

Leadership Vacuum in Dravidian Politics – Will New Players Make an Impact?

By Shreyas S P

The completion of the first phase of elections to 91 Lok Sabha (LS) constituencies has marked the beginning of the largest democratic exercise of the world. The second phase of elections to 97 LS constituencies will be held on April 18 across 12 states and a Union Territory. Among these states, Tamil Nadu (TN) stands out for many reasons.

TN is the fifth largest state in terms of LS constituencies having 39 seats. Along with the LS elections, the state will also witness bye-polls to 18 assembly constituencies, which fell vacant after the disqualification of rebel AIADMK MLAs. The state, which has pushed national parties to the corner since five decades, is a bastion of regional politics centralised towards Dravidianism and Tamil pride. The strong presence of regional parties and their potential to grab maximum number of seats makes it a politically significant state. Political parties in TN have played a crucial role in forming governments at the Centre since 1990s. It is only in 2014 that no Tamil party became a part of the national government. But it is predicted that TN parties will have a significant role to play after the 2019 elections.

The state plunged into political crisis after the death of its popular leader J Jayalalithaa in 2016. M Karunanidhi's death in 2018 made the Dravidian politics devoid of inspirational leaders. For the first time after several decades, TN is experiencing a leadership vacuum. The emergence of new political outfits like Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) and Makkal Needhi Maiyam (MNM) is challenging the status-quo. To make matters worse, there is a perception that the Centre is interfering in state affairs owing to the weak state leadership.

Politics of Tamil Nadu

The two dominant political parties of TN are All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). The state is currently ruled by the AIADMK government under the leadership of Edappadi Palaniswami (EPS). DMK is spearheading the Opposition under the leadership of M K Stalin.

AIADMK, which won a consecutive term in 2016 under the stewardship of J Jayalalithaa, faced a huge crisis following the leader's demise. O Panneerselvam (OPS) succeeded Jayalalithaa, only to make way for Jaya's aide V K Sasikala, ultimately causing him to rebel against the party. Sasikala, who was chosen as a legislative party leader by the AIADMK MLAs, was convicted by the Karnataka High Court in disproportionate assets case. The verdict sabotaged her chief ministerial aspirations which led to the election of EPS as the new Chief Minister. The OPS faction, which rebelled against the AIADMK, then made peace with the party. Sasikala was expelled from the party in August 2017. Eighteen MLAs loyal to Sasikala's nephew T T V Dinakaran rebelled against the party leadership to bring down the government. They faced disqualification which was upheld by the Madras High Court. Later, T T V Dinakaran launched a new party named Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK)

claiming Jayalalithaa's legacy. Meanwhile, in 2018, the DMK suffered the death of its patriarch M Karunanidhi.

The other important political parties of TN are Indian National Congress (INC), Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), Desiya Murpokku Munnetra Kazhagam (DMDK), Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK), Kongu Nadu Makkal Desiya Katchi (KMDK), Puthiya Tamilagam (PT), Puthiya Neethi Katchi (PNK), Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

PMK, headed by S Ramadoss, claims to be a representative of Vanniyars. VCK, headed by Thol Thirumavalavan, is a strong advocate of Dalits and Tamil nationalism. Puthiya Tamilagam is a party based in southern TN and is headed by Dr K Krishnasamy. The party represents Pallars of Dalit community. KMDK is a party based in Kongu region (western TN) representing Gounders. Actor Vijayakant's DMDK and Vaiko's MDMK enjoyed a good support in the past. PNK, headed by A C Shanmugham, claims to represent Mudaliars and is critical of Vanniyar reservation.

Kamal Haasan's MNM, launched in 2018, is promising clean and secular politics. He has succeeded in building aspirations among the youth. The candidate list announced by the party for the upcoming elections grabbed the attention for having candidates from a clean, educated and non-criminal background.

The four national parties Congress, CPI, CPM and BJP are marginal players. Though the Congress was the third largest force of TN till last decade, the party's prospects have declined from the beginning of this decade. CPI and CPM have a presence in some pockets of western, central and southern TN. BJP sprung a surprise by winning Kanyakumari seat in 2014. However, the party failed to open its account in 2016 assembly elections.

