

# Unlikely Bedfellows? The Media and Government Relations in West Bengal (1977-2011)

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the relationship between the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Front Government and the media in the provincial state of West Bengal, India, during the thirty four years (1977-2011) period when the party was in government.

The main aim of the thesis is to investigate the relation between the CPI (M) led Left Front Government and the media in West Bengal (1977-2011), the role of the media in stabilising or destabilising the Left Front Government, the impact of neoliberalism on the Left Front Government and their relation with the media, the role of the media in communicating developmental policies of the LFG to the public and finally the role which the mainstream and the party controlled media played in the public sphere.

These questions are addressed through document research of CPI (M)'s congress and conference reports, manifestos, press releases, pamphlets, leaflets, booklets; and interviews with the CPI (M) leadership and the Editors and Bureau Chiefs of the key newspapers and television channels in West Bengal. The findings are contextualised within a broader discussion of the political and historical transitions India and West Bengal have gone through in this period (chapter 4). This is the first study looking at the relationship between the media and the CPI (M) led Left Front Government over a period of thirty four years (1977-2011).

The thesis finds that neoliberalism in India had considerable effects on the CPI (M), the media and their relationship. The research finds a continuous effort from the mainstream and the party-controlled media to dominate the public sphere leading debates in order to seek some form of political consensus in order to govern. The media in West Bengal were politically divided between the left and the opposition. The research finds that this generated a market for political advertisements and political news contributing to a politically polarised media market in West Bengal that assisted in generating revenue for the media. The findings also suggest that the media contributed to rather than played a determining role in destabilising the Left Front Government. Finally the research finds that the CPI (M) had an arduous relation with the media since 1977 when the party decided to participate in the parliamentary democracy. The LFG and the mainstream media entered into an antagonistic relationship post 1991 contributing to a politically polarised media market in West Bengal.

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## **Author's Declaration**

This thesis represents the original work of Indrani Lahiri unless explicitly stated otherwise in the text. The research upon which it is based was carried out within the Division of Communication, Media and Culture, School of Arts and Humanities at the University of Stirling, under the supervision of Professor Matthew Hibberd and Dr. Marina Dekavalla during the period February 2010 to February 2014.

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## Acronyms

APL	Above Poverty Line
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BPL	Below Poverty Line
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
CITU	Centre of Indian Trade Unions
CMP	Common Minimum Programme
CNN-IBN	Cable News Network- Indian Broadcasting Network
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI (ML)	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)
CPI	Communist Party of India
CU	Calcutta University
DNA	Daily News and Analysis
ECI	Election Commission of India
FB	Forward Bloc
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
ICSSR	Indian Council of Social Science Research
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRS	India's Readership Survey
LFG	Left Front Government
LPG	Liberalisation Privatisation Globalisation
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MRUC	Media Research Users Council
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
NDTV	New Delhi Television Limited
NEP	New Economic Policy
NIP	New Industrial Policy
NRS	National Readership Survey
NRSC	National Readership Studies Council
NWICO	New World Information and Communication Order
PCI	Press Council of India
PDS	Public Distribution System
PRIs	Panchayat Raj Institutions
PSE	Public Sector Enterprises
PTI	Press Trust of India
RNI	Registrar of Newspapers for India
RSP	Revolutionary Socialist Party
SC	Supreme Court
SEBI	Securities and Exchange Board of India
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
TB	Tuberculosis
TMC	Trinamool Congress
TNC	Transnational Corporation
TOI	The Times of India
UFG	United Front Government
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
WB	West Bengal
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The CPI (M) led Left Front Government (LFG) in West Bengal<sup>1</sup>, was overthrown by the landslide election victory of the Trinamool Congress and Indian National Congress alliance on May 13, 2011. The LFG had been elected in power by the state<sup>2</sup> electorates for seven consecutive terms since 1977. This thesis explores the relationship between the LFG and the media in the state of West Bengal from 1977 to 2011. The analysis of this relationship makes a significant contribution to understanding how the left articulately manages to operate their media in a postcolonial semi feudal and semi capitalist society like West Bengal in India to challenge the mainstream liberal media.

### I. OVERVIEW

The Left Front was and remains a coalition of ten parties<sup>3</sup> headed by the largest coalition partner, Communist Party of India (Marxist). This coalition participated in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly election and came to power in the provincial state of West Bengal for the first time in 1977. The coalition, primarily relying on radical reform and development, continued to receive popular support for thirty four years. The call of '*Poribarton*' (change) invoked by the united

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<sup>1</sup> West Bengal is the provincial state in the Eastern part of India

<sup>2</sup> The word 'state' here refers to the regional provinces in India and not as generally used to refer in the sense of nation-state

<sup>3</sup> CPIM (2014), State Governments, [Online], Available at <<http://www.cpim.org/content/state-governments>> [Accessed on 19.02.2014]



opposition led by the Trinamool Congress and the civil society in 2011 defeated the government for the first time since it came to power in 1977.

According to the Election Commission of India<sup>4</sup> statistics, out of 294 seats in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly election 2011, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) was only able to secure 40 seats, and the Left Front as a coalition won 61 seats with only 41.12 percent of the vote in favour of the left; whereas the main opposition party Trinamool Congress secured 184 seats.

The reasons for their defeat according to the coalition partners<sup>5</sup> of the Left Front Government were isolation from the public, corruption, arrogance and fallacious implementation of policies. These political attacks were in the public domain since the Panchayat<sup>6</sup> election in 2008 in the state of West Bengal. The Communist Party of India (CPI) General Secretary *A.B. Bardhan* told the press,

‘The leadership got isolated from the people. At certain levels, arrogance and even corruption crept in among the cadres and leaders. They took the people for granted not

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<sup>4</sup> Statistical Report on General Election, 2011 To The Legislative Assembly of West Bengal, Election Commission of India, New Delhi, [Online], Available at < [http://eci.nic.in/eci\\_main/StatisticalReports/AE2011/stat\\_WB\\_May2011.pdf](http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/StatisticalReports/AE2011/stat_WB_May2011.pdf)> [Accessed on 30.12.2013]

<sup>5</sup> Communist Party of India (CPI) and Forward Bloc

<sup>6</sup> Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) is the system of local governance in the rural areas in the states and the basic structure remaining the same, the provincial states decide on the election and the characteristics of the PRIs. The PRIs have three tiers as defined under The Constitution of India-the *Zilla Parishad* (District Panchayat constituency), *Panchayat Samities* (Block Panchayat constituency) and *Gram Panchayat* (Village Panchayat constituency). In the state of West Bengal, the elections of the PRIs are held every five years (Source: Information on West Bengal Panchayats, Their Members and Functionaries: After the Panchayat General Elections 2008 and 2009 (Siliguri), Panchayat and Rural Development Department, Government of West Bengal, [Online], Available at < <http://rcwb.in/rcwb/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/24.-Panchayats-in-West-Bengal-at-a-Glance.pdf>> [Accessed on 31.12.2013]

realising that people are not passive and mere objects of politics but active makers of political destiny and the future.’<sup>7</sup> (May 15, 2011 02:10 IST)

The General Secretary of the Forward Bloc (FB), another coalition partner of the LFG, *Debabrata Biswas* while commenting on the defeat of the LFG in the press said,

‘It is now realised that the people overwhelmingly responded to the massive slogan of change given by the Opposition. This response of the people must have been fuelled by quite a few failures and wrong-stepping by the Left Front government.’<sup>8</sup> (May 14, 2011 23:52 IST)

The series of electoral defeats of the left<sup>9</sup> in West Bengal, in the regional Panchayat, Municipality and the Lok Sabha<sup>10</sup> elections created a clear mandate for change. The careful political strategy played by the opposition, which this time formed a unanimous coalition to fight the left, enjoyed the support of the media in West Bengal (chapter 6). This fed my intellectual curiosity to find out the relation between the CPI (M) led LFG and the mainstream media.

Firstly the thesis investigates issues and policies of reform in the state of West Bengal, and how these were communicated by the media (chapter 5 and 6). These

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<sup>7</sup>Source: *The Hindu*, Available at <<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/arrogance-corruption-led-to-isolation-in-west-bengal-says-bardhan/article2019481.ece>> [Accessed on 23.11.2013]

<sup>8</sup>Source: *The Hindu*, Available at <<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/left-will-strive-for-early-recovery/article2019394.ece>> [Accessed on 23.11.2013]

<sup>9</sup>The term ‘left’ has been employed to denote the CPI (M) and the LFG.

<sup>10</sup>The Parliament of India comprises of three elements- President, Lok Sabha or the House of the People and Rajya Sabha or the Council of States. The Lok Sabha holds its direct election every five years in a total of 552 seats, among which 530 members are elected from the states, 20 members elected from the Union Territories and remaining two elected by the President from the Anglo-Indian community (Source: Lok Sabha, [Online], Available at <<http://loksabha.nic.in/>> [Accessed on 31.12.2013]

insights are relevant to the thesis as they epitomize the role and functioning of the party controlled and mainstream media in West Bengal (chapter 8). In other words these insights exhibit the issues that the newspapers and the media reflected on while communicating the politics in the public sphere.

Secondly the thesis reviews the impact of neoliberalism on the functioning of the media (chapter 4). India adopted the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1991. This had considerable impact on the ownership and functioning of the media. Post 1991 India also witnessed the growth of the regional media which contributed towards the representation of the regional parties in national politics (chapter 4). This research therefore examines whether this impacted on the representation of the CPI (M) as a national party and their relation with the media (chapter 6 and 8).

Thirdly the left do have a smaller parallel stream of media (mainly newspapers, tabloids, journals, pamphlets, documentaries) in India employed to communicate their politics to the public and contest the mainstream media arguments (chapter 6). Thus the content in the mainstream media in India had to face the countering arguments from the party controlled media. Therefore this thesis investigates the impact that the party controlled and the mainstream media exerted on the public sphere in building any form of political consensus. I aim to examine how the mainstream and the party controlled media disseminated information and counter arguments to influence the public sphere.

Fourthly this thesis explores the role of the mainstream media in stabilising or destabilising the left in West Bengal. The media took an active role in the communicating politics in the West Bengal public sphere. In the absence of a coalition by the opposition parties until 2008, the newspapers and the media in West Bengal consciously played the role of the watch-dog. There are widely available books on the left movement, the transformation of the media, the newspapers role and also on the functioning of the media in India. However there has been limited research on the media in West Bengal and no research done on the relation between the media and the LFG in West Bengal. In other words this thesis examines how the LFG and the media viewed each other's function and role while communicating in the public sphere.

Finally the thesis examines how the above discussed factors impacted the relation between the media and the CPI (M) in the state. In other words consolidating the findings on the above investigations I have studied the relationship between the media and the CPI (M) led LFG in West Bengal during its tenure in office for thirty four years. Politically much of the mainstream media did not support the LFG. The LFG viewed the critical eye of the media as playing the role of opposition parties. The continuous strenuous relation between the two percolated the political polarisation in the public sphere. Thus the polarised political communication that took place throughout the thirty four years of the left rule influenced the society

This investigation is done by collecting data from the interviews conducted with the senior journalists and Editors and CPI (M) leaders and from the congress<sup>11</sup> and conference reports, manifestos, press releases, pamphlets, leaflets, booklets and websites of the CPI (M) over a period of thirty four years. Although there has been previous work on the role of the media in West Bengal, this is the first attempt to look into the relationship between the CPI (M) led LFG and the media in the state. Therefore the findings of this thesis will widely contribute to the field of media and political communication. The findings of this thesis provide further scope for research in the field (chapter 9).

## **II. THE THESIS STRUCTURE**

The entire thesis is divided into four parts corresponding to specific areas of investigation, comprising of *nine* chapters. Part I of the thesis consists of the *Literature Review* (chapter 2) and the *Methodology* (chapter 3), dealing broadly with the literatures available in the field to acquire the theoretical framework for investigation and the qualitative methodology of the research that this thesis employs respectively. The Literature Review chapter is divided into two sections. The first section investigates into the available research works and literatures on the normative theories of the media and its relation to state and democracy. The second section looks into the literatures on postcolonialism, media globalisation and cultural imperialism.

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<sup>11</sup> 'The Party Congress held every three years is the highest decision making body of the Party. In between two Congresses it is the Central Committee which is the highest decision making body', in, CPI (M) website, [Online], Available at < <http://www.cpim.org/leadership> > [Accessed on 19.02.2014]

As mentioned above the Methodology chapter delineates the approach taken to investigate the research question. This thesis undertakes the qualitative research methodology to investigate the research questions by employing historiography, institutional history, documentary evidences and interviews.

Part II comprises of one contextual chapter *West Bengal, Left Front Government and the Media in India* (chapter 4) to situate the research which is then further divided into two sections. Section I discusses the national movements and their connection to Marxism, a brief history of the communist parties in India, formation of West Bengal, the society and caste in Bengal, the political movements and leadership of the left and the formation of the LFG in West Bengal. The second section focuses on the restructuring of the economy and transformation in the structural and functional operations of the media, the secular challenges and the rise of the vernacular press. Both of these sections contribute to understand the socio-political and economic structure of India and situate West Bengal in the Indian context. These sections reflect on the situation before and after India adopted the open market policy in 1991.

Part III consists of the three findings chapters based on the archival and documents research and the interviews. *The Policies of the CPI (M) led LFG in West Bengal* (chapter 5) explores CPI (M)'s understanding on governance and Indian political system, the updated party programme on issues of governance post 1991, the policies of the LFG, the incidents of *Singur* and *Nandigram* and finally the reasons as put by the CPI (M) on the survival and the decline of the LFG. *The Relation of the CPI (M) led LFG with the Media* (chapter 6) explores the

understanding of the CPI (M) on the role, importance and functioning of the media pre and post 1991. It further examines the impression of the CPI (M) on the media and *Ganashakti*'s role in combating the mainstream media while defending the LFG in West Bengal. *The Media Viewpoint on the CPI (M) led LFG* (chapter 7) investigates the understanding of the media on CPI (M) led LFG. This chapter is further divided into two sections. The first section provides an analysis of the print industry in West Bengal involving some statistical data (secondary data). The second section analyses the interviews of the journalists and Editors conducted for this thesis. It therefore explores the social and political position of the media and the role it played in stabilising or destabilising the LFG in the state.

Part IV is the final part of this thesis which includes *The Discussion* (chapter 8) and *The Conclusion* (chapter 9). *The Discussion* comprises of the reflection on the research questions in the light of the literature review and the findings. *The Discussion* chapter focuses on *five* key findings. Firstly, the CPI (M) led LFG came to power by undertaking and communicating the postcolonial reform in the line of neo-liberalism in Europe involving devolution of power targeting the rural electorates. The research finds that neoliberalism had considerable impact on the structure, policies and functioning of the media in West Bengal. Secondly, the CPI (M) employed their organisation, newspaper and publications to contest the mainstream media arguments and defend the LFG in the public sphere. The mainstream media on the other hand continuously monitored the LFG and its policies and communicated accordingly in the public sphere. Therefore the research finds effort to shape public debates in order to seek some form of

political consensus. Thirdly, the research finds that the media in West Bengal were divided on political lines between the left and the opposition. This generated a market for political advertisements and news contributing to a politically polarised media market that assisted in generating revenue for the media. Fourthly, the research finds that the media contributed to rather than played a determining role in destabilising the Left Front Government. There were other organisational and political factors that compounded the resistance against the left. However this needs further research to conclude by involving the public and therefore holds the scope for future research (chapter 9). Finally the CPI (M) had a difficult relationship with the media since they decided to participate in the parliamentary democracy in 1977 which gradually got transformed into an antagonistic relationship post 1991. The reach of the media was restricted until 1991 since the postcolonial elite newspapers dominated the market and there was less scope for the regional newspapers to flourish. The literacy rate of the society was another constraint and not all were able to understand and read the postcolonial elite English newspapers. There was also only one central government controlled channel *Doordarshan* which was used as the government propaganda tool and for educative purposes. India witnessed the rise of the vernacular media and private corporate media post 1991 when it opened up the economy for foreign investments. All these contributed to the antagonistic relationship that developed post 1991. *The Conclusion* identifies the scope, audience and limitations of the research. It also focuses on the further research prospects collating on the trajectory of this thesis.



# Part I

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### Section I Normative Theories of Media

### Section II Postcolonial Society, Globalisation and Cultural Imperialism

## Chapter 3 Methodology

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Towards a theoretical framework

India as a country has not followed a uniform path in its development. It is a multicultural country with a colonial past. This chapter deals with two broader areas (1) media, democracy and their relation to state (2) postcolonial theory, globalisation and cultural imperialism.

The main aim, as discussed in chapter 1, of my research is to investigate the relation between the CPI (M) led LFG and the media in West Bengal, which is a provincial state in the postcolonial India. The normative theories of media assist in understanding the structure of the media and its performance in the particular socio-political and economic system within which it operates. It also provides an explanation of how the media is expected to function within specific conditions. Since I study the relationship between the media and the government in a postcolonial state where there was a communist government for thirty four years, therefore I find the normative theories pertinent to reflect on the relationship. This thesis studies Public Sphere briefly, as it is not central to the thesis investigation, but is relevant to reflect on the purpose behind the role played by the media in West Bengal. The challenges brought in by the *Comparing Media Systems* to the *Four Theories of the Press* are central to the investigation that I undertake for the thesis. I also examine the developmental role played by the

media in West Bengal and therefore this thesis reviews the development theory of the media.

The relation that this thesis studies, is situated in a postcolonial Nation-State which undertook structural adjustment of the economy owing to the neoliberal policies in 1991. Accordingly I also review literatures on the political theories of postcolonialism, globalisation and cultural imperialism to reflect on the relation between the media and the LFG in West Bengal. I have divided this chapter into two sections. The first section looks into the *Four Theories of the Press*, Liberal Pluralism, Marxism and Development theory. The second section looks into postcolonial theory, globalisation and cultural imperialism.

India is diverse and a unique example of representative democracy. A country where no uniform pattern of development has taken place. A country which not only has its own history and culture but is influenced by the history of invasion that generated a resistant culture; the colonial history that generated an institutional culture; a Nation-State history that promoted culture of political negotiation; a postcolonial history which had elements of resistance towards both the coloniser and the liberator or the ruling elite of the country; a history of partition that indulged non-secular motives. Therefore it is not possible to define the government media relations in West Bengal without addressing the diversity of India as discussed above. Now there is an inherent contradiction while looking into the Indian media and political system from the perspective of the Western theories, at the same time the importance of defining through western lenses cannot be denied because of the historical structure of India (discussed in detail below).

The various phases as discussed above in Indian history therefore authenticate my choice of selecting the theories for literature review to generate a manageable theoretical framework for this thesis.

Before delving into the theoretical discussion I start with answering the question of relevance of the Western theories of the media in framing a research which is located in the East and in a postcolonial nation-state.

### **Relevance of Western Models of the media in India**

This section of the chapter explores the theories of the media and their relevance to the study under research for this thesis. Two very relevant concerns are addressed here before going into details of the Western theories of media; firstly, whether the communication theories have an Indian perspective, and secondly, how relevant are Western theories of media in Indian context?

Firstly, the Constitution of India has the provision of protecting the freedom of speech and expression under Art. 19 (1a) of the Constitution, which was adopted following the ‘western libertarian tradition’ (Siebert, 1963: 33). Secondly, India being the home to varied cultures and invasions, from the Aryans to the British, has a broad spectrum of history which eventually has made India adaptable and pragmatic in its approach to development (Prakash, 2005). It is undeniable that the institutional history of India is deeply rooted in the colonial past and that is why researching on the socio-economic and political developments and contradictions can never be holistically investigated without referring to both the western theories as well as the resistance in the postcolonial India (Goswami, 2004).

Therefore though the communication theories have an Indian perspective yet the structuring of the communication system has its root in the colonial past.

The Western theories of media therefore set the defining frame for the discussion of communication in India. The Western structure of communication set up by the British in India did not go away after India gained Independence (Goswami, 2004). Both the structure and the dependence continued even after India became a nation-state (chapter 4). There was and remains a deep link between the scholars of the West with India and vice versa. The developmental planning of the communication system in India since the 1960s was constructed on Western models but through Planning Commission where state was the decisive factor. But the difference between the rural and the urban India has always been a major concern while implementing the communication programmes based on the models of the West. This non-uniformity between the rural and urban India, according to the researcher, is the Indian perspective of the communication theories essentially rooted in postcolonial India (Sangwan and Sangwan, 2003: 19-20). India has its own complexities, contradictions, ethos and diversity which are not uniform and homogeneous as in the West. Accordingly the concentration of the media, reach of the media, and access to the media is not uniform. But the scope of widening the concentration, reach and access of the media increased after the New Economic Policy in 1991 (chapter 4).

## SECTION I

This section explores the literatures on theories and approaches in the study of media. Therefore it reviews the normative theories of the media along with the media theories of liberal pluralism and Marxism. The theories of the media further provide the background to investigate the media and its relation with the state in the context of India and West Bengal (chapters 4, 6 and 7). Thus the review starts by looking into the normative and operational theories of media, a debate that began in the 1950s.

### **2.1 The Normative Theories of the Media**

McQuail (1987) described the media institutions as a reflection and product of the national history of a country or state. Media extends the bridge between the international events and national thoughts on the events; however there are certain rules and norms by the theoretical schools of how the media should and would operate within a society (Schramm, 1964).

The *Four Theories of the press* (1963: 1-2) by Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm argues that the structure of the press ‘reflects the system of social control whereby relations of individuals and institutions are adjusted’, but they employed a stereotyped structure which is then contested by other theorists (Christians et. al., 2009; Hallin and Mancini, 2004).

These theories were developed immediately after World War II and had the influence of the Cold War era. It became necessary to theorise the relation

between the mass media and politics including the role played by the mass media in the societies after World War II that contributed towards the framing of normative theories (Christians et. al., 2009: 4). The critical school of communication research however criticised the normative theories as having ‘political and cultural bias’ (Christians et. al., 2009: 4). Nerone (1995: 23) criticised the *Four Theories of The Press* to have originated from within the classical liberalism theory ‘because it is specifically within classical liberalism that the political world is divided into individuals versus society or the state’.

### **2.1.1 The Authoritarian Theory**

The Authoritarian theory defines the role of the press as to serve the government in power; and operates in a top down strategy where power rests on the top (Siebert et. al, 1963: 2). The press was there to support and communicate the royal policies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There were arguments on how the system of media should operate under the authoritarian regime depending on the conditions prevalent in the countries (Siebert, 1963:19). The direct techniques of patent, licensing system, censorship, laws, and indirect techniques of subsidising the publications, imposing taxes to restrict circulation of newspapers were introduced to control the media functions and negate freedom of press and journalists (ibid, 1963:18-25; McQuail, 1987). The function of the press under this theory is closely and remotely monitored but a certain amount of liberty in the content of the mass media is permissible to the extent it does not question the political decision makers of the system. Therefore the role of the mass media is to work in conformity with the system of government in power. But this role of the

press gradually changed with social development, with the increase in the practice of political democracy and freedom from religious orthodoxy (Siebert et.al., 1963).

Siebert (1963:10) points that many of the countries both in the First and Third world adopted the authoritarian functioning of the press either consciously or unconsciously. This theory is based on the power relation between two social institutions, where the institution of media is controlled by the institution of the government. Therefore it is a socially organised control on the press where state remains supreme. The theory of Marxism is also closely related to the principles of authoritarianism (Siebert, 1963: 17). The latter concept has been widely used in the works of the philosophers like Machiavelli, Hobbes and Hegel. However Fascism contributed to the moral perversion of this theory towards absolutism in the hands of Mussolini and Hitler (Siebert, 1963) which was based on the policy of state intervention in political and cultural matters. The media in India and in West Bengal went through similar phases where *Doordarshan*<sup>12</sup> was regarded as government's propagandist (Joseph, 2000: 165). The press went through censorships during the political emergency (1975-77) and a centralised media policy was adopted thereafter (chapter 4).

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<sup>12</sup> The Indian National Satellite (INSAT) in 1982 introduced satellite link through Low Power Transmitters to expand the television network. Doordarshan is 'the public service broadcaster with the largest terrestrial network in the world' (Rani, 2006: 27)



### **2.1.2 The Libertarian Theory**

Liberalism, a philosophy developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, based its primary mode of functioning of the state on democracy. The liberal-pluralist approach in the post Cold War period developed from within the mass society used to retaining its distinctiveness from both Western democracies and authoritarian structure (Gurevitch et al.). Liberal Pluralism since 1940's has been a popular approach to study politics and media in USA and Western Europe (Wiarda, 1997). The rise of the middle class is argued to have had a direct influence on the development of liberalism in Europe (Siebert, 1963:42). The Libertarian theory of press, also known as Free Press theory (McQuail, 1987), originating from the principles of liberalism, projects press as the weapon in the hands of free men who can then use the press to check the political power of the state (Siebert et. al., 1963). This theory widely contributed in the anti-colonial protest; protest against exploitation, to reveal the truth and in many other social interests (McQuail, 1987). There was a need to revisit the theoretical understanding of liberal pluralism on the relation between the media and the state post 1980s.

The traditional thinking of the liberal-pluralist school is embedded in theorisation of the media as a separate entity from the government or authority and hence functions as the watchdog of the government (Bennett, 1982:31). Therefore the role of media according to the liberal-pluralist school is that of the Fourth-Estate where the media functions as a vanguard of democracy (ibid, 1982:31).

The theory of liberal pluralism can further be divided into the classical and radical approaches (Curran, 1997; Curran, 2003; Garnham, 1990; Ryan, 1991). According to the classical liberal pluralism approach, the media continuously monitors the engagement of the public with the state by safeguarding individual liberty against ‘abuse of executive power’ (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Curran, 1997: 29). However it does not include the power structures operative in the societies and hence is unable to relate it to the media functioning in modern liberal democracies (Curran, 1997: 29). The radical approach however views the media as a ‘battleground between contending forces’ (ibid, 1997: 29). Therefore the balancing of the intercessions by the media conveys a message to the society. Democratisation of the media platform is an essential component to democratise society by reflecting on conflicting interests prevalent within the society. However Curran (1997:30) cautions that sometimes the radical approach promotes a ‘representative’ form of media system where ‘political representation’ within the media organisations is induced as a balancing act.

The media according to the radical approach should also equalize the disproportionate power balance in the society (ibid, 1997: 30). Therefore the radical approach includes more complex communication channels as opposed to the classical model where the communication happens between the public and the government and therefore is incapable to situate the theory in modern complex societies. Thus unlike classical liberalism the radical approach advocates investigative functioning of the media considering the complex structure of the society. One of the major differences between the classical and radical sections is

that the former insists on the media dependence on free market to dissociate itself with the government; whereas the latter eschews the concept of media freedom depending on the free market since market promotes dominant class interests (Curran, 1997: 35). Hence the radical democratic pluralism shuns the reformist approach of classical liberalism and advocates for an alternative form of governance (Huchings, 1999: 167).

This thesis examines the theory of liberal pluralism in the context of India's nation-building exercise (chapter 4). It further reviews the ownership and functions of the media after India adopted an open market economic policy in 1991 (chapter 4). I further employ the difference between the classical and radical thoughts of liberal pluralism to investigate whether the media played a balancing role through promoting political representation or an investigative role maintaining its watchdog function (chapter 8).

I also study Blumler and Gurevitch (1995: 25) who reflect on the relationship between the media professionals and the politicians under liberal pluralism. This review is relevant to examine the relationship that prevailed in West Bengal between the two institutions (chapter 8). They view the relation between the media and various information sources firstly as 'problematic' since the journalists are free to make their own choice of sources because of independent editorial policies and the media is not dominated by the state; secondly, the relation is 'pivotal' since the journalists need to employ much of their time and energy to extrapolate news from the influential political sources who themselves are subject of the stories; and thirdly it is 'extremely difficult to analyse' because the power relations

involved are complex where both the media and the politician remains accountable to the public (ibid, 1995: 25). They 'constitute a subtly composite unity' but maintain 'separate identities' (ibid, 1995: 25). It thus becomes extremely difficult, because of the 'inextricably intertwined' relation, to discern precise input from the composite political news presented in the public domain (ibid, 1995: 26). Accordingly Blumler and Gurevitch (1995, 27- 31) discuss the adversary and exchange models where the former views that the media should act as a scrutinizer of the received news from the politician, whereas the latter emphasise a more cordial exchange relationship between the two so as to enable the journalist to receive a holistic understanding of the situation and the politician. However both these models of the relationship are criticised by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995: 31) since both of them have analytical dilemmas owing to the normative and operational approaches of liberal pluralism. The normative approach as discussed previously advocates for the adversarial model whereas in the real operational situation the practitioners seem to overlook or disregard the normative approach (ibid, 1995: 31). Therefore Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) suggest a broad framework to bridge between the normative and operational approaches based on reality. According to them the relation should include mutual dependence and adaptation, regulation of roles, sharing a user generated culture, open to conflicts and arguments and a conflict management system (ibid, 1995: 32).

## **A. Habermas and the Public Sphere**

As previously mentioned in chapter 1, I study the Public Sphere not because this thesis evaluates the West Bengal Public Sphere but to examine the role played by the mainstream and the party controlled media to democratically reflect the thoughts in the public sphere. Therefore I present a brief synopsis of the Public Sphere to situate the relation between the media and the LFG in the West Bengal public sphere (chapter 6, 7 and 8).

Inspired by Horkheimer and Adorno, Habermas examined the public sphere where the socio-political discussions and debates took place and were influenced by the media in different forms (Durham and Kellner, 2006). Public Sphere is the space for the citizens to exercise their democratic rights by engaging in the conversation while debating and examining the relevant issue to reach a consensus and then contributing as a public body (Habermas 1991; Habermas, 1996: 299). Habermas originally viewed this space as independent of government interventions and was ideally located in the coffee house culture during Enlightenment in Europe. Habermas undoubtedly made the important contribution to the democratic theory and the socio-historical investigation on the conditions for a rational debate by the private individual on public issues but is criticised for being idealistic (Garnham, 1992: 359).

Habermas (1991) on the process of explaining the structural transformation of the public sphere explained the connection between the private and the public sphere; the news getting transformed into commodity; and how news became an

instrument of promulgation for the state administration (Durham and Kellner, 2006). He also emphasises the rational-critical debate gradually being replaced with negotiating dialogues between the power centres where the public is only expected to impart *éclat* (Habermas, 1991).

Mass media led to the mass consumption of culture, transformed citizens into consumers, generated an urban-centric consumer of higher status and was primarily accessible to a class 'in need of cultural legitimation' (Habermas, 1991:174). The partitioning of the audience and changing relationship of the producer and the consumer is a contribution of the transformation and according to Habermas this is precisely where the social intelligentsia also gets divided into different levels or classes (Calhoun, 1992). Thus the public sphere becomes a pre-moderated platform seeking public consent by advertising the content.

The theory of Public Sphere is criticised for eschewing the questions of nationalism, culture, religion, social movement, hegemonic power and ideology and undermining the intellectual capacity of the twentieth century public (Baker, 1992; Calhoun, 1992; Eley, 1992; Postone, 1992; Warner, 1992; Zaret, 1992). According to Boyd-Barrett (2001:230) the creation of the public by Habermas was a 'culturally-embedded social practice'. The public sphere theory is also criticised for representing the 'elite' and 'male' world (Thompson, 2001:253) and overlooking the historical importance of press in the working-class history (Curran and Seaton, 2003).

The media instead generates a public sphere where intellectual and political discussions take place but does not necessarily shape public consensus (Boyd-Barrett, 2001). The bourgeois public sphere collapses not only because of media commercialisation but the privatisation and liberalisation of the economy and society as a whole (Garnham, 2001; Dahlgren, 2000: 8). This creates a social consumerist approach which looks for solutions to public problems privately (Murdock, 2001).

### **2.1.3 Social Responsibility Theory**

The technological advancement and industrial revolution gave rise to the Social Responsibility Theory (Peterson, 1963). Post World War II there was a demand for politically unbiased interpretive news coverage (Nerone, 2004:186). It brought in changes to the ideals of democratic capitalism and became more concerned about the social moral responsibility of the media (Peterson, 1963). It was more about the audience and the uniform flow of information engaging consumers' advice (Nerone, 2004:186). This theory emphasises on the social accountability of the media and its contribution to the development of the society (McQuail, 1987); but at the same time answerable to the law of the society. It connects with the classical liberal pluralist role of the media and believes that media should honour the social diversity (McQuail, 1987, Nerone, 2004). The theory also encourages the press 'to practice responsibility to the general welfare, sincerity, truthfulness, impartiality, fair play, decency, and respect for the individual's privacy' (Peterson, 1963: 85). The Social Responsibility theory distances itself from the Libertarian theory by putting emphasis on positive liberty which conditions

responsibility on freedom. Therefore it is not about whether the press is free from government intervention but according to Social Responsibility theory the government should encourage and promote the freedom (ibid, 1963: 95). Again freedom of expression under Social Responsibility theory is the moral right of the individual but not the absolute right since it should carry the moral obligation to protect others right as opposed to the natural right under the Libertarian theory (ibid, 1963: 96-97). I employ this theory in this thesis to investigate the social accountability of the media in West Bengal (chapter 7 and 8).

#### **2.1.4 The Soviet Communist Theory**

The Marxists always saw media as an instrument in the hands of the ruling class and essentially a medium for class domination. As Bennett (1982: 49) argue,

‘Marxist inquiry into the media is motivated by the need to furnish a knowledge of their workings that can be put to use in the production of subversive signifying systems which might offset the effects of dominant ideology and contribute to the formation of a revolutionary consciousness within oppressed social groups and classes.’

According to the Marxists the media has its own ideological commitment and it works towards legitimizing the social structure according to the prevalent societal norms (ibid, 1982; Gurevitch et. al., 1982:14).

The Authoritarian theory was modified and came to be known as the Soviet Communist theory (Schramm, 1963) which views media as an instrument in the hand of the state. The 1917 Soviet revolution redefined the social institutional understandings. The media according to the Soviet Communist theory not only



informs the public but also organises the agitators' and works as a propaganda tool (Herman and Chomsky, 1994; Schramm, 1963:123; Sparks, 2000:31). The media should be controlled and guided by the working class (McQuail, 1987) instead of functioning as a Fourth Estate (Schramm, 1963: 110). In Soviet the press worked under the dictum of the leadership of the state and was regarded as another instrument of the state to propagate the views of communism (ibid, 1963: 122; Curran, 1997). Another role that the Soviet press played was that of fostering unity within the state and revealing the political understanding of the party to educate the mass (Sparks, 2000:31). The definitions of freedom and responsibility of mass media, according to Schramm (1963:125) were different for the Soviet state but they were closely integrated to the system. According to the Soviet theory news can never be objective in a capitalist system since it always functions according to the need of the capital. However the mass media was claimed to be the freest in the world in Soviet since it was free from the market compulsions of the capital. The mass media according to the theory in the Soviet did not have the need to question the state as the state was there for public good. The ownership of the instruments of the mass media was under the state and because the state was by the majority so was the ownership of the media (ibid, 1963). The Soviet press was organised, monitored, supervised and controlled. The content of the Soviet Press was also different from any other capitalist press as it did not have any advertisements, the editorials were not on mere events but it was about the 'interpretation of social processes' (ibid, 1963: 133-134).

Though the Soviet Theory of Press looks similar to the Authoritarian theory but there are differences. According to the Soviet theory the media has to be state-controlled but in the authoritarian system the media could partly be privately owned. The Soviet Communist theory emphasised on the self-regulation of the media but objected market interference (McQuail, 1987). The Soviet media was free from any capital interventions and therefore profit was not the motive but effects on public minds were central to the functioning of the media. The mass media unlike the other Authoritarian regimes was assigned the role to educate the mass in line of the political direction of the party. The planned system of administration including the media under the Soviet system was different from the other authoritarian states in history. The theory also believes that the reform in the media system to usher significant transformation is not possible without the socialist transformation of the state (Curran, 1997: 36). According to Curran (1997) the Soviet press in its initial days was more pluralistic in its approach which gradually developed an authoritative role within the society.

Sparks (2000:33-34) however demonstrated that the media system was not uniform in its function throughout all the countries in the Soviet. Therefore he questions, citing the example of Poland, the credibility of the Soviet Communist Theory as proposed by the Schrammists and the Stalinists to be rigidly 'centralized', 'controlled' and 'propagandist' (ibid, 2000:31).

This thesis studies the LFG's relation with the media, which was a government ran by the communists. They have their small parallel stream of party controlled media (chapter 6). Therefore looking into the Soviet Communist theory I examine

the approach taken by the LFG towards media by simultaneously looking into how the CPI (M) employs their media to counter the mainstream media in West Bengal (chapter 6 and 8).

The Soviet Communist Theory is further modified under the structuralist school that focuses on the relation between the media, culture and ideology by challenging the traditional Marxist explanation of economism (Althusser, 2001). According to Althusser (2001) media is the part of the ideological state apparatus and assists in disseminating ideology to the public ensuring both hegemony and the production of capital while restraining pluralist thought. The ideology of mass culture promotes a uniformity through media which establishes a typical pattern of behaviour and speech and in a way imposes on the individual to accept it as reality. According to Althusser (2001: 109) the '[I]deology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' and '[I]deology has a material existence' (ibid, 2001:108).

This view of the Marxist interpretation of media as the powerful ideological agency (Gurevitch et. al., 1982) was challenged by the other view 'grounded in empirical research within a liberal tradition' (Gurevitch et. al., 1982:13). Gurevitch et. al. (1982) argues that both lines of thoughts have internal contradictions, at the same time they exert influence on each other. There were important shifts within the Marxist schools towards empirical research on the audience and its media reception (Hartman, 1979; Morley, 2005).

Post 1960s media studies came across a new wave of intellectual contribution

from the cultural theories. The media as an institution had effects on prevailing social relations within the society which gets reflected in the 'language, symbolic and cultural codes' (Newbold, 2001: 328) that the media engages in defining the world. Marxism and specifically the Frankfurt school influence this sector of thought and construct the relation between culture-politics-society in wider form (Bennett, 1982; Hall; 1982; Newbold, 2001).

The concept of cultural hegemony was installed gaining inspiration from the works of Gramsci (Bennett, 1982, Hall 1996). Gramsci was more of a 'political intellectual and a socialist activist' than a 'general theorist' (Hall, 1996:411), who worked within the principles of historical materialism and continuously tried to connect the Marxist understanding to the societal operations in order to develop it theoretically in given historic conditions (Hall, 1996). Thus gaining the insight from the World War I Gramsci theorised the concept of cultural hegemony where two conflicting cultures compete to establish hegemony (Newbold, 2001). The same applies to the mass media which delivers this hegemonic version of the culture to interpret the world and explain the competing ideas of the elite while completely obliterating other variants (Newbold, 2001). Again another body of thought within the popular culture explains that the media does not necessarily affect culture but is reflexive of the values and cultural meanings within the society (Hall, 1971; Hoggart, 1958; Williams, 1958). The culturalist paradigm emphasises the expression and manifestation of mass society and is not necessarily linked to ideology unlike the structuralist paradigm (Hall, 2001). Also as Bennett (2001) explains the structuralist views the text as

ideologically encoded with little reference to the reality as opposed to the culturalist line of interpretation that mostly relies on human agencies. In retrospect as Bennett (2001) argues it was the need of the hour to reposition the hermetic debate of the structuralist-culturalist which eventually found the Gramscian hegemony as a new paradigm shift. Gramsci criticised economism and appreciated Lenin's contribution to the advancement of Marxism (Glucksmann, 1980). To Gramsci the struggle is more intense for the working class when the question of establishing hegemony arises both culturally and intellectually in order to obtain leadership politically (Bennett, 2001).

The civil society that includes the media also plays a dominant role in the discourse by inducing consent and eventually incorporating institutionalisation of either male dominance or by establishing hegemony of specific race or ethnicity (Durham and Kellner, 2006). Therefore as Gitlin (2003) argues media plays a role to accumulate the popular common sense in the capitalist society and then repackage and distribute it within the society accordingly. This process of cultural hegemonic pattern would operate in a particular socio-political platform by utilising the constellation of the media, other popular cultural platforms, technologies and institutions along with the state though there would always be a counterhegemonic force operating within the same perimeter (Durham and Kellner, 2006). This theory was furthered under the Institute of Social Research by Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Walter Benjamin, in the wake of monopoly capitalism, which after Hitler captured power had to expatriate to USA and worked under the affiliation of the University of

Columbia (Durham and Kellner, 2006; Gurevitch et. al, 1982; Hall, 1996). They worked more closely with the media constitution by rejecting the economism and focusing on the audience reception and text analysis and studied how the mass media worked as socio-cultural-political agents mediating within the social structure (Durham and Kellner, 2006). This thesis looks into whether the functioning of the media and the CPI (M) had similar Gramscian influences in West Bengal (chapter 6 and 8).

### **2.1.5 Development Media Theory**

The various questions about the dominance of the West in the media content and information, underdeveloped communication infrastructure and resources, the huge cost in the production, the audience and the commitment of fulfilling the primary national tasks made it necessary to rethink media theories (MacBride et. al., 1980; McQuail, 1987). Accordingly the requirement for more flexible approach of the media, which would neither replicate the capitalist or the developed framework nor the Communist pattern, was found necessary (McQuail, 1987; Thompson, 1995). Thus a more participatory form of the media to serve the national and cultural interest of the society and linking it with economic development (McQuail, 1987) is the primary objective of the Development Media theory. This theory argues about supporting the development agendas of the ‘existing political regime’ so as to support the ‘national economic development’ (Baran and Davis, 2012: 126). Therefore according to this theory the media ‘must be supportive rather than critical of government’ (ibid, 2012: 127). It is also about decentralising and democratising the production and distribution of the media to

benefit all in the society (MacBride et. al., 1980). This theory emphasises the right to express opinion. I therefore discuss the initial phase in the Indian press and media in the light of this theory. I also investigate what constraints the Indian media faced while implementing its developmental role in the wake of neoliberal policies (chapter 4, 7 and 8).

## **2.2 Comparative Analysis of Three Models of Media and Politics**

I now review the important contribution by Hallin and Mancini (2004) who replaced the dominant paradigms of the normative theories proposed by the *Four Theories of the Press* and reinstated the three models based on the European and North American countries by questioning the root of media collaboration with the political and social systems operative in a society. The three basic models proposed by Hallin and Mancini (2004: 1) focuses on the relation between the media and the political system by analysing journalism and news media engaging the comparative analysis mode of social investigation. The comparative mode of analysis assists in situating the country specific investigation on the role of the media rather than generalising it universally. They proposed three models of comparative analysis, the liberal model based on market characterisation; the democratic corporatist model where the mainstream corporate media and the alternative media coexist; and the polarized pluralist model where the state plays a dominant role in the functioning of the media and the media gets integrated with ‘party politics’ (Christians et. al., 2009: 12; Hallin and Mancini, 2004:67-68; Voltmer, 2012: 224). Hallin and Mancini (2004:21) also suggest four main attributes of the media systems on which the three models are based. These were

‘development of media market’, reflection of ‘political divisions in society’, ‘development of journalistic professionalism’ and ‘state intervention in media system’ (Hallin and Mancini, 1995: 21).

However there is a necessity to look into the operations and functioning of the media beyond the western world. Voltmer (2012) argues that to understand the non-western media and politics relationship it is not sufficient to apply one model of Hallin and Mancini to theorise the media and political system in the non-western world. This is because there is non-uniformity between the two worlds in regard to the institutional patterns and social constructs. Therefore as Curran and Park (2000) suggest de-westernising the media theories would actually expand the theoretical framework beyond the West. They question Lerner’s (1963) argument of societal transformation from traditional to modern societies in the pro-western world where the model of national development was conjured up to substantiate the ‘repressive political system and the arbitrary exercise of political power’ (Curran and Park, 2000: 5). Therefore the communication system is adopted to built a relation of trust between the ruler and the ruled and hence does not promote participatory form of democracy (ibid, 2000).

The media as a political-economic and cultural institution would certainly have the respective influences from within the society (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Hence the relation between the media and the state is complex and intertwined. This thesis examines this complex relationship in the context of West Bengal (chapters 6, 7 and 8).



Christians et. al. (2009: 16) however combined the *Four Theories of the Press* and the Three Models by Hallin and Mancini (2004) and reformulated a three level analysis into Philosophical, Political and Media, where they suggest that ‘the four historical traditions of normative theory’ does not correspond with ‘a given level of democracy’.

## Section II

### 2.4 Postcolonial Society, Globalisation and Cultural Imperialism

As I have mentioned earlier, this thesis studies the relation between the media and the LFG in the provincial state located in postcolonial India. India opened up its economy to foreign market competition in 1991 (chapter 4). Therefore this section reviews the political theories of postcolonialism, globalisation and cultural imperialism. I then examine the functioning of the LFG and the media in West Bengal (chapter 8) based on these theories. This thesis is not about the political structure of the state and does not elaborate on the political theories. However to study the relation between the media and government in India post 1991 requires a basic understanding of the postcolonial society's reception of globalisation and whether the developing mission of the transnational corporations have the same intentions as the civilising mission of the colonisers. The ownership and the functioning of the media in India encountered changes that I examine to understand the effect it had on the relation between the media and LFG. I therefore briefly introduce these political theories in this section.

#### 2.4.1 Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonialism is a non-Western way of seeing the alternative world born out of the dialectic relation between Marxism and poststructuralism or postmodernism (Gandhi, 1998) and it criticises the scholarship of Eurocentrism (Brennan, 2004: 132; Chakrabarty, 1993). In other words it indicates the positional difference between the Orient and Occident, better known as *Orientalism* (Lazarus, 2002;

Said, 2003), which continuously works towards ‘dissolution of boundaries drawn by colonial and neo-colonial Western hegemony’ (Prakash, 1995). Spivak (Gandhi, 1998; Morton, 2004) questions the academic convention in dealing with the subject of postcolonialism and includes the more critical question of subaltern<sup>13</sup> representation which has often been marginalised by the dominant Western philosophies and rejects the fact that it is approved in the non-West (Gandhi, 1998).

According to Memmi, Cassirer, and Twomey (1973:21),

‘When the colonized finally recovers his identity, he needs to find the psychological and material resources to succeed in his combat against the oppressor. Beyond this he needs to re construct his identity, to acknowledge his past and to have a more or less clear vision of his future.’

Therefore the postcolonial agenda cannot be separated from the colonial coercion and its inevitable inheritance, as Spivak (Gandhi, 1998; Morton, 2004; Said, 2001) argues that there exists continuity in socio-cultural-economic and political anatomy of the independent nations who were colonies; only the representation has undergone a bourgeois reorientation to mirror the colonial socio-political structure (Chatterjee, 2004; Morton, 2004). I take this argument to review the Indian experience later in this thesis (chapter 4). Therefore postcolonialism carries

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<sup>13</sup> Subaltern studies is about studying history of society ‘from below’ which originated as a school during the end of 1970’s in England initiated by the South Asian scholars under the direction of Ranajit Guha (Ludden, 2002:1). It deals with society and culture but separating it from the political economy and the state institutions. Nationalism, national history, popular uprisings were at the heart of this study separating these from national elites and political parties. It loudly questions the past to reflect on the national debates on ‘land reform, planning, local democracy, farm finance, industrialisation, and other topics of hot dispute’ (Ludden, 2002:10).

the best connotation in its incessant form to construe intervention into a specific complex period in history as a residuum of colonial pursuit, though the newly emerged Nation-States often attempt to sever itself from the colonial pursuit (Gandhi, 1998). Postcolonialism is associated with both optimism in the sense that something novel and creative would ease the anxieties but is pessimistic about the colonial politico-cultural derivation (Gandhi, 1998).

The colonised world is easy to define before World War II as mostly the Western or European dominance of a non-Western world (Said, 2001). Accordingly it was the world, in the words of Memmi, of 'The Colonizer and The Colonized' and as Fanon views it, as the continuous conflict between the 'oppressor and the oppressed' (Cassirer, 1973: 9). National independence brought with it the structural compulsion of dependency, inferiority and influence on one hand and self esteem of combating the coloniser on the other (Gandhi, 1998; Said, 2001). Thus the Third World emerging out of the postcolonial situation has often a painful interrogation into the past and a trauma related to the present which often leads to the cultural identity crisis (Gandhi, 1998).

