



## Nara Chandrababu Naidu Returns to the Power in Andhra Pradesh: An Overview

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**Abstract :** *The TDP swiftly became a powerful political force in the state under NTR's direction in the 1983 Andhra Pradesh state assembly elections. The TDP's success in Andhra Pradesh was mainly reflected in its national political performance. The party won 30 seats in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Indian parliament, in the first elections it ran for in 1984. There was conflict inside the TDP as a result of NTR's 1993 marriage to Lakshmi Parvathi (also known as Parvati) and his efforts to prepare her to succeed him, particularly with his son-in-law Nara Chandrababu Naidu. However, the TDP faced a number of problems that hampered its political chances, and as a result, its electoral fortunes deteriorated. The number of seats was reduced to 12 in 1998 after recovering to 13 and 16 in the 1991 and 1996 parliamentary elections, respectively. However, the TDP had a strong showing the next year, gaining 29 seats and rising to the fourth largest party in the legislature. It provided external backing to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition, which was led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and ruled the nation from 1998 to 2004. But after the party only won five seats in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, it broke with the NDA and joined the so-called "Third Front," a coalition of leftist parties against the BJP and the Congress. The party gained six seats in the 2009 legislative election. The 2012 by-elections which the YSRCP swept was the erosion of TDP's social base. Even the economically weaker Kammas started drifting away from the TDP. This was evident from the TDP's humiliating defeat even in the Kamma-Dominated constituencies. As the TDP got stronger in the runup to 2014 general elections. The social groups that deserted TDP earlier largely returned to the party fold. The TDP won in constituencies with sizeable presence of Kapu, Backward castes and also made a dent in the constituencies with a strong presence of scheduled castes and Reddy's who rallied behind the YSRCP. In sum, factors such as anxieties post-bifurcation, the image of Chandrababu Naidu as a mascot for development, the Modi factor, the realignment of social forces, the corruption charges against Jaganmohan Reddy, skilful political engineering among others, helped the TDP to make a resurgent comeback in Andhra Pradesh.*

*Key Words: Elections, TDP, YSRCP, Chandrababu Naidu, Jaganmohan Reddy*

### **Introduction:**

The emergence of an alternative political party that could end the Congress dominance, a process that began in several states of India in the 1960s, was much delayed in Andhra Pradesh (AP). This is surprising because the anti-Congress opposition and the electoral support it

enjoyed during the 1950s was much stronger in the state when compared to most others. Even after 1967, it did not follow the example set by the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu. It had to wait until the second round of the emergence of the state parties during the 1980s. As if to make up for the delay, the



Telugu Desam Party (TDP) was formed by N T Rama Rao (NTR), a famous Telugu cinema actor, in March 1982 and came to power in January 1983, all in a matter of nine months' time, a record in the history of political parties in India and probably in the world too. At a time when the non-Congress opposition in the state presented a dismal picture of hopeless division and decay, the TDP rose like a tidal wave sweeping away the listless Congress out of power in the 1983 assembly elections.

### ***Electoral History of Telugu Desam Party:***

The TDP swiftly became a powerful political force in the state under NTR's direction. In the 1983 Andhra Pradesh state assembly elections (the party had not yet received official recognition), TDP-affiliated independent candidates won by a landslide thanks to his charisma and oratory prowess combined with the party's populist policies, and NTR was appointed chief minister (head of government). NTR was still the chief minister after the party's equally impressive showing in the 1985 assembly elections, but it fell heavily to the Congress in the 1989 elections and gave up power. However, the TDP continued to be the biggest opposition party in the chamber.

