CHAPTER I
BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Overview

The title of the thesis is voting behaviour in Tamil Nadu with reference to Tirunelveli Parliamentary Constituency. Therefore, it is necessary to provide the background of the voting behaviour of the electorate in Tamil Nadu. In this chapter an attempt has been made to explain the voting behaviour of the electorate in Tamil Nadu.

Political Overview of Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu had taken active participation in the pre-independence politics of the nation. The budding desire for independence had generated numerous volunteers in the state who sacrificed their lives in the service of the nation. Several leaders of the state fought against the British and French colonial power, notable among them are Tiruppur Kumaran, Aurobindo Ghosh (Pondicherry) and poet Subramanya Bharathi and many other leaders. Finally India got her freedom in 1947 and Tamil Nadu got the separate status of a State in the Indian Union. The political scenario of Tamil Nadu was dominated by the Congress Party after 1947 which gave way to the Dravidian populist mobilization in the 1960s. Since 1967, the regional political parties took active participation in the State politics.¹

Until recently, Tamil Nadu’s electoral history reflected certain political features virtually unique to the State. One of the two major regional parties, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), has won every State assembly elections since 1967. Parties with significant support in more than two Indian States were conversely relegated to playing a minor role in State level competition earlier than in any other Indian States.

¹Political Overview in Tamil Nadu, Politics of Tamil Nadu, 2010.
The Congress Party’s electoral decline started especially early in Tamil Nadu in State level competition as Congress offshoots ceased to be significant contenders for power in the State assembly as early as 1977.\(^2\)

Besides, the major Hindu nationalist party the Bharatiya Jan Sangh/Bharatiya Janata Party has been weaker than in other major Indian States.\(^3\)

While the national parties declined in State level electoral competition and their organizational presence in society weakened, the Congress Party (henceforth Congress) remained a major force in parliamentary elections in Tamil Nadu until recently. The State’s electorate preferred an alliance including the Congress or the Congress offshoot most influential in India in all out one parliamentary election until 1996, well after the Dravidian parties became the major forces in State level competition.\(^4\)

In parliamentary elections, Tamil Nadu’s voters favoured alliances including the undivided Congress until 1967, Congress (R) in 1971 and 1977, and Congress (I) from 1980 to 1991. Even in 1996, they favoured an alliance including a Congress Party, the Tamil Maanila Congress (Moopanar) (TMC (M)), although support for this party unlike the Congress (I)) was restricted to Tamil Nadu and

\(^2\) The results of by-elections held between the birth of the ADMK in 1972 and the AIADMK’s ascent to power in 1977, as well as studies of mass politics in Tamil Nadu, suggest that the two major Dravidian parties relegated Congress offshoots to the margins of State level competition soon after the ADMK was formed. See Narendra Subramanian, Ethnicity and Populist Mobilization: Political Parties, Citizens and Democracy in South India, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp.245, 262-75.

\(^3\) The BJP has been comparably weak only in some of the small northeastern states.

\(^4\) The only exception was the elections of 1967, the first elections in which Congress dominance was challenged in many Indian States. The Congress was not allied with any major parties in those elections, and was opposed by a multi-party alliance led by the DMK. It was allied with either the DMK or the AIADMK in all but one subsequent parliamentary elections (the elections of 1998), and undoubtedly gained considerably from these alliances.
Pondicherry. The experience in Tamil Nadu differed in this regard from that at the national level, where Congress (I)’s electoral performance has declined since 1984. The divergence was particularly noticeable between Congress (I)’s strong performance in Tamil Nadu and its losses in India as a whole in 1977 and 1989, when many Indian voters registered their strong disapproval of aspects of Congress rule.

The outcomes the parliamentary elections of 1998 and 1999 seem at first glance to represent a shift from these trends of a generation. The BJP appeared to replace Congress (I) as the party that the largest number of Tamil Nadu’s voters preferred as the main power wielder at the national level. The alliance including the BJP won the majority of seats in the State in both elections, although the BJP was allied with the AIADMK in 1998 and with the DMK in 1999. The very aims that led the major Dravidian parties to see Congress (I) as an attractive ally until 1996 seemed to lead them towards an alliance with the BJP in 1998 and 1999. These tactical aims seemed to overcome the much noted ideological antipathy between the DMK and the BJP, leading to the first full-fledged electoral alliance between these two parties in 1999. This alliance gained the support of a plurality of the State’s voters despite the incongruity in the norms promoted by the alliance’s two major partners, especially earlier in their histories. So much had the Dravidian parties ceased to find the Congress (I) an attractive electoral ally in parliamentary elections that

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5 The TMC (M) was a contender for power at the national level only as part of the United Front, in the 1996 and 1998 elections (and not in 1999), unlike Congress (I) which has been an important contender in its own right throughout its existence. However, it drew a substantial portion of the votes that Congress (I) had got in Tamil Nadu until 1996, both in the parliamentary and State assembly elections of 1996, and a lower portion in later elections.

6 The DMK had a loose seat sharing arrangement with the BJP in the 1989 parliamentary elections, not based on a common agenda but aimed solely at defeating the Congress (I). This arrangement, which included a number of other parties, was electorally unsuccessful in Tamil Nadu. The parties which were part of the arrangement won just one of the State’s 39 seats.
they both stayed aloof of the Congress (I) in the 1998 elections, in which the Congress (I) fared badly, gaining merely 4.8 percent of the population and winning to seats.7

The changes in electoral outcomes in Tamil Nadu in the late 1990s raise many questions about the extent of reorientation of the electorate through this period and the relations between changing patterns of competition at the State and the national levels. If Tamil Nadu’s electorate set a trend followed later in many other States by relegating the Congress to the margins of State level competition, has it now followed trends set somewhat earlier elsewhere in India by shifting its support from the Congress to the BJP in national level competition? Or are the changed electoral results primarily a result of the Dravidian parties changing their preferences regarding electoral allies in response to perceived changes in national-level competition? Do the Dravidian parties prefer the BJP to Congress (I) now because the former party appears likely to fare better across India in parliamentary elections, or at least place the two major national parties on a par with one another as prospective allies as they became the main contenders to rule the country after the United Front lost its hold on power in 1998 and partially disintegrated thereafter? Has the BJP grown significantly in the formerly inhospitable terrain of Tamil Nadu, despite the entrenched strength of the major Dravidian parties? Or is its greater recent electoral success in Tamil Nadu merely a consequence of its growing success in national-level competition and the regional parties’ tactical approach to alliance formation?

An alliance between one of the major parties in State level competition and a credible contender to lead a national Government has been a key to success in parliamentary elections in Tamil Nadu in the late 1990s. The DMK and the AIADMK continue to be the major

State-level contenders. The Congress (I) and the BJP are the credible national-level contenders, and so was the United Front briefly. The latter forces were able to draw significant support in parliamentary elections in the State if they were allied with either the DMK or the AIADMK. As the major parties have understood the preconditions for electoral success, the two major alliances of the last three elections paired one of the major Dravidian parties with either the BJP, the Congress(I) or the TMC(M).

The first section recounts major aspects of political and electoral change in Tamil Nadu until the 1990s. The second section discusses the changes that took place through the 1990s in the major political parties of the State and important features of the new parties that emerged through this period. The third section examines changes in the patterns of political competition and partisanship through the 1990s, focusing on trends in the State assembly elections of 1996 and the parliamentary elections of 1996, 1998 and 1999. The conclusion assesses what electoral trends reflect about changes and continuities in mass politics in Tamil Nadu, and indicates possible directions of change over the next decade.

**The Dravidian Parties and Its Impact**

Subramanian has argued in his earlier work that the DMK and the AIADMK rose to prominence in Tamil Nadu politics primarily based on a popular articulation of ethnic appeals made by Justice Party and Dravida Kazhagam.\(^8\) Such populist mobilization contrasted the “people” from the “elite,” with reference to ethnic categories of caste and language use, as well as factors such as status and power. The flexible use of such layered conceptions of identity enabled both parties to mobilize broad social coalitions, extending across most social differences. It helped the DMK outdo the Congress

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initially in 1967 and aided the AIADMK in marginalizing Congress offshoots after it emerged in 1972.