Election Issues in Tamil Nadu

The issues in TN differ based on the regions. The 10,000 crore Salem-Chennai Expressway project approved by the AIADMK government turned into controversy after huge protests by farmers and residents in the villages along the highway. The recent handling of Pollachi sex scandal by the government is a major issue in western TN. The negative impact of GST on industries in Coimbatore and Tiruppur is also an election issue. The Cauvery water dispute has resonance in western and southern regions of TN.

In southern TN, reopening of Sterlite Copper power plant in Thoothukkudi gave rise to violent protests against the Central government. The state government was accused of joining hands with the Centre. The curb on manufacturing of firecrackers in Sivakasi by the Supreme Court has led to loss of jobs and business in the region. The ban on Jallikattu, a popular sport in southern and western TN, saw the entire state rising up in revolt against the Modi government in 2016.

According to various opinion polls, the anti-incumbency factor against the Central government is highest in TN compared to any other states. The state government is also facing people's wrath after Jayalalithaa's death. There was also a unique protest of TN youth against Prime Minister Narendra Modi by trending 'Modi Go Back' on Twitter whenever he visited the state in recent months.

Rural Distress

According to 2011 census, TN has a slightly higher rural population comprising 53.38 per cent of the population. Urban population accounts for 46.62 per cent of the population. Agriculture is the most predominant sector of the state economy as 70 per cent of the population is involved in agriculture and allied activities for their livelihood.

In the summer of 2017, TN suffered the worst drought in 140 years. The state received a deficit of 41 per cent rainfall. The state government declared all 32 districts as drought-hit. The districts in the Cauvery-delta region were the worst hit. The monsoon crisis worsened the Cauvery water dispute with Karnataka. Several farmers travelled to Delhi to grab the attention of the Central government. The cold response by the BJP government led to extreme forms of protests carried out by disgruntled farmers like holding rats in mouths, stripping down, eating on floor and drinking urine. As many as 111 distressed farmers of TN have decided to contest against Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Varanasi LS constituency in the upcoming elections as a form of protest.

Caste Factor in Tamil Nadu

Caste is a crucial decisive factor in Tamil politics. The Dravidian parties which fought against caste system in Tamil society have resorted to caste politics to win votes.

Dalits are the most dominant block in TN comprising 20.7 per cent of the population. The most influential castes among Dalits are Adi Dravida (10.63 per cent of the state population), Pallars (4.09 per cent), Paraiyars (3.32 per cent), Chakkiliyars (1.59 per cent) and Arunthathiyars (1.07 per cent). The dominant castes among OBCs are Vanniyars, Thevars, Vellalars and Nadars. Thevars, who comprise 7.25 per cent of the state population, are divided into Maravars (3.89 per cent), Agamudayars (1.82 per cent) and Kallars (1.54 per cent). Nadars of southern TN are divided into Hindu Nadars (2.15 per cent) and Christian Nadars (1.33 per cent).

Caste clashes and rivalry are not a new phenomenon in Tamil society. Vanniyars and Dalits in northern TN have engaged in numerous clashes. Villuppuram is the epicentre of Vanniyar–Dalit violent clashes. Vanniyars in western TN blame Gounders and Mudaliars for discriminating against them. In southern TN, Nadars and Thevars, and Devendrars and Devars are involved in caste conflicts.

Traditionally, AIADMK banks upon Thevar and Gounder votes. DMK relies on Mudaliars, Nadars and some sections of the Dalit community, while PMK woos Vanniyars. AMMK is eyeing on Thevar votes of the central and southern TN.

Table 1: Caste data of Tamil Nadu

Sl. No.	Influential caste/community of Tamil Nadu	State reservation	Percentage of state population	Region where the caste/community is influential as electorate
1.	Dalits	SC	20.7	Across TN
2.	Vanniyars	MBC	14.8	Northern and western TN
3.	Mukkulathor/Thevar	BC*	7.25	Central and southern TN
4.	Brahmins	General	3.9	Across TN
5.	Vellalars/Gounders	BC	3.57	Western TN

6.	Nadars	BC	3.48	Southern TN
7.	Tamil Muslims	BC	3.30	Northern, central and southern TN

*Reservation to Maravars, a sub-caste of Mukkulathors, is not available in few regions of TN

BC - Backward Classes, MBC - Most Backward Classes, SC - Scheduled Castes

Source: Compiled by author from different sources

Grand Alliance for 2019 Elections

TN is a hub of strong regional parties. Nearly 16 prominent regional parties and 4 national parties are contesting the 2019 elections. These parties have come together to form four grand alliances namely, DMK-led UPA, AIADMK-led NDA, AMMK-led alliance and MNM-led alliance.

