

## The NTR Phenomenon Reconsidered

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### Introduction

When on January 18, 1996 the former chief minister of the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao (NTR) died, India lost one of her most controversial and illustrious politicians. Despite the fact that, at the beginning of his political career in 1982, almost nobody had taken him and his party, the Telugu Desham ("Telugu-Land") seriously, he had established himself not only on the political stage of his home state but also in national politics. This paper attempts a descriptive analysis of NTR's role and significance in both state and national politics from the Telugu Desham's inception in 1982 until its split in 1995, stressing aspects different from those of earlier studies. Thus, my suggestions should be regarded as an addition to, rather than a criticism of the views expressed in various valuable earlier works. It may be worth mentioning here that especially Atul Kohli's contributions to the subject represent in-depth studies of the reasons for NTR's success (Kohli 1988 and 1990).

By the time he entered politics, NTR was the most popular and highest paid moviestar of Andhra Pradesh. Between 1949 and 1982 he had acted in 292 movies. By playing different Hindu gods and mythological heroes in many of his films, he had acquired an almost divine image especially among the rural population of Andhra Pradesh.<sup>1</sup> The extraordinary degree of popularity NTR achieved is best attested to by the fact that he has popularly been called *anna* ("elder brother").<sup>2</sup> NTR was an actor *par excellence*

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<sup>1</sup> Narayan 1983:76ff. Elder/Schmitthenner (1985:383) tentatively call this phenomenon "fictive personification": "By blurring his identity with those of the heroic characters he has portrayed on the screen, Rama Rao has acquired considerable legitimacy. He has used this legitimacy most effectively, perhaps, in those rural sectors of Andhra Pradesh where traditional, folklore blurring of actors with their parts has occurred - where people who play the parts of heroes or villains in village presentations are regarded by others and regard themselves as acquiring the attributes of the villains and heroes they play."

<sup>2</sup> Elder/Schmitthenner (1985:378) give the following explanation for this phenomenon which they label "fictive primary relationship": "...mass media audiences (including film

not only with regard to Indian Popular Cinema but also, and this is to be taken literally, on the political stage. He had the ability to convert his extreme popularity into votes, and his experience in film making paired with his acting skills into political advantages.

But his popularity and skills alone certainly did not account for his success as has often been suggested, especially by Congress (I) related sources. Instead, the support of certain powerful socio-economic groups must in my opinion be regarded as the basis for NTR's success. The conjunction of NTR's personality and the strategies adopted by the party made the Telugu Desham appear as the long-awaited alternative to the political establishment, largely dominated by the Congress (I), whose electoral base had become eroded by the early eighties.<sup>3</sup> In about nine months N.T. Rama Rao and his aides were able to dislodge the Congress (I) from power even though its uninterrupted rule in Andhra Pradesh had never been seriously challenged so far. The lack of opposition unity must be regarded as the main reason for the unchallenged position of the Congress (I) in Andhra Pradesh.

The subsequent rule of NTR and the Telugu Desham continued until 1989 when the party was in turn clearly defeated by the Congress (I). But in the seven years of power NTR had firmly established himself as a political force in the state as well as on the national level, so that he was able to regain power in 1994. This victory proved that the Telugu Desham had for its part been established as the most important political party in the state besides the Congress (I).

When NTR's son-in-law Naravirapalli Chandrababu Naidu initiated the split of the party and the resulting merciless end of NTR's political career in 1995, it became clear that the Telugu Desham was no longer dependent on NTR's personality and charisma. As Naidu managed to bring his faction to power and to remain as the state's chief minister up to the present day, he emerged as the political heir of NTR.

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audiences) will occasionally list the names of entertainment figures among four or five 'best friends'. (...) ... such fictive primary relationships can provide film stars who enter politics large banks of voters predisposed to vote for them because by now they are 'old friends'." The same phenomenon is described by Dickey (1993:351), but she gives an explanation which takes more of the specific Indian socio-religious context into account and thus appears more convincing: "Nor is it a contradiction to think of a leader like MGR simultaneously as a family member, since in South India this is precisely the relationship most frequently perceived between worshippers and gods in the devotional bhakti tradition, where divinities are worshipped and implored as parents, children and siblings, as well as lovers and friends."

<sup>3</sup> For a review of the Congress (I) rule in Andhra Pradesh see Innaiah 1981, Rao 1983:14-73 and Vakil 1984. Unfavourable sentiments towards the Congress (I) rule even find a literary expression in Burrakatha samples cited by Bernstorff 1971:370.



## The formation of the Telugu Desham

First public speculations of NTR's intention to enter politics were ignited some time around October 1981 by Telugu film magazines. According to Narayan (1983:6) NTR had said in an interview that "Yes, the Telugu people have been kind to me for more than three decades. They have given me their affection, patronised my films, made me rich and famous. It is my duty now to repay this debt in whatever way I can. I would like to do something for them. Beginning with my next birthday, I would like to devote 15 days every month to social service." This statement made *Jameen Raitu*, a Nellore newspaper, ask in a headline "Is NTR entering politics?"

This swift interpretation of 'social service' as 'politics' may be taken as a hint to the fact that NTR must already have had contacts to the political establishment. Several sources support this assumption and the fact that Naravirapalli Chandrababu Naidu married NTR's daughter Bhubaneshvari in 1982 proves it. Innaiah (1984:17) even asserts that "it was actually Mr. Chandrababu Naidu who persuaded Mr. Rama Rao to jump into politics". NTR's political contacts are further corroborated by Narayan (1983:7) with regard to NTR's reaction to the subsequent public debate about his plans: "Rama Rao now began thinking seriously about politics. He went to Hyderabad to talk it out with his intimate friends in politics and films." Moreover NTR had been living and working in Madras where he must have become quite familiar with the close association of politics and film industry.<sup>4</sup> On March 21, 1982 he announced at a press conference that he planned to launch a political party. From this time onwards the Telugu Desham is usually referred to by the press and others as the idea of NTR alone, a rather simplistic view with which I cannot concur. It is a well documented fact that since February 1982 NTR had negotiated with a Congress (I) politician, Nadendla Bhaskara Rao<sup>5</sup>, who two days later on March 23 announced his resignation from the state assembly as well as the Congress (I) (Narayan 1983:7). On March 28, the steering committee of the new party was formed at a meeting at N. Bhaskara Rao's residence in Hyderabad. This committee consisted of 13 members and chose NTR as president of the new party.