Aside from enabling mobilizing success, the flexible articulation of ethnic and populist appeals by the major Dravidian parties meant that the dominance of these parties did not lead to the exclusion of groups deemed ethnic outsiders, although both parties were rooted in the same ethnic movement. Groups that were viewed as outsiders in some contexts were courted as part of the popular community in other contexts. For instance, the DMK, which opposed the dominance of the upper castes especially earlier in its history, courted them as speakers of the Tamil language at other points, and a Brahmin, J. Jayalalitha, became the leader of the AIADMK in 1989. It attracted Muslims who were native speakers of Dakhni Urdu by linking its opposition to the introduction of Hindi as India’s sole official language not only with a glorification of Tamil but also with an opposition to the marginalization of Urdu. Some who were not native speakers of Tamil could even become major Dravidianist leaders if they used the plebeian Tamil that became the language of public life, the best example being M.G. Ramachandran, the founding leader of the AIADMK.9

The Dravidian parties maintained considerable support after they came to power by implementing policies that upheld their populist claims to represent the people. Populist schemes of patronage distribution were crucial in this regard, notably the expansion of quotas for the Other Backward Castes in education and Government employment, initially by the DMK in 1972 (from 25 percent to 31 percent and later by the AIADMK in 1980 (from 31 percent to 50 percent); and the free lunch scheme introduced by the AIADMK in

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9 The author has highlighted the significance of the inclusive character that the Dravidian parties assumed and explain this outcome in a comparative perspective in Narendra Subramanian, Ethnicity and Pluralism: An Exploration with Reference to Indian Experience, Canadian Journal of Political Science, December, 1999, pp.1-30.
1983, which continues to feed over a fifth of the State's population. Such policies directed patronage towards some members of the intermediate and lowers strata, much more extensively and directly than had happened during the three decades of Congress rule which preceded Dravidianist dominance in the State. They crucially helped the DMK and the AIADMK maintain their electoral dominance until the late 1980s, which declined to some extent in the late 1990s as new parties emerged.

The DMK and the AIADMK were characterized in different ways by organization pluralism, a term Subramanian uses to denote the extent of autonomy and flexibility characterizing both relations within an organization and transactions between the organization and society. Organizational pluralism has three components: strategic flexibility regarding long term goals and outlook (not just short-term tactical dexterity in responding to changing political opportunities); cadre autonomy, the autonomy of local party units, party factions, and party-affiliated associations from party leaders; and supporter autonomy, to appropriate party appeals in ways different from the explicit appeals and preferred programs of party leaders.

The DMK abandoned atheism, secession and exclusionary emphases on Tamil and non-Brahman identities. The AIADMK abandoned efforts to supplement caste with income as a criterion for Other Backward Community (OBC) quotas, a step meant to give the poorer OBCs a greater share of these quotes, when this move aroused considerable protest. Instead, it augmented these quotes, maintained its commitment to the expanded quotas through the 1980s and 1990s, and even defended them in the face of challenges in the courts. Cadre remained unenthusiastic about the DMK leaders efforts to discredit MGR through nativism in the early 1970s and resisted MGR’s efforts to dismantle his own fan clubs after the AIADMK came to power. Many core supporters of the DMK and the AIADMK were
members of caste and farmers’ associations that militantly opposed policies regarding caste quotas and agrarian subsidies which their own party adopted while it was in power, while remaining loyal to the party. Although the autonomy within Dravidianist sub-cultures was considerable, it also had its limits, set by the focus of the parties on populist clientelism as the primary means to enable upward social mobility and perhaps alter patterns of dominance. Due to the organizational pluralism of the DMK and the AIADMK, their dominance helped reinforce social pluralism in the State.10 “Social pluralism” refers to the existence of many active associations significantly autonomous of the State and of one another.

While sharing an electorally effective combination of ethnic and populist features and some organization pluralism, the DMK and the AIADMK differed significantly in the thrust of their populist appeals and policies, as well as their support bases, through the 1970s and 1980s. Subramanian has captured these contrasts by characterizing DMK as primarily assertive populist and the AIADMK as mainly paternalist populist. Assertive populism urges groups partially excluded from spheres of privilege towards militant action to gain greater access to these spheres, and sees the social changes introduced by the party as a result of the self-willed actively of the cadre. It creates entitlements for mobilized groups to good such as education, jobs, loans and subsidized producer goods. This kinds of populism appeals most to the intermediate strata, which have the ability to mobilize themselves autonomously and to compete for the entitlements created by assertive populism. It specifically appeals to the petty intelligentsia, actual or aspiring white collar workers drawn from groups with a limited history of education in English, who also tend to be the main ideologues of ethnic militancy. The DMK’s

10This argument is laid out in Subramanian, Ethnicity and Populist Mobilization, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, pp.61-63.
opposition to the Congress’s bureaucratic clientelism followed the assertive populist pattern. The party primarily mobilized the intermediate strata, became associated with agitations against the introduction of Hindi as the sole national language, and focused while in power on policies such as expanding OBC quotas.

Paternalist populism promises that a benevolent leader or party will protect the poor and the powerless from the effects of economic deprivation through the provision of subsidized wage goods. Such goods are less expensive than those that are the focus of assertive populist patronage, and so are distributed to more people, but change the social position of the recipients less. Paternalist populism appeals most to the lower strata and women, typically least able to compete for the entitlements created by assertive populism. The AIADMK’s populism was paternalist in emphasis. The AIADMK was built around the public persona that MGR built, mainly through his films, as a defender of the poor and women, and subsequently around similar charismatic qualities to which MGR’s successor, Jayalalitha, laid a partially successful claim. It initiated policies such as the free lunch scheme and gained greatest support among the lower strata and women.

As it avoided ethnic militancy even while using ethnic notions to augment its prestige, the AIADMK was most acceptable to those favouring pan-Indian nationalism, the majority of whom were Congress supporters before the AIADMK was formed. It also gained considerable support among non-Tamil speakers and the upper castes, many of whom remained averse to the DMK’s emphasis on the Tamil language and the interests of the OBCs, even after the DMK moderated these emphases.

The organizational pluralism of the major Dravidian parties meant that civic life remained strong and autonomous in Tamil Nadu amidst the dominance of these parties, and populism coexisted
with some accountability. The variations in the populist styles of the AIADMK and the DMK, and the associated differences in policy foci and primary social bases, meant that contestation over policy continued through intense competition between these two parties. However, redistributive policies were restricted to the creation of entitlements for the emergent strata, and major changes in property rights and the rapid reconfiguration of patterns of social dominance were ruled out. Such policies enabled the upward mobility of significant sections of the intermediate strata and, to a lesser extent, the lower strata. As they provided larger sections of these strata few significant improvements in their life circumstances, many core supporters of the AIADMK and the DMK drawn from these groups grew increasingly uncertain by the late 1980s that their sustained support for these parties had been adequately rapid. This weakened loyalties to these parties in the 1990s. Social structure and local patterns larger sections of these strata few significant improvements in their life circumstances, many core supporters of the AIADMK and the DMK drawn from these groups grew increasingly uncertain by the late 1980s that their sustained support for these parties had been adequately rapid. This weakened loyalties to these parties in the 1990s. Social structure and local patterns of contention vary across the socio-ecological zones into which Subramanian has divided Tamil Nadu, following the work of historians and anthropologists.11 The major river valleys were, and continue to be, more rigidly stratified, with a higher proportion of upper and lower castes and classes, and greater upper-caste dominance. The intermediate castes and classes are numerically and socially stronger in the plains, where they have a

longer history of autonomous mobilization. As parties engaged with
pre-existing patterns of contention in the process of mobilization, the
strength and composition of their sub-cultures and the extent of their
electoral support varied across the socio-ecological zones.\textsuperscript{12}

The Congress built its most durable sub-cultures in the
Tamiraparani and the Kavery Valleys, although its sub-culture was
less broad in the Kaveri Valley where many other political forces also
built themselves durable niches. It also dominated electoral support in
the southern and western plains in the 1950s and 1960s, but its roots
remained weaker in most parts of those zones. It was in the valleys
that the communists also had some strength from the 1940s onwards.
The DMK developed deep social roots in the northern plains and the
Kaveri valley, with its sub-culture also restricted in its northern plains
and the Kavery valley, with its sub culture also restricted in its spread
in the latter zone by the strength of other parties. Its electoral
performance has always been strongest in these zones, the inter-zone
differences being greatest when the party was in ascent and in some
greatest when the party was in ascent and in some decline after the
formation of the AIADMK. The AIADMK built deeper sub-cultures than
the Congress had in the southern and western plains and the
Tamiraparani valley, and enjoyed greatest electoral support in these
three zones in the 1970s and 1980s. the Kaveri valley has been the
zone of greater competition and political participation since
decolonization, and all the State’s major parties have some support
there.