Alliance	DMK-led UPA										
Parties in Fray	DMK	INC	CPI	CPM	VCK	MDMK	IJK	KMDK	IUML	Total	
Seats Contesting	20	9	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	39	

Alliance	AIADMK-led NDA								
Parties in Fray	AIADM K	PM K	BJ P	DMDK	PT	PNK	TMC	Total	
Seats Contesting	20	7	5	4	1	1	1	39	

Alliance	AMMK-led alliance		
Parties in Fray	AMMK	SDPI	Total
Seats Contesting	37	1	38

Alliance	MNM-led alliance		
Parties in Fray	MNM	RPI	Total
Seats Contesting	38	0	38

Regions of Tamil Nadu

The state can be divided into four regions namely, north, west, central and south. Each region has different demographics and socio-economic conditions.

Northern Tamil Nadu

Northern TN is the biggest region with 13 parliamentary constituencies. The capital city Chennai is located in this region. The rural composition in northern TN is 47.65 per cent. Seven out of thirteen constituencies have a rural population of more than 60 per cent. The rural distress prevalent in the state will be a strong topic in these constituencies.

Table 2: Constituencies, castes and parties contesting in northern TN

Sl. No.	Northern constituencies	LS	Rural population (in per cent)	Influential group of voters in elections	Parties in fray
1.	Thiruvallur		48.04	Vanniyars, Dalits	INC vs ADMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
2.	Chennai North		0	Slum dwellers, Industrial workers	DMK vs DMDK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
3.	Chennai Central		0	Minorities, North Indians	DMK vs PMK vs SDPI vs MNM vs NTK
4.	Chennai South		3.35	Forward castes, IT employees	DMK vs ADMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
5.	Sriperumbudur		10.4	Vanniyars, Dalits, Industrial workers	DMK vs PMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
6.	Kancheepuram		60.13	Vanniyars, Dalits	DMK vs ADMK vs AMMK vs NTK
7.	Arakkonam		60.03	Vanniyars, Dalits, Mudaliars, Muslims	DMK vs PMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
8.	Vellore		50.8	Vanniyars, Muslims, Mudaliars	DMK vs PNK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
9.	Thiruvannamalai		78.55	Farmers, Vanniyars, Mudaliars, Dalits	DMK vs ADMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
10.	Arani		83.5	Farmers, Vanniyars, Dalits, Mudaliars	INC vs ADMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
11.	Villuppuram		81.97	Vanniyars, Dalits	VCK vs PMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NT
12.	Kallakuruchi		79.65	Vanniyars	DMK vs DMDK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
13.	Cuddalore		63.07	Vanniyars, Dalits, Muslims, Fishermen	DMK vs PMK vs MNM vs NTK
	Northern TN		47.65		UPA vs NDA vs AMMK+ vs MNM+ vs NTK

Source: Compiled by author from different sources

Vanniyars and Dalits are the most influential communities in northern TN. Mudaliars, Muslims and some forward castes are important in few constituencies. The presence of Vanniyars and Dalits in this region is politically significant. Traditionally, Vanniyars are represented by PMK. There are some constituencies where the caste rivalry may result in failure of vote transfer to the alliance. PMK's alliance with NDA may favour the latter. But it can also lead to polarisation of Dalit votes towards UPA as Vanniyars and Dalits are involved in violent caste clashes historically. In Vellore, PNK – a Mudaliar party – is contesting from NDA. Vellore LS constituency has a significant population of Vanniyars, Dalits and Mudaliars. PNK's contest may help DMK to consolidate non-Mudaliar votes. The Social Democratic

Party of India (SDPI) from the AMMK alliance contesting in Chennai Central may divide minority votes, which could benefit the PMK candidate.

