

'Vijay no Vijayakanth': DMDK chief fights to keep legacy of Captain — and party — alive

For Premalatha, the focus is not just on halting erosion of votes but on holding on to a direct connection with people



DMDK chief Premalatha Vijayakanth, who is contesting from Virudhachalam in Cuddalore district, during campaigning. EXPRESS

own. "Captain was a people's leader," she says. "With the intention of serving the people, he transformed his fan clubs into a political party and entered elections. It is a story that has been told often in Tamil Nadu's cinema-politics continuum, but Vijayakanth's version had its own grammar. When his DMDK contested all 234 seats in its debut 2006 Assembly election, it won just one. But it secured 8.38% of the vote, a number Premalatha still repeats. "We must prove the percentage," she says. "Even if success does not come." The numbers tell a story of both rise and erosion. From a 8.4% vote share in 2006 and 10.3% in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, the party slipped to 7.9% in 2011 but won 29 seats, its highest ever tally and the last time it won an Assembly seat in the state. In the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, it fell further to 5.1%, then to 2.4% in 2016, and eventually into statistical marginality at 0.43% in 2021.

Memory of better times

what party insiders once described as Vijayakanth's "manager" to the DMDK's principal voice — has been gradual, and not without friction.

In 2019, Premalatha negotiated simultaneously with rival alliances led by the DMK and AIADMK, seeking maximum seats. "In parliamentary politics, there are no permanent enemies," she said at the time, a statement that sat uneasily with the party's anti-establishment origins.

Before sealing the DMDK's seat-sharing deal with the DMK in February, party insiders said Premalatha had reached out to the AIADMK, the BJP, and even the TVK. This election will see the DMDK's first tie-up with the DMK, for which the value of the partnership lies less in the DMDK's recent electoral performance and more in what party strategists describe as durable residue: Vijayakanth's followers, a base that, even after repeated defeats, has continued to gather in campaigns out of memory, loyalty, and cultural attachment. Today, Premalatha frames her role less as negotiation and more as continuity. "Fulfilling Vijayakanth's dreams, his goals — that is now the only goal of DMDK," she says.

That clarity extends, at least rhetorically, to questions of gender. Asked about navigating a space dominated by male leaders such as M K Stalin and Edappadi K Palaniswami, she dismisses the premise. "There is no gender discrimination in politics," she says. "All are citizens. All are human beings with responsibilities." Indira Gandhi and J. Jayalalitha, two figures who dominated their political landscapes, remain role models. "I never think in terms of male or female. Whatever is right, that is what we follow."

JD(U) leader Harivansh nominated for third term in Rajya Sabha

Jatin Anand New Delhi, April 10

AFTER TWO consecutive terms, senior Janata Dal (United) leader Harivansh has been nominated for another six-year term in the Rajya Sabha by President Droupadi Murmu.

This development ended speculation about whether Harivansh would continue his membership of the Upper House after making way for JD(U) patriarch Nitish Kumar on one of the four

seats that the key National Democratic Alliance (NDA) ally occupies in the House.

According to the current configuration of the 245-member House, the NDA holds sway in 141 seats, which include 105 for the BJP, five for the AIADMK, and four each for the Nationalist Congress Party and JD(U), among others.

A senior party hand and former journalist, Harivansh currently serves as the deputy chairperson of the Council of

States. His nomination was notified early on Friday.

A few months shy of turning 70 this June, Harivansh was first elected to the Rajya Sabha in April 2014 and served as a member on several key committees, including the Standing Committee on Defence, the Select Committee of Rajya Sabha on the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Bill, 2013, the Joint Committee on the Bill to amend the Citizenship Act, 1955, among others.

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