Research Paper

Role and Appraisalof Mass Media in West Bengal's Populist Elections: A Socio-Political Perspective in the 21st Century

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Abstract: *Populism heralds the renewal of democratization, democratic functions occur through the adoption of various policies and factors in the political system of a Nation. Populism refers to a range of political positions that place special emphasis on "the common People". Similarly, in the world's most populous democratic countries like India, the role of elections is very important. Needless to say, the role of mass media or mainstream electronic media (MEM) in elections is getting special recognition these days. In a federal democratic country like India, elections are being conducted in every state and leaders are elected, and we see the bickering between different parties mostly in contemporary times mass media manipulating the common people. The change of government in West Bengal since independence and the accompanying change in the lifestyle of the common people is a special example of populism politics. West Bengal where the Congress (the 1950s to 1980s stage) Communist Party of India (Marxist) (1980s to 2011 stage) and then TMC (AITC) (2011 to present) has brought extraordinary ups and downs in the lives of common people. Voters generally get to know about the fundamentals of elections like who, why, how, etc. through the media like newspapers, social media, magazines, and so on. Even last-minute changes in the polling system, violations of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), etc. are noticed by the public and the Election Commission through the media. But in the case of West Bengal mass media has remained stagnant many times and has worked actively many times. Trust in mass media is both positive and negative in nature among the general population. In this Chapter, 'the role of mass media and the role of party politics in the election conduct in a populist state like West Bengal' will be highlighted.*

Keywords: *Democracy, West Bengal, Populism, Voting, Election.*

I.   Introduction

Populism is a word, a concept whose use is very significant in the present era, especially for those democratic countries where the people have the power to form the government. At a much later stage, at the end of the 19th century, the theory began to be used, but the research and work on it in scholarly circles did not decrease. In the 21st century, every social science scholar needs to be aware of this concept. The field of populism is wide-ranging only in the world of academia, but its contribution to real life is important for democratic countries. In a democratic country like India, the contribution of populist politics is undeniable. State-wise, center-wise, populism holds a deadly place. In my paper, I have tried to give an example of how this populist theory has contributed to West Bengal's elections and party politics in West Bengal, the expansion of which is inevitable in the future, and how much the mass media is connected to it. Paul Collier said, "Populism offers the headless heart, ideology offers the heartless head". I am in favor of this idea because somewhere in the populist culture, the populist nature of our leaders is greatly hindering the thinking power of the common people, using mass media as a tool.

II.   Research Methodology

To write the paper I followed secondary data and some government websites. This is a topic that can be explored with primary data but I have tried to present my opinion through the use of secondary data in a theoretical way.

Populism and Its Immediate Explanation

Forthwith, the use of populism is increasing and theoretical use at the grass-roots level has analyzed the validity of the theory. The use of the term has been observed since the late 19th century. In the Russian Empire during the same period, an entirely different group referred to themselves as 'Narodniks', which is often translated into English as Populists, causing further confusion over the term.

There is a lot of debate in the scholarly circles about populism and the future and its consequences will be dealt with by scholars. But what is populism? Even though there is no one in particular in the scholarly circle, that is, many scholars show many types, but in the show with populism, Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira in their book "Populism: A Very Short Introduction"(2017) called populism an ideational approach, that is, where it is said 'Populism is a thin-centered ideology that sees society as ultimately divided into two homogenous and opposing camps, 'the pure people'and'the elite class', and which argues that politics should be the general will of the people. The term is used to describe left-wing presidents in Latin America, right-wing rival parties in Europe, and candidates in the United States. But its widespread use creates confusion and frustration. (C Mudde,2017) And the confusion is justified because just as there are differences in historical circles about populism, there are also differences in different subjects such as sociology, journalism, or other social science subjects. As I said before 'Populism heralds the renewal of democratization', exactly populism refers to a range of political positions that emphasize the concept of 'the people and often pit this group against the 'elite'. Like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their book "Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics", written in 1985. They argue that social movements that seek social and political change need a strategy that challenges neoliberal and neoconservative notions of democracy. In short, if we say they argued that radical democracy is the solution, not liberal democracy. Radical democracy refers to 'the roots of democracy' (Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, 1985).Partha Chatterjee in his book titled "I Am the People: Reflections on Popular Sovereignty Today" while explaining populism and democracy said about Gramsci's explanation of state and civil society, 'India is an integral state where the ruling group exercises hegemony over both states and Civil Society. (Chatterjee, 2019). In post-colonial democratic countries and a federal country like India, state politics, popular politics is a widely considered term and its use is justified by Cas Mudde, Partha Chatterjee's interpretation of the differences between the common man and the elite.