The northern plains, the largest zone, include Madras
city; the districts of Tiruvallur, Kancheepuram, Vellore,
Tiruvannamalai, Villupuram, Dharmapuri, Salem and Namakkal; all
of Cuddalore District except the Chidambaram assembly segment; and

\textsuperscript{12}Subramanian, Ethnicity and Populist Mobilization, Oxford University Press,
the assembly segments of Perambalur, Varahur, Ariyalur, Andimadam and Jayankondam in Perambalur and Tiruchirapalli District.\textsuperscript{13} The Kavery Valley consists of Nagapattinam, Tiruvarur and Thanjavur District; the Chidambaram assembly segment in Cuddalore District; and the assembly segments of Uppliapuram, Kulithalai, Musiri, Lalgudi, Srirangam, Tiruchirapalli-I and II, and Tiruverambur in Perambalur and Tiruchirapalli District.\textsuperscript{14} The western plains include Erode, Coimbatore and Nilgiris District.\textsuperscript{15} The Tamiraparani valley includes the assembly segments of Tirunelveli, Palayamcottai, Ambasamudram and Cheranmahadevi in Tirunelveli District, and the Srivaikuntam assembly segment in Thoothukudi District.\textsuperscript{16} The southern plains consist of Karur, Dindigul, Theni, Madurai, Pudukottai, Sivagangai, Ramanathapuram, Virudhunagar and Kanyakumari District; much of Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi District. i.e., the portions not included in the Tamiraparani valley; and the southern parts of Tiruchirapalli District that the neither part of the Kavery valley nor the northern plains.\textsuperscript{17} While the northern and

\textsuperscript{13}This includes the parliamentary constituencies of Madras North, Madras Central, Madras South, Sriperumbudur, Chengalpattu, Arakkonam, Vellore, Tirupattur, Vandavasi, Tindivanam, Cuddalore, Chidambaram, (except Chidambaram assembly segment), Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri, Rasipuram, Salem, Tiruchengode (Kapilamalai, Tiruchengode, Sankari, Edapadi segments), and Perambalur (except Uppliapuram segment).

\textsuperscript{14}Parliamentary constituencies: Chidambaram (Chidambaram segment), Karur (Kulithalai segment), Tiruchirapalli, Perambalur (Uppliapuram segment), Mayiladuthurai, Nagapattinam, Thanjavur, Pudukottai (Pattukottai and Peravurani segments).

\textsuperscript{15}Parliamentary constituencies: Tiruchengode (Modakurichi, Erode segments) Nilgiris, Gobichettipalayam, Coimbatore, Pollachi, Palani (Kangeyam, Velakoil segments).

\textsuperscript{16}Parliamentary Constituencies: Tirunelveli (Tirunelveli, Palayamcottai, Siruvaikuntam segments), Tenkasi (Ambasamudram segment), Tiruchendur (Cheranmahadevi segment).

\textsuperscript{17}Parliamentary Constituencies: Palani (except Kangayam and Vellakoil segments) Dindigul, Madurai, Periyakulam, Karur (except Kulithalai segment), Pudukottai (except Pattukottai and peravurani segments), Sivagangai, Ramanathapuram, Sivakasi, Tirunelveli (Vilathikulam, Ottapidaram, Tuticorin segments) Tenkasi (except Ambasamudram segment), Thiruchendur (except Cheranmahadevi segment), Nagarcoil.
southern plains are most extensive, the valleys are most densely populated.

**Congress Offshoots in State and National-Level Competition**

The electoral success of the Dravidian parties was aided by the Congress’s inability to develop a viable alternative in Tamil Nadu to the politics associated with the party during the heyday of the Congress system. Congress (O) primarily promised a return to such a pattern of governance while it existed as a distinct party, a pattern that was no longer feasible as the intermediate and the lower strata participated more extensively in politics. Congress(R), and then its successor, Congress (I), failed to contend effectively for power in the State, although the populist approach taken by Indira Gandhi from the time of the Congress split until the mid 1970s could have served such a purpose. The party did not project a distinctive politics in election campaigns, choosing instead to ally itself with one of the Dravidian parties in most elections from the 1970s onwards. Once the AIADMK was formed in 1972 that party adopted a more full-blown, paternalist populism than the Congress (R), established closer contact with its supporters than the Congress (R) did even in states where the latter was more electorally successful, and thus constricted the social space left for the Congress.

The performance of the Congress and its offshoots declined in State level competition from 1967 onwards, when the DMK assumed power, and they ceased to be major contender; to rule the State from 1977, when the AIADMK first contested a general election. Other national parties also declined rapidly due to the Dravidian parties’ growth – the communists did so from the late 1950s, when the DMK began contesting elections; and the Swatantra Party after its alliance with the Congress (O) against the DMK failed badly at the polls in 1971.
Congress (R)/Congress (I) remained significant as a third party in State level competition even after the Dravidian parties became dominant. Election results in the State assembly elections of 1977 and 1989, which it contested without an alliance with one of the major Dravidian parties, indicate that it retained the support of an electorally significant segment of voters until the late 1980s. The 17.5 percent of the vote that Congress (I) polled in 1977 is probably a good indicator as this was a four way contest, involving three other parties that polled more. Although the 1989 elections were unusual as they were held while the AIADMK was temporarily split after MGR’s death, the 20.2 percent of the vote that the Congress (I) received then may not be misleading. This is because some voters who saw the Congress (I) as their first preference voted tactically for the AIADMK from 1977 onwards as the Congress (I) no longer seemed a credible contender; and some who had tactically voted for the AIADMK from 1977 to the late 1980s reverted to the Congress (I) in 1989 when the split in the AIADMK made the Congress (I) appear a more credible contender. So, the Congress (I) retained the support of about 17 percent to 20 percent of Tamil Nadu’s voters in State-level competition between the formation of the AIADMK and the late 1980s.

The Congress (I) lost its position as an important third party in State level competition only after the formation of the TMC (M) in 1996. Until then, Congress (I)’s level of support gave the DMK and the AIADMK an incentive to ally themselves with it to increase their chances of success in State assembly elections. The Congress (I) found such alliances useful to increase its ratio of seats won to percentage of votes gained, given the pattern of electoral competition in the State. As a result, the Congress (I) was allied with one of the major Dravidian parties in four of the six assembly elections held between 1977 and 1996.
Much of the Congress (I)’s residual support was located in the Congress’s old zones of strength, outside the northern plains. So, the Congress (I) led alliance polled only 14.3 percent of the vote in the northern plains, but got between 22.0 percent and 27.7 percent in the other four zones in 1977; and 18.8 percent of the vote in the northern plains, but between 20.9 percent and 30.0 percent in the other zones in 1989. Congress sub cultures were somewhat resilient, even in the face of the sharp organizational decline that occurred from the 1970s onwards, in the areas where the Congress had built considerable contact with society through the 1950s and 1960s.

Not only did the Congress retain some influence in State level competition, alliances included Congress-dominated parliamentary elections in Tamil Nadu until 1991. Many factors account for the Congress’s consistently strong performance in parliamentary elections despite its decline in State-level competition. A section of voters preferred the Congress to hold power at the national level, and gave priority to this preference when they voted in Parliament elections, though surveys do not indicate the size of this group. Besides, other serious contenders for power at the national level remained weak in Tamil Nadu.\textsuperscript{18} This meant that an alliance of one of the major Dravidian parties with the Congress was likely to be even more electorally fruitful in parliamentary elections than in State assembly elections.\textsuperscript{19} Besides, the DMK and AIADMK hoped that an alliance with the Congress (I) would give them some influence over national policy making towards Tamil Nadu. So, one of these parties was allied with the Congress (I) in every parliamentary election between 1977 and 1966 and then again in 1999, and brought a good

\textsuperscript{18}The Janata Party was a partial exception only in 1977, its year of glory.  
\textsuperscript{19}The divergent results of the parliamentary elections of 1980 and the State assembly elections, held a few months later, are the best example of this. While the DMK – Congress (I) alliance swept the first elections, it lost the second badly.
deal of its voters to the polling booths to vote for the alliance including the Congress (I).

The manner of mobilization by the DMK was crucial in marginalizing Hindu nationalist parties in State level competition, and until recently in parliamentary elections too. Hindu nationalist parties failed to receive over 0.2 percent of the vote in State assembly elections until 1996. The DMK “immunized” Tamil Nadu from Hindu nationalist growth by building sub-cultures strongly resistant to the politicization of Hindu-Muslim animosities. This was due to the major differences in the way DMK and Hindu nationalists constructed their visions of political community and to the nature of the politicized social networks that became part of the DMK’s sub-cultures.

