

G. Duggappa: A Life of Education, Social Commitment and Public Service in Post-Independence Karnataka

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Abstract

G. Duggappa was one of the notable public figures to emerge from the socially and economically marginalized communities of post-Independence Karnataka. Born into a Dalit family in Davangere under conditions of social discrimination and economic hardship, he overcame considerable obstacles through education, discipline, perseverance and public service. Beginning his career as a teacher, he subsequently entered electoral politics and was elected to the Mysore State Legislative Assembly three times. He later served as the Chairman of the Leather and Leather-Based Industries Development Corporation and became a member and subsequently the Chairman of the Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC). His appointment as Chairman of the KPSC was historically significant, representing an important moment in the political and administrative representation of marginalized communities in Karnataka. His association with the Taralabalu Math at Sirigere, his Gandhian values, commitment to education, simple lifestyle and concern for socially disadvantaged communities shaped his public life. This article reconstructs the life and achievements of G. Duggappa and examines his contribution to education, politics, social justice and public administration. His life provides an inspiring example of how education and determination can enable individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to occupy positions of public responsibility and contribute to social transformation.

Keywords: G. Duggappa, Dalit leadership, education, Mysore State, Karnataka, Legislative Assembly, KPSC, social justice, Taralabalu Math, public service

Introduction: -

The history of modern Karnataka includes several leaders who emerged from socially disadvantaged communities and contributed significantly to the political, educational and social development of the state. Among them, G. Duggappa occupies a distinctive position. His life represents the transformative potential of education, perseverance and public service in a period when caste discrimination and economic deprivation significantly restricted opportunities for Dalit communities. Born into a socially marginalized family in Davangere, Duggappa experienced poverty and social constraints during his childhood. Nevertheless, he pursued education with remarkable determination and eventually obtained a B.Sc. degree from Central College in 1945. He subsequently pursued legal education while working as a teacher. His educational achievements were particularly significant because higher education among members of the Scheduled Castes was still uncommon during this period.

Duggappa's career subsequently moved from teaching to politics and public administration. He was elected to the Legislative Assembly on three occasions and later occupied important positions in state-level institutions. His appointment as Chairman of the Karnataka Public Service Commission marked a significant milestone in the representation of marginalized communities in public administration. This article attempts to reconstruct the life of G. Duggappa from family memories, interviews, legislative records, newspapers and secondary literature. It focuses particularly on his family background, education, association with Sirigere Math, teaching career, political career, public service and commitment to social justice.

Family Background

G. Duggappa was born into a Dalit family in Davangere. His ancestors are believed to have originated from Shyamanoor near Davangere, although the exact period of their migration and settlement in Davangere is not clearly documented. Duggappa's father, Hanumappa, was popularly known as **Gunni Hanumappa**. The nickname was associated with his physical appearance and manner of walking. Family accounts describe him as a tall, handsome and physically strong man who generally dressed in clean white clothes. The family came to be identified locally as *Gunni Hanumappa's*

family or *Gunnajjana Mane*. The family initially depended on agriculture and possessed a small amount of land. Over time, however, the land passed out of their possession, and the family had to depend on alternative sources of livelihood. Hanumappa eventually secured employment with the Davangere Municipality. At a time when electricity was not widely available, his responsibility involved lighting municipal street lamps using kerosene. The municipality supplied him with ladders and kerosene for this work. The family's economic circumstances were modest, but Duggappa's father attached considerable importance to education. His determination to educate his son became an important influence on Duggappa's later life.

Childhood and the Importance of Education

Duggappa's early childhood illustrates the tension between traditional occupations and the emerging importance of modern education. An incident from his childhood is particularly revealing. When Duggappa was studying in the second or third standard, he developed an interest in wrestling and secretly visited a *garadimane*, or traditional wrestling centre, to watch wrestlers practising *samu*. His father discovered this and was deeply concerned that such activities might divert his son from his studies. He brought Duggappa home and reprimanded him severely. Although the incident was harsh, it demonstrated his father's determination to ensure that his son concentrated on education. In later life, Duggappa's commitment to education became one of his defining characteristics. The experience also illustrates the importance that economically disadvantaged families placed on education as a means of social advancement.