Bhaba (1994) invited a more critical way of looking into the colonial past by questioning the Western Enlightenment, progressiveness and therefore questioning the sanity of social transparency. While defining culture from a postcolonial perspective Bhaba (1994:172) argues it to be both 'transnational' and 'translational' since it is connected to the 'cultural displacement' on one hand and media globalisation on the other. The 'transnational and translational' characteristics are the strategies for survival through colonial imposition and

territorial expansion of media technologies globally (Bhabha, 1994:172; Jameson, 1991). Thus the negotiated cultural identity is the resistant force against cultural homogenisation that globalisation tries to implant in a postcolonial society.

The postcolonial theory resituates itself on a nationalist approach rather than on a dependency model which results in an indeterminacy (Bhaba, 1994). But to Memmi the relation between the coloniser and the colonised is that of dependency (Gandhi, 1998). Again the native and the invader relation involves a complex process and relationship, often the revolutionary native opposing the oppressing invader (Parry, 1987). Power plays a dominant role in the relationship where individuals become a part of it (Gandhi, 1998). In the process Fanon views violence as a 'purifying force' as opposed to Marx who took violence as an inevitable part for the proletariat to capture power; though Memmi searched for an alternative negotiatory process (Memmi, Cassirer, And Twomey, 1973:35).

Colonialism can also be separated into the two genres; one form being 'physical conquest of territories' and violent, the other more persuasive and penetrating with the intension of capturing minds and promoting imperialism (Gandhi, 1998; Nandy, 2009). However to Gandhi (1998) this separation in reality does not mean that the institutional penetration of imperialism was without involving force or violence. Instead the bridge became thinner between the Orient and the Occident in every respect overindulging polarisation within the relationship and psychoanalytically, the once colonised struggle to free the externally induced colonial self (Gandhi, 1998; Prakash, 1995b).

In history postcolonialism therefore pries open a new episode which in every way tries to gather an ameliorative understanding about colonialism depending on decolonizing and anticolonial nationalism but does not solve the historically derived or produced relations (Prakash, 1995b). Therefore the idea as Prakash (1995b) argues is to continue challenging the historical scholarship.

Postcolonialism often occludes itself from the Marxist explanation of imperialism and in a way rejects the idea of colonialism being a part of capitalism in its modern endeavour (Ahmad, 1995). The postcolonial theorists on the other hand claim that Marxism always circumvents the exploitation and miseries of the colonised (Gandhi, 1998) and continues questioning the root of postcolonialism. Bartolovich (2002:1) however advocates for creating a dialogue between postcolonialism and Marxism.

Upon this scaffold Fernandez (1999) tries to prioritise the postcolonial media theory. Both postcolonial and media agenda has diverse concernment. The postcolonial theorists have mainly dealt with the debates and arguments within the theories of Eurocentrism, culture, postmodernism, colonial discourse, violence, resistance, nationalism and so on. Media, mainly the electronic media, on the other hand, were more interested in connecting the world electronically and in the process developed an understanding of utopian connectivity when electricity was a luxury or rare for more than half of the world (Fernandez, 1999). This utopian connectivity can be compared to the 'civilizing mission' of the colonial propagators and therefore had to inculcate the imperialist agenda in its human scope (Fernandez, 1999).

Depending on the postcolonial scholarship I therefore study the conflicts on developmental issues in the society of West Bengal to see whether the LFG successfully engaged itself in a dialogue with the postcolonial society. The conflicts in the postcolonial society of West Bengal are not central to my thesis but the issues are relevant to understand the reform initiative of the LFG and how it was received by the postcolonial society and the media (chapter 5, 6 and 8).

#### **2.4.2 Postcolonialism, Globalisation and the Media**

Media in any form exerts influence on the society either to stabilize or to destabilize (Ambirajan, 2000). Therefore to understand the media in a postcolonial world and after the inexorable development of information technology, globalisation has to be understood from its roots.

Globalisation is a late twentieth century phenomenon which has reshaped the traditional way of understanding society and culture (Waters, 1995). The changing patterns of production, consumption in a globally mingled economy, the changing dynamics of culture, politics and migration and the 'relations of domination' have all contributed to the process of globalisation (Robinson, 2007:125). There are debates on when actually globalisation started. The three timeframe approaches are, one that dates back to the origin on history, second that unfolds itself with the flourishing of capitalism and modernity and the third argues it to be a recent restructure initiating in the late twentieth century and connected with the postmodern and post industrial framework (Robinson 2007; Robinson, 2011; Wallerstein, 2004; Waters, 1995).

Though globalisation is regarded as a historically ambivalent term, yet there are some common agreements on global transformation, increased connectivity, more information and knowledge and the multidimensional approach (Robinson, 2007; Waters, 1995). Globalisation is connected to a multitude of theories and is widely interdisciplinary in nature (Held et al., 1999; Robinson, 2007; Sklair, 2002). There are four sources, according to Sklair (2002:40), for research in globalisation; the world-system theory, the global culture approach, the global polity and society approach and the global capitalism approach'; Robinson (2007) included the network society approach by Manuel Castells (2005) as another theory contributing to globalisation.

Globalisation is immensely dominated by the commercial, political and military interest of the US corporations (Schiller, 1976) thus replacing colonialism with cultural imperialism. Bignell (2007:168) argues that 'homogeneity of media culture' gets reconstituted as the 'homogeneity of the political economy of the media' in globalisation. McLaren and Farahmandpur (2002: 35) further validates this as 'a reformist politics in the tradition of Western Liberalism' to 'advocate an expansion of existing bourgeois forms of democratic social life into wider arenas of society'. Thus neo-liberalism is the popular form of reform that is extremely transnational in character and dominates the developing economies by extending the market in a way generating globalised class relations and conflicts (ibid, 2002:38; Robinson, 2007; Sklair, 2000). I find this interesting to address the two types of reforms that took place in India. The first was the reform initiative by the LFG in West Bengal and the second was the opening of the Indian economy in 1991. This



thesis does not elaborate on the reform initiative or the consequences of neoliberalism but the question of reform is integral to the governance of the LFG. I therefore address and analyse the reform initiative and the difference between the two reforms to examine its effect on the relation between the media and the LFG (chapter 8).

There are debates however on whether the state plays a major role in this process (Brennan, 2004; Sklair, 2000). The neo-Gramscian school argues that the formation of the transnational corporations (TC) and transnational capitalist class (TCC) along with the cultural and ideological penetration of consumerism contributes towards re-theorising the state and its perimeter of power (Hirst and Thompson, 2000; Robinson 2007; Sklair, 2002). Power being widely resting in the hands of these transnational corporations and transnational capitalist class makes it easier for the global capitalism to establish its hegemony in a global form or character through media and corporations (Herman and McChesney, 2004; Sklair, 2002).

The question is then where the relation between the state and globalisation stand essentially in a postcolonial world. Ludden (2012:216) objectively addresses this question by saying '[I]t is true that Asia's recent surge in economic growth under neo-liberal policy influence has spawned increasing inequality, but globalisation in Asia also has temporal, spatial, and social patterns that derive from imperial histories in Asia'. Therefore the base for globalisation in India has a colonial inheritance which was again authenticated by Gupta and Sharma's (2006: 278) argument that 'postcolonial developmentalist states are being reshaped in the

context of global neoliberalism’ and ‘the postcolonial developmentalist Indian state is being reframed as a facilitator of development and an empowering agent’ (ibid, 2006: 285). This thesis discusses the arguments of CPI (M) on media and globalisation from this perspective (chapter 5, 6 and 8).

Another important relation is between the ‘power and the locale’ (Giddens, 1987:13) where the locale or the nation-state construct ‘power containers’ to centralise territorial, administrative, political, economical and societal powers. India as a nation-state employed this power to unify internally and diversify externally and a more liberal or representative form of democracy was embraced to consolidate this power. I deploy this argument to see whether the coalition government by the communist and socialist parties in West Bengal did successfully create the alternative regional power containers and undertook strategies of control through the institutional mediation of power (chapter 5 and 8).

Newspapers, emerging as a result of the democratic revolutions had a wide range of influence and power attached to them. The colonisers also employed their press to shape the press and radio of the colonised to maintain colonial dominance (Herman and McChesney, 2004; Gurevitch et al., 1982). The global media operators thus found an easy platform to implant the market objectives in the system and facilitate corporatisation (Herman and McChesney, 2004: 10). I have reviewed this in the context of India where the Indian press and radio was inherited from the colonisers (chapter 4).

The social and political influence of the media and the question of its control have been central to the growth of capitalism; which accordingly changed the character of the press in India from a regulated, political, state subsidised small enterprise to a large profit-making corporate organisation operating under various market competitions (chapter 4). However with the advent of telecommunication it was realised that newspaper operation was not enough to maintain the dominance or make and seek profit globally and in India. Therefore the need for a more decentralised global media gave rise to the news agencies who dominated this space globally. Herman and McChesney (2004:12) view the news agencies as the ‘wholesalers of content’ than media. This wholesale of content creates the irrelevant deluge of information as a result of the content domination where a viewer or a reader is held captive in the situation remaining undecided on their own opinion (chapter 6).

The transnational corporations (TNC) and the foreign direct investment (FDI) emerging out of the Industrial Revolution reached its height with the advent of globalisation through the Bretton Woods institutions (Brennan, 2004; Herman and McChesney, 2004:13). There were initial conflicts on whether the role of broadcasting should be purposeful to society as educators or should be used as profit-seeking initiatives. Accordingly there were the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on the one hand who retained the educationist mode and the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) on the other who went for complete commercialisation (Herman and McChesney, 2004: 14-15). The situation became more favourable for the U.S post

World War II and they realised that the free market and ‘open-door policies’ would aid sustain hegemony over the rest of the world (Herman and McChesney, 2004:17). In India the press and the broadcasting immediately after Independence played an educative and nation-building role which continued until India experienced open market policies in 1991. I review the changes that this transformation brought in India (chapter 4).

Language also became an advantage for the U.S. and British corporations to extend influence globally and with the global acquisition of media firms paved the way for media conglomeration (Herman and McChesney, 2004:18; McChesney and Schiller, 2003). As according to Spivak (in Morton, 2004: 3) the culture of knowing the English literature in India paved the way for easier execution of imperialist agendas.

The proliferation of satellite television, according to Herman and McChesney (2004:23) reduced the differentiation between the ‘haves and the have-nots’ and in a way assisted in building a developed media system in the Third World; which has been however challenged by Iwabuchi (2007:61) arguing that the ‘neo-liberal market fundamentalism’ has actually widened the gap. Similar arguments of widening gap between information rich and information poor was re-echoed in the interviews conducted for this research (chapter 6).

The media flow, post globalisation, is not unidirectional but is actually both way from the ‘media-rich North’ to the ‘media-poor South’ and vice versa (Thussu, 2007:2). This in a way restructured the social, political, cultural and economic

dynamics and the power relations globally and in India (Thussu, 2007). Media studies has a bias of researching into the content delivered by the West and affecting the non-West, but the ‘counter-hegemonic’ trend is equally important for the discourse (Thussu, 2007:3). The de-Americanised and de-Westernised concepts have replaced the cultural hegemony of America and the dependency on the media analysis of the West (Iwabuchi, 2007:61). Therefore globalisation contributed to the growth of non-Western operators, translating and transmuting the global in local and connecting the non-West regionally which contributed towards balancing of the uneven cultural globalisation and also challenge the cultural imperialism thesis.

### **2.4.3 Cultural imperialism and Postcolonialism**

This section looks into the literatures on the relation between postcolonialism and cultural imperialism. This is relevant to the thesis as reference to cultural imperialism has often been made by the CPI (M) (chapter 6). I have discussed previously that the theory of cultural imperialism remain challenged in a globalised world. However receiving globalisation in a postcolonial society is different than in the West. Globalisation and cultural imperialism is often used as an interchangeable term in postcolonial society. Therefore I look into the relation between cultural imperialism and postcolonialism. Both the fields of inquiry have developed their theorisation but rarely worked together in academic context. The insights of postcolonialism explore globalisation as a subject rather than cultural imperialism. This may be because of the fact which Christophers (2007: 286) notes, ‘at a time when interest in cultural imperialism as a discrete subject of

inquiry, if not exactly ebbing, was beginning to be supplanted by the analysis of processes increasingly clustered together under the broader, more malleable and less prescriptive umbrella of ‘globalization’’. Christophers (2007: 292) further argues that irrespective of different positions postcolonialism and cultural imperialism should initiate a dialogue to reflect on each other. Postcolonialism has shown but little interest in the field of mass media compared to cultural imperialism which had the mass media at its core from its initial days. This is another reason for me to look into the relation between postcolonialism and cultural imperialism. It will further assist me to understand the claims made by the CPI (M) on cultural imperialism (chapter 5, 6 and 8).

Since the last two decades postcolonialism has shown interest in the mass media, texts, and cultural studies thus focusing more on the identity generation and contradictions of both the individual and the collective (ibid, 2007: 296). According to Christopher,

‘Fostering a dialogue between postcolonialism and the critique of cultural imperialism, therefore, must surely mean learning from the novel insights of the former – in particular, its formidable and insightful accounts of identity formation and contestation – while remaining attentive to the political-economic grounding offered by the latter.’

This is particularly relevant to this thesis given the debates on the role of the media working as an agent of cultural imperialism in the postcolonial society of India particularly post 1991 (chapter 5, 6 and 8).

#### **2.4.4 From Cultural Imperialism to Media Imperialism**

The growth of the Transnational Corporations (TNC) brought with it the theorisation of cultural imperialism in the late sixties and early seventies. The theories of Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Frankfurt school and Mao-Se-Tung, inspired research in cultural imperialism. From Latin America to Canada, the theorists of cultural imperialism dealt with the American ‘economic expansion’, import of ‘mass culture’, ‘media products’ and ‘communication technology’ (Roach, 1997: 48). Therefore a more complex way of domination by the US, combining the cultural and communication industries with the economic expansion to form a globalised world of dominance is the theoretical disposition of cultural imperialism.

According to Schiller (1976: 9), cultural imperialism is the,

‘sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes even bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating center of the system.’

This process of cultural penetration of the corporate power and capitalist ideologies through media displaced the ‘cultural impact of colonialism’ (Mohammadi, 1997: 49) and promoted the rise of America as a superpower. This was also referred to as ‘cultural synchronization’ by Hamelink (1983: 5) where ‘the traffic of cultural products goes massively in one direction and has basically a synchronic mode’. According to Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (1998b: 1) media played dominant role in the form of news and had ‘three purposes of political

communication, trade and pleasure' in the process of imperialism with the support of technological development. They argue,

'News contributed to the processes of the construction of national identity; to imperialism and the control of colonies; it was an essential lubricant in day-to-day financial affairs, both within and between domestic markets. The collection and dissemination of this commodity was organized and rationalized on behalf of media and non-media clients by a small group of powerful agencies, acting globally and as a cartel.' (ibid, 1998: 2)

According to them the cultural or media imperialism has been replaced by globalisation which has left the issues 'under-theorised' (ibid, 1998: 3). But it is nothing new so far as imperialism is concerned since Boyd-Barrett (1980) argues that the news agencies were already working in conformity with imperial propagandas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Tomlinson (1991) shows how the media theorists subscribe to the thesis of cultural imperialism to create the discourse of media imperialism. Therefore the imperative question to ask before understanding the cultural imperialism, is according to Tomlinson (1991: 35) what gets imposed on the receiver and, 'Is it simply a set of 'media images' or a more complex 'mediation' of cultural experience?' Fejes (1981) in his article

*Media Imperialism: an assessment* criticises that the theoretical understanding of media imperialism is indistinct in compared to the empirical findings of media imperialism. The juxtaposition between the two is absent which therefore is establishing the relation between media imperialism and dependency but is not addressing the 'phenomenon of dependency' (ibid, 1981: 288). Tomlinson (1991: 37) however criticises Fejes and addresses the ambiguity in the explanation of the



concept of culture which according to him is not just 'domain of texts and their reception'. The media do have manipulative and ideological content but essentially the TNCs are argued to have developmental role in case of Third World countries (ibid, 1991). But economic dominance creates a cultural dependency and the media institutions do play a dominant role in situating the dominance of the TNCs.

The hegemonic model of cultural imperialism or media imperialism has negotiated changes with time. The theory of media imperialism thus has been criticised on the grounds of empirical findings (Chadha and Kavoori, 2000). The main three criticisms (ibid, 2000: 416-417) are, firstly, the Western flow of media culture to the developing world has been reversed. It is no more a one-way flow. Secondly the reliance of the theory of media imperialism on the hypodermic-needle model of media effects has been challenged on the grounds that the audience are active negotiators in the reception process; and thirdly the media imperialism thesis tries to 'romanticize and fetishize' (ibid, 2000:417) nationalism and under-emphasise the heterogeneity in the society. Chadha and Kavoori (2000) also argue that media imperialism or the dominance of Western content in Asia do encounter serious challenges from the 'national gate-keeping policies' and therefore 'the inflow of imported content, appear to be vastly overstated in the Asian context' (ibid, 2000:418). The need to reorient the frame of analysis for media imperialism is imperative and as suggested by Chadha and Kavoori (2000:429) that instead of focusing on the content the need is to focus on the institutionalisation of 'US-style commercialized model of broadcasting'.

I have reviewed this institutional role of the media in India. The media in India undertook an educative role and assisted in the process of developing the national identity till 1991 (chapter 4). But with the opening up of the Indian economy to foreign players the media in India did undergo structural changes where the global media conglomerates dominated the functioning of the media (chapter 4, 5 and 6).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The literatures on the media theories, postcolonialism, globalisation and cultural imperialism reviewed in this chapter further sets the theoretical framework to investigate the main research question.

The following parts of the thesis include the methodology (chapter 3), the context (chapter 4), findings (chapter 5, 6 and 7), discussion (chapter 8) and conclusion (chapter 9) based on the theoretical framework discussed in this chapter. The investigation was done by employing the qualitative research methodology and is based on the archival research of the documentary evidences and interviews (chapter 2).

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the methodology of the project and the rationale behind its research design. This thesis examines the relation between the media and the CPI (M) in the provincial state of West Bengal and how they tried to dominate the public sphere in the postcolonial society of West Bengal. Further to that it also explores the role of the West Bengal media in political deliberation and on the survival and decline of the Left Front Government. There has been research on how the media functions in India. However a very minimum number of articles were published on the functioning of the media in West Bengal and no research has been conducted on the relationship that the media had and continues to have with the CPI (M) and vice versa. Hence this thesis is an exclusive research on the relation between the Media and the CPI (M) for three decades in West Bengal. The research has employed qualitative methods to focus on documents and the interviews with the aim to contribute to the existing debate on whether the media in West Bengal politicised the public sphere and to understand how this affected the relationship between the left and the media in West Bengal.

There were five contextual factors that contributed towards the scope of this research to investigate into the relation between the media and the CPI (M) for three decades– (1) the economic and political transitions in India and their effect in the society of West Bengal (2) the transitions and their effect on the political

strategies of the CPI (M) (3) the Left Front Government and its challenges in West Bengal (4) the structural adjustment in the Indian economy and how it affected the changes in the media (5) the structure and functioning of the media in West Bengal. The qualitative research methodology was adopted for the project involving two methods for the study. The first method was the examination of the documentary evidences through archival research of both primary (conference and congress reports, pamphlets, booklets, press releases, manifestos, articles, governmental data) and secondary sources (Economic and Political Weekly, interviews and statistics published in newspapers) relating to the society of West Bengal before and after the New Economic policy was adopted by the Government of India; the agricultural and industrial policies of the CPI (M) led LFG and the conflicts on those within the society of West Bengal; the attitudinal changes in the political leadership of the CPI (M); the caste and class divisions in West Bengal; the role of the newspaper and the print industry in West Bengal; and finally the left and their concept of alternative press in West Bengal. The second method used in the project was interviews with the senior journalists and editors and CPI (M) leaders.

### **3.2 Research questions**

The primary research question of this thesis investigates **the relation between the media and the CPI (M) led LFG in the state of West Bengal for a period of thirty-four years**; followed by four micro research questions to collate

evidence to address the primary research question. These micro questions were further split according to the methods employed for the research as following. The four micro questions considered for collating documentary evidences and while structuring interviews were:

1. How were the issues and policies of reform in the state by LFG communicated by the media?
2. What effect did the New Economic Policy (NEP) have on the CPI (M) led LFG and the Media in West Bengal?
3. How the CPI (M) with their publications and newspapers contested the mainstream media in the public sphere?
4. What role did the media play in West Bengal towards stabilizing or destabilising the LFG as alleged by the CPI (M) or the LFG?

### **3.3 The Design for research**

The methods employed are qualitative. There are considerable articles and literatures on the functioning of the CPI (M) and the LFG in West Bengal. However very limited researches on the media in West Bengal are available but none of them explicitly focus on the operational relationship between the media and the CPI (M) led LFG. Therefore this thesis has exclusively investigated the relation. The research has discussed two important events of *Singur* and *Nandigram* that took place in West Bengal (chapter 5) and is referred to as the events that changed the fate of the government. It has not undertaken any

quantitative data analysis to address issues rather the research has delineated the narrative qualitatively which can generate further quantitative introspection.

The main objective of this chapter is the projection of the process, methods and tools, involved in the entire research project in order to address and find answers to the research questions.

Therefore it consists of four sections. The first section presents the general framework to situate the research. The second section discusses Historiography and Institutional History as a methodology. This thesis employs Historiography to examine India's anti-colonial and nation-building political movements, the role of Marxism and the formation of the communist parties in India. It also looks into the institutional history of the Left Front Government led by the CPI (M) and how it became an institution of social identity over time and the media institutions in India and West Bengal. The third section is about critically examining the documentary evidences collected during the field research and from online websites of the CPI (M) and the LFG in various forms. Finally the fourth section presents a brief account of the interview process during the field research.

### **3.4 The General Framework**

The primary aim of this research is to analyse the relationship between the CPI (M) and the media in West Bengal over three decades. The qualitative nature of research demands to 'examine meaning production as a *process* which is contextualized and inextricably integrated with wider social and cultural practices' (Jensen, 1991:4). Thus I constructed a narrative on the basis of the political-organizational amendments or modifications by the CPI (M) during the

major political and structural changes, the political issues that influenced their relationship with the media, their views on the media and finally how the media see changes in the CPI (M) in India.

### **3.5 Historiography**

History derived from the Greek word *στορία* which had its primary meaning as inquiry or investigation (Joseph and Janda, 2003: 163). However *Geschichte*, the German word for History means past actuality (Garraghan, 1973). In this research history in both the senses of investigation or inquiry into past actuality, have been taken into consideration. Some historians have defined it as the process of describing the past (Spalding and Parker, 2007). History, according to Davis (2006: 15), is universal and is about the explanation of how and why things happened in the past. But this explanation can only be derived from the evidence. According to Bombaro (2012: 6) this evidence is the 'knowledge and artifacts used to demonstrate the validity of beliefs and assertions'. Therefore relevancy and reliability in using these evidences in a research project must also be carefully undertaken (ibid, 2012: 6). The three categories of evidence that can be used for the research, as Bombaro (2012: 6) states are the tertiary, secondary and primary sources. Evaluating these sources should also be considered from the point of accuracy and relevancy to the matter under research. Evaluation is important since it assists in the process of making informed judgments by validating the sources incorporated in the research (ibid, 2012: 7). Therefore this thesis has made careful considerations of the primary and secondary sources used as evidences in the process of analysis and finding answers to the research questions.

The primary sources employed in this thesis were interviews, interpersonal talks with people in the media and in the CPI (M) or the LFG, the party documents both online and in *Ganashakti* library. The primary sources actually helped gaining a more detailed understanding of the events and the mode of transitions in the society and institutions in India and West Bengal. However this thesis is not only about dates or events but it has qualitatively analysed the historical events to structure a narration of the relationship between the media and government relations in West Bengal.

The secondary sources used in this thesis were from academic journals, interviews by journalists and statistics from newspapers, having relevancy to the research questions of this thesis. The major journal used was *Economic & Political Weekly* which was accessed both in the library of *Ganashakti* and later in the form of online archival research. This was an external journal but specialised in socio-economic and political debates and counter debates which included both the CPI (M) and the media. Due to scarcity of the primary documents on media understanding by the CPI (M) and vice versa, the researcher had to collect secondary data from this external journal. This journal provided recent vital information and data on the subject matter under study in this thesis. As mentioned above it contained the controversies, arguments, disagreements, statistics, records on issues which assisted the researcher to make informed analysis of the research questions based on these secondary sources of information.



This thesis looks into a specific time span of thirty four years of governance under a negotiated coalition of communist and socialist parties in West Bengal. It explores through both the pre and post globalization periods as the governance stretched itself. Therefore investigating the transformation within the society, CPI (M) and the media, in India and West Bengal, before and after 1991, and analysing that experience to reflect on the relationship between the media and the CPI (M) is central in building the argument of the thesis. Thus it penetrates into the history of West Bengal from its genesis to the formation of the Left Front Government, with Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI (M) leading the coalition as the largest party, in West Bengal since 1977 and its historical journey through to the 1990s and after.

Thus the thesis includes two major economic phases which had considerable impacts on the society both in India and West Bengal as viewed from the perspective of the media and the CPI (M). The understanding of this economic transition coined as pre-globalisation and post-globalisation period closely defines the transition of the media (chapter 4). With the opening up of the economy the participation of the private channels and their intervention into different political, economic and social perspectives brought in interesting changes and challenges to the postcolonial society in India (chapter 4, 5 and 6). Post 1990s ushered in new challenges for the Left Front Government and for the CPI (M) in particular (chapter 5).

The secondary data has worked as evidence and examples to support the narration. This assimilated the explanatory and exploratory (analysis of the

secondary data) values of qualitative research, which is essential to establish the relationship between the media-market economy on one hand and the media-CPI (M) on the other. The researcher has discussed this in the context of West Bengal with reference to the Indian economy as a whole. Also with great emphasis the researcher studied the relationship of the media with the CPI (M) in the context of contemporary socio-economic-political-cultural history of West Bengal. The thesis reflects and analyses whether the media had an influence on the LFG and vice versa.

Schudson (1991: 181) emphasises History Proper as:

‘It takes from macro-history its dramatic question: how do communication media constitute the human character? But it takes this question of philosophical anthropology to a historically situated place – how do specific changes not only from one medium to another, but transformations in organization, ideology, economic relations, or political sponsorship within a given medium relate to changes in human experience?’

Therefore the historiography of the structural changes and ideological shifts within the CPI (M) and the media considered both before and after India accepting the Washington Consensus, is the historical context of situating the relationship. Then followed by the investigation of what role did the media play in communicating changes in West Bengal thus contributing unique findings to the field of political communication.

### 3.6 Institutional History

The researcher being an active observer of the social dynamics in West Bengal was certain that history proper has to be endorsed on a broad social dimension. This can be substantiated by looking into the Institutional History of both the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the media with its development within the society. Apart from the internal organisational procedures, this study has also focused on the external social forces of the media and its impact on the policy making of the party organisation. Now finding answers to these critical questions was a challenging task for the researcher. There were many pamphlets and booklets published over time which were not archived properly. Even the documents were scattered. Therefore the elementary task of the researcher was to investigate into the historical documents published by the CPI (M). The two most relevant and originative source books were- (1) *Banglar Communist Andolan: Dalil O Prasangik Tathya* (Five Volumes 1967- 1978) and (2) *Jyoti Basur Nirbachita Rachanasangraha* (Five Volumes 1977- 2005). The books *Banglar Communist Andolan: Dalil O Prasangik Tathya* in five volumes are the collection of pamphlets, leaflets, articles published by the CPI (M) and their mass organizations. The second *Jyoti Basur Nirbachita Rachanasangraha* in five volumes include the speeches, articles and interviews of Jyoti Basu, who was the longest serving Chief Minister in West Bengal and in India, from 1977 to 2001. Along with these two sources there were several documents in the form of articles from *The Marxist*, *Ganashakti*, *Peoples Democracy*, *Economic and Political*

*Weekly, Monthly Review, Social Scientist*, and the CPI (M) party websites which were thoroughly read and analysed.

### **3.7 Documentary evidence and Archival Research**

The major problem related to the investigation into a contemporary research is the limited quantity of academic research done on the subject. This research was the first initiative to examine the media and the government relations in the state of West Bengal over thirty four years. There were academic articles on the debacle of the left and on the survival of the left, but very limited articles on the role of the media and no articles on the relation between the left and the media in West Bengal.

As regard to documentary evidence the conversation with *Dr. Dipankar Sinha*, the Head of the Department of Political Science at Calcutta University turned out to be the most influential discussion. He suggested some of the documents that could be relevant to the research. A dedicated time was allotted to go through the archived documents in the *Ganashakti Patrika* Library. These were mainly the collection of pamphlets, leaflets, speeches, party documents combined in the form of books. The old editions of *Ganashakti* were also studied. The librarians and journalists at *Ganashakti* house assisted in the process of finding relevant documents. Also the focal person in the *Ganashakti* house was a young dedicated journalist in his late twenties, *Sudipta Basu*. The National Library and the

*Ramkrishna Mission Library* in Kolkata had many of the literatures of relevance.

The party documents in the CPI (M) state and central committee websites have been studied. Along with that the two fundamental series, as mentioned above

were studied intensively to gain an insight into the historical events. Apart from these a detailed *Economic and Political Weekly* (online) archival research was carried out with the assistance of Dr. Aniket Alam, the Executive Editor of the journal.

### **3.8 Interviews and the field experience**

According to Kvale (1996: 14) ‘[T]he qualitative research interview is a construction site for knowledge. An interview is literally an *inter view*, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest’. Therefore the researcher found the experience of interviewing the senior journalists, editors and the CPI (M) leadership to be both rewarding and challenging. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were identified to be the best option for gathering primary data given the period and subject of study. Also as Denzin (2001: 24) notes,

‘As researchers we belong to a moral community. Doing interviews is a privilege granted us, not a right that we have. Interviews are things that belong to us. Interviews are part of the dialogic conversation that connects all of us to this larger moral community. Interviews arise out of performance events. They transform information into shared experience.’

This shared experience from the perspective of the media editors and Bureau Chiefs and the CPI (M) leaderships interviewed provided important information for the research. The interviews started with general questions based on broad areas of media and politics in India and West Bengal that eventually were narrowed down as the discussion progressed, highlighting the context of the research, the relevance of political and governance issues and the elements under

study. The entire process of interview included thematising, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting (Kvale, 1996: 88). The researcher thematised the interviews under four broad categories- firstly, the policies of the LFG on governance and development, secondly, the transition of the press to media and the rise of the vernacular media, thirdly, the events of Singur and Nandigram, the role played by the media in West Bengal according to the CPI (M), and fourthly the observation of the media on the LFG. Then the researcher constructed four sets of semi-structured interview questions to retain flexibility throughout the interviews (see Appendix III). Next the researcher scheduled the interviews with the interviewees and had to be flexible throughout the field research to accommodate any re-scheduling that was necessary during the process. The interviewees were formally provided the consent form to sign and provide their interest in participating in the research interviews before the interviews commenced. The questions asked during the interviews had the flexibility to enhance the scope of data required to be accommodated retaining the flow of the interviews as a narrative and not mechanical answers (Brenner, Brown and Canter, 1985; Fontana and Frey, 2005). The seven media persons (all of whom had a print media background and then some of them shifted to electronic media) and four leaders from the CPI (M) were chosen for the interviews. The important leaders of the CPI (M), whose interviews could not be conducted face-to-face due to time constraint, were collected as a secondary data from the interviews available in online newspapers.

After returning from field research the researcher then transcribed and summarized the interviews with the verbatim quotations. The interviews were either video or audio recorded. The researcher then analysed the interviews and contacted the interviewee wherever necessary to clarify their thoughts. This was done mostly by telephoning them or by emailing them. The next step followed was verifying the claims made in the interviews against the documentary evidence that was collected during the field and archival research. Then finally the historical narrative was constructed and findings were reported based on the evidences gathered throughout the research.

During the entire interview process the aim was to gain a detailed understanding of how the CPI (M) led LFG and the media viewed each other through the series of political and social events that took place in West Bengal during thirty four years of left governance. The various political issues from the incident at *Morichjhapi* to *Singur* and *Nandigram* were discussed in the interviews (chapter7, p.226). The issues of governance and reform like the land reform, empowering the marginalized, devolution of the Panchayat, industrialization and the updated party programme to participate in the national government, were discussed to accommodate the various political transitional phases that the LFG went through. Next by covering all the political, governance and reform issues the interviews then focused on the media and foreign direct investment (FDI), paid news, neoliberal policies and the media, globalization and its effect on media ownership, corporatisation of the media, the social responsibility of the media, the developmental objectives of the

media, media as the vanguard of democracy, assault on the media, media empowerment post 1991, relevance of issues in the media. These were not done separately as topics but the reform, governance and political issues got intertwined with the issues of media functioning, ownership and operations. There were occasional mentions on the social media about media criticisms but then because this research does not study the social media in detail therefore I have tried not to divert the interviews in the line of social media.

These interviews were conducted after the LFG was voted out of power in May 2011. Therefore the obvious questions that required answer were, firstly, whether the data collected were influenced by the debacle of the LFG, and secondly, whether the persons interviewed would have given me different observation and answers had the LFG continued in power after 2011. As detailed above the media personnel and the party leadership were carefully chosen to provide their observation and answers to the questions throughout the period that the party was in power. The semi-structured interview questions (Appendix III) were framed keeping in mind the issues relevant during the thirty four years. The questions in the semi-structured interviews were organized in such a way that the interviewees were required to answer in reference to the period between 1977 and 1991. The data therefore collected post LFG debacle, included the reasons for the debacle, but were not influenced by the debacle. Secondly, the interviewees were not the early career journalists or political leaders. The persons interviewed for this thesis had more than thirty years of experience in the field of journalism and politics. They were the editorial level journalists and senior level party members



who were the key policy framers inside the media house and the party. Therefore their experience and observation over the thirty four years of LFG in power were reflected in the interviews. Had the party not lost in the 2011 Assembly election their observations on why the LFG continued would certainly have included the reasons for its continuation which they shared anyway while reflecting on the thirty years of LFG in power. The interview questions did ask about the reasons for the LFG's continuance in power and also the factors that could have differently influenced the government's tenure in office. Also if the party remained in power then the research interview questions would also have included certain questions that were not included in this project.

Next the researcher discusses the persons interviewed, the detailed experience of interviewing and the process followed during the interviews.

#### **A. Interviewees**

The interviewees for this thesis were selected on the basis of their position of prominence in the field of politics and media in West Bengal. In total eleven interviews were conducted following interpersonal discussions. The Bureau Chiefs, Editors and Senior Journalists of eminent newspapers were either emailed or telephoned. Some of the political leaders of the CPI (M) were emailed for the interviews. All of the Bureau Chiefs and Senior Journalists interviewed were highly enthusiastic about the project. This was the first time that the media was interviewed in West Bengal about their views on LFG. The eleven journalists interviewed were:

*Jayanta Ghosal*, a Senior Journalist and the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* Delhi  
Bureau Chief;

*Amitabha Raychaudhary*, Editorial Board Member of Press Trust of India (PTI);

*Paranjoy Guhathakurata*, Independent Journalist and Educator and Documentary Film Maker;

*Ajitha Menon*, Chief of Bureau, Asian News International (ANI) and has been Sub-Editor in PTI for three years;

*Sumon Chattopadhyay*, then Editor of *EkDin* (One Day), presently the Editor of *Ei Shomoy* (This Time) and Former Executive Editor of *Ananda Bazar Patrika*;

*Anjan Banerjee*, Senior Journalist, 24Ghanta Electronic news channel; and

*Sougata Mukhopadhyay*, Senior Editor in CNN-IBN and has worked before with The Time of India, also won Best Journalist award in 2011.

The journalists interviewed were chosen from an editorial background. The researcher wanted to gain the insights into mainstream media's editorial policies and understanding while reporting on the LFG. The researcher also wanted to understand what issues became relevant in the regional media while reporting on the left throughout the thirty four years that the LFG was in power. Therefore I selected the journalists who started their career when the LFG came to power; therefore they could reflect on the thirty four years of left governance.

Apart from those noted above Rajdeep Sardesai, Editor-in-Chief of IBN18 Network and former *Managing Editor of NDTV*; Diptosh Mazumder, *National Editor of DNA*;

Ashok Dasgupta, *Editor of Aajkal* and Marcus Dam, *Deputy Editor of The Hindu* were contacted for interviews. However the interviews could not be organized due to their busy schedule.

The four CPI (M) leaders interviewed were,

*Brinda Karat*, the first women to be in the CPI (M) Polit Bureau<sup>14</sup> and the Member of Rajya Sabha from Kolkata;

*Mohammad Salim*, West Bengal state secretariat and central committee member of the CPI (M), ex-Member of Parliament in the 14<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha; *Dr. Ashim Dasgupta*, state committee member of the CPI (M), ex-Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), Minister for Finance and Excise in the LFG and Professor of Economics in Calcutta University (CU); and

*Debasish Chakrabarty*, News Editor in Ganashakti, state committee member of the CPI (M).

The interviewees from the CPI (M) were selected on the criteria of their involvement in the party and the LFG at the state and the national level throughout the thirty four years that the LFG governed. The researcher structured the interviewee list to accommodate the representation from the highest committee of the party to the minister in the LFG. Accordingly Brinda Karat was interviewed from the Polit Bureau, the highest decision making body of the CPI

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<sup>14</sup> 'The Central Committee shall elect from among its members a Polit Bureau including the General Secretary. The number of members in the Polit Bureau shall be decided by the Central Committee. The Polit Bureau carries on the work of the Central Committee between its two sessions and has the right to take political and organisational decisions in between two meetings of the Central Committee', Party Constitution, in the CPI (M) website [Online], Available at < <http://www.cpim.org/party-constitution> > [Accessed on 19.02.2014].

(M). She is also the CPI (M) nominated *Rajya Sabha* MP who was responsible for meeting the press and also wrote press releases on behalf of the party. Therefore her close connection in dealing with the media as the CPI (M) party leader made the interview relevant for this thesis. *Mohammad Salim* is the CPI (M) central committee member, the state secretariat member and the ex-Parliamentarian who participated in a series of media debates and briefed the press on behalf of the party. Therefore the researcher interviewed him to gain insights on how the national and regional political issues affected the LFG and how they reflected that in the media. *Dr. Ashim Dasgupta* was the Finance Minister and the Professor of Economics at Calcutta University who was responsible for briefing the press on budgets and financial decisions by the LFG. Therefore his valuable insights on how the LFG constructed their press briefs and meets were important for this thesis. Finally *Debasish Chakraborty* was the *News Editor* of *Ganashakti* and the party state committee member who is responsible for planning and organizing the contents in *Ganashakti*. He is one of the key policy framers of the *Ganashakti* newspaper and did participate in the party seminars throughout the state to educate the party cadres on the role of the mainstream media, its corporate connections and how *Ganashakti* accepted the challenge to counter the mainstream media. Therefore he was one of the important persons to be interviewed on the working experience in the party controlled media.

Published interviews by journalists, were used as secondary data, of *Prakash Karat*, General Secretary of the CPI (M); *Buddhadev Bhattacharya*, ex-Chief Minister of West Bengal during the Left Front from 2001 and the Polit Bureau member of the

CPI (M); and Late *Jyoti Basu*, veteran communist leader, elected MLA in West Bengal for eleven consecutive terms, elected Chief Minister of West Bengal for five consecutive terms when he finally relinquished the Chief Minister office on November 6, 2000. The secondary data collected did assist in reflecting on the political and governance issues that the interviewees discussed with me in their interviews. Definitely the interview questions asked by the journalists were not the same as the researcher would have asked for the academic research but that did not undermine their relevance to reflect on the primary data to construct the historical narrative on the relation between the media and the CPI (M) led LFG. Apart from the formal interviews numerous informal discussions were carried out with the CPI (M) party members, journalists at *Ganashakti* and other media houses and also academics from Jadavpur University and University of Calcutta.

### **B. The experience of Interviewing**

The entire process of interviews and data collection from documents involved two phases of field research. The first phase of fieldwork was carried on immediately within three months of the debacle of the LFG. This first phase of interviews in July-September 2011 was extensive and important. The follow-up was done in the second phase in December 2012. The Left Front Government was defeated the first time since it came to power in 1977. Therefore this was the best period to collect lively emotions and hard facts as data for the research. The media was still accessible but the political situation was so tough that getting political persons interviewed underwent rigorous efforts.

Political hostility and assaults were the everyday episodes in the streets of West Bengal. The new government formed in West Bengal was also a coalition government by the Indian National Congress (INC), Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the independent. The CPI (M) leaders were busy in recovering from the political set-back and were addressing public rallies. Therefore as mentioned earlier, anticipating the situation the interviews were planned well in advance.

The political transition brought along with it some of the political disturbances between the opposition and the ruling parties, which even led to murders and bloodshed in college universities. This was precisely because of the upcoming Student's Union elections in the state in the month of September-October 2011 and was about establishing power in the educational institutions. Amidst such disturbances the first interview with *Mohammed Salim*, the CPI (M) state and central committee member came to be effective. The CPI (M) Polit Bureau and the Central Committee meeting in *Kolkata*<sup>15</sup>, West Bengal was scheduled on 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> August 2011. The researcher therefore planned to visit the state party headquarters at *Alimuddin Street, Kolkata*, with the aim of either conducting the interview there or schedule the interviews that were not planned till then. The main interest was interviewing *Prakash Karat*, the party General Secretary; *Sitaram Yechury*, party Polit Bureau member who is responsible for the International Affairs and *Brinda Karat* who is also a Polit Bureau member. Since the research was on the media relations with the CPI (M) for thirty four years in West Bengal, therefore the interview of the CPI (M) General Secretary regarding

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<sup>15</sup> Calcutta was renamed as Kolkata by the LFG in Bengali

his observation on the subject was of utmost importance. However since the research is based on West Bengal, the researcher was told that the party General Secretary *Prakash Karat* had little to enlighten the subject. But in the article ‘*Left Front Government: Bastion of the Left Democratic Forces*’, *Prakash Karat* (2002) mentioned the ‘bourgeois media’ acting in West Bengal and criticized their role vehemently, which was published in *The Marxist*. Therefore the researcher thought his interview would have been beneficial for this research project. However not being successful in organizing a primary interview with

*Prakash Karat*, the second option was to look into his interviews taken by the journalists (secondary data) to retain the holistic analysis of the subject matter. The journalists did not ask the same questions to the party General Secretary that the researcher would do, but they addressed the political issues and concerns that this research includes. Therefore the researcher carefully tried to understand the messages by *Prakash Karat* in these interviews to then reflect on his articles published as party documents in the party website. *Brinda Karat* was too busy in her schedule and was addressing public meetings in Kolkata as well. However she gave her written consent to participate in the interview which was conducted afterwards at the Delhi party office. The day *Brinda Karat* was interviewed it was extremely busy in the party headquarters due to the demise of *M.K. Pandhe*<sup>16</sup>.

Another Polit Bureau member, *Sitaram Yechury* was suffering from high fever<sup>17</sup> and he was even unable to attend the ongoing meeting properly in Kolkata. The

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<sup>16</sup>He was the All India General Secretary of Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), the trade union wing of the CPI (M)

<sup>17</sup>Later he was admitted to hospital in Delhi since he was suffering from *Chikungunya* (a viral infection mainly carried by mosquitoes)

CPI (M) State Committee Secretary, *Biman Bose*, and the former Chief Minister, *Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee*, both of whom are also members of the CPI (M) Polit Bureau, initially agreed to participate in the interview. They requested the semi-structured interview questions for them so that they could have enough data before they actually go for the interview.

However *Biman Basu* was travelling widely and *Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's*, former CA *Joydeep Mukherjee* conveyed that the former Chief Minister did not want to engage himself into any political controversy by giving an interview. The situation was sensitive and due to the sensitivity of the research subject, *Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee* expressed his interest to give the interview after a few months, when it would not have any serious implications on the state politics. Amidst such turmoil the researcher had a very engaging interview with *Dr. Asim Dasgupta* who was also responsible for the press briefs on behalf of the former Left Front Government and he was also the Professor of Economics at Calcutta University.

### **3.9 Analysis of the data**

The mode of understanding in a qualitative research interview has twelve aspects<sup>18</sup> to be considered while analyzing the data (Kvale, 1996: 29). The data thus collected were analysed depending on what was highlighted by the interviewees, the literatures studied and the archival research of documentary evidence. The method of analysis was planned well in advance of when the interviews were planned. The theoretical presuppositions guided the researcher to

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<sup>18</sup> The twelve aspects are 'life world', 'meaning', 'qualitative', 'descriptive', 'specificity', 'deliberate naivete', 'focused', 'ambiguity', 'change', 'sensitivity', 'interpersonal situation' and 'positive experience'.



formulate questions and the techniques for analysis (Kvale, 1996). The ongoing analysis of the data is one of the interesting parts of interpretative research and analysis (Denzin, 1994). Therefore it was important for me to do a certain level of literature review before the field research was undertaken. After returning from the field, I transcribed and summarized the interviews which then suggested more literatures to be looked into and indicated the keywords that should be employed to do more archival research. Therefore it was a process of going forward and backward continuously to investigate into the reasons and how that could be analysed in the best possible framework to retain the quality of the research. The researcher then analysed the data in three ways; firstly looked into the similarities and conflicts between the documents and the narratives constructed from the interviews; secondly the key concepts (globalization, cultural imperialism, Marxism, left ideology, corporate media, social development, media polarisation, media accountability, policies of governance, reform, neoliberal policies, manufacturing consent, elitist bias of the media, media development, media propaganda, media lobbyism, media ethics, media and democracy, technological determinism, mainstream bias of the media, postcolonial country, idealism, media monopoly, news as commodity, land acquisition, peasant revolt, industrialisation) and events (*Singur* and *Nandigram*, the Panchayat, Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly elections in West Bengal) used during the interviews were identified to look into similar arguments and dissimilarities located while pursuing archival research; thirdly the researcher looked for the consistency in what was told by the interviewees and what the document findings were. The semi-structured interview

questions were framed thematically and the analysis was also done following the same line. *The Discussion* chapter of the thesis provides analysis of the findings by engaging in a critical dialogue with theories

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided the overview of the methods employed to find answers to the research questions that this thesis address. The second part of this thesis includes the context chapter to situate the research appropriately in India and West Bengal.

## PART II

### The Context

#### Chapter 4 West Bengal, Left Front Government and the Media in India

## **Chapter 4**

### **West Bengal, Left Front Government and the Media in India**

This is the contextual chapter to situate the investigation that this thesis has undertaken. The chapter is therefore divided into two sections. The first section looks into the connection of Marxism to the Indian national movement, the formation of the communist parties, the partition of Bengal and the creation of West Bengal, the socio-political and economic history of West Bengal and finally the political movements and leadership of the left in West Bengal. The second section looks into the transformation in the Indian media, restricting of the Indian economy, the media political parties and the judiciary in India, the rise of the vernacular press, the subaltern turn of the media and the influence of the transnational corporations on the media in India.

#### **4.1 National Movement and Marxism in India**

The nationalist movement for Independence had their root in Marxism. The struggle for Indian Independence was seen as a vital historic event in the world post World War II. Habib (1988) argues while writing on the problems of the Indian historiography that the Marxist approach to history should never be treated as a dogma. The limitations of information and idea about India at the time of Marx were an obvious impediment to his analysis of India. At the same time India as elsewhere had historians who did not accept class struggle as the basis and hence interpreted the history from a different approach. Habib (1988) says that

should also be honoured and treated rationally. The relationship between the present experience and past records is extremely necessary for proper application of Marxism in a country specific context. There have been debates on forms of revolutions, governments, uprising and so on. Also theorising Marx's approach as deterministic has faced challenge from Marxist historians and practitioners (Shaw, 1979). But at the same time ambiguity starts from the interpretation of Marx's 'Historical Materialism' and also the token of inevitability attached to Marxism derails the merit of the philosophy (Habib, 1988). It would therefore be wise to look in India's history from India's perspective rather than borrowing phrases and lines and quoting Marx ambiguously in an Indian context. Hence Marx's Asiatic Mode of Production has been further developed by reflecting on the event of the past.