The DMK asserted, albeit in decreasingly militant tones, that Tamil cultural distinctiveness should have political relevance, that avenues for the upward mobility of OBCs should be opened up further, and that religion should be of marginal relevance in constructing political community. This made for a stark contrast with the BJP’s vision of India as a culturally homogeneous Hindu nation, defined primarily with reference to the mores of the upper and upper-middle castes of northern and western India. Besides, the DMK viewed Muslims as Central to the political community and built close cooperative links between the intermediate Hindu strata and Muslims in its zones of strength, the northern plains and the Kavery valley. This inhibited Hindu nationalist growth until the 1990s especially in these regions, although Hindu-Muslim animosities were present in some parts of these regions before the DMK’s growth in the 1950s.20

The Bharatiya Jan Sangh/Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was more closely associated with Brahmans in Tamil Nadu than it was elsewhere in India, further restricting its growth as Brahmans account

20Also see Subramanian, Ethnicity and Populist Mobilization, pp.315-326.
for merely 3 percent of the population and Dravidians growth highlighted their cultural distinctiveness.21

Unlike the DMK, the AIADMK was not resistant to Hindu nationalism as it was not averse to Sanskritic norms, emphasized its compatibility with pan Indian nationalism, and had greater support among the upper strata, with which Hindu nationalists were closely associated. The BJP and other Hindu nationalist organizations began to grow slowly in the State through the 1980s and the 1990s partly because the AIADMK, which ruled the State for much of these two decades, took little effective action against the promotion of violence among religious groups by these organizations.

**Other Ethnic Parties**

The rise to dominance of the Dravidian parties also restricted the appeal of caste parties until the later 1980s, although caste associations have been strong in Tamil Nadu for about a century. Although caste was Central to the DMK’s vision of the popular community, the party did not exclusively focus attention on the concerns of a particular caste. Rather, the DMK and later the AIADMK, built strong coalitions extending across caste boundaries in their regions of strength, as did the Congress in its heyday. This undermined caste parties by drawing away many of their supporters, and urging some of these parties to join one of the bigger parties. In the 1952 elections, when the Dravidianists had not yet directly entered the electoral fray, caste parties accounted for 8.6 percent of the vote. Much of this vote went to parties representing the State’s two largest caste clusters – the Vanniar and the Mukkulathor. These parties declined as one of the Vanniar parties, and the DMK built itself a strong base among the Vannians in the northern plains. The

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21This figure is based on the last census to include caste categories other than SC and ST. the Brahman share of today’s population might well be lower due to extensive migration out of Tamil Nadu. A Brahman leading the AIADMK did not pose a similar problem for this party as Brahmans have a minor share otherwise in the party leadership.
Forward Bloc declined more gradually in the 1960s and Mukkulathor support was divided among many parties thereafter. Caste parties did not regain the electoral significance they had in the early post-colonial years until 1989, after which they grew in response to the fraying of the major Dravidians subcultures.

**The Emergence of Minor Alternatives**

From 1989 onwards, some minor alternatives emerged to the major Dravidian parties, and an older party gained greater strength. The reasons for the MDMK’s emergence and limited growth were discussed earlier. While the leader is not as dominant in the MDMK as in the DMK and the AIADMK, the leadership has shown little strategic flexibility. For instance, its continued support for secession in Sri Lanka shows an unwillingness to adapt to public opinion. There is no sign of much diversity of opinion on this and other issues of major concern to the party within its sub-culture.

**Caste Parties**

Parties based almost exclusively among particular megacastes were also among the new alternatives. They reflect the growth of militant solidarity among some caste groups in response to the weakening of the multi-case coalitions assembled by the DMK and the AIADMK. The engagement of these parties in considerable mass mobilization and the militancy of many of their supporters differentiates these parties from the caste parties of the early post-colonial years, which relied primarily on the local influence of notables.

Pattali Makkal Katchi and Forward Bloc face definite limits to the extent of support they are likely to get as no mega caste accounts for over 15 percent of Tamil Nadu’s population, and the more successful caste parties have gained only between 1.7 percent and 8.2 percent of the vote in recent elections. This has nevertheless not deterred the formation of caste parties and other “niche parties,”
partly due to the distribution of the population and the patterns of electoral competition. Parties likely to gain such a vote share may make a major difference to State level electoral outcomes as the major competition has been between alliances led by the DMK and AIADMK, the vote gap between which has been small in some elections, such as the last two parliamentary elections of 1998 and 1999. Caste parties have greater potential influence over constituency level electoral outcomes as the more numerous castes account for 20 percent to 40 percent of the population in many constituencies, and more in a few.

The PMK, which started the trend of the formation of new caste parties, has been the most electorally successful of these parties, its vote share reaching a peak of 8.2 percent in the 1999 parliamentary elections. This is because there has been a long history of caste-based mobilization among the Vanniars, caste-based voting has been strongest among the Vanniars since the PMK's formation, and the Vanniars are one of the two largest megacastes in Tamil Nadu. The PMK's success and the inability of the major older parties to wean away PMK supporters encouraged the formation of other caste parties.

Two SC parties emerged and gained strength through the latter half of the 1990s, Puthiya Thamizhagam (PT), based among the Pallar caste which is numerous in Southern Tamil Nadu, and the Dalit Panthers based among the Paraiyar, more numerous in Central and northern Tamil Nadu. The restriction of their support to particular SC castes distinguishes them from the Bahujan Samaj Party, whose success they have not remotely approached. The PT's use of the word “Dalit” from its name indicate aims of building broader coalitions to transform society, rather than much success in achieving these goals. The PT has gained some support among Muslims, perhaps a first step towards building a broader coalition.
The recent SC parties’ emergence and growth is partly a response to the alienation of many SCs from the AIADMK’s declining paternalist populism. These parties have organized militant SC responses to conflict between SC and OBC groups numerous in their areas of strength. While the Pallar have been engaged in ongoing conflict with the Mukkulathor and, to a lesser extent Nadars, in the southern plains and the Tamiraparani Valley, caste conflict has primarily pitted the Vanniars against the Paraiyar in the northern plains and the Kavery Valley. The frequency of caste clashes and the violence associated with them especially increased in the northern plains and the Kavery Valley, where such clashes were not as frequent as in southern Tamil Nadu from the 1950s to the late 1980s. such clashes fueled caste parties, which have enabled the outward spread of initially localized conflicts.

The caste parties that have grown significantly so far are built around their leaders and exhibit no higher levels of organizational pluralism than the DMK and the AIADMK recently have. These parties are rather cohesive and may enable the further empowerment of weaker castes. But, the consequences of their growth so far hold only limited promise for social pluralism.

**Other Parties**

The BJP and other Hindu nationalist organizations registered modest growth in Tamil Nadu through the 1980s, and 1990s, especially in the latter decade. The BJP gained no more than 0.2 percent of the vote in any State assembly election until 1991, and major parties shunned it as an ally until 1996 partly because of its very limited vote share. The party organization grew especially between the 1991 and the 1996 elections, its membership increasing approximately ten-fold through this period, from about 30,000 to
about 3,00,000.\textsuperscript{22} Such organizational growth was accompanied by a growth in popular support, which helped the BJP conduct election campaigns more effectively, and enabled the BJP to become a factor especially in parliamentary elections thereafter. The BJP’s vote share increased considerably in the 1996 parliamentary and State assembly elections, which it contested without an alliance with other parties, to 2.9 percent in the parliamentary elections and 1.8 percent in the State assembly elections.\textsuperscript{23} As the party was not considered a likely victor then in virtually any constituency, its vote shares no doubt understate its support.

The BJP first registered its electoral presence in Tamil Nadu precisely when it also became a major contender for national-level power. Both changes made the BJP a more attractive electoral ally, leading the AIADMK to form in alliance with the BJP in 1998 and the DMK to do so in 1999. The BJP’s enhanced vote shares in these elections were partly a result of these alliances, rather than results of further growth in support after 1996. However, alliances with parties with a strong presence in Tamil Nadu did help the BJP reach voters more effectively and gained the party greater credibility among the State’s voters as a contender in both national and State level competition. In the CSDS post poll survey of 1998, 7.1 percent of respondents said they would have voted for the BJP had there been no alliances. This is an index of the BJP’s level of support in the State in the late 1990s, which is not clearly higher than it was in 1996 as such a counterfactual question might well have elicited a figure close to this had it been posed in 1996.

The BJP gained support through the 1990s among some OBCs, primarily the Kongu Vellala Gounders, the Mukkulathore, and the Nadars. This has begun to dispel the image the BJP had in Tamil

\textsuperscript{22}Interviews, V. Maithereyan, Chennai, February 1, 2000; Ela Ganesan, Chennai, February 5, 2000.
\textsuperscript{23}Public (Elections) Department, Report on General Elections, 1996, pp.81, 275.
Nadu as a Brahman Party. Significant chunks of the caste groups amongst which the BJP has grown have considerable wealth, and the party has yet to gain significant support among the lower OBCs and the SCs. The BJP growth has been greatest in the southern and western plains and the Tamiraparani valley, regions where the DMK and its immunizing effect against Hindu nationalist growth were always weak. The city of Chennai is the only old DMK base where the BJP has grown significantly; mainly among upwardly mobile Hindus. Conflict along religious lines increased with the BJP's growth in the 1990s pitting Hindus primarily against Christians in the southern plains and the Tamiraparani valley; and against Muslims in the western plains and Chennai City.

