

Now it's DMK vs BJP vs AIADMK: TN witnesses a new political equation



D. Karthik. For contact: karthikeyan.di@hindutamil.co.in

As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, when it comes to electoral battles, it has always revolved around the two major Dravidian rivals – DMK and AIADMK. Even when they were part of national fronts, these two parties in Tamil Nadu took on each other in elections.

But the 2024 parliamentary election battle is witnessing a sea-change in the alliance pattern. While the DMK's campaign armor mainly targets the BJP-led union government, coming up with criticism after criticism, the AIADMK typically projects its opposition to its bête noire DMK. The BJP, for its part, praises the late AIADMK leaders and fires salvos against the DMK.

Modi, the main target

Way back in the 2014 parliamentary elections when the Modi wave was reportedly sweeping the nation, former Chief Minister of Tamil

Nadu and AIADMK supremo Jayalalithaa shot off the question ‘Is it Modi or Lady?’, captivating the political war front. Almost in the same style, M.K.Stalin, the Chief Minister and DMK President, is seen campaigning, posing the question ‘Is it Modi or Stalin?’

As Stalin leads the INDIA front in Tamil Nadu, the DMK is undeniably constructing an electoral campaign edifice based on Modi Vs Stalin with the goal of ensuring that the front romps home to victory. At the same time, it is quite manifest that the DMK’s campaign centers around the opposition to Modi and the BJP rule, ignoring the Annamalai-led state unit of the saffron party.

Even now the DMK is ridiculing the BJP as a party not transcending the NOTA status. But the features of its election campaign do not reflect the scorn. It is mainly the Prime Minister Modi and the union government that Chief Minister Stalin is slamming in his campaign. He tries to strengthen his arguments with the list of points that show how the BJP-led union government has betrayed Tamil Nadu. Of course, it is but natural that Stalin criticizes the BJP, a party that has been in power for the past decade. But one cannot help but pose the question if the DMK relegates its achievements during the past three years of its rule to the background in its election campaign as it is mainly focused on hauling the BJP over the coal. Stalin’s campaign has been designed in such a way that it feels more like an out-and-out anti-Modi and anti-BJP cannon. This explains why Stalin lists the DMK government’s achievements only at the end of his speeches on his campaign trail.

Back in the 2019 parliamentary elections it was the BJP in power at the Centre and the AIADMK in the state. As both parties were in an alliance, it was convenient for the DMK to launch campaigns targeting both of them. Now that both BJP and AIADMK have parted ways, contesting the elections separately in the current elections, the DMK quite naturally must have been criticising both separately. But Stalin is accusing both of having a secret truck with each other. That is to say, the DMK is campaigning, virtually treating both as allies. It is only the second-rung leaders in the DMK, who are projecting the

contest as one between DMK Vs AIADMK. The overall DMK style of campaigning has sparked the question if the DMK's has started treating BJP as its arch foe, replacing the AIADMK.

AIADMK strategies

Having abolished the dual leadership and becoming the general secretary of the AIADMK, Edappadi K Palaniswami is confronted now with the challenge of proving his mettle as the sole leader of the party. The AIADMK, on its part, has the onus of proving that it has sincerely and totally distanced itself from the BJP.

On the contrary, EPS spends most of his campaign time castigating the DMK government and Chief Minister Stalin. Asked why he skips slamming the BJP, he has explained to the effect that after breaking up the alliance with the BJP, there was nothing about the party worth criticising. "After all, we are an opposition party in Tamil Nadu," he seems to have said. However, in his campaign speeches, he has, of late, been touching on the BJP in the wake of the DMK's seamless castigation of the AIADMK's failure to take on the BJP. He does not, though, mention the name of Modi, even unknowingly, in his public speeches. Since only a remarkable victory in the 2024 parliamentary elections can determine the AIADMK's future in the 2026 Assembly elections, the party is taking on the DMK alone. The AIADMK is hurling several accusations against the DMK. The DMK has failed to keep its electoral promises given in the 2021, says the AIADMK, also bringing into focus the issue of narcotics and corruption. At the same time, EPS is refuting the charges levelled by the DMK. Answering the DMK's charge of a secret AIADMK-BJP ties, EPS retorts that it is the DMK which has an unofficial truck with the BJP. But it is not understandable that by way of providing evidence for his accusation, EPS produces a photographs of official meetings between Modi and Stalin. Apart from Stalin, EPS is also taking on Udhayanidhi Stalin. In fact, EPS gives importance to Stalin's son too unlike his late leader Jayalalithaa who focussed her virulent criticism only on Karunanidhi, not on his son Stalin.

Another chink in EPS' armour of campaign is that while he says categorically the DMK has not fulfilled even 10 per cent of its election promises, he says in the same breath that it was only thanks to the pressures from the AIADMK that the DMK government is implementing the women's entitlement scheme.

BJP campaign

It is not known whether the BJP had expected victory in Tamil during the 2014 and 2019 parliamentary elections. But it is very clear now that the saffron party with its 10-year rule behind it is looking to considerable success in the current parliamentary elections, as evidenced by Modi's continuous visits to Tamil Nadu. The party is at present compelled to prove that it has grown in the state. It will stand vindicated in saying that it is a solid alternative to the Dravidian parties only if it pulls off a feat of sorts, recording a considerable percentage of votes. The BJP high command is not unaware of this compulsion.

This is why Modi's campaign style has been so tweaked that he showers MGR and Jayalalithaa with lavish praises and comes up with a volley of complaints against the DMK with a hidden agenda to wean a major chunk of the AIADMK vote-bank round to the BJP. Modi in his campaign speeches is also celebrating the Tamil culture and language to strike a sympathetic chord with Tamil Nadu voters.

In fact, it is one of the characteristics of the BJP campaign style to let a national issue turn out to be the talk of the town and cause even the opposition parties to talk about it. In fact, in keeping with its customary style, the saffron party has taken up the issue of Katchatheevu. It has succeeded greatly in making this issue generate lots of heat in discourses resounding from Delhi to Chennai in just a day. It is the BJP's intention to embarrass both Congress and DMK by letting tongues wag about the 50-year-old controversy over Katchatheevu. In retaliation, the DMK has stooped to the level of talking about China's transgressions in Arunachal Pradesh.

The DMK campaigners have been asking at public meetings why Modi had not visited Tamil Nadu during the time of floods and announced flood relief. As a counter to the Katchatheevu issue the BJP is raking up, the DMK is raising the Arunachal Pradesh issue. In retort to Modi's speech in Salem on women's power, the DMK could not help but talk about the Manipur riots issue. So it is manifest that it is the BJP's campaign style which has triggered the DMK to take up national issues in place of state issues.

In spite of their campaign styles, both DMK and AIADMK do not speak about their election manifestos in their campaign. Likewise, the BJP too does not speak much about Modi's guarantees either.

So, it is totally a new electoral battlefield in Tamil Nadu now. Who will ultimately come out triumphant in this battle royal? For now, the answer is very much in the womb of time; that will be out on June 4.

Translated by V. Mariappan.