

Devaraj Urs: A Political Profile in Courage and Conviction

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Abstract: *The present article delineates the political profile of Devaraj Urs who has created history in Karnataka state on the basis of qualitative research methodology. Devaraj Urs was born in the aristocratic Arasu community which had ruled the Princely State of Mysore. He could have obtained a very good position in the administration by using his connection with the Royal family of Mysore. Urs came back to his village to continue the agricultural activities since he believed in self-respect and self-reliance. Urs was greatly influenced by the life and mission of Subhash Chandra Bose who founded the Indian National Army. Urs had actively participated in the legislative proceedings and raised his concern for the welfare and progress of the people. He had maintained political equilibrium and kept away from the controversies. He had argued that the producers of wealth should be protected by the system through adoption of healthy practices. Urs had maintained political equilibrium and silently worked for the consolidation of Indira Congress in the state. He had organized the political workshop to train the next generation of leaders on the basis of the progressive policies of Indira Gandhi. He was highly respected as the 'people's Chief Minister' and strengthened the foundations of social justice in Karnataka state during his tenure. The people of Karnataka knew that Urs was the true leader of the masses since he had implemented several pro-active programmes for their development. He commands respect from all sections of society for his unique political leadership and noble contributions for the progress of the state in different capacities.*

1. PREAMBLE

Devaraj Urs was born in the aristocratic Arasu community which had ruled the Princely State of Mysore. He was a distant kin to the Wodeyar royal family. He was a true son of the soil and continued his association with Mother Nature as a farmer after graduation. He was actively involved in the social service which earned him great popularity as the mass leader. He had chosen the political path above his family ties. The present article delineates the political profile of Devaraj Urs who has created history in Karnataka state on the basis of qualitative research methodology.

He had won the Assembly Election in 1952 as a Congress Party candidate from Hunsur Constituency. He joined the Congress Party led by Indira Gandhi on the basis of strong political ideological conviction and social commitment. He also occupied the post of Chief Minister and functioned effectively as the voice of the voiceless, emancipator of the oppressed and facilitator of inclusive development in Karnataka state. He had made monumental contributions for the integrated development of the state in general and inclusive development of the weaker sections of society in particular. He commands respect from all sections of society for his unique political leadership and noble contributions for the progress of the state in different capacities.

2. FAMILY BACKGROUND OF URS

Devaraj Urs was born in the family which inherited the legacy of Jain – Kshatriya family which served the Vijaynagar Kings. The family was converted into Urs clan which is part of Hinduism. Urs was born on August 20, 1915 as the first child of Devaraja Urs and Devirammani at Bettada Tunga village, Hunsur taluk, Mysore district. He grew at Kallahally village, Hunsur Taluk, mother's family which inherited the legacy of Mangarasa clan. Urs had also spent his childhood in the company of famous Kannada writer Chaduranga.

Kallahally village was surrounded by bountiful natural environment, cultural heritage, socially congenial environment and historically significant resources. Urs, Chaduranga, another brother Kemparaja Urs and others had grown in a harmonious social environment. The village had respected the family of Urs which was known for historical connectivity. Urs basically belonged to an agriculturist family which enjoyed self-reliance.

Urs basically belonged to an agricultural family which was quite well off economically. He was adopted by his grandmother Gowrammani and grew under their care and responsibility. Urs had also spent about couple of months in the company of Mudduraje Urs who served as Government Magistrate. He had earned the wrath of Sir Mirza Ismail, the then Dewan of Mysore due to some personal differences. He quit the government services and came back to Mysore. He completed his primary education in Arasu Boarding School, Mysore.

Urs continued higher secondary education in Maharaja High School, Mysore. Mudduraje Urs was appointed as an Assistant Commissioner in Mysore he married Leelavati, the princess of the Mysore Royal Family. Urs had gained the royal family connectivity through Mudduraje Urs but he lived in a separate rented room and managed boarding facilities on his own. He completed the matriculation studies in Mysore. Devaraj Urs married Chikkammanni who was 11 years old as per the family traditions. He was 15 years old boy at the time of marriage.

3. EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF URS

He joined the Central College, Bangalore for graduation in science discipline. Urs had joined the K.V.Iyer gymnasium in Bangalore to improve his physical fitness. He concentrated on gaining knowledge, maintaining physical fitness and developing a sound personality. He obtained BSc degree in the year 1941. Urs had cultivated passion for reading, sports, debates and other extra-curricular activities. He was highly interested in the study of Philosophy and read Russell, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Gandhi, Periyar, Ambedkar, Lohia and other great personalities.

Urs was also actively acquainted with the literary works of great scholars in India and abroad. He had developed quest for knowledge which enabled him to become an intelligent and dynamic person in life. He was also interested in music, drama, sports and other activities. He was interested in football and wrestling activities which made him physically strong at the young age. He had cultivated the desire of becoming a strong man in life to manage various difficulties and challenges.

He could have obtained a very good position in the administration by using his connection with the Royal family of Mysore. Urs came back to his village to continue the agricultural activities since he believed in self-respect and self-reliance. He helped his parents and other family members actively in the house management and field management activities. He cultivated the land with lot of enthusiasm and managed the animals and birds with great care. He had also become a model farmer and earned the affection of the people in Kallahally village. He was also actively engaged in social work and cultivated good social relations. He had resolved the local disputes amicably and helped the people to live in a harmonious way.

Urs was selected as an army officer in the entrance test conducted by the Kings Commission. He did not join the military service against the wishes of his mother. He actively participated in agriculture and other family activities. He believed in dignity of labor and worked along with the laborers in the family with lot of love and interest. He had developed coconut farm, dairying and other remunerative activities for the development of the family.

Urs had struck a meaningful balance between the family life and social life. The marriage had proved to be harmonious and conventional. The family had three daughters — Chandra Prabha, Nagrathna and Bharathi. His wife Chikkammanni had managed the agriculture and family responsibilities very nicely. Urs was very happy with the family life, children and agricultural activities. His popularity had increased in the Hunsur taluk as a progressive farmer and leader. He was persuaded by Srinivas Iyengar and Sahukar Chennaiah to join Congress Party. Urs also took active part in the national freedom centered debates and discussions at the grassroots level. He pursued the agricultural activities with discipline, devotion and responsibility.

Urs was greatly influenced by the life and mission of Subhash Chandra Bose who founded the Indian National Army. He had cultivated nationalism in the young age. He was aware of the national freedom movement and famous Shivapura Satyagraha in Karnataka. He also participated in the Quit India Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in 1942. Urs also fought against the Mysore Chalo Agitation in 1947 along with veteran leaders like T.Siddalingaiah, K.T.Bhashyam, Sahukar Chennaiah, K.C.Reddy, S.Nijalingappa, K.Hanumanthaiah and others. The Maharaja of Mysore had agreed to establish a responsible government in Princely State of Mysore.

4. POLITICAL INNINGS OF URS

Sahukar Chennaiah was a great patriot, nationalist, leader and philanthropist in the old Mysore region. He was also a champion of the poor and downtrodden communities in the state. He had persuaded Devaraj Urs to contest the

elections to the People's Representative Assembly in the year 1941. He also provided the financial assistance to Devaraj Urs. A.Ramanna was an active journalist and an organizer of freedom movement in Mysore. He too took personal interest and mobilized a good number of friends and financial resources to facilitate the victory of Urs. All these factors had contributed significantly towards the smooth political victory of Urs who became the member at the age of 26.

Urs had actively participated in the legislative proceedings and raised his concern for the welfare and progress of the people. He had maintained political equilibrium and kept away from the controversies. He had actively participated in the unification of Karnataka movement and contributed adequately for political mobilization. He had demonstrated political maturity and leadership qualities through his meaningful discussions and social services. He had emerged as a qualified and competent political leader.

Urs entered politics in 1952 by contesting the first elections held in the country after it attained independence. He entered the Mysore State Legislative Assembly in 1952 with the support of veteran leader Sahukar Chennaiah. He won over the support of common masses and got elected to the assembly. He was supported by Kengal Hanumanthaiah in recognition of his social concern and political leadership qualities. Urs was actively involved in the Congress Party centered political and electoral activities. He was able to develop a supportive assembly constituency in Hunsur. He was not dependent on any factional loyalty and support since he had mustered adequate support from the people for his progressive thoughts and deeds.