While these are the first visible signs of NTR's political career, we may however assume that the idea of forming a new political party in Andhra Pradesh must already have been very carefully considered. The following remarks confirm that the preliminary organizational steps taken by NTR

<sup>4</sup> The association of politics and entertainment media in Tamil Nadu has been discussed in Elder/Schmitthener 1985:378ff., Dickey 1993 and Rösel 1995; Baskaran 1981 presents a monographic account of the subject.

<sup>5</sup> At that time N. Bhaskara Rao was a Congress (I)-MLA, who had been expelled from the cabinets of two former chief ministers, Marri Channa Reddy and Tanguturi Anjiah, who both doubted his loyalty. *India Today (IT)*, 30.4.1982:55, 15.2.1983:49.

and his confidants must have been based on a well-deliberated plan. With the selection of Telugu film magazines to break the news, NTR chose a medium which was in direct contact with his 600 fan clubs all over Andhra Pradesh.<sup>6</sup> Thus the visible history of the Telugu Desham begins with the utilization of NTR's fan clubs which represented an already existing, extensive organizational network to transport the message of NTR's political aspirations to larger parts of the population all over Andhra Pradesh. Apart from the publicity factor, the fan clubs' response could be taken as a preliminary indicator for NTR's political prospects.<sup>7</sup>

The subsequent phase of the formation of the party was ushered in at the convention of Tirupati on May 29, where the Telugu Desham was formally founded. By the time NTR set out on his first campaign tour for the forthcoming state assembly elections about two weeks later, much of the strategy for the campaign and the means to reach as much of the electorate as possible had already been worked out and the necessary access to mass media been organized. The extent of NTR's campaign and the complexity of the media used to cover and support it is impressive and deserves closer examination, as it unveils the massive support for the Telugu Desham by certain socio-economic groups.

The main element of the campaign was NTR's unprecedented tour of almost all the districts of Andhra Pradesh in a refitted Chevrolet bus of his Ramakrishna Cine Studios.<sup>8</sup> Between June 14, 1982 and January 3, 1983 NTR covered a distance of 35 000 km in 70 days, while an estimated 30 million people listened to his speeches which he delivered from the top of his van.<sup>9</sup> These speeches revealed that the Telugu Desham hardly had any political programme worth mentioning, but that it had a message which branded the Congress (I) as the enemy of an imaginary Telugu nation.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For further information on the role of fan clubs in politics (with regard to MGR in Tamil Nadu) see Dickey 1993:342, 357ff.

<sup>7</sup> Rao (1983:306, 308, 317) reports that NTR's fan clubs transformed themselves into a *Yuva Sena* ("Youth Army") to participate in his political campaign.

<sup>8</sup> NTR's success made this new style of campaigning a fashion for politicians all over the country. *IT*, 30.11.1989:78ff.

<sup>9</sup> An analysis of the motifs and imagery used by NTR in his campaign is found in Naidu 1984, a work which contains some of valuable suggestions regarding NTR's unmatched appeal to rural audiences.

<sup>10</sup> Historically there never existed a 'Nation of the Telugus'. Telugu is basically the name of the predominantly spoken language of Andhra Pradesh. Thus NTR postulates a nation on a purely linguistic basis. The problems of equating 'linguistic group' with 'nation' are obvious. For a brief description of the peculiarities in Andhra Pradesh with regard to this question see Sharma 1967:96ff. Taking the movements for autonomy in Telengana (1968-69) as well as in (Coastal) Andhra (1972-73) into account, this Telugu nationalism appears even more artificial. These movements are discussed in Innaiah 1981:100-112 and 121-127, Rao 1983:251-266 and Rao 1993:188ff.



Though this artificial nationalism based on linguistic principles was the central motif of the Telugu Desham's agitation to unite the electorate against the Congress (I), the Telugu Desham's campaign was centered primarily on N.T. Rama Rao and his presence on all planes of mass media.

As we have seen, NTR's political campaign had been started by film magazines and immediately picked up by the general press. In a more organized manner it had been supported by the network of his fan clubs (Elder/Schmitthenner 1985:375) which later also helped during his campaign tour, for example by distributing the party manifesto<sup>11</sup>, audio tapes etc. Simultaneously, six new movies starring NTR had been released in 1982 in order to expose NTR's film image as a political message to the urban population (Naidu 1984:132). To reach the more educated and intellectual circles of society the largest-selling Telugu daily *Eenadu* ("This Land")<sup>12</sup> covered his campaign on a daily basis.<sup>13</sup> Thus almost all relevant groups of society from villagers up to urban intellectuals were addressed by NTR's campaign.

### The support base and election strategy of the Telugu Desham

The broad access NTR had to the media reveals the massive support he received from his own community, the Kamma, or rather a class "which is predominantly (but by no means exclusively) Kamma by caste and agrarian in its origins..." (*Economic and Political Weekly [EPW]*, 10.11.1984:1901). Despite its continuously growing economic influence, this class had never been adequately represented in state politics (Kohli 1988:996 and 1990: 61ff.). Not only is the *Eenadu* owned by Ramoji Rao, a Kamma<sup>14</sup>, but it is

<sup>11</sup> The party manifesto, "Telugu Desam Pranalika", is given as appendix III in Narayan, 1983:125ff. and in Shatrugna 1984:104ff.; for a review see: *EPW*, 5.3.1983:333.

<sup>12</sup> In 1983 *Eenadu* had a maximum circulation of 347 000 copies. *IT*, 15.11.1983:104.

<sup>13</sup> "From the start of his campaign he [NTR] was supported by the influential Telugu newspaper, *Eenadu* ('This Day'), edited by another Kamma, Ramoji Rao. Even though, after the election, *Eenadu* adopted a stance somewhat independent of N.T. Rama Rao, during the election campaign, *Eenadu* provided him with maximum coverage aimed at literate Telugu speakers throughout Andhra Pradesh." Elder/Schmitthenner 1985:381. Innaiah (1984:19) further reports that "Rama Rao came into contact with Mr. Ramoji Rao, the chief editor of *Eenadu* and held discussions about the future plans and programmes of the party". Given the extent of coverage (see Innaiah 1984:34) a dialogue had to be maintained between the Telugu Desham and the *Eenadu*. The link between these two organisations was a man named Yellamanchi Sekhar, a post-graduate in political sciences and former chief reporter of *Eenadu*. He had been associated with the Telugu Desham since March 1982 (*IT*, 15.2.1983:49) and was responsible for drafting speeches for the politically inexperienced NTR during the campaign (Innaiah 1984:41).

