

Changing facets of Tamil Nadu Politics: Emergence of Hindu Nationalist Party in Dravidian Land¹

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ABSTRACT

Tamil Nadu politics, since Independence largely dominated by the Congress party. It was in state power till it was thrown out by the regional Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in 1967. For the last six decades, the state was continued to rule either by the DMK or by the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. The Dravidian party's hegemony was challenged in the late 1980s, due to the new entrants of parties. The newly started Hindu nationalist politico-religious organisations also posed challenges to Dravidian parties. The new "Hindu wave" created following the demolition of Babri Masjid gave new lease of life to the Bharatiya Janata Party in the state. Subsequently, the BJP became an important party in a highly competitive bi-polar politics. This paper attempts to explore the changing politics of Tamil Nadu and the future of the BJP in Tamil political space.

Key Words : AIADMK, BJP, Congress, Dravidian parties, DMK, Tamil Nadu

INTRODUCTION

Political discourse in Tamil Nadu was, for the last 6 decades, marked by the Dravidian political parties. The state was either ruled by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) or All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). There was no scope for the new parties, particularly for the national parties, to register the growth in the state. Ever since the Congress party was overthrown from power in 1967, no national party dominated the state politics. However, Congress continued to do "balance party" role throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In the bi-polar state politics (between the DMK and the AIADMK), a powerful national party (the Congress) plays a pivotal role in the formation of the government in elections. Even though the Congress lost power, it played an important role, in keeping the DMK out of power, by its alliance with the AIADMK.

At this juncture, due to the entry of the new political parties, in the fragmented political system, the Congress

lost its significance as the important "balance party" in the two-party state system. Further, new entrants of political parties, like the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) of Vanniyars, Viduthalai Chiruthaikal Katchi (VCK) of Paraiyars and Puthiya Tamilagam (PT) of Pallars, had affected the mainstream Dravidian parties as well. In this fragmented political system, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) proved its strength in the parliamentary and assembly elections of 1996. The BJP increased its political presence in the parliament following the destruction of Babri Masjid, Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh) in 1992. It created the new Hindu wave across the country. This reflected in Tamil Nadu as well. The BJP, for the first time in the state, won in Padmanabhapuram (Kanyakumari) constituency in 1996. After this election, both the DMK and the AIADMK competed with each other to have an alliance with the BJP. This paper attempts to explore how a Hindu nationalist party like BJP is getting a foothold in the state where the Dravidian parties were still dominating the Tamil political space. This paper attempts

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to explore what factors have helped the BJP to become an important factor in the state in that period? This paper also attempts to analyse the BJP's growth in all these years and its sustainability in state politics.

The Dravidian movement came into being in the early twentieth century with a radical social agenda of emancipating the backward and lower caste people from Brahminical domination. It played a pivotal role in developing a pan anti-Brahmin consciousness in Tamil society. The movement owing allegiance to atheistic principles critiqued the institution of caste and religion. The Dravidian Movement is among Asia's oldest and most durable ethnonational movements (Subramanian, 2011, 15). It demanded a separate country '*Dravida Nadu*' for Dravidians. Later the movement abandoned the principle of atheism under the leadership of Annadurai after he floated the new party DMK in 1949. His attitude towards religion can be encapsulated in the slogan "One Caste, One God". The Dravidian movement witnessed significant changes in its nature and content over the period. Entry of the AIADMK and the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) by M.G. Ramachandran and Vaiko in 1972 and 1994, respectively had diluted its principles and had weakened the movement as well.

The weakening of the Dravidian movement coincided with the emergence of the Hindu nationalist organisations in the state. The state, hitherto free from communal violence witnessed its first major communal violence against Christians in Mandaikadu (Kanyakumari) in 1982. Since then, though it was not as frequent as in north Indian states, Tamil Nadu saw increased violence against religious minorities over the last three decades. These issues were successfully capitalised by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in immediate elections. However, the success over communal violence was limited to two districts (Kanyakumari and Coimbatore) and the BJP failed to do the same in other parts of the state. Since then no mainstream political party made an alliance with the BJP all these years.