Among the newer parties, the BJP departs most from the Dravidian parties and Tamil Nadu's earlier political history in its focus on religion as a basis for defining political community. While the Muslim League drew some support since the 1960s in Tamil Nadu, this party engaged in less extensive mass mobilization than the BJP already has in the State. Besides, Muslims being but 5.5 percent of the State’s population always restricted the scope for the Muslim League’s growth. The potential for BJP growth in the future is considerable as 88.7 percent of the State’s population is classified as Hindu and the BJP has shown the ability to overcome some of the historical limits to its growth in the State.24

The BJP’s organizational pluralism is at least as limited as it is regions where the party is stronger. At this early stage of the party’s growth in Tamil Nadu, the differences among the organizations that are part of the Sangh Parivar are less evident here than in the BJP bastions in northern and western India. The BJP’s weak State unit has not gained greater autonomy from the national party or a

greater say in its policies in the course of its growth through the 1990s. Although it has shown tactical flexibility in attempting to shed its prior image as distant from Tamil society and the concerns of the OBCs, its Hindu nationalism is inflexible, and activists and supporters are tied closely to this vision.

The BJP’s growth is potentially more dangerous for social pluralism than the growth of caste parties. This is because the BJP has already demonstrated its ability to seriously undermine social pluralism in its areas of strength and the party’s association with Hindu nationalism places fewer constraints on its future growth than the vision of the caste does. Besides, the party’s national-level presence and current role in the national Government are likely to aid the intolerant activities of the party and the Sangh Parivar in Tamil Nadu.

The TMC (M), formed in 1996, has also been an important electoral contender. However, unlike the new caste parties and the BJP, its support has not been based on new mobilizing drives. Rather, the party took over a part of the Congress (I)’s pre-existing votes as the Congress (I) fragmented in Tamil Nadu in the 1990s. It was most successful in this regard in the 1996 and 1998 elections as the Congress (I) was hurt by its alliance with the AIADMK when the latter party was at its nadir in 1996, and by its not being allied with a major regional party in 1998. In 1999, the Congress (I) regained the support of more of those who had voted for it until the early 1990s as it was allied with the AIADMK in that election and the TMC (M) shares the organizational weaknesses of the Congress (I).

The Electoral Performances of Parties

Although the sub-cultures associated with the major Dravidian parties shrank and voter loyalties to them declined, these parties remain the State’s major electoral forces. The DMK and the AIADMK retained their dominance in the last State assembly elections
of 1996, polling 63.5 percent of the vote between them, near the middle of the range between 55.3 percent and 67.0 percent of the vote that the two parties have obtained in State assembly elections since the AIADMK was formed. Besides, some evidence suggests that preference between the DMK and the AIADMK determines the choices of many voters even in parliamentary elections. In response to a counterfactual question in a CSDS survey regarding the party they would have voted for in the absence of alliances in the 1998 parliamentary elections, 59.7 percent of those who give a definite answer said they would have voted for either the DMK or the AIADMK. However, inferences from this figure have to be tempered by taking into account the small sample size in this survey, the smaller number who gave a definite answer to this question an the complexity of the counterfactual question, answers to which might not have captured the major basis for the voting choice of many respondents.

The DMK and the AIADMK clearly retain considerable electoral support despite their diminished social presence. While they have lost some of the support they had because they were important mobilizing forces with rather distinctive profiles, they have partly compensated for this by acting more like catch all parties or rather, parties that try to catch all and manage to catch many, for some groups largely eluded their grasp in the elections of the 1990s. Despite the changes in the major Dravidian parties, they retain parts of their earlier support bases. Continuity in support for these parties is greater in the zones where they have been strong for long.

The extent of electoral support the DMK and the AIADMK enjoy is also partly because these parties appear the only viable contenders to rule the State as their competitors occupy much smaller social niches and have not approached even their weakened organizational strength. The Congress vote, already much eroded, has been split by the party’s fragmentation in Tamil Nadu, mainly between
the Congress (I) and the TMC (M). The ambit of the caste parties is restricted by their vision. Support for the BJP and the MDMK is modest, and significant increases seem unlikely in the latter case. The perception among many voters that the DMK and the AIADMK are the only viable contenders to rule the State especially influences voting for the State assembly, but also affects parliamentary elections to the extent that citizens base their voting decisions in these elections on their preferences in State-level competition. Such a perception especially influenced voting in the 1991 and 1996 elections, both of which witnessed strong anti-incumbent feelings.

Although the DMK and the AIADMK remain the major poles in Tamil Nadu’s electoral contests, some of the parties that emerged in the State from 1989 onwards established electoral footholds. Such parties polled 11.4 percent and 9.5 percent of the vote respectively in the assembly and parliamentary elections of 1996, both of which they contested without alliances with larger parties. As these parties placed themselves on the electoral map in 1996, the bigger parties included many of them in one of the two major alliances in the subsequent parliamentary elections of 1998 and 1999. The newer parties polled 20.3 percent of the popular vote in 1998 and 24.9 percent in 1999. Their vote shares increased as more voters saw them as credible contenders after 1996, felt more inclined to vote for those of them that joined one of the two major alliances, and the leaders of the bigger parties offered them good seat-sharing bargains in recognition of their already strong support among some groups.

The electoral performance of the Congress (I) and the TMC (M) fluctuated most in the last three parliamentary elections. The

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25Survey data suggest that this happened to a considerable extent in Tamil Nadu from 1996 onwards, but does not clarify how far it did. Interviews suggest that this trend dates back well before 1996.

26If one excludes the BJP and includes the TMC (M), the figures become 18.9 percent in the Assembly Elections and 33.7 percent in the Parliamentary Elections. These figures overstate the extent of voter realignment.
Congress (I)’s vote share moved from 18.2 percent in 1996 to 4.8 percent in 1998 and 11.1 percent in 1999. The TMC (M) polled 27.1 percent of the vote in 1996 and 20.2 percent in 1998, but only 7.2 percent in 1999. Both Congress offshoots fared worst when they were not allied with a major regional party, showing that they owed a significant portion of their vote to their allies in the other elections.

The relationship between the results of successive elections changed after the 1996 elections. Until 1996, Tamil Nadu went through three somewhat long phases, in the course of which the same party got a majority of seats in the State assembly the Congress until 1967, the DMK from 1967 to 1977, and the AIADMK from 1977 onwards. The electorate gave the nod to a party which it had earlier removed from power for the first time in 1989, and then again in 1996. The latter outcome alone reflects a medium term change in partisanship as the DMK’s victory in the 1989 State Assembly Elections was due to a temporary split in the AIADMK.\(^\text{27}\) While the DMK replaced the AIADMK in power in the State in 1996, the AIADMK led alliance won the 1998 Parliamentary Elections and the DMK led alliance won the 1999 Parliamentary Elections.\(^\text{28}\)

The new trend of different parties winning successive elections bring Tamil Nadu closer to the patterns at the national level, where no Prime Minister returned to power in successive elections between 1971 and 1999. The national pattern is a result of no party ruling since the 1970s in ways that elicit the continued support of enough voters to return to power.\(^\text{29}\) Such a pattern began a generation

\(^{27}\text{After the AIADMK reunited some months later, it regained its number one status in the 1989 Parliamentary Elections.}\)

\(^{28}\text{Only the big change between the 1991 and 1996 Elections marks a significant shift in voter alignments. We shall see that the other minor fluctuations were mainly results of the changing composition of alliances.}\)

\(^{29}\text{While the Congress (I) returned to power in 1984, this was due to the sympathy wave after Indira Gandhi’s assassination a little before the Elections, rather than because enough voters found governance satisfactory. Opinion polls conducted before Indira Gandhi’s death suggested that the Congress (I) would not get an absolute majority of seats in those Elections. Vajpayee’s re-Election in 1999 is not}\)
later in Tamil Nadu because governance remained satisfactory until the 1990s from the perspective of a plurality of voters, except during the two transitions from the Congress to the DMK in the mid 1960s and from the DMK to the AIADMK in the mid 1970s. Tamil Nadu caught up in the 1990s with the national pattern of unsatisfactory rule. Unlike in the past, no major party emerged in response to the widespread discontent, and anti-incumbent sentiments drove most voters towards the main opposition party or smaller parties.

