

“Assam Panchayat Election of 2018”

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Abstract: In this paper analyses the two-phase Panchayat polls were held on December 5 and 9 of Assam Panchayat Election, 2018. The polling for the first phase was hold 5 December, while that for the second phase was took place on December 9. According to figures available with the State Election Commission of Assam, 7,571 candidates were contested for the 26,808 PRI seats. Altogether 1,512 were contested for the 420 Zilla Parishad member seats, 7,004 contested for 2,199 Anchalik Panchayat member Seats, 7,667 candidates were in the fray for 2,199 Gaon Panchayat President Seats and 62,388 candidates vying for the 21,990 Gaon Panchayat member Seats. There were 78,571 contestants and 734 were elected uncontested. The total numbers of voters were 15,641,456 including 8,123,835 males and 7,517,621 females.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The model code of conduct for the Panchayat election came into force in Assam with the state Election Commission announcing the dates for the polls. The election was held for 420 Zilla Parishad Members, 2,199 Anchalik Panchayat Members, 2,199 Gaon Panchayat Presidents and 21,990 Gaon Panchayat Members. The Assam State Election Commission was announced that the Polls would hold in two Phases. The polling for the first phase was held on December 5, 2018, while that for the second phase took place on December 9, 2018. The Commission declared that in both the days, polling would hold from 7 A.M to 3 P.M. Moreover, if required, repoll for the first phase would hold on December 7, 2018 and for the second phase on December 11, 2018. The final counting of votes was started from December 12, 2018 in the 26 districts across the state.

For the first phase, the election notice was issued on 5 November and last date of filing nomination was November 15, 2018, till 3 P.M of the day. The scrutiny of nomination papers was done on November 16 and the list of validly nominated candidates was published on the same day. The date of withdrawal of candidates was November 19 till 3 P.M and the final list of contesting candidates was published on the same day after 3 P.M. for the second phase, the election notice was also issued on 9 November and the last date of filing nominations was November 19, till 3 P.M of the day. The scrutiny of nominations paper was done on November 20, 2018 and on the same day, the list of validly nominated candidates was also published. The date of withdrawal of candidate for the second phase was November 22 and on the same day after 3 P.M the final list of contesting candidates was published.

In this election, the provision of two-child norm, educational qualification and functional sanitary toilet as per the recent amendment to the Assam Panchayat Act 1994 is applicable for a candidate. Nomination papers for Gaon Panchayat member will be received by the authorised officers at respective BDO office and for Gaon Panchayat president, Anchalik Panchayat member and Zilla Parishad member, the nomination papers were received at respective deputy commissioner’s office or Sub –division office.

In first phase, polls were held in Tinsukia , Dibrugarh, Sivsagar, Charaideo, Jorhat, Majuli, Golaghat, Nagaon, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Biswanath, Sonitpur, Darrang, Morigaon, Karup (Metro) and Kamrup districts. In the second phase, the election were held in Nalbari, Barpeta, Bongaigaon, Dhubri, South Salmara Mankachar, Goalpara, Cachar, Hailakamdi, Karimganj and Hojai districts. This year (2018), the polling were held in altogether 23,505 polling stations and among them 11,597 were comparatively safe, 8,243 were sensitive and 3,665 were very sensitive. The total numbers of voters were 15,641,456 including 8,123,835 males and 7,517,621 females, an increase of 21.49 percent in regard to the number of voters from previous Panchayat elections. The following table shows the total number of voters with male and female voters.

Number of total Voters in the Assam Panchayat Poll 2018

Total Number of Voters 15,641,456	
Male Voters	Female Voters
8,123,835	7517,621

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS:

For the purpose of the study of “Assam Panchayat Election of 2018”, an analytical study follows the descriptive method. In this study data have been collected by using secondary sources. Secondary data and information have been collected from different published books, journals, internet sources, published research papers and articles, newspapers.

III. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE STUDY:

The following points are the main highlights of the study:

1. After months of delay the dates for Assam Panchayat elections of 2018 were announced, the two-phase rural polls were held on December 5 and 9.
2. Bharatiya Janata Party and Asom Gana Parishad, allies in the ruling coalition, were done it alone in rural polls.
3. The Panchayat elections was expected to be a litmus test for political parties in the run up to the Lok Sabha election (2019) especially following the clear lines of division in response to the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016.
4. While the Asom Gana Parishad and the Congress, historically opposing sides, find themselves on the same side of the debate a against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016, the BJP has toned down its rhetoric in support of the bill with the Panchayat election in mind.
5. The election was held for 420 Zilla Parishad Members, 2,199 Anchalik Panchayat Members, 2,199 Gaon Panchayat Presidents and 21,990 Gaon Panchayat Members. The Assam State Election Commission was announced that the Polls would hold in two Phases.
6. Altogether 1,512 were contested for the 420 Zilla Parishad member seats, 7,004 contested for 2,199 Anchalik Panchayat member Seats, 7,667 candidates were in the fray for 2,199 Gaon Panchayat President Seats and 62,388 candidates vying for the 21,990 Gaon Panchayat member Seats. There were 78,571 contestants and 734 were elected uncontested.

IV. RURAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN INDIA: PANCHAYATI RAJ

The constitution of India provides for a well organised and comprehensive system of local government in the whole country. Local Government is a state subject and it is the responsibility of each state to organise and continuously maintain effective, democratic and powerful local governments in its all rural and urban areas. The Directive Principles listed under Article 40 of the Constitution calls upon each state to organise village Panchayats and other local government institutions and endow them with adequate powers and authority.

Even in very ancient times village Panchayats and local councils used to work in all local areas of India. Local government existed in India in the form of ‘Sabhas’. And in the course of time these village bodies took the shape of Panchayats, an assembly of five persons, resolved issues at the village level. These even continued to work during the periods of Mughal and British rules in the country. In modern time, elected local bodies were created after 1882. The Government of India Act, 1919, village Panchayats were established in a number of provinces. This trend continued after the Government of India Act of 1935. Lord Ripon gave the local boards some independent sources of income.

In India, we have organised two types of local Self-Government – one for the rural areas and the other for urban areas. In the rural areas, we have Panchayats/village Panchayats, Panchayat Samities or Intermediate level Panchayats and Zilla Parishads or District level Panchayats. These are collectively called Panchayati Raj. Rural local Self-government in India is known by the popular name Panchayati Raj. It has the responsibility to satisfy the local civic and development needs and aspirations of the people living in the rural areas. Organisation of Panchayati Raj in India came as a revolutionary step towards rural development. The launching of Community Development Programme on 2nd October, 1952 set the stage for the organisation of Panchayati Raj. On 2nd October, 1953 the National Extension Service was launched. These steps were designed to secure the involvement of the rural people in the process of rural development.

By 1959, almost all the states had introduced Panchayati Raj in their rural areas. During 1959-92, Panchayati Raj kept on working for achieving its objectives. However, its efforts were not fully successful. Rural illiteracy, lack of funds, poverty, inexperienced representatives, lack of women participation, groupism, corruption, excessive governmental interference, lace of continuity in the working of Panchayati Raj institutions and lack of interest taken by the rural people, all became responsible for inadequate success of Panchayati Raj. These shortcomings made it essential for us to make some major reforms in the Panchayati raj. For removing the

defects of Panchayati Raj as well for strengthening its institutions, the Union Parliament passed the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992. Its purpose was to improve and strengthen Panchayati Raj in India. On April 23, 1994 all states of India completed the process of enacting fresh laws for strengthening their respective Panchayati Raj Institutions in accordance with the rules laid down by the existence in all rural areas. In the main, the 73rd Amendment Act provided for:

1. Reservation of seats for SCs and STs in proportion to their populations in the rural areas.
2. Reservation of some posts of chairpersons for the SCs and STs in a state.
3. Reservation of not less than 1/3rd of the elected seats, in each Panchayat for women. In October 2009 the Government decided to increase reservations for women from the existing 33 percent to 50 percent.
4. Reservation of 1/3rd posts of chairpersons for women;
5. Direct election of Panchayats and chairpersons of Panchayats;
6. Representation of local MPs and MLAs in Panchayati Raj institutions; and
7. Continuous, active and strong working of Panchayati Raj institutions.

V. IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT:

Lord Bryce rightly observes that, “The best school of democracy and the best guarantee for its success is the practice of local self-government”. Local Institutions constitute the strength of free nation. Local self-governing institutions are called the cradled for democracy. They are the training grounds for the future politicians of a country. Local Self-Government institutions have become part and parcel of a democratic State. They are considered as the grass-roots for democracy. These institutions are carter to the local needs. It is not possible for any government to look into the problems properly. Local Self-Government is the government of a specified locality by the local people through the representatives elected by them. A modern state cannot be administered from single seat of authority. The local problems cannot be solved without local institutions. These problems vary from place to place. As they are not uniform in character, so they can be solved only by the local problems. Local government refers to the operations of corporations, municipalities, districts boards, Panchayats and other bodies which are entrusted with the execution of functions relating to and concerning the residents o a given area or locality. Local bodies enable a large number of individuals to take part in public affairs. They are also in a position to learn the essentials of administration. Frequent elections to local institutions make the people politically conscious. People by taking part in local institutions learn how to work for others. The people can take a greater and healthy interest in political and civil affairs. The local bodies also create a sense of commonness among the people.

VI. DEMOCRACY AND LOCAL SELF- GOVERNMENT:

Local self-government is a school of democratic training for the people. Democracy and local self-government are inseparable. Both democracy and local self-government imply people’s participation. Some good points of local self-government in the democratic state and people of the locality take part in the election of members are:

1. Democracy cannot be practiced from distant centre. The local institutions constitute the basis of democracy.
2. By taking part in the local bodies people will develop good civic sense, self-reliance and public spirit to become good citizens.
3. In a democracy the people must be politically conscious. Local institutions make them politically conscious. The people are also associated with their important problems. It makes them interested in national problems.
4. Local Institutions are regarded as the best school for democracy. People learn about them first by taking part in local institutions. People know the art of serving themselves.
5. Local bodies help the democratic government to be strong and efficient. The local bodies keep the satisfied by solving the local problems.
6. Local Institutions are the sources of strength for a democracy. They make the people democratic-minded.
7. Local bodies train and supply leaders to run a democratic government. When they become good leaders of local bodies, then they can prosper later on as State or National Leaders. Local self-governing institutions are therefore called the training ground for the future leaders in a democracy.
8. In a democracy, the citizens must have the spirit of service. Local bodies develop this spirit among the people. People learn to work in co-operation in a democracy. This spirit of co-operation is vey essential for the citizens of a democratic state.
9. Local bodies are of great importance in a democracy. Democracy will have no meaning unless people are given adequate powers to solve local problems with the help of local bodies. Hence, it is local government that can flourish only in democratic state.
10. Local Institutions teach the people how to live together in a society. This desire of living together is of vital importance in a democratic state. There can be no democracy if people do not desire to live together.

The progress of local self-government in India is very slow. Hence, the basis of our democracy is also not strong. The Local institutions are not in a position to provide good leadership. India is not in a position to practice the ideals of democracy, because our local institutions are very weak. At present it is realise in most of the countries that local bodies constitute the basis of democracy. They impart primary lessons of democracy to the people. In a country like India where democracy is in a passing phase, local institutions are of vital importance. We have so many problems that the central and the state governments cannot solve all. For the political education of the people also, these local bodies are very essential.

VII. ASSAM PANCHAYATI RAJ ACT OF 1994:

The Assam Panchayat Act of 1994 received the assent of the governor of Assam on 5th May, 1994. This is an Act to amend and consolidate laws relating to Panchayats in Assam. This Act shall extend to the whole of Assam in the rural areas except the Autonomous Districts under the Sixth schedule of the Constitution of India. It shall also exclude any area which is included in a Municipality or a Town Committee or a Cantonment or a Municipal Corporation. The Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 came into force immediately. The Assam Panchayat act of 1994 has related the three-tier local Self-Government institution in the rural areas. These institutions are – Gaon Panchayat at the Village level, Anchalik Panchayat at the Block level and the Zilla Parishad at the District level. Features of Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994:

1. The Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 has been passed under the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act. Thus, the Panchayats under this Act enjoy Constitutional Status.
2. This Act has abolished Muhkuma Parishad. In this place, provision has been made for the creation of Zilla Parishad in each district of Assam.
3. The term of office of the Panchayats has been extended from 4 years to 5 years.
4. The Act has made provision for reservation of 1/3 seats in the Panchayat for women.
5. Although the State Government can take over the administration of Panchayat, election must be held within six months from the date of take-over.
6. A Finance Commission shall be constituted by the State Government to advise the government for distribution of money among the Panchayats.
7. The Panchayat Act of 1994 has given more powers to the Panchayats.
8. The Act has taken steps to make the Panchayats financially strong and independent.
9. The Act has provided that Panchayat elections shall be conducted under the supervision of the State Election Commission.

VIII. RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY:

8.1 Uncontested Candidates Winner in Assam Panchayat poll

According to the State election Commission of Assam at least 734 candidates contesting in various Panchayat seats have been declared winners uncontested. Of them, 380 were from the BJP, 193 from the Congress and 28 from the AGP. AIUDF candidates got through uncontested in 10 seats, CPI (M) in 1, BPF in 5 and Independents in 117 seats. Out of 26,808 PRI seats 734 had been won uncontested and which are given in the table of the following:

Total 734 declared winners uncontested in Assam Panchayat polls 2018

Political Party	BJP	Congress	AGP	AIUDF	CPM	BPF	Independent
Seats won	380	193	28	10	1	5	117

Source: State Election Commission of Assam

8.2 Phase-I of Assam Panchayat Poll:

The election to Panchayat bodies in sixteen administrative districts which was held in 5 December 2018. The balloting was started at 7 am and was continued till late in the evening. Initially, the turnout was not enthusiastic. The poll percentage recorded till 9 A.M was 13.7 percent, but it could see that the picked up of casting the vote as the day progressed. The overall of the polls in first phase was 80 percent voting witnessed. The first phase of Panchayat polls was held in 14,077 polling stations spread across 27 election districts. Around 98,500 polling personnel were deployed for the phase-I of the exercise. In the first phase polls total 796 candidates were contested for 251 Zilla Parishad member seats, 3,799 candidates fighting for 1,304 Anchalik Panchayat Member seats, 4,155 candidates vying for 1,304 Gaon Panchayat President Posts and 34,765 candidates are in fray for 13,040 Gaon Panchayat Member seats. The following table shows the candidates contested in the polls in the first phase:

Candidates contested in the first phase of Assam Panchayat Polls 2018

Name of Seats	Zilla Parishad Members	Anchalik Panchayat Members	Gaon Panchayat President	Gaon Panchayat Members
Total Number of Seats	251	1,304	1,304	13,040
Candidates contested against the Seats	796	3,799	4155	34,765

Source: State Election Commission of Assam

It is important to note that in the first phase polls altogether 442 candidates have been declared winner uncontested in the election districts which polls were held. Of them 250 candidates were from the BJP, 106 from Congress, 15 from AGP, 3 from AIUDF, 65 Independents and 3 from BPF.

8.3 Phase-II of Assam Panchayat Poll:

A turnout of 72 percent voting till 5 P.M was recorded during the second phase of Panchayat polls which was held in 10 districts. The percentage was expected to cross the 80 percent mark after final compilation in the evening. According to the Assam State Election Commission till 5 P.M highest polling 86 percent was recorded in Dhubri District, which was followed by South Salmara Mankachar 80 percent. At 65 percent lowest polling was recorded at North Salmara Subdivision. Polling for the second phase was conducted across 9, 428 voting centres, of which 3,081 and 1,866 had been identified as sensitive and hyper sensitive respectively. The total number of seats in the second phase of polls was 10,909. These include 169 Zilla Parishad Members, 895 Gaon Panchayat Presidents, 895 Anchalik Parishad Members and 8,950 Gaon Panchayat Members. As many as 292 constituencies went uncontested in the second phase.