Urs had won comfortably from Hunsur constituency in the General Election held in 1957. S.Nijalingappa was the Chief Minister of the state. He was not supported by the Congress leaders for his progressive ideals. He was bent upon the distribution of land to the tillers through the implementation of land reforms in the state. He had firmly believed that re-distribution of land was the surest means for the eradication of poverty in the countryside. Urs had seriously involved in the indepth study of issues and concerns of social justice and economic equity.

Urs was elected unopposed to the legislative assembly from Hunsur constituency in 1962 in recognition of his political leadership qualities. The Congress had obtained the majority in the assembly elections but its leader S.Nijalingappa was defeated in the election. All the followers of Nijalingappa had prevailed upon him to become the Chief Minister and lead the government. Urs had the courage and conviction to oppose this unhealthy political move and suggested that Nijalingappa could become the Chief Minister after winning in a bi-election on the moral ground.

Hence, the Congress Legislature Party had appointed S.R.Kanti as the leader and enabled him to become Chief Minister until further arrangement. Nijalingappa had appreciated the political stand of Devaraj Urs who had become Animal Husbandry and Information Minister in the cabinet of S.R.Kanti. Nijalingappa won the bi-election and occupied the post of Chief Minister. Urs once again became the Minister of Transportation and Information in the cabinet of Nijalingappa. However, the legislators and people were unhappy with the style of functioning and caste oriented politics pursued by Nijalingappa as the Chief Minister of the state.

Certain incidents had forced the leadership of Congress to change the Chief Minister. B.D.Jatti had become the Chief Minister of the state under the new political circumstances. Urs had consciously maintained distance from the politics of factionalism in the state since he was aware of the fact that both the factions had represented feudalism and politics of opportunism. Nijalingappa had succeeded in making a loyalist H.K.Veerannagowda as the President of the Congress and Veerendra Patil and Ramakrishna Hegde as the General Secretaries of the party.

Urs had gained a trusted friend and well wisher called R.M.Desai, a born aristocrat, fellow legislator and landlord. He had great respect for the visionary leadership of Urs and social commitment. He had brushed aside the adverse comments against Urs and questioned their morality. He had the generosity and magnanimity to defend the social and political philosophy of Urs which benefited a great majority of oppressed sections of society.

The vested interests in Congress Party had tried their best to deny ticket to Devaraj Urs in 1967 general elections. The high command was fully aware of the necessity of political leaders like Devaraj Urs. Kamaraj Nadar had played a key role in ensuring the ticket to Urs keeping in mind the leadership qualities and contributions of Urs. He was able to sail through the elections and won over the castiest forces with the help of the masses. Urs won the election and became Labor Minister under the Nijalingappa government.

Urs had tried to solve the problems of workers and bring new legislation for the welfare and progress of the workers. He changed the profile and performance of the ministry by injecting new ideas and aspirations for the benefit of the working class. He had played a crucial role in the resolution of the crisis in Minerva Mill at Bangalore on the basis of humanitarian grounds. He helped many workers to retain their jobs and continue their service. He had argued that the producers of wealth should be protected by the system through adoption of healthy practices. Urs had emerged as a progressive political leader and minister during this period.

Nijalingappa was elected as the President of Indian National Congress in 1969. Urs had the courage and conviction to prevail upon Nijalingappa not to name any successor belonging to his community. Veerendra Patil had become the Chief Minister since he belonged to Lingayat, a dominant community. Urs was not a minister in the new cabinet since he was disliked by the caste based political leaders including the new Chief Minister. He vacated the bungalow and stayed in a private rented house. There were serious political differences between Nijalingappa and Indira Gandhi. Devaraj Urs practically retired from politics when the first Congress split took place in 1969.

Nijalingappa had become the rallying point for the capitalists and feudal forces in the country. He was supported by Morarji Desai, S.K.Patil, Atulya Ghosh, N.Sanjeeva Reddy, C.B.Gupta, and others. Indira Gandhi had diametrically opposed the politics of Nijalingappa and developed serious political differences with the syndicate led by Nijalingappa. She was supported by the young turks like Chandrashekar, I.K.Gujral, Mohan Dharia and other progressive leaders at the national level. Indira Gandhi had announced the nationalization of banks, abolition of royalty to former kings and other progressive measures. She had practically won over the vested interests led by Nijalingappa faction. Urs and Basavalingappa had the courage to oppose Nijalingappa and extend moral support to Indira Gandhi. There was a clear cut political polarization in the Congress Party.

