

ILLUSTRATION:ROHNIT PHORE

REGIONAL CAFE: TAMIL NADU

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A year of landmarks is a year to reflect

How did sleepy Tamil Nadu, far from the national capital and which appeared anti-national at one point, grow into one of the most developed states in the country?

THIS YEAR IS A landmark year at many levels for Tamil Nadu, for both its history and politics. It is the 101st year of the founding of the Justice Party which was supposed to change Tamil Nadu totally. The Justice Party is the precursor to the Dravidian parties that have ruled the state for 50 years. EV Ramasamy, known as Periyar, broke away from the Justice Party and set up Dravidar Kazhagam, to fight for social justice. He and his followers wanted to end the upper caste (Brahmin) dominance in all walks of life and the humiliation of other castes in the state.

What started as a self-respect movement evolved into a strong political entity. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK),

headed by CN Annadurai (Anna), quit the Justice Party in 1949, fought the assembly elections and put an end to the ruling Congress party in 1967. So this year marks 50 years of Dravidian rule (DMK and AIADMK) in the state. The national parties, try as they might, do not exist here. No other regional party outside Tamil Nadu has seen unbroken success for 50 years.

Social justice, too, prevails, even though not with perfection. This is a state where minorities do not feel threatened. Caste clashes happen, but they remain localised, and have no bearing on state elections. The historically oppressed classes are the rulers now.

Muthuvel Karunanidhi, DMK's patriarch who became the chief minister after Anna's untimely death in 1969, has headed

the party ever since and has served five times as the chief minister. This is his 60th year as a legislator. He started as a firebrand anti-North, anti-Hindi politician, but has emerged as a national leader in the past two decades. He will turn 94 on June 3, and celebrations are planned around his birthday to build a national opposition front. Sadly, he may not be able to attend because of age-related ailments.

It is the 100th birth anniversary of Karunanidhi's arch rival, film star-turned-politician MG Ramachandran, who unseated him in 1977. Jayalalitha inherited MGR's legacy in 1991. Between the three of them, they have transformed the social, political and industrial landscape of Tamil Nadu. The parties have also left their mark in central-state relations. In their different ways, the two parties have fought for federalism and have been able to extract their pound of flesh from the Centre.

How did sleepy Tamil Nadu, far from the national capital and which appeared anti-national at one point, grow into one of the most developed states in the country? Its growth rates match that of the much-praised Gujarat. Tamil Nadu has only recently started attracting attention because of its success under various parameters. Nobody beyond the southern borders paid much attention to what was happening here. The state has only been seen as a place where film stars became leaders.

Anna, in the early days of the Dravidian movement, understood that medium is the message. He used theatre and cinema as effective instruments of communication. For many years, the Centre controlled radio and television. Cinema could, however, reach every nook and corner of Tamil Nadu. Anna instinctively understood that affirmative action will eventually lead to progress. He became chief minister at a time of severe food shortage and inflation. It was his election promise to provide 'three measures' (around 4.5kg) of rice for ₹1 through the state's public distribution system (PDS). After winning, he implemented the scheme for some time, but later had to scrap it because the state could not afford it. Karunanidhi was his successor and providing for the underprivileged got strengthened during his time. Free education, subsidised power and other schemes started covering a wider number of people. MGR launched his party AIADMK, defeated Karunanidhi in 1977, and the universal noon meal scheme he pushed through is

seen as a game-changer even today. He allowed private engineering colleges after providing for 69% reservation in education. The step made it possible for a generation of youngsters to enter professional colleges.

During Jayalalitha's last years, Tamil Nadu was increasingly turning into a welfare state. What is sneeringly referred to as the freebie culture has managed to reduce abject poverty. For example, free distribution of mixer-grinder kitchen machines reduces hours of sloggling for women of poor household. It allows women to go out and earn more income even as a domestic. Giving away cattle to the rural poor has provided them a steady income. The PDS is much better administered in Tamil Nadu than in other states. In fact, most other states have copied Tamil Nadu, seeing that welfare schemes win elections. A highly subsidised rice scheme won Chhattisgarh for the BJP in 2013.

However, Tamil Nadu is not just about 'welfare' under Dravidian parties. It has never been properly acknowledged that it was largely due to government support for education, various schemes for empowerment of girls and developmental programmes that the state was 'ready' for foreign investors soon after Liberalisation. Successful governments have actively encouraged industrial development through the Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation and the State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu, founded in 1965 and 1971, respectively. In fact, the latter (SIPCOT) set up industrial estates in the 1970s and 1980s. These agencies have been responsible for creating land banks that proved very useful when foreign investors came knocking. There are more industrial clusters in the state than anywhere in the country.

