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POLITICAL COMMUNICATION OF DRAVIDIAN PARTIES:
A STUDY OF AIADMK AND DMK

Thiruppathi P∗ and V Anil Kumar∗∗

Abstract

In Indian politics, political communication has shaped the rise and endurance of regional parties, especially the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in Tamil Nadu's electoral politics. Dravidian politics' communication is rooted with drama theatre and cinema to welfare manifestos and digital campaigns. The DMK and the AIADMK's political culture has relied on a distinct communication language based on rationalist thought, Tamil identity, and populist welfare. This paper follows the archival materials, party manifestos, speeches and unstructured questioned interviews with journalists, academicians and party cadres. It traces how Dravidian parties used media tools and cultural symbols to mobilise voters and reinforce leadership charisma with emotions. The paper argues that regional political communication represents a hybrid model of ideological persuasion and emotional populism where symbol, welfare, and leadership rhetoric merge into a coherent campaign culture. By mapping the communication strategies of the DMK and the AIADMK across decades, this study contributes to understanding how regional political parties in India negotiate identity, media and governance through communicative performance.

Keywords: *Political communication, Dravidian politics, Cinema, Theatre, welfare populism, DMK and AIADMK, Tamil Nadu*

Introduction

The Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu has long represented a confluence of politics, culture, and communication. Emerging from the Self- Respect and Justice Party movements[1] led by E.V. Ramasamy (Periyar), it developed a communicative style that merged ideology with performance, leaders' speeches, theatre, cinema, and later, mass media to challenge social hierarchies and mobilise the marginalised. Since the 1960s, the DMK and AIADMK have transformed this communicative tradition into a sustained political culture, redefining how electoral democracy operates in southern India. Dravidian politics evolved as both an ideological movement and a communicative experiment. Leaders like C.N. Annadurai and M. Karunanidhi in the DMK, and M.G. Ramachandran and J. Jayalalithaa in the AIADMK, understood that political success depended not only on policy but also on the ability to narrate change through emotion, art, and accessibility. The medium, whether a fiery street play, a cinematic dialogue, or a social media

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[1] Dravidar Kazhagam is a social movement founded by E V Ramasamy, himself known as *Thanthai Periyar.* His aim is to eradicate the ills of the existing caste system including untouchability and on a grander scale to obtain a "Dravida Nadu" from the Madras Presidency. In 1909, two lawyers in Chennai, Puruushottama Naidu and Subramaniam, expressed the opinion that "for the educational welfare of non-Brahmin students and for the improvement of their standard of living, a non-Brahmin society, and formulated and published legal plans and regulations for it. Shouldn't there be a Sangam?"

post, became inseparable from the message of social justice and welfare. Hence, this study focuses on how the DMK and AIADMK have used diverse communication tools, from print and film to television and digital media, to sustain their appeal among Tamil voters. Through field visit, archival research[2], and interviews with journalists, party cadres, and scholars, the research identifies patterns in how both parties articulate ideology, project leadership, and mobilise emotions during election campaigns. By situating these communicative practices within the broader field of political communication studies, the paper seeks to answer three interrelated questions. What are the major communication tools used by the Dravidian parties in electoral politics? How do these tools shape political participation and voter behaviour in Tamil Nadu? In what ways do the leadership styles of the DMK and AIADMK differ in their communication strategies? Ultimately, this paper argues that the Dravidian model of political communication demonstrates how regional parties have localised democratic discourse, and linked ideology with welfare, identity with emotion, and leadership with everyday life.

Literature Review

Political communication is a field that studies how information, ideology, and persuasion circulate between political actors and citizens through various media. Scholars such as Gisela Goncalves (2018) and Paul Soukup (2014) define it as the exchange of messages and meanings that shape political power and participation. Pippa Norris (2000) introduced a useful framework that distinguishes three phases of communication in electoral politics; pre-modern (direct speeches and rallies), modern (mass media and television), and post-modern (digital and social media campaigns). This framework helps contextualise the evolution of Dravidian party communication across time from theatre and film to Facebook and YouTube. In India, political communication developed within a unique democratic and multilingual setting. Scholars such as Rajni Kothari (1961) in their works and parties such as DMK in their films followed themes such as "widow-remarriage, untouchability, the self-respect marriage, zamindari abolition, prohibition, and religious hypocrisy" (Robert L Hardgrave, 1973) and have shown how regional politics, especially in South India, combined cultural assertion with populist performance. Hardgrave's seminal work demonstrated how Tamil cinema became both a medium and a metaphor for political mobilisation. Dravidian party leaders like C. N. Annadurai, M. Karunanidhi, and M. G. Ramachandran transformed drama-theatre to film, into platforms that brought rationalist and anti-caste messages to the voters.

