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POLITICAL COMMUNICATION OF DRAVIDIAN PARTIES IN TAMIL NADU: ACTIVISM, POPULISM, AND WELFARE: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Thiruppathi P* and V Anil Kumar**

Abstract

This paper, drawing on a systematic review of literature, analyses the dynamic reciprocity existing between populism, welfare programs, activism and political communication at play in Tamil Nadu's political terrain. It narrates the historical antecedents and contemporary communication strategies adopted by Dravidian parties through a review of academic literature. Further, it emphasizes the significance of political communication in the construction of public discourse, policy agendas, and election campaigns as a 'bridge' between politicians and citizens. Further, the work delves into the social and political context of Tamil Nadu, highlighting how and why regional identity, linguistic politics, and cultural symbols have gained such traction in voter mobilization and party rhetoric. It also studies the role of digital media technologies in political communication as well as their effects on public participation and opinion.

Keywords: Political Communication, Tamil Nadu, Dravidian Parties, Activism, Populism, Welfare, Media, Indian Politics

Introduction

This article explores the dynamics of political communication in Tamil Nadu based on the Dravidian political ideology, which highlights the foundational elements that include culture, language, and commitment to social justice. It discusses three critical variables that are specific to Tamil Nadu: mobilization through Dravidian ideology, growth of populism, and welfare-related activities. The influence of direct political communication is an understudied area in all the existing research on public awareness, effectiveness, citizenship engagement, and participation. It tries to unpack these relationships in conjunction with intermediary variables including the party-based activism of Dravidian parties, populism, and welfare communication. The analysis illustrates the subtle interface between media ideologies and citizens' involvement in creating a system of governance and social welfare policy in Tamil Nadu. Effective communication strategies of the parties, through welfare programs implemented by them, give efficacy to welfare policies. Agenda-setting theory contributes to the framework of Dravidian political communication; it states that mass media may influence which matters the audience should take serious without actually influencing what the audience thinks of those issues. Lippmann (1922) noted that mass media plays the doctrinal role between global events and public perceptions. Denton and Woodward (1995) noted that political marketing refers to how political organizations may take over communication tactics from the private sector to achieve strategic goals, such as vote seeking or policy change. As such, political communication includes both the allocation of public resources and the use of authority. This modality of usage—utilizing cinema, television, and, more

* Ph.D. Research Student, Centre for Political Institutions, Governance and Development (CPIGD), Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Bengaluru. E-mail: thiruppathi@isec.ac.in.

** Professor & Head, Centre for Political Institutions, Governance and Development (CPIGD), Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Bengaluru. E-mail: anilkumar@isec.ac.in

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recently, social media as primary vehicles for political speech—has shaped the practice of politics in the Dravidian world. M. Karunanidhi and M.G. Ramachandran, and J. Jayalalithaa were visionaries in using these platforms to sustain different political narratives that always reaffirmed Tamil identity and mobilized the vote. Such emerging new routes for citizen mobilization, inspired by changes in communication modalities, regional identity, linguistic politics, and populist welfare initiatives notwithstanding, have nevertheless remained highly prescient on the policy scene.

The critical definitions posited by Swanson and Nimmo (1996) have been integrated with those of Denton and Woodward (1985) to explicate the mechanisms through which communication influences public cognition, convictions, and conduct. Examining media strategies of Dravidian parties, from traditional film and television to contemporary digital platforms like WhatsApp and Twitter, will help explain their agenda-setting role, shaping of public perception, and how they maintain voter loyalty. Two cases from the DMK and AIADMK will be used to explain their focus on welfare programs and identity politics. The article takes the theme of activism as a communicative instrument, deeply ingrained in social justice and anti-Brahmin rhetoric, and uses the legacies of leaders such as Periyar and Annadurai to exemplify how symbolic communication fosters Tamil identity. Welfare initiatives such as free laptops and houses are analysed as strategic means of mobilizing marginalized populations. It discusses the appeal of populist rhetoric with respect to its resonance among lower socio-economic and rural constituents, focusing intrinsically on caste dynamics and regional pride. The move towards digital platforms is described as a double-edged phenomenon, which offers the potential for engagement but poses the problem of digital manipulation and exacerbation of the digital divide. The article traces the development of Dravidian political communication from the Justice Party era to the contemporary digital landscape and evaluates how strategic approaches have adapted to media and societal change. In conclusion, it is seen that Dravidian parties efficiently combine activism, welfare provision, and populism; however, digital media creates new complexities and opportunities for engagement with issues of caste, gender, and regional identity.

Methods

The paper draws on a systematic review of literature, case studies, and theoretical frameworks to understand how these strategies have evolved and influenced voter engagement. The paper engages in a review of most academic works by scholars, including Swanson, Nimmo, Denton, and Rajagopal on defining political communication and studying its role in creating a sense of public awareness and participation.

Thematic Approach

The paper discusses themes that include activism, populism, and welfare via case studies of leaders: Periyar, Annadurai, Karunanidhi, M. G. Ramachandran, and J. Jayalalithaa. It further describes how the Dravidian parties have moved from a traditional media platform like cinemas and TV to the emerging digital platforms of WhatsApp and Twitter. Agenda-setting theory is used to elucidate how Dravidian parties shape public opinion through issue salience. Further, it examines the function of media in voter retention and reiteration of party communications.

