

# From Separatism to Coalition: Variants in Language Politics and Leadership Pattern in Dravidian Movement

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**Abstract**—This paper describes the evolution of language politics and the part played by political leaders with reference to the Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu. It explores the interesting evolution from separatism to coalition in sustaining the values of parliamentary democracy and federalism. It seems that the appropriation of language politics is fully ascribed to the DMK leadership under Annadurai and Karunanidhi. For them, the Tamil language is a self-determining power, a terrain of nationhood, and a perennial source of social and political powers. The DMK remains a symbol of Tamil nationalist party playing language politics in the interest of the Tamils. Though electoral alliances largely determine the success, the language politics still has significant space in the politics of Tamil Nadu. Ironically, DMK moves from the periphery to centre for getting national recognition for the Tamils as well as for its own maximization of power. The evolution can be seen in two major phases as: language politics for party building; and language politics for state building with three successive political processes, namely, language politics in the process of separatism, representative politics and coalition. The much pronounced Dravidian Movement is radical enough to democratize the party ideology to survive the spirit of parliamentary democracy. This has secured its own rewards in terms of political power. The political power provides the means to achieve the social and political goal of the political party. Language politics and leadership pattern actualized this trend though the movement is shifted from separatism to coalition.

**Keywords**—Language politics, cultural nationalism, leadership, social justice

## I. INTRODUCTION

TRACING the origin of language politics in India definitely gives multiple views and theory-building exercise. The idea or consciousness of 'I am Tamil' or 'We are Tamils' can logically be perceived in opposition to counter idea or consciousness. For instance, the emergence of 'Dravidian' consciousness is much pronounced against the domination of Aryan culture. When the Tamils were fragmented as several nations as Pandyas, Cheras, Cholas, and Pallavas, the consciousness 'We are Tamils' did not assume significance. The language politics did not materialize in the homogeneous groups. Though language politics was absent in early times, some sort of identity politics was present then. For the sake of convenience, we will take 'Dravidian' and 'Tamil' as synonymous. When the Tamils themselves were fragmented as Pandyas, Cheras, Cholos, Pallavas, Saivaite, Vaishnavite, Jains and Buddhist, constructing the consciousness as 'We are Tamils' based purely on language remains a larger and inclusive identity as compared with foregoing identities. Who was or is responsible for constructing such larger identity?

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## II. THE FORMATION

It is a commonly accepted view that the significance brought by Robert Caldwell to Tamil language provided an impetus to modern day Tamil nationalism or Dravidian nationalism. The identity politics, other wise the conflict politics promoted by the Justice Party with the category of 'non-Brahmin' brought the attention of the Tamils to their historical roots of relative deprivation. This trend was systematically strengthened by Periyar. There was also an interesting movement for regaining the pure Tamil. The Thanittamizh Iyakkam (Pure Tamil Movement) is a movement of linguistic purism in Tamil literature attempting to emulate the unadulterated Tamil language of the Sangam period, avoiding Sanskrit, Persian and English derivative terms. It was initiated by Devaneyya Pavanar, Maraimalai Adigal and Bharathidasan, Perunchitthiranaar. It is believed that Suryanarayana Sastri known as Parithimar Kalaignar demanded classical language status for Tamil as early in 1902 [1].

## III. THE CONFLICT AND SEPARATISM

The introduction of Hindi in schools provoked the widespread opposition and agitations skillfully organized by the Self-Respectors during 1938. The Congress government under Rajagopalachari had to tackle not only the weakening trends in national movement but also the regional-linguistic overpowers. Subsequently, the demand for separate nation for the Tamils/Dravidians was forcefully stressed by E.V. Ramasamy (EVR). Accepting parliamentary democracy and the values of electoral politics, Annadurai had to form a new group and a new way of political socialization. Literature, drama, cinema, and oration provided enough space for that exercise.

