

TELUGU DESAM PARTY AND NATIONAL POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

Since independence the State of Andhra Pradesh has been playing a dominant role in Indian political development. The Telegu Desam Party (TDP) had played a key role in forging a non-Congress (I) and non-BJP coalition at the centre by actively negotiating with the time-tested and fairly successful strategy followed by the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) under NTR's leadership. N.T. Rama Rao, the founder President of the TDP, served as a catalyst in organizing the non-Congress Opposition conclaves in the eighties. The Telugu Desam, a regional political party was the second largest party in Lok Shaba, winning 30 seats in 1984. A similar situation arose in 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2014 when TDP played a pivotal role (this time Chandra Babu was in charge) in the formation of four central governments. In 1996, Andhra Bhawan, strategically located just off India Gate, was where the United Front was formed, with Telugu Desam Party (TDP) boss and the then Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu playing a stellar role. TDP's golden years were, when it was a key player in the governments led by the National Front (1989-91), the United Front (1996-98) and the National Democratic Alliance (1998-2004, 2014 to till today).

KEYWORDS: *Telugu Desam Party, N.T. Rama Rao, Chandrababu Naidu, National Politics, Lok Sabha*

INTRODUCTION

The emergence and development of a political party national or regional is intrinsically related to the larger socio-economic currents at work over a period of time which open up certain 'possibilities'. The dynamic nature of the configuration of the forces some of the possibilities thus emerging on the map of the social reality get concretized and become socio-political realities. An enquiry into the origin and development of the Telugu Desam Party in the State politics of Andhra Pradesh informed by the above proposition would require us to probe into the question not by merely making a textualist reading of the election manifesto and political speeches of the leaders of the TDP and comparing them with that of other parties; but, by taking a longer view of political developments to decipher the inter-relationships with the socio-economic forces that were developing in the state during the period.¹

India's political evolution since Independence presents an untidy picture but one which can best be described as the emergence of a 'market polity'.² Within the Indian political system, States have been playing a very important role in political development. The electoral politics of these Indian states have added substantially to political development since 1980's. In particular, since independence the State of Andhra Pradesh has been playing a dominant role in Indian political development. It has become a trendsetter in the Indian political process, thus contributing to political development; Andhra Pradesh has contributed one Prime Minister and Two Presidents to Indian Republic. Late Sri. N.T. Rama Rao, the founder

President of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), served as a catalyst in organizing the non-Congress Opposition conclaves in the eighties. This paved the way for the formation of the National Front Government led by V.P.Singh at Delhi. Thus, for the first time, some regional parties, including the Telugu Desam Party participated in the Government at the nation level and became active in the national political process, thus contributing to political developments. More recently, N. Chandrababu Naidu, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh has emerged as a key player capable of moulding the national political process. In fact, the advent of Nara Chandrababu Naidu, though a leader of a regional party, provided a new turn and twist to national political process - first in the formation of the United Front Government in 1996 and later in the installation of National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government led by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the centre. In any event, the importance of state political processes is on the rise and the country is adjusting to a new political culture of coalitions and alliances indicating 'market polity'. An attempt is made in this chapter the role of TDP in national Politics.

The TDP had played a key role in forging a non-Congress (I) and non-BJP coalition at the centre by actively negotiating with the time-tested and fairly successful strategy followed by the TDP under NTR's leadership. It may be recollected that it was NTR who, after his coming to power in 1983, initiated the process of forging a national alternative through a series of conclaves of the non Congress parties. NTR followed a two pronged strategy of: (a) forging an anti Congress alliance with the left in the state; (b) pursuing the politics of the non-Congress coalition at the national level. The culmination of this was the formation of National Front of which NTR was the chairman till his death. By actively participating in this process Naidu sought to demonstrate his conformity to NTR's legacy and carve out a niche for himself in the national politics.³

N.T. Rama Rao emphasized, in his own characteristic way, the need for a new political brotherhood to fight the threat to national unity arising from the failure of the ruling party at the Centre to find timely and acceptable solution to the urgent problems of the country and its different areas. On the question of the merger of parties, N.T.Rama Rao most significantly said: "this is unanimous voice of all the parties that let us not stress now on an alternative to the Congress-I. We have to first understand each other".⁴

N.T. Rama Rao, President of the Telugu Desam party took the initiative to organize a group of non-Congress and regional parties. He was keen in the coming together of the opposition parties for providing a viable alternative to the ruling Congress (I). He took the initiative to convene a conclave of all non-Congress (I) parties at Vijayawada from May 31 and June 1, 1983. Leaders of 14 parties, including the two Communist parties, issued a joint declaration on national problems including Assam and Punjab. For the first time, the BJP and Communists met together in one platform.⁵ This credit goes to N.T. Rama Rao. The main issue of discussion in the meeting was the restructuring of centre-state relations to ensure state autonomy.

