

Why the Lok Sabha elections assume significance for TN political parties



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Curtains have been rung down on campaigning for the 18th Lok Sabha elections in Tamil Nadu. Generally, elections are a litmus test for all political parties. But there are certain elections that turn out to be much more important for them. In this respect, the 2024 Lok Sabha elections are assessed as likely to determine the direction of major parties/alliances.

Ruling party's performance appraisal

The DMK-led coalition formed in Tamil Nadu in 2018 continued beyond the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and 2021 Assembly elections and is still intact in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. However, the parties, which were constituents of the DMK front in the past, have not been in the same front for the three consecutive elections. In that sense, the continuation of this alliance is a positive aspect for the DMK. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the DMK coalition recorded a landslide win, bagging 38 out of 39 constituencies in Tamil Nadu and the sole Puducherry seat as well. In the 2021 Assembly elections, the DMK alliance won 159 constituencies and after a gap of 10 years, the Dravidian major captured power in Tamil Nadu.

Now the 2024 general elections are a litmus test for the DMK front which is presently confronted with the question if it can sustain the success it achieved in 2019. The constituents of the DMK alliance, which faced the 2019 and 2021 elections as opposition parties in the state, are today facing the Lok Sabha elections as the ruling coalition. It is not that easy to face an election as a ruling party.

In fact, the election will be something like a performance from the people for the ruling party in the state. No matter if it is a Lok Sabha election, voters are always inclined to appraise the state government's performance too.

Of the 505 promises made in the election manifesto, the DMK claims to have fulfilled 462 promises after coming to power. Chief Minister M. K. Stalin keeps declaring on his campaign trail that he has fulfilled many aspects also, which were not originally promised in the party's election manifesto, including the breakfast scheme.

If the electorate accepts what the ruling party touts as its achievements, it may resonate positively in the elections. And whether there are anti-incumbency votes caused by voters' discontent will be known in this election.

Recognition of leadership

As for the AIADMK, the party is confronted with the negative campaign saying that the party has been struggling to achieve electoral victories after the demise of former Chief Minister and party supremo Jayalalithaa.

There is also criticism that the AIADMK's internal politics has weakened the party for the past seven years, owing to the dissident tracks laid by Sasikala and TTV Dhinakaran, expulsion of former Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam and elimination of dual leadership.

There is no denying that the 2024 Lok Sabha election is of great importance to the party as it is the first general election that Edappadi K. Palaniswami is facing after emerging as a single top leader in the party.

Despite a crushing defeat in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the AIADMK won 66 seats in the 2021 Assembly elections with a decent vote percentage. However, as the 2024 general election is the first one held after Panneerselvam's ouster, the AIADMK has to prove that OPS expulsion factor has not eaten into the party's influence and stock.

Tamil Nadu has been witnessing the bi-polar politics for the past 50 years. The voters of the state have had only either of the two choices – DMK or AIADMK. But the BJP wants to become an alternative to the two Dravidian majors. Tamil Nadu BJP leader Annamalai has been saying that there will be no AIADMK after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

The AIADMK can prove its foes wrong only by achieving a significant victory in this election. Besides, EPS' leadership will also be recognized depending on the results of this election.

Vote percentage target

The BJP is trying its best to gain a strong foothold in Tamil Nadu after the demise of charismatic leaders M. Karunanidhi and J. Jayalalitha. In the past, it peppered its campaigns with the slogan that it tries to create a “Tamil Nadu without ‘kazhagams’”. But ironically the saffron party faced the 2019 and 2021 elections with the support of the AIADMK. Now the trend has changed with the BJP having formed a front against the DMK and AIADMK. While it is being claimed that the BJP has grown rapidly in Tamil Nadu after the arrival of L. Murugan and Annamalai, the results of the current Lok Sabha elections will prove how true is the claim.

The BJP high command is also confident that the party will record a significant victory and vote share this time in Tamil Nadu without the support of the AIADMK. This is why Prime Minister Narendra Modi has visited Tamil Nadu to campaign more frequently than during the past elections.

Besides, the BJP conducted ‘roadshows’ in Tamil Nadu which is entirely new to the state. As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, in the past elections the non-DMK and non-AIADMK parties or alliances have got vote percentage ranging between 10 and 18. But the Naam Tamilar Katchi has also joined the list of parties sharing and splitting those votes.

Modi says the people have been dissatisfied over the DMK rule in Tamil Nadu for three years. But how the people of Tamil Nadu view his 10-year reign will be a question that will also naturally arise in this election.

How many constituencies the BJP will win in Tamil Nadu and what percentage of votes it will get will determine its performance in the 2026 assembly elections. If it records a higher percentage of votes, it will mean that the party has grown in the state. Therefore,

the BJP's activities are also oriented towards increasing the vote percentage in this election in Tamil Nadu.

Foundation for the next phase

The Naam Tamilar Katchi recorded growth to some extent in the 2016 Assembly election, 2019 Lok Sabha elections and 2021 Assembly election. Now the 2024 general elections will show whether the party's support base has expanded or not.

In 2019 and 2021, the NTK took on two strong fronts, but now it is pitted against three coalitions. Though anti-DMK and anti-AIADMK votes coupled with young votes are the NTK's forte, the BJP's presence in the fray to split those votes has made the electoral scene more competitive.

Consecutive electoral defeats will leave any party and its volunteers highly demoralized. Then the party may rethink its electoral strategy and embrace the alliance culture. But bucking this trend, Seeman refuses to budge an inch from his policy of going it alone even in the face of heavy electoral odds.

The splitting of votes by the NTK was one of the reasons there was a tough competition between the DMK and AIADMK alliances in many constituencies in the 2021 Assembly elections. The results of this election will also determine the next phase of NTK's journey. But we have to wait till June 4 to know what the election results will result in.

Translated by V Mariappan.