## IV. LANGUAGE POLITICS FOR PARTY BUILDING

The initial exercise of Annadurai was to appropriate the language politics for building his party, Dravida Munnetra Kazhgam (DMK). Regaining the values of Tamil language and literature and superimposing a rational-reformist style were needed at that time. Tamil society was viewed as free of castes. The organization of Tamil society was fully ascribed to five-fold natural stratification in terms of 'tinai.' It was believed that the issue of social inequality or relative deprivation did not exist. Annadurai added a new dimension to Tamil literature through his speech and writing. His ideas upholding the values of Tamil were enthusiastically propagated by the educated youth. He skillfully made use of the commonsense and the life-world consciousness of the Tamils [2]. Drama and Cinema helped at large scale to reach the illiterate mass. His ideas provided a sort of education to the illiterate mass. The educated youth was fascinated by the magazines and periodicals published by the DMK. Though

most of them were short-lived, they had strong impact on the youth [3]. The process of party building was utmost importance for Anna and the emerging leaders of DMK at that time. He managed to have and keep people who have different background and personality. The common ground which united them was Anna. This is how he was able to win the minds of Karunanidhi, M.G. Ramachandran (MGR), Nedunchezhiyan, Anbazhagan and Mathiaszagan. During his party building process, he had to balance the political forces emanating from EVR, Rajagopalachari, Kamaraj, and Bakthavatsalam.

#### V. LANGUAGE POLITICS FOR STATE BUILDING

From its foundation in 1949, the growth of the DMK had to tackle various challenges. First, Annadurai took care not to affect adversely EVR or his Dravidar Kazhagam (DK). Second, he had to plan in such a way to counter the Congress in the electoral politics. Third, he took utmost care not to offend the original social and religious spirit of the Tamils. Thiruvalluvar and Thirumular helped at large in regaining the pure spiritual orientation of the Tamils. Here, his rational orientation was differed from Periyar. He skillfully differentiated the terms 'Brahmin' and 'Brahminism' as Mahatma Gandhi differentiated the British and the British rule. The Constitutional (Sixteenth) Amendment Act 1963 was enacted to protect the sovereignty and integrity of India [4]. It forced the DMK to give up the demand for separate state for the Tamils. It made the DMK to revise its principles in accordance with parliamentary democracy as depicted in the Constitution of India. In fact, Annadurai himself upheld earlier the parliamentary democracy as he celebrated the Independence Day and Republic Day. The Official Language Act and the imposition of Hindi activated the DMK to continue the agitations. Its agitations become a source of mass mobilization for anti-Congress and pro-regional electoral orientations [5]. The 1967 elections favoured the DMK. As a chief minister he was instrumental in state building. The demand for separate state for the Tamils was over [6]. In other words, he had to insist the values the Tamils in every aspect of governance. To begin with, he was responsible to change 'Madras State' as 'Tamil Nadu.' The process of state building is a wider exercise. It began from the changing the name of the state to getting a rightful partner in coalition and legitimizing the Tamil as classical language.

#### VI. LANGUAGE POLITICS FROM SEPARATISM TO COALITION

In the initial stage, the language politics of the DMK was formulated as well as strengthened by the speeches and writings of Anna. It was complemented by the speeches and writings of Karunanidhi and other second-level leaders of DMK. In addition, the drama and cinema further widened the reach of the DMK. MGR and others who supported the DMK completed the process of party building. It was projected and propagated that the protection and development of Tamil culture was synonymous with the development of DMK. This trend gave an impetus to the separatist demand. It survived up to 1963 officially. For Annadurai, the social and political situation of electoral politics should sustain the values of parliamentary

democracy and federalism. The anti-Hindi agitations provided a strong base for emotional link of the DMK volunteers. By harnessing anti-Congress sentiments pervaded in the centre as well as the states of India during 1967, Annadurai was instrumental to make an electoral alliance and to see the DMK to win in the elections. Even the opposing traditions were brought together to oppose the Congress and support the DMK [7]. For the first time, the party which was criticized and condemned as regional, linguistic, chauvinistic, parochial, anti-national, separatist and communal captured power and form the government on behalf of the Tamils under the leadership of Annadurai.

