captured in the Panchayat poll.

The Jugantar report quoted the Congress President that CPI (M) virtually strangled democracy and democratic and constitutional rights of the people.

29th February, 1988

Amrita Bazaar Patrika (4 columns 338 lines) / The Statesman (3 columns 186 lines) Jugantar (1 column 120 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 115 lines)

Headline: 5 killed in firing, clashes, 70% votes cast / Early gains for CPI (M) in Panchayat poll / Trouble in various districts, 5 killed / Clashes, Firing at several places; 2 killed

Reporter / Correspondent

The Amrita Bazaar Patrika informed 5 people died due to election induced violence. There were clashes between the CPI (M) and Congress at various places. 70% votes were cast and polling continued well past the scheduled time at most places. It further informed that counting was suspended in Midnapore district late in the night because of sporadic violence. The report concluded that barring these few incidents polling was fairly peacefully.

The Statesman reported 75% turnout of voters in the 15 districts of the state for the Panchayat election. The report said apprehension of large-scale terror was belied with only isolated incidents of violence between the Congress and CPI (M) supporters. The report said violence claimed three lives while polling was suspended and countermanded in a few booths following clashes between the supporters of the
arch-rivals. The report repeated most of the other matters that have been reported in other reports on that day. The allegation of the Congress President of booth capturing and large scale rigging by the CPI (M), the FB’s allegation that CPI (M) workers intimidated its workers, its fear of manipulation during counting and announcement of results featured in this report too. The report added counting started immediately after the polling and the results have started to pour in. It informed CPI (M) was ahead in the majority gram Panchayats. The results till 3.00 p.m. were displayed.

The Anandabazar Patrika also reported 70% polling and the murder of 2 people in clashes and police firing. The report recorded the reactions of the chief minister and the Congress leader as mentioned in the other reports of that day. A FB minister B. B. Mondal was quoted in this report that the polling was not free and fair and the police and administration did not adopt requisite measure to allow the common people to exercise their franchise. The report, however, observed that the elections were largely peaceful barring a few untoward incidents.

29th February, 1988

The Anandabazar Patrika informed that many FB candidates in Tehatta fled their villages before the election due to the fear of CPI (M) supporters. The FB alleged no male voters stayed back to cast their vote in these troubled villages.

The first news item in the Jugantar reported a similar fate of FB supporters in various areas of North 24 Parganas. These supporters said if they cast their ballot they would have had to flee the village after the vote to avoid backlash from the CPI (M) supporters. The report said voting went on under the vigilant eyes of the police and corroborated the fear of the FB members as it pointed out in most booths women came to vote and the booths wore a deserted look at other places.

The second news item in the Jugantar stated that while FB blamed the CPI (M) for booth capturing and one-sided voting in various areas with the report quoting FB
supporters of Barasat that CPI (M) members prevented them from casting their votes, the RSP leaders were happy with the peaceful conclusion to the panchayat election.

In the second Anandabazar Patrika report the FB supporters of the North 24 Parganas alleged that they were unable to vote out of fear as the CPI (M) had allegedly warned them that their houses would be set ablaze if they set out to vote. The FB supporters alleged that their candidate and his family members fled the village long ago following intimidation by CPI (M) supporters and they were also prevented from campaigning.

29th February, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 124 lines)
Headline: Here CPI (M)'s rivals are independents
Reporter / Correspondent

The news item informed that in the Bhangar block in South 24 Parganas out of 155 gram Panchayat seats, the CPI (M) has already won unopposed in 138 seats. The report said local Congressmen alleged that CPI (M) workers compelled them to withdraw nominations. In the remaining seats the contest was with independents. The newspaper concluded there was no excitement or interest among the voters in this block for the above reason.

The coverage by the Bengali newspapers on the 29th was more extensive and widespread than the English newspapers. The Jugantar and Anandabazar Patrika published approximately 20 separate news items each describing the conduct of Panchayat election and the noteworthy incidents in the various districts.

29th February, 1988 - Jugantar
5 columns 111 lines – Counting on: CPI (M) ahead in gram panchayats
3 columns 87 lines – It's 3.00 p.m. both SP and DM are relaxed
3 columns 48 lines – Vote peaceful, long queues to cast vote after dusk
2 columns 60 lines – Clash in Manickchowk; 2 rounds fired in the air
2 columns 70 lines – Clash in Mangalkote; pitch battle between opponents in front of booth
3 columns 156 lines – Tremendous excitement in Howrah but clashes in Amta, Bagnan, police lath charges and fires bullets
2 columns 22 lines – Trouble in Muhammad Bazaar leads to police firing
2 columns 24 lines – Brawl in Raghunathgunj leads to death
2 columns 30 lines – Congress worker stabbed in North 24 Parganas
Reporters / Correspondents