West Bengal as a Populist Discourse: A Historical Overview

The partition of 1947 taught India a lot. India emerged from the shadow of the colonial period when India gained freedom and the federal government took on a different dimension. Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Assam, Bengal, United Provinces, Punjab, Bihar, Central Provinces, North West Frontier Province, Orissa, and Sind, these 11 provinces were in the British period and they are more important in terms of society, politics, economy. Out of it, a kind of federal government was formed, one of the main reasons which was to protest democracy and to give more priority to the 'voice of the people'. However, if we go to describe the history of the Bengal Province Burman, which we know as 'West Bengal', it can be said that Bengal at that time attained a great dimension not only in India but also in South-East Asia. Bengal has played an important role in the history of the Indian subcontinent(Young, Bin, 2008). Gupta Empire (Bengal was an important province during the Gupta Empire), Varman dynasty, Khadga dynasty, Pala Empire, Chandra dynasty, Deva dynasty, also, Delhi Sultanate (1204–1352), Bengal Sultanate (1352 –1576), Baro-Bhuyans (1576–1610), Mughal period (1574–1717), Nasiri dynasty (1717–1740) and even during the British period i.e., British East India Company (1757–1858), British crown rule (1858–1947), Bengal has passed the colonial period of so many years, yet its culture, ethics have not been confused, even in terms of economy and business, Bengal was quite advanced even after independence in 1947. However, problems arose around the partition of Bengal in 1947. The problem took time to become public. Bengal was divided into two parts, West Bengal and East Bengal, which joined Pakistan as East Pakistan, i.e., what is now known as Bangladesh (later renamed in 1971).

'Bangla Partition' made 'Bangla' as 'West Bengal' and the power struggle between different leaders that continues even todaystarted roughly after 1967. The collapse of 'Congress hegemony' in 1967 was not only faced by West Bengal but by the whole of India (Kothari, 1970). At this time in West Bengal, from the 1960s to 1970s, no big party like Congress, or BJP could rule Bengal, which was really a fascinating period in the political history of India (Rehman, 2020). Needless to say, the politics of every country is divided into two main segments, a one-party system and the other is a multi-party system. One party system basically means where there will be a "one-party system", that is, a single political party will work over the entire province or nation, where a kind of authority will work over the people. For example, it can be said of African states, China the most prominent example, and also North Korea. Even a scholar named Margaret Monyani has pointed out that 'democracy is alien to Africa'. Be that as it may, the one-party system was by no means established in India after independence in 1947, although many scholars have characterized the long-term Congress rule as a form of 'authoritarianism'. But the steady decline of the Congress not only from the main seats of the country but also from the states of the Congress slowly ended, and the conflict between the various regional parties continued to win Power. Also, since we are giving West Bengal main priority here if we can say where West Bengal was,
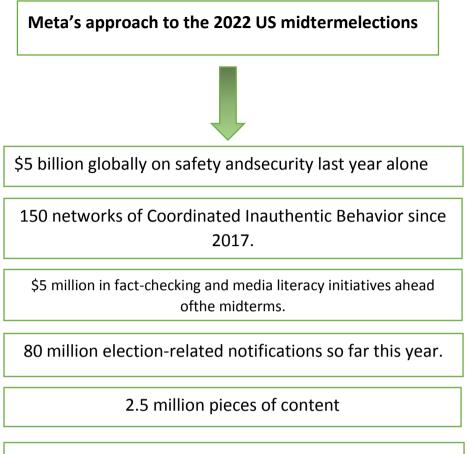
then the downfall of Congress did happen in West Bengal and with the coming of the Left government. The election of the Left government and their Marxian ideology was one of the main reasons for the popular vote bank of the Left. However, with the advent of the 1990s, the increased emphasis on industrialization in agrarian states such as West Bengal and the adoption of policies by the central government backfired for the Left. But not only the Left but BJP's slowly growing influence in West Bengal caused headaches for the Left and then the new party Trinamool Congress. However, the Trinamool Congress did not stop and the leader of the party, Mamata Banerjee, was strong enough against the Left and the BJP, and the victory of the Trinamool Congress in 2011 is one of the precedents of popular politics, and the contribution of mass media here is not taken into account.

