

State parties' tall electoral promises: Real concern or mere attention-grabbing?



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It is hardly strange that when it comes to the Assembly elections, state political parties' manifestos get a riveting attention. In the past, Tamil Nadu parties' election manifestos were the cynosure of attention to the point of being branded as 'hero of the election'. But in the parliamentary elections, the state parties' manifestos are not hot topics of discussion. This time for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections, when major national parties are yet to come up with their own election manifestos, the Tamil Nadu regional parties have released their manifestoes which almost resonate in unison.

The DMK, AIADMK, PMK and other parties have dished out identical promises in their election manifestos for the forthcoming general elections, as happened in the past; only that they have been modified in tune with today's changed situation.

Women's entitlement

The women's entitlement scheme has dominated the election manifestos for various Assembly elections in states starting with Tamil Nadu. This time, the DMK, AIADMK and PMK have at the same time made their promises of women's entitlement.

The DMK has promised Rs.1000 entitlement for women across India, the AIADMK Rs.3000 for economic uplift of household women and the PMK (a constituent of BJP front) Rs.3000 for indigent women. These promises reveal that these parties contesting the general elections in Tamil Nadu as separate fronts now are vying to woo women voters.

NEET exemption

The DMK, which promised back in the 2021 Assembly elections to get NEET scrapped and thereby faced a barrage of criticism, is reiterating the same promise in the current parliamentary elections. Over the issue, the AIADMK has promised medical course admissions based on the Plus-2 marks of students. The PMK, for its part, has also announced that it will take steps to get Tamil Nadu NEET exemption. The Naam Thamizhar Katchi does not lag in this regard, vowing to scrap the entrance exam system. The state parties' promises drive home the significance and intensity of the NEET issue.

Governor post

The role and functioning of Governors in the non-BJP-ruling states have drawn much flak from critics. At a time when there's no bonhomie between the Governor and the government in Tamil Nadu, this issue has garnered much space in the election manifestos. The DMK manifesto has announced that steps will be taken to scrap the Article 361 vesting the gubernatorial post with much power and to create a system wherein the Governor is appointed in consultations with Chief Ministers of states. The AIADMK has echoed this sentiment, emphasising that the states must have a say in gubernatorial appointments. Jumping onto the wagon, the Naam Thamizhar Katchi has promised legal amendment to remove the gubernatorial post.

Petrol and diesel prices

The spiralling prices of petrol and diesel have made such a great impact that reduction of petrol and diesel prices is promised by political parties. So, no wonder, the promise has figured in the manifestoes for the forthcoming parliamentary elections.

The AIADMK has announced that it will persuade the union government to take upon itself the task of fixing petrol and diesel prices and to reduce the prices. The DMK, for its part, has promised that cooking gas cylinder price will be fixed at Rs.500, petrol price at Rs.75 and diesel price at Rs.65. The PMK has announced that the taxes levied petrol and diesel will be brought under the purview of the GST. How the spiralling prices of petrol, diesel and cooking gas keep affecting the poor and middle-class people gets reflected in the promises dished out in the political parties' election manifestos.

Sharing of funds

Yet another hot issue is sharing of funds between the union government and the states. The states ruled by non-BJP parties are criticising the BJP led union government on this count and have also moved the Supreme Court. This issue too has figured in the election manifestos of the DMK, AIADMK and the PMK.

These three parties have promised in unison that Indian citizenship and double citizenship will be granted to Sri Lankan Tamils. They have also not failed to accommodate in their manifestoes the long-pending demand for setting up a Supreme Court Bench in Chennai.

State of state parties

The above mentioned examples show how important parties resonate in one voice dishing out Tamil Nadu-centric promises for the forthcoming general elections. In fact, galore are the promises from these state parties which sound identical.

But the ground reality is that a political party that captures power in a state Assembly election can keep its electoral promise as much as it can, but the national party with which a state party ties up, throwing promise after promise to the voters has to be voted to power at the Centre. Then only a state party can honour its electoral promises.

It feels strange that state parties are indiscriminately hurling electoral promises over the schemes whose execution falls under the jurisdiction of the union government. In this context, what is strikingly quixotic is the fact that while the DMK and Congress are electoral allies, the DMK government in Tamil Nadu is unable to get its share of the Cauvery water from Karnataka ruled by its supposed ally, that is, the Congress. Nor could the TN government rein in Karnataka shouting aloud that it will go ahead with construction of the Mokedatu dam. No wonder, one cannot help but ask the question how a state party will honour its electoral parties with the help of its allied party that captures power at the Centre. There was a common minimum programme in the coalition government installed after the parliamentary elections in 1999 and 2004. Such a plan can be put in place by the state parties in alliance with national parties. Otherwise the people-oriented promises dished out by the state parties for the parliamentary elections will just fade away as futile demands.

Translated by V. Mariappan.