Increasing weakening of the Congress to capture the power at the centre after 1996 and the emergence of the BJP as a strong contender for political power had an impact in Tamil political space as well. The DMK and the AIADMK, principal political parties in the state competed with each other to make an alliance with the BJP in various elections since 1998 and the trend was all well till the 2004 Parliament elections, and in that election,

the BJP-AIADMK alliance was routed in all 39 constituencies in the state. After 2004 debacle no major party had an alliance with the BJP, however, the BJP managed to get an alliance with the seven different parties and made 'rainbow alliance' in 2014 parliamentary elections and won in Kanyakumari. However, this victory was not all of a sudden, since 1991 the BJP was gaining momentum in the state. Although it could not convert its influence into electoral victory, the BJP made a significant impact in some constituencies.

Review of literature:

How has the Hindu nationalist BJP registered growth in the state where Dravidian parties are still dominating the political space of Tamil Nadu? How Hindu nationalist organisations developed their base where Tamil/Dravidian nationalist sentiments were still strong? The available literature on Hindu nationalist movements has failed to answer these questions. Therefore, the main purpose of the research is to fill the identified gaps in this area.

Wide arrange of research works has done on the various works of the Sangh Parivar associations at the national level and state level. Many scholars have written extensively about Sangh Parivar organisations work among Dalits, tribes and marginal section of the people (Narayan, 2009). The BJP and other Sangh Parivar organisations work in central India, Madhya Pradesh from 1925 to 1996, the different strategies they employed in this period to mobilise masses were documented comprehensively by Jaffrelot (Jaffrelot, 1996). The Sangh work in states like Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and other techniques followed in this state to strengthen the Sangh work has been analysed in detail and how the communal problems in these states were successfully translated into votes by Sangh associations were highly documented (Jayaprasad, 1991, Mathur, 2008 and Hansen, 1996).

Due to the historical weakness of the Hindu nationalist organisations in Tamil Nadu, many scholars have ignored the growth of the Sangh Parivar organisations. Over the issue of Hindu nationalist BJP's growth in Tamil Nadu, scholars have differences of opinion. Some scholars are opined that there was no rise of the Hindu groups in Tamil Nadu. Scholars like Pandian (2012), Rajadurai and Geetha (2002) and Subramanian (2011) belong to this category. They have argued that since the electoral strength of the BJP largely depends on its electoral ally and the impact of the Dravidian

ideology controls the Hindu groups. They are also arguing that though 'Vinayakar Chathurthi' was famous in Tamil Nadu, but it was largely participated by the common people who do not have any affiliation with the Hindu Munnani or any other Hindu organisation.

Scholars like Fuller (2001) and Harris (2002) argue that since the activities of the Hindu organisations have increased considerably in the forms of Thiruvilakku puja and other temple festivals and the Dravidian party cadres also widely participated in that festivals and these festivals show a rise of the Hindu organisations in the state. Fuller and Harris also pointed out in their articles that the various strategies of Hindu organisations to mobilize people into their fold and they also highlight the points regarding how Brahminical Hindu organisations mobilize and use Dalit youth for their violence.

All these articles deal with the involvement of Hindu organisations in communal clashes and their growth in the state through various activities. However, many of these works do not mention the nexus between violence and the growing presence of the BJP in the State. These studies have a micro-level focus *i.e.* one or two districts of the state. Therefore, there is a need to study the growth of Hindu right-wing politics across the state. This paper attempts to bridge this gap by studying the growth of the Hindu nationalist politics across the state. In doing so, this paper attempts to explore the reasons behind the success of the Hindu nationalist organisation in Tamil Nadu.

This paper consists of three sections, the first section traces the politics of Tamil Nadu in post-Independence period where the Congress and then the DMK and AIADMK dominated the Tamil political space. The emergence of the various Hindu nationalist organisations and their impact will be analysed in the second section and the last section deals the ascendance of the BJP in the state. Furthermore, this section also analyses show the BJP influences the fragmented political system of Tamil Nadu and its impact in Tamil politics.