Seats in the Second phase of Assam Panchayat Polls 2018

Name of Seats	Zilla Parishad Members	Anchalik Panchayat Members	Gaon Panchayat President	Gaon Panchayat Ward Members
Total Number of Seats	169	895	895	8,950

Source: State Election Commission of Assam

8.4 Result of Assam Panchayat Poll of 2018

The election was held for 420 Zilla Parishad Members, 2,199 Anchalik Panchayat Members, 2,199 Gaon Panchayat Presidents and 21,990 Gaon Panchayat Members in the Assam Panchayat Election of 2018. The following table also includes the uncontested candidates in the final result.

Seats won in poll of different political parties of Assam Panchayat Election 2018

Name of Seats	Zilla Parishad Members	Anchalik Panchayat Members	Gaon Panchayat President	Gaon Panchayat Ward Members
Total Number of Seats	420	2,199	2,199	21,990
Total Number of Seats declared	420	2,191	2,193	21,773
BJP	212	1,020	991	9,025
Congress	147	772	760	7,239
AGP	19	117	137	1,676
AIUDF	26	138	130	1,023
Others include (BPF, CPI, CPM, CPI (ML) and Independent)	16	144	175	2,810

Source: State Election Commission of Assam (2018)

The number of Zilla Parishad constituencies in BJP's kitty raised to 212 as the State Election Commission declared the results of 419 of the total 420 seats. The Congress bagged 147, while the AGP had to be content with 19. The AIUDF managed to win 26 seats while others got 16 seats in the poll result. The BJP bagged 9,025 of the 20,990 Gaon Panchayat wards whose results have been declared. The Congress got 7,239 and the AGP managed 1,676. The AIUDF won in 1,018 wards, the BPF 54, the CPI (M) 31, the CPI and CPI (ML) four each and Independents won in 2,596 seats. Results of 2,193 of the total 2,199 Gaon Panchayat President posts have been announced and the BJP got 991, the Congress 760, the AGP 137, the AIUDF 130 and Others 175 seats. As many as 1,020 elected Anchalik Panchayat members were from the BJP. The Congress got 772, the AIUDF 138, the AGP 117 and Others 144.

The result of the recent held Assam Panchayat Election proved the adage that every win is not a big win or huge Victory, and some defeats are only installments to victory in the polls. Although the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party government has won as expected, its lead over the Indian National congress proves that the show is not over, especially when the rural polls were being dubbed as a semi-final to the coming 2019 General Election polls. While the BJP has won the Zilla Parishad seats, but the INC was not far behind with its tally only 70 seats behind. At the lower strata of the Panchayat polls too, the Congress party was not far behind the ruling BJP. In the Gaon Panchayat President Posts Congress was trailed the BJP by only a margin of 232 seats. In the fray for the posts of Anchalik Panchayat Member, the difference between the ruling BJP and the Congress party was only 251. In the third category of challenged in the polls it could not see much more differences between the ruling Party BJP and the Congress. Here again the congress has given the BJP a tight fight in the Gaon Panchayat Ward Members as the difference of numbers between the parties is only 1,759. This tight race between BJP and the INC in rural Assam indicates that in the forthcoming General Election (Lok Sabha) 2019 it is not going to be a cakewalk for BJP.

In Assam the trend so far has been that the ruling party always wins the rural polls by a huge margin ahead from the second ranker of the polls, but this year in 2018 it was different. In the 2013 Assam rural polls, the ruling Congress had won 272 seats, while the second ranking AIUDF could grab only 76 seats, with BJP making it to only 15 seats. The regional political party of Assam AGP, which had formed Governments twice in the State in 1985 and 1996, got only 29 seats in 2013. This year in 2018, AGP got even fewer seats in the Zilla Parishad Members seats, only 19 seats almost washed away even after hurling several threats to pull itself away from its ruling alliance with the BJP in the State, citing and opposing the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016. The following table show the party wise result of counting of votes for Assam Panchayat Election 2013.

