

Salud Algabre, Revolutionary

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(Based on an Interview by Isagani R. Medina)

Salud Algabre who took active part in the Sakdalista Uprising, a peasant rebellion in 1935, was interviewed by Dr. Isagani R. Medina in 1977. At that time, she was 84 years old and her memory was starting to fail. Understandably, her recollection of some details in her early life was a little vague. But her experiences during the uprising as well as her nationalistic principles emerged quite clearly from the interview. This account tries to draw from the interview the rich and varied experience of Ms. Algabre as a woman revolutionary.

Beginnings

Salud Algabre, woman revolutionary, member of a peasant rebel movement, was well-born. Her grandfather, Agustin Algabre, served as *gobernadorcillo*, the highest local government official native Filipinos could aspire to be in Spanish times, from 1885 to 1886. He was landed and apparently educated, as one could not hold office then unless one had property and knew how to speak Spanish. Salud remembers his having had a vast tract of land, important enough to have its entry point known in town as "Pasok Algabre." This was in Kabuyaw (Cabuyao), Laguna where Salud was born.

Asked when she was born, Salud noted that "at that time, people did not pay attention to dates. They reckoned time by the seasons such as the ripening of the corn and the flowering of the mangoes." However, the municipal records show that she was born on October 6, 1894. Her birthplace is recorded as Banlic but according to her, she was actually born in Puntod, another barrio in Kabuyaw. Her father, Maximo, the son of Agustin, was a rich sugar cane farmer; her mother, Justina Tirones, was apparently of humbler stock: she was a seamstress and a vendor at the market and cockpits in Kalamba (Calamba). Among her siblings who survived, Salud remembers two brothers, Primitivo and Dominador. She also mentions a sister in the course of the interview.

The spirit of nationalism was a part of Salud's heritage. Her grandfather served the Spanish government but he was no mere lackey. Because of his refusal to kiss the hand of the friars, the authorities were going to exile him to Dapitan. At this, he slashed his throat — not in an attempt to kill himself, but only slightly, as a gesture of protest. Salud also had revolutionary forebears. She remembers among them her uncle on her father's side, Macario Lino, who was a member of the Katipunan. She had other relatives who joined Bonifacio's troops while several were exiled to Dapitan, Jolo and other far-flung places for their revolutionary activities.

Growing Up

Salud grew up and had her early schooling in Manila. At that time, she was staying with an uncle in Corcuera, Tondo, near Azcarraga Street (now Claro M. Recto). As was the custom in those days, before starting her formal schooling in English, she studied the *katon*¹ and the catechism in Tagalog. She remembers how those who did not learn to read or write were heavily punished. The teacher and other elders would tie a rope around the child's waist and hang her/ him from the roof; to compound the suffering, they would pinch the child on the stomach. Her grand-aunt on her father's side used to pinch her between the thigh and the groin with her long fingernails. This was expectedly very painful and would leave marks black as ink. Sometimes the children were made to kneel on mongo beans or coarse salt and beaten on their open palms with a stick.

Among her elementary school teachers, Salud remembers Ms. Damondon, her English teacher and Ms. Emilia Flores, her sewing teacher. Her favorite subject was that which contained the teachings of Quezon (probably Civics), passages from which she still recollects. She quotes during the interview: "Hereby, fellow citizens ... bear in mind that you are a Filipino and that the Philippines is your country ... you must keep it if necessary ..." She says she can accept no less: the complete independence of the Filipinos because the nationalist teachings of Quezon are inscribed in her heart (*nakatahi sa puso*, literally sewn onto her heart), including the patriotic songs. At one point in the interview, she sings "Philippines my Philippines" and is joined by the interviewer. She says these teachings are with her even when she is asleep, even in

her dreams. Similarly, the words of Bonifacio and Rizal, both of whom she considers as the national heroes and both of whom influenced her greatly, are etched in her heart.

Salud compares the life of schoolchildren now and their life then. Now children think nothing of asking for a peso or two pesos to bring to school; then their *baon*² was no more than two centavos which they kept carefully knotted up in a corner of their handkerchiefs, lest they lose it and get pinched in the thigh.

She left school before the intermediate grades. Later, she studied in Meisik which used to be a Chinese settlement in Tondo. Here she learned vocational skills such as sewing, weaving, etc. In 1915, she got married to Severo Generalla, also from Kabuyaw, although she continued to use her maiden name. As she explained, "it is my custom not to use my husband's name. I don't want my maiden name to die." They lived in Pandacan, near Generalla's place of work at a tobacco factory. Later, he and Salud set up a bakery in Pandacan.