The news clips in the Jugantar informed that in Midnapore polling was more or less peaceful though the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha abducted a polling officer and took away some ballot papers in Jhargram. There was a clash between the CPI (M) and Congress supporters in front of a booth in Manickchowk block in Malda district though elsewhere in the district polling was peaceful. There was trouble in Mangalkote, Bardwan where 22 people were injured in a clash between the Congress and CPI (M) supporters. The reports said both parties blamed each other for the clash. According to one report polling in Coochbehar was peaceful. Yet another informed there was trouble in Amta and Bagnan blocks in the Howrah district. The police resorted to firing and lathi charge to disperse the miscreants at both places. Both the Congress and CPI (M) complained of rigging against each other but the general atmosphere in the district was festive as voters queued up to cast their ballot. One report said there was trouble in Muhammad Bazaar area of Birbhum and police fired to prevent clashes between warring parties. According to reports polling continued well past midnight at several places. The report from the Murshidabad district was that polling continued in some areas well after 9.00 p.m. There were sporadic incidents of violence in this district and one person died in the violence that ensued between political opponents in Raghunathgunj. The Congress alleged planned attacks were carried out on its workers throughout the district. There was report of an incidence of violence from North 24 Parganas district where a Congress supporter was stabbed. In one report it was mentioned that in Jalpaiguri the scenario was different from the other districts as belying all possibilities of violence the situation was peaceful and under control so much so that the highest administrative officials – the Superintendent of Police (SP) and the District Magistrate (DM) were relaxed and spent a leisurely afternoon. One report said counting was proceeding steadily and the CPI (M) was ahead of its opponents everywhere.

29th February, 1988

Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 54 lines)

Headline: There may be arson and looting in Coochbehar during counting

Reporter / Correspondent

The report stated that in Coochbehar though the election went off peacefully, both the Congress and FB were apprehensive of the situation during counting. They
alleged that the ruling party would manipulate the counting and in the event of an opposition win would resort to violence. The report said CPI (M) when confronted with the charge naturally denied it.

29th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 9 lines)
Headline: Voting continued even at midnight
Reporter / Correspondent
This report informed that in some areas of Nadia and Jalpaiguri voting went on till midnight.

29th February, 1988
The Statesman (4 columns 288 lines)
Headline: FB most vocal critic of CPI (M) in panchayat poll
Primary source: Political parties
The allegations of FB against CPI (M) in the North 24 Parganas district was most pronounced in this report. This report observed that the FB had been the most vocal among the LF partners against the CPI (M) during the campaign. The report quoted district correspondents to establish the above statement. While many Congressmen privately expressed surprise at the peaceful organization of the election and the RSP admitted that voting was more or less peaceful, FB leaders leveled charges of rigging and intimidation by CPI (M) supporters. The report informed the North 24 Parganas district FB leaders considered the election a mockery of democratic rights as none of their polling agents were allowed inside the booths and voters was forced to stamp on the CPI (M) symbol. They openly voiced their apprehension that the CPI (M) may tamper with the counting process. The FB leaders of Coochbehar shared this apprehension. The FB supporters of the Hooghly district also alleged intimidation by CPI (M) supporters and unfair practices during polling.

The report commented that complicated voting process was responsible for slow polling. The opposition parties and LF partners, however, alleged that the voting procedure was deliberately slowed down by the polling officers to discourage voters.

29th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 174 lines)
Headline: ‘Why are we not able to cast our ballot standing in the queue for hours?’

Primary source: Panchayat voters

The report depicted the slow polling in a booth in the South 24 Parganas, its implications and reactions of the voters in the queue. The voters were angry that even after the stipulated polling time there were several hundred voters in front of the booth. The report mentioned that only one-fourth of the registered voters in this booth were able to cast their ballot within the stipulated time. The report mentioned that the local CPI (M) leaders were observed near the booth intimidating the people and asking them to refrain from voting.

29th February, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 88 lines)

Headline: Fear of malpractice during counting

Primary source: Political parties’ representatives

The report repeated the apprehensions of the RSP and FB that there would be malpractice during counting. In this report it was informed that CPI (M) alleged booth capturing by RSP and Congress which the two parties promptly denied.

29th February, 1988
The Statesman (1 column 31 lines) / Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 104 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 44 lines) and (3 columns 110 lines)

Headline: Basu denies crisis / Basu may drop three ministers / Political crisis likely at the comments of the three ministers: Basu / Crisis in Front to deepen at Basu’s comment

Primary source: Political party leader

The reports said the chief minister admitted that the public statements by three ministers belonging to the LF partners RSP and FB were against the political system and an example of political hara-kiri. He informed reporters that he would ask an explanation from the concerned ministers and also raise the issue with their party leaders. But he refused to admit that a constitutional crisis was caused by the statements of these ministers as claimed by the state Congress President. The chief minister commented that since there was no unity on seat adjustment among the LF constituents in the Panchayat election, there were bound to be differences but state ministers should have refrained from making wild allegations of rigging, booth
capturing against the CPI (M) during campaigning. The Anandabazar Patrika report quoted him that the public assertions of the ministers led to a 'political crisis'.

The second report in the Anandabazar Patrika speculated that the crisis in the LF deepened due to the comments of Basu. The report stated the CPI (M) leadership felt that the chief minister gave an opportunity to the concerned ministers to either back out from the statements or withdraw them. The report added the two Front partners – RSP and FB - were reluctant to do so as they felt whatever comments the concerned ministers made were part of the political campaigning during the elections. The report concluded that the resolution of this issue depended on the results of the Panchayat elections.