Case Studies

The two case studies on DMK and AIADMK highlight their usage of welfare schemes and populist rhetoric. It focuses on specific schemes such as free laptops, free housing, and also strategic usage of Tamil cinema for political messages.

Digital Transition

The study reviews the application of digital media (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp) in mobilizing voters and communicating political messages while countering the negative aspects of digital manipulation.

Data Analysis

The paper examines data from historical records, media content, and electoral outcomes to analyse the effectiveness of the Dravidian communication strategy. This method will provide a crystal-clear understanding of how Dravidian parties apply political communication to form the political discourse of Tamil Nadu.

Political Communication: Definitions

Scholars have generated myriad definitions that point out the impact of political communication on public awareness and political results. According to Swanson and Nimmo (1996), "*the strategic use of communication to influence public knowledge, beliefs, and action on political matters*," thus establishing the intentional impact on public thought and action. Similarly, Denton and Woodward define political communication as "*ways and intentions of message senders to influence the political environment*," focusing on the intended influence of political actors. On a broader level, Chaffee (2005) defines it as "*the role of communication in the political process*," situating it as a pivotal function of political dynamics. Graber and Smith (2011) define political communication as the construction, sending, receiving, and processing of messages that potentially have a significant direct or indirect impact on politics. Last but not least, Jamieson and Cappella (1996) defined it as the study of how information is disseminated, received and interpreted in a political context, concentrating on the flow and interpretation of political information among the people. Amidst these definitions, the overall profile of political communication, being complex and purposeful, comes to the fore in constituting political environments and forming public opinion.

Dravidian parties, for example, the DMK and AIADMK, tap into social justice communication to pinpoint the issues that form their policies as welfare schemes in promoting social justice, with Dalits, backward classes, and women being the main issues that have been brought forward. Campaigns in Tamil Nadu, which highly rely on welfare populism, make loyalty to the party equal to material reward that includes free laptops and subsidized goods. Language is at the heart of such movements and stands for cultural identity and political resistance against northern dominance. These messages are continued through traditional media and social media networks, which sustain party narratives and inform public opinion (Rajagopal, 2001). Dravidian politics has a strongly leader-centric approach, and such as Karunanidhi, J. Jayalalithaa, and MGR have played a crucial role in political communication ,

wherein they portray the party ideology with populist rhetoric combined with personal charisma. This communication strategy helped Dravidian parties shape the political identity of Tamil Nadu positively in terms of engaging feelings of self-respect through activism, populism, and welfare.

Looking into Agenda-Setting

This agenda-setting theory, in simple terms, postulates that mass media significantly determines what they 'ought to think' rather than mirroring what they 'think'. Walter Lippmann's seminal work *Public Opinion*, published in 1922, presents the concept that "mass media are the dogma connection between events in the world and the images in the minds of the public." Although Lippmann never used the term "agenda-setting" himself, one can easily conclude that his idea has lived on in the way it is applied today.

Lasswell's (1948) communication model targets the propaganda function of communication: "Who says what, in which channel, to whom, and with what effect?" holds the basic formula of communication analysis (Lasswell, 1948, p. 45). Such a model works out aptly in the case of Dravidian parties who utilized mass media, cinema, and populist rhetoric for enlisting their electorate. M. Karunanidhi, M.G. Ramachandran, and Jayalalithaa used these facilities for framing their political narratives and forming the Tamil identity. Empirical Evidence: McCombs and Shaw (1972) provided evidence for Lippmann's assumptions. The results proved "the power of mass media and its influence on the public agenda". Indeed, media plays a vital role in shaping the public's agendas, demonstrating the agenda-setting capacities of communication. It becomes important to infer how they affect public discourses in Tamil Nadu, how they shape the perception of the electorate and how they encourage public involvement in politics to understand the ways through which these parties exploit this theory.

McClure and Patterson (1974) attempted to determine whether the issues that continued to appeared in television news could influence viewers' attitudes. They examined "the effects of television news coverage of the 1972 presidential election" in America, noting how such media have been given significant considerations for shaping electoral results. In 1965, James E. Greg concluded that in newspaper endorsements, "local endorsements were more influential than national and state endorsements," thus suggesting the complex relationship between the media and voter behaviour.

Agenda-setting theory was famously invoked in the 1968 presidential election when McCombs and Shaw coined the term. In the 1964-1965 period, Hardgrave noted that DMK's communication strategy was aimed at forming and communicating the identity and political independence of Tamil nationalism, which was a part of this larger nationalist movement in Tamil Nadu, drawing from anti-Brahmin sentiments. Pye discussed the idea of political development through, *"The concept of political development must account for the tensions between tradition and modernization"* (Pye, 1965, p. 67). The work provides a theoretical grounding for exploring the ways in which Dravidian parties use communication to advance their development agendas. Their potential to continuously innovate in political communication – from social media today to motion pictures decades back – reflects flexibility and robustness towards changing technology as well as voter demographics. Baker and Washbrook (1975) give much importance to regional parties, such as Dravidian parties in their historical study of South Indian political institutions, and how they have managed change over the studied period.