The Congress leadership had announced the candidature of Neelam Sanjeevareddy for the post of President of India. V.V.Giri had also contested against Reddy. Indira Gandhi had called upon the elected representatives in the Congress Party to vote according to their conscience. The progressive leaders and elected representatives had strongly supported V.V.Giri and ensured his victory in the election. Urs had played a crucial role in this election which was fought between the traditional dominant powers and progressive secular forces.

5. CHAMPION OF WEAKER SECTIONS

The Congress was divided into Nijalingappa and Indira Gandhi factions in 1969. Urs stood by Indira Gandhi who formed the Congress (R) against the dominant powers led by the Congress (O), under S. Nijalingappa and other national leaders. Devaraj Urs strongly supported Indira Gandhi who stood by liberal democratic values and weaker sections of society. Babu Jaga Jeevan Ram had led the Indira Congress and played a prominent role in strengthening the liberal and progressive forces in the Congress. Kengal Hanumanthaiah, M.V.Krishnappa, K.H.Patil, Siddaveerappa, Kollur Mallappa, Sahukar Chennaiah and others joined the Congress (R).

Devaraj Urs mobilized the backward communities, Dalits and minorities and strengthened the leadership of Indira Gandhi in 1970. Urs had openly declared that Congress led by Indira Gandhi was the real forum for the empowerment of the backward classes. He enabled the Indira Congress to win all the 27 seats at the 1972 Lok Sabha elections. Urs had emerged as the alternative leader for the Congressmen and consolidated the secular and backward sections. There was a political defection in the state. Several legislators had switched over their loyalty to Indira Congress under the political diplomacy and dynamism of Devaraj Urs. There was President's rule in Karnataka since no other leader came forward to form the government with the majority support.

Urs had maintained political equilibrium and silently worked for the consolidation of Indira Congress in the state. He had organized the political workshop to train the next generation of leaders on the basis of the progressive policies of Indira Gandhi. Urs had given tickets to the backward sections of the society to contest in the 1972 general election. He did not contest the election but worked effectively as the convenor and driving force. He travelled extensively and facilitated the victory of Indira Congress in the 1972 legislative assembly elections. The election had witnessed the political supremacy of Dalits, minorities and backwards for the first time in the history of electoral politics in the state. Urs had broken the backbone of caste politics very systematically and earned the appreciation of Indira Gandhi and other leaders. Urs became the Chief Minister of Karnataka state according to the will of Indira Gandhi in 1972.

6. POLITICAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF URS

Urs ruled Karnataka for about ten years as the unquestionable leader of the masses. He implemented various developmental programmes whole heartedly and benefitted the neglected sections of society in the state. He became the 8th Chief Minister of Karnataka in 1972 with the support of Indira Gandhi. Devaraj Urs renamed *Mysore* as *Karnataka* in 1973 and took some landmark decisions.

Devaraj Urs strictly followed the principles of Indira Gandhi and implemented various social welfare programmes for the benefit of downtrodden communities. He built sound political image for the Congress party led by Indira Gandhi and increased her reputation as a champion of the poor people. He had commanded respect from the bureaucracy for his visionary and missionary zeal and competence. He used to dictate the right terms to the officials and implemented series of social and economic development programmes for the benefit of the people. He was highly respected as the 'people's Chief Minister' and strengthened the foundations of social justice in Karnataka state during his tenure.

Indira Gandhi had imposed emergency in the country on June 25, 1975 without lawful justification. The intellectuals, activists and other responsible citizens had opposed the emergency and voluntarily courted arrest for the sake of constitution and democracy. Jaya Prakash Narayan had led the 'total revolution movement' against the emergency and mobilized progressive political forces in the country. The intellectuals, youth and democrats had strongly supported the JP movement and sacrificed their personal interest for the sake of nation. All democratic forces were organized by the JP movement under the banner of 'Janata Party' which came to power in the nation. Morarji Desai was the Prime Minister of the nation and Chandra Shekar was the President of Janata Party. Devaraj Urs had managed to ensure victory for the Congress led by Indira Gandhi on the basis of pro-people governance and pro-active role as the angel guardian of social justice.

