Chapter VI

Media and the Agricultural Policy of the Left Front: The Momentum

6.1 Liberalisation: The New Context

The decade of 1990s ushered in an intensive phase of liberalisation in India, marking a qualitative shift from the Nehruvian model of welfare economy. The increasing role of the private capital, both native and global, broadly characterised the shift and conditioned the rise of new forces in Indian political-economic space. The emerging trend of a gradual rollback of the state-controlled economy in favour of private and foreign capital led to progressive opening of the domestic market and relaxation of centralised restrictions, which could bring in profound changes in federal governance as well. The state governments were required to respond with immediacy to the changing situations to adopt with the liberal reforms and competitive market economy. While many of the states readily welcomed the reforms, the Left-ruled states were quite apprehensive about the outcome and preferred to take a critical stand. Along with registering their protests against the Central government’s neo-liberal policies in tune with the ‘global imperialist forces’ and the “surrender” to the global finance capital, the Left Front governments in West Bengal gradually heightened their political campaign for an ‘alternative economic strategy’ in the context of the new situation.1

It is in this context of changing economic exigencies, the Left Front was ‘forced’ to devise its governance reforms to ‘survive’ in the age of liberalisation-privatisation-globalisation that posed new challenges for the Front and the Left politics in general. The Left leadership noted the “necessity of changing the strategies of mass movement and the principles of the Left Front” in the new circumstances (Document#1) and embarked on a strategic review of its reform programmes, fuelling much debate in the state politics since 1990s.2 The hype of economic reforms impacted the state politics in the second half of the 1990s and reached its peak in the decade-long experiments of the sixth and the seventh Left Front governments.
The sixth Left Front government took oath to the office on 21 June, 2001. From the late 1990s, the state politics was fed with the rhetorical mobilisation of the ‘new’ Left Front – the ‘better Left Front’, which predominantly took off from the change of guard in the Chief Minister’s office from Jyoti Basu to the younger leader Buddhadev Bhattacharjee in November 2000. It fuelled a great debate about the Front government’s ‘intentions’ of development of the state along a ‘new’ path. The phase can best be expressed as the ‘great leap forward’ to industrialisation and a corresponding redesigning of agrarian policies to ‘suit’ the conditions of emerging market economy. The hype was framed on the provocative assumptions about a proposed ‘tilt’ of the new leadership towards a fierce ‘advocacy’ of industrial development vis-à-vis the prioritisation of agricultural and rural reforms of the predecessors. The polemic was captured in the crucial predicament of the Front government to ‘endorse’ certain traits of liberal economic reforms, instead of mere ‘adjustments’ of the early 1990s, to fulfill the ‘urgent’ need of development of the state and added some pugnacity to the putative imagery of the ‘solidarity’ of the Front partners.3

The reforms incited tensions within the Front on ideological grounds and stirred the public domain with the activism of the ‘advocates’ and ‘critics’ of the reforms, representing both the political class and civil society. The spate of reforms in the agrarian sector was surrogated to a new model of ‘modernisation’ of agriculture, suited best with the exigencies of industrialisation and global economic transformations. As has been noted in the earlier chapters, the agricultural reform was posted in the new development agenda of the Front with the oft-quoted rhetoric – Agriculture is our foundation, Industry is the future, indicative of a critical relationship between industrialisation and agrarian reforms. It was the period of crystallisation of an informational-ideological warfare around the agriculture-industry debate that rocked the state politics, opening great scope for the vernacular media in translating different claims around development – shared or contested in the public culture. The volatility of the debate gave an opportunity for the Front and the Opposition, to ‘review’ the state of agriculture in West Bengal after two decades of the Left Front rule, especially the outcomes of the much-discussed reform of the Operation Barga in rural Bengal.
In this backdrop, it is, therefore, worth exploring how the Bengali press got embroiled in mediating the agriculture-industry debate, engaging the public deliberations with certain moral judgments and critical information. In doing so the Bengali press strengthened their respective positioning in the emerging *binaries* in the debate. The framing of the debate in the Front’s political mobilisation, with all its internal disjunctions, unfolded certain competing discourses of development and proposed contending images of *Left* governance in the state. The mainstream media’s mediation in the process reinforced certain visible traits of media encoding in production and circulation of ‘readymade schematas’, manufacturing ‘consent’ in favour of ‘discourses’ of development and navigating the public debate in a hegemonic way. The role strengthened vernacular media’s cogent positioning in agenda-setting, both in terms of generating ‘actions’ and assuring ‘symbols’ at the local/regional levels, beyond simple news-making. The rigorous articulation of ‘active schemas’ in factual reporting or narratives and marginalisation and/or underestimation of divergent cues reflected dynamics of media priming in evaluating the regime functioning. There is no denying that the vibrancy to the debate, especially in the last few years of the Left Front regime was greatly contributed by the Bengali media, opening a hitherto unseen space of media activism – both print and visual, reflecting the increasing challenges of news-making, sourcing ‘politics’ as ‘insiders’, not as ‘hawkish’ observers only, yet struggling to retain the sanctity of professional ‘objectivity’ in the truest sense of the term. The agriculture-industry debate provided the Bengali media a renewed power of ‘brand-making’, marking crucial tenors of convergence with government and oppositional agenda and exposing zones of ‘dissent’ and more importantly, building ‘trust’ in and around the process of mediation.

6.2 Sixth Left Front: Beginning of ‘Reforms’

The sixth Left Front government, formed in June 2001, headed by Buddhadev Bhattacharjee, set the target of industrialisation as the primary goal. Since early 2000, a critical deliberation was gradually being stimulated against the ‘shifting’ paradigms of the Front’s model of economic development. Though the ‘dissent’ was largely fed by the oppositional politics – both from the neo-liberal and the Left vantage points, the vernacular print and the electronic media in West Bengal played a very important role in facilitating the debate by acting as one of the physical ‘sites’ of this political
conversation. That is why, in the process of mediation, the representations of the vernacular media often prompted serious consideration and sharp responses from the ruling and the oppositional political contingent. The mainstream newspapers, since early 2000, captured the politics of reforms in terms of not only a ‘change of guard’ in the Front leadership but also a radical ‘change of policy-principles’.

6.2.1 Pre-election Mediation: 2001

The strong inclination of ABP for privatisation and minimal government and its ideological positioning against ‘Leftism’ in general was manifested in the analysis of the election manifesto of the Left Front, which set the broad tone of encoding of agricultural or industrial policy strategies in the following years. Ridiculing the election manifesto of the Front as the “Communist Manifesto”, it reminded (ABP, 3 March, 2001) that the increasing trend of investment in the state was nothing but a product of economic ‘opportunities’ unleashed by the neo-liberal economy. The editorial appreciated (ABP, 3 March, 2001) the “sign of emerging wisdom”, which meant, for ABP, an attitude of “discarding bookish Leftist jargons”. At the same time, it displayed strong dissent about the Front’s ‘negation’ of liberal economic policies of the Centre, apprehending that the policy-makers of the Front might spoil the “self-reforming austerities of the Left Front” (ABP, 3 March, 2001) led by Buddhadev Bhattacharjee. ABP advised (ABP, 3 March, 2001) them to follow the “path of Manmohan Singh-Chidambaram-Yashobant Sinha” to gain “laudation of the World Bank”. As an emphatic champion of industrialisation, it upheld the need for massive ‘modernisation’ of agrarian sector exploiting the potentials of agro-industries to feed the industrial reforms and meet the demands of the global market.

Bartaman tuned its coverage of the Front regime, from early 2001, with scathing criticism of the law and order situation of the state and skepticism about the new Chief Minister’s enterprise towards agro-industrialisation in the changing situation. Though it rallied with ABP in singling out Budhdhadev Bhattacharjee’s credential as a “liberal and open-minded” (Ghosal, 2001: 4) person in contrast to his predecessor Jyoti Basu, Bartaman refused to sail with the rhetoric of industrialisation under the ‘new’ Front leadership. Bartaman’s adversarial position in respect to the regime can be traced to the
following editorial comments filled with sarcasm and utter negativity about the ‘prospect’ of the Front’s proclamations, as early as 2001 (Bartaman, 24 March, 2001): “The claim of this government is that they are ready to establish the state as the previous station of the heaven by bringing in waves of industrialisation.”

The centrality of ‘industrialisation’ as the only ‘viable’ model of development for the state in the public debate led to a consequent downplay of agrarian policy coverage in the mainstream media, which merged well with the oft-quoted rhetorical framing of the Front government in this phase – Agriculture is our foundation, Industry is the future. Agrarian reforms received evidently low and secondary coverage in the first year of the sixth Left Front government vis-à-vis prioritisation of ‘speedy’ industrial growth. The year saw only two references of the agrarian policy of the Left Front in ABP coverage as opinionated articles (Marjit, 2001: 4; Dasgupta, 2001: 4). The first article, written by economist Sugata Marjit, published in the preceding month of the Assembly election, assessed the ‘success’ of the Left Front in agriculture and ‘decline’ of industrial health of the state. The other was a response, in the form of an article, by the veteran CPI parliamentarian and trade union leader, Gurudas Dasgupta, to counter the ‘critique’ against the Front, after the new government took oath in office. Beyond these two, the focus was predominantly turned on the ‘potentials’ of industrial reforms, both in respects to the policy coverage of the Left Front and the media-circulated schemas of development. From the early months of 2001, Bartaman campaigned vigorously for a ‘mahajot’ (grand alliance) of the anti-Front parties to ‘protect’ electoral democracy in the state, which was countered, from the very first day, in Aajkal’s framing as ‘mahajwot’(grand mess), ‘gopon jot’ (secret alliance) or ‘jot-gorapeta’(alliance fixing).

The pre-election coverage of Bartaman completely marginalised policy debates on agrarian development in its Lead or editorial pages.

The opinion-making and agenda-setting roles of the vernacular media were found to be consolidated on the eve of the elections. The Bengali press emerged as one of the primary agents of political campaigns, influencing public assessment of policy strategies by legitimising or de-legitimising their rationale to the masses. ABP published a series of articles evaluating the Front government’s performance in different sectors in the months preceding the Assembly election scheduled on 10 May, 2001. These opinionated articles
slowly built up the tones of the campaign with observations and interpretations by eminent scholars, especially economists, spinning the electoral campaign as an informational instrument. The series was introduced with an economist’s critical observations, who noted (Marjit, 2001: 4) that under the Left Front regime the performance in the agricultural sector far outstripped the other states in terms of agrarian production and the ‘credit’ should go to the land reform policies of the Front especially the Operation Barga. He lamented that the ‘success’ of the agriculture did not find a place in the debates around the development of the state. According to him, this represented partially an ‘attitudinal’ problem that equated development only with industrialisation. The series was summed up by another economist who compared the ruling and the opposition fronts in West Bengal in terms of their economic thoughts. He argued (Roy, 2001: 4) that the “old populist slogan” of the Left against the Centre had become “edgeless” in the context of economic reforms since 1990s and a mere change of guard in the leadership would not produce any revolutionary change in the state. The critical assessment of the development exercises of the Left Front reached its climax in ABP coverage on the very day of the election. The two opinion articles published in the fourth page on 10 May (2001) marked a significant change of tone with the authors pitching on their criticism of the regime in terms of ideological perspectives, shifting away the focus from mere ‘pragmatism’ of economics. Both of these articles strongly substantiated the discomfiture of ABP with the Marxian ideology and the Left socialist programmes vis-à-vis neo-liberal economic principles. Sharmila Basu, a historian by profession, wrote (2001: 4):

“…there was no future of the state with Communism. The progress seems impossible if (the state) is not free from this ideology. Even the reformists or the rebels in the CPI(M) could not achieve this liberalisation in the mindset and so, they could not show any prospect of new ‘Leftism’.”

(bracket mine)

The other article pleaded (Ghosh, 2001) strongly for privatisation in the state and suggested that the state government should visit cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore to learn the process of attracting private investment. This kind of reflection not only negated the success claims of the government but also raised questions about the credibility of the ideological scaffolding of the Left-led regime as a whole. The diffusion of the message amounted to a form of propaganda campaign, though in a suggestive
mode, in favour of liberalisation-privatisation principles, that found a more aggressive mode in following years.

The opinionated articles in the mainstream newspapers were supplemented by hard news in the first page, often shaped in reportage mode, which were again framed on selective personalised streaks and linear narratives, creating and/or deconstructing myths about the individual/collective leadership and a specific ‘model’ of development. The hard news, especially the Lead, were often accommodating a story-telling mode, favouring framing style over accuracy, wide use of metaphors and using personal, ‘semi-insider’ experiences in reporting. For example, Bartaman and Aajkal popularised satirical columns of their editors in the first page replacing the prime space of hard news. As noted earlier, Bartaman had throughout utilised this personalised mode to negate the ‘myth’ of Jyoti Basu’s leadership and ‘acted’ as the whistle blower against the ‘corruption’ of Basu and his close associates. Its crusade against ‘corruption’ and ‘terror’ of the CPI(M) in Bengal primarily rested on negating the ‘myth’ around Basu’s ‘able’ leadership. The purging took an interesting mode by a counter-framing of Budhdhadev Bhattacharjee’s personal image as “honest and simple” and his gradual shedding off “conservative, obstinate Marxism” to accommodate “liberal”, “free ideas” in dealing with the industrialists, which “had thrown a great challenge to the Opposition leader, Mamata Banerjee” (Ghosal, 2001: 4). This image-making of Front leadership in Bartaman converged well with ABP’s ‘brand-making’ of Budhdhadev Bhattacharjee as “the pioneer of new potentialities” (Chattopadhyay, 2001: 4), one who had “accepted the logic of a developmental liberal economy unfettering the slavery-chains of Left ideology and narrow Bengali parochialism” (ABP, 31 December 2002). It is to be noted that while Bartaman nurtured the personal attributes of Budhdhadev Bhattacharjee to pose him against Jyoti Basu, the rationale behind ABP’s image-making was located in their advocacy of neo-liberal economic philosophy.