The success of the Vijayawada conclave, spurred N.T. Rama Rao to continue his efforts. A second conclave scheduled to be held in New Delhi on June 30, 1983, seemed initially to have run into rough weather, with several parties which attended the Vijayawada conference refraining from taking part in it. But the situation was retrieved at the last moment by some deft diplomacy on the part of N.T. Rama Rao and Dr. Farooq Abdullah. Those who attended Vijayawada but were absent at the New Delhi meeting were; the BJP, the AIADMK and the Rashtriya Sanjay Manch.⁶ The second conclave was projected a collective stand on the sensitive Punjab issue and urged the Centre to attempt a political solution to the problem.

The third conclave was held in Srinagar on October 5, 1983. In all 53 leaders from 17 parties including four Chief Ministers took part in it.⁷ The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. G. Ramachandran, the leader of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, was the only non-congress (I) Chief Minister to have kept out of the conclave. It was said that he was contemplating to come closer to the Congress (I) which had ended its alliance with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, which did not take part in the conclaves at Vijayawada and New Delhi, was a new entrant to the Srinagar meeting. The Srinagar conclave was an important one. The only item on the agenda was centre - state relations and it adopted a comprehensive prescription for harmonious centre- state relations. It was passed a 31 points resolution suggesting large scale changes in centre-state relation in the administrative, economic and political fields. Further, they suggested that, the centre should confine itself to subjects like defence, foreign affairs, currency and communications etc.

The fourth conclave was held in Calcutta on January 13 and 14, 1984. About, 75 delegates representing 16 parties attended this conclave. The conclave adopted a resolution demanding "a total restructuring" of the economic policies of the centre and offered an alternative economic programme for the uplift of the poor and the middle classes.⁸

Many important developments followed in the latter half of 1984. NTR, sacked from power in August had to be called back to power by the Government in September. Smt. Indira Gandhi was assassinated on October 31, 1984; parties in opposition to Congress (I) except the Telugu Desam fared badly in the eighth Lok Sabha elections. These had their impact on the efforts to bring together non-Congress parties on a common platform. There was a lull for about two years in activities aimed at opposition unity, presumably due to the disappearance of Indira Gandhi and the after math.

Single Largest Opposition Party

Following the assassination of Smt. Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984 at the hands of her security guard, the whole country in 1984 Lok Sabha elections, the TDP in Andhra Pradesh arrived at a bilateral seat adjustment with the non-Congress national opposition parties. Thereafter, the TDP and its allies came to be known as 'friendly parties'. It was remarkable that they managed to stem the countrywide sympathy wave in favour of the Congress after the assassination of Indira Gandhi and deliver a miserable defeat to the Congress in the elections in the State. In his election speeches, the Congress Prime Minister Candidate Rajiv Gandhi focused on the theme that the regional parties were harmful to national unity. The TDP countered the Congress' criticism by saying that it stood for the strengthening of the federal political structure in India, in the spirit of the Constitution. NTR alleged that the Congress, despite its continuous rule in the Centre and in several States, was not able to forge unity in the country, as it was responsible for the trouble in Punjab, Assam, Kashmir, etc. He also charged that the Congress that fought for independence under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership died long ago and what remained of the Congress was full of self-seeking, immoral and corrupt politicians.

Lok Sabha election results gave a massive and unprecedented majority to Congress (I), crushing all national opposition parties to near non-existence, but Andhra Pradesh again proved an exception. The Andhra Pradesh electorate, in a repeat performance, gave a massive mandate to Rama Rao's Telugu Desam Party.⁹ The sympathy wave, following the death of Smt. Indira Gandhi failed to work in Andhra Pradesh. Congress (I) contested all the 42 seats, the Telugu Desam, which had benefitted by the sympathy and friendship of non-congress (I) opposition parties when N. T. Rama Rao was out of power, contested only 34 seats - leaving the others to its allies. This was fully in tune with the spirit of his efforts to bring about opposition unity. Vote wise the Telugu Desam polled 44.82% against the Congress (I)'s 41.81%. The strength

of the Congress (I) from Andhra Pradesh nose-dived from 39 in the previous Lok Sabha to just 6 while the Telugu Desam went up from 2 to 30. In electoral alignment with the Telugu Desam, the Bharatiya Janata Party, Janata, CPI, CPM and Congress (S) parties captured one seat each. The remaining seat, Hyderabad city, was taken by the candidate of Majlis Ittehadul Muslimeen, Sultan Salawuddin Owaisi, by a narrow margin of 3,481 votes.