**Patterns of Alliance Formation**

Changes in the number, strength and orientations of parties in Tamil Nadu, as well as some changes in national-level competition, changed patterns of alliance formation. The patterns of alliance formation especially changed after the political changes of the 1990s had their first major electoral impact in 1996. As no assembly election has been held in the State since the, alliance formation patterns have changed more so far in parliamentary than in Assembly Elections. This is not primarily due to the differences between the patterns of State and national level competition. Indeed, the differences between the alliance patterns in the two kinds of elections are declining.

From 1977 until 1996, the AIADMK could probably rely on the support of about 30 percent to 40 percent of the electorate, and the DMK on the support of about 20 percent to 25 percent in State level competition, although their vote shares departed from these ranges in some elections mainly because of the alliances they formed. Much of this support was likely to stay with these parties in Parliamentary Elections. Both major Dravidian parties focused on gaining and maintaining power in the State. Although the DMK was part of a national coalition Government from 1989 to 1991, the

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a clear sign or approval of the ruling party's approach to governance either because of the limited time that had elapsed since the last Elections.
interest of these parties in the national Government was largely restricted through this period to policies towards Tamil Nadu. The Congress (I) was clearly the third force in State level competition then, probably able to attract about 15 percent to 20 percent of the vote. Besides, it was the only national party of significance in the State, preferred by the State’s electorate in all the Parliamentary Elections of the period. The Congress (I) was far more interested in ruling the country than in its share of State assembly seats. Other parties had limited support.

The above mentioned factors gave the major Dravidian parties an incentive to form an alliance with the Congress (I), to increase their share of State assembly seats and influence national Government policies towards Tamil Nadu. This incentive was greater in Parliamentary Elections than in State Assembly Elections. As a result, two major alliances competed with each other in all parliamentary and most State Assembly Elections from 1977 to 1996. One included the Congress (I) and one of the major Dravidian parties, and the other consisted of the other major Dravidian party and some small parties. In the first alliance, the Congress (I) typically contested a higher share of parliamentary seats and its Dravidianist partner the bigger share of assembly seats. Alliances between the AIADMK and the Congress(I) in 1977, 1984, 1989 and 1991 approximately followed the “MGR formula”: two thirds of the seats for the Congress(I) and one third for the AIADMK for the Parliament; and vice versa for the assembly. When the DMK was allied with the Congress (I) in 1989, the seats were split approximately 50:50 for both the parliamentary and the Assembly Elections. In the alliance not including the Congress (I), the vast majority of seats were allocated to the Dravidian party leading it.

As the major Dravidian parties and the Congress (I) had somewhat distinct profiles and outlooks through this period, the
alliances tended to bring together parties that were more similar in this regard. The Congress (I) was allied with the AIADMK in all but one of the Parliamentary Elections between 1977 and 1996 as the AIADMK was closer to Congress’s pan Indian nationalism less averse to Congress (I)’s tendency to centralize power when it ruled the country, and the social groups supporting these parties tended to be more similar more from the lower and the upper strata, and more in the southern and western plains and the Tamiraparani valley. The DMK, on the other hand, was allied with the Janata/Janata Dal and its allies in the elections in which the latter forces were important in national level competition as the latter were less bent on the centralization when they ruled the country.

The formation of the TMC (M) meant that two parties were in the fray in the 1996 elections which had some strength in the State and were viable contenders to rule the country, alone or as part of a coalition. The AIADMK was allied with the Congress (I) and the DMK with the TMC (M), the latter two parties being part of the United Front. While the Congress (I) was allotted 74.4 percent and the AIADMK 25.6 percent of the seats for the Parliamentary Elections, the two parties contested 27.8 percent and 71.8 percent respectively of the assembly seats. Similarly, the TMC (M) contested 51.3 percent and the DMK 43.6 percent of the parliamentary seats, and 17.1 percent and 77.8 percent respectively of the assembly seats. The pattern of seats sharing within each alliance was similar to that in alliances including the Congress (I) until then. Besides, the BJP emerged on Tamil Nadu’s electoral map and its significance as a national level contender increased. Other national level changes also influenced alliance formation in Tamil Nadu after 1996. A period of coalition Governments began then, giving regional parties a greater interest in winning more parliamentary seats so that they could play a role in forming and

destabilizing national Governments. After 1996, alliances were increasingly formed at the national level to maximize the number of seats the component parties were likely to win, rather than based on common outlook.

After 1996, the major Dravidian parties could choose between three pan-Indian/national parties as their major allies in Parliamentary Elections, making it more difficult for the latter to arrive at very advantageous seat DMK and the AIADMK and the growth of niche parties also urged the major Dravidian parties to offer the latter parties favourable terms to join their alliances. As a result, the share of seats contested by the major pan-Indian/national party in the two major alliances declined in 1998 and 1999, and the shares of the DMK, the AIADMK and the smaller parties increased. In 1998, the DMK contested 43.6 percent and the TMC (M) 51.3 percent of the seats in one alliance, but the other alliance departed further from earlier trends by giving the BJP merely 12.8 percent of the seats, the AIADMK 56.4 percent, and smaller parties 30.8 percent. Both major alliances followed the emerging pattern in 1999 the DMK contesting 48.7 percent, the BJP 15.4 percent, and newer regional parties 35.9 percent of the seats in one alliance; and the AIADMK 61.5 percent, the Congress (I) 28.2 percent, and the old and stagnant Communist Parties 10.2 percent of the seats in the other alliance.\textsuperscript{31} Seat distribution in alliances for Parliamentary Elections is becoming more like the pattern common in State Assembly Elections, approximately reflecting the relative strength of parties in State level competition.

Tamil Nadu followed the national pattern of the emergence of alliances including more parties. The national level pattern of fluid alliance composition also influenced alliances in Tamil Nadu, whose composition became more flexible as the profiles of the

DMK and the AIADMK became less distinct and the range of potential allies wider. This was dramatized by the alliance in 1999 between the DMK and the BJP, which opposed one another vehemently and were seen as clearly incompatible in outlook and social base until then. The smaller parties not only get a higher share of seats, they retain more of their autonomy and distinctive character despite being part of an alliance, partly because alliances are prone to being short lived. As changes in State level competition are among the major reasons for the changes in alliance patterns in Parliamentary Elections, similar patterns are likely to be seen in the forthcoming State assembly elections of 2001. The major Dravidian parties will be pressed to allocate more seats to their allies than in the past, and can resist doing so beyond a point only at the cost of significantly reducing the chances of their alliance winning the elections.

**Effective Number of Parties**

The performance of parties in State Assembly Elections is a better basis for estimating the effective number of parties in Tamil Nadu than performance in Parliamentary Elections as regional parties influence voting preferences most in both kinds of elections, and State level competition seems the focus of most voters. While some votes in Parliamentary Elections are not determined by preferences regarding State level competition, even many who cast such votes give greater importance to State level competition. This shows the enduring effect on political sentiments of two generations of mobilization by ethnic parties whose ambit is restricted to the State. For instance, between 74 percent and 79 percent of respondents reported greater loyalty to the State than the nation in surveys conducted in 1996, 1998 and 1999 by Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. The figures were over 70 percent even among voters of pan-Indian parties and alliances led by them. Besides, over 80 percent of the voters for the major alliances of 1996 voted similarly in both the parliamentary and State
Assembly Elections. As much as 27.2 percent of the respondents expressed no definite preference regarding the party or coalition to rule the country, just after the Parliamentary Elections of 1998.

The estimates of the effective number of parties until 1996 are based on the vote shares of parties in State Assembly Elections. Figures based on the last two Parliamentary Elections are also relevant because they were held most recently, seat distribution changed in these elections in ways that better reflect the electoral appeal of parties, and so the performance of parties in these elections reflects some changes through the 1990s in the number of parties with effective support.

**Participation and Partisanship**

The decline in popular enthusiasm for the DMK and the AIADMK weakened partisan loyalties in the State as these parties have the greatest support by far. The CSDS surveys indicate that less than 25 percent of voters felt close to particular parties, and less than 20 percent felt definitely opposed to voting for any party after the last three Parliamentary Elections. These figures are as far cry from the results of surveys conducted by the Statistics Department of Madras Christian College from the early 1970s to the early 1990s, in which between 55 percent and 70 percent of the respondents consistently expressed strong support for either the DMK or the AIADMK, and for the top leaders of these two parties. An equally large proportion said they were strongly opposed to either of the major Dravidian parties, as well as the top leaders of either party.