A media analyst finds that this kind of genre in reporting has increasingly replaced the news value of policy and regime coverage in favour of story value in the Bengali news world. The coverage of electoral campaigns in most of the mainstream newspapers concentrated on the industrial development of the state and the credential of the
individual leaders, both in the ruling and the opposition front, to bring in development in West Bengal in a ‘desired’ way, and in the process, more or less, marginalised the agenda of agrarian reforms. It provides the scholars an opportunity to see how, in this mediation, frames of narratives were attached to selective social and political postulates to create a subjective reality for and against the ‘desired’ model of development to entice the readers.

6.2.2 Images of the ‘New’ Regime

As the new Front government came to power, in May, 2001, ABP editorial expressed its discomfiture with the warning (ABP, 14 May, 2001): “The task of the government is to leave behind the erroneous dreams of socialist paradise to construct the proper stairs of liberal economy.” Bartaman was manifestly assertive in its anti-Front escapade as it strongly negated the electoral victory of the Left Front for the sixth term as a result of “rigging” (Bartaman, 15 May, 2001; Sengupta, 20 May, 2001: 1; Basu, 2001:4) and this positioning continued to dominate the subsequent coverage. Ganashakti countered the criticism with its grand narrative of ‘positive’, ‘people-oriented’ performance of the Front government and explained (Ganashakti, 21 May, 2001) the “magic” behind the electoral success in terms of “four pillars” – land reform, increase of investment through expansion of irrigation, improved technology for agriculture and agriculturists and revival of panchayat system. Negating this claim altogether, Bartaman attributed the ‘success’ in recovery of land to the United Front regimes, quoting the Front government appointed Mukherjee-Banerjee Commission’s report. It questioned the “false credit” of the Front “propagated in the party newspaper” (Basu, 2001: 4).

In the process of negotiating the images of the governance the mainstream media and the ruling Front often showed a fairly identifiable convergence in their shift of focus during the last decade of the Front rule. An evident predilection for industrialisation replacing the earlier focus on agrarian sector in the government agenda and in the encoding of mainstream media marked this crucial shift. This was a thematic convergence that was nurtured vigorously both in the mainstream Bengali media’s everyday representations of the regime and the policy propaganda of the Left Front. Accordingly, coverage of agrarian policies was surrogated mostly as secondary references to industrial policies or
general economic reforms. For example, in the early months of the sixth Left Front rule, *Bartaman* brought in the articulation of agrarian policies, for the first time, in the reporting of the first state budget of the sixth Left Front government, which focused on small scale industries and agro-based industrialisation in rural Bengal. The editorial appraised (*Bartaman*, 9 March, 2002) the increased attention on investment in agriculture but lamented that the state was severely lagging behind other states in terms of irrigation system and other institutional support. This critical evaluation was partially shared even in the party newspaper when Binoy Konar, the CPI(M) peasant leader, admitted (2002: 4) that the state farms were “practically inactive”, “CADC institutions were required to take more active role in seed conservation” or “inspite of the expansion of irrigation system it was not much balanced and scientific”.

It is, therefore, worth mentioning that agricultural reforms appeared neither in the visionary statements in the *ABP* coverage of the development of the state, prejudiced around industrialisation-centred model, nor in the personalised, ‘corruption’ agenda of *Bartaman*. It was not evidently articulated even in the *Ganashakti* coverage as Lead, except in few references as a ‘success’ zone of the Front regime, drawing on the past references of land reform. *Aajkal* also placed a very nominal attention to the agrarian policy coverage in its front page during this period. Agricultural policy coverage remained as a zone of relative silence in terms of hard news or opinionated articles in the electoral campaigns. More importantly, whatever coverage the agricultural policies received, either reflected on the ‘positive’ implications of opening up the sector to the global market, accommodating liberalisation drives in the insulated agricultural economy of the state or in terms of ‘failure’ of the state to provide infrastructural support to augment important changes in agrarian sector. The opinion-spaces, during electoral coverage, rarely provided space for the plurality of views to enrich readers’ with broader scope for critical deliberations on different aspects of agrarian reform in the state.

A specific angularity to the debate, in the context of liberal reforms, was provided by the *ABP* editorials or opinion articles, which commented (Chattopadhyay, 2001a: 4) bitterly on the “cheap politics” of the Leftists around the WTO Treaty and their ignorance about the overall “interests” of Indian agriculture. The then news editor, Suman Chattopadhyay, argued (2001a: 4) that while other Indian states had already initiated project reports to
examine the impacts of the WTO treaties on their agricultural economy – one of which was the withdrawal of all kinds of quantitative restrictions by the Central government, the CPI(M) leadership was worried about the possible ‘devastating effect’ of the policy on the Indian agriculturists by allowing unrestricted import of agricultural products. The then Finance Minister, Asim Dasgupta, was insisting on a ‘renegotiation’ with the WTO to protect Indian agriculturists’ interests. The author remarked (Chattopadhyay, 2001a: 4) that the “Bengali communists” enjoyed pleasure by “fighting with the shadow” though there was no “real basis” of this threat.

ABP incited the ongoing debate on the economic conditions of the state of West Bengal under the Left-ruled regime by inviting the veteran CPI leader, Gurudas Dasgupta, in the opinion page. The well-known member of the Left parliamentary contingent and a firebrand trade union leader, Gurudas Dasgupta, responded to the charges against the ‘degradation of West Bengal’, made by the opposition parties and critics in general and especially the mainstream media. In a two-series article, he evaluated the ‘performance’ in the agricultural and industrial sectors of the Left regime particularly in respect to the all-India situation (Dasgupta, 2001: 4). Reiterating the Leftists’ claim of topping the list in agricultural production like in rice, potato in the country, Dasgupta attributed the ‘success’ to land reform, irrigation development, use of improved fertiliser and seeds, and argued that the advancement in agriculture had created the ‘ground for industrial development’ in the state. A staunch critic of the Front’s “politics of clientalism” in rural Bengal, ABP, however, acknowledged the contributions of land reform and panchayat raj as chief factors behind the long-term electoral success of the Front. In one editorial, it commented, though with a humorous tone (ABP, 21 June, 2002):

“The Front is reaping golden harvest in electoral granary for twenty five years due to the high-productive cultivation…this change is primarily economic, but it cannot be understood only in reference to the figures of economic benefits…this, in one sense, is a question of changing the balance of power in rural politics of West Bengal.”

It can be mentioned here that the Left leadership in the state have always assigned the success of the Front regime and its popularity in the rural Bengal to the combined effects of land reform and decentralised local governance.
6.2.2.1 *Brand Making in Representations*

As reflected from the electoral coverage, the Bengali press relied on, what Gerbner called, the *cultivation effect*\(^\text{12}\) in projecting different postulates about the regime functioning – *ABP*’s bias in favour of neo-liberal economy and a repudiation of socialist ideals in governance, *Bartaman*’s predilection of an ‘ideologically deviated’, ‘politically corrupt’ and ‘divided’ Front, *Aajkal*’s preferred Left model of governance anchored in Bengali chauvinism and *Ganashakti*’s projection of a ‘better Left Front’. In the process of mediation, the ‘image’ of an individual leader or a specific model of economy, in light of certain selective frames, emerged as important feature of encoding the policy strategies, reflecting ‘brand’ making as integral to framing and priming.

*ABP*’s news coverage and the opinion articles, from the very first day of the sixth Left Front regime, gradually built up a ‘Brand Buddha’ image vis-à-vis collective leadership of the Communist party, segregating the leader as the *individual*, upholding unique personal traits, distinct from the *collective mindset* of the party. *Bartaman* also engaged in the process of personalisation of leadership\(^\text{13}\) by invoking a comparison between Buddhadev Bhattacharjee and his predecessor, Jyoti Basu. *Aajkal* joined the bandwagon by projecting Buddhadev Bhattacharjee as “honest, courageous and conscientious Chief Minister” (Dasgupta, 2002:1). The liberal-democratic parties in India like the Indian National Congress or the regional parties\(^\text{14}\) have cultivated individual leaders as the ‘face’ and ‘brain’ of the party. But the leader as *individual* is somewhat antithetically placed in the Communist Party organisational structure, though party secretaries or important leaders play decisive role in projecting the party to the greater community. The mainstream Bengali media, especially *ABP*, recast the Communist Party leadership stereotypes and projected it to the public to popularise certain selective narrative of party and/or government functioning. Negating this brand making of individual leadership, *Ganashakti* representations attempted to articulate party logos vigorously and avoided any personalisation of politics. It reinforced the idea of the ‘united’ Front operating with a collective strength of decision-making. The ‘brand’ making of individual leadership was consonant with the assessment of the Left Front’s policy-strategies as well. In this process, Bengali media’s framing of policies and personalities, often producing binaries (as in the cases of Jyoti Basu-Buddhadev Bhattacharjee or Agriculture-Industry) or
emotive modes – “Leave the Aanchal of the Party”, Chief Minister“ (ABP, 23 February, 2002), especially in the editorials and opinion articles, represented apparently the broad argumentative threads essential for public deliberation in democracy, yet retaining the hegemonic tone of setting an agenda and proposing a central judgment of policy and personality evaluation for the public sphere.

6.3 New Reforms Initiatives

The sixth and seventh Left Front governments built their sustained public campaigns of the agrarian reform on the narrative of an ‘alternative’ vision in achieving breakthroughs in agrarian sector in three decades. The Left Front government asserted (Document#2: 2) that despite a “troubled backdrop” of paucity of arable land, it had been able to “richly” contribute to the “transformation” and “quantum leap in agriculture” with “its long term policies, innovative projects and sustained reform efforts”. The Front government observed (Document#3: 29) that “success in agriculture had been achieved in growth of production, timely diversification of crops and increasing implementation of scientific and technological exercises” in three decades of the Left Front rule. With this backup, the sixth Left Front government claimed (Document#2: 2) to be “witnessing a steady growth in agro-based industries with vast employment potential.” As noted in Chapter III, the core aspects of the new agricultural reforms were agro-industrialisation, mixed or contract farming and improved agro-marketing. As early as 1985, interacting with the delegates of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, Jyoti Basu proclaimed (Ganashakti, 18 April, 1985): “We are quite interested to establish agro-based industries to strengthen economic relations between agriculture and industry, so that income increases in the rural areas.”

This position, however, was not aggressively articulated in the Front’s agrarian vision statements in the 1980s, which focused more on land reforms and productivity.16 Different Plans, throughout the 1980s, addressed the issues of technological intervention, increased investment, mixed farming, breakthroughs in irrigation or agricultural marketing. But it was under the sixth Left Front regime that the agro-industrial prospect of the state was intensely propagated as the Front’s core reform agenda toeing the liberalisation-privatisation programmes and opening of the Indian agricultural market to
the global economy. The Front leadership propagated the ‘urgency’ of the ‘reform’ in the existing potentials of the agrarian sector with the projection – *industrialisation for the sake of the peasantry and agriculture itself*. The draft on agricultural reform was prepared by the sixth Left Front government in 2002, on basis of the suggestions proposed by the western consultancy firm McKinsey, which projected an important shift in agrarian vision of the Left Front in meeting the emerging challenges of privatisation-globalisation. *Ganashakti* “broke” the news on preparation of a new agricultural policy in early April, 2002, and emphasised on the “process” and “thrust” of the draft policy making. Its report, however, avoided the subtlety of engaging the US-based consultancy firm, McKinsey by the Left government, rather highlighted (*Ganashakti*, 6 April, 2002) that as a “first step” the government was “consulting with the experts” – agricultural scientists, economists, representatives of private organisations, and others to devise an “alternative” policy of “small farm management” to resist “aggressive corporatisation of agricultural production”. In a specially designed box format, the news described (*Ganashakti*, 6 April, 2002) the “new focus” in agriculture as – “speedy improvement keeping the land character and ownership intact”; “small agricultural planning as an alternative to corporate production”; “service cooperatives with small farmers”; “agricultural polyclinic to distribute micro-kit”; “multi-purpose cold storage for marketing”. Over the next few months, when the uproar over new agricultural policy was swaying the state politics, *Ganashakti* went on supporting the government and the Front’s ‘stand’ to “make an advance in agricultural production” with the oft-quoted rhetoric of “protecting the entitlement right of the small and medium farmers in the context of liberal aggression” (*Ganashakti*, 20 May, 2002). Accordingly, on the occasion of the placing of McKinsey Report to the state government, the party newspaper pitched on (*Ganashakti*, 4 May, 2002) the ‘explanations’ of the then Industry and Commerce Minister, Nirupam Sen, of ‘opting for’ contract farming instead of corporate farming considering the fragmentation of land in the state. The argument was substantiated by the veteran peasant leader, Binoy Konar, vouching for (2002: 4) “new thoughts in agriculture” in the context of neo-liberal economic reforms in the country. It is worth mentioning here that the coverage of the party newspaper reflected cross-references by seeking to substantiate the ‘claims’ of the
Front government in “determining the priorities fighting with the challenges, not ignoring the real situations” (Document#3: 13).