Table 3: Results of 2016 assembly elections and expectation for 2019 in northern TN

Party alliance	Seats won in assembly segments of northern TN	Approximate vote share (in per cent) of 2016 alliance in northern TN	Approximate vote share (in per cent) of 2019 alliance on the basis of 2016 performance in northern TN
AIADMK+	34	38.7	50.98
DMK+	44	39.42	39.96
Others	0	21.88	9.06
Total	78	100	100

Source: Election commission website and others

All the 13 constituencies have a significant population of Vanniyars. PMK is contesting five seats. It is also possible that the transfer of Vanniyar votes to the PMK may happen only in these five constituencies while the community may vote independently in other constituencies. Same implies to Dalits, who may vote against the PMK in these five constituencies and may vote independently in other constituencies.

The anti-incumbency factor against the AIADMK at state level and the BJP at national level may influence voters' choice while voting for the NDA candidates. The emergence of new parties like AMMK and MNM may divide anti-incumbency votes, which the UPA is eyeing on. NTK is another party which has challenged the status-quo and is banking upon anti-incumbency votes.

Table 4: Data of 2009, 2014 and 2019 LS elections in northern TN

Party alliance	LS seats won		Assembly segments won		No of LS seats parties contesting in 2019
	2014	2009	2014	2009	
AIADMK	13	7	78	16	5
DMK	0	3	0	40	10
INC	0	3	0	16	2
VCK	0	0	0	3	1
CPI		0		2	0
PMK		0		1	5
DMDK					2
PNK					1
Total	13	13	78	78	

DMK-led alliance
 AIADMK-led alliance
 Congres
 BJP-led alliance

Note: The similar colour shade in each column indicates alliance of parties during that year

Source: Election commission website and others

Western Tamil Nadu

Western TN consists of nine LS constituencies. The region is a hub of industries with better development than other regions of TN. This region often complains about negligence by the state government. The region comprises a rural population of 48.66 per cent.

The region is very diverse compared to other parts of TN. The influential communities are Kongu Vellalar Gounders, Vanniyars and Dalits. Gounders have traditionally voted for AIADMK. Even the current Chief Minister is a Gounder. Vanniyars of western TN feel that they are discriminated against by Gounders and Mudaliars. Gounders have traditionally supported AIADMK.

The AIADMK government's mishandling of Pollachi sex scandal recently led to huge uproar in the state. The Cauvery water dispute is a main poll issue here. The impact of demonetisation and GST has devastated industries in Coimbatore and Tiruppur. UPA is hoping to encash the anti-incumbency brewing against NDA in this region. The presence of KMDK, CPI and CPM has given a boost to the UPA in western TN.

Table 5: Constituencies, castes and parties contesting in western TN

Sl. No.	Western LS constituencies	Rural population (in per cent)	Influential group of voters in elections	Parties in fray
1.	Krishnagiri	77.21	Vanniyars, Dalits, Vellalars, Vokkaligas, Lingayats, Reddys	INC vs ADMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
2.	Dharmapuri	78.42	Vanniyars, Dalits, Vellalar Gounders	DMK vs PMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
3.	Salem	36.26	Gounders, Vanniyars, Naidus, Thevars, Chettiars, Mudaliars	DMK vs ADMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
4.	Namakkal	63.71	Kongu Vellalars, Dalits	KMDK vs ADMK vs AMMK v MNM vs NTK
5.	Erode	36.16	Dalits	MDMK vs ADMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
6.	Thiruppur	37.66	Kongu Vellalar Gounders	CPI vs ADMK vs AMMK v MNM vs NTK
7.	Nilgiris	51.59	Badagas, Arundhatiyars, Gounders	DMK vs ADMK vs AMMK v MNM vs NTK
8.	Coimbatore	17.97	Kongu Vellalar Gounders	CPM vs BJP vs AMMK v MNM vs NTK
9.	Pollachi	38.97	Gounders, Dalits, 24 Manai Telugu Chettiars, Naickers	DMK vs ADMK vs AMMK v MNM vs NTK
	Western TN	48.66		UPA vs NDA vs AMMK+ vs MNM+ vs NTK

Source: Compiled by author from different sources

Table 6: Results of 2016 assembly elections and expectation for 2019 in western TN

Party alliance	Seats won in assembly segments of western TN	Approximate vote share (in per cent) of 2016 alliance in western TN	Approximate vote share (in per cent) of 2019 on the basis of 2016 performance in western TN
AIADMK+	45	37	45.02
DMK+	10	32	33.92
Others	2	31	21.06
Total	57	100	100