The Amrita Bazaar Patrika informed that the chief minister was considering dropping the three ministers who issued public statements against him in newspapers accusing him of social fascism and against the CPI (M) that it was preparing to rig the elections if they failed to issue formal denials. The same report hinted that the defiant FB ministers could be removed by the chief minister as his party was unhappy about the comments made by them. Though this issue was not related to the proceedings on the Election Day, it featured prominently in the sample dailies.

We find that the sample newspapers mostly reflected the reactions of the contesting political parties and their leaders on the conduct of the Panchayat elections or on other issues. As during the campaigning, the events on the Election Day were also witnessed from the perspective of the political parties and their leaders instead of the grassroots who would be directly affected by the outcome of the election. The sample newspapers rarely ventured into the rural interiors to document and record the reactions and views of the grassroots or relay the voting procedure in the Panchayat areas barring one or two reports like the Anandabazar Patrika report on the slow polling in a booth in the South 24 Parganas and the atmosphere outside that booth. The disposition of the sample newspapers in the West Bengal Panchayat election was quite akin to that discussed in the Westley-Maclean model\(^1\) – they gave coverage to the social advocates (the political parties and their leaders) who wanted to reach a wider audience (the electorate). The messages disseminated by them were mostly generated by these society leaders and had little intention of persuading, motivating or even educating the potential audience. If the objective was to involve the grassroots in

\(^1\) The Westley-MacLean model along with modifications and relevance to the present study is discussed elaborately in Chapter 5
the process of development and motivate them to participate in the election process, the communication by the sample newspapers was inadequate. The sample newspapers did not give priority to grass-root interest.

The sample reports of Statesman were not available after this period.

1st March, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 89 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) racing towards landslide victory
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported that the CPI (M) headed towards a massive victory in the Panchayat election while the main opposition Congress was about to lose Malda - the sole zilla parishad under its control in the last Panchayat election. The report stated that the political observers in Bengal did not expect CPI (M) to do so well amidst antagonism from its own partners.

1st March, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 28 lines) and (2 columns 50 lines)
Headline: Three ministers: Basu to talk to them before taking action / ‘They did not say anything against the chief minister’
Primary source: Political party leader

The first news item speculated on the future of the three Front ministers who gave public statements against the chief minister and the CPI (M). The report stated that there was a debate among different circles whether these ministers had the right to continue. The chief minister said he would take a decision after talking with the respective ministers.

The other report published the viewpoint of FB leader Ashok Ghosh on this issue. He denied that FB ministers had said anything against the chief minister or his government. He said there was no scope of political crisis but admitted that the public spat between the CPI (M) and FB had damaged the image of the Front. He hoped that post election the differences would be resolved.

1st March, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 134 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 126 lines) and (2 columns 78 lines) The Statesman (2 columns 76 lines)
Headline: Clashes post election; several accusations / Ballot box looted, trouble, 4 people killed in 2 days / Three ballot boxes snatched after beating up polling officers / Cong (I) councilor hurt in attack

Reporter / Correspondent

In these reports there were details on the skirmishes in various districts after the polling. At many places there were clashes between the CPI (M) and Congress supporters during counting.

The Anandabazar Patrika informed that 4 people were killed in trouble related to polling in the last 2 days. There were several incidents of ballot box looting especially in North Bengal as soon as counting began and police had to restore to firing in three such incidents to prevent the loot. The second item in the Anandabazar informed how a polling officer was beaten and ballot papers forcibly taken away in Amta in Howrah. The Jugantar and Statesman also gave the news of ballot box and ballot paper looting. The Statesman reported that a Congress councilor of Howrah municipality was attacked by CPI (M) supporters. The Statesman report referred to attacks by CPI (M) and Congress members on each other at various places throughout the state.

1st March, 1988

The Statesman (2 columns 116 lines)

Headline: Marxists way ahead in Coochbehar

Primary source: Political party leader

The report stated that CPI (M) and FB have improved their tally from the last panchayat election at the expense of Congress. The report described the areas of dominance of the Left Front allies and quoted CPI (M) leader Shiben Chowdhury that though the CPI (M) was heading for an absolute majority in the zilla parishad it stands for the unity of Left democratic forces. The report added the FB leaders however, claimed that many of their workers have been driven out while the Congress alleged manipulation by CPI (M) in the ballot boxes for its poor results. The report also included news about polling in Murshidabad. The report said though the CPI (M) continued its winning spree there were several complaints of it terrorizing the voters and other party supporters. FB leader and minister in the state cabinet Chaya Ghosh complained that the election was not free and fair and CPI (M) was responsible for such an event. The report said she alleged CPI (M) used infiltrators from Bangladesh to rig the polls and appointed presiding officers owing allegiance to the party to
manipulate proceedings inside the booth. The report added Mannan Hossain, Congress MLA from Murshidabad also leveled similar charges. The report observed CPI (M)'s performance in the election have eclipsed their previous performances, the RSP's position has remained the same, the FB's have improved while the Congress' has declined.