The subtle ‘continuity’ in the ‘urge’ for reform since late 1980s was almost invisible in the mainstream media’s coverage of agrarian policies and found to be downplayed even in the rhetorical surges of the Front’s own mobilisational politics. It appeared, in the media encoding, to be ‘emerging’ in the specific context of the sixth Left Front regime and also in the ‘pragmatism’ of the ‘new’ leadership. It is interesting to note here that inspite of a strong critical stand against the Front’s ideological position, it was, however, ABP, which acknowledged this ‘continuity’ in a quick reference – “the unfolding of pragmatism started in times of Jyoti Basu, Budhdhadev Bhattacharjee was his successor” (ABP, 21 June, 2002). The framing of the new agricultural policy and subsequent reforms in the Bengali mainstream media, therefore, dominantly encapsulated the moments of ‘deviation’ and ‘tension’ in the Front’s ruling agenda in the last decade of its rule.

The first mention of the agrarian reform in ABP was to be found in the analysis of the state budget of 2002 by Arup Ratan Ghosh, the then Deputy General Manager of West Bengal Cooperative and Agricultural Rural Development Bank. As a person working in agricultural administration, he examined the reform proposals in the budget from its ‘pragmatic’ aspects and suggested some measures for implementation. For him, the “honest” proclamations in the budget about increased investments in agricultural inputs did not match with “utter anarchy” (Ghosh, 2002: 4) in real utilisation of potentials over the years. He showed (Ghosh, 2002: 4) that the state government “raised much hue and cry” over proliferation of agro-industries, but the “real investment” in food and food processing industries was only “two per cent”. His observations also concerned the “inefficacy of the agricultural cooperative banks” (Ghosh, 2002: 4).

Contradicting these claims, Ganashakti gradually built up a narrative of ‘success’ of the Left Front governments in bringing “positive changes” in agricultural economy in the state and locating reforms as a necessary step forward in the context of the “achieved success”. Ganashakti emphasised the need to deliver new information and discoveries in science and technology to the farmers by utilising fruits of agricultural researches and praised the rejuvenation of the Agricultural University to work on the integral
relationship between agriculture and industry. These specific dimensions of policy strategies, termed as examples of “accountable and sincere” (Ganashakti, 8 October, 2004) government in party newspaper, found very little mention in ABP, Bartaman or Aajkal. The Front publicised this moment of reform as “charting out a new path” (Karat, 2006), in its campaign that found robust projection in party newspaper’s representations. In an interview with ABP, on the eve of the one-year completion of the sixth Left Front government, Chief Minister Budhdev Bhattacharjee identified (ABP, 12 May, 2002) his primary tasks in agriculture as “consolidating the already achieved success in agriculture” and achieving value addition in agrarian sector. According to him, the second step forward necessitated development of agriculture-based industries to rejuvenate rural economy.

6.3.1 Framing the ‘Tension Zones’ of Reforms

Tuning itself with the economic reforms, the sixth Left Front Government opened the agricultural sector for industrial-commercial forces. The state politics was immediately surged up with the decision to appoint Mckinsey, the foreign consultancy firm, to suggest policy measures for agrarian reform. The hype was well captured in mainstream Bengali media’s encoding of new agricultural policies and state politics witnessed a high-strung mediatisation of the agenda in course of time. The government tabled the Policy Paper on Agriculture in April, 2002, to be finally revised on August and it exposed the intra-Front dissentions and political opposition outside the Front about the rationality and strategic modes of reform. The vernacular media took sharp positions in favour of or against the new policy and articulating their own schemas during the mediation process. While ABP and Ganashakti coverage mostly converged in strongly favouring the new reforms in agrarian sector, Bartaman took a tactical stand against ‘deviations’ in the CPI(M)’s traditional political-ideological positions on agrarian reform and provided greater exposure to the ‘dissenting’ Front partners and Opposition. ABP’s ‘support’ was to be traced in its predispositions for liberal canons, whereas the party newspaper’s coverage rested on ‘changing’ contexts. Aajkal placed the news on reform initiatives mostly in inner pages but, on occasions, covered the criticism of a section of the Left intellectuals with importance, hinting at the ideological tussle over reforms. Senior journalist of Aajkal, Arundhati Mukherjee, reporting in an anchor, pointed out (2002: 1) “that private
investment in agriculture-based industries was not a new incident, but a very old affair”, thus lowering down the high-pitch attention to ‘new’ reforms to some extent.

The role of Bengali media in inciting the debate and sensitising the reader/public with their own frames and narratives exhibited a hitherto unseen media activism in the state politics. The active engagement of Bengali media in agenda-setting and mediating the debate around agriculture-industry relationship epitomised a network of coverage with growing traits of convergence between print and electronic media. This was often evident in the same ‘panel of experts’ writing columns in the newspapers and appearing in the discussions in the private broadcast channels. The ‘involvement’ of the media was well reflected in ABP’s primary response to the intra-Front ‘tension’ arguing (Bandyopadhyay, 2002: 4) that the “uproar” about new agricultural policy was not simply “a problem of management” in the Front. If it was so, as the post-ed author believed (Bandyopadhyay, 2002: 4), the Chief Minister would have not tried to “involve the media to avoid the trouble”. Despite differences of opinion, the proclamation of the new agricultural policy gradually exhibited a convergence in building up hypes around new reform initiatives in the media encoding and public policy articulation at different levels in the state.

6.3.1.1 The McKinsey Recommendations

The two most discussed and debated components in the Policy Paper were crop diversification for the purpose of value addition and contract farming. ABP’s coverage wanted to expose (ABP, 17 May, 2002) the “pretensions” of the Front leadership “showing the excuse of the WTO treaty” for this ‘change’ in agrarian policy focus, while, in reality, it followed “the logic of the economic reforms”. ABP assumed (ABP, 17 May, 2002) that “the political compulsion forced the state government to pass the buck on the WTO”, so that there arose “no negative reaction” among the peasants of the state. The editorial, on the following day, commented (ABP, 18 May, 2002), in reference to the promises of “realist, investment-friendly” industrialisation and “new technology, new marketing and introduction of new crops” in agricultural sector, that “there would be no more satisfaction in nice assurances and spirited promises.” Ganashakti, on the other hand, justified (Dey, 2002:1) the ‘compulsion’ of the ‘shift’ to an “alternative path” in
agricultural development invoking the reference of “the context of the crisis at the national level” and “imperialist attack”. The framing actually reflected the implicit tone of the Left mobilisational politics against “aggression of corporate agricultural production” (Dey, 2002:1). From the very first day of its supportive coverage to the new agricultural policy, *ABP*, strengthening *personalisation of politics*, separated the “good resolution” of the Chief Minister from the ideological compulsions of the Front and strongly criticised (*ABP*, 27 June, 2002) the Front partners for “spoiling” the scope of reform. The reference point was a ‘reconsideration’ of the contract farming issue in the Core Committee of the Front Cabinet under the pressure of the Front partners. *ABP* found (*ABP*, 10 June, 2002) the decision of the then Minister of Agriculture, Kamal Guha (who represented the Forward Bloc), not to meet the representatives of the McKinsey, “based on weak excuses”. The editor lamented (*ABP*, 10 June, 2002) that “without giving a serious thought, the Left leaders of West Bengal feel frightened in the name of reform”. Referring to the juxtaposition of the “*swadeshi*” agricultural policy placed by the Agriculture Minister, Kamal Guha, and the ‘resistance’ of the ‘dissident’ Land Reform Minister, Abdur Rezzak Mollah (representing the CPIM) to land acquisition, the op-ed author assumed (Bandyopadhyay, 2002: 4) that “neither the Left nor the Opposition would agree to the extensive implementation of the new agri-business policy as it would certainly change the balance of power in the rural Bengal”. He satirically mentioned (Bandyopadhyay, 2002: 4) that the party decided to “follow the path of market economy” but everywhere “it would shower abuse on (*mundopat*) it”, implying a policy of “*dudh o khabo, tamak o khabo*” (a Bengali idiom meaning kissing two cheeks at the same time). Though vigorously propagating the path of reform as its house agenda, *ABP*, however, on occasions, accommodated the ‘other side’ of the deliberation over the policy changes in its opinion pages, thus, showing its eagerness to play the role as agenda-builder and as a credible forum of public debate.

On September 4, 2002, *ABP* published a two-series post-editorial by Subhendu Dasgupta, economist and civil activist, on the new agricultural policy that represented the dominant reservations of the critics in general.17 Dasgupta, a leading critic of the new agricultural policy, showed (2002b: 4) the ‘discrepancies’ in the Front’s claims about food security in the state and noted the “cleverly changed” framing of language to incorporate assuring
phrases like “keeping in mind the issue of environment” or “to think of crop diversification to increase agricultural income”. He negated the ‘claims’ of the Front government about the role of small farmers in the agricultural progress of West Bengal, citing (2002c: 4) ‘Nagarik Mancha’ (a civil rights organisation) report on the growing trend of transfer of land to the rich farmers and the displacement of small and marginal farmers from their land and agricultural activities in the state over the years. This argument actually threw questions about the ‘claims’ of the Front government in assuring land to the tillers. Dasgupta drew (2002d: 4) attention to the fact that the McKinsey Report on agrarian reform was placed under the aegis of the Industry and Commerce Ministry, not the Agriculture Department, indicative of a policy sanction to reform agriculture “not for the sake of agriculture” but for “the commercial interests of the industrial organisations”. An interesting critical piece, by Raghab Bandyopadhyay, on the emerging discourse of ‘economic reform’ supplemented the arguments, ridiculing the ‘transformations’ of the CPI(M). The title itself represented (Bandyopadhyay, 2003: 4) a popular Bengali colloquial expression – ‘Ma ja chilen, ma ja hoyechen – Marx theke McKinsey’ (metamorphosis from Marx to McKinsey), indicating complete transformation based on a “war” between “CPI(Marxist)” and “CPI(McKinsey)”. Ridiculing the hype around ‘rejuvenation’ of the state under the sixth Left Front regime, he wrote (Bandyopadhyay, 2003: 4):

“The middle class Bengali has again started to dream…it’s a new renaissance for the Bengali community. Bengal will soon secure the top place in the world community. The coalition partners (of the Front) are backstabbing such a high dream...industrialists, media, middle class and the government could have all converged with a single agenda. Such a unity of the four groups is a rare event. The main aim is Bengali capitalism.”

It is interesting to note here that the above-cited ‘renaissance’ of the state was vigorously publicised by the government, the CPI(M) and a section of Bengali media like ABP. The convergence was presumed on a shared frame of progress to be located in the ‘new’ spurt of industrialisation. Thus, in the initial years of reform, ABP’s opinion page accommodated the other side of the reform story, though broadly placing its own favourable stand at the core of the coverage.

Countering the ‘apprehensions’ of the critics, Ganashakti upheld (Dey, 2002:1) the “new turn in agriculture” in a feature series focusing on the objectives of “keeping the
entitlement to land unaffected” and “diversification in agriculture maintaining the food security in the state”. The author nullified (Dey, 2002:1) the critics’ assumptions with the ‘information’ that “there is no place of exploitative contract farming in this new agricultural policy” and assured that the contract with the farmers would be “crop based, not land based” and there would be “scope for the local self-administration like panchayat to put their opinion”.

The ‘stagnant’ state of agriculture had been noted by the West Bengal Human Development Report (WBHDR) in its economic review published in 2004. Subhendu Dasgupta, negating the ‘mild’ tone of the Report, apprehended (2004: 4) a “reverse journey” of the state from the legacy of land reform to “green revolution technology”, which ignored consulting the knowledge, experiences and proposals of the farmers. The critique of the reform proposals, based on the suggestions of McKinsey, was also addressed in Aajkal’s post-editorials from a Left vantage point. A leading Bengali Left intellectual, Debes Roy, in his article, raised (2002: 4) the question about the viability of appointing McKinsey to give suggestions to the state government. McKinsey’s proposal to move from agriculture to agri-business was read by the author as a “move from agriculture to usury” (Roy, 2002: 4). Roy strongly criticised (2002: 4) the argument of Nirupam Sen, the then Industry and Commerce Minister, of a minor “structural change” in agriculture to implement the proposals as follows:

“If he had spoken like that then he had completely uttered the World Bank version…Were not the shifts in the languages of the Industry and Commerce Minister of West Bengal, the leading Left state in India, indicating changes in principles as well?”

The adversarial role of Bartaman, on the other hand, reflected a different genre through its consistent exposing of the intra-Front dissensions on reform in agriculture and providing greater space to the ‘critics’ as a whole, from the early days of reform. It upheld the ‘objections’ of the Front partners like the RSP in implementing ‘capital investment’ in agriculture ‘ignoring’ the existing land reform laws (Bartaman, 8 March, 2003). The primacy to ‘critique’ reached its climax around mid 2003, that is, on the eve of panchayat elections. It covered extensively the points of departure in the Front partners’ position about proposals of reform, though not in the prime space of the newspaper and advanced the arguments that land reform legislations were actually made
by the previous Congress government not the Left Front regime. Widely quoting Ross Mullick and Nripen Bandyopadhyay and echoing the claims of the Congress leadership, Bartaman argued (Guhathakurta, 2003: 4) that the ‘credit’ of land acquisition policy should go to the legislations under the Congress regime and “rebellious spirit” of the Bengali peasants only “eased the job”. At the same time, it reinforced (Basu, 2003: 4) the ‘skepticism’ of a section of scholars that the statistics propagated by the government contained false account. Thus, barring a few instances, the framing of policy reforms in Bartaman resided on certain consistent and ‘relevant’ cues to feed the target audience with the image of a ‘deviated’ and ‘inefficient’ Left Front regime.