According to them, *"the Dravidian political landscape between 1880-1940 was characterized by a distinctive regional nationalism that played a pivotal role in shaping South Indian political institutions."* (p 125). They emphasize the significance of political communication techniques that this region established way back. The coming to terms with the historical context of political communication and institutions traces the origin of the development of Dravidian political strategies. Castells explains, *"Power in the network society is chiefly exercised through communication networks that structure human activity"* (Castells, 2009, p. 45). Another series of studies compares and contrasts political communication in Tamil Nadu, highlighting marked differences compared with the latter in Karnataka, primarily due to regional identity politics.

The study traces all the channels of communication impacting political participation in Tamil Nadu, emphasizing how local language media, which plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse. This study further highlights the fact that context shapes campaign messages related to elections, while also pointing out challenges in voter outreach. Dravidian electoral strategies depend much on a mix of welfare policies and identity politics. A notable point is that *"political advertisements emphasise message, tone, and candidates' personality at the expenses of real problems"* (Hasrama. 2016, p. 67), which underscores the communication in emerging democracies. There exists the practice of potentially misleading voters and influencing their behaviour on an emotional rather than rational basis. This is a relevant observation about the Dravidian parties, who strategically communicate to evoke emotional resonance and consolidate voter loyalty. The challenge for these parties is to move beyond mere persuasion and engage voters meaningfully with structural issues through their communication strategy. The study examines the involvement of parties in crisis communication. Dravidian parties have always encountered and dealt with crises through effective and strategic attempts of communication. In this regard, the study offers excellent insight into the ways in which parties advertise, but also if such an approach is effective in policymaking.

Role of Media

Politicians' speeches at public rallies and events are excellent mobilizing agents for political action. Many describe the mass "language influence," whereby the political leaders use rhetoric to influence both the reasoning and emotions of their followers. The television, according to Maya Ranganathan's *Television in Tamil Nadu Politics*, is a political communicative tool that emerged out of a "free and unconditional viewing experience." This study, therefore, reveals the possibility of the usage of television in politics, especially regarding the 2006 assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, where the free television sets' pledge was made in election manifestos (Rajagopal, 2001, p. 277).

The role of private television channels in Tamil Nadu serves as an example of political activity, offering a "Habermasian public sphere." Mass media is the most capable tool for political communication. This is how public opinion influences mass media. According to Bevan, Jay, and Kay's *Mass Communication Theory* (2005), there are actual theories of mass communication that include medium, audience, time, and circumstances. Theories of media are human inventions that aim to resolve particular problems. Lievrouw and Livingstone (2002) in *The Handbook of New Media*, argue that while the development of the internet-enabled instant information sharing, personal communication

evolved. Jennings Bryant and Dolph Zillman, on the other hand, offer a rich variety of approaches to mass communication, among which are the ethical norms to be attained by scientific communication. Political effects by media content are explored by McLeod, Koziki, and McLeod (2002), who assert that issues in political systems are largely influenced by social structures rather than media alone.

Mundorf, & Laird, K. R. (2002) argue that although information technology shapes the form of social interaction, such interaction also seems to reduce the functionality of human communication. It will thus be a theme that will find resonance within election canvassing and political messaging where users of the internet will probably perceive their use as less effective than traditional methods of communication. Harold A. Innis (2006) in *Bias of Communication* has explored the "time-dependent" properties of media and the role of media in public discourse and debates, arguing that the information transmitted by media is time and place dependent. Here, he has provided an example of how communication forms, oral traditions and written records, have influenced societal activities and public thinking. Wilson Desert, Jr. organizes and frames a vast number of concerns related to media penetration and education. Computer-based services are elaborating on old media and new media, reorganizing the world's communication networks.

According to Huntington (1965), political development is anchored on the adaptation of institutions and communication strategies to changing social realities. The understanding of how these parties adapt to such challenges in an ever-changing media landscape has been established to be an important factor of this study. The use of media, especially film and television by the Dravidian parties could be termed as a "narcotizing dysfunction," where political messages are received passively and not translated to action (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948).

According to this theory, the mass media have three social function keys: First, they *"status conferral function."* Second, they *"enforce certain social norms and can initiate organized social action by exposing conditions that conflict with public morality"* (Paul Felix Lazarsfeld - ieu.edu.tr). Third, mass media can cause a "narcotizing dysfunction," by which they *"occupy so much of the audience's attention that 'little time remains for social and political action'"* (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1948, p. 101). The theory really forces the emergence of media and journalists as powerful in moulding public opinion.

This is important for comprehending how personality played into Dravidian politics. The leadership of *"C.N. Annadurai's use of propaganda was both personal and populist, resonating with the Tamil masses"* (Price, 1999, p. 110). Price further writes, "DMK leader C.N. Annadurai used person-centered propaganda to achieve a close personal contact with the public. All his talks, writings, and media appearances were directed at projecting a friendly and engaging personality. He wonders whether populism has, in reality, improved the lives of the lower income people or it is only a game of politics to garner votes. Harris examines the populist policies of Tamil Nadu and concludes that such policies have either helped the state or merely represented a rhetoric – a type of political jargon meant to garner votes. Populism is the mass aspect of Dravidian communication politics since welfare schemes are the leadership's predominant tool for maintaining electoral support. Harris' critique has been particularly important in examining how this style of communication might prove deficient for medium and long-term economic growth.

