CHAPTER – VI

IRON LADY OF TAMIL NADU
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J.Jayalalithaa, the legendary figure in the entire state of Tamil Nadu, is affectionately referred to by the younger generation as ‘Puratchi Thalaivi’, and by the older generation of MGR and his followers mostly in the rural areas as ‘Amma’.¹ By conventional wisdom, Jayalalithaa had more disadvantages in acquiring a powerful position in the political world simply because she was a woman.² Jayalalithaa has to “struggle to reconcile conflicting demands” to avoid violating gender norms and stereotypes. In short, Jayalalithaa has to “look like a lady and act like a man”.³ In recognition of her talents, Tamil Nadu Government conferred on her the title of “Kalaimamani” in the year 1972.

Justice Party opposed Brahmin dominance in public life. The DMK and the AIADMK supported the same goals and principles, as the DK. But MGR never strained himself to fight against Brahminism to affirm his affinity with the Dravidian Movement. In an interview in 1984, she said “The identity of non-Brahmin has already disappeared. Now the Dravidian movement encompasses all the people living in the Dravidian region. I must quote onre kulam oruvane devan (one caste with one god) and if that is the point, where is the question of considering me as a Brahmin. I do not think myself as a Brahmin. I am a Tamilan and people adore me as Tamilan only”.⁴ It is surprising that Jayalalithaa, a Brahmin lady,⁵ became the leader of AIADMK, one of the Dravidian parties.

⁵ Narendra Subramanian, *loc.cit.*, pp.51-95.
Born on 24 February 1948, Jayalalithaa has a distinguished lineage. Her grandfather, Rangachari, was the family physician of the late Maharaja of Mysore, Krishna Rajendra Wodeyar. She lost her father R. Jayaram, when she was a child. Her mother Sandya, not being deterred by the calamity that befell on her, took up a job to maintain family with two children and subsequently joined the film industry as an actress. \(^6\)

Jayalalithaa was an agriculturist\(^7\) and remained unmarried.\(^8\) She eventually became the close friend of Madanapally Gopala Ramachandran (MGR), a prominent fellow film star who later founded a political party and subsequently became the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. He found her to be a convenient prop but maltreated and exploited her for years. She was spied upon and even beaten up by him.\(^9\)

**Childhood**

Jayalalithaa studied at Bishop Cotton Girls High School in Bangalore and later at the Presentation Convent in Madras. She stood first in the matriculation examination and the Government offered her a scholarship to pursue higher studies. Due to her family situation, she was unable to continue her education and she entered the Tamil film industry at the age of 16. Even during her school days, her essays had been published in the children's section of the *Illustrated Weekly of India* and she received a letter of appreciation for the same. Having read the books of English novelist Pearl S. Buck, she yearned to become a famous novelist.\(^10\)

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\(^8\) Jain, C. K., *op.cit.*, p.605.

\(^9\) Madhu Kishwar, *op.cit.*

She is an eloquent speaker in English, Tamil, Telegu and Kannada, and Hindi. She was properly trained in Bharata Natyam, a cultural dance of South India and has given hundreds of performances. She is also well trained in Kathak, Kathakali, Kuchipudi and Manipuri dances as well as in vocal. She has sung several songs in her own voice in her films.  

**Film Star**

From the very beginning of her political career, Jayalalithaa began to recognise her special relationship with MGR. She became famous only when she acted with MGR in the *Aayirathil Oruven* (one among the thousand) in 1965. Through a series of twenty-three films, she invariably acted with MGR. In Tamil Nadu, cinema has long been a ‘cultural springboard of politics’. In 1970, MGR wanted to introduce his protégée to the masses but his suggestion was strongly opposed by his peers in the party. Jayalalithaa’s cinematic images with MGR allowed her to rapidly supersede senior members of the party. Once at the behest of MGR, Jayalalithaa proceeded to the venue of the party meeting and was acclaimed highly. Among all other heroines who acted with him, MGR was fully convinced by the intellectual caliber of Jayalalithaa who possesses enviable command in English language, which is essential for understanding the complex administrative system. Jayalalithaa is blessed with the support and confidence of MGR whom she calls her “Mentor, Friend, Philosopher and Guide and her Anchor”. She said “I liked every moment of cinema experience, for it was a great help to me since it took me to the masses”. In that field also, she was always treated with respect. She always maintained a distance from them all and

15 Interview with J. Jayalalithaa by Anith Prathap, Sunday, July 1982.
treated it as a profession, not as life. In Tamil Nadu, popular film stars have entered politics, exploiting mass popularity and cultural appeal and have been successful as political leaders.