1st March, 1988  
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 64 lines) The Statesman (2 columns 58 lines)  
Headline: Attacks on victorious Congress candidates: Sattar / Rape of democracy says Sattar  
Primary source: Political party leader  
The report quoted Congress leader Abdul Sattar that victorious Congress candidates were being attacked by CPI (M) workers at various districts in the state. He informed that many such candidates had fled their homes and alleged some were abducted by CPI (M) goons like in Baruipur, South 24 Parganas.

The Statesman report said Sattar alleged the panchayat election was the "rape of democracy." The report said he was of the opinion that the Congress could not do well due to the widespread terror of CPI (M). The report said he alleged after the declaration of results in a number of places victorious candidates were threatened with dire consequences if they do not resign like Deota in South 24 Parganas. The report stated Congress leaders from Howrah and Hooghly also alleged similar threats. Sattar said in Murshidabad the party could not put up a good show as it was threatened by guns and 2 supporters were murdered there. The same report quoted Congress leader Saugata Roy that the party has hold on its ground in traditional bases like Malda and West Dinajpur.

1st March, 1988  
Jugantar (1 column 38 lines)  
Headline: CPI (M) set to win Malda zilla parishad  
Reporter / Correspondent  
The news item informed the CPI (M) is about to wrestle the Malda zilla parishad seat from the Congress which was the only zilla parishad headed by the Congress party.
1st March, 1988  
Jugantar (1 column 31 lines)  
Headline: Buta coming to see terror affected areas  
Primary source: Political party leader

The news item informed that the Union Home minister is scheduled to visit the Panchayat areas that reported incidents of terror and malpractice. The source of this news was the state Congress President who added that the people did not get an opportunity to express their preference in this election and the CPI (M) win was the contribution of the police force and the CPI (M) henchmen rather than that of the electorate. He warned the state government would be in trouble if the enquiry of the Home minister revealed any irregularity.

1st March, 1988  
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 122 lines) / The Statesman (3 columns 111 lines)  
Headline: CPI (M) heads for a landslide victory / CPI (M) the big gainer in Front's winning spree  
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reports elaborately discussed the panchayat poll results and its implications. It repeated the statement of the Jugantar that CPI (M) was set for a landslide victory in all the 15 districts while the Congress would be a distant second. The newspaper remarked that in absence of Left Front unity the spectacular win of the CPI (M) would establish its dominant position within the Front and also silence the Congress.

The Statesman report said that the Congress’ result was ‘distressing’ and CPI (M) have held on to their numero uno position in the state winning 9000 new panchayat seats while the RSP and FB have also not fared badly. The report elaborated on the state-wide results from the various districts and the CPI (M) standing at these places. The report also added that though incidents of clashes between the political opponents were not much there were several incidents of ballot box and ballot paper snatching. It reported rise in death toll from 4 to 5 in the pre-poll violence.
Headline: 2/3rd declared results in favor of the ruling party
Reporter / Correspondent

This was another analysis of the outcome of the elections. The report mentioned that the CPI (M) has occupied about two-thirds of the declared seats and fared better than the last time but the RSP has also fared better than in 1983 and the results of the other Left constituents showed that they were not far behind. The report commented that the CPI (M) despite doing well was concerned that the smaller constituents had also done well despite the Left infighting. The report observed this will have a significant impact on politics in the state. The Congress, according to this report, also fared relatively better than the last time.

The sample newspapers attached a lot of importance to the results of the elections. The Panchayat election was significant as an electoral war between the recognized political parties of the state. The representation of the sample newspapers led to the belief that the Panchayat election was an institution to ascertain the power of political parties in the rural areas, to consolidate the rural electoral base of such parties for success in the Assembly and Parliamentary elections and to keep control over the development projects in the rural areas. The prospect of grass-root empowerment and grass-root control over development planning and implementation appeared to be a distant dream from the account of the sample newspapers of my survey.

2nd March, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 62 lines)
Headline: A spectacular victory
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that the ruling party maintained the victory trend into the third day of counting. It said its win was especially remarkable at the zilla parishad level. The report discussed the implications of the 'spectacular victory' of CPI (M) in the Panchayat polls. The report referred to the magnitude of the win by referring to the data that for every gram Panchayat seat won by the Congress, the second largest party in the fray, the CPI (M) the managed to secure three. The report informed that this winning spree of the CPI (M) continued in the Panchayat samiti and zilla parishad level as well. The report observed that the CPI (M)'s impressive performance had to be evaluated against the backdrop of internal squabble within the LF and the
continuous tirade against it by Front partners, FB and RSP. These observations were also mentioned in the result analysis of the Jugantar and Anandabazar Patrika on the 1st and 2nd March respectively.

The Amrita Bazaar Patrika report further stated that recently in two other Indian states, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka ruling parties did not fare well in the local elections; the Panchayat election result in West Bengal has been an exception. The report included the newspapers' observation regarding the allegation of the Congress that the elections were largely rigged. It recommended enquiry into such allegation and at the same time stated that the complaints of manipulations by the winning side after every election have become integral to electoral politics in India. This, the newspaper remarked, disturbed the people's faith in the election process and the democratic system. The report observed (which contradicted its earlier comments on the 19th February and several times before and after) that the 'speculations regarding the crack in Left Front after the Panchayat elections due to the overbearing attitude of CPI (M) was unwarranted'. The newspaper was of the opinion that politics in West Bengal was polarized to such an extent that the smaller parties had to align themselves with one of the two bigger parties [Congress or CPI (M)] or face political oblivion. The report said that RSP and FB needed the CPI (M) to survive as much as the CPI (M) needs them to maintain its dominant status and as they are ideologically different from the Congress it is not an alternative for them.