Gandhiji's Visit to Davangere

An important episode in Duggappa's childhood was associated with Mahatma Gandhi's visit to Davangere in 1934 during his campaign against untouchability and for the upliftment of Harijans. During Gandhi's visit, a programme was organized in the Harijan settlement, later associated with Gandhinagar. A young boy was selected to offer a garland to Gandhi. Duggappa, who was known for his neat appearance and academic ability, was chosen for the honour. According to family accounts, after Duggappa garlanded Gandhi, Gandhi removed the garland and placed it around the young boy's neck. This deeply moved Duggappa's mother, Durugamma, who reportedly became emotional at witnessing the incident. The encounter became a cherished memory in Duggappa's life. His meeting with Gandhi appears to have strengthened his admiration for Gandhian ideals, particularly simplicity, social equality and service to disadvantaged communities.

Journey to Bangalore for Higher Education

After completing primary education, Duggappa had to travel to Bangalore for high-school education. At that time, educational and hostel facilities for Scheduled Caste students were limited, and Bangalore provided opportunities that were not readily available in Davangere. Local community leaders, including Guddappa Hanumanna and others, encouraged Dalit families to educate their children. They went from house to house, collected financial contributions and supported promising students in travelling to Bangalore. Among the students who benefited from this collective community effort were G. Duggappa, B. Shamappa, G. Moogappa and Mylappa. At the hostel, Duggappa came into contact with several Scheduled Caste students from different parts of Karnataka, including B. Rachaiah, N. Rachaiah, Dodda Thimmaiah, B. T. Kemparaju, K. Bheemaya and Shankarananda.

Duggappa successfully completed his SSLC and continued his college education. His student life, however, was marked by financial hardship. On several occasions, he reportedly lacked money for travel and food. At times, he remained in Bangalore rather than returning home because he could not afford the bus fare. There were also periods when he had to survive on very simple food. Despite these difficulties, he remained focused on education. His determination eventually enabled him to complete his B.Sc. degree from Central College in 1945.

Influence of K. Bheemaroo

During his college years, Duggappa was strongly influenced by K. Bheemaroo. Bheemaroo encouraged him to pursue education and inspired him to consider teaching as a profession. This influence became important in shaping Duggappa's early career. After completing his degree, Duggappa decided to enter the teaching profession. His educational achievement was itself remarkable because obtaining a university degree was still relatively uncommon among members of the Scheduled Castes during the period.

Association with the Taralabalu Math at Sirigere

After completing his B.Sc., Duggappa returned to Davangere in search of employment. His life took a decisive turn through his introduction to the senior Jagadguru of the Taralabalu Math at Sirigere. Daphedar Pennayya, who was concerned about the educational advancement of members of the Madiga community, introduced Duggappa to Sri

Shivakumara Swamiji. Recognizing Duggappa's educational qualifications, the Swamiji asked whether he would be interested in becoming a teacher. Duggappa reportedly responded with humility, indicating that he would accept whatever salary was offered and emphasizing the importance of the Guru's blessings. Impressed by his attitude, the Swamiji offered him a teaching position in an educational institution associated with the Math. This encounter became a turning point in Duggappa's life. His association with Sirigere and its educational institutions continued for several decades and influenced his personal philosophy and public life.

Career as a Teacher

Around 1945–46, Duggappa began his teaching career at a high school established by the Math at Sirigere. Because travelling regularly between Davangere and Sirigere was difficult, he constructed a small house at Sirigere and brought his mother and sisters there.