Role of Mass Media in Populistic Election Nowadays

Just as globalization has opened the world market to all, mass media has opened 'knowledge' to all ages. Mass media has increased the level of communication between people, and countries. Mass media is very important to us today, not only newspapers, but places like social media, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Telegram etc. are closely related to our lives, even teenagers who are quite a lot of this social media. Media disease is infected with it, just like social media is giving people the news of the country, it also has its negative side. Anyway, before judging the good and bad of social media, we have to think about what is the relationship between the popular election. This is what I said a little earlier social media increases communication. During my father and uncle's time, I saw morning walks in the neighborhood with a load of tea in hand and a newspaper in hand with that broken radio and 50 paisa biscuits from the tea shop, this was the main area of discussion on 'politics'. After that, the discussion about politics continued in the office, on the tram, and on the bus. Not surprised? What kind of culture? It was the authentic Bengali culture of Kolkata, today it has almost been forgotten, today very few people wake up in the morning and read the newspaper, and very few people will find out who knows what news is printed on which page of the newspaper. While going to university on the train, I used to see everyone watching the news on YouTube, what vlogs aren't there these days? There are teachers who have opened YouTube channels from the Hindu, and the Indian Express to ABP Live, and everyone watches them. It's a shame to sit on the train and read newspapers these days. Everyone thinks 'I'm showing people. Why should I show people? You can understand the effects of mass media. Mass media is responsible for our knowledge, information, education, and entertainment, whether it is politics or platforms like TikTok. Politicians did not stop making it a tool.

In a democratic country like India, no matter what, elections are viewed at a high level, and there are controversies about it from newspapers to various magazines and social media. Needless to say, the media is viewed with a big eye, especially in this era of social media. Needless to say, the media is used as a tool. During covid 19, the way in which meta is used for election campaigning and media in the voting process in US and UK is really undeniable. If you look at Meta's factsheet 2020 it is discussed in detail how META managed the voting process of these countries from global interference. Below I have tried to capture the meta approaches of the tool through a diagram (F:1). That is, not only on the 'global level', but the use of social media at the 'national-regional' level is inevitable. I tried to give an example, such as the BJP's 'Social Media Campaign in' West Bengal or "ShojaBanglayBolchi" (speaking in straightforward Bengali) campaign in opposition to the BJP in West Bengal is one of the examples. Recently Venkat Ananth (Economic Times Editor) in his article named 'Mission Bengal: How the use of social media is reaching a hitherto unseen feverish pitch' has highlighted how the BJP has used the media for vote politics in West Bengal. However, in the same article, Ananthji cites a quote of BJP MP Swapan Dasgupta, which was happened in a telephonic conversation, Swapan Dasgupta said "Today, social media has disproportionate importance in all political campaigns, and Bengal is no different. Facebook, however, has emerged as a more important platform where discussions and debates take place in the vernacular, unlike Twitter, in Bengali,". There are many such examples from various political parties. Needless to say, e-participation and use of Facebook is another aspect of democracy and potentially the only one. Pluralism can add (Robert Dahl).

F:1:*META's Approaches: Factsheet 2022*

Meta's approach to the 2022 US midtermelections

$5 billion globally on safety andsecurity last year alone

150 networks of Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior since 2017.

$5 million in fact-checking and media literacy initiatives ahead ofthe midterms.

80 million election-related notifications so far this year.

2.5 million pieces of content

14 million entries in our Ads Library

West Bengal: Popular Political Politics

'Gorom vate ghee na porle jemon bangalir cholena (Bengali can't eat hot rice without ghee), similarly, if you don't make yourself popular in politics, it won't work. Popular with whom? obviously 'the people' (common people). Right after Congress's rule in West Bengal, the rise of 'Lal Jhandawala Left Front' in 1977 completely changed the political history of West Bengal.