Later scholarship deepened the understanding of Dravidian politics by locating its communication strategies at the intersection of populism, welfare, and leadership performance. Studies have shown that charismatic leadership fused with welfare populism to reconstruct Dravidian political narratives and sustain public trust (Pandian, 1992; Vasanthi, 2016). Research further reveals that both the DMK and AIADMK institutionalised strategic communication practices from cinematic imagery to emotional appeals to preserve voter allegiance even amid ideological transitions (Manivannan, 1992; Nagaraj, 1991). Collectively, these analyses suggest that emotive symbolism and performative leadership remain the core communicative resources in Tamil Nadu's party politics. The roots of this communication style can be traced to the language of social justice first shaped by the Self-Respect Movement and the Justice Party,

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[2]   Found in Pilot field visit: the DMK and the AIADMK political party office in Chennai.

whose ideas gave political expression to equality and self-respect (Muthukumar, 2010; Thirunavukkarasu, 2013; Panneerselvan, 2021). This effectively turned all their political communication into a learning experience for the public. Using strong speeches, newspapers, and cultural storytelling, the Dravidian movement managed to turn its deep ideology into the simple, popular language of democracy that everyone understood.

This communication style erases the boundary between politics and culture, making party messages emotionally and ideologically accessible to diverse audiences. Karunanidhi used narrative and performance techniques to foster a participatory political culture based on Tamil modernity. It was Dravidian political communication as a form of intellectual activity that integrates politics, performance, and cultural symbolism (Kalaiyarasan & Vijayabaskar, 2001; Sandhya Ravishankar, 2018).

It seeks to fill that gap by examining the two parties' communication tools, ideological continuities, and media adaptations across election cycles. This establishes the Dravidian communication framework as a regional innovation and a significant contribution to global theories of political communication and populism. Existing studies have focused mainly on the campaigns of individual leaders and provide limited comparative analysis of how the DMK and AIADMK, as institutional actors, have developed distinct but interconnected communication strategies.

Methodology

This paper draws on a qualitative and interpretive research design in an attempt to analyse how political communication has evolved among the Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu and in particular, the Dravida Munetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in order not only to trace the communication tools employed by the parties but also to find out their social meanings and political effects within Tamil political culture. Examining the historical and cultural depth of Dravidian politics, this investigation mixes archival research with field-based qualitative inquiry. The primary sources for the former are party manifestos, speeches, journals, and newspapers while the latter relies on interviews and observational data from party offices, journalists, and academicians. It therefore combines qualitative and quantitative methods to trace how the various ideas, messages, and electoral strategies intersect in the different communication styles adopted by regional parties. The research also assumes an exploratory character since political communication continuously evolves with leadership changes, changing media environments, and shifting public sentiments. In this process, it examines both how parties communicate and why such communicative choices have symbolic and political weight. Secondary materials included published election manifestos (2001-2021), speeches of M. Karunanidhi and J. Jayalalithaa, academic books and journal articles, newspapers (Tamil and English), and also online archives such as Jaya TV, Namathu Amma, and YouTube Channels housing campaign materials.

Framework

The study analysed the data using a thematic and comparative framework. First, the author wanted to see how the parties' stories promoted the core Dravidian ideas, like rational thinking, social justice and Tamil identity. Second, he examined the role of the leaders themselves, studying how the unique public styles of figures like Karunanidhi, MGR., Jayalalithaa, and Stalin made their messages more powerful

through their words, their imagery, and their emotional connection with people. Finally, he tracked how their campaigning tools evolved, moving from pamphlets and stage plays to television and social media, a journey that mirrors the modern political playbook described by Norris (2000).

The Party Structure

The Dravidian parties, AIADMK and DMK, built widespread organisational networks that work from the grassroots panchayat level to the state leadership. The hierarchical model has been inherited from its predecessor social movement, the DK, which pioneered Dravidian nationalism before its political successors emerged. Although Left, Right, and Dravidian ideological groups coexist in the region, the core thrust of Dravidian social radicalism in electoral politics has been to empower the lower castes of non-Brahmins and women. Historically, such parties have sought to foster socio-economic justice and development through ideological campaigns[3], intellectual activities[4], and a platform of social reform. This paper seeks to examine this phenomenon through an analysis of AIADMK party journals, public statements by leaders such as J. Jayalalithaa, party newspapers, and relevant academic literature.