Entry into AIADMK

Jayalalithaa was at first entrusted with the task of developing the women’s wing of the AIADMK. In January 1981, the World Tamil Conference was held in Madurai in which a dance performance of Jayalalithaa was conducted. That was highly appreciated by the enlightened audience. Jayalalithaa enrolled herself as a primary member of the AIADMK party on 4 June 1982. Her first entry into politics took place on the occasion of the party conference at Cuddalore. In that conference, MGR asked her to speak on the subject, ‘Praiseworthy Qualities of Women’. Jayalalithaa gained importance in the AIADMK by her tireless work and inborn capacity. She gained her political credentials by dint of her hard and dedicated work and was appointed as the Propaganda Secretary of the AIADMK on 28 January 1983. Her rise in the party and her close rapport with party men earned her the title, Puratchi Thalaivi. She has explained the responsibilities of Propaganda Secretary as follows. “On the administrative side, I have very big responsibilities; I have strengthened the party to a great extent in the sense that until now there has been no proper organizational administration of the party. Propaganda is an encompassing word and everything is contained within that word because for any party or any political party propaganda is the body, life and

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17 Sunday, August 1982, p.3.
20 Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly Who’s Who, Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly Secretariat, Chennai, April, 1996, pp. 516-517.
the soul and without propaganda there is no politics at all”. She had daily gone to the AIADMK office for party work. The party appointed an assistant for her work. She was a popular speaker of the AIADMK and her stirring speeches at public meetings in many places of Tamil Nadu attracted her mentor and guide MGR and the Tamils. Jayalalithaa had to build her political career not upon her fame as an actress but against it. M.S.S. Pandian, a historian, has shown how she systematically undertook to destroy her former image as a free, amorous woman: she pretended that her mother had forced her to be an actress; and at the same time she positioned herself as the true political heiress of MGR who was her lover not only on the screen but also in real life. Keen alertness and courage made her to blossom into a shrewd politician, as she herself told in an interview to *Sunday* magazine, “I am not a person to be taken lightly”.

She was sent on her first election campaign by MGR on 20 February 1983 when he asked her to canvass in the Tiruchendur Assembly constituency by election. At that time, R.M. Veerappan was Minister of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments in the MGR cabinet, and had been charged with having killed an official, Subramania Pillai of the Tiruchendur temple and looted the temple hundi. The situation was tense. Bypassing other leaders, Jayalalithaa was entrusted with the propaganda work in the area. She endeared herself so much with the local people that they affectionately began calling her *Amma*. Having undertaken this onerous task, she went from village to village in this constituency and gathered support for the candidate of the AIADMK. Muslim women, who were confined to their homes, came out to greet her. She succeeded in the election campaign and brought an astounding victory for the party candidate against all odds. MGR appointed Jayalalithaa as Member of the High Level

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26 Madhu Kishwar, *loc.cit.*
Committee of the “Free Noon Meal Scheme”. She gave one lake rupees for the free noon meal scheme.

The party members of AIADMK had a sense of fulfillment because they could meet Jayalalithaa, the Propaganda Secretary personally and convey their problems, needs and demands. Jayalalithaa served as a bridge between MGR and the party cadres both in party work and tasks related to governance of the State. However, She had to resign her post after strong opposition from the male party leaders. MGR accepted her decision. But even after leaving the post, no one was appointed in her place. Women are not welcomed in politics and no wonder politics was not a bed of roses for Jayalalithaa.

Rajya Sabha Member

She rose to eminence day by day, and on 23 April 1984, she was elected to the Rajya Sabha. Then she was appointed as Deputy Leader of AIADMK Parliamentary party in the Rajya Sabha. She was assigned seat number 185 that was once occupied by C.N. Annadurai, a great Tamil leader and founder of DMK. This was an unforgettable boon conferred on her. In a debate in the Rajya Sabha on the proposed Power Projects Bill, Jayalalithaa delivered her maiden speech on 23 May 1984 thus:

"My leader, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, MGR, the founder leader of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam to which I have the honour to belong, has sent me here, together with my colleagues in the party, to echo the voice of the people of Tamil Nadu in this national forum. In particular, I have come here as the representative of the weaker sections of our society, the toiling masses, the crores of humble workers, farmers, poor agricultural labourers and women, to give oral manifestation to their feelings, aspirations and legitimate

27 The Week, 12 September, 1982.
30 Ibid., p.605.
desires and make them known to the rest of the country." She spoke on the various issues pertaining to Tamil Nadu, such as power projects, problems of weavers, the Sri Lankan issue and the activities of Jammu & Kashmir terrorist outfits in the Rajya Sabha.

She established herself as a well informed, articulate and able parliamentarian. In another speech in the Rajya Sabha on 9 August 1984, on the demands for grant for power and later on the Appropriation Bill, 1984, she touched the issues of the closure of textile mills and the immediate necessity of reopening the textile mills in Tamil Nadu, the Cauvery Water dispute between the States of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, the Telugu Ganga Project dispute between the States of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, providing drinking water to Madras City, the second rail coach factory for Tamil Nadu, Tuticorin Thermal Power Project and reversion of education to the state list from the concurrent list.