The prominent leader of the communist movement in India was Jyoti Bose. He served as the 6th and longest-serving chief minister of West Bengal from 1977 to 2000. Industrialization and agricultural development were among the first things the Left Front government did when it came to power, which helped to reduce poverty in the 1980s. Although the entire West Bengal could not forget the terrible incident like the 'Marichjhapi Massacre' during the Left Front period.

Politicians and the power struggle is between their party and the common people of the democratic country. Before becoming politicians, they are leaders of a country or a state, where their duties and responsibilities are all around the common people. Abraham Lincoln's quote 'of the people, by the people, for the people' has become the main mantra of the Democratic Party. However, despite the development, West Bengal's national income was much lower than it was after the 1990s. The resignation of Jyoti Bose in 2000 and his death in 2010 caused common people to cry. Biman Bose announced with tears that "Jyoti Babu left us".

After Jyoti Basu resigned, Buddhadev Bhattacharya became the Chief Minister of West Bengal. Industrialization in West Bengal was the main mantra of the Buddhadev Bhattacharya government. They wanted youth jobs and development of West Bengal, but it was their big mistake to exchange agricultural land, which resulted in a major blow to CPM, which took away CPI(M)'s ground from West Bengal. Needless to say, Buddhadev Bhattacharya during his time 'Salim Group' which is a big industry in Indonesia, wanted to do business in West Bengal and wanted to establish SEZ, for which they needed a lot of lands, but we know that West Bengal is also agricultural like Punjab, Bihar state,where 68 percent of the land is agricultural land and 70 percent of people depend on agriculture for their livelihood, it was never possible for such poor farmers to hand over their land to industry. As a result of which they became somewhat angry against CPI(M) and this problem took the form of movement. The one who helped raise the present Chief Minister and the then activist and later Railway Minister is none other than Mamata Banerjee aka 'Didi' to us all. The kinship with the word Didi was developed during the Nandigram Violence and Singur Violence when 'Didi' stood by these poor people. Although political gain was one of the reasons, she mobilized people against CPI(M) by making this issue an 'issue'. Mamata Banerjee protested against CPI(M)'s oppression of poor women, such as rape, violence, etc. Mamata Banerjee was ousted from the Writer's Building by the CPIM in 1993, won the 2011 assembly polls, and assumed the post of Chief Minister after 1993 stepped into the WritersBuilding in 2011 as the Chief Minister of the state, and CPI(M)'s 34-year journey Which broke by her, after that CPI(M) could not rise without a special head, if you look at the number of votes from the 1980s, you can guess how CPI(M) shot itself in the foot by going against the crowd. Below I have tried to highlight the number of votes through some tables. (F:2, F:3, F:4, F:5)

Mamata Banerjee is now included in the Chief Minister post after winning 2 times polls after 2011. The welfare schemes that she brought during her time for the farmers and a half are indisputable, also projects like 'Kanyashree Scheme', 'Yuvashree Scheme' for the youth of the state, also distribution of 'bicycles' to the school students, the 'Laxmibhandar scheme' for women below 60 years of age, etc. can be mentioned as examples. Mamata has always said that the slogan 'Ma Mati Manush' and her popularity is not only in West Bengal but in India and has also given her the title of the populist leader.

F:2: *PERFORMANCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES 1977 ELECTION IN WEST BENGAL*

PARTY SEATS SEATS CONTESTED			VOTES POLLEDVOTE % IN			
	CONTESTED	WON	FD	VOTES	%	
NATIONAL PARTIES						
CPI	63	2	51	375560	2.62%	12.67%
CPM	224	178	10	5080828	35.46%	46.23%
INC	290	20	69	3298063	23.02%	23.39%
JNP	289	29	121	2869391	20.02%	20.39%
STATE PARTIES						

FBL	36	25	3	750229	5.24%	44.64%
MUL	32	1	31	54942	0.38%	3.32%
RSP	23	20	1	536625	3.74%	46.96%

Source: STATISTICAL REPORT ON GENERAL ELECTION, 1977 TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF WEST BENGAL

F:3: *PERFORMANCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES 1996 ELECTION IN WEST BENGAL*