Though DMK and AIADMK both use political communication for electoral success, the way they go about it is quite different. For example, the DMK has an exceptionally well-organised multi-tier system of interactive channels that links up the state to district, municipal, and panchayat levels with a two-way flow of information. This is in contrast to the methods used by AIADMK, indicating thereby that although their goals are similar, their operational tactics are different.

Besides, the dynamic at the federal structure of India demands that state governments elicit cooperation from the central government. This compulsion brought about an essential ideological shift in the DMK, which, though strident in its political approach, has distanced itself from its founding principles of atheism, rationalism, and anti-caste non-Brahmanism. More recently, the legacy of the Dravidian movement has pushed both parties toward a politics of welfare programmes, yielding a form of competitive and paternalistic populism. Election manifestos commonly vow to provide mass welfare items, such as subsidised food grains, and public goods like mixers, grinders, and televisions, to lower caste groups and the poor. This is representative of the Dravidian populist tradition, critically demarcated by an inherent tension between the radical rhetoric and its pragmatic, populist politics.

Political Communication, Populism, and Leadership

Political communication has always suggested the intensity of the communication process given various labels such as campaigning, election marketing, political marketing, political campaigning, and political

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[3] The ideological view is what were the steps taken by the Dravidian parties to promote Periyar's political ideals through politics and how it was used as a tool of political communication. Because the Tamil Nadu name itself originated from Periyar's philosophy and the current state of politics in the state is a product of a long history of splits and re-splits of one broad political thought.

[4] Intellectual activism here refers to how political activism takes place with socio-political principles beyond suffrage by both Dravidian parties in electoral politics. (Read works by Prof. Ramajayam, Kalaiyarasan and Vijayabaskar etc.).

public relations (Gisela Gonçalves, 2018)[5]. But first, it must be situated within the universal principles of populist communication and charismatic leadership. According to Zsolt Enyedi (2016), paternalistic populism is a political form in which leaders combine emotional appeal with promises of security and welfare to maintain moral authority over the people. This aligns well with the leadership models of M.G. Ramachandran and J. Jayalalithaa, whose communications demonstrated intimacy and compassion while reinforcing personal charisma. Along similar lines, Massimo Morelli et al. (2021) argue that populist communication thrives on a commitment contract between leaders and followers, a symbolic promise that the leaders are an embodiment of the people's will. This communicative pact in the Dravidian movement stands as an example where leaders are not distanced rulers but performative figures who are speaking to the collective sentiment of the Tamil community. Relational communication of DMK and emotional populism of AIADMK together exhibit how ideology and empathy co-exist within regional democratic communication. And yet, there are limited studies that have undertaken a comparative look at how both DMK and AIADMK have adapted their communication strategies from the print and cinema era to the digital age. Filling this gap, the present study examines the tools, narratives, and changes that define Dravidian political communication today.

Political Communication of Dravidian Parties

How both DMK and AIADMK have used the available media to shape public consciousness is interesting in Tamil Nadu. The inseparable political connection between Dravidian politics, its fiery speeches, theatrical performances, cinema, and digital campaigns is interesting. They are not just propaganda tools but also a cultural language that connects ideology and everyday political life.

Table: 1 Political Communication Tools of Dravidian Parties

Political Communication Tools of Dravidian Parties			
S. No	**Campaign Tools**	**S. No**	**Campaign Tools**
1	Election Manifestos	11	Image cult
2	Cinema/ Ideologues/ Songs	12	Leaders' speeches / Party's Seminar or Conferences
3	Leaders writing	13	Organised party structure
4	Newspapers	14	Party symbols
5	Populism	15	Television channels
6	Social media	16	Social welfare policies
7	Street Campaigns	17	Wall Posters
8	Wall paints	18	Party's Alliance
9	Political Ideology	19	Social base representatives
10	Protests	20	Public places (Salons, Tea shops, Streets) as political communication tool.

Source: Author's field observation

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[5]   Political communication is multifaceted in nature, but this context only relates to electoral politics. When communication came to the field of political science, it created horizontal communication between political actors and voters and was friendly to the democratic system. According to Norris (2000), consider three different communication stages, regarding campaigns: pre-modern, modern, and postmodern.