The battered and broken opposition in Indian politics suffered a serious setback when it faced the electorate at the eighth general election for the Lok Sabha in December 1984. The Lok Sabha election results from Andhra Pradesh indicate that the TDP has retained its popular base. It has not only swept the polls but also emerged as the major opposition group in the Lok Sabha, INC 404, CPI (M) 23, Janata Party 16, AIADMK 12 and N.T. Rama Rao's Telugu Desam Party won 30 seats out of the 42 Lok Sabha seats, leaving only six seats to the Congress-I in Andhra Pradesh. The implication of this was the emergence of the TDP, with 30 seats, as the main opposition party in the eighth Lok Sabha (1984-1989). The national parties such as the Janata Party, the BJP, the Lok Dal, the CPI (M) and the CPI won less number of seats than the 'regional' Telugu Desam Party.¹⁰ Once again Rama Rao has become an unchallenged leader of the State. The united efforts of the Congress (I) leaders in the state to again the public confidence became a futile effort.

The Telugu Desam, a regional political party was the second largest party in Lok Shaba, winning 30 seats, thus achieving the distinction of becoming the first time in the history of Indian Parliament, Telugu Desam, a regional party became the main opposition party in the Lok Sabha. The reason for this was of course the charismatic personality of N.T. Rama Rao, but more important than this was its positive plank based on its 20 months record in office.¹¹ The thrust of its campaign consisted of the subsidized rice scheme, the midday meal program which benefitted nearly four million school children, the availability of cheap cloth to the people, the proposed construction of more than 1,000,000 tenements for the poor in rural areas and so on.

National Front Government and Telugu Desam Party

After entering Lok Sabha, V. P. Singh began his efforts to bring unity in the opposition ranks. On July 26, 1988, four opposition parties - Jana Morcha, Janata, Lok Dal (B) and Congress (S) decided to form an alliance and forum which was originally called "Samajwadi Janata Dal" and later came to be known as "Janata Dal."¹² V. P. Singh was elected its president. Thanks to the efforts of V. P. Singh and NTR seven opposition parties namely the Janata, Jana Morcha, Lok Dal (B), Congress (S), Telugu Desam, DMK and Assam Gana Parishad agreed to form an opposition alliance or Front, as an alternative to the ruling Congress (I). On August 6, 1988, the National people's Front was formed with NTR and V. P. Singh as its Chairman and Convener respectively.¹³ The official inauguration of the National Front on September 17, 1988 at Madras signified the fruition of NTR's efforts for the unity of opposition since 1983. National Front represented the first attempt by India's national opposition to accommodate the growing regionalization of Indian politics. Regional leaders played an important role in the formation of National Front.¹⁴ National Front was the second major effort since independence by India's disparate opposition to forge a national, centrist alternative to the Congress. National Front represented the first attempt by India's national opposition to accommodate the growing regionalization of Indian politics. Regional leaders N. T. Rama Rao and other leaders played an important role in the formation of the National Front and several regional parties became members of the new coalition. As the Chairman of the National Front, NTR widely canvassed in favour of Karunanidhi's DMK in Tamil Nadu during the Assembly elections of 1989 for the first time.¹⁵ DMK won a resounding success and Karunanidhi was installed as Chief Minister after 13 years.

In 9th General Elections of Lok Sabha, INC won a great majority of seats 197 in 1989. The performance of the National Front in this election fell far from the expectations with 145 seats,¹⁶ 143 seats were won by the Janata Dal; its regional ally Telugu Desam Party also performed poor with 2 M.P seats. This is the bad result which is got by the Telugu Desam Party since it's born; BJP, CPI (M), CPI won seats 89, 34 and 12 respectively.

Andhra Pradesh signified the end of an era for the Telugu Desam Supreme and National Front President N.T. Rama Rao. The popular verdict in terms of seats was indeed a rejection of N.T. Rama Rao and his style of politics,¹⁷ though the unexpected surge of support for Janata Dal - one of the principal constituent parties of National Front - in the Northern states did soften the blow somewhat. Riding the crest of an anti - NTR wave, the Congress (I) swept back to power in Andhra Pradesh, with an impressive comeback, after nearly seven years in the opposition. There are clear indications that the 1989 Lok Sabha polls are possibly the most important event in the 33 year history of Andhra Pradesh state politics.