Salud herself held a variety of jobs before and after her marriage. She and her sister used to work ironing clothes. She was a seamstress before she got married and used to do *ojales* or buttonholes by hand for an exporter of baby dresses. She also used to sell *mami*, a Chinese noodle dish. She even cared for horses and was, at some point in her life, a supervisor in the sand and gravel trade. It was as an agricultural worker that she got involved in the Sakdal revolt.

Participation in the Sakdal Movement

Salud was the only female member of the Sakdal movement. She belonged to the movement itself, not to the women's auxiliary which was organized later. Apparently, her interest in the movement was aroused when she read a copy of the *Sakdal*, the movement's official organ, which had been given to her by a relative, a certain Catalino, whom she refers to as "Lolo Lino." As she narrated it,

He reads the *Sakdal*. I used to bring them rice. He showed me the *Sakdal*.

"Here Salud, since this is how you feel, with your intense love for your country, here [is something] about revolution. Here, read it."

In fact, one of her first tasks in the movement was to distribute copies of the *Sakdal*. She would buy 50 to 100 copies of the paper and give them away for free. At that time, each copy cost P0.02 each.

Asked what it was the Sakdals were really fighting for, Salud unhesitatingly answers, "To be independent." The Sakdals were a legitimate political party. Salud points out that they had members all over the country, not just the Tagalog region. Moreover, some of their members had been elected to high office. These included governors such as the governor of Marinduque, members of Congress, etc.

But the peasants who made up the greater portion of the membership had a lot of complaints about the way the landlords (or their representatives) dealt with the farmers. These included cheating in the way they listed the amount of grain, usurious practices, etc. Salud notes how they would mix the chaff with the grain and "ask us to borrow against that. If you draw P20.00, they'll lend it to you at 20% interest and you can't just pay. They will take palay as payment." The corruption of those in power extended to the guards of their estates. Salud notes that when her husband gathered wood in Mt. Makiling "if you didn't give the [guards] any wood, you better watch out!" During fiestas, the farmers had to give "chicken, eggs, vegetables ... even delicious *kakanin* [native cakes]" In another part of the interview, she asks, "Do you think it's right that we should have kept quiet then?" and vehemently indicts the landowners: "They not only cheat us, they fool us too. Everything that makes their life easy comes from us."

The Sakdal Uprising

The Sakdal Uprising took place on May 2-3, 1935 in the form of simultaneous peasant uprisings in the provinces of Bulacan, Cavite and Laguna. . Its aim, according to American historians, was to create disorder to prevent the holding of a plebiscite to approve the Constitution of the Philippine Commonwealth. The Sakdals did not accept the Commonwealth as it did not constitute full independence.

The towns of San Ildefonso, Bulacan, and Sta. Rosa and Kabuyaw in Laguna were the major centers of the revolt. The uprising, however, was badly disorganized, according to the same historians, and it did not take long for the Philippine Constabulary to subdue the rebels.

According to Salud, the reason the uprising failed was because there was an informer whom she specifically identifies as one Santiago Bunyi (This informer is mentioned in other accounts of the uprising but is not identified). Apparently, there was a prearranged signal for the uprising — the burning of the big oil depot in Otis, Pandakan, then the revolts in the different towns would break out simultaneously. But because of the informer, the element of surprise was minimized and a large number of Sakdals perished. Salud notes that, based on their estimates, “one Sakdal member didn’t even amount to P4.00 in blood money.”

At the uprising in Kabuyaw, the Sakdals were able to take hold of the municipal hall. They removed the American flag and replaced it with the red flag of the Sakdals, Then they sang the Sakdal song whose words she can no longer remember. They held the municipal hall for over 24 hours but nothing was vandalized. Salud says that there was no previous preparation for the siege: “... when the people were in the municipal hall, that was when I started going around asking and getting food from stores, from different houses, from the wife of Felisa’s father. She was the one who helped bring the food. She had a *kalesa*...”³

The confrontation between the constabulary and the Sakdal may be reconstructed from the interview: when the constabulary came, they were led by Governor Juan Cailles, a former revolutionary general. A constabulary soldier refused to shoot. He trained his rifle upward and shot into the air, but Cailles ordered him to shoot: “*Fuego, fuego, fuego!*”⁴ Even the priest started shooting.

Salud remembers a humorous incident: During the uprising, the Sakdals intercepted several trucks coming from Manila which apparently held American marines. Whereupon, one of the Sakdals, “Tata Gaudencio,” ordered a captain who was wearing white trousers to sit on a coal heap. But she also remembers that the soldiers who came to subdue them were quite vicious: “They even butchered our cats.” They also ransacked her house, tore up all her papers and even her pictures.