Jayalalithaa’s enemies sent telex messages asking her to quit her post as the Deputy Leader of the AIADMK Parliamentary Party in the Rajya Sabha after she was elected to the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. This was nothing but a calculated ploy to deprive her of her post during MGR’s absence.

**Propaganda Secretary**

On 6 September 1985, Jayalalithaa was once again appointed Propaganda Secretary of the AIADMK. In the local body elections at a time when MGR was not in good health, the AIADMK had not fared too well. In order to revitalize the party cadres and give more momentum to party activities, he ordered a Conference to be held at Madurai under the auspices of the MGR Mantram (Fan Club). MGR sought fulfillment of his aspirations by giving Jayalalithaa the responsibility for organising the massive rally of the Mantram. The entry of Jayalalithaa into the party was described as the second upsurge in AIADMK after

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31 Jayalalithaa retained the Member of Raja sabha until she was elected to the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly in 1989.
the first one when MGR left DMK and started his own party. It was this achievement that earned her the title, ‘Puratchi Thalavi’ according to one senior party leader. Some of the leaders of the party asked ‘what is her link with the party except her relationship with MGR. Sathyavanai Muthu can say that she had gone to jail with her child in arms during the Anti-Hindi agitation. What has Jayalalithaa got to show as proof of her interest and involvement in the party? Her old MGR Films?

**Deterioration of Health of MGR**

On 5 October 1984, MGR’s health deteriorated further. He was admitted to a private hospital in Chennai. On 13 October 1984 he suffered a paralytic stroke. This news plunged the whole Tamil Nadu into deep distress. On 5 November 1984 he was taken to USA for treatment. Prayers for his recovery were organised in many places in Tamil Nadu. Jayalalithaa took part in the prayers held at the renowned Madhuranthakam temple where the deity is Lord Rama as the redeemer of the lake. While the prayers were going on, Jayalalithaa's eyes were tear-filled.

Even while MGR was recovering in an American hospital, elections fell due in Tamil Nadu. MGR was the candidate for the Andipatti assembly seat. Owing to his illness, he could not meet the people to seek their confidence. The AIADMK's ministers and leaders were all concentrating on their respective constituencies. In MGR’s absence, Jayalalithaa took his place and worked for the massive victory for AIADMK and Congress(I) alliance. The election campaign in Andipatti constituency was launched by Jayalalithaa. Thereafter, she canvassed for votes in all the constituencies, including those of allies, without making any distinction between those who were for or against her in the AIADMK. Meanwhile, a lot of internal squabbles broke out in the party, which no longer

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moved on charisma. MGR had built the party on the support of bottom-line people but he failed to create any other machinery to replace the illusionary charisma. So he felt that another film person with impressive personality and acute intelligence could establish a hold on the party. Jayalalithaa, who had developed good rapport with MGR, was accepted by a mass as the right person to assist him in executing the plan of MGR as she did in the films.

During the election campaign, other party leaders started spreading rumours about MGR's state of health. They claimed: "MGR is kept in an ice box!" and 'MGR will not come back again to rule'. They thought that if they removed the possibility of MGR returning to power from the minds of the people, then they would vote for them to come to power. Only Jayalalithaa met these calumnies headlong, giving fitting rebuttals. Wherever Jayalalithaa went, she was greeted by the people with great fervor. She kept on maintaining, 'MGR will return, his health is recovering. He will return to give good government'. At every place she urged the people: "Make Puratchi Thalaivar your Chief Minister again... Vote for the AIADMK's candidates and its allies."

As a result, MGR was voted back to power again by a thumping majority. Jayalalithaa had a sense of fulfillment in having stood by the movement and for having made her contribution for ensuring the victory of the AIADMK. However, some jealous elements in the party could not relish her success and tried to sow the seeds of dissension within the party. The election results proved that the people recognized Jayalalithaa, a close associate of MGR as the political successor to MGR. When it became known that MGR was returning to India, these elements thought that his physical and mental condition would be unstable, and mischievous plans were set afoot to exhibit him as a veritable show-piece in a caged vehicle.

On 12 February 1985, MGR returned to Tamil Nadu. Her enemies had a plan to murder Jayalalithaa on her way to the airport to receive MGR. Coming to know of this plan, Jayalalithaa left for the airport by a different route. Keen on preventing her from meeting MGR in the airport premises itself, she was confined to a room. Those who had planned out this big charade received a shock when MGR got down the flight of steps from the plane majestically, unaided. The huge mass of people who had gathered was over-joyed, almost hysterical in their happiness. Later, when he came to know of the insults that had been meted to Jayalalithaa in his absence, MGR was visibly moved. He was gratified that his absence was amply filled by the effective election campaign conducted by Jayalalithaa.