The ‘critique’ to the Front’s agri-business policy was immediately countered in ABP arguing ‘for’ the new reform measures to ‘save’ the agriculture in the state. Contrary to the arguments of the critics placed above, the post-ed author vindicated (Roy, 2002a: 4) the ‘stand’ of the Policy report in favour of profitable crop production and contract farming to increase productivity. The ‘resistance’ of the Front partners about contract farming and commercial crop diversification, according to him, was based in the apprehension of a “political suicide” (Roy, 2002a: 4) of the Front government by way of “snatching land” from the small farmers benefitted by land reform under the Left Front regime. The author strongly advocated for consolidation of small plots of land to build up big agricultural cooperatives to increase productivity with modern technology. However, this ‘alternative’ proposal found no support in the Front’s policy considerations. As has been noted in Chapter III, the CPI(M) leaders advocated ‘service cooperatives’ instead of consolidation of holding, showing the example of the Front’s ‘success’ in augmenting ‘improved agriculture in small holdings’ in the state and protective measures to resist transfer of land for ‘captive cultivation’ under contract farming. The then news editor of ABP, Suman Chattopadhyay, praising the “milestone” effort of the government, vigorously propagated for (2002c: 4) the policy suggestions of McKinsey, arguing that “a golden opportunity for West Bengal had appeared to establish it as a market leader”. This posture of ABP was well manifested in the conviction for a cosmopolitan and liberal economy vis-à-vis the “narrow mindedness of the Left ideology and parochial Bengali sentiment” (ABP, 31 December, 2002). The ‘success’ of Budhdhadev Bhattacharjee was also to be placed in this frame of ‘going beyond’ the scaffolding of the Communist party
to welcome ‘liberal’ reforms. The framing of this discourse was recognisable through certain emotive and repetitive expressions or jargons used in representing and stereotyping the Left-led regime such as ‘kupomondukota’ (narrow mindedness), ‘netibachak manasikota’ (negative mindset), ‘hothokari’(impetuous), ‘ketabi bampontha’ (bookish Leftism), ‘modhahyobitto manasikota’ (middle class mentality), “gonrami” (conservatism), and in incorporating the ‘aspirations’ of a rising upper-middle and middle class Bengali community, especially the younger generation.

As noted earlier, Aajkal, in the beginning, maintained a visibly low tone in framing the hype around the debates on agrarian reform. However, the editor expressed (Dasgupta, 2002a: 1) his emphatic support to the efforts of the Chief Minister, inspite of “some reservations”. Ganashakti’s coverage captured the rhetoric of reforms in the over-arching frame – “scourge of liberalism and new thoughts in agriculture” (Konar, 2002: 4), consolidating the Front government’s prophecy of “a new system in agriculture to face the challenges” (Dey, 2002a: 1). In this process of mediation, Ganashakti was delivering its responsibility as the party organ to work as a ‘political weapon’ for the CPI(M) and the Front by claiming to reflect the ‘true news’ to the public. Accordingly, its framing, from the very first day of reform initiatives, relied on symbolic construction and expressive political-ideological modes in favour of the Left’s traditional political constituency, such as, “to save the agriculture”, “in the interests of the peasants and rural people”, “struggle for alternative keeping the class perspective intact”, “priority to the marginalised”, and thus, building up a counter-narrative of ‘surrender’ to the liberal economy. Reiterating time and again the integrity of ‘class approach’ and ‘struggle for alternative’ in the age of imperialist globalisation, Ganashakti substantiated the Front’s oft-quoted rhetoric of “limited power of the state” and reform with “political good will”. The ‘shift’ in policies was captured with a distinct note of Budhhdhadev Bhattacharjee, framed in a banner Lead – “(We are) venturing to an unknown path bravely” (Ganashakti, 12 February, 2004).

The image-making of the Front government rested widely on certain emotive-suggestive phrases like ‘janamukhi’ (people-oriented), ‘bikolpo’ (alternative), ‘simito khomota’ (limited power), ‘goriber swarthey’ (in the interests of the poor), ‘nojirbehin safolya’ (unprecedented success), and negation of ‘apoprochar’ (misdirected campaign) of the
‘swarthaaneshi mohol’ (groups with vested interests) that provided the rallying point for the Front. This political role also prompted the newspaper, on occasions, to underplay the dissent within the Front on agrarian reform by relegating the coverage to page six as “some reservations” of the Front partners which would be “taken care of by the Chief Minister” in the Cabinet meeting (*Ganashakti*, 21 June, 2002).

6.3.1.2 Negotiating the ‘Alternative’ Image

Beyond the conformity in the ‘urgency’ of reform in agriculture, the strands of divergence in representations were manifestly reflected at two levels – among the media houses and between media and government – in projecting the images of governance. Inspite of its defense of the ‘shifts’ in the Left Front’s agrarian policy-strategies, the ‘anxiety’ of *ABP* over the ‘market-friendly reform’ in a Left-led regime, however, prompted its observation (*ABP*, 10 March, 2003) that “the Left Front had recognised market compulsion” but “market had failed to get an entry into its ideas and consciousness.” Ridiculing the claim of the Front of adopting an “alternative path”, *Bartaman* summarised (Sarkar, 2003: 4) – “better Left Front means pay when you use”.

In assessing the impact of reform initiatives, *ABP* challenged the government’s claim of economic self-sufficiency of the lower classes of peasantry, arguing that there had been a growing trend of transferring of *pattas* of land on lease due to loss in ‘alternative cultivation’, leading the peasants increasingly dependent on credit from the moneylenders for survival (Moitra, 2005a: 4). It held (Moitra, 2005a: 4) “the control of the party” and “the entry of a kind of regulated capitalism in the agriculture”, responsible for the crisis. The government, on the other hand, fiercely advocated a different narrative of “Changing Rural Bengal”\(^\text{20}\), which was prepared for an expansion of agro-based industrialisation and no longer depended only on agriculture. Downplaying the hype around investments in the agrarian sector, *Bartaman* continued with its *watchdog* role by articulating the plight of the peasants due to falling prices of rice, with the adjunct that peasants “apprehended” the government would be “facilitating the interests of the well-to-do farmers and traders” in this case (*Bartaman*, 18 January, 2003). *Ganashakti* had consistently countered such ‘apprehensions’ by placing the declaration of the then State Finance Minister in the Assembly “to buy rice from the peasants through the cooperatives with a supportive price” in the Lead (*Ganashakti*, 11 June, 2002) and throughout assured the supporters –
‘Left Front government is with the peasantry’ (Ganashakti, 12 June, 2002). In this war of words, Aajkal added a new angularity to the debate, going beyond the credo of ‘neutrality’, by critiquing the stand of a section of the mainstream Bengali media on the issue of capital-intensive reforms and privatisation – “Why these suggestions to the Left Front government to become a Rightist one?” (Dasgupta, 2003a: 1) The implicit target was primarily ABP and its associate publications as emphatic proponent of private capital and corporatisation.

The disapprobation of Aajkal of the liberal economic model converged well with Ganashakti’s scoffing at ABP’s ‘stand’ on Front’s rural development policy – “ABP opposed Operation Barga, wept for ceiling-surplus land and termed decentralisation as decentralisation of theft” (Chakraborty, 2003a: 4). Mocking at the catchline of ABP, Ganashakti wrote that it was not possible to know the state reading Anandabazar and the reality was “one misses, if (he) reads Anandabazar” (Chakraborty, 2003b: 4).

6.3.2 Mediating the ‘Shift’ in Reforms

The panchayat election in the state in 2003 provided the Bengali press the context to review the performance of the Left Front regime over twenty-six years. Bartaman published a series of op-ed articles by the leaders of the ruling and the opposition parties. The authors representing the SUCI, BJP, Congress and TMC slammed the Left Front regime for the economic stagnation of the state. Manas Bhuniya, the then Secretary of the Pradesh Congress Committee, strongly observed (2003: 4) that “the agriculture-based rural Red Palace” of the Front regime had been built on basis of “thousand examples” of “mass plunder” of crops, houses and villages in Bengal. It is interesting to note that Aajkal, manifesting its ‘friendly’ stand to the Left Front, came forward to respond to the arguments of the then BJP State President, Tathagata Roy, in this series in Bartaman about the ‘total failure’ of the state. The editor, in his special column, reminded (Dasgupta, 2003b:1) the successes of land reform under the Front regime and dismissed the arguments of Roy strongly as “pagoler pralap” (incoherent talk of a mad person).

Reiterating its adversarial assessment of the Front regime and its agricultural policies, Bartaman termed the decision of the government to speed up the provident fund project for the agricultural labourers as nothing but a “political gimmick” (Bartaman, 25 January,
2004). The oft-quoted critique about the state’s agricultural situation that a large number of peasants were deserting the ‘non-profitable’ agricultural activities and looking for other jobs found strong support in its news representations in the first page with the opinion that the whole concept of an “obstinate” barga system implemented by the Front was erroneous as it did not pay attention to “a complementary system of cooperative production and distribution followed to land reform” (Sinha Roy, 2004: 4). To substantiate the above assumptions, Bartaman highlighted the cases of suicides of the potato farmers and the severe crisis in harvesting during the draught situation in its Lead news as special reporting for a number of days.

Many scholars argued that land reform programme, decentralisation and boro-revolution were foundations of the ‘success’ of the Front in augmenting agrarian production in the first two decades, which started declining since 1990s due to a number of factors. The advocates of reform, in ABP’s opinion pages, propagated for (Sarkar, 2005: 4) ‘internal’ and ‘external’ changes in the “feudalistic prison” of West Bengal to address these problems in agriculture, by utilising modern technology in bigger land areas with less labour inputs and “to ensure big capital investment in agriculture like the industry” with “contract-farming as the basis of relationship between the industrialists and the agriculturists”. ABP rationalised the Front government’s reform strategies of augmenting big investments in agriculture on these lines of argument.

The ‘tensions’ regarding the agrarian reforms, thus, found considerable news value in the first few years of the sixth Left Front regime, which was gradually replaced by the ‘focus’ on industrialisation. The preparation of the McKinsey draft on agriculture and the placing of new agricultural policy were the focal attractions of the debate which exposed hitherto unseen convergence between the government agenda and that of a section of ‘bourgeois’ media and, on occasions, reflected a fracture in the perceived conformity of the mainstream ‘bourgeois’ media against the Left-led regime in general. The hype around “search for capital” gradually marginalised the coverage of ‘traditional’ policy principles in agrarian sector in the mainstream Bengali media, surrogating it under the exigencies of industrial reform. It can also be identified from the number and kind of coverage of the agricultural policies as Lead or in the opinion spaces compared to the
industrial policy coverage. During the period 2002-2004, i.e. of drafting the new agricultural policy, ABP covered the agricultural policies only in three Lead news (six columns), three editorials and fourteen post-editorial articles. Ganashakti was also found to be rallying with the slogan of industrialisation, which was manifested in its scanty coverage of agricultural policy in the focal spaces. It was covered in three Lead news (eleven columns), four editorials and two post-editorials during that period. Bartaman placed agricultural policy only once as Lead news and in two editorials and five post-editorials. Aajkal did not fit in any news on agricultural policy as Lead, but mostly covered it in inner pages or anchor with only one post-editorial. The dominant framing of the agrarian reform in ‘bourgeois’ media as well as in party organ, more or less, marginalised the multiple dimensions of reform, putting pre-eminence on capital investments in agriculture, like agri-business.22 The underreporting of these less-known aspects of ‘reforms’ reduced the whole programme, in the media agenda, into mere agro-industrialisation one, implying an urge of the policy reforms in agrarian sector to feed the emerging industrial sector. This lopsided attention of the vernacular media, by and large, defeated the scope of a comprehensive public debate over agricultural policies in the state during the last decade of the Left Front regime.

6.4 Climax: Land Acquisition for Industrialisation

After a brief interlude, the bustle around agrarian policy was again captured the public attention since mid 2005 when the state government was preparing for an amendment in the existing land ceiling law to accommodate the requirements of infrastructural development for urbanisation and production of commercial crops, especially the ‘need’ for land to implement proposals of huge capital investment. The Front partners and a section of the peasant front of the CPI(M) were raising strong reservations against any dilution in the existing upper limit of ceiling in land to ‘ease out’ land acquisition for industrial-commercial purposes. The debate reached an unprecedented peak in early 2007 with two incidents – one, the acquisition of land in Singur in Hooghly district for manufacturing of Nano car by Tata Motors and the other, consideration of land acquisition to set up a proposed chemical hub in Nandigram in East Medinipur district. These two cases of land acquisition for industrialisation ruptured the long-drawn political quintessence of the state under the Left-ruled regime and shook the state politics with
titanic volatility. Resistance by the Opposition — both political and civil society, to land acquisition led to occasional violent confrontations with the state administration resulting in serious law and order troubles in the state. Amidst the controversy, the seventh Left Front government was reinstated in power with a massive electoral mandate in June, 2006, and spearheaded its industrialisation programme more powerfully. In this situation, the major partner of the Left Front, CPI(M) got engaged in a more jingoistic political combat with the Opposition, with its battle cry of industrialisation programme as the only potent source of employment generation and endorsed a fierce war of propaganda in its party newspaper. The issue was immediately placed in the leading focus of the coverage for all Bengali newspapers — both in their hard news and in the editorial pages. The mainstream ‘bourgeois’ media emerged as one of the vibrant physical sites of the debate with its ‘insider’ role and spin-doctored the controversy in a hitherto unseen way, vigorously countered by the ‘alternative’ logos of the party newspaper. The framing of the debate in Bengali news world went beyond the informative-presentational mode to accommodate an evidently ‘activist’ or propaganda mode with prejudiced framing of hard news and committed expressions in editorials. The hype around “search for capital” has been more extensively dealt in Chapter VIII on industrial policy coverage. Vernacular media actively engaged in the polemical battle — Agriculture versus Industry, with generation of certain hypes, images, schemas and stereotypes around the dispute.