#### VII. LEADERSHIP PATTERN

The leadership of Annadurai was not divisive one. His style of leadership was not one that of conflict with others. Winning over the minds of the opponents through persuasion and rational-logical discussion were his method of leadership. Providing sufficient space and opportunity for the second-level leaders drawn from different social background was originally practiced by Anna. His demise in 1969 paved the way for the leadership of Karunanidhi. His style of language politics attracted both appreciations and criticisms [8]. From 1969 to 2010, he managed to withstand all the adversities of politics at the centre as well as the state. Karunanidhi continued his efforts of state building by demanding more powers to state. The concept of fiscal federalism and state autonomy were stressed against the domination of centre and the unitary tendencies of the constitution [9]. In his regime almost the state building process is completed. The interesting move is from periphery to centre, that is, from the demand of separate state to active coalition partner of the national government. In other words, the regional party becomes a part of national government. Ironically, the party once demanded a separation and a quit from the nation, now it declares as 'the government.' Even though, it is a constituent unit of the central government and the decisions are dominated by Congress or BJP, the DMK has its own moral responsibility. Being a part of coalition government at the centre, the DMK maximizes its powers on the other hand, and brings national recognition for the Tamils and their language and politics which were once criticized as parochial, chauvinistic and anti-national. The credits solely go to the leadership of Anna and Karunanidhi. By assigning a status of classical language to Tamil, it is inferred that no alien elements destroyed or undermined the Tamil language. It is also true for those who born as Tamils elsewhere. Of course, there is an importance question to be asked. Since 1972, the process of political socialization initiated by MGR established an alternative way of power-capturing method. There seems to be shift from language politics to populist agenda generated through personality politics. It seems that there are three new aspects of political development emerging in Tamil Nadu, viz, a) political development may be viewed as the efforts of the leader to reconstruct his/her own distorted-misrepresented self-image; b) mass adoration is replaced by elite sycophantic discourses; and c) depoliticized public realm paves the way for the emergence of indifferent and mediocre people which in turn provides legitimacy for the present rule. This situation also explains participation and

integration crises which result in the proliferation of political parties. One can realize that in the private realm, power is not expanded or exhibited well. In the public realm, power is being used to surpass the achievements of one's predecessor as well as the contemporary. Political development often proves that it is how to appropriate power with utmost dramatic sense of 'common good' or 'democratic way'. The first aspect explains how the leader coincidences his own identity with development which in turn further politicizes with a view to reducing the gap between the ruler and the ruled. It is convenient to locate the first aspect in MGR and later in Ms. Jayalalitha. MGR considerably politicized and made the poor people to participate in the politics who previously restricted themselves on many grounds. The asymmetrical power relations and the mass winning through their hero over the elite portrayed in his films secured constant loyalty and legitimacy. Though his films were rooted in Dravidian ideology, he was able to neutralize its radicalism in his decade of reign between 1977 and 1987; especially in the arena of Brahmin-nonBrahmin and Centre-State controversies. The strong loyalty from the masses undermined the profound question about the necessity of structural transformation. Rather, his rule opted for surface level development with little structural transformation within the framework of *status quo*. His populist programmes are the outcome of his self-styled compulsions, and his endeavours in recognizing Tamil language and culture are the direct responses for which he was previously misrepresented as non-Tamil origin. The very striking feature is his project of reconciliation of tradition and modernity, and rich and poor carried in his films which in turn contributed consolidation of the support of the various sections of people. It is argued that the concept of kingly models gives an instrument to understand the context for MGR's political success. The concept of patron-client ties and charismatic leadership have both given clues to MGR's popularity and thereby ADMK's electoral success. MGR's benevolence may also at times have been the result of arbitrary implementation and distribution of public good. There is also a valid argument that personal growth and social progress are complementary according to MGR. This process has continued in Jayalalitha's reign during 1991-1996 and 2001-2008. However, the real desire is to get beyond her mentor MGR and establish her own style of politics which itself is a highest reflection of his style with little modifications [10]. The leader should observe that any amount of glorification of his/her name through policies and programmes can be miscarried, if they fail. The second aspect explains the nature of relationship of masses and elites to the leader. MGR's screen image and his careful manifestation in the public changed the masses to admire and adore for more than one reason. His appeal reached the innermost psyche of the working class, women and children as well. All the Messianic expectations crossed through anti-colonial, cultural identity and moralized public sphere as well have been made to identify with MGR. In fact MGR's reach and impact are wider than what he confined himself within the range of his party ADMK. He profoundly supplied substitute gratification and ego-ideal in the psychological sphere of life. This caused the people to