In 1986, MGR’s health again deteriorated. In this distressed state, ten ministers of MGR’s cabinet, including R.M. Veerappan, annoyed by the growing popularity of Jayalalithaa and the increasing responsibilities given to her in the party, started openly spreading canards about her. An outraged MGR had all of them removed from his cabinet. At a time when the state and the party needed him most, the beacon that was MGR, was extinguished. He breathed his last on the night of 24 December 1987. Darkness prevailed in Tamil Nadu. The people were sunk in gloom. The masses, which loved him so much and depended on him for everything, were at a loss as to what to do. The whole of Tamil Nadu was literally inundated by their tears. The news of MGR’s death came as a rude shock to Jayalalithaa. Not only did she have to bear the loss with fortitude and courage but she also realised that the responsibility of leading the party and the people through this hour of crisis now lay with her.

Her enemies in the party, however, had other ideas. They prevented her from even having a look at the face of the MGR, when she went to pay last respects at Ramawaram Garden bungalow which was MGR’s residence. Later, while the body of MGR lay in state at Rajaji Hall for two full days, Jayalalithaa stood at his head. Abuses were hurled at her by vengeful elements, and attempts were even made to vacate her from the place where she was standing.
Later, when MGR’s body was placed on the gun carriage for its funeral journey, Jayalalithaa went up the gun-carriage to request the Army personnel to have his head raised higher so that the vast multitudes who had gathered to have a glimpse of their departed leader, could have a better view of his face. However, the vengeful elements, which were supervising the proceedings, physically pulled her down in full view of the shocked crowd and the whirring TV cameras.

Jayalalithaa showed three images in her propaganda activities. At first she was the devoted follower of MGR. Secondly she was victorious and self-sufficient and third, her status is that of an icon. However MGR’s support for her, which had been quite erratic, ceased altogether in 1984 when he fell seriously ill, and Jayalalithaa’s numerous male enemies within the party prevented her from resuming contact with the ailing leader. At MGR’s highly publicized state funeral in 1988, she managed to stand near the body of the departed leader. The local newspapers published the news and photos of the funeral proceedings.

...to the more than 15 lakh people who are estimated to have filed past MGR’s body and the whole Tamil Nadu had seen the unfolding drama on television and saw pictures of it in the newspapers and magazines the message of the tableau was clear: Veerappan, Minister of the MGR regime and Jayalalithaa’s main enemy in the party sat grim-faced and scowling on the steps at the foot of the body... but Jayalalithaa stood smart at the head of the body, impervious and stoic in her sorrow, and yet also strangely radiant. It was as if the spirit of MGR risen from his dead body was embodied again, phoenix-like in the person of Jayalalithaa.

Insulted, humiliated and unable to participate in the concluding ceremonies, an inconsolable Jayalalithaa returned home, even as the people, both party men and leaders, rushed to her house for consultations.

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Divided AIADMK

After the death of enormously popular leader of Tamil Nadu and famous film star, MGR, the male leaders of the party tried to sideline Jayalalithaa because they resented the clout she had acquired on account of her intimacy with MGR. They even tried to use MGR’s wife Janaki to obstruct Jayalalithaa from taking over the AIADMK after MGR’s death. Hence, the AIADMK party split into two factions, one headed by Janaki Ramachandran, MGR’s wife and the other led by Jayalalithaa. As an actor, Janaki was put up as a candidate against Jayalalithaa. Her party backers expected MGR’s wife to have an advantage over his mistress in inheriting his political empire. Instead, Janaki suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Jayalalithaa, who since then has established herself as the reigning queen of the AIADMK. She commands even more fear and exacts even more groveling obedience from her party members than did Indira Gandhi from her party. There are many temples in the state where she is ensconced as the presiding deity. She is deified by her followers as Mother Mary, Shakti and even Bharat Mata.

Contrarily the dissenters of AIADMK prevailed upon Governor Khurana to overlook the developments in the party and invite Janaki to form the Ministry. MGR’s wife Janaki became the Chief Minister for 28 days with the support of anti-Jayalalithaa faction. They took over the party office by force and violently evicted Jayalalithaa and the legitimate office bearers of the Party from the Party Headquarters.

On 13 January 1988, Jayalalithaa led an agitation in front of the AIADMK headquarters, staking a legitimate claim for it and demanding its opening. For three hours she conducted a dharna on the tarred road under the blazing sun. The general public and party cadres joined in large numbers. The police were

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40 Madhu Kishwar, op.cit.
41 Carole Spary, loc.cit. p.6.
nonplussed about the action to be taken. In the end, Jayalalithaa was arrested and whisked away in a police van.

The AIADMK Office soon started functioning from temporary premises at Alwarpet. Jayalalithaa went all out to ensure that the various wings of the huge party, which was paralyzed and shell shocked over the demise of its leader and the confusion that followed, started functioning once again. The Janaki Ministry collapsed over a very short period of twenty eight days. The Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly was dissolved. As elections were soon to come, some male leaders calling themselves the as "Nalwar Anee" (Group of Four), parted ways.