Although V.P. Singh was elected Prime Minister, he led a minority government that was dependent upon the support of a diverse group of opposition parties. National Front accepted a centralized leadership structure under V.P. Singh, the only non-Congress leader with a strong national identity. P. Upendra, Rajya Sabha member from T.D.P, was inducted in V.P. Singh's Central Cabinet as Minister for Information.¹⁸

Within the NF there were problems between the JD and the numerous regional parties. The JD was often accused of encroaching into territories of the regional parties. The TDP, AGP and the DMK had made specific complaints on this count. N.T. Rama Rao is reported to have underlined this point very strongly at the NF presidium meet. He held that if the concept of the NF had to take root, constituents like the TDP, AGP and DMK would also have to be allowed to grow strong. It was not enough for the JD alone to boom. The Prime Minister in his reply promised that guidelines would be issued and there would be attempts at greater coordination at the state level.

Although the National Front was successful in the 1989 parliamentary election, the disintegrative and dissenting forces in the ruling coalition were too strong, leaving fresh elections in 1991 the only option after the failure of the V.P. Singh and Chandra Shekar governments. The results of the 1991 general elections marked a clear setback for the National Front which could secure only 75 seats and thus it was obvious that the National Front Experiment had failed. The result of the election was that no party could get a majority, so a minority government (Indian National Congress with the help of left parties) was formed. Being a rival party of Congress, TDP become an opponent party at central level with 13 M.P seats at that time.

On July 20, 1995 the presidium of the National Front met for the first time in three years to settle agreements and shape a common strategy, this time well in advance of the 11th Parliamentary election scheduled for 1996. N.T. Rama Rao now even figured as a possible National Front candidate for prime ministership, besides V.P. Singh and Jyoti Basu. Just one month later the Telugu Desam was split and Chandrababu Naidu left TDP with 150 MLAs in 1995 replaced N.T. Rama Rao as Chief Minister in Andhra Pradesh. The party was split into two, one under Chandrababu Naidu and other headed by Laxmi Parvathi which came to be known as NTR Telugu Desam. Thereafter, Chandrababu Naidu with the support of CPI and CPI (M) became the Chief Minister.

This development had its effect on N.T. Rama Rao's position in the National Front. Obviously it came quite unexpected for the National Front leadership which was banking on a unified Telugu Desam, which together with the

Janata Dal formed the nucleus of the National Front. Now, they had to decide whether to stay with N.T. Rama Rao, still its chairman, or to seek an alliance with Naidu. It took the National Front more than five months to take a decision in favour of N.T. Rama Rao, which was agreed upon at a meeting of the Janata Dal's Political Affairs Committee on January 11, 1996 in New Delhi, even though the National Front's coalition partner, the Left Front, had before decided to back Chandrababu Naidu.¹⁹

Just one week later, in the aftermath of N.T. Rama Rao death on January 18, 1996 the National Front found itself not only bereft of its chairman but faced a similar decision, this time whether to back Naidu or N.T. Rama Rao authorized heiress Lakshmi Parvathi. The outcome of the 1996 parliamentary election finally solved the problem as Naidu's faction won 16 seats became a determining factor in the formation of Government at the centre, whereas Parvathi's faction was completely rejected by the electorate. The commonly expected sympathy wave for N.T. Rama Rao, which Parvathi had tried to exploit and whose supposed impact had obviously caused the National Front's hesitation to back Naidu, had shown no significant effect on the election results.²⁰ Chandrababu Naidu's TDP won the next election of 1999 Assembly elections too. As during this period India was witnessing hung Parliament in every Lok Sabha elections till 1998, the regional parties became a determining factor in the formation of Government at the centre.

Since Chandrababu Naidu's Telugu Desam Party clearly defeated Parvathi's faction, he and his party were invited by V.P. Singh and others to join the National Front- Left Front coalition. It was clear that the Bharatiya Janata Party would emerge as the single strongest party. As the three 'national' parties, Congress (I), BJP and Janata Dal fell short of a simple majority; Naidu assumed an important position in the National Front proving him to be the successor of N.T. Rama Rao on the national level too. Finally a 13 party coalition, which was renamed United Front (UF).²¹

Centre-State Relations

The 1967 general election brought a major change in the political map of India by throwing of the monopolistic control of twenty years of uninterrupted Congress rule in India. With the installation of a non-Congress, Telugu Desam Government in the state for the first time, the Centre-State relations were given a new twist. A big political event that culminated in deepening the mutual animosity, suspicion and mistrust between the Centre and the State Government was the dismissal of the N.T. Rama Rao government by the then Governor and installation of a new one under the leadership of the TDP-dissident leader Nadendla Bhaskara Rao.²² But when he was reinstated as the Chief Minister of the State after exactly one month, Rama Rao's attitude towards the Central Government became much more suspicious than even before. He alleged that the whole drama was a pre planned conspiracy to end TDP rule in the State and to restore Congress Party to power sooner or later.