find his politics impossible except embracing and culminating through another leader. This happened through the leadership of Jayalalitha. The masses are more often strangers and spectators rather than participants in the reign of Jayalalitha. This situation implies an estrangement in the people's responses, despite the fact of getting absolute majority in the election. In order to remove this lacuna, a peculiar type of sycophantic discourses is envisaged through elites ranging from politicians, bureaucrats to academicians. It shows a paradox that whether an absolute majority government needs constant glorification or the elites have no other way of getting their share except through sycophantic discourses. The logic is still to be demystified and yet to be understood what are the compelling reasons and necessities for such practices for a strong leader with stable government. The elite may think that when the volume of sycophantic messages is greater than the oppositional and critical messages, the greater would be the legitimation effect. Perhaps, the merit of these sycophantic discourses is that it provides a moral check on the part of a leader from victimizing his followers. The negative aspect is that it fosters rituals and mystification rather than preparing the people for meaningful political participation. One must remember that, psychologically speaking, for a leader or even for a person, nothing is sweeter and greater than his own name. This is because; the sense of immortality is culminated in the prolonged maintaining of one's name. The third aspect is specifically relevant to the present government under Jayalalitha. Depoliticization signifies two levels in the present context. One, the expanded legal and institutional structure together with elite-bureaucratic domination has resulted in uncreative mass participation. Two, the integration crisis in major political parties gives chance to consolidate the dissatisfied mass and paves way for the further proliferation of political parties. Thus, the indifferent and mediocre people in general and the integration crisis of the major political parties in particular enable her government legitimate and stable. One may remember the reality of Tamil society in ancient times. Though people tolerated all the absurdities and sufferings in their private life, they did not tolerate any injustice done by their king or his ministers. People had a sense of rationality to question about king's performance. One can find many numbers of events in Tamil literature. This sense of responsibility, rationality and bravery should be re-invoked in the modern citizen. The depoliticized public realm in reality seeks to maintain its strength through non-political aspects or ways of mobilization - through primordial identities. Occasionally this situation politicizes these mediocre people wrongly with a view to getting power in the other way. One may remember the merit of the Self Respect Movement of EVR which intensely activated the people to remove the domination and the sense of guilt. The recent trends ignore the fact that power is the overall capacity of a socio-political system to get things done in the interests of collective goods. It also ignores that the capacity to agree in un-coerced communication on community action. In fact, there will not be any logic in relating the popular support to the governmental performance. Loyalty shown by the elites should require a careful attention on the part of the leader. Because,

politically speaking, loyalty and trust may be hypocritical. The DMK envisaged on purely opportunistic grounds. However, as far as masses are concerned, they submit from individual weakness and helplessness, because there is no acceptable alternative. The exaggerated and aggressive masculine ideal - the dominant symbol of power - would degenerate social harmony. This signifies a constant challenge and restlessness, and the vanity and maintenance of privileged attitude which are contrary to a healthy communal life. These three aspects are not the exhaustive ones. However, the present day political development is embracing these aspects. Sometimes the hard realities prevent any amount of value judgments. People are yet to find a way to transcend the incompatibility between the private and public realm. Perhaps, political development is a costly enterprise calling for rationality, immense patience and abundant tolerance on the part of the people.