The electoral defeat underlined the dictum that in unity alone lay strength. Realising this, the rival factions of the AIADMK decided to sink their differences and came together under the leadership of Jayalalithaa. In February 1989, following the merger of both the groups, the Two Leaves Symbol was restored to the Party. This was probably for the first time in Indian political history that a party that had split was unifying once again. On 11 March 1989, in Madurai West and Marungapuri assembly bye-elections, the unified AIADMK won the seats.

DMK Party President, could not bear the increasing popularity of Jayalalithaa. He also realised that the unified AIADMK under her would pose a threat to his government. The only way out, he felt, was to eliminate her from politics. With this in mind, he started troubling her in the same way as he had belaboured MGR in the 1970s.

United AIADMK

The AIADMK had been reunited under the leadership of Jayalalithaa because the people of Tamil Nadu had given a clear victory to the Jayalalithaa’s

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*Two leaves was popular symbol of the AIADMK under the leadership of MGR. In the rural areas two leaves symbol was considered equal to MGR. The vote bank of the Two Leaves symbol was nearly 30% in Tamil Nadu. These people would never think of any other symbol even in their dream.*
faction in the election in 1989 and the faction secured 27 seats and Jayalalithaa became the first woman opposition leader\(^\text{42}\) in the history of the Legislative Assembly of Tamil Nadu. She was elected from Bodinayakkanur.\(^\text{43}\) The people of Tamil Nadu accepted her as a president of the AIADMK. Janki Ramachandran, though the wife of MGR, did not shine in the political sky. She was forced by male members like R.M.Veerapan, S.D. Somasundaram to take the mantle of leadership as the wife of MGR. But the Tamil people rejected her. The AIADMK and the DMK offshoots of the Dravidian Movement, have remained entrenched in power since 1967 as either the ruling party or the main opposition party in Tamil Nadu Politics.\(^\text{44}\)

**Opposition Leader**

On 25 March 1989, when Karunanidhi was presenting the annual budget in the Assembly, Jayalalithaa, as leader of the opposition, raised a privilege issue. When the speaker disallowed her speech on the privilege issue, an argument ensued with mounting noise and confusion. MLAs of the ruling DMK, disregarding the fact that Jayalalithaa was a woman, started attacking her. A male member pulled at her saree and attempted to outrage her modesty, in the presence of male leaders and others who passively watched the scene. "There is no guarantee for my life in Karunanidhi's regime", Jayalalithaa exclaimed. "I will come again to the Assembly only if this Government is dismissed and that too only as Chief Minister!" Making this vow, Jayalalithaa left the Assembly.\(^\text{45}\)

Jayalalithaa was admitted to hospital for the injuries sustained by her in the Assembly. Meanwhile, the outraged public held protest meetings and agitations


\(^{43}\) *Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly Who's Who*, Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly Secretariat, Chennai, April, 1991, pp. 516-517.

\(^{44}\) Ira Bhaskar, 'The Snake Pit', *Aside*, 15 November 1987, p.20; Ira Bhaskar, 'The More the Merrier', *Aside*, 30 April 1988, p.12. Records an increase in the number of political parties in Tamil Nadu from 55 to 59 created by factions within the existing groups forming "breakaway parties".

\(^{45}\) Thandavan, R., *J. Jayalalithaa*, University of Madras, Chennai, p.163.
throughout Tamil Nadu.\textsuperscript{46} Never before had the name of the Assembly been besmirched, as it was that day. This was not the first occasion when Karunanidhi and his men were indulging in such acts. Even in 1973, when MGR was speaking in the Assembly, chappals were hurled at him; the mike was snatched from his hands, and he was physically prevented from speaking in the House. Thereafter, MGR left the place, commenting, "The Legislative Assembly is dead"!

In September 1989, a caste riot erupted in Bodinaikanur leading to violence, arson and eventually police firing. Even Chief Minister Karunanidhi could not reach the troubled spots. When Jayalalithaa went to Bodinaykkanur to meet the people for the first time, the reception accorded to her by the people was overwhelming. It made her enemies shiver. Within a week after the riot, Jayalalithaa visited Bodinaikanur again to help the people in whatever way she could to mitigate their sufferings.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission of India announced that on 21 and 24 November 1989, Parliamentary elections would take place in all the States of India barring Assam. An electoral understanding was reached between the AIADMK and the Congress Party led by Rajiv Gandhi. Jayalalithaa commenced a vigorous election campaign on behalf of the alliance parties. "‘Thalaivi’ has united a divided Movement. She is ably carrying forward the legacy of MGR", praised Rajiv Gandhi.

The AIADMK alliance, which contested 40 constituencies in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, won 39. The AIADMK won all the 11 seats it contested. The INC, which contested 29 constituencies, lost only in Nagapattinam. Even this could be attributed to the fact that owing to stormy weather, the road traffic to Nagapattinam was disrupted completely and Jayalalitha could not reach the constituency to conduct her election campaign.