Indira Gandhi and Congress Party were routed in the parliament election. Devaraj Urs ensured her election to Lok Sabha from Chikmagalur Constituency against several odds. The central government had imposed President Rule in Karnataka as a matter of political revenge on the basis of certain allegations. Urs was able to garner political support on the basis of his contributions for the development of the state in general and delivery of social justice friendly services to the weaker sections of society in particular. Indira Gandhi was misled by her own son Sanjay Gandhi and other vested interests in the state congress. Urs was critical of imposition of emergency and abuse of political power by the henchmen of Indira Gandhi led by Sanjay Gandhi. These factors forced Indira Gandhi to expel Urs from the Congress even though Urs had given a new life to Indira Gandhi and saved Congress from failure in Karnataka state. Urs was politically defeated by Indira Gandhi in the elections held in 1980. Gundurao had become the Chief Minister of Karnataka by using his political connection with Indira Gandhi, Sanjay Gandhi and other leaders.

Devaraj Urs was criticized as the pioneer of political corruption in Karnataka by his adversaries. Urs was aware of the inevitability of keeping the followers together by feeding them constantly. He had to maintain the Congress Party and State Government by resorting to some kind of corrupt practices. He had openly admitted that it was inevitable for him to make money through other means to fill the pockets of his followers in the party as well as the government. A.K.Subbaiah, a veteran politician admitted that Urs had not acquired financial resources to his family. He left the world with empty hands and his family members could not become aristocrats. His associates and followers had become aristocrats at the cost of the integrity and interest of Devaraj Urs. He was guided by enlightened selfishness rather than any kind of greeds and misdeeds in this regard.

Devaraj Urs had established a regional party called 'Kranti Ranga' with the help of handful of his followers. He wanted to merge his party with the Lok Dal party of Charan Singh with a fond hope of giving a powerful alternative to Congress led by Indira Gandhi. He had lost political power and access to financial resources during the fag end of his life. He suffered from age related illness and lost his trusted brother Kemparaja Urs and beloved daughter Nagaratna under mysterious circumstances. He was ditched by his close political associates and followers who had enjoyed political power and other privileges. He had led a highly secluded life and suffered the worst kind of mental agonies due to the political betrayal of his colleagues in politics. He died a highly painful death on June 6, 1982 at the age of 67 years in Bangalore. Lakhs of people paid highly tearful tribute to Urs from Bangalore to Kallahally, his

native village. The people of Karnataka knew that Urs was the true leader of the masses since he had implemented several pro-active programmes for their development.

Urs had prepared grounds for the development of regional party to promote regional economy and development. Janata Party was also organized in the state under the leadership of Ramakrishna Hegde and his close associates. Gundu Rao had indulged in certain politically unsound and economically unethical practices and tarnished the image of Congress Party and state government. The killing of innocent peasants in the Navalagunda and Naragunda had enraged the peasants and right thinking persons in the state.

The Congress had to pay a heavy price in the 1982 assembly elections and the ground work of Devaraj Urs had fetched rich dividends politically and otherwise in the state. Ramakrishna Hegde became the Chief Minister of Karnataka and reaped the benefits diplomatically under the changed political circumstances. The Congress leaders in Karnataka also paid a heavy price for their ungrateful attitude towards Devaraj Urs subsequently.

Devaraj Urs consciously maintained distance from the family members and concentrated all his time and energy on the welfare of the people. His daughter Chandra Prabha Urs entered politics after the death of Urs. She recalls: "The citizens of the State have given me this position. I will use my power for their welfare. You should not succumb to any lures. His words are still ringing in my ears. He was fond of ragi mudde, rotti, soppina saru and other simple dishes. He never went to five-star hotels in the name of functions, but sat on mats and satiated himself with simple food". Urs led a simple and noble life. He maintained distance from star hotels and parties. He always lived with the common masses as one among them.

7. CONCLUSION

Devaraj Urs had created a historical new wave in the politics of Karnataka state. He contributed immensely for making Karnataka highly mobile, modernized and prosperous as the Chief Minister. He remains in the history of Karnataka as a highly influential role model and destiny maker. He was a great multi-faceted personality who changed the profile of Karnataka state. The post-independence period of Karnataka state can be rightly termed as 'Urs Age' from the points of view of governance and development.

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