*ABP* introduced the debate with an ‘inside’ story of the dissensions within the Front as the Lead (*ABP*, 4 August, 2005), with an accompanying editorial lamenting that “politics usually triumphed over economics in the dual battle” in the state (*ABP*, 8 August, 2005). The editor forwarded (*ABP*, 8 August, 2005) his conjecture with the following arguments that set the essential tone of the representations of the House for the subsequent period:

“Land should be made open like other resources…time has come to identify agriculture as parallel to industrial sector; large investments are needed in agriculture like industry; corporatisation can fulfill the objective – this is the ideal path of development in agriculture…to leave the question of land ownership beyond market system is indicative of imprudence.”

While vigorously supporting the structural changes in agrarian mode of production and intensive capital investment in agriculture and allied sector, *ABP*, on occasions, also
covered the ‘resentment’ around compensation to the farmers in case of land acquisition for industrial-commercial purposes in its expositions. Thus, the propagation of land acquisition for big industries was also balanced by certain apprehensions about the ‘justness’ of the compensation in a number of opinion articles, mostly written by economists (Sarkar, 2005: 4; Basu, 2007: 4; Banerjee et al. 2007b: 4). While one author suggested that “friendly relation to capital” was quite necessary but there was no necessity “to appease the capitalists or provide subsidy to them” (Sarkar, 2005: 4), another author put primacy over the question of compensation and criticised the Opposition for not paying ‘due attention’ to the compensation package during the Singur land acquisition controversy (Basu, 2007c: 4). Nine leading economists, in a two-series article, propagated for (Banerjee et al. 2007a: 4) the involvement of the government in the land acquisition process to protect the interests of the poor farmers and bargadars against big capital. The Front government also substantiated the ‘active’ role of the state in land acquisition processes. However, it can be noted that ABP’s fierce advocacy for industrialisation outweighed all such considerations over the following years and led it to thrive for an image of the ‘future of West Bengal’ in terms of industrial development.

Bartaman also created its own niche in the mediation by incessantly covering the ‘ideological deviations’ of the CPI(M) – “the traditional Left versus development” (Moitra, 2005c: 4) and reaching out to the ‘critics’ and ‘heretics’ with its intensive coverage of the ‘opposition’ to the land acquisition policy. Ganashakti and Aajkal projected the ‘compulsions’ of the Left Front to prioritise ‘new’ policies of land acquisition in the ‘new’ context of economic development in the state, downplaying the intensity of intra-Front divisions in their articulation. As Chomsky and Herman referred to a ‘filter of flak’ operative in mainstream media, these Bengali newspapers, in their own capacities, blocked ‘other’ views in their representations of the debate and pursued an emphatic spin-doctoring role to steer their target audience in support of their own schematas.

The dissensions within the Front on prioritisation of industrial development over traditional agriculture was attended in ABP’s representations with a strong bias in favour of ‘reformists’ within the Front, especially one section of the CPI(M), and a scathing critique of the ‘skeptics’. It observed (Moitra, 2005b: 4) satirically that the “tarjon-
"gorjon" (threats and roars) of the Opposotions like the Congress and TMC, reservations of the Front partners like Forward Bloc, RSP or CPI, or even the ‘open scoffing’ of two CPI(M) ministers missed the “main” issue that industry could not be built “on sky”, suggesting that they should focus more attention on “improved compensation package”. 

ABP simultaneously pitched for a “balance” between (ABP, 30 August, 2005) and “integration of” industry and agriculture (ABP, 28 August, 2005). The distinctive cohort of the two opposing houses, ABP and Ganashakti in their focus was well reflected in Ganashakti’s selection of the Chief Minister’s statement, as the title of the banner Lead, during Jakarta tour – “Chief Minister: Development of the state will maintain the balance between agriculture and industry” (Ganashakti, 30 August, 2005). In a Press Meet, the then Secretary of the CPI(M) State Committee, Anil Biswas, substantiated (Ganashakti, 4 September, 2005) the Chief Minister’s statement, arguing that the government would opt for “land of the closed industries to take over for industries”. Ganashakti upheld (Ganashakti, 4 September, 2005) it as a tactical line and rejected any “dilution of party ideology”.

Bartaman, on the other hand, framed its coverage on a more acrimonious tone in exposing the ‘deviations’ and in sharply negating the ‘new’ urge for land acquisition in favour of capital investment and thereby consolidated its space in the public debate with the ‘crusaders’ of the reform. Its encoding contested the rhetorical articulation of “the interests of the farmers” by the Front and the party newspaper. Quoting from a famous poem of Rabindranath Tagore, Dui Bigha Jomi, senior journalist Mihir Gangopadhyay observed (2005:4) that it was time for the peasants like Upen (the poor peasant character in the poem) to turn into “a wretch” and the Marxist government was engaged in that kind of job. During the last decade of the Left Front rule, Bartaman provided most extensive coverage of the Front partners in their ‘dissentions’ about the land acquisition and other aspects of agro-industrialisation and also the movements of the opposition parties against land policies. Its coverage, inducing readers to the idea of a fractured Front, centred on the ‘undemocratic’ management of the Front by highlighting the ‘allegations’ of the smaller partners that they were never “consulted” in taking such decisions (Bartaman, 24 August, 2005). One can find some interesting modes of media framing in structuring the debate in Bartaman’s coverage. One of the framing modes was
built on the articulation of a counter-image of the Salim group by invoking an ‘inside’ story as the Lead news. Devised in a reportage mode it ‘exposed’ the “land scandals” of the Salim group in their “own” country, Indonesia, and indicated that there was lack of transparency in the deal with the state government that should be investigated, incidentally which converged with the demand of the Opposition (Bartaman, 25 August, 2005).

Another type of tactical mediation involved in drawing upon the cult of Jyoti Basu as the senior leader of the Front in this debate. It is quite interesting to see that Bartaman, well-known for its critique of Basu, placed his ‘active’ mediating role in the debate in the front page with big fonts as against the ‘posturing’ of the Chief Minister, Budhhdhadev Bhattacharjee. The newspaper utilised the feature of personality-centric framing strategy, hinting at the disjunction in the CPI(M)’s ‘internal’ solidarity (Bartaman, 30 August, 2005). Bartaman’s repetitive storylines on the intra-Front conflict, often blurring the lines between fact and story, questioned the projected ‘unity’ of the ruling Front about reform. The press conferences of the Front partners on their ‘reservations’ on land acquisitions were always covered in the lead space with banner headings to implicate the ‘importance’ of the issue. The language of representations in the hard news often went beyond the essentiality of objectivity to import emotive and prejudiced expressions like “top daga” (to cannonade), “sarakder bage ana” (to bring the partners under control), “kotakhkha kora” (to insinuate), “guliye dite CPM-er chaal” (a plot of the CPM to confuse), etc. The intensity of the coverage on intra-Front dissentions was well evident from the number of days it covered such news as the Lead, mostly with big fonts and bold layout of headlines. In response, Ganashakti officiated the party stand on intra-Front dissensions by quoting Anil Biswas as – “different political parties may have separate opinions – whatever steps the state government takes, is following the legal path” (Ganashakti, 4 September, 2005). Ganashakti’s articulation of party stand gradually broke the previous abstinence in the coverage of intra-Front dissent to accommodate manifest utterances during this period. Commenting on the ‘allegations’ of the then RSP State Secretary, Debabarata Bandyopadhyay that they were ‘kept in dark’ – well acknowledged in Bartaman’s frame as well, the party newspaper insisted on Anil Biswas’s ‘assurance’ that “there was no lack of transparency in land acquisition” and that
the debate on the land acquisition for industry would not send “a wrong signal to the investors” \textit{(Ganashakti, 24 August, 2005)}. The editorial corroborated \textit{(Ganashakti, 28 August, 2005)} the stand: “The question is of perspectives…CPI(M) does not pursue any double-standard…though the big bourgeois newspapers are lamenting so”.

The party newspaper not only covered ‘explanations’ or ‘rationalisations’ of land acquisition policy but also played a role in reinforcing moral sanctions to ‘reforms’ to the party workers in fighting the Opposition. Accordingly, the framing encoded a perceptible shift in language that deviated from the former ‘official’ modes to accommodate sarcastic and figurative expressions. Thus, an editorial titled – “Agent of the \textit{Bastugughu}”\textsuperscript{25} was scripted in the form of an expo\textsc{s}e of conspiracy by using a linguistic code quite unusual for \textit{Ganashakti}’s common modes of editorial writing. Lashing out at the Opposition party, the TMC, for spoiling the industrialisation efforts of the Front government based on a ‘legacy’ of a strong rural economy, the editor wrote \textit{(Ganashakti, 16 September, 2005)}:

“In this full season of monsoon, the multi-coloured TMC leader Mamata Banerjee has jumped, not in the drenched agricultural land but into the main road of the city with a plough…these plough-holders were never concerned with the interests of the farmers and agricultural labourers; rather had danced frantically to evict them from their land and houses in the interests of the zamindars and moneylenders…they are the obedient agents of the \textit{bastugughu – jotedars}, zamindars and moneylenders in the villages.”

This was followed by a two-series post-editorial, “The Friends and Enemies of the Peasantry of West Bengal”, written by the then Panchayat and Rural Development Minister, Suryakanta Misra. He lamented (Misra, 2005: 4) that the Opposition in alliance with a section of the big business and media houses “were shedding crocodile tears for the agriculture and peasantry of West Bengal”. He assured that no captive land was allowed for the agri-business companies in the new policy. The party organ worked on a counter-framing of ‘dissent within the party’ over land acquisition by anchoring Krishak Sabha’s ‘warning’ to its members of the “false campaign” against the Front government about “forcible” land acquisition and assuring them of “suitable compensation” in case of acquisition \textit{(Ganashakti, 26 September, 2005)}. The party leadership took strong note of the ‘campaign’ by the ‘bourgeois’ media against the Front. Gautam Deb, the state secretariat member of the CPI(M), vouching for (2005: 4) “a long term battle” in the path
of reform lashed at the role of the ‘bourgeois’ media – “the road to travel is reform…Anandabazar-Star Ananda start a hullabaloo if they are restrained in their worship of capital.”

Amidst this turmoil, with the aim to address its traditional support base of lower and middle levels of peasantry, the Land and Land Reform Department of the Left Front government brought in *West Bengal Land Reform (Amendment) bill, 2005* to control reckless changes in land character. *Ganashakti* solely reported it in the Lead with the observations of the concerned Minister, Abdur Rezzak Mollah, that the bill “won’t be an obstacle to urbanisation or industrialisation” (*Ganashakti*, 5 August, 2005). It also exclusively published the report that the Chief Minister had asked advice of the well-known agricultural scientist M.S.Swaminathan on the improvement in agriculture and allied activities and that Swaminathan would work to establish a ‘Rice Park’ near Kolkata for researches on paddy cultivation (*Ganashakti*, 8 August, 2005).

On 11 September, 2005 the then All India Secretary of the CPI(M), Prakash Karat, in a post-editorial in *Ganashakti*, argued (2005: 4) in favour of the new land reform amendments, which according to him, attracted “caustic reporting” of the newspapers about land use in West Bengal. He spoke of (Karat, 2005: 4) the “perverted reporting” about the intra-party dissensions on land acquisition and land use and ‘confirmed’ that “there was no intention of the Left Front and CPI(M) to spoil the noteworthy success of the land reform” and “the present ownership structure in land used for agricultural purposes” in the state. Thus, the party organ reassured its supporters of the moral stand of the government in reform programmes vis-à-vis the adversarial campaign of the ‘bourgeois’ media about the ‘deviation’ of the Left government.

As evident from the above examples, the spatial dimension and the tenor of news in framing emerged as important indicators of prioritisation of media agenda and pointed to the nature of priming. The news on the UNDP’s Human Development Report 2005, ‘commending’ the land reform of West Bengal, especially the Operation Barga as “role model” in agrarian development found no space in *Bartaman* or in the first page of *ABP*, only to be accommodated in the fifth page with a single column (*ABP*, 11 September, 2005). *Ganashakti*, on the other hand, highlighted the Report in its editorial putting stress
on the “example of social justice” in resource distribution under the Left Front regime in West Bengal (Ganashakti, 12 September, 2005). In a comparative assessment of the nature of priming, it was found that ABP banked more on ‘informational’ news and editorial comments on increasing industrial investments in the state over ‘dissent’ on land acquisition, while Bartaman provided a greater coverage of the ‘deviations’ of the Front in its representations. During 2005, the agricultural policies, especially the debate around land acquisition, were covered as the Lead in ABP only for two days with six columns, editorial for one day and four days of post-editorial coverage, while private capital investment in the state and industrial policies were covered in fifty nine columns as Lead for twelve days along with eight and two editorial and post-editorial coverage respectively. Bartaman, on the other hand, stressed on the ‘dissent’ and ‘opposition’ to land acquisition as primary focus of coverage in sixteen days as Lead, and in three editorials and ten post-editorials in 2005.