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{The Hindu}, 26 March, 1989.
Demands to Central Government

Although in the 1989 general election, the AIADMK-Congress alliance won a spectacular victory in Tamil Nadu, V.P. Singh became the Prime Minister as Congress could not muster the required strength to form government. Emboldened by this, in Tamil Nadu the DMK continued ruling in a maverick fashion. The LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam in Sri Lanka) was moved to strengthen its position in the State. They were allowed to perpetrate atrocities on Indian soil without any attempt being made to control them. On one such occasion, LTTE elements gunned down fifteen persons in the heart of Chennai City, including EPRLF leader Padmanabha and the mercenaries escaped to Jaffna with impunity.

Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa

The V.P. Singh Government at the Centre fell, and with the support of the AIADMK and the Congress, Chandrasekhar became the Prime Minister. Prime Minister Chandrasekhar revealed that whenever Government of Tamil Nadu had been furnished with any confidential information on matters pertaining to Sri Lanka, it inevitably reached the LTTE in Jaffna within hours. In view of leaking classified defense information to LTTE and the overt encouragement given to the LTTE in Tamil Nadu, the DMK Government was dismissed on 31 January 1991.47

Covering 7346 Kms, addressing 1633 public meetings, Jayalalithaa conducted a fiery election campaign. Wherever she went, women placed only one demand again and again -- that the cheap sachet-liquor introduced by Karunanidhi government be stopped forthwith. Jayalalithaa readily gave an assurance to the women that she would close down the shops selling cheap liquor. She further assured the people that priority would be given to ensuring a higher quality of life for women.

On the night of 21 May 1991 while Jayalalithaa was touring the villages and meeting the people in Bargur constituency, she received the shocking news that former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had fallen victim to a human bomb during his campaign trail in Sriperumbudur. The cruel assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, carried out by the Sri Lanka based-LTTE at Sripeumpudhur in Tamil Nadu, showed how successfully the LTTE had spread its tentacles far and wide in Tamil Nadu. This was the greatest challenge to the law and order situation in the state. She succeeded in fulfilling her vow.48

And, as far as the people were concerned, it was virtually the last straw. Following Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, the elections scheduled for 24 May were postponed to 15 June 1991. In the general election, the AIADMK-led front won a historic victory and J. Jayalalithaa became the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.49 When she assumed power, it was unequivocally stated in all party documents that it is an ethnic political party continuing the ideas cherished by EVR, Annadurai and MGR.50 The first file to be signed by Jayalalithaa after occupying the office of Chief Minister at Fort St George, was the file relating to the abolition of cheap liquor sales.51

As a woman Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, J. Jayalalithaa gave importance to women candidates in her ministry. She was an iron lady of Tamil Nadu and assigned more women candidates in her ministry. Other male leaders in her party were not objecting for the promotion of women as ministers because if any body objected immediately they will be removed from the party. Jayalalithaa introduced no major populist policies. Indeed, she made a sharp departure from MGR's approach to governance and his style of public self-presentation. These changes were noticed more as Jayalalithaa did not have a prior image as a

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49 Ganesan, P. C., _op.cit_, p.67.
champion of the poor comparable to MGR’s. Thus MGR’s deification by large sections of his constituencies during his life time and after his death has been well documented by the media. Jayalalithaa successfully portrays herself as his chosen successor.

**Critical Moment**

In the 1996 general election, because of the wave of vituperation launched against her, victory was snatched away from the AIADMK. The DMK and some instantly created parties won the election. His objective was to somehow remove Jayalalithaa from the political arena. "If Jayalalithaa is emotionally broken, she will run away to Hyderabad; otherwise she will fly away to America..." This was what Karunanidhi kept telling everyone and this was the wrong calculation he made under the influence of his new-found followers expelled from the AIADMK.

The newspapers, which were supportive of DMK's vengeful politics, were also zealously engaged in spreading malicious gossip about Jayalalithaa at his bidding. He foisted cases on Jayalalithaa. A special Court was established to try the cases against Jayalalithaa, which is unprecedented in the legal history of India that no one has so far established a separate judicial organization to try the cases of a previous Chief Minister. She was arrested on 7 December 1996 and she was imprisoned in Chennai Central Jail. And there she was subjected to physical and emotional torture.

She was lodged in a cell in Chennai Central Jail for 28 days, close to the stinking Coovum river with bandicoots, lizards and cockroaches freely running about. At the same time, in her absence, her house was virtually ransacked day and night for a fortnight by the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-corruption (DVAC) officials of Government of Tamil Nadu. All sorts of defamatory canards

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Ibid.
and politically motivated news were spread by DMK leaders and faithfully carried out by daily newspapers.

In the local body elections in 1996, the AIADMK performed creditably. In the bye-election to Pudukkottai, the public showed that they did not believe DMK's vengeful propaganda by ensuring the victory of the AIADMK. Jayalalithaa was barred from 1996 election because of a corruption conviction against her when she was chief minister of the state between 1991 and 1996.