#### VIII. VARIANTS IN IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE

Language has been manipulated by political elites to promote communal and national movements. Over the different periods, changes have occurred within the party ideology and leadership pattern. The real issue is between the sole emphasis on social reform through mass movement and social reform through political power. The formation of the DMK assimilated the needs and aspirations of new emerging class. The DMK as a catalyst for social mobilization has effectively exploited the identity anxiety of the transitional individual in his movement from a primordially-determined unit of family, caste and village to an urban environment. Alienated from the traditional village ties, influenced by new ideas through communications media, and frustrated in economic desires, the individual is attracted toward the party, both as an expression of his discontent with society and as a psychological substitute for the roles, status, and values provided by the traditional system. The advance of the DMK among youth may be an expression of generational conflict [11]. There is a possibility in stating that the pre-colonial values have a clear impact on current political behaviour in Tamil Nadu. The concept of kingly models gives us an instrument to understand the context for MGR's political success [12]. The concept of patron-client ties and charismatic leadership has both given clues to MGR's popularity and electoral success. In modern democracy, political success depends on sphere of electorate which is fragmented on different lines. The personal popularity of any leader cannot easily be translated into the ability to solve problems.

TABLE I  
VARIANTS IN IDEOLOGY

Variants	DK	DMK	ADMK
Ideology	Atheistic, rational and secular	Rational and secular	Secular
Organization type	Pressure group	Political party	Political party
Practice	Social reforms through mass movement	Social reforms through political power	Social reforms through political power
Core demand	Separate nation	State autonomy	Federalism
Social justice	Through agitations and movements	Through law	Through law
Language policy	Anti-Hindi stand	Anti-Hindi stand	Three language formulae
Leadership	Principle	Charismatic	Charismatic

Propaganda media	Speech, writing, press	Speech, press, drama, films	Speech, press, films
Kinship orientation	Not encouraged	encouraged	Not encouraged

#### IX. ELECTORAL POLITICS

The DMK basically differs from its root DK in emphasizing on electoral participation with a view to capture political power to achieve its social and political goals. The electoral competition between DMK and Congress existed till 1971. From 1972 onwards, the competition is between DMK and ADMK. The remaining parties both national and regional parties, have to align with either DMK or ADMK for its success. Perhaps, the mutual benefits can be witnessed in such type of electoral alliance. More interestingly, the ideology is concealed in the accruing political advantage. The elections for 234 assembly constituencies are very competitive over the period.

TABLE II  
ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE OF THE DMK (1957-2006) AND THE ADMK (1977-2006)

Year	DMK		ADMK	
	Seats won	Vote %	Seats won	Vote %
1957	15	NA		
1962	50	27.10		
1967	137	40.69		
1971	184	48.58		
1977	48	24.89	130	30.36
1980	37	22.10	129	38.75
1984	24	29.34	133	37.03
1989	151	33.18	27+2	30.34
1991	2	22.46	164	44.39
1996	173	42.07	4	21.47
2001	31	30.92	132	31.44
2006	96	26.46	61	32.64

Source: Compiled from Statistical Reports (General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Tamil Nadu (1957-2006)), Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

Right from 1957, the DMK has its own network of electoral alliance in state assembly elections as well as parliamentary elections. Ironically, the DMK is not prepared to share power with other parties. At the same time, it rightfully claims a share in central government. This is due to the decline of Congress domination. The ADMK is also one the same track to compete for power.

#### X. CONCLUSION

What is the future of language politics of DMK? This question will be synonymous with 'What is the future of DMK?' The answer will be 'Tamil is the beginning and the end of the Dravidian Movement.' This is a conditional hypothesis perpetuated by ideological and leadership variants. The evolution since EVR signifies the variants and adaptations. Let us come to the issue raised in the genesis paragraph of this paper. When the Tamils themselves were fragmented as Pandyas, Cheras, Cholas, Pallavas, Saivaite, Vaishnavite, Jains and Buddhist, constructing the consciousness as 'We are Tamils' based purely on language remains a larger and inclusive identity as compared with foregoing identities. Who was or is responsible for constructing such larger identity? The answer is self-evident.

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