There was conflict inside the TDP as a result of NTR's 1993 marriage to Lakshmi Parvathi (also known as Parvati) and his efforts to prepare her to succeed him, particularly with his son-in-law Nara Chandrababu Naidu. Despite this, the

party secured a sizable majority of assembly seats (216 out of 294), and NTR was reappointed as chief minister. His time was brief, though, as Naidu led an intraparty revolution in 1995 and assumed both the position of chief minister of the state and the party's leadership. As Parvathi tried to start her own TDP faction, NTR's death early the next year exacerbated divisions within the party. Because Parvathi's group had little influence on the political landscape, the main TDP remained in power in Andhra Pradesh under Naidu. In addition to reversing some of the prior leader's measures (such as lifting the prohibition on booze sales, which had cost the state a significant amount of tax money), the administration kept many of NTR's policies, most notably the fact that it never formed an alliance with the state's Congress Party. In the 1999 assembly elections, the TDP performed well once again, gaining 180 seats; Naidu was retained as chief minister.

However, the TDP faced a number of problems that hampered its political chances, and as a result, its electoral fortunes deteriorated. One of the most notable of these was the increasing push for a part of Andhra Pradesh to be divided into a new state called Telangana. The Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) was at the vanguard of that movement. There was disagreement inside the party over the matter; some TDP leaders were in favor of the TRS plan, while others were against it. The TDP's traditional base of



support in the state's coastal districts and among its Kamma caste constituency—a small landowning community in southern India—was also weakened by the rise of smaller parties like Praja Rajyam, which subsequently merged with the Congress Party, and the Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party, which was created out of a 2011 split within the Congress.

Together, the TDP and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) were only able to secure 49 seats in the 2004 assembly elections (TDP 47, BJP 2). The TDP switched allegiances before the 2009 assembly elections, joining forces with the TRS and a number of left-leaning parties. The TDP secured 92 seats and the TRS ten, giving the two major coalition components a combined total of 102 seats. The outcome fell well short of the Congress Party's total 156-seat majority, albeit being a significant improvement over 2004.

The TDP's success in Andhra Pradesh was mainly reflected in its national political performance. The party won 30 seats in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Indian parliament, in the first elections it ran for in 1984. However, in the 1989 elections, it only managed to secure 2 seats. The number of seats was reduced to 12 in 1998 after recovering to 13 and 16 in the 1991 and 1996 parliamentary elections, respectively. However, the TDP had a strong showing the next year, gaining 29 seats and rising to the fourth largest party in the legislature. It provided external backing to

the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition, which was led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and ruled the nation from 1998 to 2004. But after the party only won five seats in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, it broke with the NDA and joined the so-called "Third Front," a coalition of leftist parties against the BJP and the Congress. The party gained six seats in the 2009 legislative election.

### **2014 General Elections**

Just months ago, the political situation in Andhra Pradesh, the divided state, was rife with ambiguity and uncertainty. Particularly under the leadership of former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) was in complete disarray because of its indecision on the complex subject of state partition. Due mostly to resignations and defections within the party, the party has suffered a humiliating setback in by-elections held at various intervals over the past few years in both the Telangana and Seemandhra areas. Since the party having failed to even hold onto its deposits in the by-elections, Naidu's comeback was viewed as all but unthinkable. Chandrababu Naidu and his party's stunning comeback in the most recent Lok Sabha elections defied this expectation. How did this occur?

The TDP's prospects had suffered significant harm prior to the Lok Sabha elections as a result of the state splitting problem. The Telangana Rashtra Samithi had been at the forefront of the push for Telangana to become its own state.



Despite initial hesitations, the Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) spoke up for united Andhra Pradesh because the Telangana area did not provide it any political advantages. The Congress, as a national party, felt comfortable staying on both sides of the debate. It was only the TDP that was in serious trouble. Telugu pride was the political capital of the TDP, which had and still has a sizable following in both areas. This was the specific cause of TDP's. This was the specific cause of TDP's ambivalence. However, TDP appears to have benefited more than any other party from the state's split.

Chandrababu Naidu gained the support of the Seemandhra region's voters, particularly the urban and middle-class ones, for his performance in the last act of the bifurcation drama. Naidu's calculated actions in the name of equal justice for both areas gave the impression to Seemandhra voters that he was making a concerted effort to keep the state from splitting. Public opinion was being formed as a result of the extraordinary media coverage that scrutinized nearly every action taken by politicians. Chandrababu Naidu's anti-bifurcation image was strengthened by the TRS campaign against him. The TDP benefited from the YSRCP leaderships. This "silence" had been brought up by the TDP as a campaign issue against the YSRP.