Seats won in poll of different political parties of Assam Panchayat Election 2013

Name of Seats	Zilla Parishad Members	Anchalik Panchayat Members	Gaon Panchayat President	Gaon Panchayat Ward Members
BJP	15	130	106	1,529
Congress	273	1,235	1,223	10,806
AGP	29	182	183	2,309
AIUDF	76	397	387	2,691
Others	27	256	301	4,373

Source: State Election Commission of Assam (2013)

IX. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY:

The following points are makes us understanding the overall performance of the different political parties in the Elections:

1. The Bharatiya Janata Party maintains winning spree in the State rural polls.
2. The Asom Gana Parishad an ally party of the BJP-led Government, contested in the Panchayat elections separately, but the regional political party failed to show a good performance in the rural polls.
3. This election was a litmus test for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party ahead of the General Election 2019 in Assam as the saffron party and its ally AGP contested this election separately in the Panchayat polls and both parties had criticized each other during the campaigns after a rift over the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016.
4. The State of Assam has given the BJP a reason to rejoice after the party’s recent defeat in the heartland states. The BJP emerged victorious in the Panchayat polls in Assam an unprecedented affair for the party in the Northeast states.
5. The Congress was in power in Assam Panchayats since 15 years. In 2013 election Congress had won around 80 percent seats compared to BJP in 2018 Panchayat election won.
6. The Panchayat results and the failure of the Assamese organisations are proof to the fact that the Anti-Bengali Muslim wave that has been at the core of the politics of Assam.
7. The BJP ruling party of the State has been successful in wooing the voters through its effort to place a mix of regional sentiments and communalism on the platter. The Saffron party has received maximum voters and captured districts mainly in the Assamese heartland where regionalism worked of the NRC.
8. AGP has been saying for more than a year now that it would cut the tie with BJP, but has not done so. They fought alone in the rural polls, a decision that has actually boomeranged, and both BJP and Congress gained from its dillydallying. AGP’s dwindling position regarding the NRC also created a polarisation between Congress’s Muslim vote bank and BJP’s Hindu Bengali-plus-Assamese vote bank. The Congress is the gainer in the Muslim Bengali dominated areas, while BJP has taken away the Hindu Assamese and Bengali voters.

9. It is clear that people prefer to have their local body representatives from the same party that is holding the State government so that there remains a direct connection between the local representative and the state ministers.
10. The Panchayat elections threw up a surprise for perfume baron-turned politician Ajmal’s All Indian United Democratic Front (AIUDF) with its vote share in minority areas in lower Assam and the Barak valley districts dipping. The party seems to have lost out to Congress and AGP in its very own bastion.
11. The BPF party’s performance in the Panchayat polls was quite good compared to the previous year.
12. It could be seen that the Independents candidates and their winning spirit were declined in this year (2018) rural election.
13. National Democratic Alliance (NDA) constituent Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), a dominant player in the State’s political landscape since its inception in 1985, has been virtually decimated in the Panchayat elections this time. AGP, which ruled Assam for two terms, has suffered serious reverses across most of the districts, but in this year (2018) also their performance was not up to date in the rural polls.

X. CONCLUSION

It is overall observation that the election was campaigned look like that for the General Elections and not for the elections to the local bodies. In the elections to the local bodies should be contested on the basis of local issues like infrastructure development including rural roads, water supply, sanitation, housing etc. But this year, Assam witnessed campaigned where local issues were relegated to the background and the political parties were concentrated more on criticizing each other parties. As the Assam Panchayat Elections 2018 are being dubbed as the semi-final before the coming Lok Sabha election in Assam sometimes early in 2019, what is to be seen is whether the Congress party can at least maintain its status achieved in the rural polls, whether AIUDF vanishes completely and AGP regains its glory. The predictions say the Congress- with its streak of success in the recently held by polls in Karnataka, the Assembly Elections, 2018 in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh and the success in Assam Panchayat Polls may be able to regain its glory in the Northeastern state as well, while for BJP, the Lok Sabha polls is a fight to get back its lost glory in the recent rounds of polls across states. However, the recent poll result, including those of Assam rural poll, indicate one thing certainly that the fight in the coming Lok Sabha elections is going to be a tough one for the BJP, ruling both in the centre and Assam. The state BJP leadership, led by Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal along with finance minister and state president of BJP’s said that while the nation was glued to BJP’s performance in the assembly elections, it missed the party’s huge victory in Assam’s Panchayat elections and the complete ouster of Congress from Northeast States. Finally, it can be conclude to say that the issues on which Panchayat, Assembly and Lok Sabha elections are fighting are totally different.

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