<sup>14</sup> "... it is further true that the one man who almost single-handedly led his campaign - Ramoji Rao, editor of the largest circulated Telugu daily *Eenadu* which functioned as a pamphlet for

also this community which is strongly engaged in film production, distribution and exhibition.<sup>15</sup> This also accounts for the fact that the first treasurer of the party was a Madras-based film producer, Tatineni Prakasa Rao, whose own words reveal the support of the film industry for the Telugu Desham: "It is never difficult to find money for a good cause. With more than 125 Telugu films made every year we can get producers to advertise in a party weekly we plan to start and contribute directly for various welfare programmes." (*IT*, 15.2.1983:49).

With this support base and NTR himself belonging to the same background, it is natural that the new party adopted strategies which had proved successful in Tamil Nadu politics whose well-established relation with the Madras-based film industry is well-known (*infra* Fn. 4). And with Marudur Gopalan Ramachandran (MGR), a living example for the art of exploiting extreme popularity to political advantage, as his colleague and friend, NTR had a blueprint for his own conversion from actor to politician. That he was familiar with the ideas of MGR and that he had understood his tactics is attested to by NTR's own words: "He [MGR] has achieved his objective. He has been able to successfully project himself as the hero standing on the side of suffering people." (*IT*, 30.4.1982:55).

It is therefore not astonishing that basic ingredients to the party programme as well as main strategies of the Telugu Desham were adopted from Tamil Nadu politics and then adjusted to the political and social realities of Andhra Pradesh.<sup>16</sup> Though the differences in the environment and the resulting necessary adjustments may add to some scholars' suggestion "that the NTR phenomenon should not be viewed as something similar to the situation in Tamilnadu, since Tamil and Telugu nationalisms are quite different from each other" (Kohli 1988:998, Fn.10), the most significant difference is that this 'sub- or regional nationalism' had been accompanied, if not initiated, by the emergence of a powerful and self-sufficient regional elite aspiring for political power, a phenomenon to be observed by the early

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NTR both at the time of his election and during the recent crisis - is a very typical representative of the pushing commercial enterprise of this class..." *EPW*, 10.11.1984:1901.

<sup>15</sup> "He [NTR] represents in more than one way the considerable hold his community has on what is possibly the most popular avenue of investment in Andhra Pradesh - film production and film distribution." *EPW*, 8.5.1982:764. "... for all the surplus that is generated by the delta agriculture goes in exactly two directions: agro-based industry and film production, distribution and exhibition." *EPW*, 10.11.1984:1901.

<sup>16</sup> These necessary adjustments include for instance the careful selection of party candidates which Shatrugna/Narayana considered another decisive factor in the Telugu Desham's victory. See *EPW*, 24.12.1983:2204f. (reprinted in a revised and more detailed form as Shatrugna/Srinivas/Narayana 1984), and Shatrugna 1984:100ff. For a description of the social and political structure of Andhra Pradesh see Reddy 1989.



eighties in other parts of India too.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless the parallels between strategies used in Tamil Nadu and those adopted by the Telugu Desham are obvious. The linguistically based Telugu nationalism which seems to have orientated itself on Tamil nationalism since the 1920's and the slogan of 'Telugu self-respect' which reminds one of the Self-respect Movement initiated by E.V. Ramasamy Naicker in Tamil Nadu and a more recent example like the Telugu Desham's 'mid-day meal scheme' for schoolchildren, which was a copy of MGR's 'nutritious noon-meal programme'<sup>18</sup>, may suffice to illustrate this point.

Judging from the facts discussed so far we may conclude that the Telugu Desham was a well-planned enterprise initiated to serve a double purpose: it was created to give a hitherto politically misrepresented but aspiring and economically powerful class (often equated with the Kamama community) their share in Andhra Pradesh politics and to stretch the political influence of the film industry beyond the borders of Tamil Nadu.

**Table 1:** Elections to the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly 1967-83: Number of seats and percentage of votes won by Congress (I) (Total number of seats 294)

	1967	1972	1978	1983
Seats	165	202	175	60
% of votes	45.1	52.3	39.2	33.6

Source: Kohli 1988:993 (Table 1)

This goal was achieved even though, as Kohli (1988:922ff.) rightly observes, the Telugu Desham won the elections to the state assembly on January 3, 1983 mainly because of the opposition unity factor. A comparison of the results of the state assembly elections 1967-83 (see Table 1) reveals that

<sup>17</sup> Several related aspects of 'Indian regionalism' are discussed in different contributions to Palanithurai/Thandavan 1992. Equally worth consideration is the criticism of the frequent use of the term 'regionalism' to label phenomena like the rise of the Telugu Desham, which is expressed in *EPW* 10.11.1984:1901. However, for the time being, I continue to use this term to denote the basic element common to parties which operate in a limited geographical territory.

<sup>18</sup> This programme was established in 1982 by MGR. It was a kind of reanimation of a similar programme invented by Kamaraj Nadar as early as 1956. In Tamil Nadu it favoured some 6.6 million schoolchildren at an estimated cost of 1.1 billion Indian Rupees. *EPW*, 9.10.1982: 1643, 22.1.1983:101-103. The significance of this scheme is discussed in detail in Rösler 1995:273f.

the Congress (I) suffered the most significant loss of votes as early as 1978, when it managed to continue on in power merely because of a fractionalized opposition.

### The first period of the Telugu Desham government

Nevertheless, the 1983 victory was impressive especially if we take into account that the Telugu Desham had managed to establish itself as the most important political force besides the Congress (I) in Andhra Pradesh within the extremely short span of nine months. If the personality factor as an underlying principle in Indian politics and the charisma of NTR in particular had been a decisive factor in the outcome of the election, the latter became most important in the time to follow. It was much more the personality of NTR and the sway he held over the people than the rest of the party, not to speak of its political performance, which cemented the Telugu Desham's position in the political landscape of Andhra Pradesh.

Almost since the party was founded it had been popularly regarded merely as a kind of executive body for NTR and he acted accordingly<sup>19</sup>. Time and again reports about NTR's arrogance and high-handedness appeared, several connected with complaints of party or even cabinet members. (See for instance *IT*, 15.3.1983:52.) Very soon after NTR's swearing in as chief minister a rift between him and the party became visible which led to the division of the party into NTR loyalists and critics. This tendency was essentially fuelled by the induction of members of his family into higher party ranks, something which he had condemned earlier in his campaign with regard to the Gandhis and the Congress (I) as 'dynastic rule'. NTR however, repeatedly denied any kind of influence of his family members on party affairs (*IT*, 31.5.1983:36, 31.1.1984:70f). Nevertheless, within the first months after the Telugu Desham's victory, NTR's son Jayakrishna was appointed as the organiser of the party's state convention and his son-in-law Daggubati Venkateshwara Rao, who had accompanied him on the campaign tour, had been elevated to the convener of the party's youth wing, the Telugu Yuvata ("Telugu Youth"). Additionally, in September 1983 the Martur assembly seat was vacated for him (*IT*, 15.11.1983: 35). The presence of NTR's wife, four of his sons and three of his daughters at a supposedly closed-door session during the party's state convention at Vijayawada had further irritated party members.