In such a polarized political scenario, grass-root empowerment outside the domain of political parties or independent of the political parties seems impossible. The dominance of political parties and their leaders in the coverage of the Panchayat elections by the sample newspapers can be traced to this reality. The media content is dependent on the socio-political structure. The report concluded that the political purpose and necessity of Left Front is known to all the allies. So even before the outcome of the Panchayat polls, the conciliatory overtures are being heard in the corridors of power.

2nd March, 1988

Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 58 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 99 lines) / Jugantar (2 columns 64 lines) / The Statesman (2 columns 128 lines)

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This relates to the concept of materialism discussed by K. E. Rosengren (See Chapter 5).
Headline: Basu wants Left Front unity strengthened / Front constituents must strive for unity: Basu / Want to consolidate Left Front: Basu / Front needs to overcome bitterness: Basu

Primary source: Political party leader

In this news the chief minister emphasized that Left front unity was necessary for the proper functioning of the newly formed Panchayats. The reporter, however, doubted the possibility of Front unity as there was discord over nomination to 6000 seats in the just concluded Panchayat polls. The chief minister claimed that people had voted for the Left on account of the work done in the Panchayat areas in the past two tenures. He also appealed to the Congress Panchayat members to cooperate with his government to strengthen the Panchayats in the state. This news was also published in the Anandabazar Patrika on the same day.

The reports said the chief minister called upon the Left constituents to forget differences and work towards the goal of a successful Panchayati raj. He said panchayat programs to be carried out in a concrete manner. The reports said Basu said there was no intimation to candidates willing to file nominations prior to the election as claimed by the Congress.

2nd March, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 48 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 30 lines)

Headline: Congress leadership made a mistake / Congress leadership responsible for defeat: Sen

Primary source: Political party leader

The reports conveyed the remarks of Congress leader Ashok Sen blaming the state Congress leadership for the debacle in the Panchayat election. He was of the opinion that rigging took place at some places but was not rampant.

This report highlighted the internal squabble in the Congress.

2nd March, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 23 lines)

Headline: CPI (M) impact increases, Congress’ decreases

Reporter / Correspondent

The news informed that the CPI (M) has advanced 34% over last year’s result while the Congress’s result has deteriorated. The CPI (M) has already occupied about 80% gram Panchayat seats.
2nd March, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 72 lines)
Headline: There wouldn’t be queues if there was rigging and terror: Biman Bose
Primary source: Political party leader

In this news item CPI (M) leader Biman Bose nullified the claims of malpractice leveled by the Congress. He said the fact that voting continued well after the scheduled time proved that the people wholeheartedly participated in the election process. He also opined that post election the Left partners would unite and there was no chance of break-up. He said that if the Left fought united then the Congress’ seats would have reduced further. He, like the chief minister, attributed the success of the CPI (M) to the work done by the Panchayats in the interest of the rural people.

2nd March, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 98 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) successful in Malda
Reporter / Correspondent

The report investigated the reasons for the defeat of Congress in the Malda zilla parishad. The main reason identified was the lack of organization and public relation on the part of Congress.

2nd March, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 62 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 111 lines)
Headline: Terror, rigging was part of the election: Kamal Guha / Efforts to unite Front partners but Kamal Guha unrelenting
Primary source: Political party leader

The reports informed that FB leader Kamal Guha has claimed that rigging and violence in Coochbehar on the Election Day was rampant. He claimed that many FB supporters had taken refuge in the party offices owing to violence. He said the election was reduced to farce as the CPI (M) secured votes by coercion and the police remained inactive during such incidents. He warned if this was the CPI (M)’s method of securing power then the Congress would soon make a comeback. The discord in Kamal Guha’s speech appeared prominently in Anandabazar Patrika too.

2nd March, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 85 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) happy, Congress alleges rigging  
Primary source: Political parties and their leaders

The report informed that the CPI (M) was content with the results of the third Panchayat elections in the state. The party however, resented the campaigning against it by its two allies FB and RSP to increase their organizational strength in the rural areas. The report informed that the Congress leadership at the Centre alleged ‘exceptional’ rigging in the West Bengal Panchayat election. A Congress leader said that the Congress knew its fate even before the results were declared as there were rampant malpractices during the elections. The Congress, the leader added, participated in the election process to remain faithful to parliamentary democracy. The report started he said the only political gain for Congress from this election was that it revealed the truth about the Left coalition to the people of Bengal.

2nd March, 1988 / 3rd March, 1988  
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 25 lines), (1 column 18 lines), (2 columns 82 lines)

Headline: 30 people injured in a clash in Midnapore / Break-in, loot at FB office / Terrorized villagers have taken refuge in FB’s office at Barasat  
Reporter / Correspondent

The first report informed about 30 people were injured in Midnapore in a clash between CPI (M) and Congress supporters while the second report said that FB alleged its party offices in Barasat were ransacked by CPI (M) supporters. The report informed the trouble started when the CPI (M) took out victory processions in the area.

