

He is called by many names. The epithets, titles and slogans, do not deter him. He could, in fact be identified as the bane of Karnataka politics and a public monster, many of his opponents may love to slay in public, but Deve Gowda is someone who cannot be wished away. You like him, or hate him, Deve Gowda is here to stay, as a person today and a name forever even after he is gone (even the year of the final departure, according to many close to him, he knows exactly.)

Some say that he is the only professional full time politician in this country. His detractors say that from the moment he opens his eyes in the morning the only thing that he thinks about is how to finish off his opponents. People who have worked with him have no reasons to doubt the fact that Gowda has nothing else in his mind apart from schemes, techniques and tricks to keep his family in power and his party afloat. Some even wonder whether Deve Gowda sleeps at all. Years ago he was seen sleeping through public functions and even party meetings but now it appears like the former PM is awake all day and even night. A man who used to smoke decades ago, Deve Gowda, now, is a non smoker and has remained a teetotaler spending hours in his puja room praying and performing rituals. In Indian society a man with such good habits and a religious inclination must be a good man, but why is Deve Gowda not seen as a good man? Is it just a great misunderstanding or a thorough disconnect? What makes him the man he is? Is Gowda as bad and crooked as he is made out to be? Why do people who fall out of his favour or part ways with him suddenly find everything wrong with him? Is he as devilishly selfish as he is portrayed ? Are there clues to the mystery behind the man called Deve Gowda?

Having started out of a small village, Deve Gowda's rise to the Prime Minister's post whether by luck or by fluke is a story that cannot be discounted. It is one of the fewest offices in this country that only the chosen few have been able to reach. Once a Prime Minister, forever a former prime minister. Deve Gowda certainly thought of it as a great moment as naturally as one in that position should have felt. But, the way he was treated back in his home state, the way his opponents reacted, the way he was ignored during his first visit to his home state after assuming office, the comments made by Ramakrishna Hegde and others, like Gowda says, are not things that can be forgotten. There have been innumerable people in this country who have assumed offices that they did not the least deserve, and it is not the general rule, particularly in politics. Gowda alone to be singled out as unworthy, must have pained him immensely. The then Congress president Sitaram Kesri even went to the extent of calling Gowda a *nikamma*.

Deve Gowda surely knew that he did not deserve the PM's chair by right or by merit and the fact was well established after what he told his ailing mother that he had assumed the post that was once held by Indira Gandhi herself. His mother's death during his tenure in Delhi, the subsequent political problems ensured a not so happy time for Gowda to even enjoy his time as the PM even for a few months. When he stepped down, many in Karnataka celebrated, though Deve Gowda is the only man from Karnataka who reached a post as formidable as that.

It is no secret that as the CM of Karnataka Deve Gowda had performed the best though the position itself was, in the presence of many, forcibly taken away from Hegde. Though considered as deserving, Gowda became the CM surprising many but performed in a systematic manner ensuring a stable government. The high of the PM's seat subsequently brought him to the low of being reduced to insignificance in Karnataka. The acid attack on his family members, particularly his wife Chennamma

who is to live with the physical and mental scars of the attack, the division of the party, the going away of friends and alienation from Delhi all added to Gowda becoming a bitter man.

Deve Gowda's family has always been a close knit one with the whole family sailing or sinking together with the big man. Kumaaraswamy though had made a mark on his own through his interests in the movie field, had lived in a separate home but was part of the family nevertheless. Revanna's wife took great pride in being the preferred daughter in law of the man who was loved, feared and despised by many. Though the political meter registered many highs and lows the family stayed together and worked together.

Kumaaraswamy too, though contesting, winning and losing from different places, was more complacent with his movie business and an occasional pat from his father. But the son's meteoric rise after the Kanakapura by-election changed the equation to some extent. Not only Gowda had an additional power at home, he also had a new and perhaps the only friend, in his son, who was quiet, submissive, obedient and loyal.

The 2004 election surprised even Deve Gowda who till then was limited to only verbally attacking and defending against his political enemies. The result was the best opportunity for him to consolidate his power, hit back and to make the best of the opportunity. He could not lose the opportunity. Anyone who faulted him in this process would have done so with acute shortage of political knowledge.

Deve Gowda knows what state he was in, in the early 90s. Full of debt and no friends it perhaps the worst phase of his life. Running from place to place, pillar to post, seeking help and looking for friends, Gowda ultimately ended up at the doorsteps of some of the best astrologers in town. It was then that it was these few astrologers who gave him the confidence to continue, with the hope for the future. Deve Gowda, on many occasions sat in disbelief in front of these men of occult knowledge listening to the utterly wonderful prospects of his future. If their words were to come true, he promised himself that he would become a staunch believer in astrology. All is history now, but for Gowda for whom it made a world of difference, it is all because of astrology, and here has been his future from then, for all of us to see.

Gowda in his period of distress and difficulties in the early 90s did not have anyone to support him. Even an early end to his life would have been more relief providing than the taunts and jibes of his opponents. Failure was laughing at his face and everyone had abandoned him. It was then he realized one bitter truth that made him a bitter person - *people come to you only when you have something, so when you have something take all that people can give and give all that they deserve in every way.*

The media too created a monster out of Deve Gowda from time to time. Friends of Hegde started direct attacks against him. Noted erstwhile economist Prof. Venkata Giri Gowda called him the king of corruption and went on to comment about his manhood and even his voice. Tabloids wrote reams of articles portraying him as a person akin in qualities to a demon. Deve Gowda became more bitter. He never forgot to strike whenever he found an opportunity.

As one more chance of power started materializing in front of him and with age catching up, Gowda started moving towards the only security of the security he had known all along, his family. And a bitter Gowda only has his family in this end, (temporary or permanent, depending on which side of the story you are in ).