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FREEDOM MOVEMENT IN HAVERI REGION- ROLE OF SIDDAMATI MAILAR AND NAGAMMA VEERANAGOUDA PATIL

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Abstract: The biography is an attempt to through the light on the role played by regional players in the freedom movement and various unconditional contribution towards nation. The life time learnings from about dedication, devotion and Nationalism from the great deo Siddamati Mailar and Nagamma Veeranagouda Patil of Karnataka region

Keywords: Siddamati Mailar, Nagamma Veeranagouda Patil, Freedom movement, regional roles

Introduction

During the national freedom movement Haveri was remarkable and played an important role. It has been rise to many freedom fighters, Journalists, Social workers, Intellectuals, Novelists and others participated. In this freedom movement some important leaders were involved such as Mailara Mahadevappa and his wife Siddamati Mailar, Sardar Veeranagouda Patil and his wife Nagamma V. Patil and daughter Leelavati Magadi wife of great freedom fighter Venkatesh Magadi, Paramanna Hosmani, Timmanagouda Menasinahal, Siddappa Hosamni, Timmappa Neshvi, Kariyappa Yererishime, Gudleppa Hallikeri and other prominent leaders were involved in in pre Gandhian and Gandhian period,

Smt. Siddamati Mahadevappa Mailar (Hosritti Ta:Dist: Haveri)

She was the brave wife of the brave martyr Mahadevappa Mailar She was married to him when she was hardly ten old He was her maternal uncle. At the time of marriage Mahadev Mailer had already come under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi and other Local leaders like Rangarao Diwakar, Gudleppa Hallikeri, K. F. Pati, Bindu Madhav Burli and D.P. Karmarkar. She was naturally drawn into the very thick of the Freedom Movement by her husband, hut remained there later most willingly. After marriage, Mahadev Mailar left home and joined the Congress workers in Dharwad against the wishes of the members of the family. When they were planning to bring him back to Motebennur, he had left for Sabarnnati Ashram to work with Gandhiji. Gandhiji had



at first, doubts whether young Mailar would be able to adjust himself to the austere life of Ashram. Mahadev belied his doubts and became one of his disciples. In fact, he was the only one who represented Karnataka in the famous Dandi Yatra undertaken by the Mahatma to protest against the salt-tax. The incident has come to be known as Salt Satyagraha Movement. He was arrested and sentenced to six months' simple imprisonment. After his release, he was given a hero's welcome in Dharwad and Motcbennur. Siddarnati, then a young girl of thirteen confided in her husband that she too would, like a true Hindu wife participate in the Freedom Movement. But she needed training. Mahadev thought that a short stay in Sabaramati Ashram was necessary for her to be initiated into Movement. In 1931 both went to Sabarnati. At that time Gandhiji was at Bardoli. On seeing Siddamrna, Gandhiji asked her why she was thinking of subjecting herself to hard life, when she should be enjoying family life. When Siddamati replied that she would like to undergo training for becoming a Satyagrahi, Gandhiji smiled and consented to her joining the Women's Ashram in Sabarnati. In 1932-33 Gandhiji gave a call to the nation for Individual Satyagraha and Siddamati was one among the many women who courted arrest. She was sentenced to six months' simple imprisonment. She was kept in Sabarmati jail for some time and transferred to Ahmedabad jail. Mahadev was then in Karnataka organizing Satyagraha. His mother Basamma Mailar also, offered Satyagraha and courted arrest. The whole area round about Motebennur was seething with national spirit. The rural women with babies in their arms participated in processions. Mahadev wanted his wife to give a lead to the women so that their energies and enthusiasm could be channelized for nation service. And Siddarnati did come up to his expectations. She was released from jail after three months. She came to Motebennur and took to constructive programme like Harijan uplift, promoting Khadi and enlisting sympathy for prohibition. The Mahatma undertook a tour of the whole country in 1934 for awakening the conscience of the public regarding the Harijans. He visited Karnataka, too. He made it a point to pay a visit to Motebennur, though Mahadev was at that time, in Hindalga jail. He took Siddamati along with him to Gujarat. As the Sabarmati Ashram had been closed, she spent a few days in Bhavnagar and later in Rajkot. She had become as good as a member of the family of Gandhiji. She returned to Motebennur after Mahadevappa was released. She joined the Harijan Balikashram in Hubli and helped Nagamma Patil in running it.