Party	Candidates	Seats	Votes	%
Left Front and allies	292	203	18,143,795	48.98
Indian National Congress	288	82	14,523,964	39.48
Bharatiya Janata Party	292	0	2,372,480	6.45
Gorkha National Liberation Front	3	3	161,498	0.44
Forward Bloc (Socialist)	20	1	123,316	0.34
Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist) Liberation	30	0	47,206	0.13

Source: STATISTICAL REPORT ON GENERAL ELECTION, 1996 TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF WEST BENGAL

F:4: *PERFORMANCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES 2006 ELECTION IN WEST BENGAL*

Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won
Communist Party of India (Marxist)	212	176
Indian National Congress	262	21
Communist Party of India	13	8
Bahujan Samaj Party	128	0
Bharatiya Janata Party	29	0
Nationalist Congress Party	2	0
All India Trinamool Congress	257	30
All India Forward Bloc	34	23
Revolutionary Socialist Party	23	20
Rashtriya Janata Dal	2	1
Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation	25	0
Jharkhand Mukti Morcha	7	0

Source: STATISTICAL REPORT ON GENERAL ELECTION, 2006 TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF WEST BENGAL

F:5: *PERFORMANCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES 2011 ELECTION IN WEST BENGAL*

Party	Seats contested	Seats won	Seat change	Vote share	Swing
Trinamool Congress	226	184	Increase 154	38.93%	Increase 12.29%
Communist Party of India (Marxist)	213	40	Decrease 136	30.08%	Decrease 7.05%

Indian National Congress	66	42	Increase21	9.09%	Decrease 5.62%
All India Forward Bloc	34	11	Decrease 12	4.80%	Decrease 0.86%
Revolutionary Socialist Party (India)	23	7	Decrease 13	2.96%	Decrease 0.75%
Gorkha Janmukti Morcha	3	3	Increase 3	0.72%	Increase New
Communist Party of India	14	2	Decrease6	1.84	Decrease 0.07%
Samajwadi Party	5	1	Increase 1	0.74%	Increase 0.03%
Socialist Unity Centre of India (C)	30	1	Decrease 1	0.44%	___
Democratic Socialist Party	2	1	___	0.35%	Increase 0.01%
Independents	___	2	Decrease 4	3.13%	Decrease 1.09%
Bharatiya Janata Party	289	0	___	4.06%	Increase 2.13%

Source: STATISTICAL REPORT ON GENERAL ELECTION, 2011 TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF WEST BENGAL

Contribution Of Mass Media to the Election Process: A Socio-Political Overview

In a post-colonial democracy like India, the importance of mass media is undeniable. In the current 21st century, the role of mass media is very important in everyone's life. Especially the issue that the media now gives more importance to is the 'political system' of the country. Media is now everywhere whether Doordarshan, newspaper, radio, or mobile phone, people's ability to verify has increased relatively through these media. Starting from the establishment of various conflicts between one country and another country or within one's own country, the ability to establish peace, especially today, is controlled by the media. If you can see not only the present time but also a little earlier history, then for example Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's newspapers such as Bahishkrut Bharat (1927-1929), Janata (1930-56), and Prabuddha Bharat (1956), etc. can be mentioned which he used to awaken, educate and disenfranchise the Dalits. He used it. Again, he opposed the caste-class division in society through these newspapers, which helps to make people aware. Many such examples are available. Even today, mass media is used in the same way, in one word it can be said 'for the people. Where people can raise their 'own voice' without any hesitation. But it also has some downsides which we will highlight later. The role of media is not only to establish peace but also to establish conflict. Also, current popular politics has hindered the democratization ability of media by using media.

Mass media today control public opinion more and more. Media today no longer acts impartially, their attitude towards people has a heavy impact on the lives of common people (Neel, 2019). Neel, feels that everything has two sides like a coin has two sides but the media wants to show us the side, which is convenient for them and will serve their interests. So he raised the question in the current 'new media era', what is the role of people's voices, people's opinions, etc. in the current democracy? Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's interpretation of the 'propaganda model to understand the role of the media shows that it is the most important of Chomsky's books on media. Explains. They say that media outlets are usually big companies, they filter the news in front of people for the sake of their own companies. Thus, news undergoes a 'self-censorship' process. These five filters are advertising, sourcing, flak (refers to negative statements), ownership, marginalizing dissent, etc. (Herman and Chomsky, 1988).