These are not hopes but promises considering the situation at the ground level. A leader's credibility is also important when making promises. In Tamil Nadu, J Jayalalithaa said that she has no other interest in life than working for the people of Tamil Nadu. Her manner of speech = both brought people into the party and advanced her political ambitions. She =established herself as an unstoppable force in Tamil Nadu politics. She, as a woman, took them all on her own and won them all, regardless of how many alliances you made against her.

Table 2: The Table Shows Available Sources.

	Assembly Election Manifestos	Assembly Election Speeches
Sources	Senior journalist	Jaya Network and Jaya TV
	Party senior member	Puthiyathalaimurai News TV
	Vikatan archive	YouTube channels (Tamil &English)
	Party web page	Party senior member
	Dravidar Kazhagam archive	Senior journalist
	The Hindu archive (Tamil &English)	Vikatan Tamil channels
	Party journals	Party web page
	Party archive	
	Academicians	

Source: Author's field observation

AIADMK: Cinema, Welfare and the Cult of Leadership

Here is a brief history of the formation of AIADMK before its entry into party affiliations. At one time, there was no AIADMK. But there was rivalry within the DMK, and MGR formed his own political party after the DMK split. The DMK split resulted in Tamil Nadu's future social change and political development. M.G Ramachandran and his allies formed a new party called the Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK), in 1972 and later prefixed the All-India to make it All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. As a result, in order to comprehend AIADMK's political communication, one must also comprehend DMK's political mobilisation.

In fact, AIADMK's distinct political communication began only after Anna's death. MGR's political communication was based on "Annaism" and people's welfare. His communication technique gave rise to the phrase "image politics" in Indian politics (MSS Pandian). Songs and scripts of many of his films contained messages on equality, honesty, and dignity of labour (Hardgrave, 1973). It worked during the 1984 assembly election, when MGR was hospitalised. Additionally, up until the most recent election, his movie songs and dialogues had significance in rural areas and had a deep emotional connection with the Tamil people and voters (Durai karuna)[6]. MGR's charisma spread from the film industry to the electorate, strengthening the AIADMK's support base. According to R. Kannan, MGR converted cinema into a medium to project himself as a hero and a reformer and changed the fan associations into political cadres (R. Kannan, 2017). The AIADMK's political operations were conducted through the MGR fan club.

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[6]   Durai karuna, Journalist – AIADMK. The author met him while conducting a pilot study to identify AIADMK's communication tools.

The AIADMK used its alliance with the Congress party to gain power in 1975. MGR needed someone to woo the crowd and confront M. Karunanidhi who had attacked him in public meetings. He thus brought the charismatic J. Jayalalithaa into electoral politics. He decided to get her to speak and soon she drew large gatherings of people. Jayalalithaa was then named the party's propaganda secretary. She was plainly convinced that she would be able to deal with her party's adversaries under MGR's tutelage. Her political communication campaign began with a basic white sari with a party border (the AIADMK flag colour). She had a captivating presence as she addressed the throng, delivered harsh statements, and effectively posed questions to the public: Will you accept Karunanidhi's poisonous rhetoric? Would you agree to marry him? (Vaasanthi, 2016) She commended MGR's social measures and her voice echoed across Tamil Nadu.

Jayalalithaa joined the ruling AIADMK party in 1982 and obtained a membership card for one rupee. She herself stated that she wished to be 'of service to the public' (Vaasanthi, 2016). However, AIADMK's electoral communication is significant, due to its participation under "Dravidian Party" in the last half decade in Tamil Nadu politics. In this pioneering field of study, AIADMK, through its style of political communication, plays a significant role in social progress with critics of its political ideology. AIADMK party leader J Jayalalithaa's famous dialogue in election campaign was "*I am by the people… I am for the people…*" *("மக்களால் நான்...! மக்களுக்காகவே நான்...!")*, AIADMK's IT wing made Jayalalithaa's voice and election campaign dialogue as a ringtone[7].

Her political activities would be reflected in the election manifestos and campaign speeches; hence this research particularly focuses on these two. Jayalalithaa has a unique means of communication. It is different from other parties' communication methods. For example, party executives and ministers have to obey her conditions, which are submitted to her orders etc. She did not stop with speeches; her itinerary was painstakingly arranged to continue the campaign. Following her arrival, the party seeks her advice in resolving internal conflicts. MGR was hospitalised during the 1984 elections, giving her the opportunity to campaign, which helped the party win, and when he returned from the hospital, the local elections were held. But he did not let her campaign, and she could not, so they did not win the election.