D. D. Kosambi and R.S. Sharma as discussed previously theorised that India has never encountered slavery but had feudalism; Habib (1988) argues that all pre-capitalist systems should not have a common shade of feudalism since it contradicts the basis of dialectics. Again historians argue that the relation between colonial settlements and England's industrial revolution was directly proportional to the pre-capitalist capital accumulation. At the same time questions regarding exploitation and its fine lines are still to be interpreted from what Marx has left behind. The question of imperialism related to finance-capital and monopoly needs further revisits.

Indian history emerged out of Marxist analysis for the first time in the works of R. P. Dutta (1940) who based on Marx's 1853 article *British Rule in India* analyses

the exploitative character of British rule in India; the limitations of the leadership of Indian National Movement and their mere subjection to British imperialism was strongly criticised (Habib, 2010). Then there were a series of works by S.A. Dange (1949), EMS Namboodiripad (1952) and finally the major breakthrough came with Kosambi's (1956) work. The acknowledgement for Indian Independence Movement often goes to Indian National Congress (INC) since it was the biggest political organisation at that time. The movement had a holistic support irrespective of class, caste, identity or politics. The movement was primarily to cease the drain of wealth and free land from foreign occupation. However with time the class outlook in shaping Independent India came to serious criticism from the Marxist wing of the movement. There were certain debates within the Marxist wing about the participation in the struggle and the roles to be taken. Indian Independence is often referred to have emerged out of the partition of not only two separate countries but on the basis of two separate religions. This partition was not only painful but established a cancerous element within the society of the two countries.

The Indian Nationalist Movement according to the Marxists had a class outlook and was a part of the anti-imperialist movement worldwide. They refused to associate themselves with the *samjhauta* (negotiation). Even Mahatma Gandhi dissociated himself from the celebration of Independence. According to the Indian Marxists India became de-colonised yet continued submitting mentally to imperialism by staying economically dependent. The Marxists or the Communists

or the Leftists, in general, had some strong views and raised intellectual debates while participating in the Indian liberation movement and later.

#### **4.2 The communist parties in India**

The Communists as an organisation in India came post Soviet Revolution. There are certain disparities regarding the exact dates of when the Communist Party of India (CPI) was formed. According to one view the Communist Party of India (CPI) was formed on 25 December 1925 in Kanpur but the Communist Party of India (Marxist) claims that the party was formed in Tashkent on 17 October 1920. The party was in a very initial stage and was in the process of building groups in Bengal, Bombay, Madras, United Provinces and Punjab. It was not until 1933 that the formation of the central working committee could be put in action. However in the process there emerged a socialist section (Congress Socialist Party) from within the Congress which started working with the Communist Party of India (CPI).

Kerala and Bengal had a sound support for communists from the very beginning. The 1946 Tebhaga movement in Bengal was organised and lead by the communists against feudalism. The Telengana Rebellion was also led by the communists through an armed struggle. Though the armed struggle and the impact it had, was hugely criticised within the party. The communists in India were in the process of fighting the feudal structure by leading agrarian movements where ever the scope came. Debates within the CPI were mounting and was influenced by the Soviet revolution. The questions of right-wing and left-wing thought were

getting polarised. However the need for Democratic Revolution along with the need to address caste problems were felt and the programme was amended and adopted over time. As Alam (2006) recollects the main debates within the party were on the lines of nationalist movements and the journey of India towards Socialism.

During the Independence movement the Krishak and Trade Union movements were led by the Communist party. Marxism is not a dogma and that is how the Communists in India started their journey working on alterations to adopt the theory in Indian soil. They reworked the notions of democracy learning from Soviet experience that they have to participate in parliamentary democracy. Though the Communists worked along with the INC to strengthen the movement of Independence; they always criticised the bourgeois rule and the economic agendas. Some of them even could not restrain to say, '*Yeah azadi jhoota hai*' meaning the Independence was fake; the government at the centre was an agent of imperialism. The two lines of National Democratic Front by CPI and People's Democratic Front by the CPI (M) eventually started experimenting to reach Socialism. However the communists played an invigorating role in the line of Lenin's Colonial Thesis (Surjeet, 2000:3) as '[T]he thesis laid down the strategy and tactics for the colonial peoples fighting for liberation'. The CPI (M) in their 1964 programme mentioned about the threats from Neo-colonialism (ibid, 2000). According to the CPI (M) it was before that India gained Independence that the workers in India fought against capitalists and therefore they were reluctant about categorising the



postcolonial resistance as something generated through national liberation movements in India (ibid, 2000).

Post independence the situation changed. The debates on civil liberties, democracy, constitutional understanding, political leadership, national and international politics all became the elements for inner-party struggle. The political split between the CPI and the CPI (M) in 1964 grounded new debates and both started to extend their base politically and organisationally. Both the parties adopted new constitutions and decided to participate in the state election. The CPI though maintained its full participation in Indian parliament but for the CPI (M) the notion was by forming the state governments they would have the weapon to sharpen class struggle.

### **4.3 Partition, West Bengal and the creation of Hindu *Bhadrolok***

This section looks into the history of political partition that Bengal went through and the formation of West Bengal. It discusses the political and social changes that Bengal went through during the days of partition. The partition of Bengal is considered to be an important episode in the history of India.

Bengal has been one of the important centres for generating and leading political movements in the form of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles in India. Bengal was also popularly known for the cultural heritage, rich literary contributions and the intelligentsia (Basu, 2013). The growing political discontent against the British in united Bengal became a reason for administrative discomfort in the region for the coloniser (Tyagi, n.d.). The effort of separating the people of

Bengal on religious lines was a calculative process undertaken by the British. The religious identities though present and maintained in the society of Bengal were never perceived in enmity. Under the leadership of Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of India, for administrative and political reasons Bengal was divided in 1905 into East Bengal (later called East Pakistan), Assam and West Bengal (Chatterjee,1999). This gave rise to political upsurge in Bengal since the political intention as Chatterjee (1999: 112) argues was ‘to curb the growing nationalist sentiments in Bengal’. Thus it was an attempt to destabilise the Hindu middle class who were understood to lead the national political movements in Bengal and in India (ibid, 1999). In the Provincial Conference of 1906, the nationalist leaders decided to ‘boycott British goods’ and use only goods produced in India (Basu Majumdar, 1993:79). The *Swadeshi* (Nationalist) movement was launched under the leadership of *Swadesh Bandhab Samiti* (Friends of National organisation) and foreign goods were set on fire as a protest against partition and foreign goods consumption (ibid, 1993:79). The movement was so vigorous that the British were forced to retreat from the decision of partition and Bengal was united again in 1911. However *Swadeshi* movement was also successful in generating the national consciousness and people realised the power of India. This movement was also powered by the nationalist songs which aroused the emotional sense of bonding together as a nation and infused the passion to liberate India from British rule. The *Swadeshi* movement played the role of catalyst in the struggle for independence. During the same time in 1907 the *Satyagraha* Movement was launched by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa (ibid, 1993). This

movement was the call to liberate not only India but the entire world but through the channel of *Ahimsa* (non-violence). The non-cooperation in the name of civil-disobedience and the Quit India movement gained momentum but involved *Himsa* (violence).

Another disturbing factor was the growing communal enmity which was initiated by the British in 1905. There were instances of communal violence and the ‘theory of two nations’ by Muhammad Ali Jinnah gained momentum (ibid, 1993:84, Raychaudhury, 2004). Finally in 1947 the British proposed the solution by partitioning the country into two independent countries of India and Pakistan (East and West Pakistan). Mahatma Gandhi though opposed could not resist the partition which was accepted by wider sections of the Indian National Congress (Basu Majumdar, 1993; Chatterjee, 1999). The partition of the two countries further ignited the communal tensions and enmity. It killed and displaced people on the grounds of communal enmity. Violence became a regular concern and ‘the fear of communal holocaust’ further agonised life. The ‘nostalgia of desh’ (Raychaudhury, 2004:5654) had deep impact on the minds. The creation of nation came with the displacement from *desh* (homeland or motherland) which was attached to the childhood memories of many.

Chatterji (1994:1) however views the partition and its leadership from a different angle of being dominated by the Bengali ‘*Bhadrolok*’ (respected gentleman) who also dominated the nationalist movement since Bengal’s initial partition in 1905. The term *Bhadrolok* with time was used to identify the middle class in Bengal. Therefore *Bhadrolok* was also called *Babu* to differentiate them from other

subordinate classes or from the Muslims. Thus national-social identities were often confused with religious identities in Bengal which was criticised in the literary works of Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and many others. According to Chatterji (1994) Bengali *Bhadrolok* was the creation by the Permanent Settlement and was a product of the land relations. *Bhadrolok* who was designated or called as *Babu* signified him to be from upper-caste Hindu background (ibid, 1994:5; Chatterjee, 1999). This has been discussed by the researcher in respect of the political and social movements in West Bengal which further support the continuation of the dominance of the Hindu upper-caste in West Bengal politics (chapter 5 and 8). The *Bhadrolok* though initially resistant to Western education or denied the modern-ness of English language finally found the stepping stone towards survival in it (Chatterji, 1994). The rich had the privilege of acquiring the western education in contrary to the marginalised. Thus the Hindu *Bhadrolok Babu* further could afford to become the Hindu educated *Bhadrolok Babu*, who according to Chatterji (1994) were more inclined to the partition given the fact that it would protect their prevailing dominance. Thus as Chatterjee (1999) argues that the partition in 1905 was predominantly administrative, but religious nationalism shaped India's Independence and the partition in 1947 predominantly on religious lines.

However the linguistic nationalism was another interesting development within East Pakistan in 1952 which demanded the recognition of Bengali language and eventually Bangladesh was formed on the basis of language bondage irrespective of religions (Chatterjee, 1999). Both West Bengal and Bangladesh have tried to

reject the religious nationalism and religious discontent but they are so deeply rooted in the history that a further unification was not possible. The researcher has further discussed the partition of Bengal and the construction of the *Bhadrolok Babu* as the immediate postcolonial identity dilemma that subsists in the postcolonial heterogeneity. It shaped the identity that continued to exist even in 2011 West Bengal since economic reforms does not necessarily include cultural reform when question of cultural identity becomes complex (chapter 8).

#### **4.4 Left Front Government in West Bengal**

Therefore as discussed in the previous section the history of West Bengal includes political turmoil since its inception. The Left Front government came to power in 1977 arising out of a state of insurgency. Some of the notable achievements of this government have been the land reform initiative also known as *Operation Barga*<sup>19</sup>, the employment generation initiative through land reform in rural areas and the creation of alternative rural credit sources (Ghosh, 1981: A49) along with the restructuring of the *Panchayat* (Chandra, Mukherjee and Mukherjee, 2008: 408-410). However industrial stagnation has been a concern for West Bengal in the 1980s, though the engineering industry and the jute did contribute to the Indian economy as a whole (Banerjee, 1984). The agrarian and industrial reform of the Left Front government towards developing an alternative economy and relating it to the sustenance of the government did encourage research and was often

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<sup>19</sup> Operation Barga is the name of the tenancy reform movement where the vested land got distributed and agricultural labourers were recorded as tenants who could exercise legal rights of tenancy in West Bengal

described as a reformist approach to communism (Gupta, 2001) or parliamentary communism (Kohli, 1983).

#### **4.5 The rural society in Bengal**

The question of agricultural labour, agricultural production and the capitalist intervention in agriculture has raised considerable debates in West Bengal. There is scarcity of materials or documents about the agricultural labourer in pre-colonial times (Habib, 2002); however the question of slavery related to agriculture was not an issue in the east as it was in the north and south of India (Chattopadhyay, 1977). Agricultural labourers were mainly hired to serve the superior class of the *Zamindars* (Habib, 2002) who were actually peasants and not a class as a whole in the pre-colonial India (Dasgupta, 1984).

The society had two systems, one was a Hindu caste driven system and the other Muslim and Tribal society which accordingly dominated the division of labour within the society (Habib, 2002); though according to Dasgupta (1984) the Muslim population also had indirect or passive influence of the caste system and the Tribals got included in the Hindu caste system who had considerable contribution in agriculture.

With the advent of British colonialism in 1757, the land relations in Bengal had undergone a dramatic change where the landowner was no more satisfied with the 'fixed rent' but aspired for a share of 'agricultural product' (Mukherjee, 1957: 41). Colonialism brought with it the aspiration of the British to obtain 'monopoly trade in Indian product' by the policies of '[B]ritish merchant capital and

industrial capital' and to extract the available resources in Bengal (Mukherjee, 1957: 41). This affected the economy of Bengal and its agricultural productivity, while the economic and political dominance of the British to plunder rather than to export were carried on placidly (Mukherjee, 1957: 42). This extraction of wealth contributed towards the industrial revolution in England and the newly grown industrialists in England wanted a raw material supply market and a manufactured product market in India, thus replacing the merchant capital with the industrial capital (Mukherjee, 1957: 42); accordingly this created new agricultural farming relations in Bengal, better known as Permanent Zamindari Settlement in 1793. Again Mukherjee (1957) views the production relations in respect to who owned the means of production and how that emerged out of the production process in colonial Bengal. Accordingly he argues that Bengal like the rest of India did not have an egalitarian society and there were mainly three class divisions, one who had the larger share of the land, second were 'self-sufficient and self-cultivating peasants with proprietary rights on land' and the third comprised of the 'sharecroppers and agricultural labourers' (Mukherjee, 1957: 14). Bengal faced severe famine and the rural workforce was dislocated to find a better place for work. The crisis growing out of competition from large scale industries on one hand and the depleting growth of the textile industry in Bengal made the situation worst for the agricultural labourers (Dasgupta, 1984). Thus Bengal had to depend on the 'migrant labourers' and the 'semi-Hinduised aborigine group' (Dasgupta, 1984: A-136). This was the time when the rise of the

rural proletariat class was evidenced in Bengal which contributed to the class-caste relationship in rural Bengal (Dasgupta, 1984).

The labour relations changed with the increase in man and land ratio post 1920s. The creation of the market redefined the relationship of the hired agricultural labourer towards feudalism rather than a wage-labour relationship that exists in capitalism; hence the transition was “‘semi-feudal’ and ‘semi capitalist’” (Dasgupta, 1984: A-142). The situation gradually changed and there was participation from the higher class into the newly flourished rural market; at the same time the agricultural workers became more class conscious and struggled against the ‘patron-client relationship’ (Dasgupta, 1984: A142). But the wage and the employment situation for the agricultural labourers did not change, both in the colonial time and in the postcolonial time, irrespective of the movements like Tebhaga.

#### **4.6 Caste in the history of West Bengal**

Caste has played a dominant role in shaping Indian society and in a way determined the occupation of the ancestors (Dasgupta, 1984); though this is not sufficient and the researcher has provided a brief overview of this ‘social institution’ (Habib, 2002: 161) later to connect historically. There are wide spread conflicts on whether caste could be equated with *varna* or *jati* (Samarendra, 2011) but that is not contextual here. The concept of caste is integrally related to the agricultural relations in pre-colonial times since the division of labour in the society was according to the caste identities (Dasgupta, 1984; Habib, 2002).



Accordingly Dasgupta (1984: A-130) refers to the four dominant caste divisions of 'higher castes, agricultural castes, artisan castes and personal services castes' in the pre-colonial society in India. In Bengal (West Bengal post partition) the adherence to caste was never deeply embedded since a considerable amount of the population was originally 'Sudra or tribal' and also there was the influence of 'Bhakti movement' (Dasgupta, 1984: A-132- A-133). The simple existing agricultural relation as an agricultural labourer (as sharecropper or wage labourer) was to work on the land of others without any proprietary rights on land in pre-colonial India and also in rural Bengal (Mukherjee, 1957).

The continued dominance of the upper caste Hindu in the politics and culture of West Bengal and the gap in 'caste mobilisation in the electoral politics of the state' has literally gone unchallenged in the history of West Bengal politics (Chatterjee, 2012:69). However Chatterjee (2012) has linked this phenomenon to the partition of Bengal and argues that the partition and exposure of the upper caste Hindu to English education had contributed towards this domination. The partition of Bengal was supported by the Hindu upper caste in order to set free from the domination of Muslim leadership, which was a dominant phenomenon in Bengal (Bandyopadhyay, 2012; Prayer, 2009). Partition was in a way a compulsion for the 'Hindu *Bhadralok*' to succeed in power and as Sen (2012:323) put it, partition was the 'nationalist resolution of the caste question'. The partition led to the homogeneity of caste and had a common ground for solidarity and struggle. Caste was no more a majorly discussed subject except in the case of marriages. However the liquidation of the challenge from the Muslim population

brought psychological and structural comfort to the upper caste Hindus. Kolkata, previously known as Calcutta, experienced major population influxes and gradually constructed the metropolitan identity. The refugee movement gradually grew up under the leadership of the communist party who belonged to the upper caste and Chatterjee (2012) argues that the continuation of this dominance has pervaded throughout the three decades left rule in West Bengal either in power or in opposition. Chatterjee (2012) argues another vital point of politicisation of the social institutions by connecting the social institutions to the local branch of the party. This guaranteed the political dominance of the Kolkata centric upper caste involving the party structure and politicisation of the local social institutions (chapter 6).

Therefore mobilising the caste for electoral purposes as Chatterjee (2012) observes was not anything new but there was no sharp political polarisation; though there was an inclination towards the Left from the *Dalits*. On the other hand Sinharay (2012) argues that caste was never an important category considered in the electoral politics of West Bengal till the inclusion of Matua Mahasangha. Chandra and Nielsen (2012) arguing in the line of Chatterjee (1997) believed that caste was a part of everyday life in West Bengal, but was not institutionalised. Bandyopadhyay (2012) however argues that caste was not only an everyday matrix but it was also institutionalised in West Bengal. She argues further that the 1977 Left Front government did not include any scheduled caste member in the ministry and that inclusion of lower castes in leadership was a matter of internal fight within the CPI (M). The dichotomy in theory and practice was

evident from the party structure of the CPI (M) as observed by Bandyopadhyay (2012).

#### **4.7 Political Movements and the Left in West Bengal**

Undivided Bengal since 1930s has been a home ground for Marxism in its best endeavour. From Masterda Surya Sen led Chittagong group to the Jyoti Basu led Left Front government; the history of Bengal reflects protest, agitation, uprising and pro-people struggles. The Sino-Soviet ideological debates affected the unity of the CPI initially and led to a split. The ultra-left adventurism in Bengal has often given rise to unprecedented political unrest which could have been avoided as historians argue. The food movement of 1959 and 1966 for the food insecurity and famine in West Bengal led by the communists had abysmal effect within the society. In 1967 under the leadership of Ajay Mukherjee from Bangla Congress the first United Front government (UFG) was formed. But the government ran its course for a very short period.

After that another ultra-left insurgency, which is also known as the *Naxalite*<sup>20</sup> movement, by the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) or the CPI (ML) gained inspiration from Charu Mazumder's historic eight documents which ignited the streets of West Bengal. The document was mainly derived from the Chinese line and vehemently criticised CPI (M)'s line of action. The political split in the CPI (M) gave rise to CPI (ML) in 1967. According to Bhattacharya (2006:

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<sup>20</sup> Naxalite movement was a tribal-peasant uprising in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal in 1967, which was originally initiated by the Telengana struggle in 1948 in Andhra Pradesh. The movement called for an armed struggle following the Chinese line.

5191) ‘while *Naxalbari* could not achieve its immediate goals, it certainly succeeded in blazing a new trail’ and ‘facilitated the formation of the UF government in West Bengal’. However the UFG of West Bengal in 1967 condemned the CPI (ML)’s line of action. Another similar uprising of the tribal-peasants was observed in the state<sup>21</sup> of West Bengal post 2006 Assembly election. This time the uprisings were in *Jangalmahal*<sup>22</sup>, in the name of Mao Tse Tung and were called Communist Party of India (*Maoists*).

In 1969 West Bengal had an election and the second United Front Government was formed with CPI (M) being one of the major parties. The other parties were RCPI, SUCI, RSP, Biplobi Bangla Congress and Workers Party. Unfortunately with the resignation of Ajay Mukherjee the political turmoil came in eventually leading to President’s rule in West Bengal. The CPI and the CPI (M) continued to work from underground during the emergency in West Bengal. However both the parties realised that a greater unity could be bestowed with a state government. The dream of a coalition government depending on the international experience of reform finally gave birth to a Communist led state government in 1977. Jyoti Basu became the first Chief Minister of the LFG in West Bengal. In that year there was a shift in the central government and Janata Party government came to power defeating the INC under the leadership of Morarji Desai. The main appeal before the mass by the CPI (M) and the Left Front was to free West Bengal from semi-fascist terror, to restore peace and freedom of expression in any form and to

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<sup>21</sup>The regional provinces in India are referred to as state and this does not imply the entire nation

<sup>22</sup>The Jangalmahal comprises of mainly the four districts of *Purba* (East) Medinipore, *Paschim* (West) Medinipore, Bankura and Purulia in the state of West Bengal

fight for democratic rights (Dasgupta, 1977). West Bengal always had a very sensitive and political mass who had participated in elections measuring the socio-political-economical perspective. Social and political peace under constitutional stability was the need of the hour.

#### **4.8 Political Leadership in West Bengal: Changes and Continuities**

The politics of modernisation as Mukherjee (1991) argue not only bring change in the political culture but its micro and macro ethos and idioms do change the leadership-role in society. The issue of political leadership cannot be analysed without the culture of the political system as a whole. The embedded psychological phenomenon in the political system shapes the political culture in a society. West Bengal inherited the economic, social and political structure from the previous political system which had the components of economic underdevelopment, copious illiteracy and a slow urban growth (Mukherjee, 1991:47). Fighting for Independence has been a contributing factor for shaping the political culture and ensuring public participation in the political system of India. But there were certain gaps in this political culture since not all were exposed to the modernisation aspect of colonialism except the higher class-caste.

Mukherjee (1991:48) stresses that it was essentially the ‘Bengali Baboos’ who were in close contact with the colonial administrators and hence the ‘elite-mass’ differentiation in the political structure of West Bengal was a colonial architecture (Acharya, 1985). The political culture of West Bengal thus had the geographical, colonial and socio-historical influences including the Renaissance, Freedom

Movement and Partition of Bengal that shaped its political structure and culture. Thus irrespective of political affiliation West Bengal had the militant spirit and political parties were mainly dominated by the educated middle class elite structure belonging to higher-caste and from a Hindu background (Mukherjee, 1991: 333-336). The social background or the socialisation aspect of middle class encouraged the participation of the '*Bhadrolok*' (Mukherjee 1991:336) in political leadership, gaining momentum from the globalisation agenda of the Indian State. The important structural aspect of the Communists in West Bengal was the potential of organisation, the principle of democratic centralism which enforced discipline within the party negating the communication chasm between the leaders and the executers, and higher level of political education as a 'process of political socialization' (Mukherjee, 1991:337).

The situation changed in the postcolonial globalised India. As Date (2009) argues, the higher class in India desired for a chief executive officer (CEO) rather than a political leader who would work in close proximity with the class interest. Date (2009) further criticises the influence of 'Thatcherism and Reaganism' in Indian politics. According to him the nexus between elite Indian political leaders and US institutions can be linked to the effort of colonialism and imperialism to influence political leadership structure in India. He then questioned the difference between leaders, activists and elected representatives and contends that the mass should be empowered to develop the leadership potential. But in globalised India the trend of taking political leadership courses by the elected Member of Parliaments organised in association with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce

and Industry (FICCI) at Yale University in US makes the motive and understanding of the political leadership questionable. Hence political leadership and the dominance of educated higher or middle class in politics of West Bengal had its link to the pre-colonial times which continued gracefully even throughout the left rule in West Bengal (chapter 5, 7 and 8).

## **SECTION II**

This chapter looks into the state structure and the structural changes induced by globalisation in India and how the media functions in this postcolonial globalised society. This chapter of the thesis looks into the changes in the media after the LPG policy was adopted by the central government in India. The transition of the media in a postcolonial society like India went through ambitious challenges. Thus the chapter has focused on a brief history and situation of the media before the NEP and accordingly constructed a narrative for post NEP.

India was the first country to emerge from colonial rule after World War II (Hardgrave and Kochanek, 2008: viii). The second largest democracy in the world, gained its political independence, if not economic, from the colonial rule of the British, in 1947. The independence came with the partition of India on religious demographics which ignited the communal sentiments and reflected through generations still today. The Republic of India adopted the secular constitution while nurturing the communal minds in latent form. Inheritance of dominance since 200 years of British colonial rule has been one of the deep rooted

cultural adoptions in Independent India. Indian press-radio is also a fruit of this cultural inheritance (Ram, 1994). However post independence the First Press Commission decided to free the press and the radio from colonial heritage and convert the policies and capital involved in the media to national interest (ibid, 1994). The postcolonial approach to introduce reform thus initiated with India gaining its Independence. The debate of whether the Indian media market should be open to foreign intervention initiated in the 1950s. The Western proclivity to dominate the postcolonial Third World market by implanting the cultural, economical and political influence was a new way of establishing dominance (Nireekshak, 2000a), which is often regarded as imperialism (Rubinoff, 1998). Again in a postcolonial society the psychological coercion between the natural inclination towards the coloniser and the process of building a nation-state emerging out of the colonial past subsists.

#### **4.9 Print -Radio-TV: The brief history of transformation in India**

The first Indian newspaper, the Calcutta General Advertiser or the Bengal Gazette, was published in January 1780 by James Augustus Hickey, who came to be known as the ‘father of the Indian press’. The first newspaper in Indian language published in 1818 was *Samachar Darpan*<sup>23</sup> in Bengali. Then it took about 150 years more to initiate the sound broadcasting through private radio clubs in 1927, until 1936 when a colonial initiative was taken to establish the All India Radio<sup>24</sup>

(AIR) with the aim to inform, educate, entertain the masses on one hand and

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<sup>23</sup> Source: [http://www.indianfaculty.com/Faculty\\_Articles/FA4/fa4.html](http://www.indianfaculty.com/Faculty_Articles/FA4/fa4.html) (Accessed on 17.12.2012)

<sup>24</sup> Source: <http://www.allindiaradio.org/about1.html> (Accessed on 17.12.2012)



continue colonial dominance on the other. At the time of Independence in 1947 AIR<sup>25</sup> had a total of six stations<sup>26</sup>. Today AIR<sup>27</sup> has a total of 232 broadcasting centres<sup>28</sup>. The rural West Bengal still depends on the radio as the primary source of information. The Audience Research Feedback Report of 2007 showed that the 'cultivation of export oriented crops and cash crops etc' under the Kisanvani Programme of the AIR had the second highest listeners from West Bengal after Haryana (Ghatak, 2010). Again with the first screening of the moving pictures by Auguste and Louis Lumiere in 1895 in Bombay, began the age of audio-video era in India.

However it was not until 1965 that total broadcasting followed. The television service and radio monopoly ran under AIR till 1976, after which *Doordarshan* was established as a broadcasting organization to manage television separately. In June 1975 the media also faced the first attack when Emergency was declared by the Indira Gandhi led Indian National Congress (INC) government which continued till March 1977 (Tarlo, 2003: 2). The period marked press censorship, arrests of journalists and torture (Thomas, 1997: 167). The news were censored, however there were instances of rejection by the newspapers, to print censored news (Jethwaney, 2002: 18). The ongoing imbroglio in Indian politics and the continuing attack on its democratic and secular character marked this turbulent era.

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<sup>25</sup>Source: <http://www.allindiaradio.org/about1.html> (Accessed on 17.12.2012)

<sup>26</sup>These six stations covered 2.5% of the area, serving only 11% of the population

<sup>27</sup>Source: <http://www.allindiaradio.org/about1.html> (Accessed on 17.12.2012)

<sup>28</sup>The 232 centres covers 99.14% of the population

#### **4.10 Restructuring the Indian Economy: Before and After**

Restructuring of the economy, new production relations, public to private enterprises, cultural and media transformations, penetration of the global economic prescriptions and above all the role of the state in India are all under investigation so far as the effect of globalisation is concerned (Sinha, 2001). The transformation of the state in a postcolonial country like India has been rapid and therefore as Sinha (2001: 55) argues that to understand this transformation, the mutual relationship between the ‘international system’, the ‘state’ and the ‘civil society’ has to be understood; and in doing so one needs to understand the political economy of the state of India since it had the mixed impulses of a traditional state based on political practices and the desire to be a modern nation-state learning from European experience (Sinha, 2001: 61).

The structural transformation of the Indian economy was influenced by the transnational corporations and eventually influenced the politics of India. India since its inception post-independence committed itself towards economic development of the state and also tried to address the issues of underdevelopment through the planning commission and not through the market (Sinha, 2001:62; Shukla, 2005). As Dipankar Gupta (2009) eloquently puts the question to the public domain, ‘Without Gandhi India may well have become independent, perhaps even earlier, but would we have been a liberal, democratic nation state?’ India as a state emerged out of the colonial past, gained independence and structurally tried to be modern, secular and democratic because of the state architects like Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Babasaheb Ambedkar and Vallabhai Patel (Gupta, 2009; Sinha,

2001). The attraction of socialism was attached to the initial thoughts of structuring the Indian state but without the violent content (Gupta, 2009). However the Nehruvian model of the economy and the Gandhian model of the state have encountered challenges time and again either from the liberal pluralists or from industrialists (Mahajan, Pai and Jayal, 1994).

The majority of the Indian population in the rural areas depend on agriculture and the higher productivity in agriculture is directly proportional to poverty reduction; similarly labour intensive industry creates jobs and contributes to the economy (Shukla, 2005). The objective of the Planning Commission to alleviate poverty became secondary in its agenda post-liberalisation as less emphasis was induced in creation of labour intensive industry, reducing illiteracy, promoting agriculture and developing rural infrastructure (Shukla, 2005). Another important sector was democratising the rural governance by decentralising power and building rural self-governments or the *Panchayat*. This was another important constitutional agenda to empower the rural people and encourage rural infrastructural development through 'gemeinschaft relationship' (Ahmed, 2008:267). But even after more than sixty years of independence the *Panchayat* does not enjoy the complete authority from decision making to policy implementation instead relying on state government funds and grants. Therefore the partial decentralisation has over the years hindered not only the rural development but also served as a barricade towards democratisation of the rural society reducing peoples' participation in development and planning (Ahmed, 2008:271). The Indian state rather than honouring the views of the electorate was from its inception a more hegemonic of

its kind and therefore the development of the state became identical to development as a whole which reinforced the economic and political agenda on its citizens (Sinha, 2001). Thus post-independence India though freed from colonial impositions, retained the ruling class mostly dominated by the big farmers, industrialists and professionals (Bardhan, 1984) who to be in power continued towards populist economic reforms; which Singh and Saluja (2005) compared with the ship hitting the iceberg in a post-1991 experience.

The 'macroeconomic imbalances' caused due to the distending hiatus between the government's 'revenue and expenditure' resulting in the amplifying of the 'fiscal deficits' (Singh and Saluja, 2005: 1) contributed towards the submission of the government to rely on foreign investment. Being in the acute debt crisis and the Gulf crisis playing the role of a catalyst, India, in the early 1990's opened up its economy to foreign investments (Derne, 2008; Mohanty and Hazary, 1997; Singh and Saluja, 2005; Sinha, 2001). Free trade, free market, free investment was the main idea of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) to correct the fiscal deficit (Singh and Saluja, 2005).

The private channels entered the Indian market in 1991 for the first time. This was precisely the time when the entire Indian economic and also the media characteristic began to change. The structural adjustment loan taken from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) by the Indian Government, as referred by Steve Derne (2008), 'the terms of which demanded a devaluation of the Indian rupee, the lifting of most restrictions on foreign investment, and the elimination of licensing requirements in all but a few industries.' Liberalisation- Privatisation-

Globalisation (LPG) along with devaluation, deregulation, was the new short term economic reform measure known as the New Economic Policy (NEP) framed by the then Narasimha Rao led Indian National Congress Government to rescue the Indian Economy (Mahajan, Pai, and Jayal, 1994; Omvedt, 2005; Singh and Saluja, 2005; Sinha, 2001). It was basically surrender to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) (Deshpande and Sarkar, 1995; Sinha, 2001), who not only provided an immediate relief to the government for fiscal corrections but also contributed to design and enforce the development policy including communication and media policy in the third world (Chakravartty and Sarikakis, 2006; Singh and Saluja, 2005).

Thus the new economic reforms ushered in a new way of economic dependence on the foreign investments in the name of structural adjustment. Also it redefined the relation between the haves and have nots (Appadurai, 2004). Before 1990's known as 'international economic integration' got transformed to a new term coined as globalization (Ahluwalia, 2008). Globalisation as Gidden (in Mohammadi, 2004:338) views is, 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa'.

In 1991 the major deregulation in the national industrial sector to raise productivity and reduce the cost and enhance competition in the domestic market eventually led to less strict policy for inviting the foreign direct investment (FDI) (Singh and Saluja, 2005: 10; Sinha, 2001). This was a major setback for the Indian nationalist and socialist economic agenda of self-reliance (Derne, 2008)

and as Sinha (2001:65) argues the complex relationship between the national and international economic players and the changing outlook of the civil society in India contributed to the situation.

Following the FDI initiative the government in India in 1994 decided to open the telecommunication sector to private investment and participation as prescribed by the IMF and World Bank, which encountered serious political opposition (Sinha, 2001). The government instead of privatising the telecommunication sector decided to welcome private investment by liberalising the 'value-added services' and provided license to two private telecom companies in the metro cities of Kolkata, Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai (Sinha, 2001:69). Thereafter in 1994 the telecommunication sector was opened to private service providers for the entire country though with certain limits on foreign participation (Sinha, 2001). The question of private intervention in the Public Sector Enterprises (PSE) would threaten the nearer socialistic policies of the state and hence the employee union called for a major strike in the country (Sinha, 2001). However the government's policy forced the domestic companies to engage in partnership with the foreign companies (Sinha, 2001) and in a way the government tactfully managed to pursue the liberalisation policy.

#### **4.11 Challenges to Secular India**

This was a time when India faced challenges towards the secular structure of the state and there was a rise in religious fundamental forces (Mahajan, Pai, and Jayal, 1994) during this period of economic liberalisation. The communal forces became

operative in the Indian society and utilised patriotism and Hindu fundamentalism as a weapon to fight the foreign capital. The inherent contradiction within the India polity in the question of secularism contributed to the political indecisiveness; accordingly there were divisions of right liberal, right fundamental, left and other democratic forces on the notion of secularism (Mahajan, Pai, and Jayal, 1994; Bhargava, 2006). As Bhargava (1994) argues, the concept of secularism separates the politics from religion and hence is complex and fallacious in its interpretations. 'Separation is required in order to ensure a subtle and complex egalitarian system' and therefore to 'curb political and religious absolutism' (Bhargava, 1994:1785). However Iqtidar (2012) believes that secularism is actually about controlling the religion by the state and not a separation of both. Chatterjee (1998:345) views this interference of the state in religion as 'Third World exceptionalism' and an elitist project (Patnaik, 2011). Again 'secularisation is seen primarily as the privatisation of religious belief and practice' (Iqtidar, 2012) and to the extent it does not interfere in the public sphere or malign the state, both could have a conjugal existence. But India being a secular state by constitution faced a severe crisis on the eve of demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 and inevitably the question of diversity and conjugal existence in every respect was challenged (Bhargava, 1994). The CPI (M) in India supported the INC for the first time to resist the fundamental forces from capturing the state power (chapter 6).

#### **4.12 Media, political parties and the judiciary in India**

There were serious criticisms of the role of the media which included the corporate interest of the media owners, untrained journalists and the irrational political influence of the powerful in India (Banerjee, 2008). In India the relation between the media and the political parties has been tumultuous. There were grave instances of political organisations and parties building up frenzy protests to burn media offices followed by the organised media setting out rally to protest by involving obscene and indecent gestures (ibid, 2008). The administrative role of the government was more calumnious where the police administration was involved to get hold of the journalists and editors and not the lunatic political protestors. This was not only restricted to certain political parties but was a political philosophy prevalent all over India where the journalists and editors were trounced, media houses and offices were ransacked by the hoodlums under political banner (ibid, 2008).

On the other hand the media's intolerance and unethical pander to the vile tastes of political hoodlums provided enormous scope for criticism. The media in India influenced by the big American corporate interest of neoliberalism in a postcolonial society played the role to depoliticise society and engrossed public attention by featuring scandalous and scurrilous news or making caricature programmes. The media in India tried to establish its power by providing trials of incidents and running sting operations to sensationalise the society and increase circulation to reap monetary profits post-1991 (Editorial, 2007b). Banerjee (2008: 11-12) argues that the media in India even made efforts to 'manufacture Islamic terrorists'



out of any incidents of bombing and blast which after investigation came out to be altogether a separate incident. The orchestrated campaign of equating terrorism to Islam is endangering the secular construct of India (Manchanda, 2010). Also sensationalising an incident on the basis of religious belief has been another way of increasing the profits of the media corporate, forgetting its social responsibility which was also debated by the CPI (M) (chapter 6 and 8).

Media's transformation from stenographer to power building block has blurred the distinction between the news and the views in the media thus exhilarating manipulation rather than shaping public opinion in liberalised India (Mani, 2011:4, Muralidharan, 2010). The perilous effects of the media on the society in India has also encouraged judicial enquiry to set up the reporting code for journalists. Muralidharan (2012) argues that this stringent approach to abide journalism would not solve the problem but would encourage authoritarian imposition which would further malign the democratic and liberal values of India. There has been effort from the political parties and civil societies in India to restrict the power of the media (ibid, 2012; Mani, 2011). However the press in India is guided by self-regulation mandate of the Press Council of India (PCI) but there is no such regulation on the electronic media. There are debates as to whether there needs to be a separate code of conduct or if the self-regulation should be extended to the electronic media (Muralidharan, 2012). But there were strong arguments in favour of the code of conduct since the media in India does not take the self-regulation seriously (Editorial, 2007b).

#### 4.13 Rise of the Vernacular press

India witnessed an overwhelming increase in readership both national and regional when that was not the case globally (chapter 7). However as Verhulst and Price (1998) argues, this increase in the readership was not only due to the thirst of the public for political news and its analysis but at the same time it was due to the market economy of advertisements along with the corporate interest in the regional language market. But as Neyazi (2011) argues, the amplification of the regional and the official language<sup>29</sup> press has contributed towards building a broader public sphere which has challenged the English language press in postcolonial India. The exponential growth in the circulation of newspapers in India from '126.96 million in 2000 to 207.10 million in 2008' owes a lot to the regional and Hindi language press (ibid, 2011:75). English newspapers post 1991 do not dominate the public sphere any more in India.<sup>30</sup> In India according to the Census 2001, 40.22 percent of the population speak and understand Hindi and the second being Bengali which is spoken by 8.3 percent of the population (ibid, 2011). Therefore the growth of the Hindi and regional press in India had deepening effect on democracy. The growth was noticed from 1980s when the

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<sup>29</sup> Hindi was declared as an official language in India (Source: Department of Official Language, [Online], Available at < <http://www.rajbhasha.nic.in/GOLPCContent.aspx?t=endolact> > [Accessed on 19.02.2014]. There were controversies on whether Hindi could be recognised as a national language. Since there is no official declaration of recognising Hindi as a national language, other than the only fact that the number of people speaking the language in India are largest and that Hindi was declared as official language by the Constitution of India on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1949 and not the national language. Therefore the Gujarat High Court verdict refused to accept Hindi as a national language of India. The articles on this verdict was published in The Hindu and The Times of India newspapers and are available at < <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/hindi-not-a-national-language-court/article94695.ece> > [Accessed on 08.12.2013] and < [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-01-25/india/28148512\\_1\\_national-language-official-language-hindi](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-01-25/india/28148512_1_national-language-official-language-hindi) > [Accessed 08.12.2013] respectively.

<sup>30</sup> Statistics of circulation of 2008 shows that the 'Hindi dailies lead with 84.9 million copies while English dailies stand at distant second with 31.5 million copies' (Neyazi, 2011:75).

Hindi newspapers which were previously produced from urban centres extended production to rural and semi-urban locality. Post-1991 India witnessed a prominence in this growth. Localisation contributed towards generating revenue and advertisement for the Hindi and regional press. The localisation of press demanded decentralised production which contributed towards the development of the local market and had a positive effect on the Indian economy. As Neyazi (2011) observes, LPG has further accelerated this growth with the advancement of technology. The growth also saw an increase in non-trained journalists who were employed by the newspaper house to gather news locally. Neyazi (2011) further argues that the local attachment to the regional newspaper contributed towards the development of the vernacular press. The public felt more attached to the news since they could visualise the reflection which was not the case for elite English newspapers. The vernacular press also dedicated special pages and supplements for local happenings and entertainment. However the regional press had to be conscious enough not to violate the cultural construct of the society but at the same time educating the masses with the changes in the lifestyle since this could endanger readership.

In India the alignment between the regional press and the regional political parties started in the late 1960s. The regional press reflected the programmes adopted for local or regional benefits by the political parties. This acted as an albatross on the political parties who had to incorporate the regional issues in their political agenda. Moreover the vernacular press always served as a political weapon in building the nationalist movements even during the colonial phase in India. The newspapers acted as the vanguard of independence and in a way initiated the

decolonisation process in the press. Even the rise of the Hindi and regional newspapers could be related to the upswing of the non-Congress political parties in India (Neyazi, 2011). The participation of the non-English speakers and the marginalised section in politics was also a contribution of the regional media.

In West Bengal the Bengali regional press has been an integral part of politics (chapter 6 and 7). Again the exponential growth of the regional newspapers was also sometimes related to the growth of literacy which Neyazi (2011) argues was not the only reason since the newspaper circulation was more than the number of literates. The growth could be also related to the empowerment of the marginalised in regional India where news became closer to the public due to localisation. Localisation of the press again was sometimes related to corruption evolving out of the regional power centres (Ninian, 2009) but that was not new in media in any level whether national or regional and hence a generic linkage would liquidate the enormous potential of the regional press to mobilise the masses in democratic participation (Neyazi, 2011). There were instances where the civil society or the general public came forward for a cause even before the government reacted. The alternative development agenda brought in by the alternative public sphere of the marginalised in India contributed towards sustenance of democracy apart from the profit motive in the post LPG era (ibid, 2011). This was true so far as the experience of West Bengal portrayed the rise of an alternative marginalised public sphere which had a close relation to the postcolonial uprising of the exploited (chapter 6, 7 and 8).

The print media in India had its own unique characteristics which were defined by Jeffrey (1993) as incomparable with any other country or continent across the globe (chapter 7). The complexity and the unintelligibility due to various regional languages of the print poses a real challenge (ibid, 1993). Post LPG the debate on whether foreign participation should be allowed in Indian print gained momentum. The miserable condition of the newspapers, the hire and fire policy of the media houses, the indecent pay of the journalists invigorated the discussion. The CPI (M) opposed the FDI in print and demanded monitoring units for the media (chapter 6). The journalists were not allowed to go beyond the narrow silhouette of the proprietor's guideline and editors or senior editors had less to do with it (Nireekshak, 2000b). The commercial department unofficially took the charge of organising news and editors were turned into mere puppets. This had considerable effect on the editorial policy and the editorials itself (ibid, 2000b).

Thus under liberalisation in India the newspaper industry as a whole was prospering but the conditions within were perishing. There was also a general agony within the journalists of not being able to serve the public with the true news but by superficially orchestrated news. But the situation, as argued by the newspaper editors, if taken up unanimously by the political parties, could not be left to worsen by inviting foreign participation (ibid, 2000b). The newspaper in India has played vital role in shaping the voice of the nation. It contributed to nation building exercise which is essential for a postcolonial developing Third World nation. Thus allowing the foreign players in this constitutive public sphere would jeopardise the national interest. The other important part is the Article 19 of

the Indian Constitution ‘which guarantees freedom of expression..only to Indian citizens’ (ibid, 2000b: 4167). Therefore the ‘Indian print media should remain Indian’ was the general consent of the nation in building (ibid, 2000b:4167).

#### **4.14 Newspapers in West Bengal**

West Bengal as a state presently has more than a 91,347,736 population (Census, 2011a) and 77.08% literacy rate (Census, 2011b) in India. According to the Registrar of Newspapers for India (2013), among 7764<sup>31</sup> verified titles there are 7069<sup>32</sup> registered publications in West Bengal within which 4771<sup>33</sup> are published in Bengali. Presently *Anandabazar Patrika* is the second largest circulated daily with the circulation of 1,282,942 among the total circulation of 3, 73,839,764 registered newspapers in India (Registrar of Newspapers for India, 2013). The important and widely circulated language newspaper dailies (see figure 3) in West Bengal with their first publication dates have been *Anandabazar Patrika* (1922), *Bartaman* (1984), *Ganashakti* (1967), *Aajkal* (1981), *UttarBanga Sangbad* (1980), *Sangbad Pratidin* (1992), *Sanmarg* (1946) and the popular English dailies are *The Times of India* (1861), *The Telegraph* (1982), *The Statesman* (1875), *The Economic Times* (1961). The popularity of newspapers and publications in West Bengal could be traced back to its political consciousness. The expansion of the

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<sup>31</sup>Registrar of Newspapers for India, Available at <[http://rni.nic.in/rni\\_display\\_state.asp](http://rni.nic.in/rni_display_state.asp)> [Accessed on 16.10.2013]

<sup>32</sup>Registrar of Newspapers for India, Available at <[http://rni.nic.in/display\\_state.asp](http://rni.nic.in/display_state.asp)> [Accessed on 16.10.2013]

<sup>33</sup>Registrar of Newspapers for India, Available at <[http://rni.nic.in/display\\_language.asp](http://rni.nic.in/display_language.asp)> [Accessed on 16.10.2013]

newspapers in Bengal gained a momentum after the 1857<sup>34</sup> revolt which is also known as India's First Nationalist Uprising and was led by the Bengal army. The Bengal Renaissance, social reform movement, also had considerable influence on the literary and cultural development in Bengal (Chatterjee, 2011).

The press in Bengal played a dominant role in the socio-political movements and against the prevalent social exploitations (Basu, 2013). As Jeffrey (1997) correctly mentions, Bengal was the first centre leading the anti-colonial movement and generates ideological struggles. Newspapers were considered as a weapon to propagate and generate national consciousness within the masses by the nationalist leaders. The newspaper was an integral part of politics in both undivided Bengal and today's West Bengal (Basu, 2013). The Vernacular Press Act of 1878 was introduced to restrict the anti-colonial criticisms by the language press *Amrita Bazar Patrika*; who refused to accept the government patronage offered by Sir Ashley Eden (Jeffrey, 1997). Later the Act was revoked by Lord Ripon. Bengal also received the first 'hot-lead mechanical casting machine' in 1935 (ibid, 1997:141). The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (1891) in order to survive the Vernacular Press Act converted from a bi-lingual daily to English daily but continued to be a leader in the national movement. However in 1922 the 'generational change within the Ghosh family' ((ibid, 1997) led to the split in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the *Anandabazar Patrika* was formed, which continues to be one of the powerful language newspapers with the largest

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<sup>34</sup> The Sepoy Mutiny of May 1857 was the revolt against the British imperial authority by the soldiers of the Bengal battalion, Source: BBC History, Available at <[www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/indian\\_rebellion\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/indian_rebellion_01.shtml)> [Accessed on 26.12.2013]

circulation in West Bengal and second largest circulation in India as discussed above. The split led to further competition between the two houses which further gave birth to the two new publications of *Hindustan Standard* and *Jugantar* by the former and the latter respectively in 1937. Bengali though was and is the second largest speaking language in India after Hindi but that did not have similar reflection in the numbers of publication or circulation until 1980s.

One of the reasons being as Jeffrey (1997) argues the widening gap between the urban centres of Calcutta and the rural. The national and political movements in West Bengal were mostly led by the middle and the elite classes (Jeffrey, 1997). Therefore it had a more polarised population of the literates in the urban centres and illiterates in the rural. This eventually restricted the publication to the urban centre of Kolkata. However as evident from Figure 1 (Appendix II) there was a constant increase in the literacy rate with the increase in population over the years from 1951 to 2011. But newspaper growth should not be related only to the growth of literacy (Neyazi, 2011).