Post-Independence Politics of Tamil Nadu:

The Dravidian movement ever since its inception in the 1910s vigorously spoke against the implementation of Hindi, the Brahmin domination in jobs, education, etc. and demanded the representation of non-Brahmins in jobs and education in the then Madras Presidency². The

Dravidian movement claimed itself as a sole representative of the Dravidians of southern India, but in reality, it was largely confined to Tamil speaking districts of the Madras Presidency (the then Madras Presidency was included present-day Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and some parts of Kerala and Karnataka).

Following Independence and after the reorganization of the states, Tamil Nadu politics was dominated by the Congress party. The Congress party ruled the state uninterruptedly from 1952 onwards until it was overthrown by the DMK in 1967 elections. The DMK came to power in 1967 and it was in state power till 1976. The hegemony of the DMK was challenged after the split in the party created by its one of the leaders and the prominent cine star M.G. Ramachandran (popularly known as MGR). In 1972, M.G. Ramachandran floated a new party named AIADMK and with the help of the Congress he captured power in the state in 1977 elections and ruled the state uninterruptedly until his death in 1987. After the demise of MGR, Tamil Nadu was either ruled by the DMK or by the AIADMK alternatively. No other parties could challenge these Dravidian parties' hegemony in the state. However, new parties were floated in this period.

In 1991, after Jayalalithaa became Chief Minister of the state, she openly inclined to Hindu religious affiliation. The AIADMK, unlike the DMK, does not have any anti-Brahmin, anti-Hindu, anti-Hindi sentiments. The AIADMK's founder leader MGR, throughout his period as Chief Minister (1977-1987), has always identified himself with Hindu sentiments. During his tenure as chief minister, Hindu nationalist BJP and other Sangh Parivar organisations had registered significant growth in the state. Meenakshipuram (Tirunelveli) Dalits converted to Islam in February 1981. 15 Muslims and one Dalit were injured in subsequent violence after conversion (Fanselow 2006, 246-248) and in Mandaikadu (Kanyakumari) communal clash between Christian fishermen and Hindu Nadar's in March 1982, 8 fishermen were killed in police firing. Both these events paved the way to the emergence of the new Hindu group named Hindu Munnani (Hindu Front). Districts near Kerala border such as Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli (in the south) and Coimbatore, Tiruppur, and Nilgiris (in the west) has witnessed a sudden rise in communal incidents. Communal disturbances in these places were there throughout the 1980s.

2. For more discussion on activities of the Dravidian movement see Subramanian (2011), Irschick (1969) and Barnett (1976).

However, post-1990s events posed a direct challenge to the existing Dravidian party's hegemony. Destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992 in Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh) and India's choice to go with neo-liberal policies changed Indian politics altogether. Hitherto, politically untouchable party, the BJP - the party which was in *pariah* status in the political circle- transformed itself vigorously and became a strong contender for political power at the centre against the Congress party. The all India trend was echoed in the Tamil Nadu politics as well, in 1996 Tamil Nadu assembly election, the BJP contested alone in 143 constituencies, though it lost in the majority of them, it won in Padmanabhapuram (Kanyakumari) constituency³. Notably, out of seven constituencies in Kanyakumari, the BJP came second in three constituencies and pushed the ruling AIADMK-Congress to third position. The BJP votes have spoiled the prospects of the Congress- AIADMK alliance in this district.

The Emergence of the Hindu Nationalist Organisations in Tamil Nadu:

Ever since the beginning, the Madras Presidency was relatively free from the communal violence and even at the time of partition Madras Presidency was relatively peaceful or the violence was much lower when compared to other parts of India. The Dravidian movement since its inception successfully included all castes and religions into its fold as against the Brahmins. Another possible explanation could be the Madras presidency in general or the Tamil Nadu, in particular, was never subjected to rule by Muslim rulers. Since the Muslim rule was not the prominent issue in Tamil Nadu the dominant narrative of Muslims as invaders which proved to be successful in north India did not work in favour of the Hindu nationalist organisations. Hence, it posed a big challenge to construct the organisation in the state. For instance, though the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was established in 1925 in Nagpur (Maharashtra), it did not have its presence in Madras Presidency until 1942. After 1942 it had its presence in Karnataka and in Kerala, but not in Tamil speaking areas. Of the 31,000 membership in the south, half of them were concentrated in Karnataka (Jaffrelot, 1996, 75).