Following the outcome of the 1989 assembly elections, Jayalalithaa's relationship inside the party was initially not in her favour, and it was assumed that she would not be the party leader. Janaki's faction was merged with Jayalalithaa's faction as a single party, and the two-leaf symbol of the party was adopted. During the last election, a new type of worship known as 'leader worship' was initiated. While dedicating her big victory in the 2011 elections, she declared to AIADMK party members, 'Don't worry about the DMK, as far as that party is concerned, it is a done tale' (Vaasanthi, 2016). In all her charity programmes and political speeches, she alluded to herself as a mother figure.

The AIADMK IT wing distributed her speeches, visuals, and even ringtone clips of her voice, making mass media participatory fandom. This era also reflected Pipa Nooris's (2000), "post-modern campaign" where emotion, media convergence, and direct leader-voter connection define political success. Communication of the AIADMK party thus flowed from MGR's cinematic charisma to Jayalalithaa's welfare populism - continuous in emotional appeal but adapting to new technologies. Both leaders

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[7]   https://mobcup.net/browse/ringtones/mp3/0/downloads/jayalalitha-speech

demonstrated what Enyedi (2016) described as paternalist populism - a mix of moral authority and protective empathy. Jayalalithaa also moved on to digital communication using television and later social media to sustain her image.

Jayalalithaa's communication is associated with government schemes, such as municipal corporations that run Amma canteens, and bicycles, mixer grinders, and electric fans are all supplied as Amma items (B. Kolappan and I. Elangovan)[8]. She achieved political communication through welfare programmes, all of which garnered popularity, and intensified her campaign to form the government again in the 2016 assembly elections. During the campaign, she stated that she had no other interests or ambitions except serving the people and that she would devote her life to them.

Figure: 1 AIADMK's Political Communication Channels
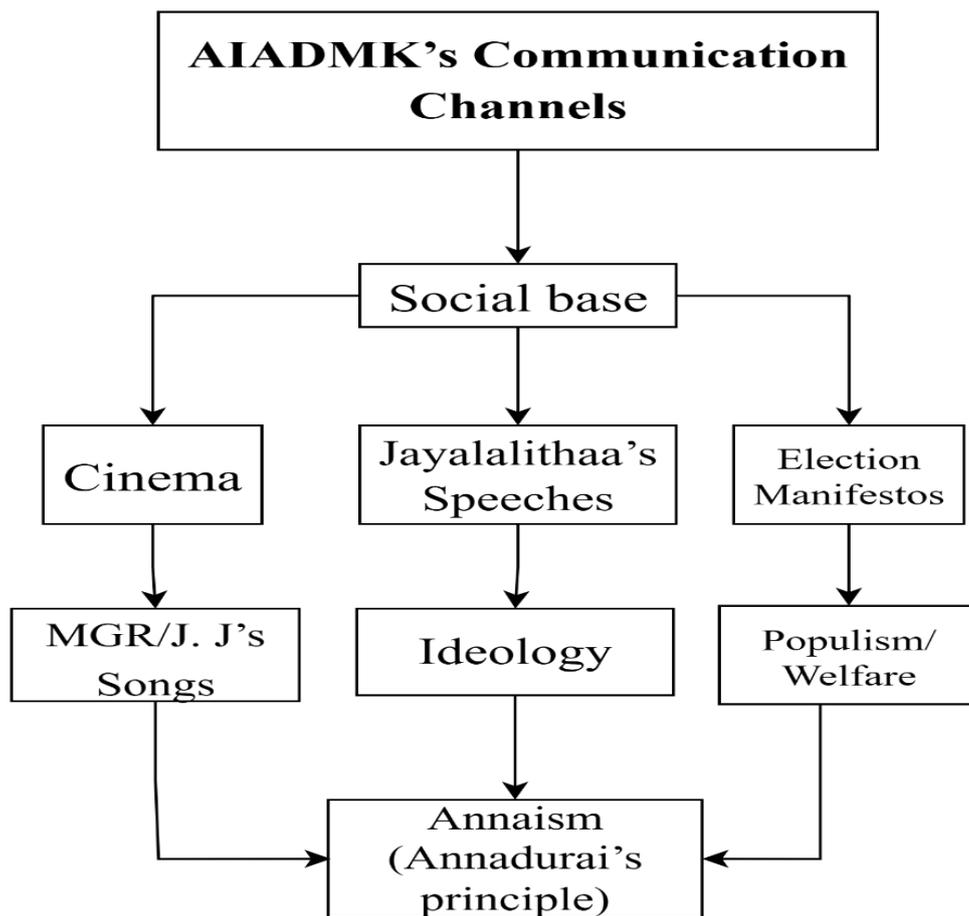
Source: Author's field observation

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8   The author had an opportunity to meet The Hindu Journalist P. Kolappan and Senior Journalist I. Elangovan (Front line) to discuss AIADMK's party political communication tools, meanwhile discussing J. Jayalalithaa's communication methods.