The decline in enthusiasm for the major parties brought with it a decline in voter participation rates in the 1990s, despite the growing attachment of small segments of the electorate to the new parties. While participation rates ranged between 65.4 percent and 73.6 percent in the three elections of the 1980s, they ranged between 58.0 percent and 66.9 percent in the four elections of the 1990s.
Among the elections of the 1990s, it was only in 1996 that voters turnout exceeded the lowest level it reached in the 1980s. Participation rates were increased in 1996 by a temporary surge of opposition to the AIADMK, rather than enthusiasm for the DMK. Participation rates were especially low in 1998 and 1999, partly due to the frequency of elections, declining below the levels registered in the State since 1962. However, the decline has only brought Tamil Nadu’s participation rates down to approximately the all India average. Tamil Nadu has ceased to be one of the more politically effervescent Indian states.

Although some voters became alienated from politics, more adopted a tactical approach to voting. Fewer voters are deeply loyal to specific parties or influenced by the extent of similarity in outlook between alliance partners. Thus, there was no major voter shift away from the DMK when the party allied itself in 1999 with the BJP, with which the DMK had been at odds for long. This contrasts with the rejection of a DMK – Congress (I) alliance by voters in the 1980 Assembly Elections, although the DMK’s outlook differed less from Congress(I)’s than from the BJP’s, and the DMK had been allied with Congress earlier but not with the BJP. Voter alignments became more fluid because of the decline in the distinctive character of the State’s two major parties and in the cohesion of their sub-cultures, the Congress’s fragmentation in the State, and the adjustment of voters to the frequent changes in alliance composition since 1996.
Table 1.1

Voter Participation Rates in Tamil Nadu in Parliamentary Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>55.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>70.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>76.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>61.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>65.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>73.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>69.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>66.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>61.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Parties more readily bring the votes of those who prefer them to the alliances they join. The votes of the niche parties are especially portable from alliance to alliance. The PMK was crucial in bringing 54.9 percent of the Vanniar vote to the DMK led alliance in 1999, helping this alliance win in the northern plains, where the Vanniars are most numerous. The DMK led alliance polled 50.1 percent of the vote to the AIADMK led alliance’s 41.2 percent in the northern plains in 1999, reversing the experience of 1998 when the number were 42.0 percent and 49.0 percent respectively.

Although the two SC parties made their chances of winning seats slim by joining the third TMC (C) led alliance in 1999, the CSDS survey estimated that 41.3 percent of SCs voted for this alliance, and the SC parties no doubt were a major reason for this.32

32 This estimate of SC support for the third alliance in unreliable as an SC caste, claimed to be the primary support base of the strongest SC party, was over sampled. To add to the problem, the PT has mainly mobilized the Pallar, not the Arunthathiyar, and the Pallar are the largest SC caste of the southern plains,
This was especially true in the Southern plains, the heartland of the strongest SC party, the PT, where the third alliance fared much better than elsewhere, polling 13.8 percent of the vote. The portability of many SC and Vanniar votes across alliances is no doubt because caste parties have gained greatest support among these groups. Indeed, the SCs and the Vanniars reported the greatest willingness to vote along caste lines in 1999 – 36.6 percent and 26.6 percent of them did, compared to 20.1 percent of the State’s population and only 13.9 percent of the Mukkulathor, who are among Tamil Nadu’s two largest castes.33

Medium Term Shifts Among Some Groups

Until the 1990s, the AIADMK was especially preferred by the SCs and the poor, and in rural areas, and the DMK was strongest among the middling status and in urban areas. The erosion of SC support for the AIADMK was especially evident when the party suffered its worst reverse in 1996. Much of this support was diverted to the DMK in 1996 and 1998, but also to the SC parties in 1999. The DMK led alliance outpolled the AIADMK led alliance even more among the SCs than among the OBCs in 1996 and received the largest chunk where the third alliance performed best. The western plains, where the Arunthathiyar are concentrated, witnessed the third alliance’s worst performance, partly because the Arunthathiyar are Tamil Nadu’s major SC least organized along caste lines. Such problems are not evident in the figures regarding other castes of the state in the 1999 survey results. See the CSDS team’s report on its 1999 survey of Tamil Nadu in Frontline, November 19, 1999, pp.50-52.

The caste categories reported in the 1998 CSDS survey of Tamil Nadu are far more questionable as castes numerous in northern India, but barely present in Tamil Nadu, are said to account for 5 percent to 12 percent of the Tamil Nadu sample. This is either because Tamil Nadu’s castes are wrongly labeled or because the sample entirely fails to represent Tamil Nadu’s caste structure, probably the former. Neither the survey’s national coordinator nor its state coordinator could clarify how to translate the reported caste categories for the Tamil Nadu sample. The aggregate caste categories reported in the 1998 survey are probably more reliable, but are less related to voter alignments. Scholars of voting and public opinion in India should be aware of such problems as the results of the CSDS surveys are used in many journalistic and academic analyses, including in parts of this chapter. These problems do not detract from the utility of these surveys for many purposes, but indicate the need to read their results carefully.

33The low figures among the Mukkulathor are related to the weakness of a new Mukkulathor Party; the Thevar Peravai.
of the SC vote in 1998 too. A popularity of the SCs is said to have favoured the minor alliance including the two major SC parties in 1999. The shift in SC support is a response to the decline of the AIADMK’s paternalist populism, the growth in caste conflict in the SC parties’ pockets of strength and the support that the AIADMK enjoys among some of the OBCs locked in conflict with the SCs.

Although the DMK gained greater SC support over the last few years and SC OBC conflicts have increased through this period, no major OBC caste has in response abandoned the DMK in large numbers, as the Vanniars did for other reasons. Mukkulathor-SC conflict has a long history in the southern plains and the Tamiraparani valley and became more bloody in the 1990s. The DMK enjoyed considerable Mukkulathor support from the late 1960s onwards, while much of the SC support was divided in these zones between the AIADMK and Congress offshoots until the early 1990s. Although the SCs in these areas have shifted to the SC parties and the DMK to a significant extent, the DMK simultaneously retained the support of many Mukkulathor even in the 1999 elections, in which Mukkulathor favoured the DMK led alliance over the AIADMK led alliance, 57.0 percent to 30.4 percent.34

The urban/rural foci of the major Dravidian parties’ strength have also changed. The DMK led alliance outpolled its major opponent in both urban and rural areas, as well as among most social groups, in 1996. it continued to vastly outdo the AIADMK led alliance in rural areas even while lagging behind the latter in urban areas in 1999, although it only got 5.4 percent more of the popular vote overall.35 The changes the AIADMK underwent clearly met with more opposition in rural than in urban areas. More scanty evidence

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34 The DMK allies of 1999 with significant Mukkulathor support could have attracted only a minority of their alliance’s Mukkulathor vote. The indication of the DMK retaining considerable support among the Mukkulathor is contrary to journalistic wisdom and the claims many non-DMK politicians made in interviews.
35 No estimated rural/urban vote breakdown was available for 1998.
suggests that the rural poor moved away from the AIADMK more than the urban poor did.\textsuperscript{36}

The considerable erosion of AIADMK support among the SCs, the poor and in rural areas contrasts with the DMK’s continued support among many of the OBCs. The AIADMK’s retreat from paternalist populism led to a greater erosion of the party’s earlier support bases than the DMK’s departure from assertive populism and ethnic militancy did. While fewer people continue to vote for the DMK and the AIADMK from election to election than was the case a decade back, this is more true of the AIADMK. This helped the DMK gain about as much support as the AIADMK or more in the last two Parliamentary Elections.\textsuperscript{37} The DMK thus broke free for the pattern in the two decades between the AIADMK’s formation and the early 1990s, when it lagged behind the AIADMK except when the AIADMK was split.

The greater erosion of support for the AIADMK than for the DMK is mainly because there has been greater upward mobility among the intermediate strata than among the lower strata over the last generation. So, more habitual DMK supporters experienced significant improvements in their life circumstances, and are in tune with the party’s gradual reorientation towards upwardly mobile

\textsuperscript{36} The urban poor are estimated to have favoured the AIADMK led alliance overwhelmingly while the rural poor were almost evenly divided between the two major alliances in CSDS’s 1999 survey: This has to be interpreted with caution as the sample of the urban poor was small. However, the AIADMK led alliance is estimated to have done better in each income group in urban than in rural areas. This adds confidence to my assessment that the AIADMK lost more support in rural than in urban areas, and among the rural poor than the urban poor. This assessment is in keeping with party performance in the different assembly segments, and the impression the author got from interviews.