However, the RSS managed to start its work in Tamil speaking parts of Madras (later in 1969 Madras

Presidency renamed as Tamil Nadu) and the first ever clash on communal lines between Hindus and Christians happened in 1963, when the RSS initiated the Vivekananda Memorial Rock in Kanyakumari. Christian fishermen opposed the construction and the Cross, which was installed earlier, was removed from the rock with the help of the then Congress government in Tamil Nadu (Ranade, 2013, 13). However, even after the successful completion of Vivekananda Rock Memorial the RSS was relatively weak in the southern states in general and Tamil Nadu in particular.

According to Jaffrelot, the main reason for the relatively low-level success of the *Sangh Parivar* in southern states was that "the RSS's Sanskritised culture was barely unacceptable to many south Indians because it was regarded as antithetic to Dravidian movement" (Jaffrelot, 1996, 75). In order to develop and strengthen the Hindu feelings among Tamils, RSS has decided to form one organisation in Tamil Nadu with Tamil sentiments and they established *Hindu Munnani* (Hindu Front) in RSS state meeting in Karur on February 1980. As Jaffrelot says, "... the RSS decided to enter politics in some states where the BJP had not well established, namely Tamil Nadu and Kerala. In both, its involvement in elections was organised through Hindu Munnani (Hindu Fronts) - a veritable innovation in RSS tactics" (Jaffrelot, 1996, 367). However, after the formation of the Hindu Munnani they couldn't gain any momentum in Tamil Nadu. But, the conversion of Dalits to Islam and communal violence against Christians paved the way for the Hindu resurgence in Tamil Nadu.

In February 1981 Meenakshipuram, a village in Tirunelveli with a population of 1300, almost all of whom were "untouchables," became a centre of controversy when large-scale conversions to Islam were reported (Katju, 2012, 33). After the conversion, there were attempts made by Hindu religious leaders to "reconvert" the converted Dalits. Soon after the conversion, on 7th March 1981, eighteen individuals, belonging to four families got converted (Kalam, 1990, 45). Following this conversion threat the Hindu Munnani had organised Hindu unity conferences and other such conferences in Kanyakumari, Madurai, and Coimbatore to unite Hindus.

On March 1st of 1982, during the Mandaikadu (Kanyakumari) Bhagavathi Amman temple festival rumour spread that Christian fishermen kidnapped and

3. Statistical Report on General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Tamil Nadu, 1996, by Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

raped Hindu devotees in Mandaikadu beach and this rumour ensured the violence between the Hindu Nadars and the Christian fishermen and subsequently 8 fishermen were killed during the police firing (EPW, 1982, 717-718; Ravichandran, 2001, 165-177). Apart from violence the Hindu Munnani organised Vinayaka Chaturthi processions throughout the state, and also organised *Tiruvilakkupujai* (lamp festival) and other religious activities. Through these activities, the Hindu Munnani came to the forefront as a militant religious organisation in the state and it was openly supported and encouraged during the Jayalalithaa regime (1991-96).

Subramanian says, "With the DMK perceived to be "pro-Muslim," the Jayalalithaa Government (1991 to 1996), tilting towards Hindutva, backed the Hindu Munnani in its activities such as organising Vinayaka Chaturthi processions, Ram Jyoti *yatras* and so forth in Chennai, Coimbatore, Madurai and other places" (Subramanian, 1998). Since the DMK continued to maintain its "pro-Muslim" image, the growth of the "Hindu wave" worked in favor of the AIADMK and large sections of upper castes, particularly Brahmins, middle and upper-middle-class people supported the AIADMK regime as against the DMK. In next section I will analyse how these changed political dimensions were capitalised by the BJP in the state.