Source: Election commission website and others

Table 7: Data of 2009, 2014 and 2019 LS elections in western TN

Party alliance	LS seats won		Assembly segments won		No of LS seats parties contesting in 2019
	2014	2009	2014	2009	
AIADMK	8	3	47	15	7
DMK	0	4	1	23	4
INC		0		5	1
CPI					1
CPM		1		4	1
KMDK					1
PMK	1		4		1
MDMK		1		7	1
BJP	0		2		1
Total	9	9	54	54	

DMK-led alliance
 AIADMK-led alliance
 INC led-alliance
 BJP-led alliance

Note: The similar colour shade in each column indicates alliance of parties during that year

Source: Election commission website and others

Central Tamil Nadu

Central TN is the smallest region in the state with seven LS constituencies. It consists a whopping 68.39 per cent of rural population. The region was worst hit during the drought in 2017. Several districts fall under the Cauvery delta region. The desilting of Cauvery river basin and water sharing agreement with Karnataka are some of the major election issues here.

It is again a diverse region with each constituency having different caste composition. Vanniyars, Thevars, Dalits and Muthuraiyars are the influential communities of the region. Jayalalithaa's former aide Sasikala hails from Thanjavur of this region. Her nephew T T V Dinakaran's AMMK may get some traction in this region. Sasikala belongs to Thevar community, who has been traditional supporters of AIADMK. Her unceremonious expulsion from the party may divide Thevar votes between AMMK and AIADMK.

Table 8: Constituencies, castes and parties contesting in central TN

Sl. No.	Central constituencies	LS	Rural population (in per cent)	Influential group of voters in elections	Parties in fray
1.	Karur		68.8	Gounders	INC vs ADMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
2.	Tiruchirapalli		33.99	Kallars (Thevars), Muthuraiyars	INC vs DMDK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
3.	Perambalur		77.66	Farmers, Muthuraiyars, Udayars, Vanniyars, Dalits, STs	IJK vs ADMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
4.	Chidambaram		81.5	Dalits, Vanniyars	VCK vs ADMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
5.	Mayiladuthurai		71.85	Dalits, Vanniyars, Muslims	DMK vs ADMK v AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
6.	Nagapattinam		77.74	Dailts, Vellalars, Mukkulathors, Muslims	CPI vs ADMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
7.	Thanjavur		67.22	Thevars	DMK vs TMC vs AMMK v MNM vs NTK
	Central TN		68.39		UPA vs NDA vs AMMK+ vs MNM+ vs NTK

Source: Compiled by author from different sources

Table 9: Results of 2016 assembly elections and expectation for 2019 in central TN

Party alliance	Seats won in assembly segments of central TN	Approximate vote share (in per cent) of 2016 alliance in central TN	Approximate vote share (in per cent) of 2019 alliance on the basis of 2016 performance in central TN
AIADMK+	20	42	48.56
DMK+	13	38.43	39.36
Others	0	19.57	12.08
Total	33	100	100

Source: Election commission website and others

Table10: Data of 2009, 2014 and 2019 LS elections in central TN

Party alliance	LS seats won		Assembly segments won		No of LS seats parties contesting in 2019
	2014	2009	2014	2009	
AIADMK	7	3	40	12	5

DMK	0	3	1	16	2
INC		0		6	2
VCK	0	1	1	6	1
CPI		0		2	1
IJK					1
DMDK					1
TMC					1
Total	7	7	42	42	

DMK-led alliance
 AIADMK-led alliance
 INC-led alliance
 BJP-led alliance

Note: The similar colour shade in each column indicates alliance of parties during that year

Source: Election commission website and others

Southern Tamil Nadu

Southern TN is a unique region where both regional parties and national parties enjoy equal importance. BJP wrested Kanyakumari during 2014 elections, while Congress won 5 out of 10 seats during 2009 elections. Both parties enjoy a good vote share here and are contesting four seats each, which is more compared to all the regions.

The region, dominated by Thevars, Dalits and Nadars, is also a place where the BJP's Hindutva politics has got some audience. Thevars have a good influence in all the 10 constituencies of this region. AMMK may snatch some Thevar votes from AIADMK.