The use of Tamil cinema by *"M.G.R's use of cinema for political purposes set the standard for future Dravidian leaders"* (Manohar, 2002, p. 56). According to Hardgrave, M.G.R played an effective role in diffusing the party's message into the grassroots level of politics by popularizing populist and Tamil nationalist messages through the screen. *"Tamil cinema has long been a vehicle for political communication, especially in the hands of leaders like M.G.R"* (Hardgrave, 1973, p. 58). The Dravidian political movement has conventionally relied on cinema to communicate effectively. The media has played a historical role in representing the Dravidian parties through its association with the Dravidian movement. The dynamic change of political stories via political narratives in Tamil Nadu has evolved to reflect both the aspirations and frustrations of the electorate. It elaborates how themes of the Dravidian party change according to changing issues and changing moods of the voters. The study finds that the political leadership in Tamil Nadu rely a great deal on media strategies to personalize politics. It is particularly crucial for understanding the media tactics portrayed by prominent Dravidian leaders and how these tactics make them successful politicians. It captures how the Dravidian parties use media. Social media has revolutionized Dravidian political campaigns, creating a direct hotline between leaders and voters. Dravidian parties have been utilizing various media forms for campaigning, such as print, radio, and television. The entire focus is laid on areas where cultural variables are crossed by Dravidian communication strategies that are strongly interwoven with cultural discourses, effective for the mobilization of publics in Tamil Nadu. Therefore, it is significant to study the communication strategy of the Dravidian parties, specifically how they pursue welfare schemes as an integral activity for developing the livelihoods of the poor. The communication strategies adopted by the Dravidian parties for promoting welfare schemes as integral instruments of improving the livelihood of the poor must be investigated, with further consideration of media's role in this process. The charismatic leadership of C.N. Annadurai his and oratory skills were great stimuli for popular opinion to make a movement in favour of DMK (Price P., 1999). Wyatt (2007) noted that the "traditional" modes of populist communication and public engagement in Tamil Nadu is fuelled by a dynamic interplay between political communication and media representation.

Activism as a Communication Tool

Speeches are meant to encourage reflection on social practices. M. S. S. Pandian (2007) examines how the categories of 'Brahmin' and 'Non-Brahmin' mutually constituted colonial modernity, rendered antagonistic politics ordinary in contemporary Tamil Nadu. V. Geetha and S. V. Rajadurai trace the socio-political history of the non-Brahmin Dravidian movement, quite vividly demonstrating that anti-caste radicalism constituted an essential contribution of Iyothee Thass' handling of caste, as well as Periyar's Self- Respect Movement in turning the cause into a call for dignity, justice, and equality. The non-Brahmin Dravidian movement shaped modern Tamil identity that still marks Tamil politics. Marguerite Ross Barnett (1976) defines Tamil nationalism as cultural nationalism based on collective cultural characteristics rather than territorial identity. Eugene F. Irschick 1969 traces the resentment of the backward castes at the hegemony of Brahmins in the Madras Presidency, depicting how historical grievances were mobilized in a collective struggle by gaining the patronage of the British government. G. Palanithurai and R. Thandavan (1993) probe Dravidian politics from an ethnic perspective, explaining

how the movement mobilized and utilized race, language, and culture to politicize and build solidarity. They discuss how 'ethnic manipulators' exploited these bonds to further their economic and cultural interests in Tamil Nadu. As such, M. S. S. Pandian (2015) analyses the way in which M.G.R deploys his cinematic image building a political personality, referring to this as a 'constructed biography,' where M.G.R's screen incarnations and populist welfare schemes immortalized him in Tamil Nadu's political landscape.

G. Palanithurai (1988) writes about E.V.R. Periyar's contributions to ethnic leadership and social change in Tamil Nadu, focusing on anti-Brahminism, social equality, and women's emancipation, showing how these values continue to influence Tamil society. S. Narayan (2018) explores how DMK's welfare schemes during 1967–1977 changed the manner of governance and framed ideology in Tamil Nadu, dealing with how welfare programs are intertwined with ideology in DMK's governance but keeps mum on Dalit representation. B.S. Chandrababu (1993) deals with the historic development process of the Self-Respect Movement under Social Protest and Its Impact on Tamil Nadu. K. Nambi Aarooran's Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism during 1905–1944 talks about the role of E.V.R. in Dravidian nationalism. P. Ramamurti (1987) analyses the failure of the Dravidian movement on economic and linguistic grounds but does observe the early success of the Justice Party.

Manavalli explores how invented traditions have articulated regional identities in South India: *"The 1991 Tamil Nadu elections were characterized by a potent mix of charismatic leadership and identity-based appeals"* (Manavalli, 2008, p. 78). Premkumar traced the transformation of the modern style of rhetorical strategies into the modern form of the Dravidian movement, changing it, *"The genesis of the Dravidian movement can be traced back to the socio-political conditions in Madras between 1852-1917"* (Premkumar, G.2001, p. 77). Saxena and Singh investigate the relationship between political ideologies and institutional practices in Indian politics, *"The ideologies of Indian politics, particularly in the south, have been shaped by regional movements like the Dravidian"* (Saxena & Singh, 2003, p. 94). Huntington discusses the process of political development and decay *"Political decay sets in when institutions fail to adapt to social and economic changes"* (Huntington, 1965, p. 78).

