

A Vote for MGR

Transaction and Devotion in South Indian Politics

Ingrid Widlund

Introduction

"Puratchi Thalaivi", or Revolutionary Leader, is the honourable title of Jayalalitha Jayaram, Chief Minister of the state of Tamil Nadu.¹ She heads the regional party ADMK, that won a convincing victory in the elections in June 1991, defeating its major rival, the likewise regionally based DMK. These two parties dominate political life in the state. Both have their roots in the Dravidian movement, which emerged in the Tamil-speaking areas of the South before India became independent. ADMK was formed in 1972 as an off-shoot of DMK, but faced no difficulties in challenging its forerunner. On the contrary, it won the first assembly elections it ever contested, and got reelected twice. This article will focus on ADMK's founder and leader M. G. Ramachandran (MGR), who personalised the party until (and perhaps even after) his death in late 1987. The purpose is to analyse the relationship between his party and its voters, from the formation to the succession of leadership in 1988. My point of departure is the tools and arguments on political clientilism found in a dissertation on Indian politics by Hans Blomkvist. A second purpose is thus to try if the patron-client concept is a useful instrument to understand ADMK's electoral successes.

The discussion relates to a much wider question of the character of popular support in modern democracies. In order to gain political influence in a democracy, a party needs political support expressed in votes. The strength of a party is ultimately determined by the number of people who are voting for it. The electoral system, patterns of coalition, etc. can have a decisive impact on the election results, but the basis of legitimate power is nevertheless the voters' choice. Whether or not the parties are motivated by ideological convictions or hunger for power, it lies in their interest to try to get as many people as possible to vote for them. By what means has a successful party in India attracted support? And, correspondingly, what considerations are the voters likely to take, in this case those who voted for ADMK in Tamil Nadu?

The introduction will be followed by a presentation of Blomkvist's analysis. In his doctoral dissertation *The Soft State* he argues that the interaction between political parties and their voters is based on political patronage, which is seen in the context of a politicized and corrupt state administration. The third section gives a short account of important features in Tamil Nadu's political history, and provides a background to ADMK's emergence. Extra attention has been

paid to cinema's role for popular mobilization. The following sections include brief descriptions of ADMK's emergence and some characteristics of its regimes. I will argue that MGR's popularity was what essentially attracted votes to ADMK, and take a closer look at his image and certain aspects of his political behaviour. The patron-client concept will be applied to the relation between MGR and his voters, and on the activities of MGR's organisational base, his fan-clubs. I will discuss the findings and relate them to Blomkvist's model of the political machine. The concept of charisma will be introduced to shed some light on components of MGR's popularity which the patron-client concept fails to explain. The discussion will then be contextualized in Tamil history and culture. Finally I will present my conclusions.

India and the Politics of Patronage

Blomkvist's discussion on patronage stems from an analysis of housing politics in Madras, the capital of Tamil Nadu, and he presents an interpretation of the interaction between political parties and voters in India, in which patron-client relations and clientilism are key-words. According to Blomkvist, Indian politics follows what he calls a patronage-logic, with consequences for the election results. Blomkvist (1988:184) is very clear on this point: "*The government in, e.g. Tamil Nadu, does not win elections and political support with policy appeals but with a selective and clever distribution of patronage*". What precisely is meant by this statement? In what follows I will sort out the components of the argument, in order to be able to discuss its relevance in the case of ADMK.

Since the well-documented north american "political machine"² is central for Blomkvist's understanding of clientilism in India, I will start the presentation of his arguments with this colourful description:

Votes flowed upwards and patronage flowed downwards. The backbone of its electorate was found in the poor districts of the city – often among poor and illiterate immigrants, /.../. The leading idea of the political machine was, we may say, the *unprincipled help* to poor immigrants in return for their votes. Sometimes a job in the city's administration or a tenement, sometimes a turkey for the Christmas table, on other occasions a necessary contact to get by in the big, foreign-city or the comforting and friendly atmosphere in the local clubhouse. If money or patronage was not enough, the city boss would use repeat voters or toughs to produce the desired electoral majority. Laws were bent or broken for political expediency, sometimes to help a voter, at other times to benefit a business interest in exchange for suitable compensation. Some political machines had well-entrenched contacts with organized crime and controlling the police department was often crucial in city politics. Ironically, in some circumstances the police had to be bribed to enforce the law (Blomkvist 1988:260f).

The quotation captures several interlinked characteristics which Blomkvist identifies in the Indian context; a corrupt public sector, a political party without ideology and respect for rules and regulations, and not the least, a relation between party and voters based on patron-client ties.

Blomkvist's (1988:226) minimal definition of the patron-client relation is: "a relationship between two individuals that is asymmetric, reciprocal and informal". It is firstly question of a highly *unequal* interaction. The client is by definition inferior to his patron, who bases his superior power and status on the command over some important resource(s). A politician/administrator, for example, may control decisions regarding distributive measures. Secondly, the relation between a patron and a client always involves an *exchange*. Both parties receive something, and they need each other. This element of mutuality is worth stressing. No matter how unjust the situation may seem, the client do get something out of it. Typically, the client is rewarded with "material goods and services intended to reduce or ameliorate his environmental threats", and renders his patron loyalty and support, for example through voting. As the patron is in the position to set the terms of trade, he can easily exploit the vulnerability of his client. But for the latter, a bad deal is better than no deal at all.

Thirdly, the informality of patron-client bonds means that the relation is personal. Blomkvist underlines that it has a "face-to-face quality". This implies that the exchange is somehow based on a direct contact between the patron and his clients. They are familiar to each other and "... there is commonly an element of trust and affection" between them. A single individual can therefore not, according to this definition, be a patron of more people than he can maintain a direct relationship with. Hence, pyramids, chains and networks naturally develop. Another aspect of the informality, is that the relation – like friendship – is not bound by formal rules. In situations where the patron-client bond gets primacy, laws and regulations can therefore easily be disregarded (Blomkvist 1988:225-232).

The political machine is a party whose support is based on such informal relations, and by implication relies on *patronage* for attaining, and staying in, power. Patronage is defined by Blomkvist (1988:202,206) as rule-breaking in exchange for some kind of political support. Patronage in this context is thus a matter of rewards, which have not been distributed in accordance to any general rule, but on the basis of political convenience. The political machine canvasses votes mainly by providing different forms of protection to vulnerable people, including "protection" from the party's own violence. Central for its vote-getting capacity is however to distribute benefits in the constituencies. Blomkvist emphasizes that the benefits do not have to be material, nor that all voters actually get anything in return. The important thing is to hand out enough rewards for people to feel trust in the party's capacity to be of assistance when needed.

The political machine thus "relies mainly on *particularistic* inducements to solicit support" (Blomkvist 1988:265). This implies that the party does not adhere to formal rules. Laws and regulations are in other words circumscribed in order to exercise maximum influence over voting behaviour. To the extent that benefits and help are derived from public programmes and schemes, they are arbitrarily distributed. Hence, laws and regulations are either broken/ignored, or not fully implemented. The rewards are therefore also *specific*, which

means that they "... can be offered to one person while being withheld from others" (Blomkvist 1988:263).

Policies and issues are regarded to be unimportant in the strive for electoral success. The actions of the political machine are not derived from any ideological principles, but from what is conceived to be the best strategy to get political support. This gives rise to a patronage- (or rule-breaking) logic. To exercise control over patronage becomes much more important than policy-making. Blomkvist (1988:238) distinguishes between the clientele- and the policy-oriented or ideological politician. The first one does not care about actual policies, but only seeks a power position, while the other one primarily wants to see certain policies being changed or sustained, whether he or somebody else gets elected. Both, or none, can have the welfare of their voters in mind. The point is that they seek support through different means, one through patronage, the other through policy-appeals. This dichotomy is also applied on voting behaviour:

In a polity dominated by a 'policy-logic' the prospective voter reviews the ideologies and policies of the contending parties; the retrospective voter reviews the actions and policies of the incumbent government and tries to evaluate it against how e.g. the national economy would have been handled by the opposition party. In a polity dominated by a 'patronage-logic' the prospective voter will consider the prospects of *patronage* from the incumbent party as compared with the opposition party; /.../. The retrospective voter will evaluate the patronage he has managed to secure from the incumbent government; e.g. a job, a tenement or a place in a school for his children (Blomkvist 1988:150f).

(Poor) Indian voters are assumed to follow the patronage-logic. Hence, the argument that political parties do not win political support with policy appeals. Voters judge a party after its capacity to provide assistance, or "to get things done" in the constituency. The alternative, in Blomkvist's view, would be to judge after *policies* (provided of course the parties have any). The policy concept is defined as an *explicitly stated directive*, to be distinguished from a single programme or government action on the one hand, and from ideology on the other hand (Blomkvist 1988:65f). However, the way the concept is juxtaposed with "patronage", suggests that Blomkvist thinks about it as everything which is not a particularistic distribution of rewards. I have therefore interpreted the use of policy appeal in his argument to broadly signify references to political ideology, "policies" and concrete issues.

The context, and cause, for this kind of political behaviour is a state which is not governed by rules, or rather, does not obey to its own rules.³ Blomkvist shows convincingly the vulnerability of poor people in a situation when the administration acts in an arbitrary manner. No public good reaches them without the right contact, and they are more or less deprived from all rights unless somebody is there to protect them. Since they cannot rely on the state for their security, they need to find another solution. Hence, "(I)n the absence of state power governed by rules, people will build reciprocal, informal alliances with someone who is powerful enough to protect them from physical and material hardships" (Blomkvist 1988:233). To have a "friend" with the right connec-

tions might be crucial to find employment, escape police harassment, or get your children admitted to school.

(Poor) people will therefore find it pointless to organize horizontally, along class-lines, or try to influence politics through interest organizations. The "underprivileged" do not act unitedly for common goals, but enter instead patron-client relations to serve their individualist interests. Clientilism replaces class struggle. The party in power uses the state as its private resource base to swop help against votes. This is however not the only mutual service at function. What Blomkvist defines as the clientilistic party sustains its position through a whole set of interpersonal exchange relations, with public officials and businessmen, as well as internally with its own activists (Blomkvist 1988:235-240).

