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## D.DEVARAJ URS: A VIBRANT LEADER OF KARNATAKA

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### **Abstract**

*Devaraj Urs was a great personality and a politician who provided efficient administration for the empowerment of backward classes to bring about social equality. He was the first Chief Minister in the country to implement the 'Land Reformation Act'. He was also a great orator and good reader as well. He had an immense concern about Backward Classes communities and he worked hard for their welfare. Urs was a simple man and a great social leader whom Karnataka has produced. Devarraj Urs become famous not only in the state politics but also throughout the country through his social concerns. Urs was a strong advocate of social reforms and strove hard for ensuring social justice. As such, it would be apt to call him a social reformer than a politician. This article examines the factors which made Urs a vibrant leader of the nation.*

**Keywords:** *Land reforms, Social equality, Backward classes, Social reforms.*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Devaraj Urs was born on August 20, 1915 at Kallahalli in Hunsur taluk, Mysore district. He was the son of Devaraj Urs and Devirammanni couple. Urs had his primary and high school education in Urs Boarding School, Mysore and later BA Degree in Maharaj College. He later returned to Kallahalli and engaged himself in agriculture. Urs was married to Chikkammanni and blessed with three daughters – Chandra Prabha, Nagarathna and Bharathi. He entered politics in 1952 and was an MLA for 10 years. When Congress split in 1969 as Samstha and Indira Congress, he stood with Indira Gandhi. He became the Chief Minister twice.

He won the elections consecutively for a span of 28 years. He was repeatedly elected to the Legislative Assembly from Hunsur constituency between 1952 and 1980. His term as Chief Minister is also one of the longest terms in the history of Karnataka. Urs served two separate terms as Chief Minister for the state of Karnataka. His first term was between the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 1972 and the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1977. His second term as Chief Minister was between the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1978 and the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 1980.

## **II. Contributions of Devaraj Urs as a leader**

Devaraj Urs was a great leader. His period is marked not only for economic development but also for the socio-economic and political reforms. As a Chief Minister, he gave first preference to irrigation and agriculture and electricity as these were the three facilities much needed by the farmers. He contributed a lot towards agriculture and backward classes and his continuous efforts to make the people of minority classes to attain a respectable status in the society. He was the voice of the silent majority and addressed the problem of social justice effectively. The contributions of Devaraj Urs to politics made various leaders emerge from various places. He emphasized bringing all suppressed classes into the mainstream of society. During his administration, Urs brought about various social changes. For the purpose of social equality, he brought the reservation. He strived for social harmony. His contributions emphasized on providing social justice in society.

### **a) Economic empowerment through land reforms**

As Chief Minister, Urs's first priority was land reform and his slogan was "Land to the tiller" (Uluvavanige bhoomi). This brought revolutionary changes in land ownership, at a time when land was owned by a few elite and powerful. Urs, taking note of the exploitation that the labourers and land tillers were subjected to introduced sweeping reforms by bestowing land ownership rights to them. With the introduction of this reform, the benami land owners had to hand over the land to farmers. Under him a sustained effort was made to equalize the land distribution through much of the state. The Urs government with the object of securing more land for distribution among landless, decided to reduce the ceiling on land holdings in the state by amending the Land Reform Act and the amended Act came into force from 1<sup>st</sup> March 1974. By implementing the Land Reforms Act, Urs had freed thousands of farmers from the clutches of landlords, who used to treat them harshly. It led to radical reforms in the political and social structure, through legal abolition of tenancy by passing the Land Reforms Act 1974 in Karnataka.

The 1974 Act is generally claims to be a very progressive revolutionary measure. Urs, the man behind it, claimed that this Act proved that the revolutionary changes could be introduced within a democratic framework. It is a well-known fact that Urs gained considerable fame by introducing the 1974 Land Reform Act. It is the best agrarian legislation in the entire country. In spite of this other economic reforms were as follows:

- He brought policies to stop manual scavenging and bonded labour.
- Absorbing 16,000 unemployed graduates in the stipendiary scheme whose services were confirmed later.
- Abolition of carrying night soil by Dalits and bonded labour.