Basu discusses *"Adi Dravida politics emerged as a significant force in the early 20th century, fueled by a distinct anti-caste rhetoric"* (Basu R. S., 2011, p. 203). Katz and Lazarsfeld first proposed a two-step flow of communication theory: *"Personal influence continues to play a critical role in the flow of mass communications"* (Katz E. & Lazarsfeld P. F., 1955, p. 27). Cohen explained the incredible influence of media in forming political messages (Cohen, 1963). While examining how the Dravidian movement revolutionized Tamil politics by introducing an ideology that blended social reform with political empowerment, Ramachandran looks into the role of print and broadcast media in Tamil Nadu politics, which determines their impact on the kind of communication strategies applied in Tamil Nadu politics (Ramachandran, 2011).

Welfare as a Communication Tool

Karl W. Deutsch's *The Nerves of Government* (1963) is a model of political communication that likens communications channels to a human nervous system in forming political direction and decision-making. Kalaiyarasan and Vijayabaskar have come up with a "Dravidian Model", which credits socio-economic

development in Tamil Nadu to social inclusion policies developed from data analysis of the 2011 census. According to them, only inclusive economic growth is feasible with the potency of proper political movements against caste inequalities. V. K. Natraj and Vaidyanathan (2014) deconstruct development narratives in Tamil Nadu, discussing institution of social safety nets and innovative public policy practices, most especially in relation to the state of farmer suicides. Others find their discussion more worldly: welfare programs such as midday meal – tracing its roots back to the schemes initiated by the Justice Party against Brahminical domination.

Narayan (2018) studies the impact of Dravidian politics on public policy, focusing on the ideological continuity between the parties of the Dravidian ideology on educational, health, and welfare aspects. This is an important history in perspective to which policies had been communicated to the electorate to gain electoral advantage. Ramajayam examines the 2019 Lok Sabha poll results in Tamil Nadu with reconsolidation of caste-based politics and reinforcement of the Dravidian identity (Ramajayam P. 2019). C.J. Baker and D.A. Washbrook trace administrative institutions in southern India to understand how changes in the political scenario impacted national movements as well as the rise of caste organizations within the Madras Presidency (1880-1940). Norris focuses on the interaction between political communication and democratic politics, using media support to openness and responsibility. *"Democratic politics thrive when political communications are transparent and inclusive"* (Norris P., 2001, p. 134). Such a historical view is offered by Pandian, but there lies a requirement for a contemporary analysis of how such ideological changes are reflected in current times' political communication, especially in the digital age. Direct expression of the Dravidian model encompasses free electricity, mid-day meals, and public housing, which are some of the welfare-based political communications of Dravidian parties. Welfare schemes form an important tenor of DMK and AIADMK rhetoric for the message, especially for lower-income and rural voters. *"The Dravidian model successfully integrates populism with welfare, creating a political economy unique to Tamil Nadu"* (Kalaiyarasan & Vijayabaskar, 2021, p. 120).

During the 1991 election, the DMK and AIADMK had employed focused communication by concentrating on specific groups of the voters (Manivannan, 1992). On these lines, the parties communicate their welfare and development agenda. Harris examines the populist policies of Tamil Nadu and how they have been successful with respect to welfare programs and their impact on economic growth (Harris J., 2001). How welfare schemes are communicated through public channels, Dravidian welfare schemes are as much about economic relief as they are about political communication. Political communication has been crucial in maintaining the Dravidian party image over the decades. It can be observed that the connection and impact of voters' choice on electoral behaviour in Tamil Nadu is increasingly shaped by media portrayal of leaders and policies.

Study of Populism as a Strategy

Somehow, populism has evoked much controversy about its connection to democracy. According to Andrew Wyatt, Tamil-style populism won over the masses through carefully crafted political images (Wyatt, 2007). The DMK and the AIADMK have effectively utilized populist rhetoric to gain mass attention and shape a new narrative of politics in their parties. John Harriss and Narendra Subramanian

affirm the centrality of identity politics in Tamil Nadu based on the fact that "the success of populism in Tamil Nadu owes much to the mobilization of identity-based politics" (Subramanian, 1999, p. 87). The development of a political community has been significant for the development of civic life because the welfare schemes have become the primary functions of the communication policies of the Dravidian parties.

Sussman (1997) thus places much more pressure on new innovations for political communication in the 21st century and argues that anything brought out as an advancement will alter public-to-government interaction tremendously. This transformation really comes in, especially in the context of Dravidian politics – how parties adapt to those lines. In South India, populist tactics are used by the Dravidian parties to influence electoral politics. The populism under discussion here is special for its blend of cultural and political narratives. This paper presents a model to help explain why the populist tactics of the Dravidian parties form a critical component of their communications policies.

Pandian analyses how the notion of Dravidian parties shifted from early anti-caste and anti-Brahmin movements to broad populist fronts that include welfare schemes and identity politics. *"The Dravidian ideology transformed substantially between 1900-1940, in the direction of greater inclusiveness and political effectiveness"* (Pandian, 1994, p. 59). Narendra Subramanian (1999) elaborates about *"The success of populism in Tamil Nadu owes much to the mobilization of identity-based politics."* Political parties, citizens, and democracy in South India work together to construct a political community and nurture civic life. The parties' organizational pluralism helped increase tolerance and electoral efficacy (Subramanian, N. 1999, p. 87).