Blomkvist implies that the voters have tangible benefits in mind when they enter the patron-client relation. They are driven by the need for security and expect a reward which makes a difference for their well-being, whether or not others are affected. The lack of interest in policy matters should not, according to Blomkvist (1988:274), be understood as a "culturally-induced irrationality". People who cast their vote in return for the (prospect of) direct assistance, have rather *responded rationally* to the political situation they live under. Within the context of a particularistic state, the position as clients is the only instrument poor people have to influence the implementation process, and thereby get some degree of security, services, or material help. To form interest organizations and forward general demands regarding policy choices tend to be a waste of time. The political parties serve as links to the bureaucracy, and are in consequence "regarded as a *means to get access to public resources*, rather than as an instrument for articulation and aggregation" (Blomkvist 1988:251f. Emphasis added).

Three important aspects of the relations between the (poor) voter and the political party are thus emphasized:

– *Lack of ideology and issues.* The activities of the "machine" are not guided by any general principles, except for the principle of vote-getting. It is thus a question of pure pragmatism. Values and political ideas are not a path to success, but quite peripheral features of the political process.

– *Reliance on personal ties.* The contact between the "machine" and the voter is sustained on a personal basis. Some kind of network in the constituencies is thus necessary. It does not have to be a party worker or local candidate serving as a link upwards in the hierarchy, but just as well any influential personality.

– *Arbitrary decision-making.* A "machine" in command over the state uses the implementation process to give political rewards (and presumably punishments) to the voters. Important decisions are taken contrary to established procedures, and laws are broken or left unenforced. More important in the persuasion of voters is however that rules are not *consistently applied*. Benefits are distributed only to those the leading party wishes to reward. A machine which is *not* in power then? Blomkvist is not explicit on this point, but presumably, its representatives make promises and create expectations in the constituencies, which would *require* rule-breaking to be fulfilled. They are also

likely to employ whatever resources they have to give evidence of their protective capacities. This aspect is to my understanding what actually singles out a machine in India from an "ordinary" party. Any decision of action is possible when nothing needs to be justified by referring to this or that policy or ideology. Both the content of the message and the type of organization gets their significance in connection to this particularistic component.

The Dravidian Movement and DMK

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) was formed in the late 40's and gained momentum in the 50's and 60's. Its first victory in the state elections in 1967 was the product of a social, cultural and political movement with origins more than fifty years earlier.

The non-Brahman concept was central for the social and political conflict which led to the formation in 1916 of the South Indian Liberation Front, commonly known as the Justice Party. Tamil Nadu was at that time part of the much larger Madras Presidency under British direct rule. Brahmins, the priestly caste, constituted not more than 3% of the population, but were represented far beyond proportion in state administration and higher education. Opposing this order was a narrow urbanized and educated elite of upper-caste non-Brahmans. Their grievances were, according to Barnett (1976: Ch.2), a result of perceived loss of status compared to their traditional position in the rural areas. The all-Indian Vedic theory of four castes or "varnas" (colour) did not properly apply in Tamil Nadu. The middle castes Kshatriyas and Vaishyas were absent, and those caste-communities (jatis) that were locally ranked just beneath the Brahmins were categorized as Sudras, the lowest caste, and "lumped together" with jatis they felt superior to. (Below Sudras were the outcastes, or Untouchables). Their indignation was combined with ideas of a racial and cultural distinction between themselves and the priestly caste (Barnett 1976: Ch2; cf. Irschick 1969).

The Justice Party contested elections and formed government several times. Given the extremely restricted franchise, they did not need to create a mass following and remained basically élitist and pro-British. The activities of the Justice Party coincided however with, and was fuelled by, a revived interest in Tamil history and culture. A renewed interest in the Tamil classics went along with creative writing and efforts to modernize Tamil. The search into a cultural past gave rise to the idea of an ancient Dravidian civilization, subdued by invading Aryans. Brahmins became defined as their descendants and were considered to belong to a different race. As Aryan representatives, they were also accused to have polluted Dravidian religion and introduced the caste system in south India (Irschick 1969:275-298; Ryerson 1988:60-70).⁴

Such ideas would continue to have importance long after the Justice Party was bypassed by more radical initiatives. The Self-Respect League was established in the mid-20's to work for the social and cultural advancement of Dravidians. It co-existed and cooperated with the moribund Justice Party until 1944, when both organizations merged into the Dravida Kazhagam, DK (The

Dravidian Federation). The radicalization of the Dravidian movement took place during this phase, under the auspices of the colourful agitator E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, known as Periyar, or Great Man. His resentment against caste oppression made him turn against Brahmans and reject religion. This was blended with socialist ideas and antagonism against Aryans/North Indians. He further advocated the creation of a separate Dravidian state, free from Brahman domination. The main activities of the Self-Respect League, subsequently the DK, were however to plead for social reform. One example of their impact was the widespread practice of so called self-respect marriages, where the rites were performed without a Brahmin. Periyar also propagated for inter-caste marriages and widow remarriage. Linguistic politics was linked to the Dravidian cause when the Congress state government in 1938 introduced the Indo-Aryan language Hindustani as a compulsory subject in provincial schools. The decision was seen as an expression of Brahman cultural dominance and led to a wave of agitations (Barnett 1976: Ch.3-4; Hardgrave 1965:25-31; Irschick 1969:330-350; Ryerson 1988:85-107).

DK made the goal of an independent Dravidian state part of their platform, and expressed their opposition to British rule. The organization still exists, but due to its militant atheism, they never managed to attract the Tamil masses. It was instead the DMK, under the talented leadership of C. N. Annadurai ("Anna"), that mobilized followers on a mass basis. The significance of the Self-Respect League and the DK, should however not be underestimated. They brought social and cultural consciousness to large sections of Tamils, and gave them a sense of common political identity. It is by instance argued by Hardgrave (1965:30) that they "brought the message of a Tamil *nationality* to the masses." To gain active, broad-based support would nevertheless require another type of political work.

There were growing tensions within the DK, and two-thirds of its members followed Annadurai as he in 1949 formed the DMK⁵. Annadurai had already built up a personal following. He was a skillful orator, dramatist, actor and writer, and had attracted many young members to the movement. To his death in 1969 he remained the front-figure of DMK. The new organization supported the same goals and principles as DK – an emphasis on radical social reform achieved through Dravidian independence.

If the 30's and 40's involved a radicalization of the regional movement, the two following decades witnessed an opposite trend. DMK softened its approach in most fields, except for language, which became the most important rallying point for regional sentiments. Atheism was abandoned in favour of the slogan "One God – one caste". The harsh rethoric (and actions) against Brahmans were transformed into a critique of "Brahminism" as an attitude. When secessionist parties were declared illegal in India, DMK swiftly gave up its demand for a separate "Dravida Nadu" to plead for more autonomy to the states. These developments were accompanied by an unprecedented growth in popular support (Barnett 1976: Ch. 4-6,9-10; Cf. Hardgrave 1965:33-80; Ryerson 1988:111-135).

In 1956, DMK decided to start contesting elections. Six years later they had become the second largest party in the state, and could assume authority in 1967. Its share of votes was increased up to 1971, from 41 to 49%. DMK's steady growth in the 60's went together with higher voter turn-outs. Apart from attracting voters from its main rival, the Congress Party, DMK managed to mobilize previously politically passive groups. This was achieved by an ideological appeal, and by efficiently making use of available means of propaganda, the cinema in particular.

The party drew most of its support from the urban middle classes and the backward castes. Youth were in particular attracted to the party. Unlike the Congress Party who tended to rely on patronage networks to canvass support, DMK approached the electorate directly. They built up a solid organizational base and had skillful orators who addressed people in their own way of speaking. The concept of honour ("manaam") was central for DMK's political discourse. By selectively referring to history and traditional legends, they associated their own cause with pride over being a Tamil (V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai).⁶ DMK's ideology was indeed linked to the cultural revival, and many Tamil scholars and artists were among the members. The impact of DMK's cultural and political message was reflected in the dramatic events of 1965. Violent rioting broke out all over Tamil Nadu when Hindi replaced English as India's official language. Ironically, the DMK remained quite passive during the agitations, in which students performed a leading role. Tamil vs. Hindi was nevertheless DMK's most important issue at the 1967 elections.

DMK added issues like inflation, corruption, and the central government's allegedly unfair treatment of the South, to their cultural and nationalistic rhetoric, as pragmatic concerns became more important than the social ideals of the Self-Respect movement. One of their major promises was to lower prices on rice, which is the most important food item in the south. DMK's political rhetoric however kept a strand of socialism. But although Annadurai said they were "more Communist than the Communist party" (Barnett 1976:262), it reflected neither in theory or practice. DMK did not adhere to marxism, or pay much attention to class issues. Progressive taxation or redistribution of the means of production was absent from DMK's agenda in power.

Annadurai died in 1969. The appeal of Anna, or "elder brother", was one of DMK's main assets. Party people venerated him as "God on earth", to follow him became a "duty". When DMK's radicalism got diluted, devotion for Anna was a replacement for the solution of difficult ideological matters (Barnett 1976:234). The news about his illness provoked a major emotional response in Tamil Nadu, and three million people are estimated to have witnessed his funeral in Madras (Ryerson 1988:108). M. Karunanidhi, leader of the strongest faction, took over after Annadurai, and led the party to its second victory in the state elections.

Cinema and Tamil Politics

We worship cinema stars and follow them, with astonishing servility – in all probability the cinema stars will not take serious note of us once they finish exploiting the DMK's following for expanding their fan circle.
(Quoted from Hardgrave 1965:66f)

DMK undoubtedly reaped great benefits from their close links with the Tamil film. The relationship has been described as symbiotic (Hardgrave 1973; Pandian 1992). Actors and authors from drama companies who had operated within the Self-Respect movement joined DMK at its inception. Both Annadurai and his successor M.Karunanidhi were busy script writers, and the party attracted a number of film personalities. DMK's hold over the cinema industry was strengthened by time. Several of its leaders had their own film companies. Before the elections in 1971, the big film studios in Madras – "Tamil Nadu's Hollywood" – were silent for three weeks. DMK had mobilized all its resources. The front position of film stars to reinforce the popular appeal would however very soon strike back on the party.