However, the role of media is both good and bad. The responsibility of the media is not only to inform the people about the current situation and what is happening where, but the media also helps people to know more, to educate, and even the responsibility of the entertainment of the people is very much of the media. In today's lonely life, people don't even have family, they want to give themselves peace of mind through social media, Instagram, etc. Through various videos, news, educational videos, etc., people can gain knowledge very easily just by using the internet.

However, through the good and bad news of the media, I tried to highlight the real aim of our paper, which is its contribution to the election process, especially in the case of West Bengal. We have already seen

how much effect the media has on people's lives. The role of media is the most important in the field of elections, if we can say where the last election of West Bengal 2021, there is the role of mass media somewhere behind the way the people of Nandigram voted for the BJP. Media not only gives information to people, but media also forces the common people and sometimes the government to take certain decisions. Slogans such as 'Bangla NijerMeyekeichaye' (Bangla wants her own daughter), 'Khela Hobe', etc. have spread through the media and have spread psychological and emotional impacts on people. 'Ki Bolche Bangla' (What is saying Bangla) has awakened the voice in people's minds and the media has brought it to everyone's attention. The use of populism in the politics of Bengal, the use of celebrity faces which the media has especially covered and spread among the common people, as a result of which one or a few parties have benefited, etc. Many such examples can be highlighted in the contribution of media in state elections. Moreover, it can be said that the election will be held after knowing which ward is standing, who has done what, which party is on the side of the people, etc. Even the announcements about the election on the Election Commission's website are being presented by the media through YouTube videos, news channels, etc. Starting from interviewing common people to what they think about which party, the media can easily get people to reveal everything. The role of media is more important in the conduct of elections.

The assassination of People's inner Choice

Needless to say, after the covid 19 period, social media had a special impact on West Bengal Elections 2021. The election of 2021 is going on for the longest time. We saw a close fight between BJP and TMC in the 2021 elections. After the covid period, parties are especially dependent on social media, where they can reach a larger population through social media. Not only BJP, and TMC but also CPM did not lag. A lot of fake news has come out. According to the 2021 NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) data, West Bengal has the highest number of cases filed against fake news, occupying the 1/4th position among all of India. According to Professor Chattopadhyay (Head of Journalism and Mass Communication at Jadavpur University), "social media is playing a major role in reaching out to a massive mass of people, and its importance is increasing day by day".

The posts that various leaders are posting on behalf of their parties on platforms like Twitter, and Facebook are manipulating people's ability to judge themselves. People trust social media more than seeing things with their own eyes these days.

BJP and TMC spent a lot of money on social media for election conduct. And if we look at these political parties, we can see how many people follow them on their social media handles, for example, CM Mamata Banerjee has 7 million followers on her Twitter, and PM Shri Narendra Modi has countless followers on his Twitter. Even Facebook is the same thing.

Beyond the ubiquitous newspaper and magazine, social media has now become a key medium for data collection and keeping track of daily news. Right or wrong people are using, believing, and also facing cheating. The manipulation of politics has blinded people. Even many people from Democratic countries are arrested many times if they say wrongly to the party leader and opposition, many examples of this are found in the pages of newspapers daily. It is questionable how much truth is preserved in a post-truth society, but there are many lies surrounding the truth that prevent people from seeking the truth. There is no way out of this trap, there is only tolerance, the ability to ignore, and the ability to make yourself share the least happiness.

III.   Conclusion

There is no specific end to all things, I think there is no end to the mass media's contribution to elections in democratic countries, the neutrality of mass media or the tendency towards popular politics. Democracy means power struggle. However, finally, I would like to point out that the establishment of democracy has given people as much mobility as it has made them worried about decision-making. Democracy is not just about voting. The branch of democracy is wide, and it is because there is democracy somewhere that the populist mode of election, the populist politics, has flourished so much. It is not different in the case of West Bengal. Politics and mass media are playing their proper role in an emerging populist state like West Bengal. However, at some point, the neutrality of mass media becomes harmful to the common people. I think mass media is an important element of democracy through which people can express themselves, it is very desirable and necessary to work for the people out of the political fence of the mass media, to keep the country's democracy alive, to be the 'voice of the people'.

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