Dravidian parties' rule has been far from perfect. Corruption charges have tainted their many achievements. The DMK has to live down the 2G scam and accusations of family rule. Jayalalitha, with all her dynamism and political acumen, was an inaccessible chief minister. She ruled with an iron hand, and freedom of expression suffered most under her. The Supreme Court has called her the most corrupt and she would have gone to prison had she lived.

The much-touted education standards are falling shut down. There are engineering colleges being shut down and seats going begging. All oppressed communities have not progressed equally. Although it is the most urbanised state in the country, infrastructure in its cities is far from adequate. The state is facing one of its worst-ever droughts and not enough is being done about it.

In spite of all the problems plaguing it, the 2016 growth figures still put it among the most progressive states. Tamil Nadu is one of the three most preferred states for business investments and it is ranked second behind Maharashtra in GDP. Foreign investments attracted during the last five years is double that investments from 2000 to 2011. In terms of poverty alleviation, Tamil Nadu is only one of eight states that recorded poverty reduction at a rate higher than the all-India average. Its per-capita income—₹1,43,547 at current prices (2015-16)—is about 70% more than the all-India average and the third-highest amongst large states. Its Human Development Index is second amongst large states and socio-economic development status is much higher than the national average.

A lot needs to be done for the state to retain its premier position. Other states have become equally competitive. Neighbouring Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are wooing investors. Ever since Jayalalitha's death, there has been political instability. The phase of larger-than-life leaders whose word is law appears to be over. It is little wonder that all the aforementioned landmarks are not being celebrated with the usual Dravidian vigour and extravagance.

FAMILY PLANNING 2020

Partnering for a progressive, healthier India

RISHMA
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For decades, India's family planning programme was focused on population control. Over the years, that focus rightly shifted to reproductive health and rights

IMAGINE AN INNOVATION that could break entrenched cycles of poverty and inequity, and spur development across India. Something that could impact family health, accelerate women's empowerment, improve education, enhance economic productivity and let India reap the benefits of its demographic dividend.

It seems almost too good to be true, but such a tool does exist—contraception. When women and men have access to contraceptives, a world of opportunities opens up for them. Family planning allows couples to decide whether, when and how many children they want, but the benefits extend far beyond that.

With better access to family planning, we would see improvements in the health of women, children and entire communities. There would be fewer unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions. More women could advance their education, participate in the workforce and contribute to the economy. I believe that women are the backbone of thriving societies, and I know that sustainable development is not possible without first investing in the health of women and children.

But if these tools exist, what's holding us back? The National Family Health Survey tells us that only 48% of married women aged 15-49 in India currently use modern contraceptives.

Contraception is a tool that could impact family health, accelerate women's empowerment, improve education, enhance economic productivity and let India reap the benefits of its demographic dividend

For decades, India's family planning programme was focused on population control. Over the years, that focus rightly shifted to reproductive health and rights. But despite this progress, many women still don't have access to contraceptives or the awareness to make informed choices about family planning.

Five years ago, countries and partners from around the world made a promise to give 12 crore more women access to contraceptives by 2020. This was part of a global movement called Family Planning 2020 (FP2020). India alone committed to provide fam-

ily planning services to 4.8 crore new users. That's not all: India also committed to continue coverage of over 10 crore women already using contraceptives, increase financing for family planning, improve access and quality of services, and make more contraceptive options available to choose from. All by 2020. This is no small promise, and we still have much to do to reach these goals.

India has also committed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include explicit targets to ensure universal access to family planning by 2030. Indeed, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Much of India's development agenda is mirrored in the SDGs." Importantly, the SDGs also emphasise that successful sustainable development requires partnerships among governments, the private sector and civil society.

The government recognises the importance of family planning. But no matter how great our commitment or how noble our intentions, we will not meet these targets acting alone. In order to drive meaningful change and accelerate progress on the FP2020 goals, partnerships are a must.

With the privilege of doing well comes the opportunity to do good. The Federation of Obstetric and Gynecological Societies of India (FOGSI) recognises the need to engage beyond the private sector. This means working with the government to provide access to quality family planning services and contraceptive choice. With 240 member societies and 34,000 individual members spread across the country, FOGSI's network has immense capacity to affect positive change. The private sector is critical to development, and FOGSI could assist the government in many ways (providing inputs on training manuals, supporting government-led trainings for service providers, or engaging with CSOs to raise awareness for the community level). Through such actions, we would reach women, men and families with information, resources and services to improve their health and well-being.