Politics of the BJP in the Dravidian state:

As discussed earlier, the BJP or its predecessor Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) did not have any significant presence in the state except in few pockets, where Sangh organisations were already working. Besides, the organisation strength of the BJP was extremely weak in the state. Issues like Meenakshipuram Dalits conversion to Islam and the communal clash between the Christians and Hindus in Mandaikadu was not capitalised by the BJP. Rather, it was successfully politicised and publicised by the newly formed Hindu Munnani. Though the BJP contested in various elections in the state, it could not make any electoral presence in the state. However, in this period (1980-1990) the BJP had pursued agitational politics in the state. Particularly in Kanyakumari, for instance, the BJP organised many protests demonstrations and continuously attacked other parties for their pro-Christian stance in the district.

Due to *en bloc* voting behaviour of Christians, party

competition was higher in Kanyakumari to get Christian votes. Hindu nationalist organisations highlighted the alliance between the Church and political parties. In doing so, the BJP claimed itself as an only party which is working for the welfare of Hindus and claimed itself as a champion of the Hindu cause. Due to these prolonged works of the BJP in this district, despite the heavy competition, the BJP won in 1996 assembly election in Padmanabhapuram (Kanyakumari) constituency. This was the first major electoral victory for the BJP since its inception in 1980 in the state. It is noteworthy that the BJP won without any electoral alliance. Due to its agitational politics combining with the organisational growth of the RSS, the BJP emerged as the important party in the late 1990s. Due to its historical weakness in Tamil Nadu, the BJP could not get any significant support from the upper castes, middle and upper-middle-class people, which was its traditional support base elsewhere in India. As we have noted earlier, these sections tend to vote for the AIADMK rather than the BJP.

Destruction of the Babri Masjid has created the "Hindu Wave" across the country, it was in favour of the BJP. Subsequently, the BJP emerged as the single largest party in the parliamentary elections of 1996. Further, the BJP also captured several states in north India. Growing Hindu religious sentiments after series of '*yatras*' and the emergence of BJP as a strong political contender at the national level after 1996, forced the AIADMK to leave Congress alliance and forge an alliance with the BJP in 1998 parliament elections. The AIADMK severed its ties with its 13 years old alliance partner, Congress, to have an electoral understanding with the BJP. However, the AIADMK's decision surprised everyone. Because, the BJP does not have any significant electoral presence in Tamil Nadu; in fact, the party's vote share does not exceed even 2 per cent in 1996 elections.⁴ Even though they worked in the state since the 1980s, it does not have a strong organisational network in the state. Further, the BJP's reach was limited to Kanyakumari and Coimbatore and does not have a state-wide presence.

Electoral understanding of the Dravidian party with the BJP raised many questions in the political circles. *The Hindu*, a leading newspaper in the state termed this alliance as "an unprincipled alliance" (Editorial, *The Hindu*, 1997, 12). The AIADMK, which follows the principles of Periyar and Annadurai, and joining hands

4. Election vote shares data calculated from various reports on state assembly elections results 1951-2011 generated by the Election Commission of India, available at: http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/StatisticalReports/ElectionStatistics.asp.

with the Hindu nationalist BJP, was seen as a betrayal by Jayalalithaa to the Dravidian principles. However, after the wide criticism, Jayalalithaa came up with the statement, defended her alliance with the BJP and assured minorities security if BJP voted to power (Special Correspondent, *The Hindu*, 1997, 1).

The AIADMK- BJP leaders toured all over the state and the BJP national leaders like Atal Bihari Vajpayee, L.K. Advani, and Murli Manohar Joshi had visited and addressed public meetings in the state. On 14th February 1998, in one such election meeting, where Advani was the prime speaker, AI-Umma activists exploded a series of 27 bombs and claimed 50 lives (Chellapandian, 2008, 114). Karunanidhi headed DMK was in power at the time and the Muslim fundamentalist organisations were behind the bomb blast, the AIADMK- BJP combo vehemently criticised state government's soft approach towards Muslim fundamentalists.

Following the serial bomb blast, Coimbatore economy went down, properties worth Rs. 100 crores were damaged (Thomas and Jagadheesan 1998). The AIADMK- BJP along with other parties like MDMK, PMK, Janata Party (JP) and Thamizhaga Rajiv Congress (TRC) formed the National Democratic Alliance in the state. The AIADMK led the NDA alliance at the state level, while the BJP led at the national level. The NDA alliance bagged 30 seats out of 39 constituencies in the state. The DMK led Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) - the breakaway faction of the Congress party- and Communist Party of India (CPI) alliance won 9 seats in the state⁵.