Anandabazar Patrika again referred to reports of threats and violence against the FB supporters by the CPI (M) in Barasat on the 3rd March. The report elaborated that candidates, their families and supporters of FB were forced to flee their villages and take refuge in party office. The report observed that most of the post-poll problem was between the CPI (M) and the FB.

2nd March, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 34 lines)

Headline: No excitement in Birbhum villages post election  
Primary source: Grass-root voters

The news item pointed out that voting in Birbhum concluded peacefully but there was no excitement or interest in the results. The voters were mostly nonchalant.
This was an indication that the Panchayat election was another voting exercise for the grassroots while it was one big opportunity for the political parties to exert influence and participate in the power play.

2nd March, 1988

Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 122 lines)

Headline: After effects of Panchayat election (Editorial)

The editorial commented that the Panchayat election pointed to two specific outcomes – one expected and the other unexpected. The expected outcome was the domination by the ruling party and the unexpected outcome was the crack in the Left Front. The editorial opined that how far the crack will widen depended on the approach and attitude of the ruling party. The editorial inadvertently accepted that the importance of the Panchayat election was overshadowed by other issues like confirming the steadfastness of the Left coalition. The objectives of grass-root participation and empowerment were lost in the wilderness. The editorial then discussed the issue which affected Left unity most - public accusations by three ministers of the RSP and the FB against the CPI (M) for perpetrating rigging and violence during elections. The editorial also commented on the position of the Congress in the West Bengal politics as well as that of the Front partners who were emerging as powerful forces outside the domain of the Front. The editorial commented the political doldrums surrounding the Panchayat elections was far from over even after the electioneering process.

2nd March, 1988

The Statesman (2 columns 102 lines)

Headline: “CPI (M) forcing recount, grabbing seats”

Primary source: Political party / leader

The report stated the West Bengal Pradesh Congress (I) Committee has alleged manipulations during counting by the ruling party. The report quoted PCC (I) spokesman that “following the polls the CPI (M) has been on the rampage in the villages, burning houses and driving out supporters and candidates.” The spokesperson Pankaj Banerjee recounted a large of seats were being grabbed after ‘forcible recounting’. He said the Congress would win fewer seats in the upper tiers as the agents cannot enter the counting centres. The report summarized the instances of
manipulation as summarized by the Congress leader. The report also included his allegations of violence on Congress workers post election.

3rd March, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (3 columns 54 lines)
Headline: Re-counting in the presence of Magistrates urged
Primary source: Political party

The news item highlighted the demand of the Congress that recounting be done in the presence of a judicial magistrate as in many places after results were announced in favor of the Congress candidate recounting reverted the result in favor of the CPI (M) candidate. The party alleged that during recounting the polling agents of the Congress candidate were driven out and ballots in favor of the party were double stamped and made invalid to secure the win of the CPI (M) candidate. The newspaper report did not probe deeper into such grave allegations of infringement upon the democratic rights of the people.

3rd March, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 36 lines) / Jugantar (3 columns 99 lines)
Headline: Conscience vote in Murshidabad / Strength of CPI (M) and RSP increased in Murshidabad
Reporters / Correspondents

The newspapers continued their analysis of polling trends. The Amrita Bazaar Patrika report analyzed the mandate in the Murshidabad district where it attributed the win of the Left Front candidates to the ‘consciousness of the voters’.

The Jugantar indicated that the support of the people to the Left coalition in the Murshidabad despite the bickering of the leaders was based on the advice of the chief minister to vote for either the CPI (M) candidate or in its absence support the officially nominated Front partners. The report informed the tally of CPI (M) and RSP increased in this district.

3rd March, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 44 lines)
Headline: LF captures 73% seats
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that of the gram Panchayat seats declared so far 73% was captured by the Left Front against 23% by the Congress. This, the report said, proved
that infighting among the Left partners did not influence the outcome of the Panchayat election this time like in 1983.

3rd March, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 47 lines)
Headline: Priya doesn’t know a battle cannot be won singlehandedly: Somen Mitra
Primary source: Political party leader
The item highlighted the internal strife in the Congress party following the Panchayat elections. Congress leader Somen Mitra blamed the Congress President for the debacle and demanded the break-up of the existing block and district Committees. He opined that the Congress lacked organizational capability and so could not put up candidates in about 16000 seats. The internal strife in the Congress was reported on the 2nd March through the comments of Ashok Sen.

3rd March, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 40 lines)
Headline: Priya claims that in actual figures Congress’s seat has increased
Primary source: Political party leader
The report reiterated Congress President’s allegations that the panchayat election was a farce and the results were maneuvered by the CPI (M) men. He claimed that the Congress win in the Panchayats this time with reference to number of seats won was more than that of 1983. The Congress President was quoted that the party could not nominate candidates in many seats and were forced to withdraw in some due to ‘red terror’.