Tamil film became politicized as early as during the all-India national struggle, but remained for long inaccessible to wider audiences. DMK's mobilization phase coincided however with rapid rural electrification. Even the most remote villages could soon be reached by this medium thanks to "touring" cinemas. By 1971, Tamil Nadu had 1,500 cinema theatres, one fourth of the total number in India. Illiteracy was no obstacle to enjoy a film and even those who were very poor could sometimes afford a ticket. Still, it was only DMK who initially saw and took advantage of cinema's potential for propaganda use. The first films of Annadurai and his colleagues were "social reformers", educative in purpose and full of critique against Brahmins, religious hypocrisy, untouchability etc. Karunanidhi's great success *Parashakti* from 1952, is often mentioned in this genre. It included e.g. a temple scene with a brahman priest molesting the chaste heroine. The fact that it built on a real case made it no less shocking. Such open social criticism was however gradually abandoned while reliance on star appeal increased.

Social reform themes were replaced by specific party propaganda. In the popular "Nadodi Mannan" (Vagabond King) 1958, the hero and king "issues a decree that could easily pass for the DMK election manifesto" (Hardgrave 1973:299). When this film had run for 100 days, DMK celebrated by organising a huge procession in Tamil Nadu's second largest town. In other cases the message was less articulate, but obvious to everybody. DMK's colours black and red, and its emblem the rising sun, appeared frequently in different forms. Annadurai's portrait could be seen now and then, and his name was more or less openly invoked. Dialogue, songs and sceneries were thus laden with party symbols. "Failures" of the Congress regime were exposed, and historical themes employed to dwell on the glory of the Tamil past.

Several stars were in DMK's fold. They brought glamour to the party and were used to attract the crowds to meetings and conferences. The greatest of them all was M.G.Ramachandran, who faithfully served DMK through film

roles and active party work.⁷ Another popular star, Sivaji Ganesan, left DMK for the Congress, and became a great asset to them instead. Hardgrave found in a survey a clear relation between star preference and party allegiance. "(W)hether an individual preferred Shivaji or M.G.R. was the best predictor of how he voted in the two elections [1962 and 1967] – Shivaji fans for Congress; M.G.R. fans for the DMK" (Hardgrave 1973:302; cf. Hardgrave and Neidhart 1975). MGR was however the most politically active of the two stars. Those who favoured him tended also to be much more interested in politics, an interesting result since they were less educated than Ganesan-fans (Hardgrave and Niedhart 1975:33). MGR associated himself totally to DMK. His films were filled with party references like those mentioned above, he held a (state)parliament seat, and became the party treasurer. Hardgrave (1973:301) describes him as "indistinguishable" from the party.

The political content of Tamil film was downgraded in the 70's, and the relation between film and politics is much less intimate now than it was before. In the 50's and 60's however, cinema proved to be instrumental in producing one of India's most extraordinary political personalities, MGR.

What started as an elitist socio-political protest expanded to a broad political movement. On the way, some ideals disappeared and the modes of expression changed. The non-Brahman concept lost its primacy as the social base widened. An emphasis on language as a unifying category allowed for the inclusion of Brahmans. The continuity consisted of a focus on culture and history, which was virtually all that remained from Periyar's radical approach when DMK faced the constraints of contesting elections. DMK's political impact in Tamil Nadu has been tremendous. It created what has been described as a "hegemonic hold over Tamil political life and culture", a mode of political communication that other parties had to follow (Geetha and Rajadurai, 1-5). The abandonment of radical reform-goals paved the way for populism and a reliance on a cinematic glamour in politics. The party that came to dominate the late 70's and the 80's represents in more than one respect a continuation of the pattern set by DMK.

Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam

Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK) was formed on October 18, 1972. The aim of the new party was, in the words of its leader MGR, to implement "Annadurai's policies and programmes including prohibition" (Barnett 1976:296-297). To include "Anna" in the party name was just another way to claim inheritance of DMK's former leader. But, as one observer notes, "(I)t could as well have been called MGRK." (MT 1988:21).

MGR was ousted from DMK one week before he set up his new party, after having publicly accused its ministers and assembly members of corruption. The party's leadership took only two days to strike back, and they hold on to the decision in spite of violent and emotional reactions from MGR's supporters all over Tamil Nadu. The formation of ADMK had little to do with differences

over ideology or policy. The split was rather the result of a competition for influence over DMK after Annadurai's death. MGR was an important asset for propaganda-purposes, but the other top cadres felt uneasy about his massive popularity. His fan-clubs (the MGR "manrams") did in addition constitute a parallel organizational structure within the party. MGR was therefore, according to Barnett (1976:294f), increasingly being perceived as a threat for the leadership. Karunanidhi sought to challenge him by promoting his own sons' film career, and lessen DMK's reliance on the financial contributions of MGR. The filmstar thus had reasons to be worried about his own position in the party (Forrester 1976:289). Moreover, he might have felt the time had come to get due recognition for his vote-getting capacity. MGR had benefited from his association with DMK, but the party gained much more from him. Neither Annadurai nor Karunanidhi did however consider to accredit him with a ministerpost (MT 1988:21).

All except a few parliamentary and assembly members remained loyal with DMK, but a large part of the mass base followed MGR. His fanclubs, which had been instrumental in recruiting members to DMK and mobilizing for the elections, became automatically the new party's organizational base. Duncan Forrester (1976:288) describes thus ADMK as being "little more than the MGR fan-clubs transformed into a political party". Karunanidhi had succeeded to keep his cabinet intact, and could hope that ADMK would not be more successful than earlier attempts to create viable parties out of DMK-factions.

However, ADMK came out victorious in the first assembly election the party contested, securing nearly one third of the votes and a majority of the seats. They had campaigned on an anti-corruption platform, in alliance with the Congress Party. These links had been forged during the nation-wide Emergency 1975-77, which MGR supported and Karunanidhi strongly opposed. MGR even flew to Delhi to express his approval before Indira Gandhi, a favor she returned by dismissing the DMK government in January 1976 and proclaiming presidential rule in Tamil Nadu (Kohli 1990:162). Four years later, however, MGR faced the same verdict after having been friendly with the Janata Government in Delhi. He managed however to bring his party to power again the same year. The success was repeated in 1984. ADMK swept the polls, despite, or perhaps thanks to, MGR being seriously ill at a hospital in New York during the campaign and election.

All observers are of one opinion: *ADMK was essentially a one-man show, relying totally on MGR's personal popularity*. Atul Kohli, for example, describes a scene from Tamil Nadu's second-largest town:

The ADMK in Madurai was virtually indistinguishable from the name and image of MGR. City streets were dominated by larger-than-life posters of MGR, clad in his Tamil *lungi* and wearing the dark sunglasses that became his political trademark. Gaudy posters, garlanded pictures, loud music from MGR's old films, and tapes of MGR's voice on loudspeakers were encountered throughout the city (Kohli 1990:172f).

MGR was the unquestioned leader of a party which even was without a formal constitution (India Today, Sep.30, 1984). In the power struggles after his

death, some of the contenders claimed that the party lacked written rules and regulations, but had only been guided by MGR's actions and decisions (Frontline, Jan.9-22, 1988). ADMK was MGR's personal creation and his popularity its main asset. Following quotation from India Today (Nov.15, 1984) is typical for the comments I have found: "... MGR had carried personality-oriented politics to its ultimate degree, keeping his party under control by making it almost completely dependent on him for votes". If not earlier, this situation became clear when the party leader fell seriously ill in 1984. He suffered from a stroke and it was uncertain whether he would survive or not. Factional tussles in his party came to the surface during his absence, and though not even physically present in India, MGR completely dominated the ensuing election campaign. Would "the revolutionary hero" be able to take up office again? DMK put this into doubt, while ADMK's main effort was to claim the opposite. The situation a leaderless ADMK faced, can be illustrated by this comment from an uncertain voter: "*MGR himself is very clean but I have my own doubts about the people around him. If one cannot be sure that he is coming back, why should I vote for the AIADMK?*" (India Today, Dec.31, 1984).⁸

Fierce competition for control over ADMK broke out when MGR died, and the party could not be held together. Two factions contested the next elections on separate platforms. MGR's widow Janaki stood against his former co-starer and "leading lady" Jayalalitha.⁹ Both tried to project themselves as the true heir of MGR. One of Jayalalitha's campaign leaders for example stated that "Our plank – and Jayalalitha's popularity stems from it – is making her MGR's political heir ..." (Frontline, April 16-29, 1988). DMK had however no problems to defeat a split ADMK and could thus return to power in 1989.

Makkal Thilakam MGR – Pride of the People

A public opinion survey from 1986 revealed that MGR's strongest support came from landless agricultural labourers. Sixty per cent of the illiterate respondents were strongly in favour MGR, while the corresponding number of college-educated people was only twenty per cent. It was stated that "(I)n other words, MGR gets his greatest support from the poorest among the poor" (Pandian 1992:18-20). Given the fact that most people in Tamil Nadu are poor, illiterate and live in rural areas, it is perhaps not a sensational discovery that the state's most popular leader relied on precisely those groups. However, that MGR's support came *primarily* from the poorest, and not for example from the broad middle class section, is not self-evident, but nevertheless treated as a commonsensical fact in all comments I have found on the matter.