Duggappa was known for his reserved, humble and respectful personality. His dedication to teaching and his respect for the Math and its spiritual leaders enabled him to develop close relationships with teachers, students and local residents. He became particularly close to H. Basappa, who subsequently served as headmaster of the school. Their professional relationship gradually developed into a close personal bond. Together they worked for the development of the institution and contributed to the educational activities of the Math. Duggappa's association with the Math also shaped his personal habits and social outlook. He adopted a simple and disciplined lifestyle and became a vegetarian. His association with the Math remained an important influence throughout his life.

Legal Education

While continuing to work as a teacher, Duggappa pursued legal education at Belgaum Law College. His decision to study law demonstrated his desire for intellectual and professional advancement. He combined his teaching responsibilities at Sirigere with his legal studies at Belgaum. According to accounts of his contemporaries, he travelled between Belgaum and Sirigere to manage both commitments. His B.Sc. education, teaching experience and legal training subsequently strengthened his qualifications for public life and politics.

Marriage and Social Significance

Duggappa's marriage to Ningamma was arranged during his teaching career at Sirigere. The proposal came through Lingaiah, an employee in the Chitradurga District Education Office and a member of the Madiga community. Duggappa and his family subsequently met Ningamma, and the marriage was agreed upon. Duggappa also wanted his sister Deviramma's marriage to take place along with his own. Accordingly, Deviramma was married to Korappa of Jagalur. The two marriages were conducted at Sirigere Math with the support of H. Basappa and the blessings of the senior Gurus. The marriages were socially significant because they occurred at a time when caste distinctions remained deeply entrenched in society.

Entry into Politics

Duggappa entered public life through his membership of the District Board of Chitradurga. His educational qualifications, experience as a teacher, social connections and reputation for simplicity gradually brought him into wider political circles.

The first general election held after Independence in 1952 was a landmark in India's democratic history. Duggappa contested from the Holalkere dual-member constituency in Chitradurga district as a Congress candidate along with G. Shivappa. The two candidates were supported by the Congress Party and received the blessings of the senior Gurus of the Sirigere Math. Their reputation as simple, disciplined and socially committed individuals contributed to their popularity. The election campaign used the symbol of a pair of bulls, popularly represented as *Jodi Attuvu*. Duggappa and Shivappa won the election, enabling Duggappa to enter the Legislative Assembly. His election was significant not merely as a personal achievement but also as an important development in the political representation of a socially marginalized community.

Duggappa as a Legislative Assembly Member

After his election, Duggappa initially continued his teaching responsibilities for about a year before resigning from the teaching profession and moving to Chitradurga.

As a legislator, he participated actively in Assembly debates and discussions. He raised issues concerning constituency development, education, depressed classes and the welfare of socially disadvantaged communities. He also advocated greater inclusiveness in educational and hostel facilities. In relation to government-supported community hostels, he suggested that a proportion of seats should be made available to students belonging to other communities. Such views reflected his broader understanding of education as a means of social integration.

Duggappa's Political Philosophy

Duggappa's political career was characterized by simplicity, personal discipline and commitment to public service. His political outlook was shaped by several influences: Gandhian ideals, his educational background, his association with Sirigere Math and his experiences of social disadvantage. Rather than viewing political office solely as a means of personal advancement, he appears to have regarded it as an instrument for addressing social and economic inequalities. His interventions concerning education, hostels, employment and the welfare of disadvantaged communities demonstrate his concern for social justice.

Leather and Leather-Based Industries Development Corporation

Duggappa's political career took a different direction after he was denied a Congress ticket in the 1972 Assembly elections. Following the election, D. Devaraja Urs became Chief Minister. Urs was known for his emphasis on the welfare of backward classes and marginalized communities. During one of his visits to Chitradurga, he met Duggappa and discussed his experience in public and social service.

Duggappa expressed a desire to work for members of the community from which he had originated. He particularly wanted to contribute to the welfare of people engaged in leather and leather-related occupations. Earlier, in 1966, Duggappa had travelled to different states to study small-scale industries and Khadi and village industries. He subsequently submitted observations and suggestions concerning the possibilities of developing similar activities in Karnataka. These experiences contributed to the establishment of the **Leather and Leather-Based Industries Development Corporation (LIDCAR)** in Karnataka. In 1973, Duggappa was appointed its first Chairman. S. M. Krishna was the Industries Minister at the time. His appointment represented a transition from electoral politics to institutional social and economic development.