Politics here is employed to empower and provide voice to the lower castes representing the oppressed communities for social justice, and at the same time as voting banks. Like all state politics in India, Tamil Nadu politics too has its social basis in caste-based politics. However, AIADMK has held a position as both ruling as well as opposition party in Dravidian politics. The caste question is the primary concern for this party. For AIADMK, caste becomes the main factor in any election in Tamil Nadu. This party has strong community-based support in western Tamil Nadu, which is called *Kongu Nadu.* The western belt, also the Kongunadu Munnetra Kazhagam (KMK) is led by a prominent textile manufacturer, a self-proclaimed representative of the *Gounder* caste.

Both the major Dravidian parties in the state have realised that they have to be the dominant group in any constituency if they want to woo voters. Thus, the selection of district secretaries and candidates from the dominant caste in each district begins. For instance, the district secretary of north Tamil Nadu in both DMK and AIADMK is appointed from the *Vanniyar* community. As an illustration, the *Vanniyar* community was chosen to nominate the district secretary for north Tamil Nadu. Crossing all divisional lines, the trend is seen throughout the state. Caste plays a major role. Apart from reserved constituencies, party members are typically of the *Thevar* community, which makes up the majority caste. The *Arunthathiyars* earlier backed the leaders MGR/Jayalalitha, who in turn received endorsement through party officials.

DMK: Ideological Continuity and Cultural Modernity

The term 'Dravida', given political meaning by the notable E.V. Ramasamy, has been central to political parties like DMK (Karunanidhi), the AIADMK (Jayalalithaa) and, for other reform movements including the Dravida Kazhagam. Dravidian ideology (திராவிடசித்தாந்தம்) was a new education practice in electoral politics for the Tamil people, practiced and propagated by Periyar and used as a kind of non-formal educational tool (Dr. S. Ilango, 2016). The approach contained a synthesis of the principles of Tamil nationalism, social reforms, mass participation, self-respect, rationalism, democracy, joint sector socialism, and communication from the party leaders to the citizens.

The DMK, throughout its history, remains ideologically and culturally anchored in rationalist and cultural reformism in the annals of Tamil Nadu politics. As its name suggests, the party was born out of the Self-Respect Movement and the Just Party initiated by Periyar. It used communication as education and a tool for emancipation. Quoting Muthukumar 2010 and Thirunavukkarasu 2013, these two early leaders who took over leadership, C.N. Annadurai, and M. Karunanidhi, continued to have the same commitment to communication through cinema and literature. The latter's screenplays, such as Parasakthi in 1952, focusing on social critique through emotional storytelling, are cited for popularising rationalist ideas while celebrating Tamil identity. Karunanidhi's speeches "My dear brethren, who are more precious than my life" (**என்உயிரினும் மேலான அன்பு உடன்பிறப்புக்களே**) often carried the impressions of his dual role: that of an intellectual-cum-dramatist. He combined classical Tamil expressions with modern idioms to create what Sadhya Ravi Shankar, 2018, called "a language of modern Dravidianism." Much as Annadurai used theatre to keep politics both ideological and entertaining, Karunanidhi turned political meetings into performance spectacles. In fact, Karunanidhi's speeches are heavily influenced by the drama format, and therefore, they use literary, chaste Tamil, dialogue as much

as formal speeches. There is a great eloquence that Annadurai and Karunanidhi used in their films, using them as vehicles for both social reform and party propaganda. (Subramanian, 2003). With DMK's use of the film medium, the party now sought to emphasize stardom as a vehicle for political mobilisation. The theater actor M.R. Radha was a devoted follower of Periyar. He ran one of the leading troupes South India, Social Reform Company, and he presented plays on anti-Brahmin and atheist themes. DK and DMK were strongly aligned with him, and these organisations benefited from his campaign. Although this was severely tested since the late 1980s, the parties maintained a degree of internal pluralism (Subramanian, 2003). Karunanidhi, being a fighter, accepted the challenge and worked from his first election to his last election campaign.

