

Freedom Movement in Haveri Region: Role of Nagamma Veeranagouda Patil

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Abstract- *This research paper explores the Historically the situation of women in India, Nagamma was the social worker who worked for uplifting the condition of the Harijan children in Karnataka. She brought the Gandhian movement to Karnataka and participated in the Indian independence struggle. After independence Nagamma Veeranagouda Patil, who was popularly called 'Amma', dedicated herself towards educating children. The hostel was based on the Gandhian principles and it became the only place other than Mahatma Gandhi's Sabarmati ashram serving the Harijan children.*

Keywords: *freedom movement, freedom fighter, social service, harijan seva. political detunes, ashram. public life, society.*

I. INTRODUCTION

During the national freedom movement Haveri was remarkable and played an important role. It has been risen 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 Yershime, Gudleppa Hallikeri and other prominent leaders were involved in in pre-Gandhian and Gandhian period.

Smt. Nagamma Veeranagouda Patil (Hirekerur)

Early Life

Namma was born on December 16, 1905. She completed her primary education in 1923 and married the founder of Karnataka Liberal Education Society and veteran leader Padmashree Sardar Veeranagouda Patil. Namma worked closely with her husband Sardar Veeranagouda to uplift the condition of

socially, educationally and economically backward women in Karnataka. She started a hostel for Harijan girls called Harijan Balika Ashram in Hubli.

II. FREEDOM MOVEMENT AND SOCIAL SERVICE

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 Karnataka 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 Nagamma 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 few couples who may be "labeled" 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 Karmarkars and others. They had before them the splendid example of Gandhiji and Kastur Ba.

Nagamrma 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 marriage 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 socialworker. 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. In 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. It 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 detainees. 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.

III. CONCLUSION

Amidst India's independence struggle, Patil became a symbol of the Gandhian movement in Karnataka. After India achieved its freedom, she devoted herself to educating children. Born on December 16, 1905, she was married to veteran freedom fighter Padma Shri Sardar Veeranagouda Patil. In 1924, when Mahatma Gandhi visited Belgaum, it made a deep impression on her & she became an ardent follower of Gandhi. During the 1930s, she joined Sardar Veeranagouda and established Hubli's Harijan Balika Ashram. Both Nagamma and her husband joined the freedom fight in 1938 after hearing Mahatma Gandhi's call to arms for the cause. She was detained and held in Hindalag Prison in Belgaum for three months that same year. In 1942, she was like wise detained and held in the Yerawada Central for 13 months. 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.

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