Appointment as Member of the Karnataka Public Service Commission

Duggappa's public career advanced further when he was appointed as a member of the Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC) in 1973. The state government increased the number of members of the Commission and appointed Duggappa and retired IAS officer Mr. Obedulla to the additional positions. His experience as a teacher, legislator, social worker and administrator made him well suited for the position. During his tenure as a KPSC member, many people approached him seeking assistance. Despite his elevated position, he reportedly remained accessible and assisted people without discrimination.

Chairman of the Karnataka Public Service Commission

Duggappa's appointment as Chairman of the KPSC represented the most important administrative milestone of his career. When the tenure of KPSC Chairman R. V. Bidap was nearing completion, discussions began regarding his successor. Chief Minister D. Devaraja Urs considered appointing a person from a marginalized community to the position. Duggappa's experience as a KPSC member, his political record and his reputation for integrity made him a suitable candidate. Leaders including K. H. Ranganath reportedly supported his appointment.

Duggappa was formally appointed Chairman of the Karnataka Public Service Commission after obtaining the Governor's approval. The charge was handed over to him on **15 February 1975**. He continued in the position until approximately 1980–81. His appointment was historically significant. It represented an important instance of a person from a historically oppressed community occupying one of the state's major constitutional and administrative positions.

Death

Duggappa remained active throughout much of his life and was not known to have suffered from prolonged illness. His final years, however, were affected by an accidental back injury.

He was admitted to hospital for treatment and initially appeared to respond positively. His family hoped for his recovery. However, his condition subsequently deteriorated, and he passed away on **2 November 1994**. His death marked the end of the life of a public servant who had traversed several important institutions of Karnataka's post-Independence history.

Contribution and Historical Significance

G. Duggappa's life is significant for several reasons.

1. His educational journey demonstrates the role of education in challenging caste and economic barriers. Obtaining a B.Sc. degree in 1945, followed by legal education, was a considerable achievement for a person from his social and economic background.
2. His career illustrates the gradual emergence of Dalit political representation in post-Independence Karnataka. His repeated election to the Legislative Assembly gave a marginalized community a voice in state politics.
3. His appointment as Chairman of LIDCAR demonstrated his concern for the economic development of communities traditionally associated with leather-related occupations.
4. His appointment as Chairman of the KPSC represented a major achievement in public administration. It demonstrated that individuals from historically excluded communities could occupy positions involving responsibility for recruitment to the state administration.
5. Finally, his life reveals the complex relationship between social mobility, education, political representation, spiritual institutions and public service in post-Independence Karnataka.

Conclusion

G. Duggappa's life represents a remarkable journey from social and economic disadvantage to positions of political and administrative responsibility. His achievements were not the result of privilege but of education, perseverance, discipline, social support and an enduring commitment to public service. From his childhood in Davangere and his difficult student years in Bangalore to his teaching career at Sirigere, his association with the Taralabalu Math, his three terms as a legislator, his leadership of LIDCAR and his historic appointment as Chairman of the Karnataka Public Service Commission, Duggappa's career reflects several important dimensions of Karnataka's social transformation after Independence. His life also demonstrates the importance of community support in creating educational opportunities for marginalized children. The assistance he received from local community leaders during his student years was subsequently reflected in his own concern for education and social advancement. Duggappa's story is therefore not merely an individual biography. It is also a narrative of social mobility, educational aspiration and the gradual democratization of political and administrative institutions. His commitment to simplicity, education, equality and public service makes his life relevant to the younger generation. In an era when public life is frequently associated with power and personal advancement, Duggappa's career offers a contrasting model—one in which education becomes a means of empowerment and public office becomes an avenue for social responsibility. His legacy deserves further scholarly study within the broader history of Dalit leadership and social transformation in Karnataka.

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