Mahadevappa and Siddamati were engaged in constructive social activities till the great call for Quit India Movement came from the Mahatma Gandhi. Siddamati now was not free to participate actively in the Movement as her child was hardly two years old. It was decided that Mahadevappa should go underground and Siddamati should look after the Ashram, helping, at the same time the underground workers passing the message, distributing the pamphlets, arranging secret meetings and fixing safe hide-outs for the workers were the responsibility of Siddamati which she discharged along with Bellary Siddamma. As the activities of Mahadevappa grew and as the police proved unsuccessful in catching him and his comrades, the watch on the Ashram tightened. The police suspected that Mahadevappa was paying regular visits to the Ashram. Once, their suspicions growing strong, the police knocked at the door of Ashram and requested Siddamati to let them in for a search. In fact, Mahadevappa had left the Ashram the previous night itself. Only Kottur Rudramma was keeping her company. Siddamati boldly told the police that Mahadevappa was not inside and moreover she would not open the door in the dead of night. If they could bring from the village a few gentlemen, then she would not mind obliging them. It was done. The doors were opened. To their great disappointment, Mahadevappa had already had given them a slip. After this incident Mahadev advised Siddamati to close the Ashram and go to Hospet. At first Siddamati declined, but after much persuasion left for Hospet with a heavy heart. The previous night she had a bad dream. She feared that some calamity might befall Mahadev.

The frequent shooting that the police resorted to in dealing with the underground workers made her feel unnerved. While parting from Mahadev, the child started crying and would not stop. When she entered the house of their friends in Hospet, the first thing that caught her eyes was the picture of Bhagat Singh. Siddamati broke down. The next day, that is 18 April, 1943 the much-feared news came that Mahadevappa had been shot dead!

Siddamati received a letter of consolation from the Mahatma, in which he had reiterated that the best tribute that she could pay to the memory of her martyr-husband was to dedicate the rest of her life for the cause for which he had laid down his life. She accordingly pledged her life for social service. In recognition of her service, she was requested to contest the election to the Legislative Assembly which she did and got elected. But her heart was in social service. She has



now established an Ashram at Motebennur which is called Mailarashram.

Smt. Nagamma Veeranagouda Patil (Hirekerur)

It was the year 1933, when Mahatma Gandhi visited Karnataka for the second time as part of his countrywide tour which he had decided to undertake to educate people against untouchability. His tour over the Karataka area spanned a brief period of ten days. He was received at Mangalore by the leading Congress leaders among who were Sardar Veerangouda Patil and his wife Nagamma Patil. Their presence was significant because they were already sworn to the cause for which the Mahatma was now pleading. They had by that time opened a Harijan Ashram in Hubli on the lines of the one at Sabaramati. On his way to Belgaum Gandhiji halted for a short time at Hubli. It was the privilege of Sardar Veerangouda Patil and Nagamma to take him round the Ashram.

Then turning round to Nagarnrna he asked "what is your activity?" Nagamma shyly answered, "I am not an educated woman. What can I do?", The Mahatma replied "Can you not bathe the children and comb their hair? Take a few Harijan girls and bring them up. That will be your task." Nagamma took it as a commandment and a blessing. Harijan Balikashram came to be established soon later, the second of its kind in the whole of India. That is how she came to be more meaningfully involved in social work, and it is through her social work that she came to be introduced to the larger public life of Karnataka.

It may be noted here that in Karnataka there are quite a few couples who may be "lied Political couples 'in the sense that for 'them political life has been a joint venture. These are the Kurtakotis, the Mailars, the Arnblis, the Magadies, the Dabades, the Dasappas, the Karmarkars the Yalagis and the Bidaris, to mention only a few known ones. It has been the case either that public life brought them together and ended in marriage as with the Magadis and the Kurtakotis or that influenced and encouraged by their husbands' role in political life their wives also decided to work in cooperation with them. Such are the Patils, Mailars, the Karnarkars and others. They had before them the splendid example of Gandhiji and Kastur Ba.

Nagarnrna was born in an orthodox family. Her father, Shri Malleshappa Pattanshetty was a



merchant. Shri Veeranagouda was a young widower when he proposed to young Nagamma. But that did not come in the way of quick settlement of marriage because he was a graduate teaching in a school recently opened by a group of young graduates who had avowed their lives for the cause of education. It may be noted that this same group later founded the Karnataka Liberal Education Society. Veeranagouda himself hesitated to marry a girl coming from an orthodox family, because he doubted whether she would be able to adjust herself to his progressive or rather revolutionary life that he had already embarked upon. The marriage took place without much pomp. Neither Shri.Veeranagouda nor Nagamma found even the slightest reason to regret their manage later at any time. Nagamma, though a slip of a girl, came to regard, like a typical Indian wife, her husband's mission as her own. As the school was not financially sound, its young enthusiastic teachers had to feel satisfied if they could manage to get two square meals for themselves and the members of their family. Though Nagamma had grown in comparatively in affluent conditions, she did not complain. On the other hand, she adjusted herself to the circumstances.

An incident took place which put to test her capacity to adjust. One day, Veeranagouda saw a boy sitting alone on the last bench looking rather lonely and depressed. He went over to him, patted him on the back and asked him why he was looking so depressed. The boy, surprised at the behavior of the teacher jumped up and said that he was an untouchable. After asking his whereabouts Shri Veeranagouda told him that he would visit him in his boarding house sometime next day. The boy touched by his teacher's affection, carried to his house in the evening a few Brinjals grown in his field. He deposited them in the verandah and asked him to take them. Shri. Veeranagouda told his mother who that boy was. The mother was also touched by the boy's affection but she disapproved of her son patting the boy on his back. Neither would she touch those Brinjals. It was left to Nagamma to collect them and cook them as her husband so desired. And she did it with pleasure.