Investigating the Effects of Digital Communication

The introduction of digital media technologies in Tamil Nadu opens avenues of opportunity and raises challenges for the communication of politics. These technologies are associated with furthering some elements of accountability, as well as transparency and citizen participation, but pose problems in terms of data privacy, online manipulation, and the digital divide. The complexity has to be negotiated by the Dravidian parties by following best ethical communication practices, holding meaningful conversations with the public, and using digital resources for inclusive processes. WhatsApp and Instagram are new rallying grounds for conveying the correct political narratives to Tamil Nadu voters. Social media is no longer an impotent tool for just Kollywood stars to reach out to their fans but is also a successful instrument where political parties reach out to people for generating opinion and spreading information. Such immediacy of communication that social media provides has helped political parties in reaching more audiences and tailoring their messages to target particular voter groups.

This will only reflect the media strategies of the Dravidian parties to make their electoral campaign more colourful and stronger. The new digital media channels, being adopted by the Dravidian parties to deliberate and execute their electoral campaigns ranging from advertisements in media to public relation, have not gained full usage potential. Sundaram (2023, p. 45) analyses the effects of social media on political communication in Tamil Nadu to understand how the Dravidian parties use social media to expose their messages to voters and engage in political discourse. *"The rise of social media has transformed the practice of political communication in Tamil Nadu"*. It is a study that will

open a window into how the parties within the Dravidian politics make use of social media channels in their contemporary contexts. There are a lot of researchable avenues, and further research is worth considering: the various strategies put in place through different social media platforms have an influence on voter engagement.

It shows how a Dravidian party takes up cultural symbols and narrative for political communication. The usage of cultural symbols in communication has been essential, specifically the Tamil language. Above all, the study brings out an important feature in creating voter perception and party identity; it will throw more light upon how cultural symbols work in the hands of the Dravidian parties to amplify their political messages to relate to Tamil identity. The public relations strategies utilized by the Dravidian in govern their image and communication with the voters. Media strategies used by Dravidian parties focus both on mass appeal and specific messages.

The importance of this research lies in its understanding the role of public relations in the design of political communication strategies for the Dravidian parties. The two public relations practices form the core of the study but explain nothing about how digital and social media changed these strategies. The study examines the communication policy of the Dravidian parties in promoting their welfare schemes and policies in terms of its success in electorally influencing the parties. Welfare politics in Tamil Nadu is inseparable from the communication strategies of the Dravidian parties. It particularly emphasizes communication of the welfare policy to the electorate and the success of such strategies in generating political support. The study does not extensively explain how digital media has influenced the welfare policy communication and how such communication policies have changed in the age of digitization. The study reveals how Dravidian parties make use of regional media to articulate themselves to their base and shape public opinion. Ramu Manivannan analyses the role of the regional media within the context of political communication and its relevance to politics in Tamil Nadu in particular, focusing on the role of the Dravidian parties. *"Regional media in Tamil Nadu has played a critical role in shaping political discourse"* (Manivannan, 2023). Harris (2001) critically looks at the strengths of Tamil populism in welfare programs while considering its contribution towards political success. Here, he argues that populist politics, after all, brings short-term electoral success but cannot remain in the long run.

Harris's work is crucial in ascertaining whether populist communications help the Dravidian parties. It illuminates how the welfare programs are framed in the voters' minds as a means of acquisition and sustainability of political authority. It does not further articulate the rest of the implications of digital media for populist strategies and how new media channels would influence the sustainability of such policies. In this respect, the part that the press plays in formulating foreign policy is concerned with research that shows it exerts a major influence over public opinion and policy decision. Foreign policy is relevant for explaining why and how media coverage of certain domestic policies (e.g., the policies of Dravidian parties), affect public opinion. It reflects the importance of media involvement in political storytelling. This study demonstrates how identity-oriented communication is a part of a strategic move by the Dravidian parties. It creates an extremely strong emotional and cultural bond between the parties and their electorate, *"Dravidian identity politics has been consolidated through incessant messaging and cultural symbolism"* (Ramajayam, 2019: 64). According to Ramajayam,

the sort of media and cultural messaging, especially in terms of caste and regional identity, which constantly enhances the Dravidian identity politics, is one key element that is more consistent in political communication. Though the study is conceptualized in the framework of more traditional identity-based communication, it will be important to consider these expansions of messages with the new digital media and how political identities can be built and deconstructed through competing narratives.

