

The configurations and calculations of TN electoral alliances



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

The electoral scene in Tamil Nadu has revolved around the two major Dravidian parties – DMK and AIADMK - for the past 50 years. In most elections, it has been DMK vs AIADMK. Sometimes, a third alliance would emerge apart from these two major contestants. In the current 2024 Parliamentary election, three alliances, each led by the DMK, AIADMK, and BJP, are confirmed to be in the fray. What are the advantages and disadvantages facing these major contestants?

DMK alliance

Way back in 2018, the DMK-led front consisting of the Congress, VCK, CPM, CPI and MDMK was formed. This alliance continued in

the 2019 general elections and 2021 Assembly elections and is very much intact for the forthcoming 2014 parliamentary elections too. It is a phenomenon unprecedented in the past 30 years in Tamil Nadu politics. It is a positive feature for the DMK alliance that the seat-sharing exercise has successfully been completed now, as done for the 2019 parliamentary elections, sorting out hassles and hindrances. Particularly, all constituents of the DMK front are functioning, bound by an anti-BJP agenda. As the INDIA front functions guns blazing against the NDA at the national level, the DMK alliance in Tamil Nadu is hell-bent on opposing the BJP. As the BJP and AIADMK were in the alliance in the 2019 general elections and 2021 Assembly elections, the DMK front was able to target both parties vigorously and garner votes. But this time the AIADMK goes it alone in the parliamentary elections and so DMK finds itself in a situation wherein it has to take on both parties separately.

The DMK alliance pins hopes on the votes likely to be brought in by the DMK government's schemes for the welfare of the people including women executed in the past three years of its rule. However, it is a given that a ruling party will also face the anti incumbency factor in the elections. If anti-votes for the BJP likely from its 10 years of rule at the Centre will be advantageous for the DMK taking on the BJP in Tamil Nadu, the DMK's three years of rule may also bring in anti-votes for the party in the state, proving disadvantageous for it. Yet just as there is no strong alternative to the BJP at the national level, so there is no strong opposition to the DMK at the state-level. This is a major advantage for the ruling Dravidian party. The straws in the wind suggest a face-off between the DMK and the BJP, going by the tirades mounted by the DMK in social media and electoral domain more against the BJP rather than the AIADMK.

State of AIADMK

The question being raised around now is if the AIADMK is the same party which went it alone in the 2014 parliamentary elections, led by former Chief Minister Jayalalithaa. Once the AIADMK was very much wooed by several parties for striking alliances. But times have changed and now it is the AIADMK, which is waiting for other parties to come and hammer out alliances. This is the scenario in the 2024 parliamentary elections. While walking out of the Nation Democratic Alliance, the AIADMK led by Edappadi K. Palaniswami declared that it would form a mega alliance sans the BJP. But now EPS has fumbled, unable to cobble together a major front he had dreamt of. The party has been pushed into a situation wherein it has to be content forming tie-ups with smaller parties such as DMDK, Puthiya Tamilagam, SDPI etc. The party may have to employ techniques for averting diversion of the anti-DMK votes to the BJP. Besides, it has to also take on O. Panneerselvam, former Chief Minister, and TTV Dhinakaran, AMMK general secretary, who have joined hands with the BJP in a bid to stall the electoral success of the EPS-led AIADMK.

Back in the day when the AIADMK was the principal opposition party, it went about launching agitation after agitation against the then DMK government during 2006-2011. Not a day passed without the AIADMK supremo Jayalalithaa issuing statements, which helped immensely in mobilisation of voters against the ruling DMK and in bringing several parties in to tie up with the AIADMK.

But much water has since flowed under the political bridge. Today EPS has to spend as much time and energy as he can, managing the internal opposition and dissidence in his party. Nonetheless, anti-BJP voters, who are also dissatisfied with the present DMK government, have appreciated the audacity and courage EPS had shown walking out of the BJP alliance by

way of countering the DMK's insinuation, 'AIADMK is a slave party.'

Moreover, the fact that the BJP's election symbol 'Lotus' is not so popular as the AIADMK's symbol 'Two Leaves' is a hopeful weapon for EPS. That probably explains why he, emulating his late female leader's style, has fielded courageously several new faces in the electoral fray. But at the same time, the AIADMK's hesitation to oppose the BJP tooth and nail is also perceptible. An example for this is the AIADMK's silence on the BJP's hand in the electoral bonds issue while it heavily slams the DMK over the issue. This fact lends credence to the DMK front's accusation of a secret BJP-AIADMK truck – an accusation that the AIADMK has to counter at any cost in order to woo the voters who are dead against both BJP and DMK.

BJP alliance

The BJP high command is always of the opinion that the BJP-AIADMK tie-up is a natural alliance. That is why the saffron party leaders were reiterating that its doors were always open to the AIADMK though the latter has officially parted ways with the BJP. Yet the BJP, despite the AIADMK's parting of ways, has grown to the point of leading an alliance in Tamil Nadu. One of the major factors for this is the leadership of Annamalai who has, of late, been hogging the limelight in social media.

Though the BJP-AIADMK alliance started very much in 2019, the saffron party has never hesitated to project itself as the principal opposition party in Tamil Nadu. After the 2021 Assembly elections, the AIADMK became the main opposition party and yet it has been the BJP, which is the de facto opposition party, leaving no stone unturned in developing itself in the state, luring VIPs from other parties and also roping in celebrities.

As it happened in 2014, the BJP has this time around ably cobbled together an alliance; particularly, the PMK and TMC, refusing to tie up with the AIADMK, have made a beeline for the BJP. Various reasons have been cited for this development. All said and done, it is manifest that the BJP has successfully sidelined the AIADMK and formed its own alliance where it can dictate its own terms. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaign is the main component of the BJP's armour. Like never before, Modi has been on campaign trails in Tamil Nadu, targeting the DMK. As the BJP is ideologically diametrically opposed to the DMK, it is easier for the saffron party to take on the DMK without inhibitions.

But what the BJP is blissfully unaware of is the truth that its campaign against the DMK alone, sparing the AIADMK will give rise to several speculations. The BJP has been opposing Dravidian politics in the presence of OPS and TTV Dhinakaran, slamming the dynastic politics in the presence of G.K. Vasan and Dr. Anbumani Ramadoss and heavily cracking down on corruption in the presence of OPS and TTV Dhinakaran.... All these activities of the BJP are likely to cause the party lots of complications.

Thus the battle lines have been drawn for the 2024 parliamentary elections in Tamil Nadu. Of these three major alliances, which will romp home to victory, walking away with a sizable number of constituencies will depend on the mood of the voters in the weeks preceding the elections.

Translated by V. Mariappan.