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<sup>19</sup> NTR's own words may be cited as an illustration of his attitude: "There is only Number One in Telugu Desam and that is NTR. There is no Number Two in my party. All the others are equal and they are treated as such." *IT*, 15.9.1984:23.



More serious, however, were the numerous defections of members from other parties to the Telugu Desham. The fact that a considerable number of pre-election defectors from other parties were not only admitted to the Telugu Desham but were also selected as the party's contestants in the election, led to dissidence and resignations from the party even before the 1983 state assembly election (Rao 1983:317ff.). But the post-electoral mass defections of disillusioned Congress(I) politicians to the Telugu Desham caused a split between those who had joined the party before the election and those who had changed sides thereafter.

Most controversial in this respect was the admission of NTR's other son-in-law N. Chandrababu Naidu to the party who, as a former Congress(I) minister, applied for admission soon after the election in which he was defeated by a Telugu Desham candidate. Naidu, who by now regarded the Congress(I) as a "laughing stock" (*IT*, 15.2.1983:47), obviously felt the weakness, or rather absence, of a second rank of Telugu Desham leadership, due to the vacuum which NTR caused and maintained. As NTR's son-in-law and the only person in the family with sound experience in political matters, he saw a good chance to become the party's real strongman in the long run (*IT*, 15.9.1984:28). A week after the state convention, Naidu's admission showed a first result when Baggidi Gopal, a MLA, was expelled from the party because he had accused Naidu of pressurizing him to vacate his Punganur assembly seat (*IT*, 15.9.1983:47). In the following period Naidu successfully worked towards strengthening his own position in the party and extending his influence. He usually spent the morning hours at NTR's official residence talking to visitors and party legislators and advising NTR in policy matters, though officially he held no public office (*IT*, 31.1.1984:69, 15.9.1984:28). At the second party convention at Vishakhapatnam in May 1984 Naidu already figured as a candidate to succeed Parvataneni Upendra as party general secretary. His important role in the party became all too obvious in August 1984 when, after the dismissal of the Telugu Desham government by governor Ram Lal, it was he who kept NTR's group of loyalists together while they were receiving offers of up to 200 000 Rupees per person for their defection to the dissident camp of N. Bhaskara Rao (*IT*, 31.8.1985:40).<sup>20</sup>

On the surface the plot against NTR seemed to be a reaction to NTR's egocentric behaviour, his rude attacks on functionaries<sup>21</sup> as well as to the

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<sup>20</sup> I may again cite NTR, who said after his reinstatement as chief minister in 1984: "Chandrababu is an astute politician. But for his struggle, the Telugu Desam would not have been reborn. I will never forget his services." *IT*, 15.5.1996:40.

<sup>21</sup> In NTR's battle against corruption, one of his major promises, the first visible result was the arrest of a Sub-Registrar from Vijayawada in March 1983. *IT*, 31.3.1983:146. But the case

growing influence of family members, especially that of Chandrababu Naidu. But the main reason for the dismissal of his government was NTR's attitude towards the Congress (I) dominated Centre, which had caused him a massive loss of support from the propertied classes (*EPW*, 10.11.1984: 1903), a problem NTR had repeatedly been warned of.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore the accompanying revolt within the Telugu Desham was the manifestation of the already existing split in the party. Significantly it was N. Bhaskara Rao, who had been frustrated by not being made the official number two of the party, who led the revolt which later proved to be a gross tactical mistake committed by Indira Gandhi, Ram Lal, N. Bhaskara Rao and a few others (*IT*, 15.9.1984:18ff., 30.9.1984:18ff., 31.10.1984:30ff.).<sup>23</sup> Adding to the Congress (I)'s almost unbelievable miscalculation of the situation, the unconventional way NTR reacted to the whole affair secured him a victory of sorts and put the lid on N. Bhaskara Rao's political career.

The dismissal came at a time when NTR had just returned from the U.S. where he had undergone a triple coronary bypass surgery. Still ailing and dependent on a wheel chair, he took his 161 loyal MLAs to the Rashtrapati Bhavan in Delhi with the intention of proving his majority before the President of India, as the Governor of Andhra Pradesh, Ram Lal, had not permitted him to do so in the state legislative assembly. It was an unexpected move which not only lifted his cause to the national level but also exposed the full extent of the plot planned by Indira Gandhi and the Congress (I).<sup>24</sup> The whole affair served a severe blow to Indira Gandhi's national and international reputation as 25 foreign television stations covered the event in addition to the domestic media. Soon afterwards NTR toured several districts of Andhra Pradesh in his van to take his cause to the village level. The

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which really upset his partymen happened in March 1984, when NTR laid a trap to verify charges of corruption against the Minister of State for Labour and Employment, M. Ramachandra Rao. The bait proved successful and the minister was sacked. *IT*, 15.3.1984:44.

<sup>22</sup> Even publicly, as by Ramoji Rao in January 1984: "It's true that he has made quite a few silly mistakes. It is still not too late for him to mend his ways..." *IT*, 31.1.1984:69f., and, somewhat more outspoken, in September 1984: "If he gets over this crisis he must mend his ways. Otherwise, we -his supporters and friends- will have no option but to leave him." *IT*, 15.9.1984:27.

<sup>23</sup> Interestingly the plot was already forecast by the magazine *Janata* in April 1983: "She [Indira Gandhi] is sending feelers to the former Congressmen in Telugu Desam, including Shri Nadendla Bhaskara Rao who has got an eye on the Chief Ministership. Without much fuss Nadendla is silently mobilising all the anti-NTR forces within the party to strike a deal at the appropriate time." *Janata*, 24.4.1983:13.

<sup>24</sup> NTR used a similar strategy in September 1988 when Congress (I) MLAs went on a hunger strike over the issue of allocating more irrigation water for the drought prone Rayalaseema region. Along with a number of Telugu Desham officials he went to Delhi to put the blame on the Central government which he accused of stalling several crucial development programmes in the state, especially the Telugu Ganga project. *IT*, 30.9.1988:44ff.



whole story resulted in the dissolution of the state legislative assembly and two considerable victories for the Telugu Desham, one in the 1984 parliamentary election in which the party secured 30 out of 42 seats in the Lok Sabha, the other in the state assembly election in 1985 where the Telugu Desham repeated its 1983 result of 202 seats, making NTR not only the safest chief minister but also the leader of the largest opposition party at the Centre.