The DMK was institutionally developing a bottom-up structure of communication that linked local units to the state headquarters through a consistent message. Publications like *Murasoli* served as both ideological organs and participatory forums where party cadres engaged in discussion. This organisational model in communication gave them enduring inner coherence (Subramanian, 2003). In latter decades, under M. K. Stalin, the DMK has adopted digital modes of outreach, including Twitter (now X) spaces, online campaigns, and mobile apps while retaining the ideological vocabulary of the party. This blend of rationalist tradition with digital inclusivity represents what Goncalves terms 'adaptive political communication', wherein historical identity is rearticulated on new media platforms.

Comparative Analysis

While comparative analysis of the Dravidian political communication, originates from a common Dravidian tradition, their communication strategies reveal both divergence and convergence. The AIADMK's approach is emotional, centralised and leader centric. It personalises welfare as moral commitment. The DMK's approach is ideology driven, collective, and programmatic. It frames communication as a vehicle for social justice and linguistic identity.

Table: 1, Covering Paths and Divergent Narratives

Dimension	Ideological	Leadership	Communication Mediums	Emotional Tone	Organizational Flow
DMK	Rationalism, Tamil identity, Social Justice	Intellectual, Participatory (**Annadurai** and **Karunanidhi**)	Theatre, Literature, Party newspaper (*Murasoli*)	Rational persuasion with cultural symbolism	Bottom-up, Cadre communication
AIADMK	Annaism, Populism, Welfare paternalism	Charismatic, maternal/paternal (**MGR** and **Jayalalithaa**)	Cinema, Television, Welfare branding (*Amma tagged schemes*)	Empathetic populism and visual emotionality	Top-down, leader-centric dissemination

Source: Author's field observation

Despite their contrasts, both parties share a commitment to competitive populism a constant effort to outdo each other in welfare promises and emotional outreach. This rivalry has institutionalised populist communication as a permanent feature of Tamil Nadu politics (Harriss, 2000). It underlines the paradox of the Dravidian movement politics of rational reform that has grown into mass emotional mobilisation. Both leaders speak their people's language, and it makes for political participation via cultural intimacy - from the oratorical prose of Karunanidhi to the maternal rhetoric of Jayalalithaa.

Discussion

Dravidian parties have transformed the act of communication into a political ritual. Dravidian political communication represents a dynamic interplay between ideological identity and performance in Tamil Nadu. And it creates a space for democratic participation and to understand the regional politics. Their political communication from print (1920s), drama-theatre (1940s), cinema (1960s) to television (1980s) and social media (present) is not only a technological shift but a serious shift in the way the political communication has progressed.

The Dravidian movement began with a cultural awakening, using art as an aid to teaching. Its early leadership through the Justice Party and the Self-Respect Movement employed pamphlets, street plays, and public speeches to destroy these caste hierarchies and the latter's flowing Brahminical authority. With the rise of Annadurai and Karunanidhi, this further became a drama-cinema-based political communication that allowed rational messages to be put in ways appealing to the heart (Hartgrave, 1973). This communication culture resulted in media populism in the 1980s, enthroning visual representational hero-worship and welfare symbols over ideological argumentation under MGR and Jayalalithaa. The relationship between the leader and the voter - the emotional bond - became the pivotal syntax in political communication. "*Anaivarakum Amma*" was an election message but much more importantly, a metaphor for care and belonging. In the last two decades, both parties have updated this emotive communication to digital platforms. The IT wing of the AIADMK and digital communications teams of the DMK now rally workers and shape their narrative on the networks of X (Twitter), YouTube, and WhatsApp. This digital platform shift moves Dravidian political communication to a postmodern phase (Norris, 2000), marked by emotion, immediacy, and personalisation as characteristic elements of public communication.

Under the cinema screen and digital media lies an intricate social structure, caste, an unspoken but enduring dimension of political communication. Both parties strategically select their candidates and local leaders from the dominant castes in every region - e.g., Thevars and Pallars in the south, Vanniyars and Paraiyars in the north, and Gounders and Arunthathiyars in the west - to guarantee social alignment (Harriss, 2000). They speak a common language of equality and development through speeches and statements, often portraying themselves as champions of the oppressed. This duality between caste reality and egalitarian rhetoric defines the paradox of Dravidian communication. By allowing both parties to maintain broad coalitions of voters while preserving a moral vocabulary of social justice, local workers are able to interpret communication through social identity, linguistic identity, and material advantages, so that it resonates with both ideology and livelihood.