3rd March, 1988
Jugantar (2 column 65 lines)
Headline: Attempt on to release a joint statement
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed that the Left Front constituents have decided to issue a joint statement to the public thanking them for their support in the Panchayat elections. The report commented that differences between the Front constituents were about to dissipate following increase in seats of all constituents in the recently concluded Panchayat election.
3rd March, 1988
Jugantar (1 column 65 lines)
Headline: The spectacular success of the Left Front (Editorial)
   The editorial commented that the CPI (M) proved that it was an indomitable political strength in West Bengal. It also proved that chief minister Jyoti Basu was the undisputable Left Front leader in the state and the people had confidence in his leadership as his party dominated the Panchayat election for the third consecutive time. The editorial commented that the main political forces considered the Panchayat election as a platform for increasing their organizational strength before the general elections. The editorial termed this result as spectacular for the Left Front as it was difficult to maintain this landslide majority after staying in power for over 10 years. The editorial discussed the various instances which could have turned out as impediments to the Left victory including their internal squabble and public disagreement. It also pointed out the Congress was unable to capitalize on the differences in the Left Front due to its weak organization at the grass-root level. The editorial stated CPI (M) showed the smaller partners their right place in the alliance and the future of the FB and RSP ministers who berated the CPI (M) and the chief minister was uncertain. The editorial concluded that the smaller Left parties would not abandon the coalition as their future outside the Front was uncertain. The Congress, the editorial commented, raved and ranted about the CPI (M) sponsored terror and rigging from the beginning but now after the one-sided result it remained to be seen how far its allegations would be taken into account. The editorial analyzed the impact of the statements made by the Congress President during campaigning. The concluding remark of the editorial was significant “the Panchayat system has helped the CPI (M) to develop a strong organizational set-up at the grass-root level which translated into electoral success.”

3rd March, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 26 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)’s seat count increased by 10000
Reporter / Correspondent
   The report said the CPI (M)’s tally has increased by 10,000 and the RSP and FB’s count has also increased while that of the Congress has reduced.
5th March, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 57 lines) and (3 columns 42 lines) The Statesman (2 columns 100 lines)

Headline: Constituents prevent CPI (M) from passing a resolution on “peaceful elections” / Not much progress in ending bickering in the Left Front in Front meeting / CPI (M) and FB-RSP do not agree on unanimous resolution

Primary source: Political parties / spokespersons

The first report informed that Left Front constituents prevented the CPI (M) from passing a resolution in the LF meeting that the Panchayat election was peaceful. The report also informed that the three ministers of FB and RSP who made controversial statements during the campaign were determined not to oblige “big brother.” The report commented this would create a rift within the Front. The concerned ministers and their parties, however, were of the opinion that it would not affect the Left government in any way. The report said the chairman of the LF addressing reporters after this meeting had to admit that there was law and order problem in some panchayat areas and all parties had to work toward restoring peace.

5th March, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 48 lines) and (1 column 36 lines)

Headline: Three ministers refuse to withdraw statements / Did not criticize Government or Basu – RSP, FB

Primary source: Political party

The first item informed that the three concerned ministers were unwilling to withdraw their comments as they were of the opinion that the comments were neither against the chief minister or the government. They said in the electoral battle they have commented against their political opposition, CPI (M) and its leader Jyoti Basu.

It seemed that one important aftermath of the Panchayat election was the controversy surrounding the comments of the three ministers and the reactions in the Left Front to it ranging from the CPI (M)’s demand for withdrawal to the FB and RSP’s refusal to do so. The adamant stance of both sides cast a shadow on the Front. The sample newspapers discussed elaborately on the consequences of this controversy and repeatedly emphasized it would have an adverse impact on the Front despite its impressive show in the Panchayat election. There were about six reports in the Anandabazar Patrika itself on this particular issue between the 3rd and 6th March and
Chapter 9

the content reiterated the statements of the ministers and their implications according to the leaders of FB, RSP, CPI (M) and the Congress.

The relation between the Left partners was a significant topic for the sample newspapers as evident from the above reports and the editorials.

5th March, 1988
Jugantar (4 columns 122 lines)
Headline: More trouble: 3 members of three political parties killed in three districts
Reporter / Correspondent
The news item in the Jugantar on the 5th March reported the murder of three political workers of three different parties in different incidents in the state. This report also informed that violence after the elections have rendered many people homeless.

5th March, 1988
Jugantar (4 columns 132 lines)
Headline: In Midnapore, besides Contai and Tamluk Congress could not put up a fight
Reporter / Correspondent
The report stated that the power and influence of the ruling party has increased and the Congress forced to fight in the absence of a capable leader faced drastic loss in Midnapore district.

5th March, 1988
Jugantar (2 columns 18 lines)
Headline: Need to redo counting: Congress
Primary source: Political party
In this report Congress leaders demanded recounting of all samiti and zilla parishad seats. They alleged manipulation during counting, forcible ouster of Congress agents and then declaration of results in favor of the CPI (M) candidate. Similar allegations by the party on manipulation during counting were reported in the Jugantar on 6th March too (1 column 36 lines; They won by fraud).

6th March, 1988
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (5 columns 110 lines)
Headline: Poll victory surpasses CPI (M) expectation
Primary source: Political party

The report said the poll results have even surprised the CPI (M) as the ruling party did not expect such a huge win. The party attributed its win to the political consciousness of the rural electorate. The report added whatever the allegations of terror and rigging by the opposition in most seats the CPI (M) candidates established huge margins over their electoral opponents. The report also observed that Congress was routed in the villages because the landless laborers remained loyal to the Left parties.