LPG brought in new scopes and challenged the traditional concentration of newspapers in the urban centres. The localisation of press through decentralised publishing and reflection of the regional news empowered the rural masses, both in India and in West Bengal. The district editions supported the mission of the expansion of the readership and built close connections with the local political leaders and communities. West Bengal in general has been a highly political state and the appetite for political news has also contributed towards the increase in readership. The question of whether the rural market in West Bengal could



provide economic return for the newspapers both from the perspective of advertisements and circulations was answered positively by the experiments of chit-fund industries (Jeffrey, 1997). Though the chit fund companies soon became bankrupt but it initiated the process of decentralised publication which was soon followed by other newspapers. Post 1991 there was an influx in the readership figures in West Bengal and the newspapers were newly designed to attract the rural mass.

#### **4.15 Representation of the Public: a subaltern turn of the media**

Public empowerment through alternative social dialogue has been a new trend globally and in India. Letters to the editors were the only space available for the public to initiate a dialogue in the past. But within a few decades of LPG the power of the internet created a new ambience for the public. The development of blog, alternative email campaigns, media activism has laid considerable emphasis on the resistance produced by the media in India (chapter 6 and 7). Though there is considerable ambiguity about this virtual public sphere being equally accessible to the elite and the marginalised, it is true that the public has more space to communicate its voice and contribute to democracy (chapter 6 and 7).

However in India the gap in representation of the marginal and local was to some extent mitigated by the rise of the regional or vernacular media post 1991 as discussed above. The conflict, heterogeneity and the postcolonial 'other' (chapter 2) did find

some space in the regional press which generated the public voice. This was not only the case of the press but the same happened in the electronic media. The postcolonial elite dominance of the English media in India suffered a real challenge in the wake of the vernacular media (chapter 7 and 8).

#### **4.16 Media transformation in India**

Given the Indian state structure and the NEP now the question is where the Indian media stand in this transformation. The Indian broadcasting system was initially under direct state control until 1991. It was used as a medium of instruction to educate the mass and create the national identity which was essential in a postcolonial state like India (Thussu, 1999). Emerging out of the authoritative colonial rule the initial phase of radio broadcasting in India faced challenges to generate both revenue and listeners; since the lack of enthusiasm deterred investors from investment and also the considerable amount of the rural population did not have access to electricity till 1970s (Jeffrey, 2008). The inherited colonial broadcasting system and the aspiration to create a broadcasting policy inspired by the Soviet Union in India initially faced trouble because of the language (ibid, 2008). However with the satellite channels, private television the scope of broadcasting news and programmes in regional languages became possible since early nineties in India (Mehta, 2008). At the same time the Indian media got engaged as a medium in spreading the ideology of consumerism, brought in with the wave of liberalisation after 1991 (Scrase and Scrase, 2009). Thus the socio-economic and political agendas of the capitalist growth and development in India got integrated with the

large scale growth of the media industry (Kumari, 2008) after the entry of the global media conglomerates. The advent of satellite channels, internet after the New Economic Reforms in 1991, accelerated peoples' access to information (Derne, 1999; Kothari, 2006). The citizens were transformed to consumers (Kumari, 2008). The profound influence of the 'Western transnational media empires' brought in a change in Indian broadcasting (Thussu, 1999:125).

India had only Doordarshan, the state controlled channel in 1991 (Joseph, 2000: 165; Mehta, 2008; Thussu, 1998: 273; Thussu, 1999:126) which multiplied rapidly after the open market economy came into being. The one channel of Doordarshan in 1991 went up to more than 70 in 1998 (Thussu, 1998: 273). The privatization process not only gave rise to overabundance of media outlets (Gordon, 2008; Mehta, 2008) but also brought in foreign direct investment and commercialized state television network (chapter 6). Doordarshan, which was essentially used as a 'propaganda tool for the government' was forced to change its education oriented programme to entertainment orientation in order to meet advertisers demand and to survive in the consumer market (Thussu, 1999:125). The rapid growth of the Indian economy gave birth to the rising middle class, urban elites whose desire for consumption rose with that of the economy (Derne, 2008; Thussu, 1999). At the same time this middle class became the most authentic target for the transnational broadcasters (Thussu, 1999). However the middle class in liberalised India has undergone transformation and differentiation (Deshpande, 2003; Lakha, 1999) but the middle class category was itself criticised by Sen and Stivens (1998) as groups and not class.

Again the affluent class in India had the desire to identify themselves with the life abroad. This was also depicted in the Indian movies in late 1990's. Though the effect of transnational capitalist class produced by globalization was always discussed, little attention was provided to study the effects of globalisation on a transnational middle class (Sklair: 2001, in Derne, 2008: 93). Derne (2008) argues it was necessary to study the new class identity produced by economic globalisation since it is grounded in both production and consumption making class identity a transnational component. Moreover with the diversity in Indian society 'demand for a wide array of satellite channels, catering to different languages and tastes' was huge (Thussu, 1999:125). The pluralistic character of India found within every form of language, architecture, medicine, art, industry, agriculture, education (Hazarika and Garg, 2008:244) also served the necessary market for the global conglomerates. Thus the market in India was worth investing and there was ample scope to earn profit by the transnational corporations after 1991.

The state dominated planned economy in India was replaced by the transnational hegemonic political culture (Kumari, 2008) of globalisation after 1991. According to Thussu (1999:131) '[I]n a post-colonial polity like that of India, the idea of a public sphere is still in its infancy, given the historical legacy of authoritarian colonial governments and the post-Independence experiences of state control of the electronic media'. However the researcher argues the development of alternative postcolonial public sphere through the rise of the vernacular press which has challenged the authoritarian control of the governments in India

(chapter 8). This also led to the national representation of the regional political parties which has further contributed to the practice of pluralism in Indian democracy (chapter 6 and 8).

The period of 1990 followed industrial recession, declining per capita output levels, falling rate of foodgrains production. The only two achievements were, 'low rate of inflation and comfortable level of foreign exchange reserves' (Patnaik, 2001). However little of the facts were reflected in the news media. However as Mehta (2008: 32) puts it that the 24-hour news channel had definite contributions to Indian democracy and 'news production itself is a cultural process' which works under 'institutional constraints'. The field of sociology and communication has worked closely in this field of news generation (Schudson, 2011).

#### **4.17 Electronic media and the TNC in India**

India is a nation with diversity<sup>35</sup>. *Doordarshan* had the prime aim to educate, inform and create a feeling of national identity among the citizens until 1991 (Thussu, 1998: 273; Thussu, 1999:126). With the advent of the satellite television and the process of economic liberalization introduced in 1991, Doordarshan also faced serious setbacks in the competitive profit driven market (Hazarika and Garg, 2008:245, Verhulst and Price, 1998). The question of autonomy of the media was not new in India. But the media reform invigorated the question of media ownership and control in India. The educative role of Doordarshan got

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<sup>35</sup> '1562 mother tongues, 10 writing systems, and 76 languages in the school system out of 2000 codified languages' (Hazarika and Garg, 2008: 244)

transformed into a political weapon to construct the electoral politics (Hazariika and Garg, 2008). The satellite channels on the other hand with no social commitments targeted the middle class with its West-driven entertainment (Thussu, 1998: 277). Accordingly by 1998 ‘major transnational media players, notably STAR, BBC, Discovery, MTV, Sony, CNN, Disney and CNBC’ (ibid, 1998) captured the wealthy-urban-middle class audience. It was easy to capture the minds as according to Derne (2008: 203), the ‘transnational middle class’ embraces cosmopolitan fashion to identify itself with the consuming elites in the rich countries. This paved the way for cosmopolitan consumption to ‘distinguish itself from the Indian poor’ (ibid, 203).

The new communication technologies were increasing the inequalities between the information rich and the information poor in the system after 1991 (chapter 6). This cultural intervention brought changes in every aspect of media’s functioning and the society. Another threat was also from the cable television networks. The regional cable TV networks also started working in close proximity with the regional or local political leaders, big businesses and sometimes even the underworld since mid-nineties (Verhulst and Price, 1998). According to Iyer (1994:3082) this was a ‘macro crisis’ which threatened the ‘sovereignty, democracy and secular, socialist fundamentals of our constitutional order’ and in a way contributed to economic re-colonisation. The foreign participation in Indian media thus according to critics violated the Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Indian constitution<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> The Constitution of India, [Online], Available at < <http://india.gov.in/my-government/constitution-india/constitution-india-full-text>> [Accessed on 08.03.2013]

The PARAM<sup>37</sup> supercomputers (Thomas, 1997) and satellite television were the initial examples of US-led technology transfer. The gradual transformation started in the 1980's for the Indian media. New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) coined by UNESCO and propagated vehemently by the MacBride Commission report left deep impact in Indian media and politics (Chomsky, 1989: 9). Its prime objective was to bring in a balance in the flow of information between the North and the South. In India at the time of emergency (1975-77), this issue of NWICO initially came in. Indira Gandhi was an ardent supporter of the NWICO like that of President Suharto of Indonesia and Kenneth Kaunda, former president of Zambia (Chomsky, 1989). NWICO propagation was utilised for their narrow political benefits. The perception about representation of news in newspapers were changing and had negative influence on the public which was in tune with what McQuail (1976: 29) mentions, '[P]eople were fully reluctant to confer on newspaper its fully idealized role. The newspaper could act as the watchdog of government, but the government also was asked to be a watchdog of the press' (Schultz, 1998: 64). This was exceptionally true for the media in West Bengal.

In India the centralised media policy framed by Indira Gandhi was also a fruit of NWICO. The inherent contradiction of arresting journalists on one hand and propagating alternative media in the name of NWICO marked the mockery of mediated politics. This was the time when the new form of cultural imperialism began to 'translate its rhetoric into reality' (Thomas,

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<sup>37</sup> *PARAM* in Hindi means super and India's first supercomputers were named as *PARAM* which was launched in 1991

1997: 170). It was since the 1980's that the process of economic liberalization in India was slowly making its way. According to both Dewey (1927) and Chomsky (1989), citizens have to be conscious and able to recognize the manipulations by the government and the media in order to protect oneself and the democratic practices of the society. But in India, as argued by the CPI (M) public opinion was expressed through top-down strategies, there was less scope for an individual to analyze the political aspects before forming an opinion (chapter 6).

India with, more than 1,210,193,422 (Census, 2011a) populations, 74% literacy (ibid, 2011b), many religious practices, caste system, has really undergone difficulty in stabilizing its political democracy. The criminalization of politics and corruption has been the main concern of the Republic. With advanced technological merging of the media with politics after 1991, the social structure, the class outlook began to take a new turn in India. The political parties were in collusion with the private media channels and invest lots of money to propagate political line of action (Iyer, 1994). Even the corporate sectors invested and had the capability to change the news demography. The combination of industrial and media power portend a threat to Indian democracy (ibid, 1994). The Indian finance ministry along with the Indian press lobbied with the foreign media players as an effect of economic liberalisation (Ram, 1994).

The nationalist structure of the Indian press underwent an internationalist structure to compete with foreign media; the only constraint being implied was 'minority equity holding in an Indian newspaper, that is, up to 49 per cent of its ownership' (ibid, 1994: 2787). This caused considerable debates inside and



outside the Indian National Congress as well as within the media organisations. The Indian media was going through a transition where there was the traditional, pluralistic and independent media<sup>38</sup> on one hand and the electronic media being accused of manipulations on the other (ibid, 1994). The inclusion of the foreign media players and the TNCs in the media sector contributed in magnifying the imperial agenda of the TNCs accordingly strengthening the propaganda motive of the media (ibid, 1994). The dominance of the foreign capital in the media market did not only mean a share of profit but guaranteed domination in editorial, technological and financial terms (ibid, 1994). The threat was not restricted to the English newspapers but also to regional press (Phaugat, 2011). Traditionally the nature of Indian press is political, guided by the Indian constitution and part of the Indian political system; thus dominance of finance capital has eventually imparted political effect on the press (Ram, 1994). The foreign players in the press portrayed India as dependant from an Occidental perspective, which again influenced the media content to impart influence on the Indian populace (Iyer, 1994). The press in India was often criticised because of its dependence on international news agencies at the same time providing less opportunity to publish articles by local talents (Nireekshak, 2000a). The bankruptcy of the Fourth-Estate (Schultz, 1998) as compared to the whole world is also not a different phenomenon in India.

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<sup>38</sup> Ram (1994) meant the traditional, pluralistic and independent media to be the press as it provided space for ideological and political debates and opinions which contributed to the freedom of expression.

Media in India post LPG received funding from big corporate who did have other industries. Thus newspapers and electronic media got transformed from social advocate to a commodity in the economy to create profit where 'truth' became a 'casualty' (Iyer, 1994: 3083). The interest of the media remains no more for the public but acts by and for profit. Media's unconditional subjugation to the commercial interest overlooking the public did cause hindrance in pertaining democratic character of the society. After implementation of LPG, the media's role became centralized in India. Now the media's role was not only to deliver news but also impart imported culture in local form. Media also produces cultural alienation by camouflaging reality (Iyer, 1994). The new Entertainment Industry was set up to manufacture culture within the society, which was an innovative way for 'manufacturing consent' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). In India the media's content and control post liberalisation went through an array of metamorphoses. The influence of finance capital drove the media to serve the corporate interest which eventually was shaped by 'advertising' and 'market research' (Rao, 2002:105). Advertising<sup>39</sup> has been one of the primary sources of revenue generation for both the print and the electronic media. Again advertisement as an industry is dominated by the big capitalists who are again few in number thus contributing to a centralised mode. The global conglomerates along with the multinational corporations did engage themselves in the survey of the India market in regard to readership and viewership and accordingly influenced the advertising industry to reap greater profits (ibid, 2002). Rao (2002:

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<sup>39</sup> Advertising by the multinational corporations in India has contributed towards 45-55 percent of revenue generation for the media and 60 percent for the newspapers (Rao, 2002)

105) also argue that the ‘planning’ and ‘public relation’ of the media has further contributed towards lesser editorial control. The media in India with the dominance of the finance capital thus have the pernicious potential to ‘can make and unmake even prime ministers’ in a ‘Goebbelsian fashion’ (Iyer, 1994: 3082-3083).

The media and entertainment industry in India has suffered a slowdown due to global financial crisis in 2009. But it has, as a whole, according to Federation of Indian Chambers & Commerce Industry (Raghavendra, 2010), ‘registered a modest growth of around 1.3% in 2009 as compared to 12% in 2008’. Again the ‘[B]roadcast and television sector comprises over 43% of the overall Rs.5.87-lakh-crore media and entertainment sector’ (FICCI, 2010). This confines itself to the fact that the emergence of the global network capitalism is increasingly accumulating the political, economic and cultural capital on transnational network organizations that make up the use of new technologies to invade Third World postcolonial countries like India. In India, ‘[R]adio reaches 97.3 per cent of the population, while television covers 87 per cent’ (Gupta, 2004: 191). The greater concentration and centralization of capital by combining the market and new information technology is also a new form of exerting cultural imperialism. But public in general while consuming the news is unaware of these hidden policies. The next part of the thesis is based on the findings from documentary evidences and interviews conducted. The chapters also include references to the debates and arguments from the journal *Economic and Political Weekly* since there were limited documents available from the perspective of the media.

PART III  
The Findings

Chapter 5 The Policies of the  
CPI (M) led LFG in  
West Bengal

Chapter 6 The Relation of the CPI  
(M) led LFG with the Media

Chapter 7 The Media Viewpoint on  
the CPI (M) led LFG

## Chapter 5

### **The Policies of the CPI (M) led LFG in West Bengal**

The CPI (M) went through serious debates within the organisation during its tenure in power from 1977-2011. The main policy decisions within the CPI (M) are important to understand how they dealt with the issues of governance, reform in a postcolonial society. The political policies of the CPI (M) are relevant to understand the relationship between the LFG and the media in West Bengal as the issues in the state had effects on the relationship. This also guides me further to find how the CPI (M) viewed the role of the media in democracy. I discuss that in the next chapter. This chapter starts with the CPI (M)'s view on the functioning of the Indian state. This chapter is based on the documents I studied and have occasional references to the secondary data collected from the Economic and Political Weekly archive to alleviate the gap in the primary sources as discussed previously in the Methodology chapter of this thesis.

#### **5.1 CPI (M) on the Indian state, political system and language**

The article '*Federalism and the Political System in India*' (2004) by the present General Secretary of the CPI (M) argues on the federal structure of the Indian constitution and how it has been contravened since India became an independent Nation-State. The above article further contends that there were continuous struggle and political movements within the country to retain the federal character and to resist any form of encroachment. *Karat* in this article identifies two phases broadly; first one being the 'nation building and development exercise' (2004:1)

and the second being the formation of the regional parties to bring in a challenge for the Indian National Congress, in 1967, when the Indian National Congress was for the first time defeated in nine states including West Bengal (2004:2). There were initially the separatist movement and therefore the challenge was to retain the united diversity of country till late sixties. However *Karat* argues that the first political democratic movement post-independence was the demand of the formation of the linguistic states. The communist party supported and led the movement. The growth of the regional parties paved the way for greater negotiations and restructuring of the Centre-State relation. Indian constitution<sup>40</sup> has the Centre, State and Concurrent list which divides the power accordingly. The Centre-State relation depends upon the vested power assigned by the lists, though the power of the Centre has a binding core. Thus influencing the Centre-State relation also demanded a greater role of the regional parties.

However with the growth of the regional parties there arose the chance of forming an alliance between them as an alternative to Indian National Congress at the centre. The year 1989 thus marked an important electoral transition in India, when for the first time a non-Congress government was elected and the new phase of coalition politics set in. Thus broadly categorising there were two forces operative in Indian politics, one struggling to retain the federal character of the state and the other trying to introduce more centralised functioning and policies. The left supported the regional coalition at the centre and also worked towards retaining federalism. However *Karat* (2004) delineates in the article that

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<sup>40</sup> Indian Constitution, Electronic Content, *As modified up to the 1st December, 2007*, Available at <<http://lawmin.nic.in/coi/coiason29july08.pdf>> [Accessed on 06.10.2013]

irrespective of the efforts the federal character could not be strengthened in India. Both the large parties (Indian National Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party) wanted a strong centre and were not interested in the devolution of power apart from the *Panchayati Raj* system. Secondly the introduction of the LPG contributed towards 'market federalism' that imposed the fiscal burdens of the centre on to the states (ibid, 2004:5). The competition between the states to attract investment without any specific planning of the centre worsened the situation outstretching regional disparities. This provided scope for rebels within the states and instigated the demands of dividing states further on grounds of 'backwardness' (ibid, 2004:6). *Karat* eloquently states in this article about an alternative policy by the left that would restructure the Centre-State relations and strengthen both. The left emphasised the democratic devolution of power, clearly defined areas of central intervention and power, 'equitable sharing of taxes and resources', decentralised administration and 'regional autonomy' (ibid, 2004:8). Therefore post independence the CPI (M) mainly concentrated on the postcolonial reformist approach. The decision to form the state governments was also a part of this reformist approach and was largely influenced by the reform in Europe.

## **5.2 Introduction of Left Front and its political understanding in West Bengal**

Jyoti Basu (1977: 2-3) being the main craftsman, the Left Front in West Bengal was always conscious of the fact that the government had limited constitutional power and urged for 'people's cooperation' to successfully fulfil the tasks. The Left Front in 1977 drafted a common minimum programme to contest in the

Assembly election (Basu, 2006a). This programme included a brief narration of the utterly anxious situation of phobia in West Bengal and the proposals to overcome and reorient policies for both state and centre. It outlined the proposals to end bureaucracy, withdrawal of Misa law, to free the political prisoners, to restrain exercise of the Presidential Rule in normal situations apart from international threats, to undertake land reform, to reopen the lock out factories and to include the native language as the medium of instruction in education to mention a few (Basu, 2006a: 423-430). The proposed economic measures advocated nationalising industries, to cease monopoly capital, generate work and social security for the disadvantaged (ibid, 2006a: 427). They also recommended building labour unions, specifying minimum wage for labour, eight hours of work, job security (ibid, 2006a: 428). The proposal included the formation of state enquiry commission to investigate into the heinous political crime or execution and bring impeccable justice to the victim and family (ibid, 2006a: 430). The inclusion of the minority community and the emphasis on protecting their rights were also emphasised (ibid, 2006a: 430).

The need for constitutional amendments was also necessary to implement certain changes in the proposal. Therefore the Left Front government concentrated on the policies that the state government could work on or the issues which were in the Concurrent List of the Indian Constitution. The first and important was the land question. The left under the leadership of CPI (M) decided to address and go for agrarian reform. In doing so they wanted to decentralise power in the rural areas through proper functioning of the three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions (CPIM,



n.d.). Indian constitution did have the provision but the political intension of implementing the land reform in the country was absent.

The CPI (M) in their booklet *25 Years of Left Front in West Bengal* (n.d.) stated,

‘The most important lesson learnt from the obstacles put by the Central Government, bureaucracy and judiciary in the attempts to implement the land reforms by the 1967 and 1969 United Front Governments was that the implementation of land reforms required democratisation of local Government and involvement of masses in the implementation of land reforms.’

This alternative initiative of implementing land reform and reorganising the democratic institutions like the *Panchayat* not only popularised the politics of the left but at the same time made the rural West Bengal believe that they could run their own government (Basu, 1982: 182). Ousting the big landlords and empowering the agricultural workers, impecunious peasantry, small and marginal farmers established a long standing faith and shifted the rural mass towards the left (Basu, 2006b: 496). The pro-people initiative included but was not restricted to restoring freedom of speech, rights of the organised and unorganised factory workers, women empowerment and civil liberty (Basu, 2006c). The CPI (M) in this phase also had to assert the constitutional rights and communicate their understanding on democracy and democratic rights distinctly (Basu, 2006b).

The decentralisation of power in the rural areas both politically and economically had an embryonic potential for the longevity of the government. But the question of devolution of power and participation of the mass in policy formation or execution has been a matter of concern thereafter (Ghatak and Ghatak, 2002). The

CPI (M) under the leadership of Land Reform Minister Benoy Choudhury recorded 1.6 million sharecroppers and established their right to cultivate and retain a cropping share under Operation Barga. The *Kishak Sabha*, mass organisation of the peasants, communicated the reform process that had a long-term enduring effect on the economy and politics of West Bengal (Ghosh, 1981). Left Front Government (LFG) in West Bengal was thus regarded as the government for the marginalised which encouraged hope and aspiration within the enormous rural population of West Bengal (Karat, 2002).

Immediately after winning the Panchayat election in 1978, the flood situation in West Bengal came as a challenge (Basu, 1978). This created crisis all over the state during all the three phases of flood situation. However the organisational effectiveness and the role of the Panchayat in distributing flood relief and helping the flood affected people had a far reaching effect. The recovery and the re-building phase were taken up as the primary and foremost task of the Left Front government and the parties within it (Basu, 1978). The CPI (M) being the largest party within the front took its additional responsibility along with its mass organisations. The collective responsibility of the government and the parties were able to provide relief to the victims (Ranadive, 1978).

Therefore the aim of the CPI (M) led LFG was to consolidate peoples' faith and support within the society of West Bengal. Initially the longevity of the LFG was not something that the CPI (M) believed in or desired for (Karat, 2002). Dasgupta (1977: 444) mentioned in the booklet *Ganatontrer jonnyo Byapokotamo Mancho*

*Gathoner Tatporjyo*<sup>41</sup> that the CPI (M) should remain aware of their class interest while forming or supporting a government. Forming a government for the CPI (M) was to enhance the class struggle and inspire the revolutionary movements of the working class to develop.

The CPI (M) also continued their rigorous campaigns in the state of West Bengal as a task to make people aware of their limited power of governance due to the constitutional structure of India. The power of LFG was the power of the workers, farmers, middle class and the general mass and therefore the CPI (M), according to Basu (1980), must educate the masses to consolidate them democratically. A very common phrase often used by the CPI (M) since it came to power in West Bengal was, '*Janogoner Chetonar Bikash Chai*<sup>42</sup>', (Basu, 1979; Dasgupta, 1977) by injecting the political thinking and the ideology of the CPI (M) (Basu, 1979: 68). The LFG, according to Basu (1980: 118), was committed to ensure peoples' democratic rights and uplift the marginalised class in the society.

The CPI (M) thus created their mass organisations representing almost every section of the society. The political thought behind creation of mass organisations was to provide support to the party and the LFG (Basu, 2006b). Accordingly the mass organisations of the CPI (M) were the Trade Union Front working within rail, tea estate, engineering, electricity sector, mining, iron and steel factory and with the state government civil servants; the Peasants Front; the

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<sup>41</sup> *Ganatontrer jonnyo Byapokotamo Mancho Gathoner Tatporjyo* means A Wider Platform to Protect Democracy

<sup>42</sup> '*Janogoner Chetonar Bikash Chai*', in other words, their task was to 'enhance the consciousness of the masses'

Women Front; the Youth Front; the Student Front; the Writers and Cultural Front; the Lawyers Front; Professors' Front; Primary Teachers Front; Secondary Teachers Front; and Relief Front (Basu, 2006c: 496-566). The various publications of the CPI (M), including *Ganashakti*, *Deshhitaishi* and *Nandan*, were also represented as a 'front' because the publications and the press worked as an organiser and agitator within the society (ibid, 2006c; Basu, 1986). This thesis accordingly looks into the role of *Ganashakti* in West Bengal (chapter 6).

Thus LFG was considered as a weapon in the hands of the common people to fight for their rights within the society which was run by the political and ideological direction of the largest coalition partner the CPI (M) (Basu, 1981). This thesis has not investigated into the details of the land reform and Panchayat system since they are not central to the thesis. However I have examined the land reform and Panchayat as a part of the reform governance since it is relevant in understanding the relationship between the media and the LFG. During the period between 1977 and 1991 the majority of the campaigns conducted by the LFG were on the achievements of the land reform and devolution of power through Panchayat. This thesis also discusses the transition from agrarian reform to industrial reform and the understanding of the CPI (M) led LFG. This is because the transition has been often cited as one of the main reasons for the defeat of the left in West Bengal by the media and the scholars. To build up the argument therefore it is necessary to highlight the incidents and policies that created debate in the public sphere. The thesis then examines how the CPI (M) and the media

represented themselves in the public sphere and hence investigate into their relationship.

### **5.3 Land Reform, Panchayat and the LFG**

The initiative of the 'Land Reform Act of 1955' brought in changes and the sharecroppers got transformed to agricultural labourers. In Bengal the first intensive campaign under the United Front Government in 1967 and 1969-70 was to recover illegal and surplus land from the big farmers and distribute to the landless (Dasgupta, 1984: A-142).

The Left Front government came to power in West Bengal in 1977 and undertook agrarian reform in the state where 74 percent of the population were in rural areas (Mallick, 2008). The Left Front government's aim was to end the exploitation by reducing the feudal contents in the society of West Bengal on the one hand and secondly to create a political bondage so that they could fight for their demands (Dasgupta, 1984). Secondly, the landless labourers were made owners of the land they had their houses on and at the same time compensating the landowners from the government. This brought security and comfort to the landless. The alternative employment generation through the local rural government or the *Panchayat*, increasing the wage and fixing a minimum wage were some of the other reform initiatives by the Left Front government in the initial years after it came to power (Bhattacharyya and Bhattacharyya, 2007).

The Land Reform was pursued with the assistance of the *Kishan Sabha* (peasant organisation) and the *Panchayat* (CPIM, 2002). As the document on the 25 years of the Left Front government read:

‘West Bengal accounts for only 3.5 per cent of agricultural land in the country. It is noteworthy that the land vested under land reform legislation in West Bengal constitutes about 18 per cent of all land vested in the country under land reform legislation. The land redistributed in West Bengal under land reform constitutes about 20 per cent of the total land redistributed in India. *Dalits* and *adivasis* were the major beneficiaries of land reforms. About 55 per cent of beneficiaries of land redistribution and 42 per cent of recorded *bargadars* came from these sections.’ CPI (M), 2002

Not only Land Reform but the three-tier *Panchayat* was also taken seriously in the state with elections held every five years, as a process of democratising the rural society and were also responsible for the implementation of the poverty alleviation programme (CPIM, 2002, Guha, 2004). The document also argues that this process of local self governance along with the land reform programme increased the food grain production, cropping intensity, fishing and also enhanced the living standard of the agricultural labourers. This increased the purchasing power of the agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers who could then have increased access to the advanced green revolution technology (Bhattacharyya and Bhattacharyya, 2007). The agricultural development had deep impact in the society and increased production led to increased consumption and well being of the people.

The empowerment of the *Dalits* and *Adivasis* through *Panchayat* and land reform was another important achievement by the government as claimed in the document. In general this was an alternative experiment on the part of a radical government to empower the lower class and build the trajectory of how reform could contribute to the Indian democracy (Mallick, 2008). *Panchayat* in India used to be a weapon in the hands of the ruling elite and dominant caste in the villages and benefitted them the most irrespective of the efforts by the Planning Commission. In West Bengal it was the initiative of the Communist rural elite class –caste to organise the lower caste-class in a movement to achieve their rights. Mallick (2008) views it more as a motivation than to do anything about the class-caste origin of the Communist leadership. This contributed towards building and developing the rural economy in West Bengal till the early 1990s. The poverty alleviation programme has been another concrete achievement of the left as Dasgupta (1995:2691) argues in *Institutional Reforms and Poverty Alleviation in West Bengal*. According to him ‘income disparity’ and ‘unemployment’ were the two factors that contributed to poverty and hence an institutional reform and political decentralisation along with the poverty alleviation programme in West Bengal assisted in recovering the poverty situation<sup>43</sup> (1995:2691).

Apart from the achievements the Left Front and mainly the CPI (M) has often being criticised for the organisational and institutional deformities. The initiative of *Operation Barga* as critics argue inducted an ‘institutional structure of tenancy’ which in a way abandoned the instigation for socialist revolution (Bhattacharyya,

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<sup>43</sup> There was a decline in rural poverty during 1977-78 to 1989-90 (Ghosh, 1998:2994)

2007:280). Bandyopadhyay (2001:440) criticised CPI (M) for ‘throttling protest’ in the rural West Bengal ‘with their proud display of muscle-power, police and administration’; and apprehended that the assertion of violence in rural politics, though at that point limited to only three districts of Midnapore, Hugli and Bankura, would detonate to leave a devastating effect in the rest of the state. There was political polarisation already in place between the left and the rightist fundamental forces in the villages of West Bengal. He also criticised the CPI (M) for destabilising the other left coalition partners in rural politics and hence emerging out as the single largest dominant party defying the agenda of multiparty democracy. The land reform and the *Panchayat* were the two pillars of the CPI (M) to hegemonise the rural West Bengal. Village politics as Bandyopadhyay argue explicitly, was all about capturing power in the *Panchayat* in order ‘to control the village’ (ibid, 2001:440).

The statistical survey revealed that the majority of the *Panchayat* members were landowners, teachers or social workers while the agricultural labourers and poor uneducated members were an absolute minority in the citadel of democracy. In arguing why the anti-incumbency factor did not work in the rural West Bengal Bandyopadhyay contends that the CPI (M) engaged ‘bullying tactics and electoral malpractices’ (2001:440) to stay in power. There were social or labour boycotts and even monetary fines for whoever opposed the CPI (M) and this resulted in reducing the opponents or protestors to negligible minority for a while.

Also CPI (M)’s analysis about the grassroot level of *Panchayat* to be non-political and mostly regional contributed to wrong understanding of the class struggle



(Bhattacharya, 1993). The class struggle of the CPI (M) was replaced by ‘nationalist and constitutionalist discourse’ (Bhattacharya, 1993: 1491-1492). Bandyopadhyay argues that the entire process of land reform was implemented by ‘reforms movement and legislation’ (2001:441). There were reports submitted by the LFG’s ex-officio members on how the *Panchayats* gradually dropped the land reform agenda (Bhattacharya, 1993).

Bandyopadhyay further points out these were not regular incidents to defame the noble initiative of Operation Barga, but they did complicate the rural politics and life. All these contributed to the violence in rural West Bengal and as Bandyopadhyay (2001:442) asserted, ‘[L]ack of development is not the only reason that invites the reign of terror. But it perpetuates a vicious circle – lack of development creates tension and tension impedes development.’

The success of the agrarian reform in West Bengal had a major setback because of the neoliberal economic policy and also because of a non-sustainable late green revolution in the 1980s (Bhattacharyya and Bhattacharyya, 2007).

#### **5.4 Policy of the LFG on Governance and Reform**

The experiments in the district level to strengthen the democratic practice and to gather feedback in order to improve local and state governance were carried out in the rural areas (Basu, 1982; Basu 1989). Following the first decade of the experience the Left in West Bengal decided to go for industrialisation (ibid, 1982). The open door policy of the Central Indian National Congress government adopted in 1991 had considerable impact on the Left policies (Guha, 2004; CPIM,

2008b). The land reform process still needed serious attention. The changing pattern of production relationships demanded further interventions and was realised by the CPI (M) in the early nineties (Basu, 1991b; CPIM, 2008:37).

However the left and particularly the CPI (M) were largely criticised both in the state and in the media for the adoption of the new industrial development policy in West Bengal (Basu, 1994a; Basu, 1995: 72-76). This was the time when the left started turning right as argued by media (ibid, 1995: 75). The land acquisition policy of the Left Front government was argued to become industry friendly and hence affected the subaltern perspective (chapter 7). The industrial licensing policy of the central government required the state governments to take permission for industry clearance from the former. The Haldia Petrochemical suffered a delay of twelve years before the approval was given by the centre (Basu, 1991a: 251). This created an imbalance in the state so far as industrialisation was concerned (ibid, 1991a). However *Jyoti Basu*, the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, explained their eagerness to build small, medium and large scale industries in the state of West Bengal but with an alternative policy. They emphasised seeking the non-residential Indian investments in West Bengal along with various European companies (Basu, 1992:319).

The new economic policy or LPG was a submission to the World Bank, WTO and IMF as argued by the CPI (M) (Basu, 1992; Basu, 1994a). However due to removal of the licensing policy it became easier for the state governments to invite industry and investment (Basu, 1992: 321). The CPI (M) had long inner party discussions and debates about the industrial policy to be adopted and

implemented (Basu, 1994b). The CPI (M) organised mass meetings of their party members to communicate the political understanding of the party on governance and industrial reforms (ibid, 1994b). Basu (1994b) while addressing this meeting emphasised on the alternative governance and the functioning of the communists within the parliamentary democratic system 'in which real State power resides at the Centre' (CPIM, 2008b:32). According to him it was the duty of the party members to communicate the difference between the LFG and the INC led Central Government so that the public understands through their experience (ibid, 1994b:36-37).

The political understanding of the CPI (M) on the LFG was that the government should be run from among the masses rather than from its administrative centre Writers Building (ibid, 1994b: 37). This should be done, according to Basu (1994b) by engaging the mass organisations locally and within the social institutions.

The aim of the LFG was to gain the confidence and faith of the public irrespective of class differences (ibid, 1994b: 38). To gain the confidence the LFG should remain committed towards the development of the state and its public. Hence agrarian reform was not enough to generate employment since it too has a saturation point. To consolidate the achievements of the agrarian development along with the small scale and cottage industries in the state, the need to build the medium and large scale industries was becoming a necessity for the state's economic development (Basu, 1994b: 40-41). There was also growing scope for exporting finished goods in the foreign markets to increase competition. The

documents suggest that a clear understanding was still to be explained and accepted within the party. The transition from land reform to industrialisation was a tough political decision but the left were confident on implementing it in West Bengal. The inner organisational debates on the issue were still to find concrete answers. Serious critical analysis of the industrial policy (Das Gupta, 1995) of the left came out in different academic journals and newspapers.

The LFG welcomed international technology and investment in industry in a way that would not have affected the nationalised industries (Basu, 1994a; Basu 1994b). The primary goal of the changes in industrial policy was to make the state self-reliant (CPIM, 2007). At the same time they criticised the unconditional support to international investment in industry by the Indian National Congress government (CPIM, 2002). The CPI (M) in the article *Thirty Years of the Left Front Government in West Bengal* (2007) mentioned about the dual role that they had to undertake during 1991 while the Congress led Central government adopted the NEP.

The CPI (M) criticised the policy of liberalisation but also saw the new hope as,

‘[O]n the one hand these policy changes were clearly in the rightwing direction, which was opposed by the CPI (M) and the Left. On the other hand, it also meant an end to the discriminatory policy regime of the Central government, based upon licensing and freight equalization policy, which has caused enormous harm to the economic interests of West Bengal. It was in this backdrop that the Left Front government had to devise its industrialization strategy.’ (17 June, 2007)

The CPI (M) held organisational meetings to clinch their stand regarding industrialisation and its constraints within the semi-feudal and semi-capitalist structure of India. The LFG was in the state for providing relief to the people rather than to provide long term permanent solution. The veteran Jyoti Basu in an interview with INN mentioned that it was not possible for the LFG to adopt a socialist or even a social democratic working pattern (1995:75). However the LFG was committed to work for the common good of the people on the basis of the Common Minimum Programme in the state (ibid, 1995: 75; CPIM, 2008). There was difference of opinion within the CPI (M) on the objective of the LFG. One idea was that the LFG was there to provide relief and the other insisted on seeing the LFG as a government with long term planning. This was explained in the para 112 in the old programme on the CPI (M). It gave rise to serious debates within the party and was finally amended to para 7.17 of the updated programme (CPIM, 2008:39).

Amidst this the political unrest at the centre during the 1996 Loksabha or Parliament election invited new challenge for the left in India. The country faced the question of unconditional subjection to 'imperialist capital' (Ahmad, 1997:1329), the rise of the Hindu fundamentalism and the opportunity for a third alternative force led by the left and CPI (M) in particular (CPIM, 2002; CPIM, 2008b:37) came. The CPI (M) along with the 12 other regional parties formed an alliance to form the Central government at the centre, however the CPI (M) did not participate in the government but supported it from outside (Basu, 1996:92). India experienced for the first time the coalition politics after forty eight years of

Independence. The Indian National Congress had no choice but to support the government though the offer of Jyoti Basu to be the Prime Minister was turned down by himself in conformity with the party line (Akbar, 1997). Later on this stand of the CPI (M) was criticised publicly as a ‘historical blunder’ by Jyoti Basu (ibid, 1997).

The process of industrialisation carried on and became the main agenda of the Left Front government in the 2006 election. The left secured highest number of seats ever since they came to power in 1977 and had the clear mandate of the public. CPI (M) secured the largest number of seats within the alliance. Banerjee (2006) views this consecutive victory of the Left as the lack of proper opposition to gain the electoral confidence and that the public had no better choice than the Left Front. The left resorted to the worst chicanery to retain power giving rise to ‘Party Society’ (Bhattacharya, 2009:59) in rural West Bengal. The rural unrest prevailed and winning electoral seats uncontested in Panchayats had some message to deliver about the democratic practices (Roy and Banerjee, 2006). The CPI (M) being the largest ally were unable to notice or appreciate the fact that the land insecurities still prevailed in the rural West Bengal (Chatterjee and Basu, 2009). The resistance in Singur and Nandigram was the worst in the decades of Left rule. People’s mandate for industrialisation was not at the cost of the suffrage of the peasantry (Banerjee, 2006; Chatterjee, 2009). There were severe debates within the Left Front and many of the other parties from within even spoke to the media criticising the CPI (M)’s stand. The defeat of the Left Front in the Panchayat election 2008 and Loksabha elections 2009 had the clarion call for the political

change in the Assembly election 2011 in the state as discussed by the media persons interviewed for this thesis (chapter 7).

### **5.5 The CPI (M) on Liberalisation-Privatisation-Globalisation (LPG)**

Since the inception of the LPG in India in 1991, the CPI (M) has campaigned about the concern of how the neoliberal economy could pose a threat to the self-reliance of India. In the party document (2001) the then General Secretary of the CPI (M) Harkishan Singh Surjeet, emphasised on building resistance which they referred to as ‘struggle’ against the austerity measures of the NEP. Thus finance capital<sup>44</sup> which entered the country imparted ‘negative impact upon the balanced, equitable and sustained development’ not only on the world economy but also on India (Surjeet, 2001: 2). The inequalities in poverty and income along with imbalances within the economy are some of the crude realities of neoliberalism. Thus the document affirmed the world wide resistance to neoliberal agendas from Geneva to Latin America and envisaged the integration of the Third World. The document made some strong understanding on the exploitation of the neoliberal forces of domination under globalisation. It further emphasises the unipolarity of the world and argued that the US as supreme power with other imperialist centres of European Union and Japan are exercising ‘economic and military hegemony over the rest of the world’ (ibid: 2001:4). The consolidation of the imperialist forces further paved a smooth path for ‘the hegemony of international finance capital’ (Karat, 2011:5). The dominance though has met profound

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<sup>44</sup>The merging of the bank and industrial capital is called Finance Capital which exercises ‘virtual monopoly’ and ‘strengthens the dominance of financial oligarchy’ (Lenin’s Selected Works, 1963, Vol 1., pp.667-766, Progress Publishers, Moscow, Available at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/>, Accessed on 01.09.2013).

resistance by countries on the grounds of retaining 'sovereignty', 'national independence', 'social progress and peace' (Surjeet, 2001:4).

Though liberalisation was initiated in the 1980s, it gained momentum with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In India other than defence, all the important sectors were made open to foreign capital. Patnaik (2001) argues that it was the Indian state and the media who worked in conformity to popularise the neoliberal policies in India. There were a total of 1429 items whose import to Indian market initially was restricted, but post April 2001 was given a unfettered entry including commodities in agriculture and textile (Surjeet, 2001:5). These imports not only had a reverse effect on commodities produced in India but at the same time the foreign liabilities were mounting. Thus liberalisation is a way of gaining profit from the postcolonial Third world countries and inducing huge subsidies in the First World countries. The diminution of the role of the state as the producer and investor with the operation of liberalisation in India had dwindling effect on public investment (Patnaik, 2001). Surjeet (2001: 7) further argues that it was not the pressure of the WTO but the will of the ruling class in India who were eager to show their undaunted support for the 'imperialist masters'. As Patnaik (2001:13) argues, it was the shift from the production capital to the finance capital that happens in liberalisation and hence 'is a major episode in the history of class struggle'. Therefore the alternative discourse of combat, according to Patnaik should be the 'widest mobilization of classes against those promoting "liberalization"' (2001:13) and that can be achieved by advocating 'robust state



intervention' to generate 'employment and reduce income inequality' (Karat, 2011: 6).

In the Marxists view, LPG was not only an economic disaster for India but it also affected the culture of the country. The 'internationalism' of the working class culture was endangered by 'the philosophy of universalisation of the market' where culture gets commodified; 'cooperation among individuals' became easy prey for 'infinite competition' with the advent of new technology (Surjeet, 2001: 11). Surjeet (2001) further delineated how the cultural invasion through cable TV networks are shaping the cultural values and inducing the clarion call to join globalisation by penetrating deep into the consciousness. Access to the new technology becomes a necessity for survival in the age of globalisation and generates the myth of universality 'in an unequal, class divided world' (ibid, 2001: 11). Thus to Surjeet (2001:11) 'owning an internet connection is a class privilege' in India. To make technology accessible to all there needs to be a change in the 'social relations of production' (ibid, 2011:12). The Marxists were not opposed to new technologies as Surjeet emphasised but they did not accept the myth of the technology being accessed by all.

### **5.6 Updated Party Programme of the CPI (M)**

The CPI (M) updated its party programme in the year 2000 in respect to parliamentary democracy and socio-economic-political challenges in postcolonial India. The then party General Secretary *Harkishan Singh Surjeet*, better known in the party as HKS, in the article *The CPI (M) Programme: Updated In Tune with Changing Times* (2000) delineated the thoughts and ideological construct of the

party while updating its programme. The programme of the communist party is based on the application of Marxism-Leninism in the given condition of a country and individuals who desire to be a member needs to adhere to it. The programme of the communist party should also consist of the immediate and long term objectives depending on the socio-political-economic conditions in the country.

The three stages of achieving socialist revolution as discussed in the programme of the CPI (M) were based on the principles adopted in the Communist International. During independence it was the task of the party to resist British colonialism and imperial agendas. It tried to construct the resistance in the form of anti-imperialist and anti-feudal movements within the country, given the fact that the big landlords tied up themselves with the British. Therefore 'national liberation' was the immediate objective of the CPI at that point of time (ibid, 2000:1). The long term objective of the party was the anti-feudal movement. However since the Indian bourgeoisie compromised with the British imperialism, therefore the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist struggles remained unaccomplished in independent India. The party programme with the long term objective of 'Peoples' Democratic Movement in India' was adopted immediately after and as HKS argue in the article, it would be led by the working class 'only' (ibid, 2000:1). After the accomplished task of Peoples' Democratic Movement, the tactics for the socialist revolution would be undertaken. In India as HKS explained in the article that under the leadership of the working class and in alliance with 'the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie, and sections of the non-big

bourgeoisie' (ibid, 2000:2) the Peoples' Democratic Revolution would take its course. There have been numerous debates within the communist party since pre-independence on the paths and tactics to be adopted. There were divisions within the party broadly on two lines of strategy- the Soviet and the Chinese. The non-uniformity in the strategy led the communist party to seek the assistance of the CPSU, and as HKS narrated in the article, the delegation of the communist party came back to India with a draft and resolution of seeking a path in Indian way. The party programme got approved in 1954 but ignited various debates in the party. The party tried to resolve the debates and answer the questions publishing documents, pamphlets within the party. However the situation within the party got worse and the CPI (M) was formed. The programme of the CPI (M) got adopted in 1964.

The split in the party was based on the basic questions of 'class collaboration', 'class struggle', and 'national democracy versus peoples' democracy' (ibid, 2000:7). The programme of the CPI (M) got modified with the changes in the international situation of socialist countries and also identifying the wrong political analysis of the international situation. Accordingly the programme was updated and the inclusion of the role of the communists in India's struggle for independence, formation of the communist party and the anti-imperialist struggles were included. In India the situation post-independence changed and the 'semi-feudal landlords' were transformed to 'capitalist landlords' (ibid, 2000:11). Therefore the party objective is to abolish landlordism taking the regional disparities in consideration. The creation of resistance to pro-imperialist initiative

of the central government in the era of liberalisation is the objective of the party in regard to the foreign policy. The class composition determines the state structure and in India it is being compromised in favour of the bourgeoisie.

The programme further argues that the state formation on linguistic agenda was democratic but the initiative of the BJP led NDA government to break the states further on 'administrative convenience' (ibid, 2000:14) was an attack on India's federalism. Similarly the programme of the CPI (M) also includes resolution to fight any anti-secular attacks and to abolish the caste system in India. The objectives of Peoples' Democratic Revolution though are anti-feudal and anti-imperialist, but in reality they welcome capitalist investment where they were in power.

The programme though emphasising the role of the peasantry and agricultural labourers did not say anything about an equal participation of the working class and the peasantry so far as the leadership to the Peoples' Democratic Revolution is concerned. The party had its peasant mass organisation, *All India Kisan Sabha*, and recognised the revolts in India led by the peasantry. The programme identified the agricultural labourers as a revolutionary class and the foremost task of the party was to complete agrarian revolution but did not recognise the agricultural labourers as revolutionary leaders. Another important change was the participation of the CPI (M) not only in the state governments (as in the 1964 programme) but also participation in the central government if the scope arises. There were considerable debates within the CPI (M) on the participation in the central government since 1996. The CPI (M) refused to participate in the central

government in 1996 under the leadership of the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, Jyoti Basu. Later Sri Jyoti Basu addressed this as a ‘historical blunder’ and that further instigated the debate. Finally it got accepted within the party in the updated programme.

The party programme further emphasises on the working of the CPI (M) on the basis of democratic centralism. Democratic centralism is the way of democratically contributing to a debate within the party and concluding it in a centralised way on the basis of majority’s view, either ‘unanimously or by a majority vote’ (ibid, 2000:26). The common consensus should then be implemented and given a considerable time for testing in reality. However the principle of democratic centralism in the age of globalisation where media possess a vital role was not discussed in the programme. The political resolution of the party also had no clear understanding of the media and did not recognise either the power of the media or the strategy to deal with it until 2012. The resolution also did not include the cultural question and how it views culture until 2012. The major inclusion of the specific sections of ‘Identity Politics’, ‘Media in Corporate Grip’ and ‘Culture’ (CPIM, 2012:25-36) was adopted from the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPI (M) in 2012.