The boy was staying in a boarding place meant for the untouchables. It was run by Shri. Ingale, another social worker. The strength of the boarding house was about a dozen. When Shri. Veeranagouda visited the boarding house the next day the boys were singing a prayer, the gist of



which was, 'who is there to protect us, oh God? He was affected by the emotion which they were putting in to that song and decided to visit them regularly. Later it so, happened that Shri Ingale who was working as its secretary had to give up his work and leave Belgaum. Then Shri. Veeranagouda shifted the boys to his own house. The question arose as to who should cook for them. Nagamma volunteered to do that job. That is how Nagamma was initiated into social service. Shri Veeranagouda's orthodox mother left her son's house, the very next day. Her charge against her son was: Veeranagouda loves Harijan boys more than his own mother! Nagamma never complained. She had come to regard her husband's work as her own.

So, when Gandhiji asked her to take a few Harijan girls and open an Ashram for them, Nagamma felt that the service that she had already rendered had come to be recognized and also rewarded. She had already dreamt of such a thing in the course of her travel of Northern India in the company of her husband. The visit to Sabaramati where a Harijan Kanyashala was run by a lady had made a great impact on her mind. So, now, with a sense of dedication and missionary zeal Nagamma set about her task. She visited Davangere, Bellary and Belgaum and persuaded parents to send their daughters to the Ashram. For the parents, it was a unique experience and for the children, it was a blessing. In the very first year Nagamma succeeded in collecting about twenty girls. The children were taught how to keep themselves clean and how to help each other.¹²²In the initial stage they were scared to mix with children of higher castes. She allowed her own children to play with them! Gradually she led them from a life of fear and constraint to a life of love and freedom.

The social service which she undertook with so much of sincerity opened for her new avenues of service. In 1937 the Congress for the first time decided to contest the elections to the Legislative Assembly. Nagamma contested from Ranebennur constituency a reserved seat for women and got elected defeating a strong rival like Padmavati Angadi. A new chapter opened in her life. From social work she had now launched on a political career. She is the first elected lady-member of the Assembly in Karnataka. In 1939 the Second World War broke out. The Congress demanded that India be given full freedom so that she might heartily cooperate with the British in defeating the fascist forces. But the British arrogantly turned down the demand, as a result of



which the Congress asked its members to resign their membership of the Legislative Assemblies, and offer individual Satyagraha. The Congress declared that it could not cooperate with the Government in its war efforts. When India was denied of her own right to rule herself how could she be expected to fight for the right of other countries to rule themselves? According to the instructions of her party, Nagamma addressed a meeting at Byadagi and called on the people not to extend any cooperation to the government. The war, she reiterated, was not fought to uphold liberty of all nations, but to perpetuate the expansionist designs of the colonial powers. She was arrested the same day. She was fined Rs. 200/-and if she failed to pay it she was to undergo three months' simple imprisonment. She declined to pay the fine and went to jail.¹²⁴It was the first taste of the jail life. She carried on social work in jail too, by giving the inmates (non- political) lessons in reading, writing, music and so on. Gandhiji had defined Freedom Movement as aiming not only against political slavery but against social and economic slavery, too.

Life was not smooth after her release from the jail. In August 1942 Gandhiji gave the final call to the British to quit India. The whole country was in the grip of tension. Nagamma again courted arrest. Her youngest daughter, Sundari, was then four years old. Shri.Veeranagouda was already in jail. There was no 'home' as such where she could leave the child. The British had struck such terror in the hearts of the people by their oppressive measures that even the closest relatives feared to keep the children of the political detunes. So, Nagamma had to take Sundari along with her to the jail. She remained in Yarawada jail, for ten months.

The young Harijan girls in the Ashram inspired by Nagamma's example went in procession, raised anti-British slogans and offered Satyagraha in two batches and courted arrest. The whole atmosphere in Hubli was tense. The youngest girl arrested was hardly nine years old! Nagamma had inculcated in them a sense of patriotism and a spirit to agitate for freedom. With the members of the Harijan Balikashram also interned, the whole family of Nagamma was as good as in jail.

The political prisoners were not served good food. She staged Satyagraha along with others. She persuaded others to volunteer to cook. Once when they were all seated in the dining hall for lunch the jail Superintendent appeared on the scene. He was requested to remove his shoes and come in, but when he arrogantly declined they went on fast. The officer was careful



enough not to wear the shoes when next time he visited the dining hall. A few old mothers whose sons were absconding had also been rounded up and brought to the jail. Ignorant people that they were, they found it extremely difficult to adjust emotionally to the life in jail. Nagamma had to console them.

Ten months' imprisonment, she was released and she came home to find everything in disorder. Boldly she faced the situation and carried on in the absence of her husband. After independence many sought power, but not the Patils. She decided to dedicate her life to social service. The Mahila Vidyapith is as much the product of Shri Veerangouda's selfless work as of Nagamma Veeranagouda Patil.

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