The dubious role played by the Governor in the murky happenings attracted nation-wide attention and became extremely controversial. Rama Rao and the non-Congress opposition party leaders described the action of Ram Lal as "daylight murder of democracy" and alleged that the developments were engineered by the Congress Party at the Centre. There was a wide-spread demand for the recall of the Governor. In the face of the torrential criticism against his role, Ram Lal resigned the office of the Governor and the Central Government appointed Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma as the new Governor of Andhra Pradesh.

The cold war between the Governor and the Telugu Desam Party Government reached a new high on February 3, 1988 when the Cabinet passed a resolution that the "Governor's conduct and utterances were detrimental to the interests

and self-respect of Andhra Pradesh".²³ Consequently, it put forward the extreme demand for the abolition of the office of Governor; this is similar to the demand voiced by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam government of Tamil Nadu in 1974 and stand taken by the Opposition parties conclave held at Srinagar in October 1983.

N.T. Rama Rao, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, one of the vocal exponents of State autonomy, has blamed a number of times that the Centre is making inroads into the legitimate areas of the State and pleaded for restructuring the Constitution. On May 5, 1983, N.T. Rama Rao said that the states were "neither adversaries nor supplicants to the Centre, but partners in the democratic endeavour for creating an egalitarian society in which people of different states would have equal opportunities for development."²⁴ He decried the drift towards more and more concentration of power in the Centre's hands.

At the initiative of N.T. Rama Rao 'leaders of the thirteen non-Congress-I parties, four of them in power in different States, have on January 4, 1986 decided to form a common forum for discussions and action on various problems and issues confronting the States and the nation'.²⁵ These parties 'demanded restructuring of the Constitution as it was heavily weighted in favour of the Union with the States having little control over fiscal, political and media policies'.²⁶ Telugu Desam Party and other regional parties have demanded greater autonomy for the states. They believe that India is only federal in name as the central government unnecessarily interferes in state affairs which have marginalised the role of state. True federalism needs to be established by giving more autonomy to states. N.T.Rama Rao and other regional party's leaders are demanding greater share in revenue.

United Front and Telugu Desam Party

N.Chandrababu Naidu, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh has emerged as a key player capable of moulding the national political process. In fact, the advent of Nara Chandrababu Naidu, though a leader of a regional party, provided a new turn and twist to national political process - first in the formation of the United Front Government in 1996 and later in the installation of National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government led by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the centre depending on the outside support of the TDP legislators elected from the State of Andhra Pradesh.

Chandrababu Naidu served as the convener of United Front. That made Chandrababu Naidu a prominent figure in Central politics. The coalition formed two governments in India between 1996 and 1998.²⁷ The Prime Minister was first from Janata Dal - H. D. Deve Gowda, and then later succeeded by I. K. Gujral. Both governments were supported from outside by the Indian National Congress under Sitaram Kesri.

After the 1996 general election, the BJP emerged as the single largest party with 161 seats. Congress (I), Janata Dal and TDP got 140, 46 and 16 seats respectively. Vajpayee was invited by President Shankar Dayal Sharma to form a government, but after 13 days in office, proved unable to muster a governing majority and resigned. Following the resignation of the BJP cabinet and the expressed disinterest of the Congress (I) in forming a government, at that crucial juncture Chandrababu Naidu supported Deve Gowda from Karnataka who assumed Prime Ministership on 1996 May 14th.²⁸ The TDP garnered the support of AGP, DMK, Tamil Maanila Congress National Conference, and Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party formed 13 parties behind the United Front Government.

The President invited H.D.Dewe Gowda, the leader of the United Front, to form a cabinet. Gowda and his cabinet were sworn in on June 1st, 1996 and with the support of the Congress (I) the new Government won the vote of confidence

on June 12, 1996.²⁹ In this coalition Telugu Desam Candidates were inducted into H.D. Deve Gowda's Central Cabinet. TDP M.P Kinjarapu Yerram Naidu became a minister at the centre, holding the portfolio of Rural Development and Employment. Then onwards Chandrababu Naidu became very prominent in decision-making at Centre too.