### **5.7 Industrial Reform: Singur and Nandigram**

In India acquiring a land for industrial and development purposes is still done under the Land Acquisition Act formulated during the colonial regime and the only way it can compensate is in monetary terms (Guha, 2004). Land acquisition

has been an issue in West Bengal since the 1990s. As Guha (2007) argues, the initial land acquisition for industry at Kharagpur, before the New Industrial Policy (NIP) of the state government in 1994 came into existence, did face considerable peasant resistance which went unheard except little news in English news daily

*The Statesman*. The researcher has dealt with the media responses later in this thesis (chapter 7). However this coverage was important so far as the political motives of the rightist, ultra leftist, human rights activists and the civil society or intelligentsia (as they were referred post 2001) were concerned. Since Guha (2007) eloquently argues that none of them showed any political interest or even thought of taking the sides of the peasants to build a greater resistance. There were lack of political apprehension at that embryonic stage of state induced private industrialisation, and the agenda was not taken seriously in building up agitation. Therefore the ‘combination of capitalist-friendly policy and the colonial Land Acquisition Act’ (Guha, 2004: 4620) of the LFG was unable to provide alternative measures and rehabilitation to the affected peasants.

The leftists in the state generally adopted a bottom-up strategy rather than top-down strategy in planning and implementing developmental agendas. This was important in two ways; firstly, to include the peasants and rural population in the bottom line by engaging them in the development process and secondly, this assisted in the process of identifying and exploring suitable land for industrial development<sup>45</sup>. According to Guha (2004), these changed with the advent of the new economic policy and liberalisation initiative of the central government. The

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<sup>45</sup> In Medinipur this was published in the form of a document ‘Village Based District Planning Process: An Outline of Methodology’ in September 1985

state government also took the initiative to set up capital intensive technologies and heavy industries on the basis of achievements in the land reform process (CPIM, 2008b). The argument by the CPI (M) was that there were changes in the labour and production relations due to the development of the rural economy. The CPI (M) states in its report,

‘The Party has to study the changes that have come about in class relations especially after three decades of land reforms and the development of capitalist relations. We have to examine the shifts in class positions with the advent of a rural rich strata. Similarly, under the impact of neo-liberal policies, there are changes that have occurred among the middle-classes and other strata.’ (2011:6)

The pro-peasant government suddenly took up policies that became a threat to the peasants. The West Bengal Assembly election 2006 was fought by the Left Front on the agenda of transforming the achievements of land reform to build industry in order to generate alternative employment. The CPI (M) pursued this political agenda within the Left Front and came back to power with overwhelming majority both as a party and also as a coalition. The left claimed that people had given a clear mandate for industrialisation and hence the reason for majority (CPIM, 2008b). Soon after the election the government faced crisis in *Nandigram* and *Singur* on the question of land acquisition (CPIM, 2011). Banerjee and Roy (2007) argue that negating the ideological and political construct of land reform and democracy while implementing the industrial policy has contributed towards the unrest in West Bengal. The compensation package offered to the wretched had

clear signs of discrimination<sup>46</sup>. Secondly, the democratic structure of the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) was also ignored in this entire planning and process of industrialisation. The industrialisation policy was planned and decided as a top-down strategy where PRIs were mere implementers. Bhaduri (2007:552) called it 'developmental terrorism'. This created repugnance not only within the general rural populace but also within the supporters of the left. The survival of the rural poor faced crisis and Banerjee and Roy (2007) epitomizes the insecurity that stimulated the anger to revolt (CPIM, 2011).

On the other hand Bose (2007) argues that the LFG proposed compensation at a much higher rate than prevalent in the market and that the owner of the land could move to the court if they were dissatisfied with the government offer. The LFG also consulted the farmers before they gave their written consent for selling the land and this process was adopted by the government to avoid legal delays. It was not the first time that land has been acquired for industry in *Singur*, but it was the first time when the state government became involved in the process of land acquisition and not the agents. Bose (2007) interpreted that had this process of acquiring the land being done by the industrialists, then it would have been a different situation altogether. The land agents who used to make money out of this acquisition suffered since the government intervened into the process directly. This created a sense of loss within the agents who under the banner of opposition revolted citing agrarian unrest due to agricultural land acquisition. But in

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<sup>46</sup> There were no compensation for the agricultural labourers and the unregistered sharecroppers, but the registered sharecroppers and the landowners received compensation. This was a reversal of the leftist policies where the cultivators were not properly compensated or marginalised where as the non-cultivators were compensated largely (Banerjee and Roy, 2007).



the wake of LPG, the central government has proposed Special Economic Zones (SEZ) which would be acquired by the industrialists for projects and the Land Acquisition Act 1894 would not be operative in those zones forcing the farmers towards more exploitation. Bose (2007) further defended the LFGs noble initiative to intervene into the process with specific policy which would have benefited the farmers and the *bargadars* against the exploitation.

### **5.8 Views on Left Front government's (LFG) survival and decline**

As Gupta (2001:4319) mentions in his article *Left Front Rule in West Bengal*, the continuance of CPI (M)'s rule in West Bengal could be 'an interesting area of social research' is in proximity with the main research question of this thesis. The remarkable span of governance by the coalition of the left that scintillated with brilliance made a history. This thesis looks into the relationship between CPI (M) and the media, which is first in its kind, and also tried to answer what role did the media play in stabilising or destabilising the left. Therefore this section looks into the various criticisms and analysis already in the public domain on the reasons for the survival and decline and investigates whether the media played any role.

CPI (M) got the absolute majority of seats in the Assembly election 2006. It was from the very beginning a determining force within the left coalition in West Bengal. The CPI (M) in the *Political Resolution* adopted in their 20<sup>th</sup> Congress mentioned, '[T]he implementation of land reforms, the democratization of the Panchayat system and decentralisation, ensuring the rights of the working people, the maintenance of communal harmony and inculcation of secular values' (2012)

were the achievements of the LFG. The CPI (M) in their 19<sup>th</sup> Congress mentioned that the correct implementation and understanding of their party programme has invited 'more support for the Left Front and the Left-led alliance which were translated into popular mandates for forming Left-led governments' (2008b: 32). Therefore the pro-people policies of the LFG were central to its survival according to the CPI (M).

However over the years of its governance, the determining force was converted to a dominant force and started dictating, as Gupta (2001:4319) argue, 'the mode of functioning of the Left Front'. This role reversal of the CPI (M) slowly began in the nineties. The CPI (M)'s main centre of support was the rural West Bengal and after 1977 the marginalised in the rural areas could raise their voice as CPI (M) was their advocator (Gupta, 2001). But as discussed in the chapter 4 of this thesis, like the agrarian production relations, politics was mainly dominated by the middle class leaders of the CPI (M). The ambivalent thoughts of the middle class leadership who participated in the struggle from outside since independence were eventually unable to understand the chemistry of solidarity within the peasantry (Chatterjee, 1986). Gupta (2001: 4319) adding to the claim argue that the school teachers 'were an important component of the rural middle class' and 'have played an important role in legitimising the rule of the CPM in rural Bengal'.

In urban West Bengal the CPI (M) was successful in gaining the confidence of the intellectuals and the civil society. The LFG was also supported by a majority of the middle class professionals, among whom the CPI (M) was able to penetrate and form different politico-professional wings as has been discussed earlier in this

chapter. The trade union movements under the CPI (M)'s mass front Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) worked towards resolving the industrial disputes and confrontations but in a peaceful way (ibid, 2001). The CITU explains their political line of action as 'progressive trade union centre, opposed to imperialist globalisation, championing the cause of working class and defending economic sovereignty of the country',<sup>47</sup>. However unionisation has been a central point of criticism about the left which has been discussed later in the chapter.

Another important reason for the survival of the LFG as discussed by Gupta (2001:4319) was the discipline of the party that facilitated 'a strong link between party leadership and the cadres'. This also assisted in resolving disputes within the local community because of the intense interpersonal contact (ibid, 2001; Bhattacharyya, 2004) that was maintained by the cadres of the CPI (M). However as Guha (1998) suggests, since elitism dominated Indian history therefore it was the coercion or the dominance and not hegemony of the political parties that dictated the political path in India. The same was true for West Bengal as Gupta (2001:4320) eloquently states that "the autonomy of the 'civil society'" became non-existent which had a reversal effect in the polity. The researcher has debated this concept of 'dominance without hegemony' in *The Discussion* chapter as a challenge of retaining the hegemony obtained in a state and not in a nation due to the counter-hegemonic forces operative in the country. Bhattacharyya (2004: 5483) however argues that "permanent incumbency' stands in lieu of a social status quo" for

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<sup>47</sup> About us, CITU, Available at < <http://www.citucentre.org/abtus/index.html>> [Accessed on 29.09.2013]

left's continuance in power. This has been however negated by the media professionals (chapter 7).

Another study based on 'quantitative survey (2003-06)' and 'ethnographic observation' on the sustenance of the LFG, that Chatterjee (2009: 42) contends to was,

‘..the *institutional effectiveness* of the structures of rural government and mobilisation of political support built by the Left Front and, two, a form of *clientelism* in which the Left parties hold their supporters under some sort of permanent dependence’.

Taking both the views in consideration it can be thus argued that a para-hegemonic situation did exist in West Bengal from its initial days which were effectively turned into a hegemonic practice. However to retain the hegemony one has to be considerate about the consensus and internal democracy of both the people and the coalition. Discipline with the combination of democracy is vital for a hegemonic consistency. This balance was disturbed both within and outside the coalition and the party. Thus encouraging squabbles in the public domain by the coalition partners of the LFG which heightened with the incident of police firing in Nandigram on March 14, 2007 (CPIM, 2008b:27).

The decline of the CPI (M) was reasoned as ‘empiricisation’ (Patnaik, 2011: 12), wrong approach to ‘parliamentary democracy’ or problems of ‘revisionism’ (Gohain, 2011:79), the peasant unrest, class alienation (Gohain, 2011), ‘party takeover of administration’ (Banerjee, 2011: 18) and the media claimed it to be ‘the beginning of the end of the Left in India’ (Bhattacharya, 2011: 71).

Bhattacharya argues that the slogan of the LFG has undergone changes with the ideological erosion of the CPI (M). LFG was initially meant to be 'the weapon of struggle' then it was modified to be called 'instrument of development' and finally it got transformed into the 'instrument of repression' (2011: 73). The CPI (M) discussed this matter seriously in their 19<sup>th</sup> Congress and cautioned '[T]he fear among the peasantry of losing their land has to be addressed in a serious manner..local people need to be involved in the process of land acquisition and fixing the compensation amount..[T]hese tasks are not only administrative but also political' (2008b:42). An alienation of the government from the mass was felt as the report said 'never did we face such resistance to development on the question of land' (CPIM, 2008b:42).

Bhattacharya (2011: 73) argues in line with Banerjee's (2011: 19) that the 'radical realignment of Left forces on the basis of united struggle' was needed. Banerjee (2011: 19) further advised that 'the hegemony of the CPI (M)' should be rejected and a balance between the 'Left parliamentary parties' and the 'non-parliamentary movements' was essential. These criticisms were not new in 2011 and have been prevalent in the public domain since late eighties. Banerjee (1990: 1812) in his article *West Bengal Today: An Anticipatory Post-Mortem*, excoriated CPI (M) leaders for their 'ineptitude, callousness and arrogance' and the 'Stalinist style of functioning' involving 'party gerontocracy'. The article (ibid, 1990; Roy, 1985) spoke about alienation from the masses, unionisation of government employees, partisan approach, exploiting party membership for social evils, justifying the organisational malpractices within the party as the vices from within the society.

The CPI (M) West Bengal state secretary, *Biman Basu*, in admitting the same told to the press,

‘We failed to work from the state level to the lowermost branch tier with the attitude required and in the way we should have rallied the people around..The sum total of all these mistakes was that a section of the poor people got confused and veered away from us...We have, time and again, taken decisions on running the party and imbuing party cadres with the right Communist spirit.’ (NDTV, 5 October 2011, 15:11 IST)

Banerjee (2007: 1241) also argue that though the CPI (M) followed ‘[L]eninist concept of vanguardism’ so far as the organisation was concerned but the leaders were incapable with ‘low ideological level’. Similar arguments were voiced by *Biman Basu* while reflecting on the reasons for their defeat in the Assembly election 2011, when he admitted, ‘[W]e could not groom ideal Communist leaders and workers’ (NDTV, 2011).

However irrespective of the embroilment in the public sphere the LFG continued to be in power until 2011. Finally it was the incidents in *Nandigram*<sup>48</sup> and *Singur*<sup>49</sup> that the media held responsible for the defeat of the left (chapter 7). *Buddhadeb Bhattacharya*, the then Chief Minister of the state, however in an interview with the Outlook Magazine (Mitra, 2011) admitted that the CPI (M) ‘lost touch’ with the public. He narrated the incident in *Nandigram* as,

‘We were merely considering building a chemical hub in that area. And the people had been notified to that effect. The opposition found in this an opportunity to incite suspicion

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<sup>48</sup>Land acquisition for the construction of Special Economic Zone

<sup>49</sup>Land acquisition for the construction of the *Nano* car factory by the TATA, which was then transferred to *Sananda* in Gujarat

against the government. They stirred up a rebellion, even bringing in armed Maoists to help them. Subsequently, lawlessness prevailed in that area: roads were dug up to prevent anyone from entering Nandigram; there was no administration in that area for nearly three months. The police was sent to Nandigram to contain the situation, and not to forcefully grab the land of the people against their wishes.’

The left were however criticised for embracing the ‘neo-liberal reforms’ (A CPI (M) Supporter, 2007: 1594) and forcibly induce the process of industrialisation in *Nandigram* and *Singur* which had a reversal effect on both CPI (M) and LFG. The CPI (M) in their 19<sup>th</sup> Congress also mentioned this concern within their report as,

‘[C]aution is also required in changing land use for the purpose of industry. Priority should be given to setting up of industries in relatively less fertile land...After the experience of Nandigram where a chemical hub was proposed to be set up and the political and administrative mistakes made, we must be all the more careful on large-scale land acquisition.’ (2008b:43).

Therefore there was a contradiction on the incident in *Nandigram*. The Chief Minister of West Bengal held the opposition guilty for inciting suspicion against the ruling party, while the CPI (M) was critical on their position in *Nandigram*. The arguments set forth by left academic and the ex-Member of Parliament (MP) Bhattacharya (2007: 1895) of the CPI (M) towards what happened in Nandigram was ‘*ill-founded rumours*’ and was reasoned as:

‘displacement of large numbers of people in the name of development is not unknown in India and has happened in other states like Orissa, Maharashtra, Gujarat or Madhya Pradesh; in this case, actual displacement has not taken place, but violent incidents have

followed a mere proposal to set up a relatively small special economic zone (SEZ) in West Bengal.’

These statements, as the researcher has argued later in *The Discussion* chapter, diluted the alternative heraldry of politics and equated the left and the non-left politics in the eyes of the public.

Last but not the least, the CPI (M) also related their defeat in West Bengal to the withdrawal of their support from the UPA government. The CPI (M) Central Committee meeting on the *Review Report of the Assembly Elections* (2011c:3) clearly states,

‘[T]he Assembly elections were held in a situation marked by the concerted efforts of the ruling classes and imperialism to weaken the CPI (M) and the left. These efforts began due to the role played by the Left during the UPA-I government in opposing the neo-liberal policies and the strategic alliance with the United States. They got intensified after the withdrawal of the support to the government in July 2008. The ruling classes and imperialist agencies worked to assemble a range of forces to attack the left in West Bengal, the strongest base of the Left in the country.’

However when the researcher interviewed the party leadership there was again a difference of opinion on the issue (chapter 6).

Finally the researcher would like to note, as Chatterjee (2009: 45) claimed in his article *The Coming Crisis in West Bengal*, that the instability of the LFG like the PRIs in West Bengal,

‘...do not indicate a lack of faith in local governmental institutions but rather a pervasive distrust in the moral authority of those who claim to mediate, on political grounds, the



contending claims to livelihood, fairness and dignity. It is this popular distrust that signals the coming crisis in West Bengal'

## 5.9 Conclusion

In the Assembly election 2011, out of 294 seats the Left Front won only 62 seats. The Left secured 41.12 percent of the vote while the opposition alliance led by the Trinamool Congress received 48.54 percent (CPIM, 2011c:2). The CPI (M) since the LFG came to power increased the strength of its organisation through its party cadre recruitment system which was mainly based on the mass organisations. It had a brilliant network all over the state and according to the statistics held by the CPI (M) in their report<sup>50</sup> (2008b:35). But the left was defeated.

The CPI (M) summarised the reason for their defeat in the central committee meeting self-critically. Firstly, the performance of the LFG in the state of West Bengal was criticised pertaining to,

‘the public distribution system, health, education, rural electrification and other developmental and welfare measures. Some of the programmes and schemes were not taken up for implementation. The deficiencies in basic services and their delivery caused discontent among the people.’ (2011c:3)

Secondly, the opposition was in alliance and they contested united against the left coalition. Thirdly, the ‘administrative and political mistakes’ of the Singur and Nandigram incidents ‘proved costly’ (ibid, 2011c: 4). Fourthly, the CPI (M) admitted that ‘[T]he image of the Party amongst the people has been dented by

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<sup>50</sup> In 1977 the party and the mass organisations had a total membership of 33, 720 and 25, 00, 000 respectively. However in 2012 the membership of the party and the mass organisation rose to 3, 21, 682 and 3, 43, 24, 754 respectively (CPIM, 2008b:35)

manifestations of highhandedness, bureaucratisation and refusal to hear the views of the people. The existence of corruption and wrong-doing among a small strata of Party leaders and cadres due to the corrosive influence of being a “ruling party” and running the government for a prolonged period was also resented by the people’(ibid, 2011c: 4). Fifthly, there was a lack of faith and confidence of the working class on the representation of the class struggle by the CPI (M). Sixthly, because of the corporate directions of the mass media they resorted to systematic anti-campaigns against the LFG and the CPI (M) in West Bengal. This continuous campaign, according to the CPI (M) penetrated and influenced the middle class.

This chapter also focused on the postcolonial reform initiatives taken by the CPI (M) led LFG which was surely not following a socialist pattern. The reform that the government undertook reflected the reform initiative taken in the European countries. The LFG was keen to democratise the society, ensure participation of the mass, take welfare measures and decentralise power. The government certainly tried to constitute authoritative governance by institutionalising politics and conveying it to the mass through own network of mass organisations. Therefore by looking into the policies of the LFG I could establish the form of governance that the LFG undertook for thirty four years in power.

In the next chapter I examine the CPI (M)’s understanding of the media by examining their congress, conference, meeting reports and campaign materials and the interviews.

## Chapter 6

### **The Relation of the CPI (M) led LFG with the media**

This chapter looks into the portrayal of the media by the CPI (M) in their various party documents (the congress and conference reports, collection of pamphlets, leaflets and booklets, press releases and internal party documents from the CPI (M) website) and the interviews conducted for the purpose of this thesis. This is presented in the sequence of the major events in Indian politics to situate the understanding of the CPI (M) and the LFG broadly on the media. The chapter thus explores the understanding of the CPI (M) on the social role of media, on private participation in media, the 1999 Lok Sabha election when the media was involved to launch the 'Shinning India' campaign, the 2004 Lok Sabha election when the CPI (M) for the first time in history supported the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government led by the INC on the basis of a Common Minimum Programme, the paid news phenomenon, and finally the role of the media in West Bengal. It further delineates the findings from the interviews conducted during the field research of the CPI (M) leadership. The leaderships of the CPI (M) interviewed are also responsible to speak in the media on behalf of the party and one of them is the News Editor of *Ganashakti*. Therefore in this chapter I find out the reflection of the CPI (M) on their relationship with the media in West Bengal and whether the media played any role in stabilising or destabilising the LFG.

## 6.1 On the role and importance of media- The view of the CPI (M)

It was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPI (M) in 2012 that a specific space was allotted to media, culture and identity politics formally within the party report (chapter 5). *Debasish Chakraborty*, the News Editor of *Ganashakti* and the state committee member of the CPI (M), also re-echoed the equivalent concern that the communist parties did not have a well defined unified understanding or policy on the media. The CPI (M) relied on its own parallel stream of newspapers and journals. Publications were contemplated as an organisational tool to disseminate party understanding and information within the mass. The media performed significant functions at different social and political transitions and transformations (chapter 7). *Salim* in his interview recognised the revolutionary and progressive role of the media in India. However at the same time media was considered as a weapon in the hands of the bourgeoisie by the CPI (M). He cogently stated in the interview,

‘The media is also a strong weapon in the hands of the bourgeoisie. They use the media at times to propagate and stop it in case of crisis. They restrict information in the name of democracy.’ – Mohammad Salim, Central Committee Member of the CPI (M) (Interview 2011<sup>51</sup>)

*Debasish Chakraborty* however emphasised media to be corporate and not bourgeoisie. The media in India did undergo structural changes which has consequently affected the policy of the media (chapter 4). The corporate interests along with the technological advancement did contribute towards the era of

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<sup>51</sup> ‘Interview 2011’ refers to the interviews conducted by the researcher for this thesis.

embedded and paid journalism. The interest of the monopoly capital was regarded as identical to the corporate interest of the media by the CPI (M). There were plethora of media outlets but *Salim* in his interview underscored the control of the policies and content to be dominated by the international media, mainly from Europe and US (CPIM, 2012). He cogently argue that the dominance of the international media was such that the name and interest of Obama's wife and children were known to the world but no one knew the name of the Chief Minister of north-eastern states in India. Similarly the presentation of content in the public domain by the media, according to *Salim*, was also dominated by the international political interest as was seen during the Iraq and the Afghanistan war. Therefore there was an increasing challenge that was felt by the CPI (M) and they had to rethink their traditional position on the media.

Post liberalisation the influx of the electronic news channels compelled the CPI (M) to attach itself, if not as an owner, but as a moderator of some of the regional and national electronic news channels. Since the electronic media is not the central media discussed in the thesis therefore no detailed interview on the impact and relation with the electronic media was undertaken. But post 1991 analysis of the media in India and West Bengal do require some reference to the electronic media and can provide a wider angle for further research as recommended in the *Conclusion* chapter of this thesis. The media editorial policies generally in India and West Bengal were chronicled as hostile and inconsiderate to the communist movement (CPIM, 2008).

*Doordarshan* was pro-central government (chapter 4) but as *Brinda* said was still accountable to the parliament in the pre 1991 period which the private players were not obliged to. She argued the hostility of the media in the neo-liberal decade was mostly directed towards the left since,

‘[T]here has been a qualitative change in the neo-liberal decade and there was exponential growth in the media and the types of media and particularly by the electronic media. Therefore ownership patterns in the media certainly are of crucial importance in determining the role of the media, in any country including India. But as far as the Communist movement itself is concerned, if we look at the role of the media, say for example, in 1957, when the first elected Communist Government was formed in Kerala, the media created an anti-communist hysteria all over whipped up by the then newspapers. Off course today TV has a greater influence on the public, but I am not talking about the form or the impact of the influence. But what I am saying is that as far as the role of the media is concerned and the communist movement, we really have thought that the media has been very hostile towards us, from the time we decided to participate in the Parliamentary election.’ – Brinda Karat, Polit Bureau member of the CPI (M) (Interview, 2011)

Therefore according to Brinda the media’s hostility against the left was connected to their participation in the parliamentary democracy. This role reversal of the media as argued by *Brinda* relates to the watchdog function of the media by Liberal-Pluralists where the media continuously monitors the state (McQuail, 1976, and Schultz, 1998, chapter 2). The privately owned media in India, according to *Brinda*, not only have their own agenda but also they set agenda for the public. This argument was in tune with the Soviet Communist Theory and the propaganda theory of Herman and Chomsky which argues that the media works as

a propaganda tool in the hands of the state (chapter 2). In doing so, *Brinda* argued the media in West Bengal presented a 'skilful misinterpretation' of the LFG policies in the public domain to influence the government and to set apolitical agenda for the public and the opposition. A similar understanding was also shared by *Chakraborty* where he mentioned that the media is not manufacturing consent by collating the contents within the society but it is manufacturing the content within the society. Therefore the discontent within an individual as *Chakraborty* cogently stated was a manufactured discontent by the media. Thus the relevance of an issue is dictated by the media in the public sphere to transform the movement into media's object to recreate meaning.

The role of the media in India has qualitatively changed owing to the advancement of technology (chapter 4). The combination of both technological advancement and political role intensified the influence and dominance of the media in India and in West Bengal (chapter 4). The deluge of information by the media was deemed dangerous by *Chakraborty* as people are left with no choice but to get drenched in the deluge which in the other way affects individual's cognizance (also see Herman and McChesney, 2004). According to him the avalanche of information in actuality is making the individual more confused and complex, affecting the everyday life of the individual. Media therefore maintains a dialectical relationship with the society where it is making the society both enriched with information at the same time keeping it poorly informed which

*Debasish Chakraborty* referred to as the ‘*tathya samriddha ebong tathya gorib*’<sup>52</sup>,

function of the media in his interview. The media however does not force its readers or viewers to read a particular newspaper or subscribe to a specific channel. But the individual is deemed to be free in their choices. However it is fascinating to observe that with the plethora of media outlets there is always a dominant text that revolves in all the media in whatever may be the form. An individual though presumed is not free to choose the information that would have otherwise enrich them. Hence *Chakraborty* appositely argued that the media did have different biases whether political, economic or social but they have a common bias which can be referred to as the mainstream bias. This is very strong internal bias because of the media dynamics. Thus as *Kuypers* (2002:199) argues that in the framing of the media, ‘it is not the frequency of the word, metaphor, or concept that accounts for its strength, but rather how it is consistently framed across time’ was important. This was also true for the regional press in West Bengal, as discussed later in this chapter, where the reporting of certain regional political events were consistently framed across time. Thus, according to

*Chakraborty*, individuals in India and in West Bengal were not free from the dictatorial content generation role of the media.

The media also subscribes to the class interest of the capitalists (*CPIM*, 2012). In India the media is relatively free and state or central government intervention is virtually low. This freedom of expression practised is good for the Indian

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<sup>52</sup> ‘Information rich and information poor’



democracy. But the limitation of the media presently in India is that it is imprisoned by profit (chapter 7). Sainath (2011) argued,

‘It is literally is a manufacturing content. Paid news is the death of journalism. It is drive by corporate interest, it is driven by corporate interest, it is drive by corporate greed and profit and there is outright lying to the readers and viewers, is a perfectly normal practice. In television, some of the economic channels, each line is a reference to your company is sold and paid for. I always said the Indian media that it is politically free imprisoned by profit.’

However this was not the case for West Bengal where the media was both politically and economically imprisoned (chapter 8). In a postcolonial society like India, because of the socio-political impetus, journalism was linked to idealism. However with liberalisation had similar effects as the economy in India post 1991 (chapter 4 and 8). Before liberalisation the only international media in India was the BBC which was again an obvious postcolonial dependence that India had structurally (chapter 4). Post liberalisation the media has been transformed into big business houses and has scrupulously attached itself to the big corporate in India and internationally (chapter 4). The Star network in India has Rupert Murdoch’s investment and it runs a news channel in collaboration with the Anandabazar Group in West Bengal, which was called *Star Ananda* but now known as *ABP Ananda*. Therefore the international finance capital has seriously penetrated the media business (chapter 7). This has transformed the character of the media in India. The media in India is no more pro-corporate but it is itself corporate (*Chakraborty, Interview 2011*). Liberalisation-Privatisation-Globalisation (LPG) induced corporatisation contributed to the fundamental

change that the Indian media has experienced (also discussed in chapter 4). The big corporate like TATA, Ambani, Reliance has considerably invested through the share market in media. The productive capital was overtaken by the finance capital in India. *Chakraborty* further argued that capital means profit and the dynamics of the capital is the same in whatever it gets invested.

Therefore it is because of the market that the media has a ‘structural compulsion to lie’ which eventually leads to the ‘structural shut out of the poor’ (Sainath, 2012). The poor has become unwanted for the Indian media which can be evidenced from the fact that the newspapers, except a few, do not have an agricultural correspondent, whereas the rural societies in India are primarily dependent on agriculture (ibid, 2012). Irrespective of denial there were certain projections on the agricultural problems and disturbances in Indian newspapers and other media. This was because, according to *Chakraborty*, firstly, India practices living political pluralism and there is also the practice of democracy. Therefore media are left with little option but to contextualise the entire society. Secondly the large concentration of media brings in competition for news search. But the point here is, as *Chakraborty* explained, the foci of the media is not the farmers but the investors. He reiterated the similar concern as put by Sainath (2007),

‘A nation founded on principles of egalitarianism embedded in its Constitution, now witnesses the growth of inequality on a scale not seen since the days of the Colonial Raj. A nation that ranks fourth in the world’s list of dollar billionaires, ranks 126th in human development. A crisis in the countryside has seen agriculture—on which close to 60 per cent of the population, or over 600 million people, depend—descend into the doldrums. It

has seen rural employment crash. It has driven hundreds of thousands from villages towards towns and cities in search of jobs that are not there. It has pushed millions deeper into debt and has seen, according to the government itself, over 112,000 farmers take their own lives in distress in a decade...This time around, though, the response of a media politically free but chained by profit, has not been anywhere as inspiring. Front pages and prime time are the turf of film stars, fashion shows and the entrenched privilege of the elite. Rural India, where the greatest battles of our freedom were fought, is pretty low down in the media's priority list.'

Palagummi Sainath himself is the Rural Affairs Editor for *The Hindu* and is widely known in Indian journalism for his contribution in projecting the 'other' India and promoting developmental journalism. He won the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2007 for his invaluable contribution to rural reporting. According to Sainath (1996) the statistics is what the poor India gets converted to and the interest of the media in India is not about representing the poor but about making poverty and rural underdevelopment a sellable commodity. Therefore from intellectuals to policy makers in India think (ibid, 1996:424),

'[S]omething must be done about poverty. Everyone agrees that 'not enough is being done.'

But the hard reality is that policy on reform takes central stage whereas policy on poverty gets re-scripted every time. It was thus the corporate intervention in the land for Special Economic Zone (SEZ) which allured the media's heed in India.

*Chakraborty* further narrated that post independence media had never showed interest in land. The question of land distribution or land reform was never discussed in the media since it was the agenda for the farmers who were again not

their main consumers. But when the corporate investors in India confronted trouble in acquiring land then it became a dominant text in the media. Therefore this re-echoed the argument by Bignell (2007) which states that the cultural homogeneity gets replaced by the 'homogeneity of the political economy of the media' in globalisation (chapter 2, p.41). Accordingly *Chakraborty* argued that land was required for SEZ and the use value of land has changed over the years. Land is not only a land now but the accumulation of capital. In reality it is the primitive accumulation of capital which is taking place. He further explained this to be the 'expropriation of wealth' which was not the normal flow of capital but the forcible occupation of land by capital. The irony he referred to here was that agricultural problem in relation to the question of occupation of land became a dominant text in India but not the mass scale suicide of the farmers. Therefore the poverty, hunger, malnutrition, disease and suicide of the farmers were of less concern to the media.

In India where 40 percent of the rural population is below poverty line (BPL), according to *Chakraborty*, the issue of food security not only gets neglected but the mainstream newspapers were against it, whereas the Indian budget gets referred to as a 5652 budget (5652 is the share indicator of Nifty). The issue of the burden of the middle class paying subsidy in food and agriculture becomes the central concern for analysis in the media. This did not however nullify media's representation of the marginalised but the representation was more as an event and not as a process. *Chakraborty* was also critical of the regional media since they

also did not perform to the level of representation expected. Hence the structural compulsion of the media forces it to choose the dominant text and the dominant issue to make it sellable in the market like any other commodity.

*Chakraborty* presented another example of how people in India were made to believe that the communicable diseases like the Tuberculosis (TB), Malaria or Diarrhoea were on the decline, which was quite natural with the development of the nation, but the lifestyle related cardio-vascular diseases were causing more deaths. This projection of news was confectionalised to absorb the target readers who were the real consumers. It was true that death due to lifestyle problems were increasing but the figures were not comparable to the deaths caused by the communicable diseases. Now a reader gets influenced by these facts because the reader does not go and check the statistics by the health ministry. The fact behind such a projection of news was that the people who suffer from TB were not of much interest to the corporate media. Those people were not readers or were very unmindful viewers of the television media. So they were not the consumers. Now since the media depends on the revenue from advertisements therefore it had to be mindful of its target group. This is where the structural compulsions of the media are observed. The production of media also differs from the production of any other commodity in the market. Media is the carrier of other commodities in the form of advertisement. Thus the advertisers perceive the readers or the viewers as their potential consumers. The target group of the newspapers or other media is thus important to the advertisers and not for circulation alone. This structural

compulsion forces the newspapers to reorient their content. This was referred to as the internal dynamics of capital by the news editor of *Ganashakti*.

Another issue was of cross advertising where the newspapers advertise in the TV and vice versa is advantageous for the media having cross holdings. Therefore it ignited the obvious threat to the survival of the regional and small media in the galaxy of corporate induced media competition. It was also a sombre challenge for CPI (M) in West Bengal since they had *Ganashakti* but the circulation and the reach was restricted as they did not have cross holding. Again both the newspapers and the electronic channels in India like elsewhere in the globe depend on advertisement revenue and circulation revenue. Therefore the political agenda of the media, as argued by Chakraborty, is in propinquity with the political and ideological subscription of the big corporate or capitalists and not the communists. This claim supports Herman and Mc Chesney's (2004:10) argument about the global media system facilitating the process of corporatisation (chapter 2). The Foreign Direct investment (FDI) had obvious dictations in Indian media.

The question here was whether an alternative media is something that the CPI (M) was looking forward to as they mentioned about the Latin American experience in their 19<sup>th</sup> Congress (CPIM, 2008b). According to *Brinda* (Interview 2011) it was a subject of poignant interest but certainly India should not be compared with the Latin American countries. CPI (M) did have their newspapers, journals and other published documents to counter the mainstream media. The party made efforts to

popularise those among the mass through increasing circulation and other form of promotions through their mass organisations. However the power backed by money that the mainstream media fostered was beyond the reach of the CPI (M). Therefore nationally it was not possible and practical for the CPI (M) to own media and bridge the illusions or distortions in the public sphere; though initiatives in the state level were taken like the *Kairali* TV in Kerala initiated by the left sympathisers (*Brinda*, Interview 2011). At the same time in West Bengal *Ganashakti* also reorganised its content to attract more readers as *Chakraborty* mentioned in the interview,

‘Our survey portrayed that *Ganashakti*’s page eight tops the list. That is the sports page. We should have made the paper more attractive to the readers. We are focusing on the youth. A recent report said that we are ahead in percentage of the readership between 11-15 years of age. This is because we have changed the language pattern, included elements. We have also dedicated pages to Rabindranath Tagore and have incorporated a new page ‘*Satsakal*’ (Early Morning) which is otherwise not expected in *Ganashakti*. This has generated considerable interest. We are working more towards the sports page and we have renowned players as columnist who writes for free.’

Therefore there were certainly newspapers or TV channels, according to *Brinda*, which were ‘not so deeply ingrained with anti-communism’ and portrayed the leftwing or an impartial point of view (see the *Figure 2* in Appendix IV). The initiative of the left in developing their newspapers and journals, contributed towards the development of the left movement in India. However as the previous statement by *Chakraborty* suggests the CPI (M) continuously updated its structure

of press and publication to sustain in the market both politically and economically.

## **6.2 The CPI (M) viewpoint on the transition of the media**

The gradual transition of the class in West Bengal was also another concern of the CPI (M). The growth of the middle class and ‘corroding effect on the social consciousness of the middle classes through liberalisation and consumerism’ has been widely discussed in the reports of the CPI (M) (2002a; 2008b; 2012). The LFG surely had a strong base in the rural society but winning the urban society was still less than half-way. There have been arguments on the growth of the urban middle class posing hurdles for the CPI (M) and the LFG. But the researcher would like to remind that the growth of the middle class was not restricted to urban areas only; the rural society also in India and West Bengal were and are undergoing the transition (chapter 4).

Another important question related to the growth of the middle class was the technological advancement and its access. The technological revolution in India had changed the overall experience of the media in everyday life (chapter 4). Thus it became a challenge for the CPI (M) both in the state and in India as individual connectivity and interpersonal communication galvanised the entire communication experience. Though it was not formally addressed by the CPI (M) as a serious inclusion until 2012 (also see chapter 5). The social media, as cogently stated by *Brinda* in the interview, was for ‘a particular section of the society’ in India but do have enough space for the party to intervene. The younger sections in the party being interested in the mode of communication do try to



disseminate information and communicate in the space. The question was therefore to gain the minds of the techno-middle class which was a part of the techno-capitalist growth in India. The CPI (M) had their own websites both at all India level and in the states. The efforts to digitise the documents were also taken to disseminate information on the political-ideological understanding in the public domain. In 2011 when these research interviews were conducted, the CPI (M), after two decades of media influx, accepted the fact that it could not ignore the media and its influence on the public. But being remindful of the class interest

*Brinda* coherently stated,

‘But the basic classes, the primary class of the communists, of our levels of mass communication, obviously are embedded in totally different structures. This cannot in our mind, can replace our contacts with the people. Therefore for us communication directly with people is still extremely important and crucial. It is not about giving a message in the cyber land, but it is also about meeting somebody and has an eye contact, to some heart to heart contact. This is very important for communists. Communists need to understand the people.’

Thus the concern was that the reach of the social media penetrated the class (middle and higher) which was not the key constituency for the CPI (M) and hence to *Brinda*, ‘for communists it is still leg-work’ which was vital to reach its target group.

The media houses were further condemned as no more guided by principles or ideologies which was common four-five decades ago. The journalists used to be social activists and hence renowned in the field in India. But the entire process of

journalism has been going through a transitory phase in India. The culture of download and print becoming dominant since information is readily available in the internet. Thus no effort for investigation is required to make news. *Salim* provided the instance by saying that it is easier to make news on AIDS than on ‘*Kala-azar*<sup>53</sup> or *Kalajwar*’. However *Salim* also emphasised that the communist party media played an important role in making regional news by inducing investigative and developmental journalism. No reappraisal of the media or on the empowerment of the rural through the rise of the vernacular press, the challenge of the regional media to the postcolonial English media was heard in any of the interviews conducted for this research work; thus the sustained heterogeneity within the postcolonial society and its conflicts were overlooked. The consecutive successions to power breed overconfidence and hence the micro conflicts and achievements in the society were not given proper recognition by the CPI (M). The peoples’ verdict for the LFG was misconstrued as unconditional pliability of the public. Secondly post update of the party programme (chapter 5) when the longevity of the LFG was conceived to be stable for substantial period, the sense of plenary power developed within the CPI (M). Gradually the CPI (M) became eager to participate in the national politics with a commendable position. The next part focuses on the criticism of the role of national and regional media by the CPI (M) in national politics.

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<sup>53</sup> *Kala-azar* (Hindi) is a fatal illness associated with dark complexion and pigmentation on the skin; *kala* means black and *azar* means fever and in Bengali it is known as *Kalajwar*. (Available at <[http://www.who.int/global\\_health\\_histories/seminars/presentation35a.pdf](http://www.who.int/global_health_histories/seminars/presentation35a.pdf)>, Accessed on 14.12.2013]

### **6.3 On the Role of Media in 1999 Lok Sabha election**

The Lok Sabha election, 1999, brought in a new challenge in Indian politics. Media was used for the first time to campaign against the secular character of the Indian nation. The print media defended the secular notion of the Indian state and also criticised the economic policies of liberalisation as a threat to the Indian sovereignty in general (Ram: 1994). But there were instances of the Hindi newspapers playing communal cards through the news (Neyazi, 2011). The General Election in 1999 changed the political scenario in India. The failure of the Left democratic alternative to form a government in 1996 paved the way for the rise of Hindu fascist force to capture power in 1999. For the first time a non-secular government, run on the notion of Hinduism, was established in 1999. The CPI (M) in their review (1999) held the middle class responsible for rallying with the BJP. According to the review report of the election, the CPI (M) opined,

‘The communal forces are also able to exert and appeal on the urban middle class. The bourgeois media targets these sections to foster mindless consumerism and anti-democratic values. With the decline of the Congress and the exhaustion of the old Nehruvian framework, new sections among the middle class look to Hindutva as an alternative ideology. There are at least 50 to 60 million people belonging to this category who are setting the pace of public opinion.’ (1999)

The CPI (M) in this report also argue that there were big investments in media coverage and hype set out by the media in favour of BJP led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government (CPIM, 1999). The caption of ‘Shining India’ was used by NDA to regain its power in 2004. The entire mass media with exception

of few were used to propagate this slogan (CPIM, 2004). The CPI (M) argued in their *Review of the 1999 Lok Sabha Elections* that,

‘The big business already controls the print media. The electronic media with privatisation has also come under the influence of big business. The Prasar Bharati was already being used by the caretaker government. Thus the entire media including significant sections of the regional media rallied in support of the BJP and projected issues in such a manner as to favour the BJP alliance. Another aspect of this campaign was the use of opinion polls and exit polls to influence public opinion by projecting a big victory for the BJP’. (CPIM, 1999)

There was also an initiative of the BJP led NDA to allow the foreign direct investment in print and electronic media which was criticised by the CPI (M) as a threat to Indian sovereignty.

#### **6.4 On Media Privatisation and Foreign Direct Investment**

The Polit Bureau of the CPI (M) issued a statement opposing the foreign direct investment (FDI) in the print media in 2002. The party accused the then BJP led NDA government for violating the Standing Committee decision and allowing ‘26 percent FDI in news and current affairs publications and 74 per cent investment in non-news and non-current affairs journals’ (CPIM, 2002b). The CPI (M) considered this to be an attack on the national sovereignty and referred that the western countries also did not allow FDI in print considering the adverse implications. Further the CPI (M) said in its report that,

‘The print media plays a key role in shaping political views and opinions in our system and big foreign monopoly media will be in a position to project their views through

Indian newspapers. It is significant that the pro-BJP owners in the newspaper industry have actively worked to get this decision taken.’ (2002c)

Therefore the CPI (M) was strictly against any private participation in print media as it was perceived as a threat to the national integrity.

The CPI (M) continuously campaigned in public sphere on the threat that they conceived the NDA to induce in national politics. The next important election was the Lok Sabha 2004, when the CPI (M) decided to support the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) led by the Indian National Congress at the centre to combat Hindu fanaticism and liberalisation agendas. However Indian National Congress has often taken soft Hindu fundamental stands throughout its history (Banerjee, 2008).

### **6.5 The CPI (M), UPA and the Media**

Before the Lok Sabha election 2004 there were questions raised by the CPI (M) on the advertisements by the political parties. The CPI (M) in their press release (2004) mentioned that,

‘[T]he Election Commission should intervene to stop the advertisements issued by the various departments of the Central government about the performance of the government. These advertisements are nothing but political propaganda by making use of the tax payers’ money.’

Further to that the CPI (M) in their statement requested the ECI to ‘take steps to ban advertisements on TV and other electronic media in order to avoid distortion of the election process by using money power’, ‘regulate advertisements in the

print media' and impose restriction on the 'publication of poll surveys' (2004). The CPI (M) argues that the political parties with access to the corporate funds would be in an advantageous position to politically campaign in the media whereas the smaller parties would not be able to take this advantage. They also cautioned the ECI by mentioning that the USA style of Presidential election by promoting the 'poll advertisements' should not be allowed in India since it would drain enormous funds for no good (CPIM, 2004).

There was a major political shift in the Indian politics in 2004 when the CPI (M) decided to support the UPA owing to the majority required to form a government after the election. There were serious debates and joggles within the party which I have discussed in the previous chapter. The media on the other hand also played a unique role in 'manufacturing the abuse' against the left politics and ideological shift (Editorial, 2007a:3520). The left though supported the UPA government from outside was also critical of the government's anti-people policies. The left claimed that they supported the government at the centre from outside on the basis of the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) but the Indian National Congress seemed to deflate from the agreed agendas for peoples' development.

However the biggest political squabble between the left and the UPA was on the Indo-US nuclear deal (2008b). The mainstream media demonstrated abhorrence in every respect towards the left on their criticism of the Indo-US nuclear deal (Editorial, 2007a; CPIM, 2008b). The Indian National Congress campaigned for the nuclear deal as important for the nation's development in the generation of energy and so did the media. The left vehemently opposed the deal and were

portrayed by the media as working in China's interest (ibid, 2007a). All the mainstream newspapers and channels flooded with the criticism of the left and there were mobile phone surveys launched to get the voice of the nation heard; though the cellular phone initiative was urban centric and reflected opinions in favour of the nuclear deal (ibid, 2007a). The left were projected as traitors. The left finally withdrew its support from the UPA on the basis of their objection to the nuclear deal.

As Bose (2009: 32) argued defending CPI (M)'s position on nuclear deal that the criticisms within and outside the party, projected ignorance of 'the impact of imperialism on national sovereignty'. The critics on the other hand argue that the left was neither successful in its intension of delivering an alternative developmental model at the centre depending on the LFG experience in the three states of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura nor they could influence the UPA to implement the CMP (Editorial, 2008).

The disparagement of the CPI (M) and the left on the withdrawal of support from the UPA government on the issue of the nuclear deal had considerable impact on the moral trust of the public. The CPI (M) invited raucous criticisms by the media on being irresponsible to the concern of the nation even when they had the considerable number to support the central government. The media on the other hand was criticised to be cacophonous and was more interested in the pursuit of the consequences rather than the content of the nuclear deal. The withdrawal of support on the issue of nuclear deal was a political and ideological decision of the left and particularly the CPI (M) defended its position as an uncompromising

fundamental ideological position. As Karat (2011) eloquently argued in his interview with the CNN-IBN,

‘We have reviewed all this in our party, we have a method, decisions are taken, the central committee took a decision. It was unanimous. We have reviewed that subsequently in our meetings, it has been endorsed. There is no issue in our party regarding these matters... That is an issue that we cannot compromise on Indian National Congress led government. Our party is very clear and our decision is correct. The issue was only what we said was that the nuclear issue was a difficult issue electorally to mobilise people. That we have said already in our position. And even in West Bengal, in Kerala or anywhere else in the Lok Sabha election, this was not an issue on which we could go to the people and mobilise them easily.’

The CPI (M) was also found in the denial mode about the impact of the withdrawal on the crisis in West Bengal since the verdict of the *Panchayat* elections of 2008 indicated regional political disputes and concerns that had to be taken into consideration by the party (*Brinda*, Interview 2011). As Bose<sup>54</sup> (2009: 32) similarly argue in his article *Verdict 2009: An Appraisal of Critiques of the Left*, ‘there were organisational shortcomings and mistakes by the Left Front-led West Bengal government is undeniable’.

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<sup>54</sup> Prasenjit Bose is the Researcher in Economics and Political Activist who worked as a Convenor of the CPI (M) Research Unit from 2004 to 2012. He resigned from the CPI (M) in 2012 owing to his objection to CPI (M)’s decision of supporting Pranab Mukherjee of the INC as UPA’s presidential candidate. The Polit Bureau however rejected his resignation on the grounds of maligning the party line and expelled him from the party [Source: Online, Available at <<https://plus.google.com/115590696411238659606>> and <<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/cpim-expels-prasenjit-for-questioning-support-to-pranab/articles3563321.ece>> [Accessed on 14.12.2013]



Again Karat (2011) when asked whether the alliance of the opposition was possible in West Bengal after so many years because of their withdrawal of support he cogently stated,

‘When has the Congress helped the CPI (M) and West Bengal? The Congress party in class terms has always fought and tried to defeat or weaken the CPI (M). There has never been any history of co-operation between the Congress and the CPI (M) either in Kerala or West Bengal... They came, they were together in 2001, and they were together in Panchayat election. We have seen that BJP, Congress and Trinamool worked together. This is the class reality in Bengal.’

In the report of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress however the CPI (M) admitted that the Congress gained support from the middle class, minorities and the youth. Thus there were clearly conflict of thoughts and interpretations not only in the public sphere on the withdrawal of support and the impact on the Assembly election of 2011 but also debates were raged within the party (CPIM, 2011c, p. 161; Bose, 2009, p.184; Karat, 2011, p.185). This has been also supported by the interviews from the media in the next chapter. The CPI (M) though explained this feud as a media spin to take forward their opposition for very obvious pro American corporate reason.