6.5 Assembly Election (2006): High-pitch Debate

With the ensuing Assembly election in May, 2006, the Front spearheaded its public campaign on the “success” of the regime, banking on the oft-quoted slogan of ‘better Left Front’, raised under the sixth Left Front government. The then Chief Minister, Budhdhadev Bhattacharjee, in an interview with Ganashakti, suggested three priorities of the seventh Left Front government: “priority to the poor people, to consolidate the overall success of the agriculture and to intensify the already created headway in industrialisation” (Ganashakti, 16 April, 2006). The party newspaper, confirming its role as ‘mobilising agent’, sustained the campaign with eulogistic phrases like “consistent sensitiveness”, “accountability”, “political ethics” and “transparency” of the Front government (Ganashakti, 19 April. 2006). On the other hand, ABP covered the ‘focus’ of the seventh Left Front government on its own terms as “industrialisation, development”, pointing to the shift from “the traditional focus on agriculture in past elections” (ABP, 16 January, 2006). The increased attention to industrialisation relegated agricultural policies to coverage only in three days in ABP representations – one in the first page but not as Lead news and two as post-editorials. The hard news was a kind of reportage on the migrating trend of agrarian labour as a result of failure of the state to achieve employment generation in agriculture with proper support of agro-industrialisation (ABP,
10 April, 2006). It was supported with visual imaging placed in graphical representation to help the reader in deconstructing the implicit assumptions of news or reportage in favour of agro-industrialisation. Thus, as a corollary to the reportage (see the following box), there was a projection (ABP, 10 April, 2006) of two specific electoral survey-based questions, tailor-made to fit the above assumptions:

| Operation Barga is the key to the success of the Left Front in rural areas |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Yes | No |
| 76  | 24  |

| It is difficult to achieve success in agriculture without agro-industrialisation |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Yes | No |
| 96  | 4   |

The advocacy of the House for ‘reform’ in agriculture reached its peak on the immediate eve of the election. The post-editorials forcefully pleaded for contract farming and other market-related reforms once again and lashed out at the critics inside the Front for spoiling the issue of contract farming with their opposition. The arguments for building ‘consent’ for reform and de-legitimising any ‘opposition’ were well evident from the following excerpt (Marjit, 2006: 4):

“Capitalism in the city and socialism in villages? …Some days ago, a section of the local government expressed their reluctance about contract farming and dumped the whole issue under deep water…actually what is working behind the rejections of these issues is the logic of a sinking, broken traditional economy, that is, the economy of ‘regulation’.”

ABP’s mediation drew upon the already mentioned narrative frame of “old CPI(M), new CPI(M)” (Sarkar, 2006: 4) in a post-editorial. On a comparative scale, the argument was forwarded (Sarkar, 2006: 4) that the ‘old’ CPI(M) had done some “good jobs” after coming to power like “taking away the land of the rich and distributing it to the poor; ensuring the entitlement of the bargadars to land and increasing the representation of the poor farmers and agricultural laborers to panchayats”. The ‘new’ CPI(M) since 2000 “had taken interest in constructing factories, entertainment park, satellite township on agricultural land” to augment industrialisation (Sarkar, 2006: 4). But the author apprehended (Sarkar, 2006: 4) that the ‘old’ CPI(M) would again become more ‘active’ to ingest the “new reformist” CPI(M), because the “real vote bank of the party was in
villages, underdeveloped areas and in unorganised sectors, where the idea of reform would result negatively”. The branding of a pro-reform image of the Chief Minister, breaking the “conservative Marxism of the predecessors”, found its exalted expression in the title of an editorial – ‘Nutan juger bhore’ (at the dawn of a new age), which demonstrated a strong justification of the Chief Minister’s much-debated comments about the “practice of capitalism” in the state by his government (ABP, 14 April, 2006).26

Interestingly, the same day, Barun Sengupta, the then editor of Bartaman, wrote a special column in the first page hitting at the ‘cohort’ of a section of the Bengali media with the ruling party. Referring to the opinion of the late editor of ABP, Ashok Kumar Sarkar, he asserted – “brokerage cannot be equated with journalism in the same footing” (Sengupta, 2006:1), hinting at the ‘convergence’ of media and ruling agenda in respect to a specific model of development. Bartaman had occasionally showed its disparagement by identifying a section of the Bengali media ‘favourable’ to the Front as “brotherly” to the CPI(M) and “failing to play its role” in reporting “truth” to the public “due to gratitude or fear or respect to the CPI(M)” (Bartaman, 7 February, 2006) or more aggressively as “Buddhapujari” (devotee of Buddhadev Bhattacharjee) (Basu, 2007a: 4). This was indicative of a fragmented space in the mainstream Bengali news world and an occasional departure from the well-known ‘solidarity’ of the ‘bourgeois’ press against the Front.

On the eve of election, rivalry between media houses, especially ‘bourgeois’ newspapers and party organ was manifesting a heightened phase. Ganashakti editorials and opinion articles were lashing at the “anti-Left Front propaganda” of the big ‘bourgeois’ newspapers, especially ABP and Bartaman, as the “Main opposition” (Deb, 2006: 4) of the Front, using strong expressions like “Beosadar Anadabazar”27 and “nokhodontohn (edentulous) journalism” (Deb, 2006: 4; Chakraborty, 2006: 4). Since mid March 2006, Ganashakti reinforced the narrative of “successes” of the Front through a feature series – ‘tathya ja bole’ (what the data say) in page four, on the Front’s achievements in various sectors. The State Committee of the CPI(M) prepared a documentary video titled “Feet on the Ground, Head Held High” in the 2006 election campaign. The same slogan was used in the advertisement visuals of the public campaign of the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, Government of West Bengal, implying a convergence
of propaganda messages and strategies in party organ, party organisation and government communication. *Ganashakti* and *ABP* regularly provided space for the government campaigns on industry and agriculture in their first pages as part of public advertisement. The framing showed a more evident ideological reinforcement of the worldviews in the representations of the electoral verdict and a corresponding war of positions among the media houses. For *ABP*, the Front’s victory in the election was a victory “more of the government’s policy of development than that of the partisan politics of the CPI(M)” (*ABP*, 12 May, 2006). A senior journalist of *ABP*, Jayanta Ghosal, in a cross-referencing framing mode, cited (2006: 4) an article – “In search of an alternative”, written by the then Industry and Commerce Minister, Nirupam Sen in *Ganashakti* to argue that “alternative in the party programme was not a socialist alternative”. Posing a counter-narrative frame of *ABP*, *Ganashakti* captured the moment of electoral victory in a banner headline as “*Lal Bangla aaro Lal*” (red Bengal acquiring deeper red) (*Ganashakti*, 12 May, 2006) implying the reinforcement of the ‘Left’ inclination of the West Bengal electorate in the election. *Aajkal* also rallied with (*Aajkal*, 12 May, 2006) the same ‘Leftist’ tenor in its headline – “*Banglar mati durjoy ghanti*” (the soil of Bengal is invincible land) and ‘endorsed’ that the victory reflected “a political decision of the West Bengal electorate” (Roy, 2006).

Media scholars widely agree that repeated circulation of narratives, observations, comments produces certain *cultivation effect* for the general readers, who are prompted to internalise these *worldviews* as rational, legitimate and ‘natural’ ones. As is seen from the aforementioned examples, one of the appropriate periods of circulation of these messages and images were election events when media’s role in interpreting politics/policies/regimes converged with political parties’ interests in informational and propagandist warfare in respective ways. The ‘manufacturing consent’ or ‘selling politics’ strategies of the media took an interesting shape in setting ‘priorities’ for the governing elites during mediation and the Bengali press found a niche in contextualising and rationalising the policies to the local audience. Thus both the pre-election coverage and the electoral verdict in favour of the Left Front in the Assembly election of 2006 were scripted on different emotive frames and role labels in the mainstream Bengali media.
6.6 Seventh Left Front Government in power

Just after coming to power, the two senior ministers of the seventh Left Front government, Nirupam Sen, the Industry and Commerce Minister and Abdur Rezzak Mollah, the Land Reform Minister, met to deliberate over the compensation package for the farmers in case of land acquisition and creation of a list of land needed to be acquired. *Ganashakti*, gearing up to counter the anti-Front government propaganda on land acquisition policy, made (*Ganashakti*, 24 May, 2006) it a Lead news with seven columns. While the editorials heightened (*Ganashakti*, 25 May, 2006) the criticism against the “web of bad arguments” by the “*hastimurkher dol*”(a group of utter idiots) who had suddenly been emerging as “peasant sympathisers”, the framing of Lead news relied on literal coverage of the press conferences of the Left Front leaders to ‘assure’ the farmers about compensation and alternative arrangements of employment in case of any land acquisition (*Ganashakti*, 30 May, 2006; *Ganashakti*, 20 June, 2006). At the same time, *Ganashakti*’s encoding corroborated strongly the ‘disapproval’ of the party to the ‘stories’ of the ‘bourgeois’ media in propagating a ‘split’ in the party and the Front in terms of agrarian reforms. It provided extensive coverage to the statements made by the veteran peasant leaders like Binoy Konar, Madan Ghosh and Samar Baora upholding ‘unanimity’ of the Krishak Sabha members about agrarian reforms (*Ganashakti*, 30 May, 2006; *Ganashakti*, 19 July, 2006; Konar, 2006: 4) in the state as well as the position of the Left Front Chairman and the Chief Minister on the “Left solidarity” against the “conspirators” (*Ganashakti*, 4 and 19 November 2006). *Aajkal* also covered the rehabilitation package in its Lead designed in a special box format (*Aajkal*, 24 May, 2006). For next few months, its coverage, toeing *Ganashakti*’s line, stressed the ‘willingness’ of Singur farmers to give land to Tata Motors, ‘assurances’ of the CPI(M) leadership that no multi-crop land would be taken for industrialisation or details of packages of compensation for sharecroppers. *ABP*, on the other hand, welcomed the journey of the “corporate” Left Front (*ABP*, 13 May, 2006) and the “eagerness” of the CPI(M) to take over the Ministry of Agriculture in its own hands to “adjust” agriculture with the “new environment of industrialisation” (*ABP*, 15 May, 2006). The first meet of the Cabinet passed proposals on new agricultural commission, rehabilitation packages for land acquisition, which was greeted in the first page of *ABP* as “checkmate with the
weapon of development” (ABP, 1 June, 2006) and in Aajkal as the achieved “unanimity” of the four Leftist peasant organisations on the land acquisition policy for industrialisation (Aajkal, 1 June, 2006).

6.6.1 Singur and Nandigram: Political Flashpoints

The issue of land acquisition for the industrialisation purpose in Singur and Nandigram gradually overshadowed other dimensions of agricultural reforms in the state from 2006 onwards in media representations and political articulations, reflective of the perceived convergence of the political and civil society around the ‘hype’ of industrialisation. Despite certain attempts of the government to publicise its ‘breakthrough’ in agribusiness, irrigation, crop diversification, etc. the media agenda appreciated only the great gusto of the politics of acquisition and broadly marginalised the deliberations on above-mentioned aspects of agrarian reforms as ‘secondary’.

One of the critical issues in the debate on land acquisition in Singur was the ‘willingness’ of the local farmers to part away with their agricultural land for the Tata factory and receive compensation. The Front and the government were engaged in bitter arguments with the Opposition about the ‘number’ of willing farmers and this war of claims and counter-claims built up the central narrative of the polemical battle for next few years. Ganashakti coverage of the issue, from the very first day, rested on an aggressive mobilisational mode by concentrating on ‘willing’ farmers with massive coverage — visual and narrative, of pro-industry moves. Land acquisition was posited as a ‘necessary’ step and any opposition to it as “threat to industrialisation efforts in the state”. Aajkal reinstated the government agenda vigorously and complemented Ganashakti’s arguments with wide coverage of rehabilitation and compensation packages for the ‘unwilling’ farmers.

The new agricultural policy suggested a change in the existing limit of land ceiling to facilitate land use for industrialisation purpose, which was strongly opposed by a section of the Front partners. Ganashakti could not sideline the ‘dissension’ altogether. At the same time, the party newspaper reinstated the ‘assurance’ that the land would be taken only after checking its “social value” (Ganashakti, 2 December, 2006). During the peak phases of agriculture-industry debate Ganashakti published three-day feature series in
the front pages on ‘path of development’ to justify the ‘need’ to reduce the dependence on agriculture to save agriculture itself (Ganashakti, 31 January-2 February, 2007). The post-editorials resided on ‘facts’ on agricultural land in West Bengal, ‘challenges’ to build up the state as self-sufficient in food or ‘efforts’ to strengthen the prospects of agri-business through diversification of crop production, etc. For these special articles, Ganashakti invited State President of Krishak Sabha, local peasant leader of Singur or professor of Vidhanchandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya to substantiate the Front government’s stand.