Sussman examines how new technologies reshape information distribution and citizen engagement. He mentions that new technologies can alter traditional ways of communication and relation between the public and government. "*Information technology has become the key tool for political communication in the 21st century*" (Sussman, 1997, p. 133). For a complete understanding of the ability and prospects of Dravidian parties, it is necessary to perform this research. It offers a perspective by featuring how mass communication changed from mainstream to digital media in laying political communication programs. The study is relevant for understanding how media are used by Dravidian parties for shaping public taste and influencing political behaviour. It establishes a foundation for the analysis of the effectiveness of the media-based communication strategies and leaves a gap in how digital media and social networks influence public opinion and political actions in Tamil Nadu through a focus on traditional mass media. Pandian traces the development of Dravidian ideology from its inception to the mid-20th century and the ways in which ideological changes have affected political communication. It provides insight into the change in Dravidian ideology and how it has come to influence current strategies for political communication (Pandian, 1994). The article throws light upon the nature of impact of political communication strategies upon electoral success, where $r = 0.78$, and focuses on the campaign effectiveness and governmental constructions of the Dravidian parties. A politician's success in Tamil Nadu depends upon his ability to tap into local concerns and narratives. In relation to how to understand elections, this study tests the relationship between communication strategies and electoral outcomes while considering the aspects that determine why elections turn out well for the Dravidian parties.

Evolution of Dravidian Political Communication

This study focuses on the development of political institutions in South India during colonial times with a focus on the way in which such institutions shaped the rise of modern political parties, including the Justice Party. Understanding the development of the Justice Party into the Dravidian movement is essential for understanding the bases of Dravidian political communication. This indeed provided increased emphases on anti-Brahminism and social justice. The development of political institutions also led to the major thrust of these trends. The developments documented by Baker and Washbrook up to 1940, create an interregnum in understanding how the early political structures affected the post-independence communication strategies as the digital age unfolds. Hardgrave researches the symbiotic link between political communications and Tamil cinema, targeting film stars such as M.G. Ramachandran. The key to success in Dravidian political communications is that they gained mastery over cinema; stars like M.G.R. and Jayalalitha wove their political discourse from their celebrity status and films by intertwining entertainment and politics.

The urbanization context and radical populism in Madras, now known as Chennai, form the core of Rudolph's discussion, focusing on how the urban environment shaped the politics of the Dravidian parties. *"The urban life of Madras in the early twentieth century was marked by a growing radical populism, as exemplified by the Dravidian movement"* (Rudolph, 1961, p. 128). He dwells much on the urban appeal of Dravidian populism targeted policies at the slum-dwellers and the working class. The paper is useful for critically understanding how Dravidian parties calibrate political communications for city audiences where Chennai and other cities have long been battling grounds. Campaigns target welfare programs that include public housing for the urban population. This is an important study in the sense that it delineates how the messages of the Dravidian parties in respect of regional and economic issues continue to be valid today.

Manivannan analyses the 1991 Tamil Nadu elections. The report has focused on key issues raised and the strategies adopted by the parties. These strategies continued to highlight issue-oriented communication with a strong emphasis on regionalism, caste, and economic development. Traditional media again mediated all these election strategies, but a gap exists in the comprehension of how these issue-based strategies migrated into digital platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp during the last elections. This study provides a framework for understanding how Dravidian ideologies influence their communication models, especially in governance, social justice, and anti-caste rhetoric. This paper introduces public service provision in Tamil Nadu, particularly the mechanisms of service delivery and political communication. *"Public services in Tamil Nadu are strongly entrenched in the state's political institutions, shaped by Dravidian governance models"* (Srinivasan, 2010, p. 119). It is helpful for understanding how Dravidian parties relate their achievements and policies in the field of public services, describing how the delivery of services is used as a communication tool. It maintains an institutional approach without following how the digital communication is used by the Dravidian parties to present their service delivery achievements. Knowledge of the role played by the digital media in Dravidian politics reveals how modern communication tools and platforms have been adopted by the parties.

Kumar (2017) looks at how new digital media helps in rescripting political campaigning in Tamil Nadu with special reference to the Dravidian parties. The article focuses on the incorporation of social media, websites, and other internet mediums in political communication (Kumar, 2017). It elaborates on the function of public meetings as a way to mobilize politics and voters by Dravidian parties. Public meetings have formed a core part of the Dravidian political mobilization, and they can be seen both as a spectacle and a strategy. This paper explores the historical importance of public meetings and their sustained role in the Dravidian political strategy.

Political Communication of Dravidian Politics

Literature on the political communication aspects of the Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu offers an all-round view of how various strategies are employed to sway voter behaviour and public opinion. Effective crisis communication strategies directly pay off because 65% of the voters responded in the affirmative to such policy responses during their times of crisis. It would mean that effective communication is the only means through which confidence can be maintained amongst the public

(Rajiv, 2020). Modern party systems are strongly associated with the role of regional parties that give people political activities and intervention in policy-making processes. Political parties cannot be summarized through a single theoretical framework, since different types of political systems have unique activities and developments. Academics rarely do anything else other than use Western democratic frameworks to analyse political communication. At its birth, India was a one-party dominant system led by the Congress Party that guided India's freedom movement and led the early years of India's democratic processes. This dominance survived four parliamentary elections between 1952 and 1967. Rajni Kothari used this phenomenon for the first time as "Congress System" and Morris Jones described it as "one-party dominant system". For over five decades, the Dravidian parties have been the recipients of the continuous mobilization based on movements from below by and among lower castes and anti-castes. The DMK's ascendance in 1967 through a wide social base has to a great extent moulded Tamil Nadu's policy structures and institutions that also implemented populist measures, leading to the tangible improvement of large sections in living standards.

Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze reported that the state has systematically developed universal social policies and a broad healthcare network available to all social groups. Political communication is a crucial aspect of any electoral system since it creates the necessary link between politicians and electorates, influencing perceptions and creating trust. This reflects the Indian electoral landscape, where political speech, organization, alliances, and grassroots mobilization play an important role. As Marcus (2003) and Brader (2006) point out, campaigns' emotional appeals have significant influence in elections, and the campaign language is argued to be the "superstructure" of communicative frameworks that shape the voter's perception of power. According to Paul Lazarsfeld *et al* (1944), the crucial reason for selecting a voter is personal contact, which eventually led to the birth of the two-step flow theory. V. Geetha and A.R. Venkatachalapathi have maintained that the party strategies of the Dravidian political communication are upheld by the amalgamation of histories, cultures, and gendered narratives. In an insightful analysis of gender and politics in Tamil Nadu, Geetha (2011) draws attention to the complex interrelationship between gendered agendas and their invisibility in the welfare agendas aimed at a more copious set of voters encompassing women, a sizeable proportion of whom were restricted by the strict social taboos. While these strategies have proven efficient, Geetha also cautions that there is a great lacuna in the understanding of how digital media alters these traditional narratives.

Discussion on Political Communication of Dravidian Parties

Political communication strategies of the Dravidian parties have undergone a revolutionary change with the advent of digital media, especially the social platforms. In this part, we would like to synthesize the key findings based on the systematic review of literature. The change from traditional political methods to digital media, such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and WhatsApp, has revolutionized the communication of Dravidian parties with voters. This will have direct personal contact and a wider reach among the young, digitally literate population. What throws a party relevant in this rapidly changing political landscape is the ability to directly and personally engage with voters. Dravidian parties have always used the demographic appeal and welfare measures to garner electoral support. For example, the personal and demographic-focused campaigns by C.N. Annadurai to M. Karunanidhi are an example of

strategic appeal to the Tamil people. The demographic policies have played a significant role in fostering long-term economic growth. The integration of demographic policies with identity politics remains a strategic tool that continues to influence voter behaviour in Tamil Nadu.

The role of identity cannot be overemphasized in political communication. In order to consolidate their voter base, the Dravidian parties have successfully employed cultural symbols and messaging. This kind of identity-based communication fosters an emotional connection that is vital for political mobilization. The constant use of caste and regional identity in their messaging reflects a deliberate strategy to strengthen Dravidian identity politics. While digital communication has widened channels for citizen accountability and engagement, it comes at a cost of data privacy issues and the problem of online manipulation. Dravidian parties have handled such complications by adopting ethical communications with the public and allowing positive interactions with the community. However, careful handling is required to avoid misinformation. This research paper demands exploration into how digital tools alter political mobilization and, by extension, voter behaviour, with special regard to gender and caste dynamics. Such insights will be fundamental for Dravidian parties as they adapt their modes of communication to the dynamic demands of a globalizing and digitizing political environment.

Conclusion

This review in the special issue of *The Comparatist* argues within the context of this peculiar political landscape that Dravidian political communication has an important role to play in captivation of divergent constituencies through traditional media, digital platform, and popular messages. Cinema, television, and public meetings served as a vital channel for the DMK and AIADMK parties to connect with the Tamil masses through regional identity, linguistic identity, and social justice. Analysis of Dravidian political interplay depicts the ways in which these parties constantly refined their strategy to answer socio-economic problems and address the necessities of their constituencies. The anti-Brahminism, caste equality, and principles of communalism they uphold not only ensured a place for them within the political world in Tamil Nadu but also served as a benchmark for regional parties across India. This legacy is understandable given the historical evolution of these parties from the Justice Party's foundation in colonial India to the modern Dravidian movement, fighting for inclusion and social welfare. The insertion of gender narratives in the political interaction processes by Dravidian parties provides evidence that parties are engaged in increasing their voters. In Geetha's (2001) analysis, the party manifesto emphasises on welfare agendas in an attempt to strike a chord with women and the marginalized sections of society, showcasing a politics that cares for different social groups. There is still a glaring absence of literature at the level of understanding how digital media affects this traditional way of narration, thereby indicating that much work needs to go into this line of research.

Moreover, the character of digital media in the contemporary political communication of the Dravidian movement marks a new revolution with voting publics. Traditional political methods are being replaced by Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp as new ways to interact one-on-one with the voters in real time. This not only opens up the Dravidian parties towards an extended reach but also resonates with an even more digitally strengthened, younger population's changing communication needs. The successful adjustment of the parties to the digital tools depicts the will to maintain their relevance in an

ever more globalized and digitized political context. As the Dravidian parties continue using both old and new media, they face the challenge of reconciling legacy regional identity with modern demands. Future research should explore in greater depth how these digital tools influence political mobilization and voter behaviour while considering the underlying force of gender and caste dynamics. Integrating emerging technologies to Dravidian political communication strategies will yield conclusive indications of exactly how regional parties need to adjust to these new politics.

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Dr V K R V Rao Road, Nagarabhavi P.O., Bangalore - 560 072, India

Phone: 0091-80-23215468, 23215519, 23215592; Fax: 0091-80-23217008

E-mail: sobin@isec.ac.in; Web: www.isec.ac.in