## **6.6 Paid News in India**

Paid news had miasmatic effect on the history of mass media in India. As Thakurta (2011:12) opined that since 2009 Lok Sabha election, India saw profuse exertion of paid news in the mainstream media. Irrespective of the efforts to reduce the paid news, there have been major discrepancies in working of the Election

Commission of India (ECI), Press Council of India (PCI), Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and other sections of the political parties, civil society and the media (Thakurta, 2011: 12). The ECI made efforts to reduce the paid news by issuing notices about the strict vigilance on whether there was evidence of a probable unjust alliance between the publisher and the political parties either to promote or to malign a candidate of particular political affiliation (Thakurta, 2011). Accordingly the publisher's name, address and the printer's name was made mandatory on any type of published material. There were instances where the candidates contesting elections were served legal notices to disclose the expenditure of campaign materials or paid news (Thakurta, 2011). Thakurta (2011) also argued the incongruity in the implementation of the regulation imposed by the Supreme Court (SC) and the Election Commission, since the regulation imposes restriction on the electronic media and not the print media. However later in 2010 the ECI on identifying the incongruities imposed a strict vigilance on the campaigns and advertisements of the print media.

In West Bengal as Thakurta (2011) argued that the media itself was politically polarized. Also the communist parties and the oppositions had their own publications. The Anandabazar Patrika is one of the leading newspapers with the highest circulation in the state and their editorial policy was to oppose 'the ruling regimes' (Thakurta, 2011:13). Therefore instances of paid news have been relatively low in West Bengal where political affiliation of the media was more important than money. The CPI (M) issued a memo to the ECI on the role of the

media in West Bengal before the Assembly election in the state (2011b). The memo stated,

‘We would like to draw your attention to a very disturbing development regarding paid news and the manipulation of media organisations through the instrument of financial ratification to influence news coverage by the said media organisation to further the electoral interest of a particular political party. An all-party meeting convened at the behest of the Election Commission had unanimously agreed that the EC can, indeed, act on instances of “paid news” as it vitiates the process of free and fair elections and undermines a level playing field. It was also decided in the said meeting to classify paid news as an electoral offence and recommend an amendment to the RPA to incorporate this understanding’. (CPIM, 2011b)

In this memo the CPI (M) argued that the media was working in the interest of certain political parties. They mentioned particularly about the *Pratidin* newspaper and its political intensions of supporting the TMC. The CPI (M) requested an independent inquiry by the ECI to ‘scrutinize whether there is a relationship between advertisement revenue earned and the nature of coverage’ and to take necessary steps ‘against the pernicious instrument of ‘paid news’’ (CPIM, 2011b).

The problem in India is about the regulation on media since there is no central regulatory body to impose stricter rules. There are arguments and counter-arguments on whether there should be a regulatory body or media should be self-regulated, as media is ‘an auditor of the society’ (Thakurta, 2011:14). The CPI (M) was however of the opinion that the Central government should appoint an independent co-regulating body rather than intervening politically by regulating media content (2009a). This argument was also put forward by *Debasish*

*Chakraborty*, News Editor of *Ganashakti* as one of the crisis in Indian democracy. The CPI (M) in their press statement (2006) mentioned about the necessity of setting up a media commission to monitor the media on its transformations and engagement with the foreign media. The statement insisted that,

‘[T]he government should also set up a media commission to look into the entire gamut of the media from print to electronic. This is necessary in view of the entry of foreign media and the condition of journalists and workers and the various issues which have been thrown up by the expansion of the media. The commission should also look into the condition of journalists and employees. The last media/press commission was appointed 29 years ago’.

Sainath (2012) in his article postulated paid news to be ‘not an aberration’ since commercialisation of the economy and media in the society had to have an effect on the news. Therefore it would have been preposterous to imagine news to be commercially impotent. Sainath (2012) further asserted that the Indian media has experienced a new chemistry of ‘Advertising-Bollywood-Corporate’, which he referred to as the ‘ABC of the Indian media’. Thus paid news was the inevitable consequence of conglomerating in India.

This culture of conglomeration also demands a special training for the individuals as journalists. The training to ‘confectionalize’ and ‘fictionalize’ news are provided to journalists in the media houses to adjust to conglomeration. The India media thus though ‘politically free’ but are ‘imprisoned by profit’ (Sainath, 2012). In the next part I have highlighted the findings on the role of the media as viewed by the CPI (M) in West Bengal. It also discusses whether the CPI (M) held the media responsible for their debacle in the state Assembly 2011.

### **6.7 On the Role of Media in West Bengal**

The media's role in West Bengal has been vehemently criticised by the CPI (M) since 1977. The newspapers and the media reach were limited before 1991 and hence the LFG could successfully deal with the mainstream by countering it through their organisation and publications. However post 1991 the media with more power was criticised to be launching systematic anti-campaigns against the left in West Bengal. The *Manifesto of the Left Parties for Lok Sabha elections-1998* mentioned categorically on the media that,

‘The Prasar Bharati Corporation must be strengthened so that it becomes a genuine public broadcasting service. There has to be legislation to prevent growth of monopolies in the print and electronic media which is inherently undemocratic. No foreign ownership of print media...Enforce a media code for satellite broadcasters...Ensure that states have a say in media policy and programmes in the public broadcasting service.’

After the result of the 1999 Lok Sabha elections in the state, the CPI (M) mentioned in their analysis that,

‘The mainstream media conducted an anti Left Front campaign as usual. But what was notable this time was the viciousness of the systematic campaign launched by the major newspapers against the CPI (M) and the projection of Mamata Banerjee.’ (CPIM, 1999)

In the same report they mentioned that the media's projection of equating the left with the INC was maligning the ideological position of the CPI (M). To combat the anti-campaigns unleashed through the media, a rigorous political and ideological education necessary for the party members, as the CPI (M) argued,

‘Faced with deliberate attempts to increase religiosity and caste identities, purveying of consumerist and egoistic values through the media and large-scale anti-Communist

propaganda, we must be able first of all to equip our Party members, to meet this offensive.’ (CPIM, 1999)

Another instance of criticism of the role of the media was after the 2001 West Bengal Assembly election (CPIM, 2001). The print and the electronic media were criticised for being utilised by the opposition to mobilise anti-left campaigns in the state (CPIM, 2001). Before the 2001 Assembly election a fraction of the CPI (M) leadership left the party and built a new organisation Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). The bourgeois media was argued to be backing the PDS ‘to disrupt the CPI (M)'s election prospects’ (CPIM, 2001). Similar criticisms of the media resounded after the incidents of *Nandigram* as the CPI (M) in their 19<sup>th</sup> Congress report mentioned that the,

‘Nandigram events were used by the ruling classes and the big business media to defame and slander the Party. It is an important weapon in the anti-CPI (M) propaganda.’ (CPIM, 2008b: 47)

The CPI (M) was suspected of being stocking up arms in their houses and party office. The media widely covered this news on arms recovery. The CPI (M) argued that the ‘obnoxious exercise’ of arms seizures was ‘legitimized by wide coverage by sections of the media who unquestioningly and uncritically accept the version dished out by the TMC local leadership and their willing police accomplices’ (CPIM, 2011d). Therefore the CPI (M) described these incidents as ‘dramas’ and ‘conspiracies’ against them where the media played in hands with the political conspirators (CPIM, 2011d).

The CPI (M) accused the media to be playing the role of the opposition party in West Bengal and said,

‘It would seem that sections of the media have taken on the role of an opposition party in West Bengal with not even a fig leaf of impartiality. This is not a new development. However, the vitriol and the range of personalised attacks certainly provide a new low in the record of media reporting.’ (CPIM, 2009b)

The media was not only conspiring but they also were blamed to have covered-up the violence unleashed by the opposition on the CPI (M) cadres (CPIM, 2009b). Politically biased reporting by the media in West Bengal did set an instance ‘of how news can be manipulated to suit the interests of corporate houses foreign and Indian’ (CPIM, 2009b).

The newspapers in West Bengal vehemently criticised the LFG’s policy and slogan of ‘from agriculture to industry’ and branded this transition as pro-bourgeoisie. The criticisms were done in a way to benefit the media industry. According to *Brinda*, the deliberate reproduction of the agenda by the media portraying that the entire policy of agrarian reform has shifted towards industrial development did serve as the propaganda against the CPI (M) and the LFG; but in reality as *Brinda* emphasised, the land reform statistics of the LFG in West Bengal had the best record in India (see Appendix I).

Another imperative criticism by the newspapers and other media was the coercion and homicide in *Singur* and *Nandigram* (chapter 5). This thesis is qualitative hence enumeration and analysis of data as part of content analysis, about the criticisms by the media on both the incidents, was not undertaken but it can be undertaken as a future research project (chapter 9). However while obtaining the

analysis of the data from the *Economic and Political Weekly*, as mentioned in the above two sections of the thesis, I found that the newspapers and the media in West Bengal vehemently criticised the LFG for its industrial policy along with the coercion induced to implement its policy (chapter 5). *Buddhadeb Bhattacharya* (2011) in an interview apologised for the situation but at the same time addressed the incident in *Nandigram* to be the conspiracy of the media and the opposition. He argue in the interview,

‘I am sorry about what happened and I have said so. But the way that the media, including your magazine, reported on Nandigram is not the way that it happened. The Left Front has suffered because of this... The job of the police was to control the unruly mob, which had unfortunately been made to believe that the government had sent forces to snatch their land. That was not the case... The killing of innocent people (in the firing) should never have happened and we are sorry for that. But the circumstances under which it happened were not a creation of the West Bengal government but that of the opposition... We did try to clarify things. We held press conferences and also conducted interviews but, by and large, the press has been with the opposition.’

Therefore the Chief Minister of the state held the media and the opposition responsible for the incident in Nandigram which was in tune with what the CPI (M) discussed in their conferences. This has been also been reflected by the media as discussed in the next chapter by the interviews of the journalists and editors of newspapers and electronic channels on the incident in *Nandigram*. The animosity of the CPI (M) also generated concern within the LFG and the coalition partners started criticising the LFG publicly (CPIM, 2008b: 27). The CPI (M) was however in the denial mode and claimed that the LFG in West Bengal did ‘ensure



a fair compensation package for those displaced from the land in Singur' and that they did not want to forcibly occupy lands in Nandigram (CPIM, 2008b:28). It was the Goebelsian propaganda of the media that misrepresented the truth.

According to *Brinda*, the LFG in West Bengal had the peoples' mandate. The fact was, according to *Brinda Karat*, that irrespective of the restrictions on the functioning of the parties in the LFG before elections on how they interact with the people and irrespective of employing platoons of forces in all the elections, the LFG used to win in the elections. The span between the Lok Sabha election 2009 and state Assembly election 2011, witnessed the reign of terror and violence against the left and particularly CPI (M) which was overlooked by the media. Instead *Brinda* complained that 'the brutal incidents, against our cadres, who come from the most oppressed sections of the society, were showed to be concealed with a manufactured discontent'. The alliance between the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the CPI (Maoists) in the rural areas created the situation of violence and according to the CPI (M) it was a manufactured discontent to occupy the power which was backed by the media (CPIM, 2011a).

There was the anti-incumbency factor combined with the feeling of tiredness after 34 years LFG which the opposition and the media took advantage of (*Brinda*, Interview 2011). The opposition in West Bengal adopted undemocratic means of resistance. The CPI (M), according to *Brinda*, was responsible in going to the people and rectified the errors for which they were condemned but at the same time they believed that they were to decide their rights or the wrongs and did not expect others proposition on it. The democratic process in West Bengal was

replaced by the reign of propaganda both by the opposition and the media which concealed the terror, was undemocratic. The opposition induced the political vendetta and the media was silent on it. This was claimed to be Murdochisation of the press and the media in West Bengal in the realm of cultural imperialism. The political meetings of the opposition held at media (*Star Ananda* now known as *ABP Ananda*) houses further supported the intensity of the claim of corporate interest in the politics of West Bengal. Thus the CPI (M) alleged the media to be masquerading behind the notion of 'independent media' while taking active part in politics.

Investigation shows that the CPI (M) before the 2011 West Bengal Assembly election underwent a political advertising exercise as claimed by the Times News Network report on the December 25, 2010 (Chakraborty, 2010). The CPI (M) allocated 'Rs. 30 crore' towards advertisements of the achievements of the LFG in West Bengal (ibid, 2010). The LFG Minister of State for Information and Culture justified these initiatives as a step by the government to defend the achievement statistics which was challenged by the opposition. Hence it was a political task and not corporate advertisement to inform the electorates about the works of the government. The Minister when asked why the advertisement campaign by the LFG should not be compared to the 'Shinning India' campaign launched by the BJP, the Minister replied 'India Shining wasn't scientific. It was blown out of proportion. Our campaign, be it through billboards or television or radio, are strictly based on facts and evidence' (ibid, 2010). This argument was similar to the Soviet Theory of Press which states that the press should be utilised in

fostering unity and revealing political understanding of the party to educate the mass and the media does not need to question its noble intentions since the state was by the majority (chapter 2).

### **6.8 On the debacle of the LFG: the CPI (M) arguments**

*Prakash Karat* (2011), the CPI (M) General Secretary, in an interview with *Smitha Nair* of CNN-IBN, immediately after the catastrophe of the LFG in West Bengal identified the land issue to be one of the vital reasons behind the debacle. He said in the interview (Appendix IV),

‘We gauged it, we tried to make amends, we said land acquisition was one issue that will be dealt with carefully, land won't be taken away without the farmers consent. But I think the damage was already done at that time.’

The CPI (M) was also alleged of arrogance (chapter 7 and 8). However Karat (2011) while in the denial mode cogently stated,

‘I don't think there was arrogance. Because every year whether it was Assembly or Panchayat elections or a Parliament election, we were being accounted to by the people. If we were arrogant all through people wouldn't have reposed their confidence in us again and again, but 34 years of historic rule despite our achievements produced some negative factors.’

But *Buddhadeb Bhattacharya* (2011a), the then Chief Minister of West Bengal and Polit Bureau member of the CPI (M), in an interview with *Hindustan Times*, when questioned about how the opposition without any policy was taking over the left in West Bengal, he eloquently stated,

‘Being in the ruling front, some leaders and cadres think they are running people's lives... this unnecessary interference was there. Bossing should be stopped. Some corrupt, bad elements have entered the party... We also expelled some members from the party. We have taken disciplinary action against many district-level leaders. We have cautioned others.’

Post debacle the CPI (M) had internal debates on who should be held accountable for the decline of the LFG. The choice was entirely between the two, *Buddhadeb Bhattacharya* or *Prakash Karat* (chapter 7). However when Karat (2011) was questioned in an interview with CNN-IBN that whether he would or *Buddhadeb Bhattacharya* should accept the moral responsibility of the catastrophe then he eloquently stated,

‘In our party this does not arise. It's like when our ship goes through stormy weather, nobody jumps out of the ship, you see. They have to steer the ship to the right course and get out of the difficulties. There is no question in the party for elections in communists. Our communist party, we don't hold anybody accountable for electoral losses. If there is any organisational indiscipline, somebody has not worked properly in an election, as you said, sabotaged the party's decision then action would follow. Otherwise, elections are a part of our overall political activity. We do not see it as the prime activity alone. So the collective responsibility is there, the individual accountability is there. All that is taken into account... Nobody will jump the ship. None of the leaders...because of an electoral loss, we do not say that this person is of no use, let's throw him out of the ship nor is that person is allowed to jump ship. Everybody takes the responsibility. So the talk about *Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee* quitting...just does not happen in our party.’

The debacle of the left in the Lok Sabha election 2009 did generate feud within the coalition partners of the LFG. *Nandagopal Bhattacharya*, the CPI leader,

instigated a scorching attack on the CPI (M). The CPI (M) was held culpable because of their intolerance and arrogance. The leader of the CPI also nitpicked the CPI (M) for being ignorant of the coalition partners' propositions and told in an interview with the Times News Network (2009),

‘CPM men have become arrogant and are isolated from people. Singur and Nandigram played a definite role in the Left's poor performance. We often warned them (read CPM) but they refused to listen.’

Therefore, according to the critics, the CPI (M) scripted their Waterloo. The *Nandigram* and *Singur* fiasco had intense impact on the rural electorates, as argued by the critics, and hence played a catalytic role in the debacle of the LFG. The defeated Chief Minister of West Bengal, *Buddhadeb Bhattacharya* (2013), in an interview with *ABP Ananda*, twenty months after the debacle of the LFG, addressed the issue of industrialisation and explained that the growth of West Bengal can only be achieved by sustaining the agricultural achievements and planning industrialisation for development. He repented for the police firing in *Nandigram* which he was unaware and told,

‘I was in the Assembly floor in a meeting and when I came back to my office I got the news that there was a police firing and the casualty was fourteen. Later on I came to know that the casualty from police firing was six and the rest were from other injuries and my question is who did those? The opposition blamed that the CPI (M) cadres wearing the police uniform along with the police did the firing and hundreds were killed. This was an allegation from nowhere.’

### 6.9 LFG and the media: disentangling the relational thread

The left and the CPI (M) in particular tried to penetrate not only in the print but also into the working of the *Doordarshan* and suggested for proper regional representation (Basu, 1986a). They suggested broadcasting news from Kolkata centre in two other regional languages since Kolkata had considerable population of non-Bengali and Nepali speakers. Chief Minister *Jyoti Basu* (1986a) also proposed for educative programmes that could be effective to the rural population and assist them in overcoming superstition and backwardness in his speech

*Doordarshane Chai Ancholik Protinidhitto*<sup>55</sup>. Post 1991 the development of the regional news channels also provided scope for the regional political parties and the CPI (M) to participate in the political debates and argue on the development statistics to reach its target public. The important 24 hour regional news channels being launched by the Anandabazar Patrika group called *Star Ananda*, now known as *ABP Ananda*, Zee Network launched *24 Ghanta* along with others like *ETV Bangla*, *Channel 10*, *Kolkata TV*, *Tara News*, *Mahua Khabor* and *NE Bangla*.

The Academics and theoreticians have welcomed the inclusion of developmental statistics in electoral politics by both the media and the political parties since it facilitates citizens towards accomplishing informed decision (Himanshu, 2009). But at the same time both the political parties and the media in India and in West Bengal were criticised of manipulating the official statistics for their own benefits (ibid, 2009). The unfinished works of the academics, the interpretive statistics by

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<sup>55</sup> 'There needs to be regional representation in *Doordarshan*'

political parties and statistics from unverified sources were used in conjunction with official governmental statistics by the media in West Bengal. Himanshu (2009:31) argue this in the article *Electoral Politics and the Manipulation of Statistics* and provided the example of how the poverty statistics of Murshidabad, a district in West Bengal, was utilised by the political parties to campaign against the LFG without verifying the plausibility of the statistics. The newspapers in West Bengal were rigorously polarised on political lines.

The scope of manipulation was further extended post 1991 with the influx of private TV channels both in India and in West Bengal. The big newspaper houses created TV channels as discussed above and similar polarisations were noticed (see the *Figure 2* in Appendix IV). I have not detailed specifically the electronic media experience since it is not the central to this thesis. However since the transformation of the media contributed towards a new epoch in journalism in India therefore I have referenced this to provide a comprehensive representation of arguments holistically on the media. The culture of dailies, tabloids, small magazines and any form of journalism was a characteristic feature of Bengal both pre and post independence. The CPI (M) and the left had always maintained a relation with the newspaper houses (see the *Figure 2* in Appendix IV) at the same time criticizing them of publishing untrue news and propagating flamboyant interpretation about the left (chapter 7). The corporate media was also vehemently criticised on reporting the views and not the news. On the other hand the media in West Bengal has criticised the arrogance of the party leaders in dealing with the media (chapter 7). There were widespread instances of the journalists being

assaulted and arrested (Ray, 2009) for covering an incident or reporting against the CPI (M). Even the reporters of the *Ganashakti Patrika* participated in the conflicts advocating the CPI (M) supporters and taking the law in own hands (ibid, 2009). However there prevailed absolute silence on the part of the newspapers and journalists' associations except a couple (ibid, 2009). Thus the evidences of conflicts prevailed in West Bengal between the CPI (M) and the media.

While discussing the relation between the media and the LFG with *Dr. Asim Dasgupta*, the veteran professor and former minister in LFG, perspicuously stated that the media policy by the CPI (M) has to be understood from the party leadership and he could only narrate his experience of the relationship while being in the government. This signifies the magnitude of internal discipline within the CPI (M) where a state committee member could not even think of reflecting his views on the media since he was not entitled for the same.

He was responsible to write the economic review of the LFG during the initial tenure in office when *Dr. Ashok Mitra* was the Finance Minister of the LFG. The economic reports consisted of the state domestic behaviour, demographic factors, statistics on agriculture, rural development, small and medium scale industry, large industry, organized sector and the unorganized sector, infrastructure (road, electricity) and social sectors. The reports used to focus on the disadvantaged sections of the society (SC/ST), the women issues (in the later phase) and issues of common concerns like problems of price hike and inflation. It also included the details of production in all sectors and various other statistics. Even there were



discussions on the land reform policy and how it helped the economy by overcoming existing agricultural problems. The achievements of the LFG were documented in the reports published by Left Front and was placed in details during the budget. The budget was again addressed before the press and the custom was followed at least once a year. The discussions on various political agendas were undertaken by the LFG and the press were invited to attend these for information. The achievements in land reform and consequently developing the irrigation system to sustain the achievements in productivity were carried out. All these decisions were also shared with the press either at the press corner in Writers Building, in Kolkata or in Delhi in case of national developmental agenda. However according to *Dasgupta* the press was found reluctant in focusing on the developmental agendas, achievements and statistics. *Jyoti Basu*, the veteran communist leader and the stalwart commander of the LFG, as *Dasgupta* reminisced, used to say that the fight of the LFG and the CPI (M) was against both class enemy and media. In West Bengal before any elections the media used to staunchly criticise the LFG.

Irrespective of the animosity by the media the LFG continued to address the media in a well structured manner as *Dasgupta* recollected,

‘The leftists don’t like to meet the press often and not everyone can speak in the media. Though there have been some breaching of this policy but we as an organization adhere to it. When I met the press, I used to issue a written statement to all of them and then if they had any questions they came come up with those. Now individual statements to the media were never tolerated in the party or in the government. Giving information is not about individual charisma but about composite achievements. To us all the newspapers

from small to big are same.’ – *Dr. Asim Dasgupta*, Minister of Finance and Excise, LFG (Interview, 2011)

Therefore the message here from *Dasgupta* was indicating a more socio-institutional relationship between the government and the media where one informs the other and ensures a democratic way of functioning. This practise prevailed between 1977-1991 when there were limited press and media in the state and also because the policies of the LFG was more pro-people (as discussed by the media personnel in the next chapter 7).

The relational animosity was claimed to have been changed with the CPI (M)’s approach towards economic restructuring in the state (chapter 7). The media in West Bengal was inclined to take a soft stance on LFG to support industrialisation (chapter 7). In the launching ceremony of *The Hindu Business Line*, Kolkata edition, the then Chief Minister *Buddhadeb Bhattacharya* (Dam, 2006) articulately stated,

‘Competition [in the media] is welcome if it remains on the right track ... the West Bengal Government welcomes criticism which helps promote the interests of the people and it is for the media to protect the multi-religious, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic identity of India... the launch of *Business Line* is a very good decision which will help the business community in the State and effectively serve the needs of our people in the corporate sector’

Thus the economic transition of the left had an impact on their relation with the newspapers and other forms of media in the state (chapter 7). The period between the two State Assembly elections of 2006 and 2011 galvanized the strenuous

relationship between the media and the CPI (M). The incidents in *Singur* and *Nandigram* further aggravated the situation (chapter 7). The marginalised section of the society though with limited access to media does access the information on political parties and leaders from the media to make informed decisions and understand their rights and entitlements (Banerjee et al, 2010; Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004). This has been discussed in more relevance to the West Bengal context in the *Discussion* chapter.

#### **6.10 Thirty four years of LFG in West Bengal: the raison d'être by the CPI (M)**

‘It was because of our own political process, policies, our weakness and our strengths. We certainly believe that is certainly the core, which will either take you forward or not take you forward.’ - Brinda Karat (Interview, 2011)

‘We have not controlled the state but we were able to create leftist minds in millions. This is the biggest contingent of anti-globalisation and anti-international finance capital in the whole world.’ - Debasish Chakraborty (Interview, 2011)

The rationale for the thirty four years of rule by the LFG in West Bengal as elucidated by the CPI (M) was their policies and achievements. However the media was held responsible for representing the ‘mistruth’ in the public domain since technological progression created the scope for encroachment and hence media had the tools, as *Brinda* claimed, to ‘black-out certain, de-contextualize something and therefore present a picture, which may not represent the truth’. However since the left, according to *Debasish Chakraborty*, has never compromised with the anti-campaigns and were successful in maintaining a

congenial political communication, has contributed towards the longevity of the LFG in West Bengal. All the apparatus of the state are generally dominated by the ruling class ideology. Therefore the socialisation process of the leftist ideas by the CPI (M) and other LFG coalition parties were done meticulously. The counter political- ideological socialisation of the left was successfully ingrained in the society of West Bengal. Therefore the CPI (M) as claimed was successful in hegemonising the society of West Bengal but faced challenges in retaining the hegemony (chapter 8).

### **6.11 Ganashakti: the alternative stream of political journalism**

The important social dynamics in West Bengal, as mentioned in the above section, was the close connection of politics and press since its inception. The political leaders were closely associated with the press and some of them were themselves journalists (trained and non-trained). This was not necessarily true for the Communists only but applied also to other political parties. The Left Front government since its inception as claimed by the CPI (M) faced severe criticisms from the big newspaper houses like Anandabazar Patrika (Basu, 2005). The LFG was mainly criticised for their rhetorical approach to administration. However the CPI (M) in West Bengal and India had their own newspaper organisations; which they inherited from the practise and ideas of V.I. Lenin's (1902) *Iskra*. The role of newspaper to be a collective propagandist, agitator and organiser was regarded as highly acceptable within the CPI (M), and had their own newspaper as a parallel stream of controlling information in West Bengal. This was also true for the all India centre. In West Bengal *Ganashakti*, *Deshitaishi* and *Peoples Democracy*

were the party mouthpieces and they worked as organisers and were distributed within the mass through the party and mass organisations. The circulations of these newspapers were done through party comrades and had specific targets for each branch, local, zonal and district committees (2006c). During the days of semi-fascists rule in West Bengal all these publications were censored by the ruling Indian National Congress.

The branch, local, zonal, district and state conferences of the CPI (M) and its mass organisations addressed in detail the circulations of the party publication, newspaper, along with the circulation of the mass front mouthpieces like *Eksathe* (Women's front), *Chatra Sangram* (student front), *Jubashakti* (Youth Front), *Nandan* and *Gananatyo* (cultural front), *Kishan Mazdoor* (agricultural labour and peasant front), *Swadhinata*, *Deshitaishi* (socio-political-economical). There were also pamphlets and booklets published by the mass organisations and the CPI (M) all over the years addressing specific socio-political-economic issues either regional, national or international.

*Ganashakti* has played a dominant political role if not social in West Bengal (chapter 8). *Ganashakti* which was initially an evening daily in 1967 upgraded itself to a morning daily in 1986. Presently *Ganashakti* runs three editions of *Kolkata*, *Durgapur* and *Siliguri*. Publications or parallel stream of journalism which was popularly addressed as an alternative journalism was not only the feature or initiative of West Bengal alone. Over the years the regional wings of the CPI (M) and its mass organisations in different states had their regional dailies and mouthpieces in regional languages. The central committee of the CPI (M) had

*People's Democracy* and *The Marxist*. Even there were party literatures and regional translations done by the party members and leaders from various international communist journals. Publications were seriously discussed and reviewed within the meetings and conferences to retain its sharpness to intensify class struggle within the society (Basu, 2006c). It was also a challenge for the CPI (M) to sustain the alternative stream of journalism through the representation of the marginalised in the age of globalisation in India.

*Ganashakti* since its first publication in January 3, 1967 has continuously worked towards establishing itself as a publishing house and seriously modified itself to compete with the right stream of newspapers and electronic channels post liberalisation. *Ganashakti* transformed the way of presentation, content of news and its advertisement policy with the transformation in the economy in the early 1990s (Jeffrey, 1997). This was also claimed to be true by the News Editor of *Ganashakti*. However *Ganashakti* is run by waged party whole-timers whose monthly wages as in 2013 was still as low as INR 5000.00 (GBP 50). *Debasish Chakraborty* articulately explained that *Ganashakti* pay wages and not salaries to the party whole-timers who work as journalists (trained and non-trained) but take it to be their political task. On the other hand, according to *Salim*,

‘The flooding situation of the media is absorbing many new, fresh individuals who didn’t have the proper training or knows very little about the field. These individuals are trained in that specific orientation and absorbing that culture. The media have its own culture, ladder, guru cult and the individual is trained how to climb the ladder.’ (Interview, 2011)

*Ganashakti* as a media house had the technologically advanced equipments to compete in quality with the other newspaper houses in West Bengal. According to the Readership Survey in West Bengal 2011 (Quarter 2) *Ganashakti* ranked fourth among the vernacular dailies in the state (see *Table 3* in Appendix IV). Therefore it was one of the largest circulated newspaper dailies in the state in 2011 when the field research was conducted. The circulation of *Ganashakti* is primarily organised by the CPI (M) through their branch, local, zonal and district committees. All the individual committee have their own target figures for circulation. Thus it is considered to be the organisational task of the CPI (M) to educate both its cadres and the public. However this is not an easy task for the newspaper house as *Debasish Chakraborty* delineated in his interview. In the age of corporatisation of the media when other newspaper houses were keen to invite corporate advertisement, *Ganashakti* relied more on small-medium scale industries in West Bengal. The advantage for *Ganashakti* is the content for the public space as other newspapers increasingly subscribe to the private space. *Chakraborty* told in the interview, that as a News Editor he had his own theorisation,

‘...to push the frontier as much as possible when the profit is pushing you back. A newspaper is full of private space, so you search for public space. Creating a public space in the media is a rebel in itself.’ (*Debasish Chakraborty, Interview, 2011*)

He accepted the fact that there was an antagonistic relation between the CPI (M) and the mainstream media in the state (chapter 7 and 8). He recollected that whenever in the history of India, the communist party was declared illegal, the

press supported the decision. The ABP has always opposed the left movements in West Bengal. The creation of pseudo-nationalism during the Indo-China border war by the ABP and the arrest of the communist leaders were deemed to be the conspiracy of the newspaper house. Therefore to *Debasish Chakraborty* the anti-communist conspiracy or the relation of antagonism was a pre-1977 phenomenon. However with the communist parties in power post 1977, there were operational changes and the LFG had to focus more on developmental agendas. The media also changed their way of opposition. The press in West Bengal vehemently opposed the land reform movement and restructuring of the *Panchayat*.

*Panchayat* was held responsible for the malpractices and corruption in the village level. Post land reform, the tenancy being institutionalised invited corruption both monetarily and morally. There were also other criticisms of the CPI (M) on the grounds of trade unionism which according to the media has maligned the state of industries in West Bengal. The media was on the other hand accused of legitimising Maoism and the bloodsheds in West Bengal. The Marxist ideology and Marxists in general were always attacked by the media.

This onslaught by the media was backed by corporate power post 1991 (chapter 7). There were some regional media channels which were funded by non-banking microfinance businesses. The congruence between the big business capital and regional business capital during LPG determined the functioning of the media houses. *Ganashakti* according to *Chakraborty* performed a vital role to carry the message of the alternative press and the left to the public. The left as he recollected had always confronted the political and ideological attacks with their



organisation and political campaigns. In West Bengal leftism was so deeply rooted through the culture, society and politics that even the mainstream media had the compulsion to provide some space to the left. But primarily the left relied on interpersonal communication, campaigns and mass speeches. The voters of the left as *Chakraborty* said were not influenced but did have some influence of the media. Therefore *Chakraborty* indicated that the CPI (M) emphasised on establishing the cultural hegemony (as discussed in chapter 2) in the state to resist the competing ideas. The political campaigns of the left in certain times were not able to cope up with the comprehensive oppositions in the public domain by the media. The public sphere had the media generated discontent. There were certain limitations of the left to combat these but he appreciated the fact that the left with its mass organisations fought vigorously against the campaigns in the public sphere. The role of *Ganashakti* provided a mammoth support to this fight of the left (chapter 8).

*Ganashakti* as a press was an ideological organ of the CPI (M). This decision of politically controlling the public sphere was an ideological task of the communist parties not only in India but also in other communist regimes of the world. A communist newspaper performs the three tasks of propaganda, agitation and organisation as referred to by V.I. Lenin (1902) in his famous book *What is to be Done* (also see the Soviet Communist Theory in chapter 2 of this thesis).

*Ganashakti* is distinct from other newspapers as it does not have a private ownership but is owned by the party and it is run by the party whole-timers.

*Chakraborty* further explained that *Ganashakti* thus enjoys freedom from market

as it is not a mechanical media institution and the journalism in the house is not dominated by the market compulsion. Therefore it is easier for it to challenge other newspapers in the market ideologically. But he admitted the fact that objectivity in journalism is nothing but illusion; and truth is not ‘*akhanda*’,<sup>56</sup>. Therefore the news in *Ganashakti* represents the majority of the mass, but he claimed it not to be entirely true, however it does not have the compulsion to lie. For practical political purpose there are some declared limitations of truth for *Ganashakti*, as *Chakraborty* explained, but it fights in entirety.

Thus the party-controlled newspaper in a way has challenged what capital wants from it. The resources are small but the wide network of unskilled district correspondents all over the state was strong enough and there is hardly any news that can escape from their reach. The readership of *Ganashakti* is greater than the circulation since reading boards are installed in the locality both in the rural and in the urban areas by the party. *Ganashakti* also works as a vanguard against all the structural lies and domination of other newspapers. The house equips the cadres and the leaders of the communist parties with the political-economic and social campaign materials.

According to *Chakraborty* this is a hard task to manage within the capital intensive media operations of the society. *Ganashakti* understood the technological compulsion in the mid-1980s. The *ABP* and the *Ganashakti* were the first two newspaper houses with the satellite television antenna. The internet and the convergence of the media were undertaken as serious projects within

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<sup>56</sup> Akhanda is a Bengali word which means undisputed/unbroken

*Ganashakti*. Therefore modernising the press according to the demand of the hour is meticulously done to survive in the market (*Chakraborty*, Interview 2011). However the crisis of revenue generation through advertisements is one of the main challenges the house encountered. The only way to mitigate the crisis was thought to be the expansion of the newspaper through internet. Accordingly the

*Ganashakti* house has instituted the electronic version of the newspaper both in English and Bengali. The Facebook page of *Ganashakti* has also become popular in disseminating information.

*Ganashakti* however did not play the role of the watchdog in West Bengal. It functions as an organ of the communist party and defending the LFG is undertaken as political task of the house. *Chakraborty* cogently mentioned,

‘We thought that defending the LFG was our political task. That was good for the overwhelming majority of the mass. Though it was a partisan task but it was morally correct. In many of the cases we self critically think that we could give the wider picture of the state and its limitations. Why LFG is important this we have reflected more economically than politically. But say for example in case of the problems in a hospital, the question comes whether we should have dealt the topic in more depth? We think that it was essential and it was our late understanding and we tried to do it post 2009. But since 2008 the government was under immense attack; amidst all those if we would have projected the self critical understanding then that would have jeopardised the whole situation even more.’

Therefore *Ganashakti* played a more balancing role towards the sustenance of the LFG. To be critical of the LFG would have encouraged the opposition and the media to lodge a greater conspiracy which would have been fatal for the

government that was already working for the marginalised. However the news editor self critically said in the interview that the difference between the political process and the bureaucratic process could have been reflected. This partisan approach of non reflection of certain malpractices also had an impact on the readership of *Ganashakti*.

Lastly, the slogan of *Ganashakti* ‘*Amra Niropekhoyo Noi; Amra Mehanoti Manusher Pokhye*’ which means ‘We are not Neutral; we are on the side of Working Class People’ and it certainly alienates other classes of the society from its slogan (see chapter 8 of the thesis). Accepting the gap, the news editor of *Ganashakti* expressed his desire to rethink on the slogan but at the same time he made it clear that the CPI (M) was way behind to have a conclusive understanding on the media.

I discuss this in *The Discussion* chapter that the functioning of the *Ganashakti* is still considered as an ideological and political task of the CPI (M) rather than as a profit seeking publishing house. But at the same time there has been a very silent transformational approach in using the central slogan of *Ganashakti*. As the name *Ganashakti* means Peoples’ Power and so is its intension for a pro-people alternative journalism. Digitisation of *Ganashakti* and its English version website came into existence in the late nineties. The English website of the *Ganashakti* declared in its ‘About Us’ section regarding its commitment to people and alternative journalism as-

‘In front of the post commercial growth of global media and its national, regional and even local counterparts both in print and electronic categories it is high time to combat those packaged news and sponsored views. This website will strongly combat the continuous disinformation and misinformation campaign against our Party and Left Front government in West Bengal.’ -  
Ganashakti English news website<sup>57</sup>

Therefore according to the website *Ganashakti* was committed in protecting the CPI (M) party and counter the anti-campaigns against the LFG. The imperative question here is who comes first, peoples’ power or party’s interest?

## **6.12 Conclusion**

As evident from the above findings, there was certainly a relation of animosity between the CPI (M) and the media since it came to power in 1977. The media in West Bengal according to the CPI (M) often took a political position by rallying against the left. The corporatisation of the media made it even more powerful by making it technologically sound. The reach of the media increased from what it was in 1977 when the LFG came to power. Over the years the structural and functional changes in the mainstream media has not only projected a market-driven culture but at the same time has worked politically to serve the corporate interests both in India and in West Bengal. Therefore the corporate houses tried to ‘manufacture a consensus’ (CPIM, 2012: 28) through the media to weaken the left since ‘[T]he corporate-run media seeks to manufacture consent for neo-liberal policies’ (CPIM, 2012:36).

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<sup>57</sup> About Us, Ganashakti, Available at <<http://ganashakti.com/english/cms/page/about>> [Accessed on 20.10.2013]

However no specific media policy of the CPI (M) was found in place except out rightly contesting the mainstream media either through the CPI (M)'s own network of media and publications or through public meetings and speeches. This was considered to be a serious lacuna in the entire organisational planning of the CPI (M) as discussed by the News Editor of Ganashakti. The next chapter explores the media scenario in the state of West Bengal.

The interviews and documents suggest that though there has been no formal document and organised understanding regarding the media but there were constant endeavour to influence and compete with the mainstream media to exercise control on the public sphere. There were also sharing of information between the communist parties worldwide and the CPI (M). However the challenge was to share that information with the rural populace. Again due to the scarcity of funds required to propagate the views was another constraint for the communist parties. Thus the alternative way of disseminating information and ideals within the mass were promulgation, organisation and networking.

The CPI (M) participated in the media debates, media discussions, conducted press meets, and disseminated information through press briefs. But in the age of technological advancement, as the leaders of the CPI (M) argued in their interviews, the media retains the power to edit what has to be shown according to the policies of the media houses. The prodigious quibble of the media clutched the minds of the public in West Bengal and the decline of the left was observed to be a conspiracy by the media. Though there were anti-communist propaganda before 1991 but the power and reach of the media post LPG exasperated the campaign in

the public sphere. There were also two antithetic understanding within the CPI (M) regarding the role of the media. One thought media to be a determinant force and manufactured the consent of the electorates in West Bengal; the other thought was that the media performed the role of a catalyst given the political discontent within the society in West Bengal. But both the thoughts had a common understanding that the media was influential. The discontent in the society was again perceived to be a manufactured one either by the oppositions or by the media. The internal discontent within the LFG and CPI (M) was certainly even more competent in generating dissension which instigated open media statements that denied the decorum of democratic centralism both within the CPI (M) and the LFG.

The media in India is self-regulated and do not have a systematic social control that is necessary for the media to be obligated to the society. India has a constitution that details how people of India should react in a democratic republic, there are laws that define the workings of the legislature and the judiciary but unfortunately the media has no law to follow. Media thus only has the compulsion of the market and choice of the public which decides whether the consumption was satisfactory for generating a certain amount of profit for the media and market. Media has their own understanding of tolerance, discrimination, social evils, and ethics; hence to the point one subscribes to the same understanding, it is accepted and approved by the media. The relation of antagonism however peaked with the rise in the discontent within the society in West Bengal from 2008, after

the *Panchayat* election. Whether it was only political or had the postcolonial heterogeneity will be discussed later (chapter 8).

The next chapter has delineated the observation of the media on CPI (M) and how they thought the relationship between them existed over thirty four years of left governance in the state.



## **Chapter 7**

### **The Media Viewpoint on the CPI (M) led LFG**

This chapter focuses on the media and the media views on the CPI (M) led LFG in West Bengal. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section looks into the newspapers and print industry in West Bengal. The second section looks into how the media viewed their relationship with the LFG over thirty four years in West Bengal. This chapter is based on the interviews of the senior journalists and Editors. I have also made occasional references to secondary data, as previously mentioned in the Methodology chapter of this thesis.

The findings in this chapter suggest that the media in West Bengal reacted in three different ways during the three phases in the state. In the first phase of LFG the media had a limited reach and was critical, in the second phase it started compromising and in the third phase the media supported the LFG because of their own class interest. The transformation and the transition of the media in India have undergone structural adjustments as discussed previously in the chapter 4 of the thesis. The previous chapter has dealt with how the CPI (M) views the role of the media in West Bengal. This chapter delineates the views of the media professionals on the CPI (M) and their observation on whether the media played a role to stabilise or destabilise the regime of the left in West Bengal.

This chapter analyses the interviews to understand this intertwined relationship holistically in the state of West Bengal. However it begins by briefly investigating the overall scenario of the newspaper and the print industry in West Bengal.

## SECTION I

### 7.1 Print Industry in West Bengal

The print industry in West Bengal has always played an important role in India. The IRS survey of 2011 Q4<sup>58</sup> depicted West Bengal's two magazines and one daily, Karmakshetra and Karmasangsthan and Anandabazar Patrika respectively to be in the top 10 list of the language publication in India. The print industry in West Bengal as in 2011 (FICCI, 2011: 27) was estimated to have a market value of 'INR 900 crores' (9 Billion), among which the Bengali print market accounts for '550 crores' (5.5 Billion) as compared to the English print market of 'INR 350 crores' (3.5 Billion). The circulation figures of the Vernacular and English dailies (see the *Figure 1* in Appendix IV) clearly project the preference of the vernacular publication, which dominate 60 percent of the market share to English in West Bengal (ibid, 2011:27). The importance of the advertisement revenue cannot be underestimated in this regard. In West Bengal 73 percent of the revenue for Bengali newspaper comes from advertisements with many of the national companies advertising in the leading dailies and 27 percent of the revenue comes from circulation (ibid, 2011). The Anandabazar Patrika Group has established itself as one of the leading publishing house in Eastern India. It has continuously developed the international connections by initiating innovative marketing strategies and tried to connect with the Bengali community from all over the

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<sup>58</sup> IRS 2011 Q4 Topline Findings, Hansa Research, [Online], Available at <[http://mruc.net/irs2011q4\\_%20toplines.pdf](http://mruc.net/irs2011q4_%20toplines.pdf)> [Accessed on 19.10.2013]

world. Thus the high brand equity of the leading publishing house has contributed towards its growth and sustenance in competition.

Another important initiative was the digitization of the content and online publication of the language dailies in Bengali and Devanagari script. This has not only led to the integration of the non-residential and residential Bengali community but also attracted online advertisement revenues which are often considered to be generous. The high circulation of the newspapers in West Bengal has also benefitted from the strong regional networks and both urban and rural centres. To further connect with the rural and sub-urban readers the dailies has often dedicated special pages to the districts which increased their popularity and circulation in those areas. The journalists providing news from the district centres are often non-trained but have strong networks in the region. Thus empowerment of the public and the region in West Bengal through newspapers has been a post 1990 effort by the publishing houses.

## SECTION II

### 7.2 On the social role and the transition of the media in India

The social role of the media in India has been open to subjective interpretations.

As *Sougata Mukhopadhyay* stated in his interview,

‘Social commitment is subject to subjective interpretation. There would be some organizations who think that social commitment may lie in talking about down-trodden, others may think that social commitment is about representing the upwardly mobile middle-class. They have the target audience in mind. It’s an extremely subjective call to be taken.’ (Interview, 2011)

However the impact of media in the second largest democracy of the world cannot be studied in isolation from the imperative transition that it has gone through post 1991. Whether the media played a role in the developmental agendas of the country or acted towards strengthening democracy, is certainly open to discussions and debates as argued by the journalists in their interviews for this thesis. The social role of the media to encourage people in developing their society has had negligible importance in the media industry. *Ghosal* in his interview mentioned that the news should not be viewed from the social responsibility perspective as,

‘Now I am not Romila Thappar or Sumit Sarkar. To me every day I have to make the newspaper running with stories to sell. When we write the fact it is never value free. Now obviously when I write stories then the subconscious thinking of mine gets portrayed in the news. I don’t run journalism with the theory of falsifiability. This creates a perception. This perception can be viewed as distorted to someone because of his or her

priority. A journalist needs to compromise in the mode of production. Now since news can be viewed so it seems like our social responsibility is bigger than others but which is not the fact.'

His arguments contested the Social Responsibility Theory of the media (chapter 2) and legitimised the radical liberal pluralism and democratic corporatist outlook of the media (chapter 2). The role of the media according to *Mukhopadhyay* and *Ghosal* was to inform the public about the government policies and projects to assist the public in making informed decisions.

### **7.3 On the political transitions in West Bengal (1977-2011)**

The LFG in West Bengal, according to *Debasis Bhattacharya*, came to power because of the division in the votes of the opposition and did not have unconditional support of the people. The communist party in West Bengal was mostly identified with the CPI (M). Therefore to discuss the left, as he told, one needs to first describe the CPI (M). The long 34 years of the LFG can be broken down to three phases of the CPI (M); firstly from 1977 to 1985, secondly from 1986-2000 and finally from 2001-2011. Now the CPI (M) after coming to power in the first six-seven years, as *Debasis Bhattacharya* argued, did not expect to retain the government for such a long period (this was also discussed by the CPIM leadership, chapter 5). The experience of 1959 in Kerala, 1967 and 1970 experience of first and the second United Front Government (UFG) in West Bengal, did not have much ingredient for the LFG to think about the sustainability of the government. Keeping in mind that the ruling class of the country or the central government would not assist in the process of sustainability of the LFG, it

was hard for the CPI (M) or the LFG to plan for long term governance. Therefore the LFG experimented with the short term commitments (chapter 5). The further consequences or the support required to sustain the achievements were not planned since the question of sustenance was still in the state of enigma. *Debasis Bhattacharya* recollected in his interview that the first Chief Minister of the LFG and the veteran leader *Jyoti Basu* (popularly known as *Jyotibabu*) himself confirmed the un-clinched question of LFG sustenance.

Similarly the media in West Bengal also had three phases of operation and development. The media did not maintain a uniform pattern as was discussed by *Chattopadhyay* and *Bhattacharya* in their interviews. The electronic media in West Bengal became dominant not until the late nineties. During the first phase of the LFG and the CPI (M), there were newspapers in West Bengal but it was not that powerful as it emerged to be post 1991. The only television channel was *Doordarshan* with a very restricted viewership (chapter 4). The two English newspapers were *The Statesman* and *Amritabazar Patrika* and the Bengali newspapers were *ABP* and *Jugantor* with few other inconsequential newspapers like *Satyajug*, *Basumati* and others. As *Chattopadhyay* narrated,

‘The Amrita Bazar Patrika group ie Jugantor group participated in the Congress party. They were *Tushar kanti Ghosh*, *Tarun kanti Ghosh*, *Prafulla kanti Ghosh*. They were not only active participants in the Congress party but some of them became ministers. Thus they identified themselves with the Congress. The Sarkars’ who dominated ABP, was till Ashok Sarkar tremendously anti-communists. When I worked in the ABP I felt like it to be almost like the Pradesh Congress Committee office. There was a ‘they-us’ relationship between the Left and the ABP. Thus Left came to power in this state despite the media.’

The newspapers did not have much influence on the public because of the level of literacy, education and financial condition. Therefore the subscription level of the newspapers was also nominal. West Bengal was far behind other states in the number of circulation of newspapers and therefore had nominal influence on the public but the relation with the communist party was adversarial as

*Chattopadhyay* cogently stated,

‘The media influenced in lower degree but that did not hinder the process of coming to power of the left or to maintain its stability. Jyoti Basu in all his meetings used to accuse media and used to say that four newspapers have always campaigned against us. But Jyotibabu said that ‘we want this anti campaign because this indicates that we are on the right track’. There was an adversarial relationship between the media and the left which existed from day one.’