It is this fact that must be regarded as especially significant when we consider that NTR began to work towards opposition unity on the national level soon after his victory in 1983. Influenced by the idea of a council of chief ministers of the three southern states which were not ruled by the Congress (I), Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Pondichery, an idea initiated by Karnataka chief minister Ramakrishna Hegde (*IT*, 31.5.1983:108, Ray 1984:151ff.), he organized a meeting of 14 non-Congress (I) political parties. Being the first such meeting in the history of independent India it was the climax of the Telugu Desham's party convention in Vijayawada from May 26-28, 1983. 24 leaders of opposition parties shared a common platform and even decided on a common resolution as well as on further meetings (*IT*, 30.6.1983:20f.). Thus NTR can be credited with having initiated a process to form a joint national opposition in which he again played an important role in September 1988, when he organized a meeting which led to the formation of the National Front (NF), of which he became the chairman (*IT*, 15.1.1989:44; *Sunday*, 5.8.1990:23).

**Table 2:** Elections to the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly 1983-94: Number of seats won by Congress (I), Telugu Desham, and others (Total number of seats 294)

	Congress (I)	Telugu Desham	Others
1983	60	202	32
1985	50	202	42
1989	182	74	38
1994	26	219	47

Source: Compiled from: Chowdhry 1995: Tables 1.1 and 1.6

**Table 3:** Lok Sabha Elections in Andhra Pradesh 1984-96: Number of seats won by Congress (I), Telugu Desham, and others (Total number of seats 42)

	Congress(I)	Telugu Desham	Others
1984	6	30	6
1989	39	2	1
1991	24	13	5
1996	22	16	4

*Source:* Compiled from various issues of *India Today*

### NTR's first political defeat

Despite his significant role in the NF, NTR's fate on both the state and national level changed dramatically when the Telugu Desham was defeated by the Congress (I) in the state assembly as well as in the parliamentary elections in December 1989 (see Tables 2 and 3).<sup>25</sup>

With regard to the response of the electorate, which had been divided on a larger scale on the reservation debate in 1986 (*IT*, 15.8.1986:36, 31.8.1986: 50ff., 30.9.1986:33, 15.4.1987:28.), this defeat was mainly due to the poor performance of the Telugu Desham government in terms of keeping to NTR's pre-election promises, the poor implementation and scrapping of popular programmes to support the weaker sections of society<sup>26</sup>, usually referred to as 'populist measures', as well as the problems which their implementation had caused for the state's finances (*IT*, 31.1.1984:58, 15.11.1984: 58; *Sunday*, 27.12.1987:27). These shortcomings had caused considerable damage to NTR's image, as it had become all too obvious that the politician NTR could not live up to the ideals, standards and abilities his film image had initially seemed to promise. This time his elaborate campaign which comprised of his success-proof state-wide tour in his van and extensive reports about the proposed release of a new movie,

<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting, that one of the few successful TDP candidates in these elections was N. Chandrababu Naidu.

<sup>26</sup> For instance, soon after the election victory in 1985, NTR stopped the midday meal scheme. *EPW*, 25.5.1985:898; *IT*, 15.6.1985: 52 f.



*Brahmarishi Vishvamitra* (IT, 15.4.1989:26f., 15.7.1989:18ff.; *Sunday*, 23.4.1989:10ff.)<sup>27</sup>, intended to underline his image as a political *sannyasi* that he had tried to adopt shortly after his victory in 1983, could not prevent his defeat.

The debacle reflected an internal crisis of both the administration and the party. The level of support from bureaucratic circles, which had remained low ever since the retirement age issue in 1983 (*EPW*, 23.7.1983:1308f., 6.8.1983:1371; *IT*, 15.8.1983:24f., 31.8.1983:35f.; Innaiah 1984:69ff.), had been further eroded (*IT*, 15.2.1989:49f.). Moreover the party was openly divided since NTR had reshuffled his entire cabinet in February 1989 in order to maintain his autocratic position (*IT*, 15.3.1989:30f., 31.3.1989:34, 15.4.1989:24ff.; *Sunday*, 16.3.1989:56f., 9.4.1989:16f.). The dismissal of his ministers had been justified by NTR on the grounds that he held them collectively responsible for leaking out unfavourable budget figures to the press. The figures' appearance in *Eenadu* was especially significant, since it indicated that the former support from the Kamma community had changed to opposition too. The cabinet recast had been supported by NTR's son-in-law D. Venkateshwara Rao, although he, as the state's health minister, was among the ministers who had been dismissed. As the leader of a significant group of Telugu Desham legislators, Venkateshwara Rao had also become a threat to N. Chandrababu Naidu, who had opposed the cabinet dissolution. Now the rivalry between Venkateshwara Rao and Chandrababu Naidu became visible.

As mentioned above, Naidu himself had already achieved a central position in the party by 1984 which he further strengthened through his activities in party training camps in 1985 (*IT*, 31.7.1985:45f., 31.8.1985:40). His importance for the Telugu Desham was officially confirmed by his appointment as party general secretary later that year. He increasingly interfered in policy making and developed aspirations for the party leadership (*IT*, 30.6.1986:25). Consequently, NTR, who had never left any doubt about his own unimpeachable position, tried to check Naidu (*IT*, 15.4.1987:28) who had nevertheless firmly cemented his own position in the party (*Sunday*, 27.12.1987:25). Yet, subsequent to the reshuffle, Naidu, who still feared to openly challenge NTR, kept a low profile.

The first period of Telugu Desham rule in Andhra Pradesh thus resulted in a messy situation for NTR: the electoral base was disillusioned and di-

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<sup>27</sup> The project, however, had to be postponed and only an 18-minute trailer could be used in the campaign. *IT*, 30.11.1989:42. After his defeat, NTR concentrated on the film's completion. The film was ready by August 1990 and planned to be released in two versions, Telugu and Hindi, to expose NTR not only as a regional but also as a national leader. According to the first show was scheduled for Independence Day. *Sunday*, 5.8.1990:21.

vided, his two sons-in-law struggled for influence and power, most of his former allies were disappointed and withdrew their support<sup>28</sup>, dissidence in his party grew constantly and his screen image, which had helped him so much, was stained by several scandals and charges of corruption (*IT*, 31.1.1984:69, 15.6.1985:54, 30.9.1986:90, 31.12.1988:49, 15.5.1989:29ff., 15.7.1989:18ff.; *Sunday*, 15.11.1987:30f., 27.12.1987:26, 17.1.1988:12ff.). But on the other hand NTR had achieved the unprecedented: to firmly establish himself, a political novice, and the Telugu Desham, a party without any historical background, as the only political alternative to the Congress (I) in Andhra Pradesh.