On 30th March 1997, Kesari drove up to the Rasthtrapati Bhavan to inform President K.R. Narayana that the Congress-I withdrew its support to the Deve Gowda government.³⁰ Gowda did not bargain for this. He went ahead seeking a confidence vote in the Lok Sabha. The motion was moved and after a debate, it was voted upon late in the night on 11 April 1997. The numbers were as expected 288 against the motion and 188 for the motion. The Congress-I and the BJP voted against the government. The United Front convenor Chandrababu Naidu and other from the coalition and the Left parties were meeting at the Andhra Bhavan to identify another leader. The Congress-I had promised to support anyone but Gowda.

The United Front arrived at a consensus to elect External Affairs Minister Inder Kumar Gujral all its leader in place of Mr. H.D. Deve Gowda; on whose removal was contingent the Congress renewed supports the multi-party combine. On a day marked by tension and high drama, the endorsement of Mr. Gujral's candidature by the state for the formation on new UF Government. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu was at the centre of the hectic parleys and backroom consultations spread over two excruciating days that saw all the 13 Front partners agreeing finally on a common candidate.³¹ In the overly crowded race for power, Mr. Gujral emerged the winner as the agreed nominee of the Telugu Desam Party, the Left parties as also the Janata Dal. His first public appearance upon being elected the leader was at Andhra Bhavan in the company of Chandrababu Naidu.

The Prime Minister was chosen by the leader of Telugu Desam Chandrababu Naidu and Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. After the fall of Devegowda government, again he along with Harkishan Singh Surjeet (CPM) played the role of kingmaker in installing I.K. Gujral as the Prime Minister.³² TDP joining the United Front government, TDP M.P, Yerram Naidu became a minister at the centre, holding the portfolio of Rural Development and Employment.

In November a commission of inquiry issued a report stating that the Dravida Munnetra Kazhaghham (DMK) party shared responsibility for the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. The Congress party then demanded that the United Front drop the DMK from its government. When the Front refused to do so, on 28th November, 1997 the Congress party that evening took the final plunge and withdrew its support to the United Front Government and staked its claim to form the next Government at the Centre. Prime Minister I.K. Gujral submitted his resignation to President K.R. Narayana.³³ Significantly, the Front had not recommended the dissolution of the Lok Sabha. Front Convener, Chandrababu Naidu said, "we have made it clear to the President that we will not support a BJP government, a BJP-led government or a Congress-Led government."³⁴ The President accepted the resignation of the Gujral government and asked the latter to continue in office till alternative arrangements were made.

National Democratic Alliance and Telugu Desam Party

The National Democratic Alliance was formed in May 1998 as a coalition to contest the general elections.³⁵ It was led by the Bharatiya Janata Party, and included several regional parties, including the Samata Party and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhaghham (AIADMK), as well as Shiv Sena, the only member which shared the Hindutva ideology of the BJP, with outside support provided by the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). In this Election most of the seats won by BJP among the all parties with 182 seats, followed by INC, CPM and TDP with 141, 32 and 12 seats.

In this general election, the left parties, along with TDP were partners in the United Front, which opposed both the BJP and the Congress. However, after the results were declared, which threw up a hung Parliament, they were prepared to support the formation of a Congress government at the centre, as they wanted to prevent a BJP- led coalition to assume power. Chandrababu Naidu, convener of the United Front, felt offended because the Left did not care to consult him on the matter. Given the political condition in Andhra Pradesh, where the TDP drew its basic sustenance from its vigorous opposition to the Congress, he certainly could not support a Congress government. As a result Chandrababu Naidu voted to leave the United Front; he resigned from the United Front and declared that his party would vote in Parliament in favour of the BJP-led coalition government.³⁶ T.D.P. candidate G.M.C. Balayogi was elected as speaker of the twelfth Lok Sabha on 24th March, 1998.³⁷ The election of Balayogi as speaker was, indeed, a precedent setting event in many respects. It was for the first time in the history of India that a *dalit* leader was elected to the chair. It is also for the first time that a member belonging to a regional party became the speaker of Lok Sabha. Chandrababu Naidu refused to join central cabinet and started playing key role from outside. The BJP-led coalition experiment failed very soon by early 1999, the NDA government lost its majority after the AIADMK with its 18 seats, withdrew their support. President Kocheril Raman Narayanan dissolved the Parliament and called fresh elections.