The situation changed between 1986 and 2000. The number of vernacular newspapers increased and newspapers like *Bartaman* and *Aajkal* rose to prominence along with others in West Bengal. However the influence of the newspapers was mostly within the educated people and the political activists. But the third phase, post 2000, West Bengal witnessed the influx of the media in the form of private television networks which increased the interest about news within the public. This invariably influenced and increased the readership and viewership of the print and visual media respectively. However according to *Bandopadhyay* the electronic media had its own limitations and viewership did not have an inverse relation to readership. Print is actually a document, as *Bandopadhyay* stated, and is highly acknowledged by the society intellectually. Accordingly the newspaper houses who published from the Kolkata centre, started



publishing district editions (chapter 4). The newspaper circulation increased in the rural areas. *Chattopadhyay* however demarcated the pre and post television phases in West Bengal as having dramatic consequences since it empowered the media with the audio-visual device. He mentioned the incident of police firing to forcibly evict the Bangladeshi refugees who refused to leave from West Bengal on January 31, 1979 at *Morichjhapi* and the bloody battle in *Gorbeta* and *Keshpur* (1998-2000) first unleashed by TMC and then by CPI (M) in its volume, magnitude and intensity was much higher than *Nandigram* and *Singur*. But it did not have the impact on the people because there was no television. However the statements of the left in West Bengal post *Nandigram* incident became a weapon for the electronic media as,

‘There were some three-four statements by *Biman Bose*, *Binoy Kongar* and *Buddhadeb Bhattacharya* that sealed their fate. I was in Kolkata TV then and played the role of catalyst. I sent a women journalist for interviewing *Binoy Kongar* on *Nandigram*. Binoyda told ‘What is TMC thinking? If they attack *Lakshman Seth* then will we spare *Suvendu Adhikary*?’ This statement brought the highest TRP for the next three weeks. I continued to show and question the politics of *bodla* or the politics of reappraisal in the minds of the left. *Buddhadeb Bhattacharya* told that ‘they have been paid back in the same coins’; *Binoy Kongar* in another interview told the women to show their bumps to *Mamata Banerjee* if she comes. These quotes have impacted negatively around one crores voters.’

Politically in West Bengal there was a status-quo and opposition rested only in ‘peanut people’ according to *Sougata Mukhopadhyay*. Having said that it can be argued that the newspapers that had staunch anti-left editorial policy in West Bengal, like *The Statesman* and *Bartaman*, had large circulation and therefore the anti-left aspirations in West Bengal were not negligible. The period between 1991 and 2000 was important in the sense that the

development of capitalism was in making both in India and West Bengal. This rise in capitalist trend gave rise to the increase of the middle class within the society. The ratio of the number of middle class families to total population in West Bengal increased between 2000 and 2011 (*Bhattacharya*, Interview 2011). The emergence of strong middle class including upper middle class within the society in last 11 years in West Bengal was an important characteristic feature.

With the advent of numerous private TV channels it became necessary to generate fund and that came through advertisements. Thus there was an increase in the advertisers. Now advertisers advertised to sell the product and certainly there was an increase in the number of consumers to buy the commodities or products in West Bengal. The advertisements in the TV channels were mainly lifestyle oriented commodities like cars, washing machines and others which confirmed the fact that the level of affluence did increase in the society. This was not the phenomenon in the late seventies or eighties. Thus the emergent middle and the upper middle class within the society, according to *Bhattacharya*, had an impact on the society as a whole. The salary structure in private, state and central government did undergo rigorous changes within the last decade. This has contributed to the rise of the affluent middle class within the society. They catered the media and vice versa. The national English newspapers like *The Hindu*, *Times of India (TOI)* started their Kolkata edition. Even the Bengali newspapers started involving the district pages for different districts in West Bengal and started their district editions. This contributed to the increase in the circulation of the newspapers. In the rural areas also there has been an increase in

the percentage of people above the poverty line that the LFG used to propagate.

*Debasis Bhattacharya* affirmed this to be obviously one of the achievements of the LFG in West Bengal. The people in Above Poverty Line (APL) level could buy newspapers and TV. Therefore the media in West Bengal did become powerful in the last decade.

According to *Anjan Bandopadhyay* of *24 Ghanta*, the media adopted itself to the dramatic political polarisation within the society in West Bengal. He eloquently stated,

‘But the reflection of the society on media is definitely on such a large scale was however a very new phenomenon. Now the question comes whether this role is justified or not? Definitely not. Media should never become polarized. Public don’t expect media to be playing such a crude role. But media is also a part of the society and thus this was not unnatural... In case of West Bengal, since the left was in power for such a long period, so most of the media houses played an anti-establishment role. I am not bringing in any political inclination...’

The television channels made a greater effort of representing both the left and the non-left according to their editorial policies. People in West Bengal became aware of the political affiliations of the media both electronic and newspaper. But this was not true for all the media houses and in that sense the objectivity of the news was maintained by some of the media houses. Generally the national media was more eager to present the issues and therefore the political inclination was more issue based (*Mukhopadhyay*, Interview 2011).

In West Bengal however the media did play a social role and had representation of the marginalised given the fact that the incident of *Amlasol*<sup>59</sup> in the West Medinipore district of the state was published in one of the mainstream vernacular newspapers. Hunger was claiming lives in the village of *Amlasol* in a state even in the late nineties where communists were in power for almost three decades.

*Sougata Mukhopadhyay* argued this to be the social commitment of the media on greater public interest. This experience of the public got invigorated with the live coverage of the television channels in real time and can be referred to as the empowerment. However this real time coverage of the media in political situations invited outrage by the political parties as happened while covering the *Nandigram* incident by the CNN-IBN. The OB van of CNN-IBN was shattered; the camera and the mobile phones were taken away and the journalists were held hostage as narrated by *Sougata Mukhopadhyay* in his interview. The political clashes became frequent in West Bengal post 2006. The media in West Bengal due to the political polarisation had to be cautious and calculative to be on the right side of the political clash or else were attacked irrespective of the political parties. These attacks were on the rise since the public could easily identify the political affiliation of a news channel or newspaper which was either in agreement or segregation with their political interest. Therefore the political outrages on the media made it impossible for them to cover the entire situation irrespective of political affiliations.

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<sup>59</sup> *Amlasole* is a village in the southwest of West Midnapore district, in the state of West Bengal, where there was starvation deaths in 2004. The media highlighted this news and questioned the LFG on the issue (Mahato and Mahato, 2007:44; Chaudhuri, A.K., 2007:299)

Another important phenomenon was the cultivation of the political personnel within the media houses by both the CPI (M) and the opposition. The news in the media in West Bengal had the compulsion of reflecting the editorial policy of the media houses. Therefore objectivity was not a daily phenomenon in the regional media houses in West Bengal. *Smt. Ajitha Menon* in her interview shared the observation that even the journalists in West Bengal were polarised on political lines. The phenomenon of political polarisation was nothing new in India as this practise, according to *Menon*, prevailed in the southern part of the country where political parties own media houses. According to *Guha Thakurta* wherever there were bipolar contests like in Kerala, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, there the media were also polarized strongly along political lines. But the naked media polarisation that West Bengal witnessed was first of its kind in the country and *Menon* vehemently stated,

‘Discontent in the society is quite possible after along 34years rule in a state. People voted in huge numbers against the government. So that is true to an extent. Media can talk about it. But media cannot say that the other side is god incarnate.’ (Interview, 2011)

#### **7.4 On relation between the LFG and the Media in West Bengal**

The first day when the LFG took oath in the Assembly on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1977, *Debasis Bhattacharya* recollected, immediately after there was a five minute meeting of the cabinet among the five cabinet ministers who were sworn in that day were *Jyoti Basu*, Finance Minister *Dr. Ashok Mitra*, Labour minister *Krishnapada Ghosh*, Forward Block (FB) leader *Dr. Kanailal Bhattacharya* and Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) leader *Jatin Chakraborty*. They took two decisions in their

first meeting, one, to appoint *Snehangshu Acharya* as Advocate general and secondly, to free all the political prisoners unconditionally irrespective of the political parties. The newspapers were critical of the second decision as they opined that there would be a complete unrest of law and order. There were severe criticisms in the editorials of the newspapers. Then the first Panchayat election was on 4<sup>th</sup> June 1978. There were many court cases at that time and also

*Operation Barga* was undertaken (chapter 6). According to *Bhattacharya*, the journalists at that time, even the owners of the newspapers were unconscious about *Panchayat* or land reform. That was why they could not criticize it very well though they never appreciated. The press did not know, as *Debasis Bhattacharya* advocated, what could be the implications of taking away land from big land owners and distributing them within the small land less labourers and were suspicious of the fact that if the *bargadars* were recorded then there would be no more evictions next year.

There were some general notions that the LFG was against private ownership and they would not let the business of individuals flourish in West Bengal. As *Bhattacharya* further recollected, the then Chief minister *Jyoti Basu* in a meeting with the businessmen addressed this concern and told that due to constitutional structure they did not have the right to cease private property. Therefore individual business could be done but the LFG conditioned that the fair labour practice was essential to run a business. This was very important and was expected from a left government, though it was equally hard to institutionalise fair labour practice in the age of capitalism.

There was a sense of insecurity about the sustainability of the LFG in the initial years which gradually attenuated with it being re-elected to power in the consecutive terms (chapter 5). The dissolve of fear provided the scope for the LFG to think about consolidation of the vote bank, electoral age and politics. Gradually they renewed the decision of encouraging only small and medium scale industries to large scale industries in collaboration with the big businesses in 1985 like the Haldia Petrochemicals with Goenka. Haldia Petrochemical was not only a large scale industry but it was highly technical in its operations. *Bhattacharya* viewed this as either a deviation or an ideological compromise and referred this as a rightist turn post 1985; which reached a crescendo, according to *Chattopadhyay*, during *Buddhadeb Bhattacharya's* tenure. *Ghosal* on the other hand referred this as a tactical line adopted by the CPI (M) for the survival of the LFG. However the main reason for this by the LFG was creating employment in the state (chapter 5).

The state government did not have enough finance to create industry. Thus collaboration was sought with the regional businesses. This step was viewed by the media as a political decision to consolidate its position in the electoral politics. The media accordingly changed its position and a shift in their editorial policy about the LFG was noticed. From then, as *Debasis Bhattacharya* stated in his interview, *Jyoti Basu* came to be known as the pragmatic leader and not the leader of the mass movement. This generated considerable debate within the party, as *Bhattacharya* recollected, in the state conference held at *Tollygunj* in 1985 before 12<sup>th</sup> Party congress of the CPI (M). But this issue was clinched in the conferences. In continuation with this deviation, according to *Bhattacharya*, *Jyoti Basu* placed

the New Industrial Policy on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1994. This policy welcomed the Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and the big bourgeoisie. Immediately after that on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1995 at Netaji Indoor Stadium in Kolkata, there was a three day conference of the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) and was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister *Narashimha Rao*. In that a large team of businessmen in concord flight came to participate in Kolkata. The Prime Minister of Singapore also participated in the conference. In the same year, as recollected by *Bhattacharya*, *Jyoti Basu* went to America. The then state ambassador of America *Siddhartha Sankar Ray* arranged the diplomats and business men. The left was criticised to deviate from more than half of what it decided to be its industrial policy during the initial days of the LFG in power. The unfair labour practice increased. The hire and fire policy came into being, the provident fund was cheated, gratuity was not given. After all as *Guha Thakurata* claimed in his interview, the businessmen were there to make business and they would continue to do so irrespective of political transformations.

The media gets influenced by the business and political interests of the corporate and so interestingly, according to *Bhattacharya*, the anti campaign of the media subsided with the shift in the industrial policy of the LFG in West Bengal. This transition was claimed to have affected the internal politics of the CPI (M) where an industrial minister was included in the state committee whereas the labour minister was excluded. According to *Bhattacharya* this was due to the political understanding regarding the importance of labour and industry which got reflected in the composition of the party committees.



*Chattopadhyay* recollected that the role of the media in West Bengal changed with the different reform phases of the LFG,

‘So consciously the left apart from the *Ganashakti* tried to take advantage of *Aajkal*.

*Aajkal* became rabidly pro-left. Even 24ghanta from day one till date is recognized as an organ of the left by the general people. Thus the left from being a passive observer turned to be the active participant in the media politics.’

The instigation of television bites could not be resisted both within the party and the LFG. The CPI (M) observed that it was not only the newspapers but also the electronic channels where they need to intervene (chapter 6). This was a planned and deliberate attempt of the left to exploit the media but the media, as *Ghosal* cogently stated, did not take the responsibility to cater the left. The advertisements on the achievements of the LFG and on various other schemes were given in the newspapers and the television channels. But the advertisements as *Debasish Bhattacharya* cogently stated in his interview was only given to pro-left media houses. He equated this change with the change in the European countries. Similarly, as *Ghosal* argued, that the CPI (M) boycotted certain television channels and newspapers because they criticised the left. Therefore according to *Ghosal*, the left did not honour the political pluralism that India as democracy practiced. According to him the old school of communists knew how to exploit the media and had the craftsmanship within. Similar argument was made by *Paranjoy Guha Thakurta* that the left needs to be reminded that, ‘[A]s far as meeting the press is concerned, you need people who are articulate, but you also need to get hold of the arrogance’.

However the national media was considered to be sympathetic towards the left by *Amitabha Raychoudhury* of the PTI because of the lifestyle they maintained. But *Raychoudhury* from a national media perspective had similar observation that the news about the LFG's performance or policies were not provided to the newspapers. Even there was limited number of press conferences coordinated by the left at the centre and therefore the national media did not have the resources to make stories on the LFG. He mentioned that the national newspapers used to cover the central ministry to receive news and collected information from the pamphlets and handouts that were supplied by the state governments. However West Bengal became an interest in the national media since the Singur incident. According to *Raychoudhury*,

‘WB became a projection after Singur and Nandigram. But again there was the banner of TATA or a new complication over land acquisition involved. The journalists were not aware of the historical land reform process in West Bengal because there were no specific projections! Whenever police gets involved in the process, media become anti-police. The images of poor people bitten up by the police had severe reactions all over. Sources say that the competitors of TATA actually funded the discontent, mostly a corporate battle. Again after many years the anti-left movement gained a momentum in India and the media grabbed it to its own interest.’ (Interview 2011)

Thus *Raychoudhury* re-echoed the observation of Sainath and *Chakraborty* (chapter 6) that it was the corporate investment in land that brought the peasants in news and not the social responsibility.

Another problematic tendency to reach the public through the media was observed post liberalisation. This approach alienated the left from the rural voters since the

traditional one to one communication was gradually getting replaced.

*Bhattacharya* claimed that in the Assembly election 2011 (though no research was conducted to prove the claim) the left got considerable vote from the urban middle and higher classes but not from the rural populace. The subaltern vote went to the opposition. The style of election campaign also changed for the left. They became more comfortable in well decorated vehicle as compared to the opposition leader who walked with the public in the election campaign. This was provided as an example by *Bhattacharya* but in reality the sense of being in power and authority had an impact on the behavioural approach of the CPI (M) in West Bengal. The Assembly election campaigns, with time, transformed itself into a '*jatra style*' as Banerjee (2006: 864) argued,

‘In West Bengal’s assembly elections, foreplay seems to be more important than the actual act. More than the polls and their results, it is the pre-poll excitement that stimulates the mind of the Bengali electorate. To them, the climax – or the anti-climax (?) – is a foregone conclusion. Like the audience of the popular Bengali folk theatre *jatra*, they know who will be the winner. Yet, they participate with gusto in the public meetings, follow with avid interest every bit of intrigue that is hatched by political rivals, vicariously enjoy the gossip about amorous escapades, or financial scams of sitting MLAs, and lap up all the sensational news (both authentic and fictitious) dished up by the newspapers. Added to this, of course, is the excitement of watching the rise in the murder graph– political workers and polling agents getting killed in inter-party clashes on the eve of the election. The *jatra* thus gets re-enacted in the socio-political stage of West Bengal during every election with all the ingredients of a tragi-comic opera. We have sleaze, sex and violence – with a bit of political rhetoric thrown in. What more do we need for a perfect electoral ad-campaign?’

There was thus a shift in the support base of the left during 2000-2011 periods. This phase between 2000 and 2011 can further be divided into two periods, one from 2000-2006 and the other 2006-2011. The political situation in West Bengal was at its worst during 2006-2011 periods. The left after winning the Assembly election in 2006 with overwhelming majority unleashed its agenda of industrialisation by employing administration. Critics argue that in this interlude the coalition partners, the mass organisations and even the CPI (M) were not involved organisationally but were informed by the LFG (*Ghosal*, Interview 2011, *Chattopadhyay*, Interview 2011). Any developmental agendas of the left previously used to involve the coalition parties or the mass organisations to reach the mass and initiate a dialogue. This dialogue was mostly to address the conflicts and resistance within the society and a general consensus building approach was followed. This did not happen in Singur and Nandigram (*Menon*, Interview 2011). However during *Singur* and *Nandigram* this process was not undertaken and the peasant organisation of the left *Kishan Sabha* felt alienated from this entire process.

The LFG received candid support from the two big media houses ABP and TOI who also opposed the *Singur* movement by the peasants. It was because of the interest of the media in industry, as *Ghosal* stated, that the ABP supported the LFG's policy. The reason behind this support, as *Bhattacharya* viewed was the advertisement by the TATA motors that these two media houses received. The relatively smaller media who did not receive the support of the LFG supported the peasant movement and the opposition. The shift in the left political decision was

portrayed in the newspapers and other media as from confiscation of property to the investment of private capital. The left having no defined political line post-Soviet, as argued by *Bhattacharya* and *Ghosal* in their interviews, decided to adopt itself to the developmental path of the China. But at the same time as claimed by the critics that the rural poverty in West Bengal was high in compared to other states in India. I have mentioned the incident of *Amlasole* before in this chapter. Now poverty, according to Chattopadhyay (2010: 89) in the thesis

*Analysis of Poverty in Rural West Bengal: A Spatial Approach*, generates from the ‘scarcity of resources’ and both the level of education and geographical factors contribute to the ‘differences in the incidences of poverty’. The suggestions put forward by Chattopadhyay (2011) in his article *Inter-Regional Poverty Comparisons: Case of West Bengal*, was the need to formulate policy by the state government while taking the poverty alleviation programme taking into consideration how effectively the resources could be utilised and at the same time attention should be given to raise the level of education, governmental aids and generate employment opportunities.

According to the statistics in the press note of the Central Planning Commission (2013: 6), during 2011-12, West Bengal was the fifth largest state in population below poverty line after Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Another statistics by the Planning Commission<sup>60</sup> showed the percentile decrease in the population below the poverty line from 1973 to 1994. In that report West

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<sup>60</sup> Poverty and Social Development in West Bengal, [Online], Available at <[http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/sereport/ser/wbm/wbm\\_ch2.pdf](http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/sereport/ser/wbm/wbm_ch2.pdf)> [Accessed on 08.11.2013]

Bengal had the highest percentage (73.16) of population below the poverty line in 1973-74 which decreased over the years to 40.80 in 1993-94. The report (p.17) addressed this decrease as ‘a visible fall in poverty proportions’ for the state of West Bengal in compared to the other states in India. Therefore the argument about the rural poverty being high as compared to other states in India is partly true owing to the statistics of the planning commission, but at the same time the rate of decrease in the percentage of population below poverty line from the time when LFG came to power has been consistent. Thus representing the data and statistics politically has been one of the challenging consequences of political polarisation in West Bengal.

Some of the most vibrant criticisms about the LFG in the media were the declining standard of the government schools, the problems in the health sector and the constraints in identifying the next step in supporting the land reform achievements in West Bengal. The LFG was successful in creating employment and increasing the salaries but did not monitor the consequences on the basis of evaluation (*Bhattacharya*, Interview 2011). The inclination of the government in West Bengal shifted from marginalised towards the middle class, according to the *Bhattacharya* and hence the class approach towards development in the society got changed. This transformation in policy thoughts of the LFG was sometimes criticised to be the contribution of an individual rather than the CPI (M) by saying,

‘The collapse of Soviet was due to Gorbachev as seen by CPIM, Naxalites say because of Khrushchev’s revisionism and CPI says because of Stalin’s exercise. Now Buddhadeb

Bhattacharya told that he do not believe in three of these but identified the lack of human rights within the socialist structure.’ - *Debasis Bhattacharya* (Interview, 2011)

This is not the unique form of criticism for West Bengal but can be supported by the narratives from history. The collapse of the socialist system in history has always been the responsibility of an individual rather than the collective. I would argue this to be a fallacy that resists the rectification analysis of the system of socialism. A collective responsibility is stronger than the individual responsibility which the forces of capitalism has magnificently utilised to weaken the political and structural analysis of the decline. This is one of the important findings that the researcher has also mentioned in *The Discussion* chapter.

However though the CPI (M) did not have a well defined and declared media policy but they participated in the media debates and programme. The choice of selecting the media channel or newspaper to participate was entirely on the discretion of the party. *Ghosal* criticised that *Buddhadeb Bhattacharya*, the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, chose to be interviewed by *The Times of India* and *Malayama Manorama* but not the *ABP*. The left also maintained a considerable distance from the mainstream media as they had the confidence on their own organisational structure and political propagation through their press and publications (chapter 6 and 8). It was not possible for the newspapers to be influential in every corner of the society owing to the level of literacy. Therefore the left knew that no matter what the bourgeois media wrote about them they were organisationally strong enough to hold meetings and neutralise any effect. The confidence of the left in their organisation and decisions gradually got

transformed to arrogance in the sense that the left started anticipating their decisions to be always correct and had to be accepted by the public.

In the age of technology literacy was not a constraint to get informed. The audio-visual media had a revolutionary effect on the people both in India and in West Bengal (chapter 4 and 8). Thus from the late nineties the CPI (M) had no option but to communicate with the media. *Bandopadhyay* however mentioned that though the CPI (M) was conservative in the initial decade but gradually they overcame. The element of mutual distrust was always there because of the political polarisation of the media. But as *Ghosal* mentioned that the media cannot operate according to the dictum of a political party and the left would be infantile in thinking that all the newspapers would provide a similar support as *Ganashakti*. He further argued,

‘This is not a post revolutionary society in West Bengal. Not all newspaper is going to be *Ganashakti* and therefore they need to utilise and exploit the media. The media is guided by the capitalist ideology but also giving space to free market. The regional media have had always a polarised stand in the states because they are still behind in the race of capitalist development. *Ajkal* needs to depend on state government advertisements but the ABP do not. Similarly the big media houses do not need to take a stand because they are not dependant for the revenue generation. They are answerable to the industrialists but not the political parties. Media management is a part of the system and the political parties must take that seriously. The editorial policy of the media is the corporate editorial policy. Once I sarcastically remarked that the editors should be called the editorial managers, journalists could be called editorial executives. So then the editorial executives are implementing the corporate editorial policy of the big house. The communist party



should think that after being in the parliamentary democracy they have lost their character, and then it is no point arguing media to be a demon.’

The effect of the audio-visual media was strongly felt during the peasant unrest in *Singur*. As *Smt. Ajitha Menon* claimed in her interview that the number of farmers who were willing to give their lands were majority in numerical sense but the discontent of the minority got dramatically reflected in the media. The land acquired for the railway project was much more and the compensation was also less than what the farmers were offered in *Singur* (chapter 5). The media did receive advertisements on the multi-cropped lands to be acquired by the railways in the state and there was no discontent within the farmers as *Menon* argues. The media also did not bother to comment on the acquisition of the multi-cropped lands for railways. Therefore the opposition in the media on the question of *Singur* was political rather than developmental. But as previously mentioned the big media houses did support the LFG’s decision on industry in *Singur* but the vehement opposition from the media came after the mass firing at *Nandigram*. *Ghosal* said,

‘We supported in Singur but after the mass firing in Nandigram we started to oppose the LF government on the issue of bad governance. Now we supported the LF because they supported capitalism. The big newspaper has a market economy. The media can play the role of a catalyst within a big mass consent. But we cannot determine a force. Media is dictated by the market. When we supported in Singur our circulation dropped by 50,000. Our editor told that no matter the circulation dropped we would support because that is the commitment of capitalism. Nirupam Sen told that their agrarian base was collapsing because of Singur. The farmers felt alienated. Nirupam Sen told that, ‘Our party needs to

give a social cost and we are prepared for that. We know we are doing it for betterment.’  
We as a media house were also prepared to bear the circulation cost. But the Nandigram incident gave the whole situation u-turn.’

*Ghosal* further explained this situation of left getting back to power for consecutive terms as the psychological constraint of the Bengali community towards accepting change. He insisted that if the Bengali community were consumerist in nature, then this change in the government would have come in earlier. *Chattopadhyay* in his interview however negated the fact to say that,

‘People in West Bengal voted consciously. We forget one thing, because of the preponderance of the CPIM that it was from day one a coalition government. Also the difference in voting percentage between the left and the opposition was 7-8 percent. Therefore there were two preconditions to topple the LFG, one, to disunite the left coalition, and second, to swing the difference in voting percentage in favour of the opposition. Precisely the first condition was never fulfilled, but the second condition was fulfilled first in the 2009 Loksabha elections and then in the state Assembly election 2011 by consolidating the opposition vote. So it will be completely simplistic to say that the psychology of the Bengali inertia assisted in the longevity of the government. The LFG had the people’s mandate.’

### **7.5 On the debacle of the LFG: the raison d’être by Media**

Power was the cementing factor behind the unity within the LFG. As *Chattopadhyay* said,

‘CPIM is the most dominant partner in this coalition so we wrongly treat the government to be by the CPIM. This government has 13 components. There are parties in this coalition whose vote share is 0.1% to less. It was decided in 1977 by stalwart leaders that

if the left needs to be in power then they need to unite under a single banner, so that there remains no options to use our disunity by the opponents. The architect of that coalition was *Jyotibabu*. That coalition remained intact for the 34 long years and it still remains so.'

The people of West Bengal were in dilemma on a concrete political alternative to the LFG and were unsure of the consequences of ousting the LFG out of power. The media's contribution to public's realisation by organising and categorising possible political alternative in the public sphere was argued as a major contribution of the media in West Bengal.

According to *Guha Thakurta*, in 2006 after the LFG was brought back to power, the Chief Minister *Buddhadeb Bhattacharya* was projected as the harbinger of change for West Bengal by the *ABP*. *Chattopadhyay* also referred to in his interview about the creation of 'Brand Buddha' by him while he was working as an Editor in *ABP*. The same media criticised the left after the incidents in *Nandigram*. Therefore post 2008 the elections in West Bengal were projecting a clear anti-left mandate. The anti-left votes had always been there in West Bengal since the mid-eighties. The percentage of votes received by the left was not huge. But the representative form of democracy that India constitutionally enjoys made it easier for the left to be in power for consecutive terms, as *Chattopadhyay* argue,

'In a form of democracy which is actually first past the poll, where one after gaining 48% vote get three fourth majority in 294 seats and 30% vote gives only 30 seats. The left cannot be held responsible for it. This is the problem of Indian constitution. There is no concept of proportional representation. Left have always secured the advantage of this arithmetic. Left was known as 'garib manusher party' (Party of the downtrodden). Left

always won the votes of the downtrodden till 2009, when finally its rural base got disturbed.’

Critics also argue that the anti-left aspirations were subdued by the ‘machinery of the left’ (*Sougata Mukhopadhyay*, Interview 2011) and they hardly got transferred to ballot boxes. There were electoral malpractices which developed within the CPI (M) to retain power. These had camouflaging effect and also invited negative image of the CPI (M). *Debasis Bhattacharya* mentioned in his interview,

‘The number or percentage of votes was badly inflated. For example on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2005, in the Kolkata corporation election, the CPI (M) candidate in *Kashipur* constituency got 82% vote. Whereas the North Kolkata CPI (M) candidate Md. Salim in 2009 Lok Sabha election got 40% vote in the same ward. Then in four years the vote decreased by 42%. However the incidents in Singur and Nandigram were portrayed as a reason for this decrease. But they did not have the potential to decrease the vote by 40%. The opponents were actually weak and rigging was done to show the figure as 82%. There were constituencies where the total number of vote polled was 1497 and CPIM got 1494, how was this possible? I asked Gautam Dev about it and he told it is not fair, it is better to lose 3 seats. This started from 1990 with the Kolkata corporation election. This created a camouflaging effect.’

But post 2008 elections regenerated enthusiasm both within the public and the media. This was the first time that the public realised that the LFG in West Bengal can be defeated. It was interesting for the media since it against political status-quo which circumvents democratic practice. The strong editorials in the newspapers and the coverage of the news in the electronic channels projected the growing discontent in the society continuously to built consensus within the

public. The media was argued to be funded by the opposition who had corporate support as well (chapter 6). *Raychoudhury* mentioned that the Star group was national and they backed the opposition in West Bengal. The discontents highlighted in the media were regarding the financial stability, employment conditions, the status of the health and education sector, long standing political grudges, and obviously the issue of land for the large rural electorate.

The CPI (M) in West Bengal had the impression, as *Mukhopadhyay* delineated, that the withdrawal of their support from the UPA on the issue of the nuclear deal had an impact on the election results, but this proposition of argument was vehemently criticised by the party central committee leadership. Instead it was the regional issues that generated the discontent within the public and the land acquisition process of the LFG was also criticised by the central committee of the CPI (M) (as discussed in the previous chapter 6). There were mixed reactions from the media persons interviewed, on the effect of the withdrawal of support of the left from the UPA on the West Bengal Assembly election 2011. According to *Chattopadhyay*, consolidation of the opposition under a single banner to fight against the left in West Bengal was becoming inevitable as,

‘Irrespective of where left stands there were every possibility of an understanding between the Indian National Congress and the TMC in West Bengal. This was because Congress had a very bitter experience of working with the left in the centre. The left did back seat driving for the last four and a half years. They were offered positions like Deputy Prime Ministership (to *Somnath Chatterjee*) in the government but they rejected. They were offered four other cabinet but, they did not take it! However they became the real master. They dictated every step of the central government. So there was turmoil

over every issue in the central government. Congress had to consider every issue because if the left withdrew the support then the government would not survive. So this was inevitable that the Congress would no longer tolerate the left. So I believe this to be an extraneous factor which has played a very marginal role may be in the urban section of West Bengal. This could have been an issue in the Lok Sabha but not two years after in Assembly.’

This view was supported by *Raychoudhury* and he mentioned about the merging of the industrial capital with politics including some operational malpractices during the election (though not proven) in West Bengal as another form of conspiracy against the left. He mentioned,

‘This was because of a funded conspiracy against the left. Also the congress wanted to take the revenge on the left, because they withdrew support from the UPA. There was some hidden funding, though the source was not clear. There were some problems in the voting machine. In an informal talk with the election commissions’ technical expert, I came to know that this can be done and has been done. This was not only in case of West Bengal, but also in case of other states, like Karnataka. The left has also given memorandum, but has not taken up the case after the election results were declared. Some international conspiracy was also mentioned by the party leadership, but was nothing very concrete. The Indo-US deal was at stake, so there could have been possible funding by the US. America sent millions of dollars for IC814 (which was hijacked) and *Jashwant Singh* was involved.’

It was thus argued to be both the regional and national factors responsible for the decline of the LFG. The media neither contributed to the stability of the LFG nor was it responsible for the decline of the LFG. As *Bandopadhyay* mentioned,

‘But the stability of the government was not dependant on the media. It would be a very simplistic assumption to think that because the media reach was nominal in pre liberalized India, therefore the left survived! Now media reach has definitely increased, but the media reached the spot when the state government committed a mistake in Singur land acquisition, or in Nandigram. The question is, were there no mistakes before? There may have been, but they were small or negligible in case of impact. Media played a very small role which was supported by the civil society movement. So it was basically because of the culmination of various factors that contributed to the end of the Left... Was

*Anna Hazare* created by the media? No. Similarly the land issue was not created by the media. The land movement was already nurtured within the society. The farmers’ discontent was already within the society of West Bengal. These were again highlighted by the political parties. Why the media could not create issue or generate a mass movement on the farmers’ suicide in *Bidharbha*? It is because there are no certain culmination points. Issues are created in the grounds.’

Industrialisation as an agenda of the left though was considered to be the correct decision by the media professionals but the process of implementing was fallacious. It became responsible for the decline of the left in West Bengal.

*Chattopadhyay* cogently stated as,

‘The agenda of industrialisation was not bad but it was the implementation of the agenda that dig the burial. The destination was right but the methodology was wrong. Why the land is *Singur*, it could have been somewhere else. The land seemed to be lucrative but it was a multi cropped land. The left thought that they were 235 and so they can pursue anything they think! The party was not well informed. The first day TATA went to *Singur* was chased by the villagers. The situation went from bad to worst. But still I think that if the government would not have fumbled and could have manufactured hundred NANO cars from that industry the agitation would have died down. The people of West

Bengal have not seen such an industry after *Haldia* Petrochemicals. But *Haldia* is so hi-tech that manpower is not much needed there. But an automobile industry would have given rise to hundreds of tertiary sectors and generated income. So the question of the media is why did *Buddhababu* retreat? Any decision by any government has to be backed by the moral support of conviction like Margaret Thatcher did in England. This is where *Buddhababu* lacked. CPIM or *Buddhadeb Bhattacharya* told in response that ‘this is our compulsion!’ However if they could justify and said that, ‘this is the only way out and TATA will build the industry here. No matter if our government was defeated!’, then that could have saved the government! They should have exercised the political power here. But instead they started withdrawing themselves and the more *Buddhadeb* did it, the more he lost the battle. This is the saga of Singur.’

There was also a communication gap, as *Smt. Ajitha Menon* argued in her interview with the researcher, on the agenda of industrialisation between the LFG and the public in West Bengal which was utilised by the opposition and the chasing media who felt alienated. According to *Menon*,

‘The left policies were an alternative and the process of industrialisation was the obvious step to be taken. But that became the key issue for their downfall. It was because that they didn’t initiate the deliberation of the policy in the public domain. There was a complete misunderstanding between the government in WB and what the people thought in WB. Say for example in the case of Nandigram, the government failed completely to talk to the general people before issuing a notice for land acquisition. Eventually the other side had the opportunity to tell the people that the government is going to take away your land.’

The developmental statistics according to her in West Bengal were quite positive in respect to the whole country but that did not get reflected in the media.



*Raychoudhury* argued this to be a lack of understanding of the untrained journalists or new comers in the field of journalism nationally as because the fertility question while acquiring land in West Bengal for development was different from that of Rajasthan. However, the media in West Bengal, according to *Smt. Ajitha Menon* projected ‘distorted facts or presented pseudo-facts’ which got absorbed in the public. The left were not politically capable to convince the mass about the transition from agriculture to industry in the state of West Bengal.

*Ghosal* indicated a perilous tendency where the pseudo-left got accepted to the public as an alternative of the left. He said,

‘*Prabhat Patnaik* is raging a debate and I think that to be very important. He has mentioned about the deviation of the people from the left to the right wing. Public are getting wrong notion in thinking that the CPIM couldn’t give us socialism but the right wing party can give them the same. This is dangerous. *Mamata Banerjee*<sup>61</sup> is pseudo-left. He compared this with the Natzi party of Hitler.’

The media personnel interviewed as felt that the mutual dependence relationship between the left and the media should not be expected. *Bandopadhyay* believed that the media in West Bengal did reflect the policies of the LFG but media should not act as the spokesperson of the government. On the other hand the media should not expect news to be coming to them because it is their duty to collect and collate materials to make news. Thus either way he contested the notion of dependence of the government and the media.

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<sup>61</sup> Smt. Mamata Banerjee is presently the Chief Minister of West Bengal and the leader of the TMC.

Another imperative factor was the constraint of the left to spread in other states except the three states of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. The crisis of the left in projecting young leaders also created a sense of leadership gap within the party and the mass (chapter 6).

The CPI (M) on the other hand held media responsible towards aggravating the anti-left sentiments within the public either by being a dominant consent maker or a content manufacturer (chapter 6). But *Bandopadhyay* argued that,

‘I believe that media is basically reflective. The reflection may be limited or limitless sometimes. But not manufacturing consent.’

The journalists interviewed were more or less on the same line of thought by saying that the media had no dominant role in the political transformation that took place in West Bengal and it was the transitional politics that the left failed to communicate articulately. *Ghosal* in this context mentioned,

‘Our circulation department were no more prepared to take the risk after Nandigram. So we went on to sell the discontent. Now there is a question whether we told and then the discontent arose or there was a discount which we actually sold? I believe we played the second role. The left tend to hold us responsible for their defeat. But this is an oversimplification. When we praise the left they don’t ask why the media whom they attribute as the agent of the imperialist force is actually praising them. Why did the left accept the praise in case of Singur? Therefore on the one hand they are trying to use the big media and on the other hand they are calling them the hand of the bourgeoisie. So either they need to go back in the 1970’s and tell the media are untouchables and should try to publish newspapers like ‘*Swadhinata*’ (Independence). But they can’t go back to that phase because time has moved on. Why *Ganashakti* became a morning daily? Why

there are film and sports page in *Ganashakti*? Why there was advertisement by Coca Cola in *Ganashakti*? This was because they wanted to survive in the market.’

Paranjoy Guha Thakurata also indicated that it was because of the deeds of the left that they should be held responsible for and not the media. He explained this by saying,

‘When you don’t know how to dance, you blame the floor! Did the media say to open fire on the mass in Nandigram? Did the media dictate the left on how they should take on the opposition in Singur? It is very easy to find a scapegoat in the media. It also establishes that the left are still in the denial mode and keep on indicating the media for their demise. Off course the media has changed, but it’s not for the left only but for everybody. There were no 24\*7 channels before 1991! In any democracy bad news is good news! Good news is no news! So when *Singur*, *Nandigram*, *Lalgarh* and *Netai* happen, there would be a huge number of media coverage. Even *Narendra Modi* complained about the riots which were showed 24\*7 after Gujarat riots! If you are heading a political party or a government and you are oblivious to the requirement of the 24\*7 television news channels, then who do you blame but yourself.’

According to the media since the LFG lost power in West Bengal they were cribbing than making introspections. *Guha Thakurta* advised the left instead of being humble and acknowledging the fact continued to be in the state of arrogance. To him, even after the defeat, the left continues to be eager for the new TMC government to make mistakes which they could take advantage of in their campaigns.

The fear factor about the left also got minimised with the election results post 2008. The tolerance level of the left declined with their continuous succession to

power and as *Chattopadhyay* pointed in his interview that West Bengal was the only state in India where people used to scan the situation before commenting on or criticising the left. There was a fear factor. According to *Chattopadhyay*,

‘Wherever Left is in power, in a totalitarian system or in the democracy, one of the major components is the sense of fear. The form or pattern of structure of the left is so embedded in the system when they are in power that people fear. This doesn’t mean that there was physical torture but the notion was ‘either you are with me or you are with the enemy!’

But with the evaporation of the fear factor the public became vocal. There were also inner party contradictions within the CPI (M). Two of the major coalition partners RSP and FB started criticizing the CPI (M) state leadership publicly in the media. All these factors together merged, acted against the LFG and its continuity to power. The party organization of the CPI (M) gradually lost its public connection. The interpersonal communication gradually got replaced with huge mass meetings and decorative political rallies.

### **7.6 On media self-criticisms**

The media persons interviewed for this thesis were also self-critical in saying that the media was in the business of profit making and media ethics changed its discourse while committing to the TRP factor. As *Ghosal* while commenting on media ethics said,

‘I won’t say that the ethics of the media has totally gone crazy. Now we don’t exactly know where the ethics starts and ethics stops! The stories having the social commitment don’t find space in the columns whereas the sensationalising of a story grabs space. So

morality, ethics don't have space in media. I was told by a senior intelligence officer that conscience is highly soluble in whisky.'

It was not that the media was not playing the role of the watchdog but at the same time the media had market compulsions. The growing discontent within the society when gets reflected in the media then the content of heterogeneity having its own market value supports the revenue generation for the media. This was also true for West Bengal. Moreover it was the media to decide the content, as argued by *Debasish Chakraborty* of *Ganashakti*,

'The media is only self-regulated, there is no control over media, people can't control it, and there are no special laws to control it. The communication between media and democracy is entirely one way. This is dangerous. Whatever media publishes or telecasts is entirely on their own will.' – *Debasish Chakraborty*, News Editor,

*Ganashakti* (2011)

Thus media decides to cover developmental issues if it involves corruption and violence since the news then would incur high Television Rating Point (TRP). But the journalists who spoke about development, have-nots, poverty alleviation, and poverty or food security, in general, were categorised as having left inclination (*Menon*, Interview 2011). Thus increasingly the media itself was divided into the left and right politics and given the fact that in India there is no media redresser body therefore objectivity is held captive in politics. Media ethics is getting increasingly dominated by money and power and as *Ghosal* said in his interview that there should be no doubt that media serves the interest of capitalism. According to *Ghosal*,

‘There is a conflict of class. The transition of the media from its feudal to bourgeois state is also a progress. The bourgeois media do not sense this class conflict. This can eventually lead to major discontent which can become a big event. Now farmers’ discontent is also a commodity in today’s market. This is actually the engulfing role of the media. The suicide of a farmer also raises TRP! The social antagonism has space in the bourgeois media. The media interest differs from state to state, sometimes it can be against some party or antiestablishment. We want that the *Ganashakti* should write against us, because the anti-CPIM client should then read our newspaper. This is not a monolithic structure.’

*Raychoudhury* also supported this view by mentioning that ‘[F]armers are represented in the news depending on the sale value in the media’. The transformation of the media in India did bring in huge changes in the structure and operations of the media that eventually shaped its policy making decisions in India. According to *Guha Thakurta*,

‘Now let us accept the fact that the media organizations are privately owned and controlled. A substantial section of them are more interested in reaching the consumers through advertisements than providing information to the viewers. This is a worldwide phenomenon. The market is more important than the society. Secondly, news is viewed as a commodity. The question of further dilution of norms and ethics comes afterwards. The audience gets dumped down. So because of the unique nature and character of the media, an intensification of competition does not result in the improvement of the standards.’

Therefore the media in West Bengal did not portray the farmer’s grief but media found potential anti-left mandate in the grief, as *Chattopadhyay* delineated,

‘Newspaper was always for the elite, by the elite and of the elite. Media took the land issue seriously in West Bengal because media found in it a political weapon to berate and criticize the left and not because they were unhappy about the farmers losing their land!’

Thus *Raychoudhury* argued in his interview that the media has no ideology of its own except the profit motive. Therefore new streams of citizen journalism are getting introduced in the field which is also a fascinating way of increasing circulation and profit. Contractual employments in the media are replacing the traditional system of employment. The hire and fire policy as previously mentioned in this chapter are becoming part of the media. Media in India is no more just a publication and fourth estate but it is an industry. Like *Ghosal* eloquently stated,

‘When I was the editor of a little magazine, it was not an industry. There I didn’t have the concern of revenue generation. But media as a industry is part of this social and political system. During the freedom movement media was a platform to fight against the imperialist force and that was a completely different perspective. But in the post independence period the emergence of the capitalist force and the emergence of the media should be studied jointly. Thus the media has developed itself like other service sectors did.’

### **7.7 On the revival of the relation**

*Raychoudhury* reflected on the question when asked on the revival of the relationship between the media and the left as,

‘CPI (M) needs to have a concrete media policy and documents. They need to have specific cell for the media people. They need to have a designated spokesperson. In WB this has to be done particularly. We get the news from the planning commission but that

should not be the case. There should be a proper analysis of the media, its class character. The left must also plan to have a channel of its own. The employee in the media is from a middle-class background not from the bourgeoisie background. So it can be dealt with if the policy of the left is correct. It is a question of media management.’

### **7.8 Can social media be the vanguard of democracy?**

Social media is not the central media discussed in this thesis. However reference to social media during the interview was made and hence a brief findings on how the journalists view this empowerment of the public needs discussion. There were mixed reactions on the power of social media. According to some social media have no objectivity and others felt that though it is still not accessible to the majority of the public in India, but it has the potential to present uncontrolled news in the public domain. The social media has posed real threats to the mainstream journalism and even the news shared by the public is getting picked up to write news articles. Chattopadhyay explained the situation as,

‘In today’s world people don’t have time to sit before a TV and watch news. They are watching on mobile phone. But in India this feature is not a phenomenon yet. The first reason of that is the underdeveloped status of India. There should be a level of affluence for the new media to proliferate. That size of the population is still small. But time is coming when working in a newspaper will be considered as off stream or historical. Television will be taken over by the internet. But social media is contributing to the urban movements like *Anna Hazare*. So the day is not far off when people will use the social media for every issue. But the size of the population will be constrained to start with. In the Assembly election 2011 in West Bengal the social media also played a role within the urban electorate. Now India is a young nation. 60% of its population is below the age of 25. So the youth is the determining factor in near future even in West Bengal. However



India is an exception in regard to the increasing number of newspaper when the whole world is decreasing its numbers.’

*Bandopadhyay* saw the interactivity in the social media as a probable threat to the more traditional media; whereas *Mukhopadhyay* questioned the objectivity of the social media.

## **7.9 Conclusion**

The interviewees from the media were more or less of the opinion that the discontent was already prevailing in the rural society in West Bengal because of the operative role of the LFG. Since media, whether newspaper or electronic, is answerable to the market and not to political parties, therefore their compulsion was to sell news as any other commodity in the public domain. The media did have an influential role in the public sphere and it assisted in concretizing the consensus against the left. But the media did not manufacture consent in West Bengal as narrated by the interviewees; instead it played a catalytic role by projecting anti-left discontent consistently.

The relationship between the left and the media was certainly not cordial and had certain mishandling from the left to make it worst. But it was more of an antipathy than antagonistic relation that the media viewed to prevail between them and the left in West Bengal during its tenure in power. It was also made clear that the LFG survived in West Bengal not because of any psychological inertia or since the newspapers were not strong enough to leave an impact on peoples mind. It survived because it was close to the public. It lasted because it reflected in itself a

government for the marginalized. It had the mandate of the public since it adopted the socio-political and cultural policies for the development of the marginalized in West Bengal society. Social security provided by the LFG was another reason for its survival.

The slogan for transition from agriculture to industry was argued to be a pertinent decision but the LFG could not communicate the relevance of the slogan within the mass. The three fundamental reasons as identified by the journalists interviewed behind this were, one, the mass organizations and the party members were unaware of the entire process and there were certain debates within the party on the agenda of transition, secondly, the overconfidence of the LFG and the CPI

(M) in land acquisition for industry which made the left feared usurper of land in the state, and thirdly, the arrogance and bureaucratic approach of the CPI (M) and the LFG which they inherited from the power of parliamentary democracy. However at the same time the media criticised the policy of the left for industrialisation by the private enterprises as a deviation in their ideological commitment towards socialism. The question although is how a regional state government can create conditions for socialism within a semi-feudal and semi-capitalist country like India. It could have been possible if the CPI (M) or the left would have been able to spread in other regions of the country rather than concentrating on the governments in only three states. If the central government be questioned as to why after so many years of independence India still have grave poverties, unemployment, social insecurities and malnutrition then a similar question can address the shortcomings of the left both in West Bengal and in

India. There were situations like the farmer's suicide, privatization of the public sectors, rising disparities between the classes, caste differentiation, atrocities against women which could have been the revolutionary agendas for the left to spread their ideological and political outlook.

The participation in the parliamentary democracy does not rule out the exercise for the extra-parliamentarian practices by making people aware of their social rights which have been one of the strengths of the left during the Independence movement in India. Arrogance comes with consistent power and bureaucracy assists in stabilising the power. Therefore both arrogance and bureaucracy became a part of the LFG which was an unexpected gesture for the public who voted them for seven consecutive terms. Their power factors prevailed both in the micro and macro sense which threaded the constituents of discontent within the society.

'Down with bourgeois media' was one of the popular slogans of the left. However they were unable to identify that there is an inherent conflict within the media on the class character. The media if considered from outside can be seen regimented and bourgeois in its structure. But when one looks in the media from inside it comprises of thousands of employees who cannot be classed as bourgeoisie. The journalists are employees of a media house who works to earn the daily subsistence as any other employee in any other organization. It is interesting in the sense that the media has the potential to change from within as it too has the required heterogeneity to revolt.