As mentioned in Chapter IV, from December, 2006, confrontational politics rose to its high-pitch dimension around the land acquisition issue in Singur and Nandigram. The Bengali press internalised the spirit of the debate and gradually emerged as the extended site of political mobilisation. Veteran peasant leader and a member of the CPI(M) State Secretariat, Madan Ghosh, set (2006: 4) the dominant tone of the ruling party’s narrative of a “conspiracy by a few meki (false) peasant supporters” and “solidarity of the Right and ultra-Left groups” in his article in Ganashakti. The representations were anchored on a high-pitch rhetorical and ideological battle in favour of the Front’s land acquisition policy. In this process of framing, texts and headlines reflected a semantic appeal in turning the messages as supportive actions and communicating certain emotional norms of the emerging political battle to the audience and party workers. At the same time, Ganashakti was restoring the news on routine government programmes such as special drives to registration of bargadars (Ganashakti, 10 January, 2007) or preparation of land bank in the state (Ganashakti, 9 February, 2007) in the first pages to indicate a ‘continuity’ in the process of agrarian reform programmes amidst the hype around industrialisation. Aajkal fraternised with the party organ by its incessant ‘positive’ coverage of land acquisition policy and a strong disapprobation of the anti-Front opposition. The framing of the land acquisition debate in the Lead news or edit pages of Aajkal strengthened the “conspiracy” theory of the Front leadership and the party organ. Accordingly, both of these newspapers, in their priming strategy, provided salience to the issue of ‘violence’ and ‘obstructions’ in the process of land acquisition in Singur and Nandigram.
As the confrontation intensified, *ABP* indulged on a systematic and selective coverage of ‘prospects’ of industrialisation in the state, setting aside the polemics around land acquisition from its first pages. On the one hand, it downplayed the spirited politics of the Opposition, and on the other, orchestrated the ‘hype’ around industrialisation with massive coverage of investments by Tata Motors and other industrial houses. Amidst the war of information around number of ‘willing-unwilling’ farmers in Singur and violent confrontations in Nandigram, *Bartaman* delved into the ‘disagreement’ of the Land Reform Minister, Abdur Rezzak Mollah with the ‘accounts’ of “Buddhadev Bhattacharjee and Nirupam Sen” (*Bartaman*, 23 December, 2006), exposing a different narrative of ‘consensus’ within the ruling party. From November 2006 onwards, it spearheaded its coverage on the “lack of transparency” in the “deals” in land acquisition and induced readers with the innuendo of a “mass upsurge” (Sanyal, 2006: 4) of the landless farmers in Singur or anti-chemical hub mobilisation in Nandigram. An interesting ‘borrowing’ of metaphor could be evident in one of the post-editorials in *Bartaman* in reference to the ‘vicious’ networking of propaganda, that shared its concern with the leaders of the Communist parties and party organ, *Ganashakti*, though from an absolutely different perspective. The oft-quoted rhetoric of the Left leaders about the anti-Front propaganda – ‘Goebbolsean strategy of lying’, was revoked (Dutta, 2006: 4) by *Bartaman* to negate the ‘necessity’ of land acquisition: “From the three platforms of power – politics-economics-mass media, loud propaganda is made in Goebbolesean style that development is a sinless process and eviction is only a small side-effect of that sinless activity.” Throughout this period, *Bartaman* placed the ‘dissent’ of the ‘insiders’, especially the Front partners, in the Lead news for a number of days and attempted to insinuate a split between Jyoti Basu and Buddhadev Bhattacharjee over land acquisition and industrialisation issues.\(^3\)

### 6.6.1.1 Mediating the ‘Climax’

From early 2007, the epi-centre of state politics turned to Nandigram where anti-land acquisition movement against the proposed chemical hub by the Salim group culminated in a violent outburst resulting in loss of lives. The state politics was intensified by hitherto unseen political resistance against the Left Front government and a corresponding media framing of the moment with strong moral judgments and
reassurances of rhetorical battle at different levels of representations. In this process of framing, political violence emerged as a major ‘lead’ for media representations, setting aside deliberations over agrarian reforms. Land acquisition agenda enhanced the already established fraternity of a section of the vernacular media houses and political groups and civil society in the state in building up the cohort for and/or against the Front governance.

_Bartaman_ heightened its crusade against the government by putting up banner headlines on “state terror” and articulated the moments with emotive expressions embedded in a low-to-high pitch of the conflict, progressively accommodating the more committed expressions of the battlefront like ‘gonohotta’ (mass killing), ‘roktopiyasi’ (blood-thirst) in mounting the narrative. The common perceptions about ‘objective’ nature of hard news in the first page, therefore, had often been reconsidered as an extended zone of editorial discourses, assuring salience of issues and certain stereotypes, imageries and symbols. _ABP_, on the other hand, sourced its reporting mostly on the government version and broadly showed camaraderie with the ‘official’ stand on land acquisition. _Ganashakti_’s framing also came up with the continued self-reflexive discourse of “suicidal path of violence” or “instigation” by the Opposition in “absence of logic (Dey, 2006: 4; Chakraborty, 2007a: 4; _Ganashakti_, 6 February, 2007). _Aajkal_ rallied with the same ‘official’ frame to cover the violence as “attack of the Trinamoolis (members of Trinamool)” (_Aajkal_, 5 January, 2007).

Over next three months, _ABP_’s encoding gradually built up an evident posturing against state and/or party-led violence and a simultaneous proselytisation in favour of industrialisation. While the op-ed spaces strongly criticised ‘hastiness’ of the government in land acquisition process, it also deliberated on the necessity of building up of ‘consent’ at different levels in the programme of industrialisation and demanded serious circumspection over ‘compensation’ in case of land acquisition. _ABP_ and _Aajkal_ strongly pitched for a ‘democratic ambience’ (_ABP_, 7 February, 2007; _Aajkal_, 6 February, 2007; _Aajkal_, 12 March, 2007) in the dialogical process over reform. However, strengthening its commitment to liberal reforms, _ABP_ strongly pleaded for opening of land market to ‘direct’ transaction between buyer and seller with minimal intervention of the government and accordingly, denounced the attempts to ‘fix’ the upper limit of land ownership (_ABP_, 10 February, 2007). _Ganashakti_ retorted back to the Opposition and
Bartaman’s mockery by giving a “Red Salute” to the “inheritors of Tebhaga” in its reporting of the Front’s rally in the Brigade Parade Ground (Chakraborty, 2007b: 4), inciting the memories of anti-Jotedar, “land capture” movements of the past. As the civil society rallied against the land acquisition the party newspaper built up its own narrative by addressing the ‘discontent’ of the intellectuals and civil activists, on repeated occasions, with a mixture of satire and defensive judgments.

6.6.2 Post-Nandigram days

The Singur and Nandigram cases revealed a unique convergence of opinion in a section of the Bengali media in revisiting the agriculture-industry debate in the state by negating the “baseless war” around “agriculture vs. industry” or “village vs. town” (ABP, 13 March, 2007), in post-Nandigram days. Ganashakti had repeatedly reinforced this position of the party and the Front government in its coverage of the Nandigram episode and post-Nandigram representations (Ganashakti, 4 January, 2008; Ganashakti, 10 May, 2008). One of the most emphatic coverage of such disposition came from the ABP House in upholding Amartya Sen’s arguments on the debate. In an interview with the ABP correspondent, Sen focused on the “complementary relationship of agriculture and modern industries” (ABP, 15 January, 2008), defending the reforms to improve employment and production generation in agriculture. Aajkal also strongly articulated the argument citing Amartya Sen and Muhammad Younus (Aajkal, 13 February, 2007). This thematic convergence of framing in Ganashakti, Aajkal and ABP went beyond the scope of print media’s representations, oft and again, to manifest an inter-textual coverage by instances of public advertisements released by the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs on ‘agriculture vs. industry’ issue.32 These visuals, addressing the ‘progress’ of the state in industrialisation ‘based on’ the ‘success’ of agriculture, were widely circulated and posted in the first pages of party organ and ABP since 2006. These government advertisements were broadly ‘missing’ in Bartaman during the peak period of the debate around Nandigram issue, only to be accommodated in later days when it was placed in four column spaces in the first pages for consecutive days. The CPI(M) in its 22nd State Party Conference in 2008 adopted a resolution on this ‘balancing’ of agriculture and industry which received a verbatim coverage in the party organ (Ganashakti, 16 January, 2008). In the conference, Budhdhudev Bhattacharjee, in his
concluding address, refuted the “misconception” (*Ganashakti*, 18 January, 2008) that the Front was moving away from the peasants and repeated the party line of “enhancing employment in agriculture”, reassuring “equal importance” of agri-business and agricultural production. Thus, a hitherto unseen convergence of opinions was unfolding in the public sphere, since 2007, at two levels – one, on the essentiality of market-based reform in the agrarian sector to ensure complementarity of agriculture and industry (as articulated in the state agenda and in media agenda for *ABP, Aajkal* and *Ganashakti*) and the other, against the alleged ‘deviations’ of the Front from its traditional dispositions in respect to development (as reflected in the Opposition’s agenda and in *Bartaman*’s coverage).

As the Panchayat election was approaching, a renewed attention to the rural Bengal became evident in state politics in mid 2008, which resulted in a resurgence of the agriculture-industry debate in the media representations. From late March to early April in 2008, *Ganashakti* interjected its routine reporting on agrarian reforms with an array of features, framed in informal oral style – ‘*bodle jaoa jibon*’ (changed lives), ‘*voter lodai*’ (electoral battle) or ‘*panchayat-er kaaj*’ (performance of the Panchayat) highlighting the ‘transformations’ in the lives of the farmers due to proliferation in agri-business, investments in irrigation, empowerment through local self-government etc. It was an attempt to restore the ‘silenced’ zones of ‘successes’ of agrarian and rural reforms under the Front government, during the commotion of land acquisition. *Ganashakti* highlighted the ‘lead’ of the state in “benefitting the Muslims and Scheduled Class and Tribes in land entitlement” (*Ganashakti*, 12 April, 2008). The party organ, however, encoded the paradigmatic shift in land reform movement in the new economic situation by stressing on ‘impossibility’ of radical land reform in the existing structure (*Ganashakti*, 19 February, 2008). At the same time, it picked up the increased “share of investment in agriculture” and “100 crore fund for the Land-givers” (*Ganashakti*, 18 March, 2008) in the state budget as indicative of the Front’s continued ‘commitment’ to the farmers and “empowerment of the poor”. The framing renewed the political logos by caustically terming the ‘bourgeois’ and ‘corporate’ media as “friend, philosopher and guide” of the Opposition (*Ganashakti*, 13 May, 2008). The mediation of such rhetorical war against the
Opposition, including the ‘bourgeois’ media rested on the potential of locally used tropes or metaphors, suitable for communicating with the rural populace.  

With a different angularity, ABP also provided a wide coverage of the ‘changing’ thoughts of the Front government on the existing land reform law to launch a “new phase” of land reform “to abolish the system of bargadari” by giving bargadars land ownership and “compensate the land owner on market rates” (ABP, 21 March, 2008) or “life insurance coverage for the farmers in respect to compensation” (Mitra, 2008: 1). However, it assumed the exigencies of ‘panchayat votes’ in the proposals of the State budget to extend the Bhoomidan project for the landless bargadars and criticised the budget for not considering the issue of productivity (Sarkar, 2008: 4). For ABP, the Front manifesto for panchayat election actually talked of ‘transforming the villages into cities’ by putting stress on “massive demands of rural market” for industrialisation (ABP, 8 April, 2008). ABP’s prioritisation of industrialisation was once again vindicated by its analysis of the electoral results. The editorial wrote (ABP, 23 May, 2008):

“Land acquisition, in most cases, is inevitable for industrialisation, urbanization...In an agriculture-based underdeveloped state, it is prudent not to depend on whole-hearted consensus to initiate massive industrialisation. In this evolutionary process, it is expected that some people will suffer in some areas and some will be evicted. The West Bengal populace, especially the Opposition politics is to determine whether they are ready to accept these losses in the future interests of development in the state.”

Bartaman, on the other hand, kept on exposing the “barbarshahi” (barbaric regime) of the CPI(M) in rural Bengal in post-editorials and widely covering the distribution of land to the industrialists “bypassing the ceiling limit” in different parts of the state by the CPI(M) keeping the partners “in dark” in the Lead. In this attempt to build up the counter-narrative of ‘success’ of the Front government, certain underreported issues of rural reform programmes got temporal prominence in Bartaman’s coverage like ‘failure’ of the state in rice procurement or “highest number of starving people in the state”. The electoral verdict in favour of the Opposition in many districts in panchayat election was posed in banner headlines as “a blow to Budhdhadev’s industrial policy” and “a reply to capturing of land” by the CPI(M) (Bartaman, 22 May, 2008). In the context of an electoral debacle of the Front in rural Bengal in panchayat election, Bartaman could renew its legitimate critique of the Front’s agrarian policies from the immediate coverage.
of an introspection of the CPI(M) State Committee to be ‘cautious’ about further moves in land acquisition, which did not show up in the party organ (Bartaman, 27 May, 2008).