13th Lok Sabha Election was declared in October 1999. This was again a coalition government National Democratic Alliance led by BJP with 24 parties.³⁸ When the elections were held, the BJP alliance with NDA (some old parties leaving the NDA and some other new parties joined the NDA) campaigned. The patriotic fervour aroused during the conflict with Pakistan in Kargil and subsequent military successes there seem to have rebounded to the benefit of BJP and its allies which increased their tally of seats in the new Lok Sabha. Prominent among the parties in the winning coalition were Telugu Desam Party of Chandrababu Naidu and the DMK led by M. Karunanidhi.

The BJP had its own strategy, priorities and compulsions. Coming to power at the Centre was its immediate priority, and, in any case, it had no chance of coming to power on its own in the State it required the TDP's support in the Lok Sabha. Chandrababu Naidu extracted concessions from the BJP's Central leadership, as he knew that it needed his support to win the Lok Sabha elections. Thus, the complementarity of each other's priorities and pragmatic considerations made the alliance possible. Though the coalition as a whole achieved a substantial majority,³⁹ the BJP's won tally of seats remained unchanged, NDA parties JD, Shiv Sena, BJD and DMK won 21, 15, 15 and 12 seats respectively. The Telugu Desam Party won 29 seats in this election. This confirmed the emerging trend of large ruling coalition's in which major national parties play a coordinating, but not a dominating role. The Telugu Desam had been the second largest party after the BJP, with 29 Lok Sabha seats, Telugu Desam was also the largest regional party represented in the Rajya Sabha, with 13 seats.

Chandrababu sounded earnest in his effort and there appeared virtually no alternative to the course he had adopted. By the time of the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, Chandrababu was projected in the regional and national media as a 'model Chief Minister', 'dynamic reformer', 'hi-tech Chief Minister', etc. Chandrababu appealed to the voters to choose between the TDP, which stood for development, stability and SMART government and the Congress, which stood for stagnation, disorder and retrogression. He talked of good governance, bringing professionalism into politics and the need to eliminate corruption and criminal elements from public life. He appealed to intellectuals, professionals, businessmen and artists to take an active interest in politics and held open meetings to recruit them into the TDP

The Telugu Desam Party had demanded several times and got concessions from the NDA Government in Delhi between 1999 and 2004. To cope with natural calamities like flood and drought, the TDP was able to extract generous grants from Centre. Even the TDP pushed the central government to endorse its loans from the World Bank;⁴⁰ in fact, it extracted the privilege to negotiate with the World Bank directly and got the Union Government's guarantees to backup its debt to the international financial enterprises.

The NDA alliance lost the 2004 general elections; The BJP-led NDA had won 186 seats compared to 222 seats of United Progressive Alliance led by the Congress Party. The NDA defeat was so massive that its leaders were totally stunned by it. In Andhra Pradesh, also the ruling Telugu Desam Party-Bharatiya Janata Party (TDP-BJP) combine were routed. BJP could not win a single seat. Telugu Desam won only 5 seats. The result was a landslide victory for the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) which won 34 out of 42 seats, which reflects the state elections that occurred before the general elections, where National Democratic Alliance (NDA) member, TDP, was defeated soundly by Indian National Congress. Much of the success for Congress also relied on the support of Telangana Rashtra Samithi. Congress had contested in alliance with Telangana Rashtra Samithi (a TDP splinter group, worked for the separation of Telangana from AP) and the communist parties. Chandrababu Naidu to support the NDA government despite blood bath in Gujarat, He was paid heavily and was swept out of power in Andhra Pradesh as Muslims refused to vote for him.

The Third Front existed as the United National Progressive Alliance (UNPA) for a brief period of time in 2008. It was then a grouping of eight political parties in India along with Telugu Desam Party, who were neither in United Progressive Alliance (UPA) nor in National Democratic Alliance (NDA) or in Indian left. The Samajwadi Party was a member of the eight members UNPA. UNPA was opposed to the Indo-US nuclear deal. But the SP defected from this stand after a meeting with President Abdul Kalam.⁴¹ The alliance had then approached Abdul Kalam to contest the Indian presidential election in 2007. Rasheed Masood was their Vice-Presidential candidate. The UNPA however split in 2008,⁴² to be resurrected in 2009 as the Third Front. The Telugu Desam Party President Chandrababu Naidu, a key player in the fledgling Third Front. The UNPA was created as an alliance of ten different political parties on March 12, 2009.⁴³ The constituents of the third front in the Telugu Desam Party, the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), Communist Party of India (CPI), Forward Bloc (FB), Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), AIADMK and JD-S. The newly formed alliance carried with them 109 seats before the 2009 election. Third front lost in 2009 Lok Sabha general elections and split after the elections.