The main issues in southern TN are the death of 191 fishermen in Kanyakumari, Sterlite Copper Power Plant in Thoothukkudi, curb on firecracker manufacturing in Sivakasi and devastation caused by cyclones Ockhi and Gaja. Both the AIADMK and BJP are facing backlash in this region due to these grieving issues. The disgruntlement prevalent in this region might work in favour of the UPA.

Table 11: Constituencies, castes and parties contesting in southern TN

Sl. No.	Southern constituencies	LS	Rural population (in per cent)	Influential group of voters in elections	Parties in fray
1.	Dindigul		59.84	Thevars, Christian Vanniyars	DMK vs PMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
2.	Sivagangai		75.23	Chettiars, Dalits, Thevars, Konars	INC vs BJP vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
3.	Madurai		23.62	Thevars	CPM vs ADMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
4.	Theni		44.13	Thevars	INC vs ADMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
5.	Virudhunagar		45.37	Thevars, Dalits, Naickers, Nadars	INC vs DMDK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
6.	Ramanathapuram		73.89	Thevars, Dalits, Muslims	IUML vs BJP vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
7.	Thoothukkudi		48.92	Nadars	DMK vs BJP vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK

8.	Tenkasi	51.99	Dalits, Nadars, Yadavas	Thevars, Muslims,	DMK vs PT vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
9.	Tirunelveli	47.59	Nadars, Thevars	Dalits,	DMK vs ADMK vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
10.	Kanyakumari	17.67	Hindus, Muslims	Christians,	INC vs BJP vs AMMK vs MNM vs NTK
	Southern TN	48.82			UPA vs NDA vs AMMK+ vs MNM+ s NTK

Source: Compiled by author from different sources

Table 12: Results of 2016 assembly elections and expectation for 2019 in southern TN

Party alliance	Seats won in assembly segments of southern TN	Approximate vote share (in per cent) of 2016 alliance in southern TN	Approximate vote share (in per cent) of 2019 alliance on the basis of 2016 performance in southern TN
AIADMK+	35	42	47.73
DMK+	29	41.81	41.5
Others	0	16.19	10.77
Total	64	100	100

Source: Election commission website and others

Table 13: Data of 2009, 2014 and 2019 LS elections in southern TN

Party alliance	LS seats won		Assembly segments won		No of LS seats parties contesting in 2019
	2014	2009	2014	2009	
AIADMK	9	0	52	9	3
DMK	0	4	2	21	4
INC	0	5	1	21	4
IUML					1
CPI		1		4	0
CPM					1
PMK					1
BJP	1	0	5	2	4
DMDK					1
MDMK		0		3	0
PT					1
Total	10	10	60	60	

● DMK-led alliance ● AIADMK-led alliance ● INC-led alliance ● BJP-led alliance

Note: The similar colour shade in each column indicates alliance of parties during that year

Source: Election commission website and others

X-factors

Dinakaran's AMMK, Kamal Haasan's MNM and Seeman's NTK are the X-factors in the 2019 LS elections. While AMMK and MNM are contesting elections for the first time, NTK – founded in 1958 – is invoking passion about Tamil pride. The performance of these three parties will be watched closely as TN is experiencing a political vacuum after the death of Jayalalithaa and Karunanidhi.

Conclusion

TN is moving towards an unpredictable political transformation. Both the DMK and AIADMK had an imposing presence of their leaders on the party. The loss of tall leaders in both the parties has left them confused. DMK is relatively stable under M K Stalin. But AIADMK has not yet come to its terms. The party has weakened severely due to spilt and internal clashes. The influence of the BJP in AIADMK's politics is affecting the authority and public perception of the latter. Though the DMK-led UPA is ahead in 2019 race, it is unlikely that the alliance will sweep the state. TN has often witnessed a wave election where one party sweeps the election. But currently the state lacks effective leaders and party mechanism to turn it into their favour.

The 2019 elections will manifest the direction of Tamil politics. This election will be a major election in TN after the 2016 assembly elections. The absence of two tall leaders of Dravidian parties is a new phenomenon. The battle is wide open for all parties in TN due to the weak state government and the uninspiring Opposition. The new players are hoping to make an impact in Tamil politics and fill the political vacuum, which the state is experiencing.

**Shreyas SP was a Research Intern at CPPR, working on Indian General Elections 2019*