6th March, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 80 lines)

Headline: Centre has asked for all information relating to post panchayat poll violence
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that the Centre has asked the state government to send a report on the violent incidents in the state before and after the Panchayat elections. The report specified that the Central government was concerned by the statements of the state ministers against the inactive police force. The report also informed that post election violence continued to plague the various districts.

6th March, 1988
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 221 lines)

Headline: Victorious Congress candidates disappear before Priya’s visit
Reporter / Correspondent

The news informed that the state Congress President visited the various areas in the North and South 24 Parganas to investigate the attacks on his party workers. The report said that the situation in the villages was so grim that the victorious candidates of the opposition parties along with their families have fled the villages even after hearing that their leader was coming to meet them. The report conveyed the idea that participation in the voting process endangered the life and property of the people. This grave reality suggested that the objective of the Panchayati Raj Institutions to provide empowerment to the people was not appreciated by the
political parties and they were more eager to control the local bodies for their own gratification.

6th March, 1988
Jugantar (3 columns 54 lines) and (5 column 135 lines)
Headline: FB and Congress’ seat count decrease in Birbhum / Nobody expected CPI (M)’s spectacular victory in North 24 Parganas
Reporters / Correspondents
The first report specified that in Birbhum CPI (M) gained seats at the expense of Congress and FB.

The second report said the results of North 24 Parganas where the CPI (M) managed to register a huge win despite the acute differences among the partners was unexpected. The report informed the seat count of both the FB and the RSP decreased and the Congress who had thought it would gain from the Left discord did not make much headway.

6th March, 1988
Jugantar (3 column 54 lines)
Headline: Congress to protest if the Governor’s speech mentioned “peaceful polls”
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed that the Congress will protest in the Assembly if the Governor in his speech stated that the Panchayat elections were peaceful and will demand an explanation from the chief minister on the allegations directed against him by his cabinet colleagues.

CONCLUSION
The emphasis of the 1988 Panchayat election coverage was on description of the political situation during the election, status of the political parties and the opinion of the political party leaders. There was very little communication and interaction with grass-root (see Analysis 9.2 on the source-wise distribution of news items that featured in the sample newspapers during the survey period). The mass media mirrored the social reality. The primary importance of the grassroots in the election process was as voters. The emphasis on the political parties and their activities was so
much that decentralization of political and administrative power held little significance for the grassroots even 10 years after the working of the Panchayat system. The sample newspapers confirmed the status of the grassroots in the Panchayat election process.

The coverage of the 1988 Panchayat elections by the sample newspapers was more widespread than in 1978 and 1983. But prominent issues featuring in the coverage dealt with either the political struggle for supremacy or tension of the political parties for votes or the concerns of the leaders. So the extensive coverage (see Analysis 9.1 for the number of news items on panchayat election during the sample period) had no real efficacy for the rural electorate as it did not highlight issues related to their interest. The impact of the newspapers on the rural audience was limited. The newspapers (mass media) and the opinion leaders (political party leaders) were mutually dependent on each other. The media relied on the information provided by the political parties and their leaders and the political party leaders were depended on the newspapers for the dissemination of their viewpoint to a potential vote bank.
WEEKLY ANALYSIS OF NEWS ITEMS IN SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS (1988)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Newspaper</th>
<th>No. of News Items</th>
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<tr>
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<td>The Statesman</td>
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<td>21</td>
</tr>
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<td>Anandabazar Patrika</td>
<td>10</td>
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</table>

Table 9.1 (a): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 08.02.1988 - 14.02.1988

Date: 08.02.1988 - 14.02.1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Newspapers</th>
<th>No. of News Items</th>
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Figure 9.1 (a): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 08.02.1988-14.02.1988

<table>
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Date: 15.02.1988 - 21.02.1988

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Figure 9.1 (b): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 15.02.1988-21.02.1988

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Date: 22.02.1988 - 28.02.1988

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Figure 9.1 (c): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 22.02.1988-28.02.1988
Table 9.1 (d): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 29.02.1988 - 06.03.1988

<table>
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Figure 9.1 (d): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 29.02.1988-06.03.1988
Chapter 9

TOTAL SAMPLED NEWS ITEMS IN 1988

AMRITA
BAZAAR
PATRIKA
127
THE STATESMAN
JUGANTAR
ANANDABAZAR PATRIKA

Table 9.1 (e): Total News Items on Panchayat Election in Sample Newspapers during 08.02.1988 - 06.03.1988

Figure 9.1 (e): Total News Items on Panchayat Election in Sample Newspapers during 08.02.1988 - 06.03.1988

380
SOURCE-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF NEWS ITEMS ON PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS DURING 08.02.1988 - 06.03.1988

<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>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.2: Source-Wise Distribution of News Items on Panchayat Elections during 08.02.1988-06.03.1988

Figure 9.2: Source-wise distribution of news items on panchayat elections during 08.02.1988 - 06.03.1988

NO. OF NEWS ITEMS IN 4 SAMPLE NEWS PAPERS

381