In the western districts- Coimbatore, Dharmapuri, Erode, Karur, Krishnagiri, Namakkal, Salem, The Nilgiris, and Tiruppur- the AIADMK- BJP alliance won all the seats in these districts. As mentioned earlier, the AIADMK- BJP's stand against minority communalism worked in favour of this alliance. The BJP's Coimbatore candidate C.P. Radhakrishnan, won by 144, 676 votes, the highest margin in the state and this confirmed the voter's approval of this alliance.

Due to political differences in the NDA alliance, the AIADMK withdrew its support to the BJP government and nation has faced its 13th Lok Sabha election in 1999. The AIADMK's place in the National Democratic Alliance was successfully replaced by the DMK. This alliance won 26 seats in 1999 elections and its rival the

AIADMK faced this election by renewing its alliance with the Congress, CPI and Communist Party of India [Marxist] (CPI[M]) and this alliance bagged 13 seats in the state. However, the BJP has increased its seats from three in 1998 elections to four in 1999 elections and its vote share also increased from 6.86 per cent to 7.14 per cent, respectively.

As discussed earlier, in 1998 and 1999 parliamentary elections the BJP headed NDA alliance came to power with the help of the AIADMK and DMK alliance, respectively. With this alliance, the BJP extended to new places. Both the DMK and AIADMK played a vital role in popularising the BJP every nook and corners of the state. Due to this alliance, the "outsider" image of the BJP was wiped out and the normalization of the BJP took place in the state. This alliance factor (1998-2004) gave a new lease of life to the BJP. It helped the BJP to register its growth beyond its traditional support base and to reach to new sections across the state.

The BJP again made an alliance with the AIADMK in the parliamentary elections of 2004. The AIADMK- BJP alliance came to an end following the 2004 Lok Sabha election debacle and the alliance with the major Dravidian parties came to end with this. Since then, the BJP was not part of the alliance and could not win any seats in any of the assembly and parliamentary elections. The BJP went back to the period of the 1980s and it was politically isolated. After six years of alliance period with the AIADMK and the DMK, the BJP again went through its political *pariah* status in Tamil Nadu. Since then it had lost its political importance in the state and the trend continued till the 2014 Parliamentary elections.

From 2004 to 2014, the party again renewed its anti-Dravidian party principle and launched various protests and conferences across the state. The BJP along with other Sangh Parivar organisations organised public meetings to expose the "anti-Hindu" tendencies of the DMK and the AIADMK governments. Meanwhile, in the parliamentary elections of 2009 and in the assembly elections of 2011, the BJP tried to forge a cross-caste alliance with the different caste-based parties. However, it was in vain and did not yield any positive results in favour of the BJP. Since the political acceptance of the BJP has increased, even Dalit political parties/ organisations had close tie-ups with the BJP and condemned the major Dravidian parties for denying

5. Statistical Report on General Election to the Lok Sabha for 1998 by Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

rightful place of the Dalits in the political space.

The BJP, compared to previous elections made a broad electoral alliance with the other smaller and new parties in 2014 parliament elections. The BJP made cross caste alliance with the PMK, A.C. Shanmugam's Pudhiya Needhi Katchi (PNK, New Justice Party) and Kongunadu Makkal Desia Katchi (KMDK) parties representing Vanniyar, Mudaliyar and Vellala Gounder castes, respectively. The above-mentioned castes are in a majority in north and western parts of Tamil Nadu and play a crucial role in determining winning candidates in their respective areas. In addition to its alliance with the caste-based parties, the BJP also made an electoral understanding with the MDMK of Vaiko, Desiya Murpokku Dravidar Kazhagam (DMDK) of Vijaykanth and Paari Vendhar's Indhiya Jananayaka Katchi (IJK). The BJP led seven party NDA alliance was popularly referred to as "rainbow alliance" (Prasad, 2014).