The question thus becomes deeper for not only the left but to anyone who wants a social development, to think whether the heterogeneous content within the media can be employed for the betterment of the society. The CPI (M) showed intolerance in dealing with the journalists who represented a politically polarized media house by profession but necessarily would not have subscribed to the politics personally. The journalists were assigned jobs to perform and get paid as any other labour would have been paid. Definitely with few exceptions which rested both with the left and the right stream journalists. But as mentioned in this and the previous chapter, the journalists faced humiliating situations, hostility and were made hostages in a state where the communists were in power for thirty four years. Certainly these situations as discussed by the media professionals in their interviews contributed towards the intolerance of the public who voted to de-stabilise the left.

## Part IV

Chapter 8 Discussion

Chapter 9 Conclusion

## **Chapter 8**

### **Discussion**

The thesis has so far provided the context and findings to the main research questions (chapter 2), addressed the dominant issues that influenced both the media<sup>62</sup> and the CPI (M) led LFG, and emphasised the relation and transformation of both in respect to the restructuring of the Indian economy. The findings (chapter 5 to chapter 7) are based on the documentary evidence, interviews and some academic articles from the Economic and Political Weekly as mentioned in the Methodology of this chapter. However the transition through which the media and the CPI (M) went was related to the reform in the Indian economy and therefore is ongoing. The period under study was the thirty four years which includes the first two decades of liberalisation in India. It also includes the reform that the LFG undertook after coming to power in 1977. This chapter reflects on the key findings of this research relating them to the broader body of work outlined in the literature review.

#### **9.1 NEP and the Media in West Bengal**

I start this section by presenting my findings on the impact of the NEP on the LFG and the media in West Bengal. Neoliberalism not only influenced the structure and ownership of the media but it also exerted influence on the relationship between the LFG and the media in West Bengal. The concentration and reach of

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<sup>62</sup> The term 'media' represents the newspapers in general, apart from the specific mentions of electronic media

the newspapers and media increased post 1991. This period also witnessed the growth of the regional media in India and in West Bengal. Hence the question of regional empowerment was invigorated with the growth of the regional media. This influence of the regional newspapers and media was not restricted to regional empowerment but also was linked to the growth of the regional political parties. Post 1991 observed increased representation of the regional parties in national politics. Therefore I have studied the growth of the regional newspapers and media, CPI (M)'s participation in national politics, and the transition and the transformation of the media.

India was gradually progressing towards economic liberalisation since the 1980s (p.120). It finally materialised in 1991 with India's acceptance of SAP which contributed towards the framing of the NEP (Derne, 2008, p.101; Deshpande and Sarkar, 1995, p.102; Mahajan, Pai, and Jayal, 1994; Mohanty and Hazary, 1997, p.101; Omvedt, 2005, p.102; Sinha, 2001, p.102; Singh and Saluja, 2005; p. 102). The NEP had direct influences on the media in India (Chakravartty and Sarikakis, 2006, p. 102; Singh and Saluja, 2005, p.102). The Nehruvian and the Gandhian model of the economy faced challenges from neoliberalism (Mahajan, Pai and Jayal, 1994, p.100).

Liberalisation post 1991 contributed towards raising the middle class aspirations and making them easy targets of the global media conglomerates (see Bhattacharya, p.226; Derne, 2008, p. 116 and 117; Deshpande, 2003, p.116; Jeffrey, 1997, p.113; Lakha, 1999, p.116; Thussu, 1998, p.119; Thussu, 1999, p.116). Similar arguments were voiced by the CPIM (2011) who felt that the

urban middle class were easy targets for the transnational media (p.152 and 163). They emphasised that their power rested in both the marginalised and the middle class in West Bengal (see Basu 1980, p.132). This was the period when a gradual shift in the policies of the LFG from the marginalised to the affluent was noticed which had adverse effect on LFG's reputation (see Bhattacharya, p.232). The leadership of the CPI (M) though mainly dominated by the middle class was conscious of the fact that their main strength in electoral politics came from the marginalised (this has been referred throughout by the leaderships interviewed for this thesis in chapter 6). But at the same time governance in a liberalised economy and electoral politics demands an inclusion of all sections of the society while framing policies. LFG was no exception.

The Hindu-upper caste dominance was lying in a quiescent form within the society till it was formally addressed by the fundamental forces in India post 1991 (see see Bhargava, 2006, p.104; Mahajan, Pai, and Jayal, 1994, p.103; CPIM, 2002, p.142; CPIM, 2008b, p.142). It was also interesting to see the rise of nationalism, religious fundamentalism and traditionalism in the wake of liberalisation-privatisation-globalisation in India. This rise of fundamentalism, as CPI (M) argued was not because of globalisation alone but it had to do with the collapse of the Soviet Union since it provoked an unchallenged market globalisation (p.145). The CPI (M) argued that the state should be separated from religion (see Bhargava, 1994, p.104). But at the same time to resist fundamentalism the CPI (M) decided to involve the state power by supporting the UPA in 2004 (see Iqtidar, 2012, p.104).



Therefore the above findings suggest it to be rather a postcolonial approach employed by both sides in India (Chatterjee, 1998, p.104). The NDA employed religion to defend nationalism and the CPI (M) used the state to resist religious fundamentalism (p.181-182). Either way it was the postcolonial resistance where it was optimistic about doing something novel by either defending nationalism or protecting the secular construct of India (see Gandhi, 1998, p.37).

India is a Nation-State. But its colonial past is deeply integrated into the institutional system (see Bhaba, 1994, p.37; Gandhi, 1998, p.37). This inevitably gives rise to a complex idea about national and postcolonial identity which invariably implants resistance against globalisation in a postcolonial society (see Bhaba, 1991, p.38; Gandhi, 1998, p.38; Jameson, 1991, p.38). Marxism on the other hand also speaks about building resistance against imperialism (Gandhi, 1998; Nandy, 2009, p.38). My findings for this thesis suggest that a dialogue between the two would be beneficial to address the resistance in a postcolonial Nation-State like India (also see Bartolovich, 2002, p.39; Ahmad, 1995, p.39; CPIM, 2011c, p.161; Surjeet, 2000, p.147).

Therefore depending on the theoretical framework and the findings of this thesis, I found that the contemporary Indian history, post Independence can be divided broadly into two phases, first a postcolonial India and the second continues from the first as postcolonial liberalised India. These two phases are precisely based on the structural adjustment of the Indian economy in 1991 (see Singh and Saluja, 2005, p.101-102). The Indian press and the broadcasting system till 1991 were carrying a colonial legacy (see Gurevitch et al., 1982, p.43; Herman and McChesney, 2004, p.45; Jeffrey, 2008, p.115) when the press and the

*Doordarshan* were mostly employed as a Central government propagandist along with the educational role, but rooted in the Indian economy (see Hazarika and Garg, 2008, p.118-119; Thussu, 1999, p.116). The second phase, post 1991, saw an influx of private media with the intention to depoliticise and sensationalise society on the basis of capitalist and corporatist ideals (see Iyer, 1994, p.121 and 123; Christians et. al., 2009; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Voltmer, 2012: 224) turning the media into power building blocks and citizens into consumers rooted in an open market economy (Kumari, 2008, p. 116). Therefore the media institutions in India certainly justify McQuail's (1987) claim that they give the reflection of and are a product of India's national history (p. 15).

With the rapid growth of the economy and the middle class, a more consumerist approach developed within the society which compelled *Doordarshan* to modify its programme and include entertainment along with the educative programmes (see Thussu, 1998 and 1999, p.116 and 117). The pluralist character of the Indian state made it easier for the global conglomerates to find an easy productive market to reap profits (See Hazarika and Garg, 2008, p.118-119). There was and is a conflict between two structures of media operations, one colonial and the other transnational that created a political imbroglio within the media institutions in India (also see Gupta and Sharma, 2006, p.42).

Development planning in India was done through the Planning Commission by the state which was replaced by the transnational hegemonic culture (Ahmed, 2008, p.100; Kumari, 2008, p.117; Shukla, 2005, p.100; Sinha 2001, p.99). The focus of economic policy in India shifted towards crude industrialisation,

commercialisation and corporatisation, neglecting agriculture, literacy, rural infrastructure development or labour intensive industry (Shukla, 2005, p.99). Similar effects were noticed post 1991 in the state of West Bengal (Basu, 1991b, p.139; CPIM, 2008b, p.138-139; Guha, 2004, p.138). There was a shift in the policy of the LFG from agrarian reform to industrialisation post 1980s which raised considerable debates within the party and the left coalition (Basu, 1982, p.138; Basu, 1991a, Basu, 1992, p.139, Basu, 1994b, p.140; Basu, 2008b, p.140).

Globalisation induced a competition within the economy which assisted in developing the regional market in India and in West Bengal. Not only India had the influence of 'Thatcherism and Reaganism' (Date, 2009, p.95) but West Bengal was no exception. In West Bengal also the policy of the left post 1991 changed and the New Industrial Policy in 1994 was constructed to invite capital intensive industries in the state (see Basu, 1992 and 1994a, 1994b, p.139). The LFG undertook industrial reform to consolidate the achievements of the agrarian reform and generate employment in the state (Basu, 1994b, p.140; CPIM, 2007, p.141). Thus the evolution of hybrid cultures and identities in India generated a third way of receiving globalisation through postcolonial reform and parliamentary communism (also see Gupta, 2001, p. 87 and 155; Kohli, 1983, p. 86-87) rather than adhering strictly to the normative approach. The left were criticised for their industrial reform policy in the state by the media and the academics (Banerjee and Roy, 2007, p.153; Bhaduri, 2007, p.153; Dasgupta, 1995, p.141). The CPI (M) on the other hand criticised the neoliberal policies of the central government as a threat to the India's sovereignty but undertook

postcolonial radical liberalised reform in the state for the common good of the people (Basu, 1995, p.142; Guha, 2007, p.151; Karat, 2011, p.146; Surjeet, 2001, p.144-145). The implementation of the industrial policy of the LFG created a sense of insecurity which developed discontent within the society (A CPIM Supporter, 2007, p.160).

Economic restructuring in India however had a decentralising effect on the media which empowered the regional societies with the vernacular media. This challenged the postcolonial elite's dominance of the mainstream English media promoting the pluralist structure of India widening the public sphere (See Neyazi, 2011, p.107). The rise of the vernacular media post-1991 in India created a sense of inclusion. The vernacular media gradually contributed towards developing the regional market (p.108). This growth also created aspiration within the society (p.108) and worked towards sustenance of democracy in the society (see Neyazi, 2011, p.109). Transnational corporations and transnational products in India gradually got interpreted in a local way post 1991 (Hamelink, 1983, p.48; Mohammadi, 1997, p. 48; Mohammadi, 2004, p.102) rather than going into a synchronic mode of cultural reception (Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen, 1998b, p.48). Therefore a synthesis occurred in cultural reception retaining the postcolonial identity and political content which was indicated by the rise of the vernacular press in India as an alternative to the English newspapers (Neyazi, p.107). But this view was challenged by the CPI (M) and also journalists according to whom media worked basically on the instructions of capital and had no developmental agendas (see CPIM, 2012, p.169; Sainath, 2011, p.170-172). Chakraborty also in

his interview for this thesis mentioned the media to be corporate (p.170). The continuous assimilation of the traditional and the modern, innovation and annihilation, global and the local wove the threads of corporate capitalism in India.

The regional newspapers also created more scope of employment regionally. It was cost-effective to employ un-trained journalists in the districts having basic academic achievements (Banerjee, 2008, p.105; Neyazi, 2011, p.107; Raychoudhury, p.250). It also generated an enthusiasm within the district and in the village where the journalist belonged. The society in West Bengal still retains the traditional values and obligations. A social gathering in the evening to discuss various socio-economic-political news with a cup of tea, serves to be the best entertainment for families and even individuals. West Bengal still retains the tea-stall or the coffee house culture to discuss the dominant news and share views. Therefore the news in the regional newspapers and in the late nineties the regional electronic channels provided the required information for the citizens to discuss and decide their opinion in West Bengal. Employing fresh individuals as untrained journalists was however criticised by the CPI (M) as a threat to the profession (see Salim, p.207). This was a contradiction within the thoughts of the CPI (M) on media, since the newspaper house *Ganashakti* also had few trained professional journalists, but being a 'party wholetimer' was the main criteria for the house (see Chakraborty, p.207).

The media institutions work within a set frame of the economy and politics of a country and India is no exception. The transformation in the society compelled the

media to change accordingly (also see McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2002, Robinson, 2007, Sklair, 2000, p.41) in India and West Bengal. The CPI (M) in a neo-Gramscian way argued that the TNCs in India have promoted the consumerist culture to re-theorise the state structure (also see Hirst and Thompson, 2000; Robinson 2007; Sklair, 2002, p.42). This reshaped the traditional way of understanding the society and culture in India (Kumari, 2008, p.116; Thussu, 1999, p.116; Waters, 1995, p.40).

However the important question to ask at this stage is whether media in the age of globalisation works as a negotiator or arbitrator? I have investigated the relationship between the media and the CPI (M) in the state of West Bengal with no literatures on post-1991 media developments in West Bengal. Therefore as I have also mentioned in the Introduction and the Methodology chapters of this thesis, I had to rely on the articles and literatures on the media in India and then connect it to the West Bengal media to situate the narrative. Therefore to find out the role of the media in India is vital and a trans-disciplinary approach is necessary to capture its contours, dynamics, trajectories, problems, and possible futures. The role of the media in India has not been uniform across issues as was claimed by the CPI (M) and the journalists interviewed (chapter 6 and 7).

The participation of the CPI (M) in the central government gained resilience from the experience of the LFG which became stronger in the wake of 1996 Lok Sabha election (see CPIM, 2002 and 2008b, Basu, 1996, p.142). The coalition of regional parties led by the CPI (M) can actually be connected to the regional empowerment of the media which assisted in raising the voice of the regional

representation in national politics (see Neyazi, 2011, p.109-110). The CPI (M) on the other hand viewed the media as a career of cultural imperialism which became pronounced with the advent of new technologies (Surjeet, 2001, p. 146; also see Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen, 1998b, p.48). It was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPI (M) in 2012 that a dedicated section was allocated for their understanding and strategies on the media in the Political Resolution (CPIM, 2012, p.150; also see Chakraborty, p.165).

## **9.2 The Mainstream and the Party-controlled Media in West Bengal**

Thirdly in this chapter I narrate the experience of the mainstream and the party-controlled newspapers and media in West Bengal. This was an exclusive investigation to understand how the party-controlled and the mainstream media exerted influence in the public sphere to communicate political and social issues. The mainstream media was continuously challenged by the party-controlled media to sustain the hegemony in the public sphere. I certainly investigated the existing public sphere in West Bengal to understand the relevance of the issues and how they were communicated. But I did not evaluate the West Bengal public sphere in itself since that is out of the scope of this research.

According to CPI (M) monitoring the content and jurisdiction of the media was important since media restricts democracy (Salim, p.165; also see Schultz, 1998, p.120). The mainstream media in West Bengal was going through a transformation which not only concentrated on the production or distribution of the content but emphasised ideological and political consent generation

(Salim, p.166 and CPIM, 2012, p.166 and p.214; Chakraborty, p.168; Ghosal, p.242; also see Durham and Kellner, 2006, p.30; Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p.123; Tomlinson, 1991, p.49). There was however a difference in views and some media were also perceived as a reflector rather than consent maker (Bandyopadhyay, p.251). The editorial policies of the media towards the LFG was claimed to be hostile which accorded with the CPI (M)'s decision to participate in parliamentary politics (CPIM, 2008, p.167; Brinda, p.168; also see Bennett, 1982, p.19; Curran, 1997, p.20). There were mainly two arguments on the role of the media. The CPI (M) claimed that the media tried to generate anti-left consensus and the media's claim was that the polarised representation of the society was reflected by the media (Brinda, p.167-168; CPIM, 1999, p.181; CPIM, 2001, p.191; CPIM, 2002c, p.181-182; Chakraborty, p.170 and 174; Chattopadhyay, p.255-256; Ghosal, p. 256-257; Mukhopadhyay, p.226; Raychoudhury, p.235; also see Curran, 1997, p.19; Curran, 2003; Garnham, 1990; Ryan, 1991; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, p. 19-20).

Again the regional media had close political connections therefore polarisation in media was not new in India. But naked political polarisation was something that happened exclusively in West Bengal (Bandyopadhyay, p.228; Mukhopadhyay, p.228; Menon, p. 230; Guha Thakurta, p.230) where even the journalists were polarised on political lines (*Menon*, 230). This political role of the media was connected to the combination of media and industrial power operating in the state (Iyer, 1994, p.121; Raychoudhury, p.247), following the 'Murdoch' way (Brinda, p.194-195). The mainstream media bias of framing news and words consistently



across time to resonate a specific political message against the LFG created ambiguity within the electorates in the state (Chakraborty, p.169; CPIM, 2009b, p.192; Kuypers, 2002, p.169).

In West Bengal, interestingly, both the mainstream media and the left media played the watchdog role to monitor each other. The media in West Bengal worked as a contending political platform, which relegated political motive over profit motive and it was possible because of the politicisation of social institutions by the left (Chatterjee, 2012, p.91). On the other hand the readers or the audiences in West Bengal were also not mere consumers (Habermas, 1991, p.22) who could be easily targeted by the advertisers, rather they were claimed to be conscious voters (Chattopadhyay, p.244). The continuous process of political culture in the state of West Bengal generated the strong political public sphere which had the influence of the media. The mainstream media presented pseudo-facts and opposed LFG not for developmental reasons but for political and corporate compulsions. The media in West Bengal created the 'Brand Buddha' as a harbinger for change and the same brand was criticised by the creator after Nandigram (Chattopadhyay, p.244). On the other hand Ganashakti had the political task of defending the LFG and therefore for them truth was not '*akhanda*' (Chakraborty, p.211). Hence both the mainstream and the left media had the structural compulsion to lie; either for profit or for politics (see Sainath, 2012, p.171).

Ganashakti on the other hand defended the LFG and its policies and did not play the role of watchdog in West Bengal (Chakraborty, p.212). The above findings suggest that the media in West Bengal was imprisoned by both profit and politics.

This was also true in the case of the *Ganashakti* house in West Bengal. *Debasish Chakraborty* argued in the interview that their house did not have the market compulsion but at the same time he emphasised that continuous upgrade of content and reorientation of the pages were done to attract readers (Chakraborty, p.176 and p.211). Therefore even if not dominated by the market, they had the quest to survive in the market. Unlike the Soviet press the *Ganashakti* did have advertisements (also see Schramm, 1963, p.26). *Ganashakti* even included advertisements from the Central Government and rarely but sometimes from multinational corporations (Ghosal, 251-252). The statement of *Pankaj Ghosh*<sup>63</sup> to TOI clearly mentioned that they did not boycott the MNCs, but it was the other way round. Therefore although not a compulsion of the market, it was not free from it either. However *Ganashakti* had the compulsion to sustain the LFG which was the government for the marginalised. Similar arguments like the Soviet Media theory were re-echoed when the News Editor of *Ganashakti* emphasised the self-regulation of the media and argued that there are no laws to systematically control the media thereby making the communication between the media and democracy one-way (also see CPIM, 2006, p.188-189; McQuail, 1987, p.27). According to the CPI (M) the media as a social institution should be systematically monitored by the state if not controlled (also see Chakraborty, p. 254; Muralidharan, 2012,

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<sup>63</sup> "We have not boycotted Coke and Pepsi. Rather it is they who have been boycotting us for long," rued Pankaj Ghosh, the advertisement manager of the CPM mouthpiece *Ganashakti* on Tuesday. "They hardly ever advertise in our paper," Ghosh said. [Banerjee, A. (2003) CPM's blows hot, blows cold over cola, in, Times of India, Aug 13, 01.47pm IST, [Online], Available at <[http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2003-08-13/kolkata/27200933\\_1\\_coke-and-pepsi-soft-drink-cpm](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2003-08-13/kolkata/27200933_1_coke-and-pepsi-soft-drink-cpm)> [Accessed on 29.06.2012]

p.106; Editorial, 2007b, p.105; Schramm, 1963, p.25). This also justifies why the CPI (M) in West Bengal systematically tried to intervene in the media and occasionally boycotted certain electronic channels in the state (Chattopadhyay, p.234; Ghosal, p.241).

The findings also suggest that there was an unvoiced transition in the slogan of *Ganashakti* which was found to be non-uniform. The print version of the paper declares ‘*Amra Niropekhyo Noi; Amra Mehanoti Manusher Pokhye*’,<sup>64</sup>. However none of the newly developed websites whether English or Bengali contain this slogan. The Bengali site however says ‘*Samoyer Sathe..*’. one of the vital questions regarding *Ganashakti* and its slogan, which is again dealt with as an ideological question by the CPI (M), was the inclusion of the working class in the slogan. The silent transformation within *Ganashakti* (p.213-214) and the introduction of the line ‘*Samoyer Sathe*’,<sup>65</sup> further supports the claim of postcolonial reformist approach within the CPI (M) and its widest circulated newspaper. Even the ‘About us’ section of the *Ganashakti* website does not include a single line about the marginalised section or the working class but eloquently states, to reiterate, ‘[T]his website will strongly combat the continuous disinformation and misinformation campaign against our Party and Left Front government in West Bengal’. Thus the question of protecting the party and the government became central to the agenda rather than protecting the marginalised or the working class. Therefore power became the central question for CPI (M). This transformation further supports the claim that the CPI (M) got magnetised towards

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<sup>64</sup> ‘We are not neutral but are for the working people’

<sup>65</sup> ‘With Time..’

parliamentary democracy and could understand that reform would contribute to their sustenance. However development or reform for the people but without involving the people had detrimental effect, as admitted by CPI (M) and its coalition partners, not only in the society but also within the party (CPIM, 2008b, p.158; also see Ahmed, 2008, p.100).

Therefore the mainstream media and the party-controlled media continuously challenged each other and supplied the content in the public sphere to hegemonise. The CPI (M) led LFG and the mainstream media played the role of watchdog on each other in the state (also see Schultz, 1998, p. 120). The LFG communicated in a structured way with the mainstream media which gradually blurred with time (see Chattopadhyay, p.226; Dasgupta, 201-202).

### **9.3 The Role of the Media in Stabilising and Destabilising the LFG**

Fourthly in West Bengal there were claims that the media played a definite role in destabilising the LFG (CPIM, 2001, p.190). Therefore I examined what role did the mainstream media played in West Bengal since 1977. To understand that I looked into the issues of industrialisation and land acquisition in West Bengal after the Assembly election of 2006 when the LFG secured the highest number of seats on the agenda of industrialisation (p.143). The two incidents of *Singur* and *Nandigram*, as I have discussed in the Introduction chapter of this thesis, was held responsible for the debacle of the left. Therefore I have looked into the crucial years between 2006 and 2008 and 2008-2011. The first phase, from 2006-2008, was mostly about implementing the industrialisation agenda of the left in the state.

The second phase, 2008-2011, was about the consequences that led to consistent defeat of the left in all the elections, from Panchayat to Assembly.

There were wide claims about the mainstream media playing as an imperial agent, determined to create anti-left propaganda in the state. The land became an issue in the West Bengal media not due to their interest in the story of the marginalised but due to corporate interest (Chakraborty, p.172-173). The incidents of peasant uprising at *Singur* and *Nandigram* were projected in a concocted manner by the media as was alleged by the CPI (M). The media on the other hand accused CPI (M) for forcibly occupying the lands from the farmers and dug their own burial (see Chattopadhyay, p.248-249; Ghosal, p.242). The media supported the left on industrial policy but opposed them on bad governance (see Bandopadhyay, p.247-248; Chattopadhyay, p.244; Ghosal, p.242-243 and 251; Guha Thakurta, p.244 and 252; Menon, p.249). There were also indications of the corporates getting involved in the land acquisition issue (Raychoudhury, p.235). The usual dialogue between the public and the government through the mass organisation was found to be absent (Menon, p.237). The critics also argued that the people did not vote the LFG for industrialisation at the cost of peasantry (Banerjee, 2006; Chatterjee, 2009, p.143). The CPI (M) although accepted their shortcomings but emphasised that it was because that the state government intervened in the land acquisition process therefore that ignited problems (Bhattacharya, 2013; Bose, 2007, p.153; CPIM, 2008b, p.160; Karat, 2011, p.196).

#### **9.4 The Relationship between the Media and the LFG in West Bengal**

Finally based on the above findings I now reflect on the relationship between the CPI (M) and the media that existed in West Bengal between 1977 and 2011.

As the findings suggest there was political and economic compulsion to shape public debate both by the left and the mainstream media (chapter 5 and 6). Accordingly there was a continuous contending relationship to dominate the public sphere in West Bengal which matured with the influx of the media post 1991. The public sphere was mostly dominated by the politics of the left till the late nineties, since the newspapers had restricted readership and reach, hence were not powerful. There was a continuous brawl in the public sphere between the campaigns, publications and the press of the CPI (M) on one hand and the mainstream media on the other. As evident from the interviews of the media informants, the mainstream press in West Bengal never had a cordial relationship with the left until the left turned right in their policies (also see Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, p.20-21). Thus the media in West Bengal did not view that it was their social responsibility to interpret news or defend LFG but their duty was to present facts and information in the public sphere (Ghosal, p.222-223; Mukhopadhyay, p.223). The media was answerable to the industrialists and not to the political parties and it was not the responsibility of the media to mesmerise the public by highlighting the left (*Brinda*, p.281; *Chakraborty*, p.242; *Ghosal*, p.243). Thus a continuous effort by the CPI (M) led LFG and the mainstream media to hegemonise the public sphere was noticed in West Bengal (also see Boyd-Barrett, 2001, p.24; Murdock, 2001, p.24; Gurevitch et al., 1982, p.28; Newbold, 2000, p.29; Hall, 1971, p.29; Hoggart, 1958, p.29; Williams, 1958, p.29).

This continuous struggle to retain hegemony in the public sphere sometimes took the form of clientelism (Chatterjee, 2009, p.157). The CPI (M) in West Bengal was inclined to fight their class enemy and the media (Dasgupta, p.202). The structural compulsion of hegemonising the state society occasionally involved left journalists in an operational political feud and there were instances of hostility and assaults on journalists in the state (Banerjee, 2008, p.104; Ray, 2009, p. 201; *Mukhopadhyay*, p.229). The CPI (M) though opposed to paid news but gradually got accustomed to political advertisement in the media which they defended to be their political task (CPIM, 2011b, p.187-188; Sainath, 2011, p.189; Chakraborty, 2010, p.195).

The persuasion of agendas of the LFG through the party organisation of the CPI (M) was gradually transformed into the dictation of the agendas. There were two main reasons behind this; firstly, the CPI (M) gradually gained a commendable position within the LFG because of the increase in the number of seats won in the Assembly elections; secondly the fact that the LFG and the CPI (M) were voted to power in consecutive elections generated a sense of authority like any other authoritative rule in history. The difference in attitude, appearance and decision making was gradually blurring between the left and the right. The LFG came to power by fighting against the authoritative rule and violence in West Bengal. However the incidents in *Singur* and *Nandigram* witnessed a role reversal of the CPI (M) which provided scope for the media to sell the discontent. The farmer's discontent and the social antagonisms are commodities which are sellable in the market, and media in West Bengal took the advantage as anywhere else in India.

Industrialisation was a compulsion for the state governments towards economic development. But there was a qualitative difference on the persuasion of the land reform agenda and imposing the agenda of industrialisation. Land reform was related to giving lands to the marginalised but the building industry was about acquiring land. Therefore, as argued by the media interviewees, the party should have been more responsible towards implementing the agenda of industrialisation. There was a kind of urgency noticed while implementing the process of industrialisation. It was because of the time compulsion for any business to grow its industry. But compulsion on industry should not have been a compulsion for the LFG, as argued by Bhattacharya, because it represented an alternative form of governance. The social insecurity dominated the rural minds and the left were unable to defend their position (Menon, p.252) which ignited the anger to revolt (CPIM, 2011, p.154; CPIM, 2008b, p.158).

There were changes in the language of public rally using sophisticated and difficult words which were far away from the reach of the general public. The presentation, style and approach changed, the dress code changed, the general mass was baffled by the technical, theoretical language of the left (Banerjee, 2006, p.104 and 236; Bhattacharya, p.236). There was also an increase in some popular political demonstration to gain media coverage. The intolerance towards democratic practise and arrogance was on the rise (Banerjee, 1990, p.158; Roy, 1985, p.158; Basu, 2011, p.159) though the party general secretary was found in a denial mode (Karat, 2011, p.196).



Politicisation of the masses and a general appetite for political news has contributed towards the development of the press in West Bengal (chapter 7; also see Durham and Kellner, 2006, p.23). West Bengal has set the example that wealth and urbanisation had minimal effect on the circulation in a polarised postcolonial society. It was the political predilection that largely contributed towards the development of the press. This inevitably contributed towards developing a political acrimony between the mainstream newspapers and the left. The leadership of the CPI (M) argued that the technological changes empowered the media to make skilful misinterpretation of the left policies in the public domain (Brinda, p.168). On the other hand the media claimed that it was no more possible for the left to deny their statements as distorted by the media since it was the audio-visual media. Therefore the media utilised the statements by the left and projected continuously across time which generated both revenue and political consent (Chattopadhyay, p.226). The media was also accused by the CPI (M) to be playing the role of an opposition party to gain electoral consent against the left in West Bengal (CPIM, 2009b, p.192; also see Althusser, 2001, p.28; Gurevitch et. al., 1982, p.28; Newbold, 2001, p.29; Bennett, 2001, p.32). The incidents of *Nandigram* and *Singur* were ‘ill-founded rumours’ used by the media as anti-CPI (M) propaganda in the state followed by the created drama of arms recovery in *Lalgarh* and *Netai* (Bhattacharya, 2007, p.160; CPIM, 2008b, p.191). The then Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya repented for whatever happened in *Nandigram* but at the same time accused the opposition of building up the rebellion (p.159-160). The media on the other hand compared the CPI (M)

statements with that of Narendra Modi<sup>66</sup>, who after the Gujarat communal riots accused the media on concocting evidences (Guha Thakurta, p.252).

*Chattopadhyay* (p.253) however opined that the sense of fear is one of the vital elements in the governance of the left and LFG was no exception.

The left and the media also held responsible the support withdrawal of the left from the UPA in 2008 that the assisted in the coalition of the opposition in the state, though there were differences of opinion (CPIM, 2011c, 161; Bose, 2009, p.184;*Brinda*, p.204; Karat, 2011, p.185). The Assembly election 2011, according to the CPI (M) involved a conspiracy of the ruling class and imperialism to berate the left in the state (CPIM, 2011c, p.161).

## **9.5 Conclusion**

Atul Kohli's claim of the 'rise of reform communism' in the context of West Bengal needs further reconstruction. As I have explained, it was the postcolonial radical reform by the CPI (M) in a postcolonial liberalised India, who themselves were open for both economic and cultural reforms. From agriculture to industry was the relevant slogan for the left in West Bengal since for a state to become economically sound in generating employment and income in a country like India a balance between agriculture and industry is a necessity and not a privilege. Thus there was no conflict in the political line of thought rather it was the political line of action and implementation that generated conflict in the state (chapter 6 and 7). The overconfidence in governmental action backed up by the quantitative analysis

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<sup>66</sup> Narendra Modi is the Chief Minister of Gujarat supported by BJP

of seats in the assembly and neglecting the postcolonial identity within the society culminated in producing the catalyst of *Nandigram* and *Singur*.

The communist party in a society like West Bengal was perceived as an alternative heraldry of politics based on the trust and patronage towards the programme of both the LFG and the CPI (M). Therefore once the trust and the patronage for a communist party are challenged it has every possibility for a permanent anti-incumbency not only in the state but also in the country. The left in India generally undertook a postcolonial way of resisting US imperialism but had obvious dependence on Eurocentrism. The cultural imperialism thesis, it though has been widely contested, was taken up as a primary functional problem of the media by the left.

The above discussion on findings also suggests that defining the relation between the media and the political parties cannot be generalised and has to be country-specific. In West Bengal the media had the market compulsions, reflections of political differences and government interventions on one hand and the question of developing the field of journalism (Hallin and Mancini, 2004, p.32-34). As discussed in the literature review, it is not possible to look into one theory or one model to define the relationship in India because of its non-uniformity with the West (Curran and Park, 2000, 36; Voltmer, 2012, p.32). Therefore the findings and the discussions suggest that the two models, Democratic Corporatist and the Polarized Pluralist, were found to be operative in the society of West Bengal (see Christians et. al., 2009, Hallin and Mancini, 2004 and Voltmer, 2012, p.34).

## **Chapter 9**

### **Conclusion**

As I have mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis, the relationship between the media and the LFG makes a significant contribution to the field of political communication. This thesis is the first attempt to situate the historical narrative on the relationship. I have so far explicitly delineated findings and constructed the discussion in the light of the literature review undertaken for this thesis. In this chapter I summarise the aim and outcome of my research and finally how this thesis can contribute towards further academic research. Accordingly I had five key questions and I present the five key answers in this chapter.

The history of post independent India is divided into two phases of postcolonial society (1947-1990) and postcolonial liberalised society (1991 to present). The relationship that I have studied in this thesis was based in the state of West Bengal which had similar phases of postcolonial reform. However the research finds that radical reform influenced by Europe was already a project undertaken by the LFG in the late 1970s when it succeeded to power by communicating efficiently the postcolonial reform.

The left vehemently opposed the liberalisation along U.S. lines but accepted the radical reform liberalisation influenced by Europe. It is a remarkable history of postcolonial radical reform liberalism that the LFG undertook. This thesis is not about left politics but about political communication. Therefore a detailed study on postcolonial radical reform liberalism was not undertaken. But a precise investigation to find the root of the society and the CPI (M)'s inbuilt

political relations with the social institutions has been undertaken. This was necessary to reflect on the relationship that I studied in this thesis.

This thesis studied the effect of the NEP on the governance of the LFG and the functioning of the media as discussed in the Introduction of this thesis. The research found that post 1991 the CPI (M) strengthened their political intention to participate not only in the state but in the national government which further supports their radical reformist approach. The rise of the regional media in this process empowered not only the masses but also the regional parties to represent themselves nationally.

The challenge was far greater in West Bengal. There were two types of newspapers and electronic media operating in West Bengal- the mainstream media and the party-controlled media. This thesis found that, CPI (M) meticulously developed their newspaper *Ganashakti* and other publications. The CPI (M) led LFG communicated their issues and policies mainly through their publications and organisation. *Ganashakti* played a vital role in defending the LFG in the public sphere. Apart from that they produced political journalists from within the organisation and through politicisation of the institutions. The journalists in *Ganashakti* are therefore non-trained but committed, non-salaried but determined to contest the mainstream media politically. The mainstream media on the other hand consistently monitored and challenged the LFG since 1977. The mainstream media in West Bengal emphasised the implementation process of the reforms undertaken by the LFG. They continuously compared the agricultural reforms, the political devolution with the industrial reform initiative taken by the government. The issues brought in by the regional opposition political parties also got reflected in the media post 1991. This thesis finds that the mainstream media played four

different roles during the thirty four years LFG was in power in West Bengal. In the first phase it was critical of the government but had less power. The media continuously monitored the LFG and its policies to communicate to the public. During this period the media market was also less developed. The LFG was also going through its initial days in power and the party-controlled media was also less developed. In the second phase the media started compromising because of the change in the direction of the government policies towards industrialisation and development. This phase also witnessed a gradual inclination of India towards neoliberal policies. In the third phase the media started supporting the industrial agenda of the left and finally the media found highly sellable content within the discontent of the rural society. I found by collating these four phases that the relationship between the media and the CPI (M) was difficult initially but gradually it became antagonistic between the political and market interests. The development of the market, the political divisions in the society, and the increase in the government interventions in the media in West Bengal integrated the mainstream media with the party politics in West Bengal.

The continuous contending relationship between the party-controlled media and the mainstream media developed the polarised pluralist media market in West Bengal. The corporate intentions merged with the political polarisation in the regional mainstream media. The mainstream media also became polarised along political lines. This was not only because some of the media politically opposed the LFG but also because the media found huge revenue generation potential by reflecting the discontent in the public sphere. On the other hand because the party-controlled newspapers and media had political commitments, they continuously challenged the mainstream content in the postcolonial

public sphere. The issues of *Singur* and *Nandigram* facilitated the representation of the discontent in the society which the media utilised skilfully to represent the conflict situation. The party-controlled media and the organisation of the CPI (M) were not proficient enough to manage the conflict situation and communicate their alternative politics in the postcolonial public sphere.

This research also examined whether the mainstream media played any role to stabilise or destabilise the LFG in West Bengal. The mainstream media in the absence of a proper political opposition party in the state since 1977 took an active part in communicating politics in the public sphere. The opposition was weak until 1998. Interestingly the power of the media that the leadership referred to in their interview was also restricted till 1991. However post 1991 the media was more powerful in its political deliberations and as mentioned earlier the media had the political and corporate pressures. Therefore the media did represent the discontent continuously in the public sphere to impart influence but did play a catalytic rather than deterministic role in destabilising the left. The mainstream media tried to retain its democratic, corporatist, polarised and pluralist approach while communicating in the postcolonial public sphere.

This thesis finally contributes largely towards understanding the relationship between the media and CPI (M)-led LFG in the postcolonial public sphere in West Bengal. However the important thing to remember here is that it is a postcolonial liberalised society. Postcolonial society often remembers and interrogates its past and continues with a distress which is not easy to come to terms with. The content of distress flows through the interpersonal networking within the society. Therefore any obvious relation between the oppressor and the oppressed invigorates the conflict. The mainstream regional media as the social institution

and being imprisoned by both politics and market in West Bengal played a contributory role to enliven the conflict by skilful representation of the discontent in the rural society which was the main target electorate of the LFG. Also since it is a postcolonial society, the communication system worked as a trust builder even in a liberalised situation. The media-generated content is beyond the aims and objectives of this thesis, but can definitely be an exciting project to build on the narrative of this thesis.

Additionally the study recognises the craftsmanship of Jyoti Basu and inevitably raises the question of individual leadership for sustaining a communist regime given the Soviet and Latin American experience. The second major indication that came up through the discussion and findings in the previous chapters of this thesis is that the transnational media played the similar role as the civilising mission of the colonisers in India. This can be furthered through future research initiatives in the field of political communication. Finally this chapter indicates the limitations and further scope for research on the narrative of this thesis. They are summarised below.

### **12.1 Limitations**

A comprehensive study of the representation of the left in electronic media could have supported the claims with greater emphasis. However this limitation would provide the scope for future research in this field. There have been separate studies regarding the CPI (M) and the media, but this was the first initiative to present the narrative account of the relation between the two in West Bengal. It inevitably has limitations since the study was broad in order to situate the narrative. But it would provide scope for further ethnographic research based on the individual incidents and



political events that happened in West Bengal involving audience reception research.

### **13.2 Scope of further research**

This thesis provides scope for future research as I have mentioned above. Additionally, social media and its relevance to communicate politics in a postcolonial postmodern West Bengal can be another area to look into for future research. A quantitative study by doing content analysis of the newspapers regarding the representation of the Left Front or the CPI (M) in West Bengal by the mainstream media can provide a supportive account to the findings of this thesis. Finally studying the other coalition partners of the Left Front can be another area for research on how the coalition sustained itself and the mainstream media represented it in the West Bengal postcolonial public sphere.

This thesis has largely contributed to the complexity in a postcolonial nation-state. The discussion and the findings suggest that to develop the field of political communication in a country like India further research needs to be conducted on how Marxism can engage in a dialogue with the postcolonial theory. The postcolonial identity retains its colonial past in the memories and relates to it at the time of political crisis. The postcolonial identity generation process has been extremely complex in India owing to the existence of class, caste, religion differences and other ethnic identities.

The complexity in a postcolonial nation-state hence demand a more interactive conversation between the concepts of postcolonialism, globalization, de-Westernization, Americanization and Europeanization. It has been fascinating to witness throughout this thesis, how the above political theories work with and contradict each other in a country which has a colonial past. Therefore further research on how these theories impart influence and penetrate the culture in a developing nation can contribute to the understanding of how a postcolonial country engages with the rest of the world.

This thesis also provides scope for future research in whether the regional growth of the media contributed to the growth of the regional separatist movement within the provincial states in India.

Finally the findings also suggest that future research on whether the media in India is contributing to the commercialization of democracy can be another interesting project. Media in India as this thesis suggests impart a certain degree of influence to trivialize and distort political deliberation. But the question is whether in doing so the media encourage democratic citizenship in the Indian or West Bengal public sphere?

## Appendix I

Table 1 Comparison of Per-capita income between India and West Bengal taking 1993-94 base prices

Year	1993-94	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
West Bengal	6,755.95	7,491.86	8,407.58	8,813.76	9,319.70	9,796.33	10,380.20	10,950.95	11,611.70	12,294.54
Growth Rate (WB)	-	10.89	12.22	4.83	5.74	5.11	5.96	5.50	6.03	5.88
India	7,690	8,489	9,244	9,650	10,071	10,308	10,754	11,013	11,799	12,414
Growth Rate (India)	-	10.39	8.89	4.39	4.36	2.35	4.33	2.41	7.14	5.21

Source: Khasnabis (2008: 112) Per Capita Income: West Bengal and India (at 1993-94 prices in Rs.)

Table 2 Landless agricultural workers in West Bengal (1981-2001)

Year	Number
1981	38,92,000
1991	54,82,000 (46.1% of total agricultural workers)
2001	73,71,000 (56.07% of total agricultural workers)

Source: Shodhganga, Census of India 2001, Available at <  
[http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/2970/18/18\\_chapter%2014.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/2970/18/18_chapter%2014.pdf)>  
 [Accessed on 30.10.2013]

## Appendix II

1951-2011													
Population <sup>67</sup> (in Lakhs)							Literacy <sup>68</sup> (in %)						
1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
263.00	349.26	443.12	545.81	680.78	801.76	913.48	24.61	34.46	38.86	48.65	57.70	68.64	77.08

Figure 1 Population and Literacy in West Bengal (1951-2011)

1971-2011								
Populations <sup>69</sup>			Literacy (in %)			Publication <sup>70</sup> (registered)		
1971	1991	2011	1971 <sup>71</sup>	1991 <sup>72</sup>	2011	1971	1991	2011
54,581,000	68,078,000	91,347,736	38.86	57.70	77.08	2170	3710	7764

Figure 2 Populations, Literacy and Publication in West Bengal (1971-2011)

<sup>67</sup> Population of India (1951-2001) [Online] Available at <<http://indiabudget.nic.in/es2006-07/chapt2007/tab97.pdf>> [Accessed on 18.10.2013]

<sup>68</sup> State-wise Literacy Rates (1951-2011), [Online] Available at <[http://planningcommission.nic.in/data/datatable/0904/tab\\_160.pdf](http://planningcommission.nic.in/data/datatable/0904/tab_160.pdf)> [Accessed on 18.10.2013]

<sup>69</sup> Population of India (1951-2001), [Online], Available at <<http://indiabudget.nic.in/es2006-07/chapt2007/tab97.pdf>> [Accessed on 16.10.2013]

<sup>70</sup> Registrar of Newspapers for India, West Bengal, December 1971, [Online], Available at <[http://rni.nic.in/rni\\_display\\_state.asp](http://rni.nic.in/rni_display_state.asp)> [Accessed on 16.10.2013]

<sup>71</sup> State-wise literacy rates (1951-2011), [Online], Available at <[http://planningcommission.nic.in/data/datatable/0904/tab\\_160.pdf](http://planningcommission.nic.in/data/datatable/0904/tab_160.pdf)> [Accessed on 16.10.2013]

<sup>72</sup> Census of India 2001, Provisional Population Totals, Chapter 7, [Online], Available at <[http://censusindia.gov.in/Data\\_Products/Library/Provisional\\_Population\\_Total\\_link/PDF\\_Links/chapter7.pdf](http://censusindia.gov.in/Data_Products/Library/Provisional_Population_Total_link/PDF_Links/chapter7.pdf)> [Accessed on 16.10.2013]

## **Appendix III**

### **Samples of semi-structured interview questions**

#### **2.1 Interview Questions- Set 1-Media**

##### **“The CPIM and its relation with media: 34 years in West Bengal”**

*A questionnaire by Indrani Lahiri in relation to the above doctoral research in University of Stirling, Scotland, UK, June 2012*

1. Why do you think that the LF Government stayed for tenure of 34 years in power even in post liberal era?
2. How well was that communicated in the media?
3. What do you think about the relationship between the media and the CPIM in West Bengal?

## Appendix IV

### NEWSPAPER CIRCULATION FIGURES

S no.	CIRCULATION	FIGURES	
1.	Total number of newspaper registered as on 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2010-2011	82,222	
2.	Number of new newspaper registered in 2011	4853	
3.	Total number of circulations	32,92,04,841	
4.	Largest number of newspapers registered in any Indian language (Hindi)	32,793	
5.	Second largest of newspaper registered (English)	11478	
6.	State with largest number of newspapers (Uttar Pradesh)	13,065	
7.	State with second largest number of newspapers (Delhi)	10,606	
8.	Largest circulated daily:		
	<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Place of publication</b>
	Eenadu	Telegu	Hyderabad
	The Hindu	English	Chennai
	Ananda Bazar Patrika	Bengali	Kolkata
9.	The largest circulated multi- edition daily:		
	<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Number of Editions</b>	
	The Times of India	12	37,46,929
	Eenadu	19	29,55,300
10.	Largest circulated periodical is The Hindu Weekly		13,48,160

Figure 1 Statistics of Registrar of Newspapers in India, Source: The Hoot<sup>73</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Akoijam, I. (2013) Media Statistics, Posted/Updated Tuesday, Apr 16 19:38:07, in, The Hoot, Available at <<http://thehoot.org/web/NEWSPAPERS/5845-1-1-37-true.html>> [Accessed on 18.10.2013]

<b>POLITICIANS/ PEOPLE WITH POLITICAL CONNECTION</b>	<b>POLITICAL PARTY/ POSITION</b>	<b>MEDIA OUTLET</b>	<b>NAME OF COMPANY</b>
RP Group (the company was approached by the Trinamool Congress for a bail out)	Trinamool Congress	TV-Kolkata TV	SST Media Private Limited
SwapanSadhan (Tutu) Bose	Trinamool Congress RajyaSabha MP	Newspaper- Sangbad Pratidin	PratidinPrakashani
Mr.SnatanuGhosh& Smt. SudeshnaGhosh	Trinamool Congress controlled	TV- Channel 10	Bengal Media Private Limited
AvikDutta	Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPM controlled	TV- 24 Ghanta	Zee Akaash News Private Limited. A joint venture between Zee News and Akaash Bangla (AB)
AvikDutta	CPI(M) state committee member. AvikDutta is a former student leader of the CPM and is assistant editor at Ganashakti	TV-Aakash Bangla	Sky B (Bangla) Private Limited

Figure 2 The political connection of the regional news channel, Source: The Hoot<sup>74</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Media Companies with Political Links (2012), in, The Hoot, Posted/Updated Sunday, Oct 21 11:08:46, [Online], Available at <<http://thehoot.org/web/home/story.php?storyid=5812&mod=1&pg=1&sectionId=16&valid=true>> [Accessed on 20.10.2013]

Daily	Language	2011 Q2 (in Lakhs)
<i>Anandabazar Patrika</i>	Bengali	59.92
<i>Bartaman</i>	Bengali	29.63
<i>The Telegraph</i>	English	10.39
<i>Sangbad Pratidin</i>	Bengali	9.58
<i>Ganashakti</i>	Bengali	7.90
<i>Aajkaal</i>	Bengali	6.28
<i>TOI - Kolkata</i>	English	6.00
<i>UttarBanga Sambad</i>	Bengali	5.16
<i>Sanmarg</i>	Hindi	4.80
<i>The Economic Times</i>	English	0.68

Figure 3 Top 10 dailies in Readership Survey in West Bengal<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> IRS Q2 2011: Top 10 dailies in West Bengal, BestMediaInfo, Bureau , Delhi, June 22 [Online], Available at < <http://www.bestmediainfo.com/2011/10/irs-q2-2011-top-10-dailies-in-west-bengal/> > [Accessed on 19.10.2013]



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