That his government had not made much of a difference to the common man was to be expected despite NTR's promises and confessions. Its main objective was to cut into the established political structures which were largely dominated by the Congress (I)-Reddi network<sup>29</sup> as well as to favour the propertied and especially the non-Reddi, agro-based class. Accordingly, NTR's tirelessly promised service to the poor turned out to be a service to the class he belonged to, since he diverted the attention of the weaker sections of society from effective measures for their uplift (which in the Indian context means first of all effective land reforms) to 'populist' schemes such as rice at 2 Rupees per kg<sup>30</sup> or a daily meal for schoolchildren among others.<sup>31</sup> Simultaneously the Telugu Desham government strengthened the police force in its merciless battle against activists who try to organize peasants, tribals and landless laborers under the pretext of a 'naxalite menace'.

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<sup>28</sup> Again we may regard a public statement of Ramoji Rao as an indicator to that loss of support: "We supported NTR to cleanse the political system in Andhra but he is going astray and arrogating powers to himself, the very reason for which he fought against Mrs Gandhi. He inspires confidence in the people but is not willing to delegate responsibility. This is a danger to democracy and my obligation is not to him, but to the people who read us every morning." *IT*, 30.6.1985:55.

<sup>29</sup> A good indicator for this fact are the Telugu Desham's repeated efforts to restructure rural administration. *IT*, 15.2.1984:121, 15.4.1984:64f.; *EPW*, 9.3.1985:393ff., 1.10.1994:2585.

<sup>30</sup> For a critical and detailed analysis of the impact of the 2-Rupees-a-kg rice scheme see *EPW* 14.10.1995:2537ff.

<sup>31</sup> A propos 'populism': This term has become extremely popular to denote any supposed welfare scheme ever since Indira Gandhi's famous "Garibi hatao" campaign. The term usually carries a negative connotation in the general sense of 'buying votes with promises' and is frequently used to discredit the concerned programmes without any detailed analysis of their actual effects. Although, in my opinion, the term is widely used rather indiscriminately, I equally do not agree with J.V.M. Sarma (*EPW*, 4.3.1995:417ff.), who seems to avoid the term completely, and instead interprets welfare programmes like, for instance, NTR's 2-Rupees-a-kg rice scheme as "social security" or "safety net programmes". A more balanced approach to the matter is reflected in a few interesting remarks of K. Balagopal in *EPW*, 21.1.1995:136, 139.



Thus the Telugu Desham government substantially strengthened the widespread quasi-feudal structures prevalent in large parts of Andhra Pradesh (*EPW*, 7.7.1984:1021ff., Kohli 1988:1000ff.).<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the Telugu Desham government must be blamed for having made no progress with regard to the unemployment problem (*EPW* 15.4.1995:811ff.).

That NTR's support base, which should have been substantially favoured by his government, finally began to withdraw, had several reasons which are more or less rooted in the egocentric and whimsical nature of his person. For one thing, these groups soon had to realise that NTR had his own will and ambitions: not only would he at times make decisions (even unpopular or unrealistic ones that he later had to cancel) without prior consultation with concerned cabinet members; but due to his eagerness to please the electorate (which he still regarded as his audience), they had to share him and his favours with other sections of society. But more importantly he soured the state's relationship with the Centre and that was contrary to the principles and interests of a class whose economic activities were by no means confined to Andhra Pradesh alone.

### **The second period of the Telugu Desham government and NTR's final defeat**

However, the disappointment of the electorate with NTR and the memory of his government's failures did not last too long. Already in the 10th parliamentary election in 1991 the Telugu Desham seemed to have recovered. Although the party won only 13 of the 42 seats available, an analysis of the results shows that the Telugu Desham might perhaps have won the majority of seats, had Rajiv Gandhi not been assassinated during the election. 17 constituencies voted before the assassination of which the Telugu Desham (plus allies) won nine with 41.58% of the total vote as against 39.14% for the Congress (I). But out of 24 constituencies which voted immediately after the assassination, the Telugu Desham could win only four. Its share of votes dropped to only 35.9%, whereas the Congress (I)'s share of votes increased to 48.59% (*Sunday*, 30.6.1991:28). Even though the common interpretation of this phenomenon as a 'sympathy vote' has quite convincingly been questioned by Rudolph (1993), the effect of the assassination on the electoral outcome cannot be doubted.

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<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the NTR government has repeatedly been held responsible for an increase of 'official' violence under the guise of 'naxalite encounters'. *EPW*, 24.9.1983:1649ff., 21.1.1984:109ff., 2.2.1985:174, 27.4.1985:748f., 22.6.1985:1073f., 13.7.1985:1167ff., 3.8.1985:1298ff., 14.9.1985:546ff.; *IT*, 31.10.1986:29.

After his defeat in 1989, many experts were convinced that NTR's political career had come to an end. This seemed to be confirmed by NTR himself, who turned to films and abstained from state politics for almost a year. Although public opinion also suspected NTR of being frustrated and intending to withdraw from politics, his efforts to complete his film *Brahmarishi Vishvamitra* which was to be released simultaneously in two versions, Telugu and Hindi (*infra* Fn. 27), indicate that he was continuously working on his political future behind the scenes (*Sunday*, 5.8.1990:21). Yet the film was a flop, even in the Telugu version. This failure, along with further electoral setbacks in a couple of assembly by-elections, crossed his plans for a 'Bharat Desham', a national party that he temporarily intended to launch.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, he was visibly back on the political stage early in 1991, working towards his political comeback (*IT*, 15.2.1991:56). After a full-term Congress (I) interregnum which was marked by scandals, inefficiency and dissidence (*Sunday*, 6.1.1991:14f.) and which once again proved the Congress (I)'s inability to form a stable government,<sup>34</sup> the electorate seemed to be left with no alternative than to re-elect NTR and the Telugu Desham in the 1994 state assembly election. But when NTR and his Telugu Desham regained power with an unprecedented majority of 219 seats (see Table 2), the foundations for a crucial split in the party which brought about NTR's ultimate defeat were already laid.