These were landmark decisions taken by Urs. He must be remembered for his achievements in weaning away poor people from the clutches of the rich money lenders. The deeds of the late Chief Minister in the irrigation sector too had helped the farmer community tremendously. The Kali project, one of them was executed amidst opposition from several quarters.

#### **b) Social empowerment through social justice**

Devaraj Urs is held famously as the greatest social reformers ever from Karnataka. He is remembered as the man who gave a voice to the oppressed. He made several key changes that brought not only relief, but also restored a sense of dignity to the people of Karnataka. He strongly believed in equality and social responsibility. He was the voice for voiceless and fought for their rights. It was Urs who laid the foundation for the internationally renowned Electronic City in Bangalore. Urs brought a new scheme to light up the homes of poor by facilitating supply of electricity to all.

Devaraj Urs hit upon a political strategy of dividing the two dominant communities and uniting the non-dominant backward caste people. He appointed Havanur Commission to identify socially and educationally backward castes in the state and to recommend reservations in admissions to educational backward castes in the state and recommend reservations in admissions to educational institutions and in state government jobs. During his tenure, he introduced many pro-people schemes. When the land reform act was enacted, he was the first person to give his six acre to a poor Dalith named Cheluvaiah..He did not believe in caste system and he think that the first task ahead of him was the eradication of caste system. He also took great pains to provide shelter to the shelter less under Garibi Hatao scheme. He also strove hard for eradication of bonded labour, besides launching a massive rehabilitation programme for the victims which brought about a revolutionary change. Urs is considered as the greatest social reformer of Karnataka.

### **c) Political empowerment through new awakening among backward classes and enhancing backward class representation**

Devaraj Urs was a very able administrator. He became a mass leader for his commitment to implementing policies on the lines of 'Sarvarigo Samapaalu, Sarvarigoo Samabalu'. Even today Urs was remembered due to the good works he done for the welfare of the people. Devaraj Urs also believed that no political changes can be brought about if there was no deviation from old practices. So, he constituted a youth force, represented by almost all communities, to play an active role in politics, which turned out to be a big success for him. Some of his young followers then included were R.GunduRao, M.Veerappa Moily, S.Bangarappa and S.M.Krishna who all became Chief Ministers of the state later and some SC/ST leaders like Mallikarjuna Kharge, T.N.Narasimha Murthy, K.H. Ranganath, B.Shankarananda, L.G.Havanur etc who have made a mark for themselves in State Politics. The other Backward Class leaders groomed by Urs included Dharam Singh, K.T. Rathod and Shivanna.

One of the most important political strategies pursued by Urs was to break the control of dominant landed groups over state level politics and to replace it with an alliance of the Backward Classes, Dalits and Minority groups. During this period the representation of socially and politically deprived sections in the Legislative Assembly increased to a very significant extent. It was during the term of Devaraj Urs that most of the associations were revived and they were strengthened to act effective units of political mobilization. Urs was also instrumental in establishing associations for groups, which were too depressed and had not previously possessed any such organization. He encouraged the formation of Common Socio-Political Forum of the Backward Classes to represent common social, political and economic interests of those groups.

Another important step taken by Urs was appointment of a Backward Classes Commission and formulation of a new reservation policy for the Backward Classes. In 1972, a Backward Classes Commission was appointed under the Chairmanship of a leader of the Backward Classes, L.G.Havanur. Urs initiated and introduced a large number of welfare programmes to improve the living conditions of the weaker sections such as Debt Relief Act, People's Housing Scheme, Old age Pension to the destitute and disabled, Bank finance to the artisans special programmes for handloom weavers, free legal aid, restructuring of co-operative societies, nutritional programmes for children. Though most of these schemes were introduced in general terms, they were actually intended to reach to Backward Classes and downtrodden sections.

## Conclusion

The Devaraj Urs era in Karnataka from 1972 to 1980 is widely considered a unique position in the history of the state. He was one of the greatest social reformers the state had seen. He implemented the policies to ensure social justice and equality. He was a simple man and a great social leader whom Karnataka has produced. He worked for the development of the society, especially backward classes. His vision for an egalitarian society, which he strived for by providing reservation in education and employment for backward and minority classes. While governing the State, Urs took into consideration mainly the welfare of the people and for this cause, he did not hesitate to alter the law. Basically, he was a politician with a humane outlook.

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