After having agreed to include the above issues of concern in the National Agenda for Governance, Prime Minister Vajpayee backtracked on the assurances given to Jayalalithaa, specifically on the issue of Cauvery River Water. He constituted the Cauvery River Water Authority contrary to the interests of Tamil Nadu's farmers, especially the farmers of Thanjavur, Tiruchirappalli and Pudukkottai. The performance of the BJP-led government in several other key areas of governance including defense and national security also left much to be desired. Under the circumstances, Jayalalithaa was compelled to withdraw her support to the BJP-led Government at the Centre.

The BJP Government was pushed to seeking a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha, which it lost and precipitated the Parliamentary elections in 1999. In this general election, the Democratic Progressive Front, led by Jayalalithaa, had the Congress as one of its constituent parties. Jayalalithaa went on a whirlwind tour of the whole of Tamil Nadu campaigning for this secular alliance. Though the AIADMK-led front put up a creditable show in Tamil Nadu, on the national level, the BJP-led front stole a marginal edge to form a fragile coalition.

**Cut-out Culture**

In a photograph widely published in the media, Jayalalithaa stands in a prayerful pose, with folded hands, looking up respectively at a garlanded
photograph of MGR.\textsuperscript{53} Hence the propaganda images of Jayalalithaa derive their evocative appeal from their references to her filmic association with MGR.

The cut-out culture enormously developed in her regime.\textsuperscript{54} A large number of labourers began erecting wooden poles to support the approximately 75 cut-outs that were to be displayed along the Anna Salai, Chennai, and the main processional route of the rally. This culture is still continued in the Tamil Nadu. The message of the cut-outs was reiterated in her campaign speeches, where much to the chagrin of the press she did not address ‘real issues’. Her slogan was that she ‘would bring back MGR’s rule’.\textsuperscript{55}

**Goddess Culture**

Jayalalithaa represented herself as a goddess during the electoral campaign of 1991. Alleging that she had been assaulted within the state’s Assembly by members of the rival party, she referred to this incident presenting herself as Draupadi, the famous heroine of the Mahabharata.\textsuperscript{56} This great Indian epic narrates the battle between the five Pandava brothers along with their wife Draupathi and their cousins, the Kauravas. The eldest of the Kauravas then decides to humiliate Draupadi by divesting her of her sari. After the victory of her party, Jayalaithaa became Chief Minister and unleashed a personality cult, which manifested itself through her representation as a variety of goddesses including non-Hindu ones. During the Christmas of 1994, for instance, she was represented as the *Virgin Mary* on huge wooden cut-outs all over Madras. In 1998, to celebrate her party’s 25\textsuperscript{th} anniversary, she was portrayed as *Kali*, wearing a garland of skulls, placing under her foot Karunanidhi depicted as an asura.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{53} The Photograph published by *Cult of Personality, Sunday*, 9 May 1992, p.16.
\textsuperscript{54} ‘AIADMK Rally Does MGR Proud’, in *Indian Express*, 8 October 1990.
\textsuperscript{56} Stéphanie Tawa Lama, *loc.cit.*, p.10.
\textsuperscript{57} Pandian, M. S. S., ‘Jayalalitha: Desire and Political Legitimation’, *Seminar*, Vol.401, January 1993, pp.31-34.
The AIADMK MLAs and party men in public prostrated themselves in front of Jayalalithaa even though the latter had given public statements asking her party men and MLAs and Ministers not to prostrate in public. But this statement was ignored and the practice of prostration continued and newspapers published such pictures of prostration in front of Jayalalithaa.

Various Measures

Jayalalithaa has echoed the feelings of Indian women who are exploited and subjugated for centuries. For the first time she made it possible for twenty-five women to enter the legislative assembly from her party. This is the first time women representation was highly achieved by the regional party in India. She made it compulsory that women teachers be recruited in schools teaching up to the fifth standard. During 1990-1991, 42.6 per cent of women teachers were recruited for the elementary and the middle schools.

In order to set up the EVR Self-Respect Foundation for propagating the ideals of Thanthai Periyar, a donation of Rs.5 lakhs was made by Jayalalithaa to the President of the Dravidar Kazhagam, K. Veeramani. On behalf of the Tamil Nadu Government, an award was instituted to those propagating the ideas and ideals of the EVR, the father of the Dravida Movement. The first to receive the award was K. Veeramani himself. On the birth anniversary of Annadurai on 15 September 1991, Annadurai’s wife Rani Ammaiayar was given Rs. 5 lakhs as donation.

When the works of Annadurai were nationalised, as per the request of Annadurai’s family members, Rs.75 lakhs was given to Rani Ammaiayar. This was an occasion, which brought much joy to Jayalalithaa, because though Karunanidhi

58 Transcript of J. Jayalalitha’s interview by Karan Thapar on BBC World’s Hard Talk India. The Interview was telecast on BBC World on Friday 1st October 2004 at 2200 IST
59 Jain, C. K., op.cit., p.117.
60 Ibid., p.114.
announced at one time that Rs.2 crores would be given by his government, after assuming power, he had failed to discharge his commitment.