MGR's popularity cut across castes and communal groups. It obviously did not matter that he was not Tamil by birth (even though DMK attacked him on that point), and his caste was unknown to most people. As pointed out by Dickey (1993:354), this is "highly unusual" in the community conscious India. His support base could thus best be understood as class- rather than caste- or community-specific.¹⁰ Many of these poor people did not only give MGR their

vote at election time, they gave him their full devotion. There are numerous, more or less spectacular, examples. Thirty-one people were reported to have committed suicide after his death in December 1987 and "countless" young men performed the ritual of shaving their heads, which is normally done when a family member has died. People travelled from far-off villages to form the funeral procession in Madras of two million people (Pandian 1992:17). It is estimated that 500,000 people filed past the body, and the city witnessed "a frenzy of grief" (Frontline, Jan. 9-22, 1988). His illness in 1984 provoked even more intense reactions. There were cases of self-immolation and people slashed themselves with razor blades, or cut off toes and fingers to make offerings to the deities for MGR's recovery. (Pandian 1992:18; India Today, Nov.15, 1984). This occasion provides evidence that the adulation of MGR had become close to, or actually religious: "It was a scale of mass idolatry never before witnessed in the country. On the roads of Madras and other towns in the district, small processions of men, women and children trekked for up to 30 km to a favoured temple or church. Posters went up on walls and in buses, praying for MGR's recovery" (India Today, Nov.15, 1984). For a lot of people MGR was divine, while still alive, and the religious manifestations of his followers only proliferated after his death. Shrines have been built for him, and devotees undertake pilgrimages to a temple at his former residence. One of them said: "*In some religions, gods have been born as human beings. Don't people worship them? Our god is MGR...*" (Pandian 1992:129f).

His death probably came as a surprise to some supporters. MGR was presented as the thrice-born. His second birth was when he survived a bullet in 1967, and the third birth when he recovered from his serious illness. Since he had defeated death twice, it was but a far step to regard him as immortal. When he returned to Madras to be sworn in for the third term as Chief Minister, he was greeted by a rejoicing crowd of between 500,000 and 1 million people. One enthusiast stated: "*This is his third birth. Twice before he has hovered between life and death. But we believe MGR can never be vanquished*" (India Today, Feb.28, 1985). Some ardent fans may today even deny that he has died, while for others, their hero is among them through his films.

A defeat to DMK in a by-election in early 1984, indicated that MGR's support had decreased before his illness. Even if his popularity really had been on the decline, it is clear that he nevertheless had a strong personal following.

Tamil Nadu under ADMK-rule

O great one who conceived countless schemes and translated them into great achievements!

O golden-hearted one!

O great revolutionary leader!

We pray that your glittering reign continues for many more years.

(The Chairman of the Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation, in IWI, July 13, 1986)

In sharp contrasts to all popular and official tributes, the reports on ADMK's achievements in power give evidence of serious problems. A lot of criticism is

voiced in the comments, making corruption, populism, mismanagement and repression recurrent themes. To begin with, the economy of Tamil Nadu did not fare well under MGR's rule. Annual growth and per capita income (in 1985) was lower than the national average and industrial development stood still. Tamil Nadu had in twenty years fallen from third position among industrialized states to a ranking between eight and thirteen. A negative trend which started during DMK's reign, was reinforced under MGR. Bad infrastructure, especially of power-supply, led to an "exodus of industries" and people in the sector complained over large-scale corruption of the administration. In addition, rural and urban unemployment increased to above all-India level (TWI, July 6, 1986; cf. *India Today*, Nov. 15, 1984). The Madras Institute for Development Studies reported in 1988 that there had been a "clear shift" from investments on irrigation and power, to current expenditure in the social and agricultural sectors. The interplay between the political parties in the state was defined as a case of "competitive populism", where each tried to outbid the other in granting subsidies and welfare programmes (MIDS 1988:331-334).

MGR had little interest in measures that did not give immediate political pay-off. The hall-mark of his regimes was the emphasis on welfare schemes. The government drafted a variety of such programmes (even though all never took off), for example free electricity for farmers, monetary aid for unemployed youth, allowances for pregnant women, aid for the funeral rights for Harijans and the job-for-every family scheme (TWI, July 6, 1986). Of outstanding significance was however the "Chief Ministers Nutritious Meal Programme", under which 8.5 million children between 2 and 15 were given free meals every day in school. School enrolment increased rapidly, children's health standards improved and the implementation of the scheme gave employment to over 200,000 people, mostly women (Frontline, Jan. 22, 1988).

It seems however that the poor themselves partially financed the programmes that were aimed at their uplift (cf. Pandian 1992:24; Washbrook 1989:255). General taxation was regressive. Direct taxes which fall on the wealthy, land revenue, agricultural income and urban land tax, accounted 1980-85 to less than 2% of the total tax revenue. Large farmers benefitted from a heavily subsidised provision of electricity and public irrigation to the agricultural sector. Sales taxes on consumer products and excise revenue, did on the other hand constitute a large share of public income. While sales taxes primarily affect the middle classes, poor people contributed substantially to the state exchequer through their consumption of country spirits. In contrary to election promises, the government relaxed prohibition in 1981, which almost doubled the excise revenue in three years to 20 million rupees (MIDS 1988:306-318). National government funds is also an important financial source. The midday-meal scheme for example, became funded through the central five-year plan.

Before MGR's illness barred any criticism on his integrity and capacity, corruption was emerging as a major political issue again. Several allegations had to do with the liquor trade and the granting of licences. Despite regulations to limit the consumption, Tamil Nadu became in the 80's "one of the wettest

states in the country" (India Today, Nov.15, 1984). There were immense profits to be made, and the "liquor barons" cut gold, with good help from the government. Tamil Nadu's taxing policy in the field was unique in India. Taxes on parts of the liquor trade was namely paid by the state *not* by the manufacturers (Pandian 1992:23). It was revealed that MGR was personally not very concerned with keeping detailed accounts when he publicly declared that he had borrowed large sums of money from the party to pay his taxes, and the party treasurer claimed he never knew about it (India Today, April 15, 1985).

Administrative routines are not only reported to have been corrupt, but above all extremely slow and inefficient. MGR centralized decision-making to himself, and his illness made only things worse. To exemplify, when 50 000 files were already pending in his secretariat, he ordered his government colleagues to obtain clearance from him before taking *any* decisions (TWI, July 6, 1986). The government omitted moreover to hold any elections to the local level bodies: panchayats, panchayat unions and cooperatives, which instead were managed by appointed officials. Its record on civil rights was not very flattering either. The so called Goondas Act which was enacted in 1982, allowed the state authorities at district level to detain anybody who was considered a *potential* violator of the law, for a whole year without trial. About 50 people per month was on average detained under this Act. Other laws that were enacted in the 80's gave the government power to punish political criticism in the media (Pandian 1992:26f). The activities of the intelligence service created "an air of suspicion and fear" (India Today, Nov. 15, 1984), and instances of police repression were reported, including the arrestation of children.

ADMK's political success thus seems to have been closely related to the personal popularity of its leader MGR. From what I have found, however, his political achievements do not impress. The administration was in a mess, the economy went down, he did nothing to change the structural imbalances between rich and poor, and he paid little respect to civil liberties. Still, he led the largest party in the state and managed to get reelected twice, primarily by the section of society that seemed to gain the least.

Puratchi Nadigar MGR – Revolutionary Actor

How did MGR acquire his extraordinary position as a people's hero? His popularity did not, as we have seen, stem from his time as a party leader. His suspension from DMK provoked strong reactions from his supporters. People took to the streets in protest, and there were riots all over the state for three weeks. He had a large personal following in 1967 as well. When he was shot by a co-actor and brought to hospital, there was a full display of emotional reactions similar to those I have already described. At that time already, people spoke of him as a God. His popularity is in fact mentioned among the factors that brought DMK to power in 1967 (Hardgrave 1971:311; Barnett 1976:137). To be able to understand MGR's mass appeal, we must therefore turn to his film acting career.

His followers did not make any difference between the hero in the films and the real person (Dickey 1991; Hardgrave 1971; Pandian 1992). The DMK leaders tried in vain to remind people that the films of their former vote-getter was not the same as his politics. MGR did carefully construct an image for himself that would appeal to the poor and oppressed. In his own words:

... it is not enough if you are a good man, you must create an image that you are a good man. /.../ The image is what immediately strikes you when you see a person or hear his name. You must put forward an image if you want to get anywhere. (In Pandian 1992:95)

His star status allowed him to influence film-making. Song lyrics were changed, dialogues rewritten, camera angles adjusted, dances re-choreographed. MGR made use of all his skills to create the formula that suited him. He could exercise a financial control over the Tamil film industry, and producers had to bow at his will (Pandian 1992:95f).

Maradur Gopalamenon Ramachandran was a Malayalee¹¹, born at Sri Lanka in 1917 (some say earlier). The family moved to Tamil Nadu after the death of the father. Due to extreme poverty, MGR had to join a drama troupe at the age of seven. His background of deprivation became later one of his main political assets. He repeatedly referred to his days of hardship, and they were well publicized by the party. Nonetheless, he knew what poverty meant and could use this knowledge for his films. His first film role was in 1936, and the first success came eleven years later. In total, he participated in 136 films during his long career. The last one was released in 1978, when he had already become chief minister. Every new release of a MGR-starrer was a festivity. Prices went up, but his most ardent fans could easily skip a meal to pay for a desired ticket (Hardgrave 1971:313). Film-going could take the form of a religious ritual. Pandian (1992:77) describes: "One can witness ebullient crowds gathered to watch MGR films, burning camphor before larger-than-life cut-outs of the hero and distributing butter-milk and water to the populace – as one would do before a Hindu deity during temple festivals". What then characterized this modern deity?

The filmstar MGR had virility, charm and good looks. But this was not enough to make him politically significant. MGR was, however, always the hero. This meant firstly that he was the embodiment of all social virtues. "(H)e may be the captain of the guard in revolt against tyrannies of a wicked *dewan*;¹² a humble clerk at odds with a corrupt bureaucracy; a cowherder in struggle against a cruel landlord. Whatever the role, it is always the same: the audience expects and demands it. The hero neither smokes nor drinks, and is devoted to his suffering mother. In love scenes with the villain's daughter, he is almost invariably the pursued rather than the pursuer" (Hardgrave 1971:309). Secondly, the typical MGR-character was the underdog who rose above his position to establish justice. He often played the role of a simple working man, whether peasant, shoe-shine boy or rickshaw-puller, with whom the poor could identify (Pandian 1992:40). But his role-figures defied authority, refusing to bow their heads before the powerful, the elite. Moreover, the film hero ac-

quired important signs of dominance, access to education and women, and the right to dispense justice. Education is often beyond reach for the poor, but MGR manage (against all odds) to acquire learning and use it in his defense of the powerless. Our hero is not surprisingly irresistible to women, especially for rich, upper caste girls who do not hesitate to marry him, in spite of marked social and economical differences. MGR did of course always defeat the evil forces, represented by the villain. His action scenes are famous and extremely popular. MGR is invincible and fights bravely against criminals or oppressors.