\textsuperscript{37} The 1996 Election results do not represent the trends of the last five years as the anti AIADMK wave, which dominated these Elections, receded. Not much has separated the two major alliances in the 1998 Elections. Even in the 1998 Elections, in which the DMK led alliance trained behind the AIADMK led alliance, 28.6 percent of those who gave a definite answer said they would have voted for the DMK in the absence of alliances, while only 20.2 percent said they would have voted for the AIADMK in this scenario. This suggests that the DMK was at least on a par with the AIADMK among voters in the late 1990s.
groups. Many such DMK supporters are less attached to the politics of Tamil than they once were as they find English a better route to privilege; and are not eager to gain more from OBC militancy than the already existing OBC quotas. So, they are not averse to the DMK’s retreat from a militant politics of language and caste. Fewer members of the groups amongst which the AIADMK enjoyed greatest support until the 1990s find the party’s move away from paternalist populism acceptable as most of them remain somewhat poor and powerless. Jayalalitha’s entanglement in many Court cases regarding charges of corruption and popular revulsion against the violent responses of some AIADMK activists to a Court judgement against their leader in February 2000\textsuperscript{38} may further reduce the AIADMK’s vote share in the next Assembly Elections due in 2001.

**Voter Alignments in the Socio-Ecological Zones**

Although the voting trends of some social groups changed, the zones of relative strength of the two major parties have not changed much. Until the early 1990s, the AIADMK was strongest in the southern and western plains and the Tamirparani valley, while the northern plains and the Kavery valley were the DMK’s strongest zones. The AIADMK suffered its worst reverses in the 1996 Parliamentary Elections in the northern plains and the Kavery valley, where it polled merely 3.1 percent and 1.3 percent of the vote respectively, compared to its State level tally of 7.9 percent; but retained some respectability in the other three zones, where it polled 17.9 percent, 17.1 percent and 13.1 percent. This similar to the experience of the DMK in its worst elections of 1977 and 1991, in which it retained some strength in the northern plains and the Kavery valley, but was routed elsewhere. When it no longer faced strong anti-incumbent feelings in 1998, the AIADMK still performed best in the

\textsuperscript{38} The Hindu, February 3, 4 and 5, 2000; The Hindu, April 29, 2000.
Tamiraparani valley and the southern plains, while polling 25.9 percent of the vote in the State.

The DMK, on the other hand, had its grandest victories of 1996 in the northern plains and its only unimpressive performance in the southern plains, while polling 22.7 percent of the State wide vote. There were similar zonal variations in its performance in 1998, while polling 20.1 percent in the State; and in 1999, when it polled 23.1 percent around the State. The low vote shares of the major parties in particular zones are partly due to the allocation of more seats in these zones to their allies. Nevertheless, the vote shares of parties in the different zones do reflect regional variations in support as constituencies are allocated to parties within alliances based on informed assessments of where these parties have greatest support.

There is less continuity between the zonal variations in the performances of the Congress offshoots since 1996 and the earlier zonal distribution of Congress support. Indeed, there have been many changes in the zones of relative strength of these parties even through the last three elections. This is because the Congress offshoots drew a bigger share of their votes in these elections from their allies, and the Congress subcultures have weakened much further than the Dravidianist subcultures.

There is more continuity in the zonal strengths of the newer parties, closely related in the cases of the caste parties to the zones where the castes they mobilize are concentrated. So, the PMK has performed well since its formation only in the northern plains and, to a lesser extent, the Kavery valley. The PT has similarly done well only in the southern plains and the Tamiraparani valley since it became a minor electoral force in 1998. Although the BJP is not associated with a particular caste, it has performed relatively well with consistency only in the western plains, polling 3.1 percent there in 1996, 24.6 percent in 1998 and 24.0 percent in 1999. However, it is
also strong in the southern plains, where it performed best when it contested on its own in 1996, getting 5.0 percent of the vote while polling 2.9 percent around the State. The zonal concentration of support for the newer parties makes them more valuable allies.

Despite the continuities in the zonal base of the DMK and the AIADMK, these parties lost some support even in their zones of strength. The DMK lost considerable support to the PMK in the northern plains, and to a lesser extent in the Kavery valley. The AIADMK lost support in the western plains to the BJP; and in the southern plains and the Tamiraparani valley to the DMK, the BJP, and the PT.

**Conclusion**

Tamil Nadu had taken active participation in the pre-independence politics of the nation. The budding desire for independence had generated numerous volunteers in the State who sacrificed their lives in the service of the nation. The political scenario of Tamil Nadu was dominated by the Congress Party after 1947 which gave way to the Dravidian populist mobilization in the 1960s. Since 1967, the regional political parties took active participation in the State politics.

The DMK and the AIADMK dominated Tamil Nadu politics for a generation based on the waves of ethnic and populist mobilization they led. They became weaker in several respects over the decade because of their disengagement from mass mobilization, their weakened association with distinct outlooks and their earlier social basis, and the emergence of new parties occupying specific social niches. While the extent of loyal support declined for the major Dravidian parties, the share of these parties in the popular vote in state assembly elections did not decrease much. As these parties continue to be the major contenders to rule the state, a significant position of the electorate votes for one of these parties based on
tactical considerations that vary from election to election. The DMK and the AIADMK remain the strongest forces in Parliamentary Elections too, in which major national/pan-Indian parties need an alliance with one of them. The emergence of viable national/pan-Indian alternatives to the Congress (I) changed patterns of competition in Parliamentary elections.

The changes over the last decade in the array of political forces changed alliance patterns and vote shares after 1998 Parliamentary Elections. The major Dravidian parties contested more seats in these Elections than they earlier had in Parliamentary Elections, and so their vote shares did not decline. While newer parties were allocated more seats in the major alliances and got a higher share of the vote, the Congress (I)’s vote share declined. The political changes of the last decade are also likely to change alliance patterns and outcomes in the next assembly Elections of 2001. the seats contested by the DMK and the AIADMK and the combined vote share of these parties are likely to decline, reflecting the decline in the support they enjoy and the growth of newer parties.\(^{39}\) The AIADMK lost more loyal support than the DMK did, but has addressed this problem so far only by forming alliances with more parties.

Although the major Dravidian parties retreated from mobilization, the ethnic and populist sentiments aroused by these parties remain strong across boundaries of partisanship. So, the vast majority of voters gives Tamil Nadu priority over India, and support major populist policies such as the free lunch scheme and the OBC quotas. Besides, most of the new political forces that are now at the forefront of mobilization also employ ethnic or populist appeals. Assertive populism is central to both the MDMK and the PMK, the strongest of the new parties. Notions of Tamil ethnicity are important

\(^{39}\) The combined vote share of the two major parties will probably decline below 60 percent, a level below which it dipped after 1977 only when the AIADMK was temporarily split in 1989.
to the MDMK and are also voiced by the PMK, although they do not motivate much of the PMK’s support. The notions of caste, central to the PMK and the other caste parties, are different from those employed by the DMK and the AIADMK as they do not enable building broad multi-caste social coalitions which share language and territory. Among the newly growing political forces, the BJP departs most from the Dravidian parties’ appeals and Tamil Nadu’s earlier political history because of its religious nationalism. The BJP’s growth remains modest so far, but the party has become a viable alternative to the Congress (I) in Tamil Nadu too as a national party contending for Parliamentary seats.

The weakening of loyalties towards the DMK and the AIADMK has gone along with a decline in the organizational pluralism of these parties. The political forces that have grown recently are also characterized by limited organizational pluralism. So, social pluralism became weaker and the accountability declined in Tamil Nadu in the 1990s. Conflict has increased along both caste and religious boundaries, a trend that seems likely to continue. There is considerable discontent with the rule of the major Dravidian parties, which continued through the 1990s, although only some groups have responded to this by mobilizing behind newer parties.

The weakened links between the major Dravidian parties and society mean that continuity of support for these parties is more uncertain than it was a decade earlier. The extent to which such support declines depends partly on the nature of such alternatives as emerge. More caste parties might grow, but will face limits to their growth similar to those that have restricted the existing caste parties. Among the newer parties, the BJP has the greatest potential to become a major electoral force because it aims to mobilize a far more numerous community. Besides, changes in the DMK have lowered some of the earlier barriers to the BJP’s growth. As the BJP has amply
demonstrated its tendency to undermine social pluralism, the extent of its growth over the next decade will greatly influence the future of pluralism in Tamil Nadu.

While voter alignments have become more fluid, they are also unlikely to change rapidly in a political society crowded with parties that are somewhat established in different social niches. So, neither the quick decline of the major Dravidian parties nor the meteoric rise of the BJP or other political forces is likely.

The details furnished about the voting behaviour of the electorate in Tamil Nadu have been analyzed in this chapter in macro perspective. The real reasons for the political apathy and political involvement of the electorate could be analyzed more effectively by detailed analysis at micro level. Therefore, the researcher thought it appropriate to take up a research study on the voting behaviour of the electorate in Tamil Nadu with reference to Tirunelveli Parliamentary Constituency.