Our theme for 2017 is "She matters: care, educate, transform." But transformation cannot come about in isolation. It can only happen when we join hands and work together. The FP2020 goals are ambitious, but they are not unattainable. We can achieve them.

—UTKARSH ANAND

Bright Ujjwala

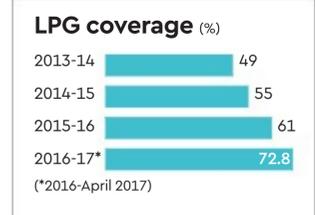
PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi launched the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) under the ministry of petroleum & natural gas on May 1, 2016, from Uttar Pradesh's Ballia district. The ₹8,000 crore scheme aims to provide LPG connections free of cost to 5 crore below poverty line (BPL) households, as recognised under the Socio-Economic Caste Census-2011 data, by 2019. For 2016-17, the target was set at 1.5 crore households, which the ministry achieved in just nine months, and it has been able to cover 2 crore households by the end of calendar year 2016.

The rapid progress of the PMUY has raised the percentage of Scheduled Caste

and Scheduled Tribe households with LPG connections to 37% of the total LPG coverage in the country. The same has risen to 13% for minorities. Priority is given to states where LPG penetration is below the national average, such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Ujjwala independently addresses women, mainly from the economically weaker sections, as it must contribute towards making the lives of women and children easier and healthier, so that they don't spend time collecting firewood and other unhealthy items.

An oil ministry statement said that, in FY17, the three fuel retailers—Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petro-



leum—issued a total of 3.75 crore new LPG connections, the highest number given in any year, including connections under the PMUY scheme. As a result, the

LPG coverage in the country jumped to 72.8%, with 19.88 crore active consumers, as on April 1, 2017. Apart from the successes, there are multiple challenges too, such as inadequacy of authenticated data on BPL population and identification of poor households, in transferring subsidies as it may involve leakages.

To realise the true benefits of this ambitious scheme, the government must build a proper mechanism to identify the deserving beneficiaries, strengthen distribution channels, and ensure the supply of LPG and cylinders as planned.

THE FIRST COMPUTERS WERE large machines that filled entire rooms. As they became cheaper and smaller, they moved out of basements and laboratories and closer to human beings: pockets to desks and laps, and eventually into purses and on wrists. So far they have stopped—mostly—at the surface of the human body. But computers are breaching the epidermis, and may one day enter the brain cavity itself. How would so-called "brain computers" work?

"Brain computer" is a catch-all term for a range of technologies. Definitions diverge in terms of where the computer is located, and its levels of processing power. Today's brain computers are relatively simple devices that exist for medical purposes and rely on crude connections to the brain. They are almost always low-power devices worn on the outside of the body, which deliver blunt signals through the skin to relevant regions of the brain. Hundreds of thousands of people already use these ma-

What is a brain computer?

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chines to bypass today's input/output systems—such as fingers and voice or eyes and ears—to communicate directly with the brain. Largely they are used to make up for a damaged bodily function, such as hearing loss.

The simplest type of brain computer is a

cochlear implant. These devices transform sound waves into electrical signals, to stimulate the auditory nerve directly. The computer controlling this process sits behind the ear, connected to a microphone and a wearable battery pack. It transmits both power and



soundwaves—transformed into electromagnetic signals—to an implant just inside the skull, next to the ear. That implant receives the signal wirelessly, translates it into an electrical current and passes it down a wire, past the biological machinery of the ear, to an elec-

trode embedded in the auditory nerve. Another sort of existing brain computer is called a neurostimulator, used in the treatment of Parkinson's disease. It is usually implanted under the skin on the chest or lower back. It sends electrical signals to parts of the brain

called the basal ganglia, which are associated with control of voluntary movement.

Another form of brain computer is emerging out of Silicon Valley—albeit one that is, for now, still on the drawing board. Entrepreneurs think that devices could go beyond simply replacing lost functions: the brain could be connected to computers and to the internet to give it entirely new functions that are beyond human beings' abilities today. Imagine Google searches that deliver their result to the brain before the question is consciously asked; or direct, brain-to-brain communication, unhindered by devices. Elon Musk, with his new company Neuralink, and Bryan Johnson, with a slightly older company called Kernel, are leading the charge. For now, the function of the brain is not understood in enough detail to read and write information at this level of linguistic communication. But for the optimists of Silicon Valley, it is only a matter of time.

THE ECONOMIST