His films usually depicted a conflict between oppressed and oppressors. Unnecessary to say, MGR always stood by the poor. The "happy-endings" took however place in a context where nothing really had changed. MGR married the heroine and defeated the villain, but the basic injustices remained (Pandian 1992:70; Hardgrave 1971:309). Poor and uneducated people nevertheless saw a hero, who not only understood their problems, but also had the power to make life better for them. According to Dickey (1991:19), this is what made MGR different from other stars. The films contained the message that MGR's fate could be theirs, and that he had the capacity to help those in need. Such messages were efficiently spread through the film songs. There are songs in all Tamil films (like Indian film in general). You can here the most popular ones being played everywhere, at bus stations, party meetings, weddings, in temples etc. The political significance of these songs is that they were taken as MGR's personal ideological statements. In a film released in 1976 for example, he sings:

Toiling hands should rule tomorrows world
 Revolutionary flowers should bloom all over the land
 We do our duty without fear, and claim our due without hesitation,
 Come join (me) comrades.
 It is past when ploughs burdened our shoulders
 And scarcity stayed in our homes.
 The time is near when everything belongs to everyone. The time of dawn is near;
 Dharma is about to pronounce its verdict;
 Never do the honest die.
 (In Pandian 1992:55)

His title "Revolutionary Leader" can be explained by the fact that he, as the moral man, repeatedly defeated and changed position with the (wicked) local rulers. According to Price (1991:12f), MGR's type of heroism was indeed perceived as revolutionary in Tamil Nadu. In another type of roles, MGR plays the benevolent rich man of high social standing, who denounces his wealth and status to those who are less fortunate. For example, he marries the low class/caste girl, gives away land to his workers, or carry out manual work together with the poor. This can be seen as the opposite coin of the morality of the other films – "a world of transformed exploiters with untransformed property and power relations" (Pandian 1992:70) – the heroism of a superior who does something good for the poor, but basically remains above them. The "blooming of revolutionary flowers" obviously meant something else than structural change. The role as generous giver is however a theme that MGR

emphasized in his real life performances. This aspect of his image will therefore be dealt with more closely.

Ponmana Chemmal MGR – Golden-hearted Giver

MGR is not the only Indian film-actor who has turned to politics, but the most successful one.¹³ Stardom is not automatically transferable to (sustained) political popularity. What made MGR so outstanding in this respect? We have found some clues by assessing his particular screen image. It is noteworthy that his films have continued to attract the crowds, and do so even 15 years after the last one was released. To be a credible political leader, this is however hardly enough. In this section I will show how MGR's screen-image was reinforced, and blurred, with his real-life performances.

MGR made his best to emphasize his and ADMK's closeness with the poor. As mentioned, his poverty-stricken background proved to be useful in the propaganda. An election-poster in 1980 thus read:

I am not a scholar who has mastered Economics. But I have suffered hunger and poverty in my life. I have climbed thousands of steps and sought employment and was tired of the statement 'no job'. I know the suffering of my mother who could not give us a ball of rice when we returned from school. Till my last breath, I will work [for the people] that no mother in Tamil Nadu suffer the way my mother did. MGR – Born poor – Brought up by the poor – Lives for the poor – The child of our home (Pandian 1992:100).

At meetings, he addressed the audience as "my blood brothers and sisters", and managed to create an atmosphere of trust and friendship (Pandian 1992:100). Numerous other public appearances furnished the image of a protector who cares. His followers evidently felt an emotional and personal closeness to MGR. He was their brother, father and friend (Dickey 1992:15). Most important were his acts of giving. While still a member and promoter of DMK, he made himself known as of a generous nature. As Hardgrave (1971:308) observes: "Without children of his own, he has adopted the poor as his wards. He is always the first to give disaster relief; he supports orphanages and schools; and after torrential rains in Madras he gave raincoats, emblazoned with DMK insignia, to 6,000 rickshaw wallahs". Annadurai did in fact actively propagate for MGR's alleged largess. DMK's news-papers described in an exaggerated way his (actual and expected) donations, and instances of giving to the poor were turned into party political manifestations (Pandian 1992:102f). The actor himself claimed that he returned to the poor the money he got from them, and his fans believed so (Hardgrave 1971:308). Hence, when he died, some people expected his fortunes to be distributed among them (Dickey 1993:353). As the elite hero he sometimes portrayed in his films, MGR was projected as a renouncer of status as well, because of his behaviour and attitude to people that suffered (Pandian 1992:106).

People who came to MGR's residence were always given a meal, and the word spread (Pandian 1992:104). It is also said that MGR very cleverly chose the targets for his largess, geographically and otherwise, so that virtually all his

followers at least had *heard* about somebody who once was given something from MGR (Pamela Price, Oslo, April 1992). The myths were thus allowed to flourish. They were promoted by the popular press in Tamil Nadu and by so called popular biographies, which are widely read by the literate poor. According to Pandian (1992:97-105), the content and wide distribution of these inexpensive biographies can explain why people started to perceive the hero at the screen as identical with real life MGR. The news-reels before a film are in general also used as a means to advertise benevolent and charitable actions of politicians (Dickey 1993:353). The welfare schemes of the ADMK-government fell well in line with MGR's already established image as a renouncer. The announcements of various programmes to help the poor, provided evidence of MGR's commitment. The best example is quite naturally the midday meal scheme. Note that its official name was the *Chief Minister's Nutritious Meal Programme*. It was, as Pandian (1992:104) comments, "projected as an extension of MGR's personal charity". To emphasize the connection, the government allotted money for pictures of MGR eating with poor children for display in every single noon meal centre. MGR spoke about the project as the

... outcome of my experience of extreme starvation at an age when I only knew to cry when I was hungry. But for the munificence of a woman next door who extended a bowl of rice gruel to us and saved us from the cruel hands of death, we would have departed from this world long ago. Such merciful womenfolk, having great faith in me, elected me as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. To wipe the tears of these women I have taken up this project... (Pandian 1992:98).

The quotation is interesting for several reasons; the manner in which MGR speaks about the initiative as only his, not the governments (probably to the point) and how he refers to his personal experiences. It has a highly emotional touch and, I believe, reflects the importance of female votes. The majority of MGR's supporters were women. It is held that they found him extremely attractive because of his charm and good looks (read fair skin), but certain issues were also associated with female support. MGR had one year earlier relaxed prohibition, a measure that could very well have given him reasons to "wipe the tears" of women. By giving children food, he could compensate this turn-about, and successfully combine something tangible with the emotional appeal to motherhood (cf. Washbrook 1989:258).

It is easy to turn cynical in the study of MGR. However, it would not be unreasonable to believe that, due to his background, the concern for "common people" was genuine. Even though he reaped most of the benefits, his intentions might have been sincere. Whether or not, we have at this point some evidence to suggest that the image as a giver – of being a generous leader – was a key to MGR's political success.

MGR thus appealed to the electorate as a provider of assistance, and there are reasons to believe that those who voted for him perceived him precisely as such. One observer points out that people felt they could turn directly to MGR. It was believed that once you came to meet him he would solve your problems of need (MT 1988:21). He performed his role through governmental welfare measures and through private actions. The relation between MGR and his

voters was to a large extent not dependent on pyramids and networks. The interaction lacked a "face-to-face quality" in the literal sense, but was probably perceived of as direct. The *informality* of the relation also had to do with the fact that public measures were projected/perceived as private.¹⁴ Public and private instances of largesse were thus not kept apart. His benevolence may also at times have been the result of corruption (embezzlement), or arbitrary implementation.

The number of actual transactions between MGR and the beneficiaries were, with the exception of the midday-meal scheme, by necessity quite few. In this respect as well, MGR's example diverge from a typical patron-client relation. The majority of those who voted for him was never rewarded. How could such a relation persist? This can, at least partly be solved by not restricting the notion of rewards to tangible benefits. Blomkvist points out that "material inducements" are not *per se* what makes the political machine successful, and he quotes Judith Chubb:

In the last analysis, the systems works less through the distribution of benefits to all-comers, than through the astute management of *scarcity* and, above all, *the critical element of hope*. The key to the successful machine politician is not mass patronage, but maintenance of the maximum clientele with the minimum payoff in terms of actual benefits. (Blomkvist 1988:265. Second emphasis added).

This is, I believe, precisely to the point. MGR skillfully used what resources he had, and people found reasons to believe that they would be the targets for his generosity next time, perhaps a saree, a pension, or cheaper rice. As Blomkvist (1988:279) also points out, concrete "gifts" have a stronger impact on people, than less tangible rewards. Therefore, a politician like MGR "prefers more tangible goods for fewer voters than tangible goods for more voters". A cynical observer would suggest that economic development and structural change were at cross-purposes with MGR's self-interest, and thereby explain the CM's non-interest in anything else than populist schemes. Others would describe it as a political necessity, given the deficiencies of the state-system itself. "If reforms could not be promoted in reality, the next best thing was to *create an illusion of change*." (EPW, Jan. 2-9, 1988:23. Emphasis added)

What I believe is the most important aspect, is that MGR provided hope to a section of very poor and powerless people (cf. Hardgrave 1971:308). Through his films, and various other advertising means, he appeared as somebody they felt they could trust and rely on, somebody that stood on their side. The desperate reactions after his death is an indication of how much this hope meant. When the news spread, rioting and looting broke lose in Madras, and the violence was directed against the establishments of the rich. As Pandian (1992:142) states by quoting Hobsbawn: "*Men can live without justice, and generally must, but they cannot live without hope*". MGR swapped hope and tangible rewards against votes. The question then naturally arises if hope can be conceived of as a reward in a patron-client relation. Is it meaningful to discuss in terms of an "abstract patron-client bond"? Or, are other conceptualizations more elucidating? Before tackling such questions, I will take a look at MGR's organisational base.