Beneficiary of Bifurcation the Seemandhra electorate, more or less, reconciled with the reality of a divided

state. The circumstances and the manner in which the state was divided created a sense of helplessness among the people of Seemandhra. The campaign against the bifurcation in which all parties and civil society participated further strengthened this hurt sentiment. The capital city, Hyderabad, was the bone of contention. An urge for development prevailed over the concern for welfare schemes. Building of infra structure in the new state and setting up of a new capital city dominated the political discourse. This was the context power for agriculture. Chandrababu Democratic Alliance in which elections were held in the Naidu then paid a heavy political price ed the threat into an Seemandhra region.

Learning from his party's defeats in 2009, Chandrababu Naidu did not lag behind in making several populist promises. More significantly, his promises of loan waiver for farmers and women workers with the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWACRA) certainly influenced voters. Nearly 20% of he DWACRA groups did not repay the loans in April in some banks. This increased to as high as 80% in may indicating the impact of Chandrababu Naidu's promises of a loan waiver. Naidu had in the past suffered from a credibility gap among voters apropos his welfare agenda, due to his reformist image. But in the post bifurcation scenario Candrababu Naidu could overcome this to an extent. While Naidu promised loan Waivers, YSRCP's Jaganmohan Reddy called it



impossible. Surprisingly, this is in sharp contrast to the situation in 2004 when the YSRCP leader's father Y S Rajasekhar Reddy promised free power for agriculture. Chandrababu Naidu then paid a heavy political price for calling such a promise impossible to implement. While Chandrababu Naidu has realised that economic and political arguments sometimes work at cross purposes, Jaganmohan Reddy interestingly failed to follow his father's footsteps and instead went on to tread a politically disastrous path which Naidu has experienced in 2004.

### ***The MODI factor***

The sense of helplessness strongly in stilled in the Seemandhra electorate in turn also generated a feeling that the residual state of Andhra Pradesh desperately needed help from the central government. Jaganmohan Reddy failed to acknowledge this new sentiment among the people. In fact, Jaganmohan Reddy was also one among the leaders who were responsible for creating such a sense of helplessness. Chandrababu Naidu demonstrated consummate political skills by arriving at an early understanding with the Narendra Modi-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and converted the threat into an opportunity. The strong Modi sentiment evident across the country convinced the average voter in the Seemandhra region that Chandrababu Naidu could form part of a winning combination at the centre and could deliver for the truncated state without a

capital. The Modi factor thus helped Chandrababu Naidu to further galvanise his campaign. However, it is wrong to conclude that Chandrababu Naidu could ride to success only due to the Modi factor. This was evident from the fact that TDP performed well even in the elections to the local bodies much before an alliance with BJP was formalised and before popular film actor Pawan Kalyan joined the TDP-BJP bandwagon. While Chandrababu Naidu could successfully located himself in a national political context that was considered so crucial for the Seemandhra in the wake of bifurcation, Jaganmohan Reddy demonstrated an utter lack of strategy. He even sent signals of extending support to much discredited United Progressive

Alliance which proved to be costly to his electoral prospects. Jaganmohan Reddy's stand of supporting any possible formation at the centre for the benefit of the state failed to convince the electorate. This is because of the discernible political trend in favour of the NDA. Even the minorities have not shown such a consolidated aversion towards Modi in Seemandhra, as this region has no history of large-scale communal mobilisation. The religious identity of minorities subsumes into the linguistic identity of this region.

### ***Political Polarisation***

The Congress Party was decimated in the Seemandhra region. The people's disenchantment with Congress across the country was further reinforce here due to the division of the state. While



every political party was to be blamed for this division, the people of Seemandhra decided to punish the Congress the most. The orchestrated campaign by the Congress chief minister Kirankumar Reddy and the Congress Members of Parliament against the party-led central government itself completely discredited the party.

