Media Representations of the Left Front in West Bengal: Analysis of Select Bengali Newspapers

Abstract

The intervention of mass media in constructing ‘political knowledge’ and shaping political participation is emerging as important paradigm in understanding democratic governance. The reach and permeation of mass media in contemporary society and its role in steering public opinion marks an important entry into the terrain of politics. The meteoric rise of mass media has contributed greatly in generating numerous images and imageries of political regimes in different contexts. The representations of the media produced in the encoding process give birth to messages that provide a critical assessment of the regime functioning and set the stage for deliberation in democracy. This role has led to the increasing mediatisation of politics manifested in the dynamic relationship between mass media and democratic politics. In light of the above-mentioned assumptions the study has sought to explore the role of the Bengali mainstream press in constructing and mediating the images of the Left-led regime in West Bengal. Media-politics interface takes a critical dimension in a Left-led regime that is best reflected in the context of the three and half decades of the Left Front rule in West Bengal. The gradual unfolding of a dynamic relationship between the mainstream Bengali press and the Left Front governments in West Bengal, during the period 1977-2011, set the stage for a critical communicative discourse for the democratic politics in West Bengal. The study situates the analysis of the media-Front relationship in the backdrop of conceptual-theoretical assumptions about the mediatisation of politics. It has sought to explore how, in terms of representations, the Bengali press interpreted the Left-led regime, particularly the evolution of agricultural and industrial policy strategies in two broad phases. This work has tried to capture the encoding process in a specific way – the encoding of the narratives, images and modes of the news representations of the select Bengali newspapers in mediating the images of the Left-led governance. In the process, the study throws light on the crucial role of the Bengali press as agenda setters and site of political mobilisation.

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