MGR rasigar manrams – the fanclubs

Whereas DMK is recognized for its well-organized party structure and disciplined cadre base, ADMK's party organization seem to have been quite weak.¹⁵ MGR's fan-clubs have however been defined as the "backbone" of ADMK (India Today, Nov. 15, 1984; Pandian 1992:30) and can well have provided what the party itself lacked. This section is largely based on a study in Madurai by the American anthropologist Sara Dickey (1993). She found an elaborate organizational network at grass-root level, manned by dedicated people, who performed important political functions outside the actual party-structure.

All great (male) stars of the Tamil film have their own fans associations ("rasigar manrams"), which vary widely in size, scope of activities and organization. The largest ones are represented at several levels, from local to state/national. MGR's fans belonged to the *All World MGR Fans Association*. According to India Today (Nov. 15, 1984) it had in 1984 15,000 branches with 1.8 million members. As the best funded organization, its units could be very active at the grass-roots. Local clubs are popular meeting places for the, mostly young, men in the neighbourhood. The members are in general from the working class and have no education beyond primary schooling. Recreational activities dominate, even though the stated purpose is to carry out social service in the name of the star.

MGR's fan-clubs did politics in several ways. The most obvious one was by providing direct campaign assistance to ADMK (cf. Hardgrave 1973:303). This included fund raising, help to prepare party rallies, and campaign work for local candidates (the choice of whom they could often influence). They attended party gatherings and advertised the re-release of important MGR-movies. Secondly, the clubs engaged in social service activities in their neighbourhood, which also meant politics, but in a different manner. The services Dickey (1993:359) came across included "advising authorities of fires, crimes or electrical outages, cleaning blocked drains and dirty streets, providing shelter for flood victims, and handing out food and clothing to local residents, as well as larger projects such as donating expensive tools to laborers".

People did thus get concrete and useful help from their neighbourhood clubs in times of trouble. Club officers served in those cases often as intermediaries between local residents and public officials, "especially when the officials belonged to the ADMK" (ibid.). It could also be question of making government programmes accessible to those entitled to them, which is far from self-evident in India. One club-leader said about their role: "*We have to act! If people ask us for things, we have to give them, or they will stop believing in us and there will be no club.*" (Dickey 1993:361) Hence, the clubs were the peoples representatives before higher authorities and their existence was at least perceived to hinge upon how they performed this role.

And all this was done to honour the star. It was found that (at least the leading) members were truly devoted to MGR (cf. Hardgrave 1973:303). In their efforts they were motivated by a desire to promote his glory. Dickey maintains that

you needed to prove your commitment to MGR in order to climb in a fan-club, whereas advancement in the regular party was only dependent on your ability to attract support from a group, no devotion required. The idealistic attitude of the fans was however sometimes combined with more personal objectives. A leading position in a club gave some social standing, and could serve as a stepping-stone for a political career within the party, difficult as it was since club members tended to be viewed with disdain by party people.

Even so, it is reported that MGR filled ADMK's general council and executive committee with manram-people (India Today, Sep.30, 1984). One of the top-figures in the party, R.M.Veerappan, also "happened" to be patron over the fan-clubs. Not surprisingly, Dickey (1993:367) notes that after ADMK lost power in 1989 the clubs did not any longer have access to the human and financial resources of the government. Hence, in spite of being formally outside state- and party-structure, there are indications that the distinction between private and public got blurred.

It might then seem to be somewhat of an understatement that MGR himself accredited his fans to be "a necessary link between the party and the people" (In Dickey 1993:363). No doubt did he have reasons to be happy with them. He got the credit for work done by the fan-clubs, and was praised in cases when his administration now and then managed to provide people services. The resources made available through fan-clubs, as well as public welfare, was projected as part and parcel of MGR's personal generosity. According to Dickey, their main function was therefore to *operationalize* MGR's image. Hence, the members reinforced the impact of MGR's own acts of giving and concern for the "common man". The benefits to MGR are also likely to have been quite direct. When club members campaigned for him (or to be precise, for the local candidate), they promised to assist the residents in return for votes. Dickey (1993:359) thus interprets her findings as a typical patron-client relation: "*The supportive relationship between the club and residents is an important and reciprocal one. The club provides occasional social services and local political representation, and neighbors give financial and electoral support*".

Fan-club leaders had access to something people needed, namely connections with party officials in the administration. This important resource made their relation with the other residents *asymmetric*. Due to their (public/private?) funding, they had also the monetary resources to "give things" to people who asked for help. The relation was *informal* firstly since the members belonged to the neighbourhood and had personal (face-to-face) contact with the voters, but also in the sense of being unofficial. The relations upwards, between club-leaders and the ADMK-hierarchy, are also likely to have relied on personalistic, informal ties. Some leaders evidently got well rewarded by the party for their work, while other might have achieved a higher status in their neighbourhood.

My information about these clubs is scarce, so I cannot draw any far-reaching conclusions. However, in case they engaged in the kind of activities Dickey describes, they served as important intermediaries between the ADMK/MGR

and the voters, and can very well have secured votes for ADMK, which their hero would not have managed to get without them.

A machine with a face

MGR was the head of a regime in which poor people certainly needed a patron. It is widely held that his administration was corrupt and there are indications that the police could not be trusted. Nothing was done to change the gross inequalities which create social and economical vulnerability. ADMK's voters became in one sense the clients of MGR. People expected, and to some extent got, some direct benefits in return for their political support, which to a large extent is likely to have been aimed at MGR personally, not his party or any local candidate. MGR's fan-clubs constituted his organizational base. The relations between fan-club leaders and local residents were also asymmetric, informal and reciprocal. It is possible to conceive of a situation where residents so to speak voted for the mantram, without being bothered about who they worked for. There is also reason to suggest that there was a chain or pyramid of such relations up to ADMK's top.

Is the notion of a political machine then applicable? I have found both similarities and dissimilarities. ADMK/MGR politics was clearly a case of political pragmatism. This is the only way to make sense of proliferate subsidies to powerful groups¹⁶ and the plethora of welfare schemes, given the apparent lack of long-term (post-election) investments. There are no indications that ADMK had any ideological backing. (Even though the mysterious concept of "Annamism" has been launched.) The party relied instead on the attractiveness of its leader. Issues were however not totally absent. MGR charged the DMK government for corruption, perhaps not a matter of policy in a conventional sense, but certainly an important issue in India. Secondly, it is said that MGR tried to secure women votes by promises of prohibition.

The fan-clubs constituted an informal network at grass roots level, and they provided help in order to raise political support. This was achieved through an "arbitrary distribution" of public good, which could have operated in two ways. Mantram-leaders used their political contacts to serve the neighbourhood, and it is not unreasonable to believe that public funds were channelled to the clubs for their important work. When real assistance reached people directly through the administration, it can very well have been a result of arbitrary decision-making. There is little doubt that public programmes seldom were generally applied, they reached some but not others (cf. Guhan 1989).

Considering the allegations of corruption and MGR's omnipotence, I have no reason to question that ADMK operated as a clientilistic party in its relations to the bureaucracy and private interests. My concern is however the relationship with the voters, including the party workers, and here the situation is more complex. Even if it would be correct to assume that inefficiency and arbitrariness characterized the regime, we cannot automatically draw the conclusion that it was a matter of patronage vis-a-vis the voters. By linking patronage to

particularism (or rule-breaking), Blomkvist makes the concept distinct from populism, which of course can be practiced in accordance to prevalent rules and procedures. In principle, I think he has got a point. All perceived or actual political "rewards" to (parts of) the electorate, such as subsidised food items, higher pensions, or a nice sports arena, could otherwise be categorized as instances of patronage, and the concept would lose much of its analytical strength. If on the other hand, we would be content to emphasize the informal, in the sense of *private*, not official aspect of rewards in a patron-client relation, it would be possible to regard MGR's welfarist approach as an expression of patronage, *whether or not* the schemes were generally applied, and still keep the distinction from other cases of political rewards or populism. This deviance from Blomkvist's definition could perhaps make sense, as MGR's image as a giver and protector was central for his popularity.

The major difference between ADMK and the political machine is however expressed by the concept itself. The "machine" makes us think about an impersonal entity, while ADMK was completely personalized. Its credibility and legitimacy was in essence the credibility and legitimacy of MGR. Unlike the political machine, ADMK is not likely to have been dependent on the efficiency of local representatives, even if they were useful. MGR's *image*, disseminated through films, inexpensive booklets, posters etc., probably attracted votes by its own strength. One function of the fan-clubs was in fact to promote this image.

Fan-club members were thus much more than pragmatic vote-canvassers. They were not driven by a strong ideological belief, but were no less idealistic. Neither were leading members *primarily* involved in any exchange relation with the party or its leader. Even though some could, and did, expect a career in the party from their involvement, other motives had primacy. The clubs were manned by people who truly admired MGR and wanted to do good in his name. This pronounced personalization, including the element of worship, cannot be understood with help from the machine model. It is not at all unique to India, but in the case of MGR it was driven to its extreme.

Patronage and Charisma

While identifying some central aspects of a political machine in ADMK, the underlying argument about voters' motives does not fully convince me. "Votes flowed upwards and patronage downwards" gives a simplistic picture in this case. This has to do with the personalization mentioned above. The relation between MGR and his followers included a highly emotional element. People not only expected tangible benefits from their leading politician, they also admired him for his (ascribed) character and deeds. Dickey (1993:353) hence observed that "(A)dulation and transaction coexist for most followers". I would therefore suggest that Blomkvist's "patronage-logic voter" not is typical for those who cast their votes in favour of MGR. His choice at the ballot-box

might have been determined by the prospects of patronage, but other considerations are likely to have been at play as well.