As soon as Jayalalithaa became Chief Minister, in the Legislative Assembly, she unveiled a photo of MGR. Designs for the Memorial for MGR were obtained from renowned architects, and at an expense of Rs.2.75 crores, the memorial square was redesigned.

Jayalalithaa formed the Chengleput MGR district in the name of MGR. She also founded a Transport Corporation in his name. She renamed the Nutritious Noon Meal Scheme as ‘Dr MGR Nutritious Meal Scheme’. She also instituted Endowments and Trusts in his name. Whenever AIADMK Conferences were held, the inaugural event consisted of the unveiling of MGR’s statue at the venue.

At the time of holding the Eighth World Tamil Conference, on behalf of the AIADMK, a statue of MGR was unveiled in Thanjavur.

The barely veiled allusions in the media appeared relating to the Jayalalithaa’s deep relationship with Sasikala Nararajan, who was former’s house mate and perpetual public companion. Sasikala’s family enjoyed considerable influence in the party and the government, and it received a big share of the rents of office. It is unclear that these allusions would affect significantly Jayalalithaa’s popularity. Yet in combination with the charges that had eroded the AIADMK’s paternalist populist appeal, these claims further undermined support for the AIADMK. So, the opinion polls showed the DMK ahead of the AIADMK by 1993. The DMK reversed the verdict of the 1991 elections by registering massive victories in the 1996 assembly and parliamentary elections.

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Awards

In 1992, the prestigious University of Madras, Chennai conferred on her the honorary Doctorate in recognition of her varied talents and accomplishments and this trend was followed by other universities like Bharathidasan University and Agricultural University which also conferred the honorary Doctorate.

The University of Madras, which made an appraisal of the historic achievements of Jayalalithaa, had this to say: "Aesthetic Sense, Political Clarity and Administrative Acumen - these three qualities are integrated in one person - that is Puratchi Thalaivi. She is the first woman Minister to get kudos for paying special attention to Women's Development. Jayalalithaa's proficiency in many languages, mental astuteness, tremendous will power and intelligence has combined to help her emerge as a leader in her own right. She is a symbol of national integration, clarity of thought, political astuteness, breadth of vision as a builder of bridges between the ancient and the modern arts, releasing the human consciousness from the fetters of slavish thoughts, her ceaseless work, will-power in channelising the people's force, clarity of thought vis-à-vis Tamil Language and coalition politics place her in supreme position". For all the above qualities of head and heart, Jayalalithaa was awarded the Doctorate, honoris causa by the University of Madras.

Charges

Corruption charges was more rampant during the rule of Jayalalithaa and its effects were openly displayed in luxurious public ritual than while MGR was the Chief Minister. The lavish wedding ceremony of the adopted son of Jayalalithaa was the instance most noted by the media and the public, and cost the AIADMK more dearly in the 1996 elections. Estimates of the wedding expenses vary from Rs. 40 million (according to the wedding's chief organizer) to Rs. 1 billion (commonly reported in the media). The state is said to have borne a big chunk of these expenses; Ibid., pp.51-95.
corruption of other AIADMK leaders, or were inclined to excuse both as they felt the rents were linked to the regime's paternalist policies, which addressed their interests. As no new paternalist policies were introduced during the Jayalalithaa's rule, public opposition to the corruption of that period was much greater.64

Violent responses of some AIADMK activists to a court judgment against their leader in February 200065 further reduced the AIADMK's vote bank in the assembly elections of 2001. At the same time, her penchant for corruption is legendary and her vindictiveness is frightening. The numerous court cases filed against her by the DMK government are merely the proverbial tip of the iceberg of corruption that characterised her tenure as Chief Minister. During her reign as Chief Minister, there were numerous physical, even murderous attacks, on those who dared to stand up to her. The victims included journalists, lawyers, and even bureaucrats like one of the women IAS officials, Chandralekha on whose face acid was thrown at Jayalalithaa's behest. Even when out of power, she has been involved in physical attacks on those she imagined have wronged her, including her own auditor, and she had beaten him up with her sandals, assisted by her female companion, Sasikala. The remarkable fact is that she gets away with all such outrageous acts rather than be demonized for such vicious behaviour. In fact, these vengeful acts have added to her aura of being shakti incarnate.66

Jayalalithaa is primarily relieved from all corruption cases and regained power in Tamil Nadu. Single woman in Indian society, that too a woman involved in public life, has to encounter innumerable difficulties such as personal threat, and character assassination. Jayalalithaa managed everything skillfully and became a leader recognized by everybody. This only proves the point that a woman can still explore the world of political power and emerge as a leader as good as any male leader.

64 Ibid.
65 The Hindu, 29 February 2000.
66 Madhu Kishwar, op.cit.