Besides his two sons-in-law, D. Venkateshwara Rao and N. Chandrababu Naidu, a third contestant for NTR's succession as party chief had made her appearance: Lakshmi Parvati, who first approached NTR in 1987 under the pretext that she was working on a thesis on his contribution to Telugu cinema (*IT*, 15.12.1994:31). Quite apart from her affection for NTR, she seems to have sensed that NTR's successor could be selected only from among his own family and with her marriage to NTR in September 1993, her political prospects improved considerably.<sup>35</sup> Subsequently she began to play an im-

<sup>33</sup> This plan was due to NTR's growing dissatisfaction with the NF. *Sunday*, 1.12.1991:16 f.

<sup>34</sup> Like in the years prior to 1983, when Andhra Pradesh saw four chief ministers in just two years (Marri Channa Reddy was replaced in October 1980 by Tanguturi Anjiah who, in February 1982, was substituted by Bhavanam Venkataram Reddy, who again had to vacate the post in September 1982 for Kotla Vijayabhaskara Reddy. *IT*, 15.10.1982: 58), this interregnum added yet more names to the list of Congress(I) chief ministers. Marri Channa Reddy, who had defeated NTR in 1989, had to resign in December 1990 (*IT*, 15.1.1991:38) and was succeeded by Nedurumalli Janardhan Reddy. Following charges of corruption he was replaced by Kotla Vijayabhaskara Reddy in October 1992. *IT*, 15.10.1992:42ff., 31.10.1992:40f. Ironically the latter had been the very Congress (I) chief minister whom NTR had so clearly defeated in 1983.

<sup>35</sup> Consider the example of J. Jayalalitha, who, as a former mistress of MGR, even managed to sideline MGR's legal wife V.N. Janaki in the struggle for MGR's political inheritance.



portant role in the party which was highlighted in NTR's 1994 election campaign, where she exhibited her wifely devotion to NTR while accompanying him on his election tour through the state's districts (*IT*, 15.12.1994:28, 31.12.1994:40). Her presence in the campaign was also an appeal to the female electorate which NTR had especially aimed at with the promise of prohibition. But helpful as she was during the campaign, she proved to be fatal with regard to NTR's yet unchallenged position as party chief. Soon after the 1994 state assembly election the inner-family struggle broke out into the open over the Tekkali assembly seat (*IT* 15.5.1995:46ff.). By that time Lakshmi Parvati could already count on the support of a faction within the Telugu Desham, since she had earlier been involved in the distribution of party tickets (*IT*, 31.12.1994:40, 15.9.1995:29). Party members who had adjusted their own aspirations to the established balance of power between the unchallenged leadership of NTR and the organisational grip on the party held by N. Chandrababu Naidu repeatedly complained about Lakshmi Parvati's growing influence. Yet NTR missed the chance to pacify the growing dissent.

On the contrary NTR seemed bound to sacrifice the established stability of the party to his young wife's ambition. So in August 1995 he further strengthened her position by suspending seven MLA's and one minister who had been allegedly working against her. This suspension along with a physical attack by her supporters on her main adversary in the Tekkali assembly seat controversy, NTR's son Harikrishna, resulted in an open revolt against NTR in the family as well as in the party.

This revolt was led by N. Chandrababu Naidu, who meanwhile had become the state finance minister and now saw his chance to take over the party leadership. He organised a meeting of his supporters in Hyderabad intended as a final attempt to make NTR reduce Lakshmi Parvati's influence. Even his rival D. Venkateshwara Rao and his supporters joined Naidu's camp. NTR however rejected the dissident demands which were submitted to him by three pro-Naidu ministers on August 23, one of these demands being the removal of seven ministers of the Parvati group. On August 24, 147 dissident MLAs met and elected N. Chandrababu Naidu as their leader. Naidu accordingly claimed the chief ministership as he had the majority of Telugu Desham MLAs on his side. The governor Krishna Kanth fixed August 31 as the date when Naidu would have to prove his majority. On August 28, NTR was left with just 36 MLAs against Naidu's 178 (*IT*, 15.9.1995: 29). The whole affair ended with Naidu taking over as chief minister.

NTR reacted to the plot like he did in 1984, when he was temporarily ousted by N. Bhaskara Rao. He tried to take his cause to the people in order to create a public reaction strong enough to have himself re-installed, but

this time he failed. The response to his state-wide tour was by no means as intense as it was in 1984 because NTR himself was publicly held responsible for the debacle. Public opinion was substantially influenced by *Eenadu*, which by now had shifted its support to Chandrababu Naidu. This reflected the disappointment of the Kamma elite with NTR (*EPW*, 7.10.1995:2483f.), which also considered Naidu, himself a businessman, a more suitable representative of their class.

This massive, albeit not sudden decrease in popularity and support sheds yet another light on the 1994 assembly election: the decisive factor for the Telugu Desham's victory was neither NTR's charisma nor his 'populist' promises, but the Congress (I)'s complete failure, which stemmed mainly from its notorious dissidence and factionalism. Accordingly, one may say that it was this time not the result of opposition unity but rather of Congress (I) disunity.

Although NTR's position was again strengthened in October 1995, when his other son-in-law D. Venkateshvara Rao came back to his fold from Naidu's faction, he could not win back a sufficient number of MLAs to regain power, as he had also irrevocably lost his support base within the party due to the fact that the position of Lakshmi Parvati had remained untouched (*IT*, 30.11.1995:23). The last major setback for NTR was marked by a verdict of the Andhra Pradesh High Court which declared the appointment of Chandrababu Naidu as chief minister after the split of the Telugu Desham valid (*IT*, 15.1.1996:15).

### **The Telugu Desham after NTR's death**

NTR set his last hope on the people's verdict in the 11th parliamentary elections scheduled for April/May 1996. However, he did not live to see that decision, as he suffered a fatal heart attack in the early morning hours of January 18, 1996. NTR's sudden death was the catalyst for the split of the Telugu Desham into two factions headed by N. Chandrababu Naidu and Lakshmi Parvati, the latter claiming to be NTR's only legitimate heiress. But the electorate did not accept her claim as is shown by the results of the 1996 parliamentary election, in which the Naidu faction managed to win 16 seats, whereas Parvati's faction could not even win a single one. The division of votes between the two factions, however, may have helped the Congress (I) to win 22 seats.

This clear victory of Naidu over Parvati strengthened Naidu's position as chief minister and helped to establish a new generation of leaders in the party whose members had already been operating behind the scene under



NTR's autocratic supremacy. With elections to the state legislative assembly only 18 months back at that time, Naidu and his confidants had more than three years left to prove their leadership qualities.