Throughout the period of uproar on land acquisition for industrialisation and capital investment in agriculture the Bengali media explored the opportunity to emerge as the mise-en-scene of high politics in the state by stimulating numerous images and symbols of policy making and public articulation. In absence of any public consensus on the debate, the unfinished agenda was kept open to revisiting the space with promises of re-creation and re-formulation. It can be summed up briefly with one such restoration moment in early 2009, when the state government organised a panel discussion on ‘Whither the development of the state?’, attended by Economists Amartya Sen, Amiya Kumar Bagchi, Pranab Bardhan, Political Scientist Partha Chatterjee and the then FICCI President Amit Mitra. Ganashakti endorsed the consensus of the discussion in its reporting – “There is no other alternative to industrialisation in the development of the state” (Ganashakti, 1 January, 2009), despite ‘differences’ of opinion over the processes of development and land acquisition for industrial purposes. Bartaman countered the consensus by exposing the ‘dissatisfaction’ of the scholars about the whole process of land acquisition and industrialisation in a banner caption – “The government has not done a right job by acquiring land for the Tatas in Singur: Amartya” (Bartaman, 1 January, 2009), reiterating in the editorial – “the critique of Brand-Budhdha” by Amartya Sen and other speakers (Bartaman, 1 January, 2009). On this occasion, Bartaman questioned the ‘intention’ of the government in organising such a seminar as the ‘criticisms’ did not get due coverage to the party newspaper. Thus, it can be said that the competing mediations over the agriculture versus industry debate situated the mainstream media in the orbit of propaganda politics, and thereby diluting their traditional credo of professional ethos.

6.7 Concluding Observation

The Left Front government’s ‘alternative development’ discourse, centred around rural reform programmes, especially redistributive reforms, was progressively shifted to project a ‘compulsion’ of the state government to accommodate liberal reforms in the agrarian sector in the Front’s mobilisational politics in the last decade of the Front regime. The shift was internalised in the spirited political campaign discourse of the Front
government and found resonance in the media discourse as well. The Bengali press translated the changing agenda of the Front governance reforms in terms of its own political-ideological frames, endorsing or disapproving ‘consensus’ around set of agenda in the public deliberations. In the process, as ‘gatekeepers’, its role was prejudiced on ‘selective’ representations or filtering information to facilitate different readings of the policy agenda for the reader/citizen. Vernacular media texts had emerged as important constituent of the political spin-doctoring exercise at the local/regional level in West Bengal over these years of the Front regime. There is no denying of the fact that the Bengali media could shed off its ‘observer’ or ‘narrator’ role to emerge as ‘insiders’ or ‘backstage actors’ by nurturing networking with the political leadership and civil activists during the deliberations. Thus, it emerged as a physical ‘site’ of policy debates, privileged with its moral and informational schemas, especially during conflict situations.

Mediating the issues of land acquisition reflected the Bengali media’s increasing coalesce with the political parties and civil society, hitherto unseen in state politics, in encoding the nuances of Left governance in the state. The cohort of the leading journalists, media managers and the political and social activists in responding to the debates around agrarian reforms marked a paradigmatic shift in the Bengali media’s traditional narrator-interpreter role to accommodate a more activist one. As is evident from the examples cited in the chapter, the ‘shift’ got reflected in media’s framing of hard news with overt posturing on issues, even in routine reporting. The editorials reinforced the agenda-setting role by articulating pronounced ideological positioning of the house. The op-ed articles were also arranged in selective frames of reasoning that the house broadly subscribed to. This led to a fairly visible convergence of moral and political judgments in the editorials and the post-editorial articles producing certain unilinear and dominant frames in coverage of policies and reforms. The vernacular media nurtured the hype around agro-industrialisation in unique ways and played an active role in rallying public opinion in supporting the hype. The encoding, to a section of Bengali media, sustained a kind of ‘brand-making’ of policy and leadership, which was embedded in their respective predispositions. A section of the mainstream media, like Bartaman, delved into the tension-zones in the party-government or the intra-Front relationship to substantiate its position in the debate. During the sixth and seventh Left Front regimes, land acquisition
received the dominant media coverage as a primary aspect of the agriculture-industry debate, rendering other aspects of agrarian policies to a marginal position as public issues.\(^{35}\) Coverage of these ‘auxiliary’ aspects of agrarian policies in the Bengali media was limited to infrequent references in opinion articles, missing largely the hard news frame in the first page or the editorials. The competitive coverage of the Bengali press generated lot of competing narratives of the agriculture-industry debate in the Bengal politics in the last decade of the Front rule.

In the process of constructing news and opinions, the representations were mediated on basis of certain strands of *divergence*, manifested at two levels – among the media houses and between media and government, in projecting the agrarian vision of the Left Front. Bengali press often nurtured this divergence as their unique house policies and tried to build up its own ‘brand’ of news making in the public sphere. At the same time, the framing shed light on areas of significant *convergence* at the above-mentioned levels that refracted dynamic shades of consensual politics or agenda setting. Both the media organisations and the political process in the state could feed each other and draw sustenance from this process. As is evident from the illustrations, the mediation process did not incorporate linearity in the convergence or adversarial patterns over the years; it rather reflected certain temporal or thematic specificities. The next chapter deals with the Bengali media’s encoding of industrial policies of the first two Left Front governments.

**Notes**

1. In July, 1991, the Left Front government in West Bengal prepared a document on ‘alternative economic principles’ with the help of some Left economists. The CPI(M) Central Committee adopted a resolution in 1994, “On the Role of the Left Front Government in West Bengal in the context of the New Economic Policy”, which explained the ‘alternative’ focus and ‘adjustments’ to policies to meet the ‘new situation brought about by the Centre’s policy of liberalisation’.

2. The CPI(M) adopted its Party Programme in the 7th Party Congress of the CPI (31st October - 9th November, 1964), held at Kolkata. It revised and ‘updated’ this Party Programme in the Special Party Conference at Thiruvantapuram, held in 20-23 October, 2000 in the context of emerging situation.

3. After coming to power for the sixth consecutive terms, the then Chief Minister Budhdhadev Bhattacharjee proposed (2002) to initiate “a second stage of rural
development programme” in the state by expanding agro-based industrialisation and also urged “the private sector to make more investment in order to build a prosperous West Bengal”.

4. A great part of the focus of policy debates had increasingly been shifted to the media spaces – in the editorials and post-editorials of newspapers or in the panel discussions in the news channels, reducing the importance of the legislative debates in the public sphere. This trend was further strengthened by the over-whelming popularity of the electronic media. The journalists and the politicians often developed a symbiotic relationship, which helped in nurturing mutually shared discourses in policy debates. To cite one example, during land acquisition debate, ABP editorials took a manifest stand on the “necessity of land acquisition in the interests of industrialisation”, supplementing the government’s arguments and branded any opposition to it as “irrational” (ABP, 15 January, 2009), shedding off any distancing in reporting.

5. Roger Silverstone reflected on the role of media in enabling a kind of ‘ontological security’ by ‘building and sustaining trust’. He wrote (1999:119): “We have come to depend on media for this security. We trust them to be there always, and we panic when they break down. We rely on them for information about the world to which we would not have access without them...The media are always with us. Both as background and as foreground”.

6. One can identify the trio, Manmohan Singh and P. Chidambaram from the Congress Party and Yashobant Sinha from the BJP, as the most emphatic proponents of liberalisation-privatisation policy in India since 1990s.

7. Shanto Iyengar shows (1997: 144) how, in the contemporary world, “mass media have replaced the political party as the key intermediary between voters and candidates” in electoral campaigning. He notes (1997: 147), in the context of US Presidential elections, how the “spin control – being able to shape the daily flow of news – is crucial to electoral success.”

8. Scholars like Stuart Hall, Marshall McLuhan or Roland Barthes had explored the engagement of the media in framing of myths and its sustenance.

9. The observation was made by Suvoronjon Dasgupta, formerly Professor in the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata, and a well-known media analyst, in an interview with the researcher on 4 July, 2007.

10. This is a popular Bengali idiom literally meaning sound of a large drum, implying here ‘greater propaganda than real work’.

11. As has been noted in Chapter Three, the performance of the Front in changing the rural profile of Bengal was assessed in a number of scholarly researches. Many scholars had observed that the rural Bengal experienced qualitative changes under Left-led governance and the two basic reforms contributing to these changes were ‘land reform and panchayat system’ (Mathew, 1995; Lieten, 1992).

12. In analysing the political influence of the television, G. Gerbner identified this effect as the influence coming from repeated, long-term exposure to media storytelling, which contains the worldview of the mainstream media. The reader/audience gradually
internalises the stories and the worldview gets legitimised, serving political purposes in a subtle way (Gerbner et al. 1984).

13. Manuel Castells describes (2011:235) personalisation of politics or the politics of personality as “the fundamental feature of media politics”, which becomes more operative during election coverage. He cites examples to show “how successful political personalities are often made rather than discovered” (2011:236) in the process of mediation.

14. Some of the regional parties in India that are centred on individual leadership are the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Samajbadi Party, the BSP, the DMK or the AIADMK.

15. Aanchal means ‘the over-the-shoulder part of the saree’ and the expression means ‘to become independent’.

16. As mentioned in Chapter III, veteran peasant leader of the CPI(M), Harekrishna Konar pointed out the need to move on to industrialisation as a necessary follow up of agrarian reforms in the Garulia State Party Conference of the CPI(M). The Front/party, however, did not visibly project the suggestion in its political agendas in the 1980s.


18. The public campaigns of the Left Front government rested on the emotive hype of “holding the head high” of the state and accordingly, threaded the ‘new’ efforts of the government in different sectors of economy in that frame of ‘achievement’.

19. Many observers argued (Chakrabarty, 2006; Chattopadhyay, 2006; Dam, 2006) that the new leadership of the Front could offer the message of hope to the new voters by focusing more on industrialisation, urban infrastructural developments and middle class aspirations. This could be one strong reason of massive electoral mandate in favour of the Left Front in 2006.

20. Changing Rural Bengal, the public advertisement visual by the Department of Information and Culture, Government of West Bengal, got wide circulation through the newspapers and billboards in 2005.

21. a species of rice that was believed to be the basis of agricultural revolution in West Bengal in the first few decades of the Front rule (Mehta, 2011: 175; Erenstein et al. 2007: 16).

22. The Department of Agriculture and the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs publicised the ‘achievements’ of the state government in diversification of crops, intensive farming, integrated use of fertilisers and pesticides, expansion of irrigation potentials and agricultural credit facilities to the farmers, etc. during the last decade of the Front rule.

23. The Front won 235 seats in the state Assembly out of a total of 294 in 2007 election.

24. During the period August and September, 2005, land acquisition and intra-Front debate were covered for twenty two days as Lead.

25. Bastugughu is a Bengali figurative and derogative expression meaning a person who resides in the household permanently and brings it to ruin.
26. Budhdhadev Bhattacharjee remarked in an interview with *Ganashakti*, on the eve of election, that “it was not possible for us to build up socialism in West Bengal” in the context of experiments with development within a capitalist structure of provincial government (*Ganashakti*, 16 April, 2006). He reiterated this position in another interview with *ABP* (*ABP*, 16 May, 2006) after the publication of result.

27. Hindi word *Beosadar* literally means ‘businessman’. But the expression was often used in a derogatory sense by the middle-class Bengali community.

28. The line has been taken from a famous poem of Sukanta Bhattacharyya, one of the well-known Leftist poets in Bengal.

29. *Ganashakti* incited the combative mood of the battle by captions like “the peasants are guarding Singur to check the outsiders” (*Ganashakti*, 4 December, 2006), or “For what reason is this desperate suicidal opposition?” (Dey, 2006: 4) – appealing to the emotions of the party workers.

30. The coverage endorsed the accusations made by the Opposition against the government, borrowing phrases from their political speeches, by use of expressions like ‘dhappa’ (bluff), ‘information pollution’, ‘lukochapa’ (dodging), etc.

31. During November-December, 2006, the ‘dissent’ within the Front was covered in six days, twenty-one columns as Lead, two editorials and one post-editorial in *Bartaman*.

32. The public advertisement visuals framed the debate in ‘balancing’ captions – *Agriculture and Industry: Two Pillars of New Bengal; Industrialisation is not for the cities only, rural youth will also work in the industries; Agriculture is the protector of the civilisation, Industry is the carrier.* Another advertisement hit at the ‘allegations’ of the critics about the probable decline in amount of land for food crops due to acquisition for industrialisation. The text went like – *The total amount of agricultural land in West Bengal is 58.08 lakh hectares – presently, Industry needs even less than 1%.*

33. Such local and ‘rural’ idiomatic expressions with strong connotative significance could be found in post-editorial captions, by the Land Reform Minister, Abdur Rezzak Mollah – ‘Don’t break the rice pot, everything will be scattered, the crow and cranes will eat up’ (Mollah, 2008a: 4), ‘the measuring rope (tike dori) is in the hands of the rural government’ (Mollah, 2008b: 4) or in editorials – “The people of this state knows to take out the poison of snakes” (*Ganashakti*, 13 May, 2008).

34. Manuel Castells argues (2011: 158): “Frames are active by finding resonance and increasing the magnitude of their repetition...in the absence of counter-frames in the information provided by the media, the audience will gravitate toward the frames that are suggested.”

35. During 2002-2009, Government of West Bengal portal on agricultural policy reforms highlighted increasing crop intensity, improved crop varieties, seed researches and villages, breakthroughs in surface water and irrigation potentials, multi-storage facilities etc. among major ‘achievements’ of the Front government (Website#1).
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