In 2014 National Elections Chandrababu Naidu demonstrated consummate political skills by arriving at an early understanding with the Narendra Modi-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and converted the threat into an opportunity. The strong Modi sentiment evident across the country convinced the average voter in the Seemandhra region that Chandrababu Naidu could form part of a winning combination at the centre and could deliver for the truncated state without a capital. The Modi factor thus helped Chandrababu Naidu to further galvanise his campaign. "However, it is wrong to conclude that Chandrababu Naidu could ride to success only due to the Modi factor. This was evident from the fact that TDP performed well even in the elections to the local bodies much before an alliance with BJP was formalised and before popular film actor Pawan Kalyan joined the TDP-BJP bandwagon."⁴⁴ The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) considerably improved their tally from the 2009 elections.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014. The party won two out of every three seats it contested, or 282 of the 428 seats for which it put up candidates.⁴⁵ Under Chandrababu Naidu's leadership, the TDP-BJP combine got a clear majority in Andhra Pradesh.

Chandrababu Naidu was a crucial supporter during the Vajpayee period, he had extended only outside support, without becoming part of NDA and TDP members didn't join Union Cabinet, except taking Lok Sabha speaker post for some time. But this time, Telugu Desam Party part of NDA. The TDP have 16 MPs almost close to Shiva Sena and was offered only one cabinet minister, Naidu didn't make it an issue unlike Shiva Sena. He only said: "I am not bargaining for cabinet berths, I am only interested to secure maximum support from the Centre for the development of Andhra Pradesh".⁴⁶ Pusapati Ashok Gajapathi Raju, sworn in on May 26, 2014, as a minister of the civil aviation portfolio in the Modi's union Cabinet,⁴⁷ and he is one of the senior politicians in Telugu Desam Party. Hailing from the titular family of Vizianagaram, TDP MP Pusapati Ashok Gajapathi Raju is a seven-time MLA in Andhra Pradesh. Ashok, who was elected from Vizianagaram, is the only member from the Lok Sabha to make it to the cabinet rank from residual Andhra Pradesh. TDP Rajya Sabha member Yalamanchili Satyanaryana alias 'Sujana' Chowdary was appointed as Minister of State for Science & Technology on November 09, 2014 during first Cabinet Expansion of Modi's NDA Government.

Nirmala Sitharaman has been allotted the MP seat in June, 2014 (Rajya Sabha) from Andhra Pradesh. This seat is allotted by Telugu Desam Party,⁴⁸ which is one of the major alliance partners of BJP led NDA Govt. The BJP's national leadership has asked Telugu Desam president and Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu to allot the Rajya Sabha seat to them to accommodate Ms Sitharaman who is not a member either of the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha. Chandrababu Naidu informed his party MPs of the request by their alliance partner. She is from Tamil Nadu, presently serving as Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Ministry of Commerce & Industry, as well as a Minister of State for Finance and Corporate Affairs which fall under the Ministry of Finance headed by Arun Jaitley. Until recently, she served as a national spokesperson for Bharatiya Janata Party.

CONCLUSIONS

The TDP's political performance at the national level largely mirrored its fortunes in Andhra Pradesh. The Congress swept the entire country except Andhra Pradesh in 1984 Parliament Elections. It won a whopping 404 seats out of the 491 it contested! The second largest party was the TDP! TDP swept the AP seats, winning 30 out of the 42 seats by itself. This meant that this is the first time a regional party got to play a major role in the national politics. This strength of the TDP ensured that NTR later went on to become the chairman of the National Front government in 1989. The importance of this victory cannot be underestimated at all. It at once catapulted TDP to national significance. A similar situation arose in 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2014 when TDP played a pivotal role (this time Chandra Babu was in charge) in the formation of four central governments. In 1996, Andhra Bhawan, strategically located just off India Gate, was where the United Front was formed, with Telugu Desam Party (TDP) boss and the then Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu playing a stellar role. TDP's golden years, when it was a key player in the governments led by the National Front (1989-91), the United Front (1996-98) and the National Democratic Alliance (1998-2004, 2014 to till today). The TDP has played a positive and crucial role. Now it was continuing with BJP and other regional parties. Till 2014, perhaps no other regional party played such an important role in the national political developments.

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