The Congress which ruled the state for 10 years failed to get represented in the residual state's legislature. The party managed to retain its electoral deposits in barely 10 constituencies. All this indicates the extent of rout suffered by the ruling party. The erosion in the Congress vote post bifurcation and the shift from the party to the TDP was clear. The TDP leadership cleverly fuelled this further by encouraging defections of many Congress leaders and cadres including several senior ministers even as the YSRCP was lukewarm to taking Congressmen into their fold.

Besides the above, a series of corruption charges dented Jaganmohan Reddy and his party's image. The TDP could convince the electorate that Jaganmohan Reddy represented the interests of crony capitalism. Corporate leaders rallied behind TDP-BJP combine giving it an image of supporters of productive capital. As Seemandhra region saw extreme political polarisation, other minor political forces like the left parties, Jai Samaikyandhra Party, Losatta, etc, got totally marginalised. This is evident from their negligible vote share. This

further consolidated TDP's vote share. The electoral arena was divided into pro-jagan and non-Jagan, Anti-Jagan camps. The alliance with the BJP, Pawan Kalyan's campaign, support from the Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi, BC Sangam, etc, helped TDP in varying measures, Chandrababu Naidu was at his best in political engineering. But Jaganmohan Reddy also displayed political arrogance and immaturity, for instance, in refusing the offer of an alliance from the left parties, especially the Communist Party of India (M). While the TDP was desperately trying for a possible grand political alliance, Jaganmohan Reddy chose to go alone. The political arithmetic in the elections thus went completely against him.

The YSRCP vote share stagnated while TDP's vote share became marginally higher. The TDP-BJP combine secured nearly 47% of the votes while YSRCP managed to get around 45%. These two together got over 90% of the votes indicating the extent of political polarisation. No other political party will have a presence in the Seemandhra state legislature. The TDP was the chief beneficiary of this unusually extreme political polarisation. A marginal difference in the vote share got converted into a significant difference in the seat share providing disastrous for the YSRCP.

### ***Social Engineering***

The TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu left no stone unturned to ensure his victory. Apart from skilful pre-election



management, he also engineered a successful social coalition. He tried to rally behind all those social formations which were unconnected with the YSRCP. The Kapus account for a sizeable segment in many constituencies of this region. Chandrababu Naidu attracted Kapu leaders influential at the constituency, district and state level into the party fold by assuring party tickets. Some of them were given tickets as a group, also crating an impression of Kapu exodus into TDP. The Kapus along with other backward classes were promised a deputy chief minister's post. Chandrababu Naidu sympathetically responded to the long pending demand of the Kapu for backward class reservation. The Pawan Kalyan support factor also contributed to the drift of Kapu voters towards the TDP-BJP combine. This Kapus for the first time in three decades voted such large numbers for the TDP. This is evident from the fact that TDP won overwhelmingly in the constituencies where Kapus are numerically strong.

The upper caste Hindu voters also seem to have voted in large numbers for the TDP. This happened perhaps due to factors such as the marginalisation of Congress, the alliance with BJP and the Christian overtones in the image of the YSRCP. The social forces owing allegiance to the YSRCP reportedly showed their dominance at the village level as the party was projected to win the elections. This led to the consolidation of all the other castes opposed to them. This political

realignment of caste has greatly contributed to the comeback of Chandrababu Naidu. The 2012 by - elections which the YSRCP swept was the erosion of TDP's social base. Even the economically weaker Kammas started drafting away from the TDP. This was evident from the TDP's humiliating defeat even in the Kamma-Dominated constituencies. As the TDP got stronger in the runup to 2014 general elections. The social groups that deserted TDP earlier largely returned to the party fold. The TDP won in constituencies with sizeable presence of Kapu, Backward castes and also made a dent in the constituencies with a strong presence of scheduled castes cand Reddy's who rallied behind the YRSCP.

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