The dichotomy of a patronage- and policy-logic is therefore not entirely satisfying. If we try to apply it on the ADMK-voter, who is rather than not likely to be poor, he would according to the policy-logic perhaps think like this: "I vote for ADMK/MGR because I think their economic policy promotes the well-being of the Tamil people" Or, to take a more fair example: "I want prohibition to still be in force. Liquour is a social evil and a lot of women are spared from hardship thanks to ADMK/MGR". The voter who follows the patronage-logic would argue like this: "Last time ADMK won the elections, the MGR "manram" helped me to get my pension, I'd better vote for ADMK again. Perhaps my son can get employed at the bus company with their assistance." Or, "I saw in the paper how MGR distributed clothes in the nearby town. If he gets reelected, I trust he will do the same thing for us". Except for the first example they are, I believe, all possible. Provided the definition of "policy" allow us to include single issues, this logic cannot be rejected. However, on the basis of my information, I can easily conceive of this reflection as well: "MGR is a good man. He gives are children food. I can only support such a virtuous person." Or, "MGR is my hero – look at what he does to villains! As long as he stays in power, there is a chance for justice". As far as I understand, neither of these motives fit into Blomkvist's alternatives. I would therefore argue that his dichotomy, at least in this case, conceals an important element of voters' motives.

I would like to point at the moral force of MGR's appearance. His films included the message that virtues pay off. The hero was rewarded for his courage, honesty and goodness. It is significant that those aspects of his personal life which did not correspond to the ideal behaviour according to prevalent social norms, were silenced or still explained as virtuous (Pandian 1992: 119f).¹⁷ He appealed to film-goers, and I believe to voters, by symbolizing "the good forces", which only partially had to do with the role as provider and protector.

Despite malpractices of his regime, a lot of people had absolute faith in the integrity of MGR. It was not insensitivity to the problems that made them rely on him, but a firm conviction that he himself was good and honest. ADMK-voters could be very critical to the ministers, never to MGR (Dickey 1993: 357). The comments of a rickshaw puller can serve as an illustration: "*Our Chief Minister is a good man. He asks his subordinates to pursue matters. But they are not doing so.*"; "*He doesn't take bribe. In his name, others – this minister, that minister – take bribe. Because of this, MGR gets a bad name.*" (Pandian 1992:127). MGR could successfully project others as corrupt, even his own ministers. The bureaucracy often came under his and ADMK's attack, getting the blame for the government's shortcomings, but MGR's own reputation was not harmed. He was the well-meaning leader, who was separated from the people by sinister officials (Pandian 1991:124f; cf. Washbrook 1989; Price 1991). The significance of these statements is however that the rickshaw-puller is likely to have given political support to a regime he identified as corrupt! Of

course, one can point at lack of better alternatives. But the point is that the corruption in government and administration *did not matter* for his political loyalty. This is not, I believe, because he expected benefits from a particularistic administration, but because voting became an expression of strong sympathy and trust in one single person, including the hope that this person would "set things right". If our rickshaw-puller is typical for many of MGR's supporters, and I think he is, the patronage-logic fails to explain certain aspects of his appeal.

This gives us also reason to question Blomkvist's argument about rational voting behaviour. A person who cast his vote in favour of a patron, or as his patron wishes, is according to Blomkvist rational, since the relation he enters gives him some influence over the implementation process. The voter has understood how he can gain, or avoid loss, from the system, and acts accordingly. But people who acknowledged the corruption under ADMK, but still were attracted to the party because of MGR, did not (at least not only) vote in order to get direct access to public resources. If they perceived that MGR had no real power over his administration, but did not care because they liked him, it is difficult to conceive of a vote for MGR as a "rational response" to a certain political situation. As an alternative, these people actually thought that "the poor people's friend" could bring about change, and fit badly into Blomkvist's conclusion by not having understood how to influence politics at the grass roots.

My suggestion is in consequence that the relationship between MGR/ADMK and the voters was not in all instances (or not only) upheld by patronage, that is, not even the *expectation* of patronage. It is question of a relation that might well be asymmetric and informal, but which contradicts the patron-client bond, since *it does not require an exchange*. To conceptualize the matter I have turned to Max Weber's notion of charisma:

... a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are ... not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them, the individual concerned is treated as a leader. (Quoted in Bendix 1977:88, n.15)

The authority of a charismatic leader is based on people's *belief* in his possession of such extraordinary qualities, whether actual or not. To retain the confidence of his followers, the leader must constantly give evidence of his powers (Weber 1982b, 294f). MGR created an image that served precisely that end. In one film after another, he was the embodiment of all good, with a capacity to "establish justice". Events in his real life furnished the charisma. MGR's return from hospital in 1985 for example, was taken as "proof" of superhuman powers. The hero was reborn again.

The typified charismatic leader is driven by an inner calling – he has a mission to perform – and his followers are attracted to him on that basis (Weber 1982c:246f). MGR's alleged mission was to help the poor. He strengthened his film image by adding performances of personal and public largesse, and the

poor became his followers. Charismatic dominance is legitimacy derived from absolute confidence and devotion in one leader, may he be a prophet or head of a party (Weber 1982a:79).¹⁸ I would argue that many of ADMK's voters are likely to have had that kind of faith in MGR. They believed in his sincerity and capacity to carry out the mission, and gave him political support on those grounds. The expectation, or hope for something tangible ran, I believe, parallel with an unquestioned loyalty and devotion to a good-hearted personality. Once we acknowledge other voting-logics than those put forward by Blomkvist, the intense emotional reactions MGR evoked becomes more comprehensible. The fact that a large number of DMK-members joined MGR when he set up a new party, in spite of no marked differences in terms of policy or ideology, is also better explained by viewing MGR as a charismatic leader. One of Blomkvist's central arguments is that lack of policy-differences between Indian parties is a consequence of the particularistic (rule-breaking) state. The charismatic element of Indian politics might however also be a factor. Personalities, whether patrons or not, attracts votes by own force.

By introducing the concept of charisma, I am also arguing that the *element of hope* has a wider meaning than Blomkvist accredit it with. It may partly be a question of hope for something tangible, personal security etc., but can as well signify *faith* in the existence of goodness and justice. I am not of the view that poverty and deprivation by necessity breeds cynicism. On the contrary, poor people perhaps more eagerly than others hang on to the belief that there are good forces, after all. (Whether they behave according to such ideals is of course a different matter.)

The concepts of patron-client ties and charismatic leadership, have both given clues to MGR's popularity, and thereby ADMK's electoral successes. To conclude my analysis I will in brief put these findings in the perspective of Indian history and Tamil culture.

The King and his devoted subjects

That day, a huge procession began from Madurai railway station. MGR sat on a chariot drawn by four horses [and was] thronged by the people. The chariot had a background of a rising sun on a lotus

At the beginning of the procession there were party volunteers carrying festoons. There were also artistes playing silambam. Elephants garlanded MGR twice [during the procession].

(Pandian 1992:113)

This specific event took place before MGR left DMK, but is likely to be quite typical for ADMK's manifestations as well. Both Dravidian parties excelled in large processions, and MGR appeared often "as if he was a crowned king" (Pandian 1992:113; cf. IWI, July 13, 1986; Ryerson 1988:127). Such events could at one level be seen as part of the general propaganda, an instrument to wipe out the distinction between the real person and the image. At the same

time however, they can be treated as expressions of Tamil culture and values with a general relevance for regional politics.

Could MGR's style of leadership be understood as a modern version of medieval kingship? The historian Pamela Price argues that elements of populism and the significance of personalities, are expressions of a political culture with roots in the middle ages. Pre-colonial values have, according to her, a clear impact on current political behaviour in Tamil Nadu. There are several such norms or values; patterns of authority and leadership has however been influenced by the idea of *kingship*. The concept of "kingly models" gives us an instrument to understand the context for MGR's political success.

At the core of kingly models – monarchical political culture – is the conviction that daily well-being or relief from distress is dependent on discrete acts of mercy and generosity from superior beings, human or divine. Monarchical political culture causes political possibilities to be focused on what a person of superior status and power (both have divine attributes in popular Hinduism) can do to affect the well-being of others, either through largesse/and or command of labor. (Price 1989a:571)

Three features of MGR's appeal are captured by this quotation: the reliance on a personal authority, the importance of largesse, and the notion of divinity. Price locates the origins of this political culture in the pre-colonial kingdoms.

Largesse, to begin with, was a "fundamental element" of state-formation and rule. The kings endowed land and valuable goods to local leaders in exchange for political support and loyalty. Generosity was thus a means to achieve kingly status, and part of the protective responsibilities of the ruler (Price 1989b:155f; Price 1989a:563). Washbrook (1989:234) emphasizes the fact that Tamil kingdoms had no centralized authority for resource extraction. The role of the kings was to *give* to his subjects, never to take away. To appear as a self-less renouncer is in this view thus to act in accordance with deep-rooted notions of the responsibility and roles of a political leader.

MGR's ascribed altruism also fit quite well into Mines and Gourishinkar's (1990) conceptualization of the South Indian "big man" (*periyar, periyavar*). This person, traditionally a man, is a high-status individual who through his command over an institution (for example a party) serves his constituency with charity, donations and other benefits. Like the medieval kings, the authors note "self-less generosity ... (is) central to his fame" (Mines and Gourishinkar 1990: 764). Largesse thus seem to be fundamental for the charisma being part of such big men's eminence.

MGR's ascribed divinity can also be seen in this context. Price (1989a:562-565) argues that kingly status has a divine connotation. In fact, gods are also kings. In popular Hinduism, people view their deities as royals who rule from the temple. The persistence of monarchical political culture has thus been supported by religious practices. Whether or not, there is evidently no contradiction in conceiving a person as a god. The distinction between divine and human is in traditional culture less marked than between worshipper and worshipped. Several Hindu gods have appeared as humans, and to deify human beings is,

according to Pandian (1992:132), a "generalised religio-cultural practice" among non-Brahmans in Tamil Nadu. The south Indian religious tradition (Bakhti) did also allow MGR's followers to regard him as family member or friend, since this is how people worship their deities.