The BJP contested in six parliamentary seats namely, Chennai South, Coimbatore, Thanjavur, Sivaganga, Ramanathapuram, and Kanyakumari (erstwhile Nagercoil). In addition to this, alliance partners of the NDA also contested on BJP election symbol in Vellore (PNK), Pollachi (KMDK) and Perambalur (IJK) constituencies. The BJP promised to provide good governance and development if it is voted to power. In addition to this, the BJP adhered to its original agenda of construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya, abrogation of Article 370 and promised to implement uniform civil code after it coming back to power (Ramachandran, 2014).

Interestingly, the BJP followed new strategies throughout the election time, which was absent in all these years. For instance, the BJP candidate for Nilgiris constituency promised to get the ST status for Badagas and also, he assured to set up Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Nilgiris (later his candidature was rejected) (Special Correspondent, *The Hindu* 2014). Likewise, the BJP candidate for Coimbatore promised to address all local issues if the BJP is voted to power. He also promised to bring metro train services to Coimbatore, to establish technology and management institutions and he promised transparent administration for ease of doing business (Staff Reporter, *The Hindu* 2014). This is the first time the BJP is addressing all these local issues and promised to resolve all after coming to power.

On polling day, the state witnessed 72.8 per cent of

voters turn out. Post poll survey suggested that the BJP led NDA alliance was leading in all constituencies on par with the AIADMK and it predicted that in some places the NDA alliance pushed the AIADMK (*Tamil Thamarai*, 2014). Despite Modi's star campaign in the state, the BJP's 'rainbow alliance' won in only two constituencies namely Dharmapuri and Kanyakumari by the PMK and BJP, respectively. The NDA alliance polled 18.6 per cent votes, in six constituencies the NDA candidates came second and pushed the DMK to a third place (Ravishankar, 2016).

Conclusion:

From the above discussion, it is evident that the BJP, despite its historical weakness, registered steady development in the state. Even though it failed to replicate its Kanyakumari success elsewhere in the state, it proved itself as the reliable party to come to power or to win in parliamentary elections. It also a fact that the growth of the other Hindu nationalist organisations such as Hindu Munnani and the VHP along with the RSS played a considerable role in the expansion of the BJP. The main drawback the BJP has in Tamil Nadu is the crisis in the leadership. The state BJP does not have a strong, widely accepted leader in the state. The state BJP, even before becoming a contender in the state political space, is caught up in the faction fights between the various groups and almost all factions are on caste or region based. Apart from Kanyakumari district, the Hindu nationalist organizations are weak or insignificant in other districts of the state. Tirunelveli, for instance, shares most of the borders with the Kanyakumari, does not have any BJP or Hindu nationalist organizations impact in this district, the BJP and RSS cadres are attributing caste as a significant factor for this failure in Tirunelveli.

The BJP's vote share is largely confined to its traditional strongholds. In Kanyakumari, where the party is historically strong, the BJP came to the second position in 4 constituencies (Nagercoil, Colachel, Vilavancode, and Killiyoor) and pushed the ruling AIADMK to the third position in the assembly elections of 2016⁶. In addition to this, the BJP came in the third position, following the AIADMK and the DMK, in 32 constituencies. Unlike the earlier elections, this time the BJP increased its performance across the state. Among the 32 constituencies, where the party came in the third position,

6. Data's compiled from Statistical Report on General Elections, 2016 to the Legislative Assembly of Tamil Nadu, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

12 constituencies in the north, 11 constituencies in the west, 2 in Delta region and 7 in southern parts of Tamil Nadu. While the party retained its position in southern and western regions, it advanced its position in the northern region. The BJP's breakthrough in northern districts can be seen as a significant development for the party in northern districts.

The demise of the AIADMK chief Jayalalitha and the DMK president Karunanidhi opened new avenues for the small and marginal parties to seek recognition in the absence of tall leaders. Hitherto sidelined political parties and groups resumed their activities to use the political vacuum created after Jayalalitha. The absence of the strong leader in the state and having political power at the centre led the BJP to use the political climate of Tamil Nadu in its favor to strengthen the party.

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