Emotional Bonding: Leadership

The paper shows the essential role of leadership and political communications in Dravidian politics. Each of these leaders developed a distinct communication ethos, which was different for each personality and period. For example, Annadurai's humour and emotional warmth(*"அன்புள்ளநண்பர்களே!..."*,that is *"Dear Friends…"*), M. Karunanidhi's power of speech (*"My dear brethren, who are more precious than my life…"*), MGR's cinematic heroism(*"என் அருமைத்தாய்மார்களே, சகோதர சகோதரிகளே…"*, that is *"My dear mothers, brothers and sisters…"*), and the material authority of Jayalalithaa all created different emotional contracts between leaders and the voters. This echoes Enyedi's concept of paternalistic

populism, whereby leaders personify both authority and empathy, serving as moral guardians over distant politicians (Enyedi, 2016). In that sense, communication concerns not only what leaders say but also how they are seen and heard and remembered. Public meetings, film screenings, and televised welfare releases become symbolic performances of hope. Apart from these, the body language, gestures, and tone of leaders carry as much meaning as their words. In this quite performative sense, it is the latter that finally speaks to Dravidian political communication, setting it apart from purely rational modes of discourse.

Governance and Communication

A defining feature of communication is how seamlessly it integrates into state governance. The *Amma Canteen (2013)* and *Kalaignar Housing schemes (1975)* function as both welfare interventions and communicative artefacts that reinforce emotional legitimacy. Leaders' welfare announcements, budget promises, and flagship schemes are communicated as acts of moral fulfilment, rather than administrative policy. This process of welfare and communication supports scholars like Morelli call a "commitment contract" (Morelli et al, 2021) between leaders and citizens - an implicit understanding that the leader's word equals action. It exposed the participatory dimension of democracy. Here citizens become emotionally involved in the communication chain and governance in day-to-day life through symbols, slogans and schemes. Dravidian politics experience broadens the understanding of political communication beyond Western models. It is an act of cultural negotiation. Both the parties show that ideology can survive through emotion and emotion can be legitimised through ideology. In the hybrid form, three key functions: (1) it educates - translating rationalist and egalitarian ideas into public language. (2) it mobilises - creating emotional solidarity among fragmented social groups. (3) it governs - turning welfare delivery into communicative performance. This combination of education, emotion and empowerment has made Tamil Nadu's Dravidian politics a living laboratory for studying democratic communication in India.

Conclusion

This study has explored how Dravidian parties have exercised political message as both an ideological device and a gregarious practice. From the super-patriotic oratory of Annadurai and Karunanidhi to the passional populism of MGR and Jayalalithaa, message in Tamil politics has been greater than a medium of persuasion; it has been a means of erecting a more; a community sustaining popular participation. While under dissection, it shows that Dravidian political message evolved through there lapping phases; (1) ideological message (theatre, flyers, oratory). (2) cinematic and mass-media populism (movie, radio, and TV. (3) digital personalisation (gregarious media, online juggernauts, and emblematic weal). Each phase expanded the reach of political dispatches while heightening their passional resonance with subjects. The transition from rational reformism to passional populism didn't replace testament but rearticulated it in more popular, affective forms. This rigidity explains the rootedness of both the parties in Tamil political geography.

The fieldwork and archival rulings confirm that the Dravidian parties have erected a communicative structure that connects the state's political, artistic and verbal identity. Their manifestos, songs, films, and weal programmes form a participated communicative mind that interlinks the

conceptions of Tamil choosers. As on elderly person said during a field interview, "in Tamil Nadu, politics is not precisely stated, it's performed." This performative proportion captures the substance of Dravidian message politics as lived cultivation. While the motion began with a rationalist notice of persuasion, estate, and scale, its message practices calculations of emotion, passion. The pressure between ideological denomination and attractive personalisation continues to outline Tamil politics. However, it is this balance between observation and feeling, attestation and affection, that sustains the Dravidian republic's communicative power.

Digital media have transformed the ways in which Dravidian politics is communicating its message. A new generation of leaders like M. K. Stalin and Udhayanidhi Stalin, who have become comfortable with online platforms, face-to-face engagement, and data-driven outreach, is bringing a fresh dimension to the movement's long tradition of creativity and performance. This digital shift changes how voters - especially young people and rural communities - connect with the political narrative through social media, memes, and visual storytelling as spaces of participation. The Dravidian experience makes it clear that political messaging in a democracy is not merely a strategic enterprise; it is rather a continuous dialogue between history, identity, and aspiration. Communication legacies from DMK and AIADMK, anchored around ideas of collective justice and artistic expression, will remind us that, yes, politics in India can be an act of imagination, a means of sustaining the spirit of the republic.

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