The focus on individuals ("achieved personal ruling authority") would, according to Price (1989a:562-563; 1989b:152) be an implication of the role of kings and the structure of states. The old kingdoms were loose pyramids of smaller entities ruled as personal domains. At the top was a high-status center that neither relied on monopoly of force or tools of taxation for its authority, but on the idea of sacred kingship – achieved largely through gifting. Such values were diffused downwards as constituting segments were incorporated through ritual in the larger domain. Kings and chiefs became personal symbols for the well-being of their communities.

Without going into depth of Price' cultural approach, and its historical and anthropological bases, it is to my notion clear that it offers suggestive ideas of how to understand contemporary Tamil, and Indian, politics. Price' thesis is that the prevalence of patron-client relations in India is an outcome of a political pattern that persisted and evolved after the actual kingdoms had been subdued by the British.

Blomkvist (1988:226) argues that the basis for a patron-client relation should be located in a specific political situation, not in any value system. I do not disagree, but would like to point at Price' argument that the expression such relations take, might be understood in the light of prevalent values. MGR performed the role of a king brilliantly (cf. Washbrook 1989:240). The emphasis on personal generosity made his image correspond to people's expectations of the benevolent leader. That is, I believe, a clue to his charisma. Largesse is an important and admired aspect of leadership in India. Along with the likewise culturally rooted focus on personal domains of rule, his tremendous popularity makes more sense. The intense expressions for it is also an implication of cultural practices, found in religion.

Conclusions

We have now seen how ADMK got the votes of the poorest in Tamil Nadu, and managed to retain their support despite a quite bad record, not the least for these poor people. The immediate conclusion is that ADMK's electoral support primarily was an outcome of MGR's personal popularity. My point of departure for analysing the interaction has been the tools and arguments on clientilism presented by Blomkvist (1988). They have been complemented by the idea of charismatic leadership, and put in a cultural perspective. My second conclusion is that MGR's role can partly be understood in terms of patronage, partly in terms of charisma. The matter is however complex, and my attempt to apply the patron-client concept, including the notion of patronage, gave rise to several questions. The criteria of a patron-client relation as put forward by Blomkvist, namely asymmetry, informality and reciprocity, left the door open for

different interpretations of MGR's role. What do we for example require of a reward from a patron, can it be symbolic, expected, or both? Does the relation need to be direct in a literal sense, or is a private/non-official character enough?

My guiding line has been how the people concerned are likely to have perceived the situation. In consequence, I have found the patron-client concept useful to capture some features of the relation. MGR's voters are likely to have expected a direct pay-off from their electoral support. The activities of fan-clubs were one reason. MGR's manrams vis-a-vis the neighbourhood fit quite well into the definition of a patron-client situation. Another reason was on the one hand MGR's own acts of private charity, and on the other hand his emphasis on public welfare. The broad meaning of patronage is protection. This seems to have been a crucial part of MGR's appeal, but generally applied measures, like the important midday meal-scheme are difficult to fit into the conceptualization of a patron-client relation. The *perception* of informality is hardly enough to equate it with a face-to-face situation. There was nevertheless an element of individual transaction, whether actual or not, between MGR and his voters. Its likeliness to have rested on expected, as much as on real exchange, does not alter the nature of the support.

The idea of charismatic leadership captured another side of the interaction. I have argued that the expectation of tangible rewards was combined with admiration and devotion to the personality MGR. The relation between fan-club members and the party/MGR included certainly a component of clientilism, but, as important was a self-less adulation of the star. This, I believe, holds true also for other voters; for example among those women who are said to have been his strongest supporters. The relation did thus include a component which did not require an exchange. There is by implication a third logic to add to Blomkvist's suggested voting considerations. People who do not care, or do not know, about issues and ideology can still be idealistic. Values exist also outside the realm of political ideology, and people's need for heroes, like MGR, show that moral values have importance. The film medium was the means by which MGR rose to his position. The importance of cinema cannot be overestimated in this case. It allowed MGR to construct an appealing image, efficiently disseminated to a predominantly lower class audience.

To exactly define what is, and what is not, a patron-client relation is in this context however much less interesting than to actually pay attention to the important aspects of MGR's appeal. I have found it to be the emphasis on largesse, the identification with poor people, and the embodiment of good virtues. The importance of MGR's person, whether conceived of as a patron or charismatic leader, makes the political machine less adequate as a tool, despite the traits it share with ADMK – an interpersonal network, pragmatism, and particularism.

MGR's image and related politics represented a continuation, and reinforcement, of features that appeared with DMK. Populism and the reliance on charismatic personalities became apparent in the 60's as the party deradicalized. Such trends can be elucidated by using a cultural perspective. The cultural frame, which shapes people's expectations, provide the conditions for the

impact of MGR's charisma and acts of patronage. Both the need for actual protection, and for somebody to have faith in get however salient because of the poverty and oppression poor people face. To sum up, I would say that ADMK attracted voters primarily by means of its leading personality, who appealed both to people's emotions and to their desire for tangible benefits. The voters' choice is likely to have been the result of the admiration for a benevolent leader, as well as the calculated expectation of personal pay-off. Transaction and devotion coexisted.

A few years after MGR's death, his royal mantle has been picked up by Jayalalitha. Like her predecessor, she has undertaken well-publicized acts of gifting and a personality cult is being created around her. Once again, "(A)n attempt of deification", is taking place in Tamil Nadu, and critical voices in the media are under assault (Frontline, May 9-22, 1992). MGR's former protégée, might perhaps not reach the heights of his popularity, but it is clearly a pattern repeating itself. The people of Tamil Nadu has now got a queen.

Noter

1. Tamil Nadu – the land of Tamils – was called Madras state until the late 60s when the name was changed as an expression for regional sentiments. "Tamil" designates both a language and a people. The language belong to the Dravidian family, whose major tongues predominate in the four south Indian states. The people, those who speak Tamil, inhabit primarily south India and parts of Sri Lanka. Tamil Nadu is, along with Kerala, India's southernmost state. It had in 1980 nearly 50 million inhabitants, similar in population size to France or Turkey. The current borders were established in 1956, with the linguistic reorganization of Indian states. That year, Tamil Nadu thus became a linguistically (fairly) homogenous area. The vast majority of the population are Hindus (88.9%) About 70% live in rural areas. Like in India in general, there is widespread poverty. Tamil Nadu is in fact one of India's poorest states. 50% are illiterate (women 65%) and 40% were in 1983 living below the poverty line. (MIDS 1988:Ch. 1)

2. The term has been used to characterize the (Democratic) party organization in some of the big cities at the turn of the last century. Tammany Hall in New York is considered the most typical case.

3. The definition reads as follows: "A state whose actions are ordered by something *other* than rules, e.g. the whims of the ruler, friendship or family relations, esteem, political connections or money (bribes)" (Blomkvist 1988:185).

4. "Dravidian" refers today to a separate family of languages spoken in south India. Tamil is considered to be the oldest one and has a very rich literary tradition. Most north Indian languages, including Sanskrit, belong to the Indo-Aryan linguistic group.

5. Periyar had declared India's day of Independence in 1947 to be a day of mourning, as it did not lead to the creation of an independent south Indian state, an action against which Annadurai protested in public. Many were also opposed to Periyar's autocratic style of leadership. The final blow to DMK's unity came when Periyar, at the age of 71, announced that he would marry a 28-year old activist, who he had also chosen to be his successor.

6. The special appeal of DMK can be illustrated by this eloquent argument against the Communists. "... (I)f a morsel of food and a strip of cloth were to be given a naked and hungry captive on his release, he would go for the strip of cloth to cover his shame and preserve his honour and only then look to his stomach." (Geetha and Rajadurai, 30).

7. Annadurai is supposed to have said about MGR, "When we show his face, we get 40,000 votes; when he speaks a few words, we get 4 lakhs" Quoted from Hardgrave 1973:302. (One lakh=100,000)

8. The name of the party had been slightly changed to the "All India ADMK" (AIADMK), but will in this article be referred to as ADMK only.

9. Jayalalitha was a controversial person within the party. She entered politics late and made a rapid career under MGR's protection. The power struggles after his death was in Kohli's words "more like a medieval court intrigue than a political succession in a democracy" (Kohli 1990:164). For an account on this powerplay see Frontline, Jan. 9-22, 1988.

10. This is not to say that caste is an unimportant factor in elections in Tamil Nadu. A local candidate need to be of the dominant community in the constituency, but since all parties follow this rule, other factors explain election outcomes at that level. Caste configurations may determine the results in the district or municipality, but voting do not go along caste lines at the state level.

11. Malayalee is spoken in the areas that today constitute the state of Kerala, west of Tamil Nadu.

12. A dewan was the finance minister of the old kingdoms.

13. Other stars-turned-politicians are N.T. Rama Rao in Andhra Pradesh, leader of the regional party Telugu Desam, and former chief minister; Tamil Nadu's current chief minister Jayalalitha; Sivaji Ganesan, Congress- and later Janata Dal-politician in Tamil Nadu, and Amitabh Bachchan (has now left politics), a great star of the Hindi film and personal friend with Rajiv Gandhi.

14. See Dickey (1993:353) People could point at their children's school uniform claiming it was a gift from MGR.

15. Kohli found in 1986 that "MGR had a lot of people working for him, but not as integral parts of a party." He define them as "propaganda organizations", often headed by former fan-club members (Kohli 1990: 173; cf. Sathyamurthy 1989).

16. MIDS 1988:333, refers for example to a successful "agriculturists lobby", having obtained "low taxes, low water charges, highly concessional power tariffs, subsidies on agricultural inputs, loan write-offs, ..."

17. The fact that MGR married three times, with the third wife while the second was still alive, and despite her husband being alive, would for example had been enough to regard him as a "notorious home-breaker" (Pandian 1992:119).

18. The other two legitimizing principles are dominance by virtue of "legality" and by virtue of tradition (*legal and traditional domination*).

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