### **The Telugu Desham's role in national politics**

Since 1983, when NTR had demonstrated the effectiveness of opposition unity for the first time, he had time and again tried to bring opposition leaders together to form a national alternative to the Congress (I). Although the National Front (NF) was successful in the 1989 parliamentary election, the disintegrative and dissenting forces in the subsequently ruling coalition were too strong, making fresh elections in 1991 the only option after the failure of the V.P. Singh and Chandra Shekhar governments. The results of the 1991 general election marked a clear setback for the NF which could secure only 75 seats and thus it was obvious that the NF experiment had failed.

On July 20, 1995 the presidium of the NF met for the first time in three years to settle agreements and shape a common strategy, this time well in advance of the 11th parliamentary election scheduled for April/May 1996 (*IT*, 15.8.1994:33ff.). Due to the massive mandate the electorate of Andhra Pradesh had given him in 1994, NTR now even figured as a possible NF candidate for prime ministership, besides V.P. Singh and Jyoti Basu. Just one month later the Telugu Desham split and Naidu replaced NTR as chief minister in Andhra Pradesh. This development had its effect on NTR's position in the NF. Obviously it came quite unexpected for the NF leadership which was banking on a unified Telugu Desham, which together with the Janata Dal formed the nucleus of the NF's repeatedly shifting alignments, to contest for the 42 Lok Sabha seats from Andhra Pradesh. Now the NF had to decide whether to stay with NTR, still its chairman, or to seek an alliance with Naidu. It took the NF more than five months to make a decision in favour of NTR, which was agreed upon at a meeting of the Janata Dal's Political Affairs Committee in Delhi on January 11, 1996, even though the NF's coalition partner, the Left Front (LF), had quite early decided to back Naidu.

Just one week later, in the aftermath of NTR's death on January 18, 1996, the NF found itself not only bereft of its chairman but confronted with a similar decision, this time whether to back Naidu or NTR's 'authorized' heiress Lakshmi Parvati. The outcome of the 1996 parliamentary election finally solved the problem as Naidu's faction won 16 seats, whereas Parvati's faction was completely rejected by the electorate. The commonly expected sympathy wave for NTR, which Parvati had tried to exploit and

whose supposed impact had obviously caused the NF's hesitation to back Naidu, had shown no significant effect on the election results.

Since Naidu's Telugu Desham clearly defeated Parvati's faction, he and his party were invited by V.P. Singh and others to join the NF-LF coalition, as soon as it was clear that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would emerge as the single strongest party (*IT*, 31.5.1996: 29 f.). Given the increased importance of regional parties, as the three national parties, Congress (I), BJP and Janata Dal, fell short of a simple majority, Naidu assumed an important position in the NF, proving him to be the successor of NTR on the national level too. Finally a 13-party coalition, which was renamed United Front (UF), emerged and formed the government after the BJP could not win a simple majority. In this coalition Naidu's Telugu Desham with its 16 Lok Sabha seats was one of the stronger regional constituents. Accordingly three Telugu Desham ministers were included in Haranahalli Dodde Deve Gowda's cabinet.

Even though Naidu had played a key role in the nomination of Deve Gowda in June 1996, they soon became foes (*Aside*, 1.1.1997:34, 37). In August 1996, the Almatti dam controversy between Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka led to a severe disagreement between both of them. In November 1996, their relationship turned into an open conflict when Deve Gowda accused Naidu of grossly exaggerating the figures regarding the cyclonic damage suffered by Andhra Pradesh's coastal districts and refused to meet Naidu's considerable financial demands for cyclone relief in the state (*Aside*, 1.1.1997:34ff.). Deve Gowda's refusal put Naidu in a difficult situation. Andhra Pradesh had already witnessed a severe financial crisis due to NTR's poll promises of prohibition and subsidised rice which Naidu could not dare step back upon. Therefore he had already tried to assure maximum benefits for Andhra Pradesh by demanding a redefinition of Centre-state relations (*IT*, 30.6.1996:42ff.), a point which had been central to the Telugu Desham's programme since its inception. In order to strengthen his position and justify his demands, he had tried to win the support of other regional parties shortly after Deve Gowda had taken over as prime minister by convening a so-called 'Federal Front' of regional parties (*IT*, 30.6.1996:44). When Deve Gowda had to resign in April 1997, Naidu, who had meanwhile become the chairman of the UF steering committee, played a key role in installing Inder Kumar Gujral as the new prime minister (*IT*, 30.4.1997:16, 15.5.1997:14). These facts illustrate that Naidu achieved a rise in importance in the UF similar to that which he had earlier managed to achieve in the Telugu Desham.



## **NTR's political inheritance**

Naidu's success in the political arena which is indicated by the important positions he currently holds is a cumulation of years of patient but constant effort. Being the central force behind the scenes in the Telugu Desham, he patiently awaited the appropriate time to challenge NTR's charisma and popularity. As a key player in the UF, Naidu has till now kept a low profile. His political past, however, has sufficiently proved his ambitions. In the UF Naidu has to deal with a number of equally ambitious rivals, some of whom are power politicians of a long standing. The time may not yet have come for him as he belongs to a new generation of politicians.

With his defection from the Congress (I) in 1983 Naidu has shown that he had understood the undercurrent in India's political landscape: the increasing importance of so-called 'regional', non-Congress (I) parties at the state level and the shift from Congress (I)-dominated to coalition politics on the national level. On both levels he has successfully succeeded Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao, who must in my opinion be regarded as an outstanding figure in Indian politics, because he has given a significant boost to both of these developments: he established the most prominent, perhaps most significant regional party of the 1980's and put an end to the predominance of the Congress (I) in Andhra Pradesh. Moreover, he was equally instrumental in putting an end to the predominance of the Congress (I) in national politics by repeatedly trying to forge a front of opposition parties. What he did not end, however, was dynastic politics: true, he defeated Indira Gandhi as well as her son and successor Rajiv, but even though he had criticized them for their 'dynastic rule' he himself figured as the unimpeachable leader of the Telugu Desham until his death. And it soon became clear that his political inheritance could be passed on only to a member of his family. From the ensuing struggle within NTR's clan Chandrababu Naidu emerged victorious. Although his position as the leader of the Telugu Desham has been confirmed by the results of the 1996 parliamentary election, his position as chief minister of Andhra Pradesh is still not secure. But given his tactical skills, his experience and the amount of time until the next state assembly election in Andhra Pradesh is due, he can be expected to further establish himself in state and national politics.

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**Jakob Rösel**

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