After the uprising, some of the Sakdals were caught and jailed; others hid or went elsewhere; some wanted to continue the civil war. Salud fled to the hills but was chased by the constabulary. She narrates an encounter with a soldier who confronted her with a fixed bayonet attached to a gun:

He called to me. "Psst!" He motioned me to approach him.
Then when we were facing each other he stopped; I also stopped.
[And then] he left, just like that.

At one time, she hid in the river in Kabuyaw, on a bridge near the irrigation works in their place. This bridge, which was made of bamboo, was almost submerged; she stayed where the water was shallow, in a half-sitting position:

They [the people] were asked where I was or if they saw me, but they said no. I squeezed myself into a hole, I don't know if it was that of a snake or other [wild animal].

Salud kept walking towards Cavite. When she reached Silang, while walking by a deep river, she fell from the river's high bank as she was retreating from a huge pile of rocks across her path. Her long hair which was caught in some branches kept her from falling into the river altogether. In Silang, she turned towards Barrio Puting Kahoy where her uncle, also a Sakdal, lived. She kept walking till she was faint from hunger; when she chanced upon some hen's eggs, she seized them and gulped them down raw. When night fell, the place where she found herself was lit by a myriad fireflies. The place was teeming with them. She felt very cold among the tall trees and was fearful of *kapres*.⁵ But she saw nothing so she walked on.

After a while, she heard someone repeatedly calling. It turned out that the constabulary were with her uncle. "Salud, Salud, come out of there," she heard her uncle say. Then she heard the voice of Captain Angeles talking to her uncle: "Don't, she might not want me to see her. Let her hide." Salud continued to hide in a grove of bamboo trees which had been cut down. Her uncle called out: "There you are. Come out, Nene, so you can be brought to town. Otherwise, the P.C. [Philippine Constabulary] will set fire to all our houses."

When she was captured by the P.C., did they harm her in any way? Salud narrates that her uncle went with her and presented her to the mayor of Silang who summoned the Chief of Police along with two other policemen. Her uncle vouched for her: "Here, she has surfaced at last. She comes from a good family; I can guarantee her good behavior. She is the daughter of my brother who lives in Banlic."

What about her children? Did she worry about them while she was fleeing the PC? "They went and stayed with my aunt, Inang Marta, who took care of them. But I felt bad that I had to leave them behind." An interesting sidelight is the story of one of her children who was suckled by a dog. According to her son who was present at the interview, the baby, Salud's youngest child at the time, was left alone beside their dog who had just given birth. She was crying because she was apparently hungry. When her sisters finally got to her, she was suckling from the dog.

After her arrest, Salud was brought to Sta. Cruz, the capital of Laguna and then transferred to Manila where the hearings on her case were held in Intramuros. Her children used to follow her around from hearing to hearing, because this was the only place where they could see her. According to her recollection, Salud was imprisoned for one year and seven months at the time at the Women's Correctional in Mandaluyong, now a city of Metro Manila. However, this was not the only time she was imprisoned. The guerrillas held her prisoner for a few months during the Japanese occupation and then again she was held by the Americans during the liberation period.

The Sakdal in fact remained vigorous, even after the failed rebellion. Salud recalls how the late Amado V. Hernandez called them *Samahang Walang Kadaladala* (The Movement That Can Not Be Intimidated). They held a National Assembly on November 30, 1935 and were active during the Japanese Occupation (1941-1944). Salud denies that the Sakdals were in league with the Japanese, as is the popular opinion. She herself continued to involve herself in movements against rich people who were perceived to be holding on unfairly to large tracts of land, like the Tuasons who held the Tatalon estate, in Quezon City. According to her, "the reason why I neglected my children is because I helped fight the avidity of the Tuasons in Tatalon."

Even when she was old and suffering from various illnesses, Sakdals from different regions of the country would come and ask for her advice or opinion. Even the Marcoses apparently valued her wisdom. According to her, "I received a letter from Imelda asking us to help them. If I were 65 or 69 years old, I might still be able to help, but I'm already old." Besides, she has had her share of disillusionment. Even now (the time of the interview), "they're [the upper classes] the kings. They have

knowledge, wealth and power: “Wealth, never mind. Power, that’s bad. They grow rich while the others have no means of livelihood.”

Asked what advice she can give the Filipino youth, her grandchildren and great grandchildren, Salud Algabre says, “I no longer have anything to say. It’s really up to them. They should love their country. They’re Filipinos. They should help their fellow Filipinos rise.”

Memory and Imagination in the Fight For Freedom

David Sturtevant, writing about the Sakdal uprising, tried to identify the wellsprings of Salud Algabre’s fight for freedom, viz.:

...She was driven by faint memories of a golden age—a distant time of freedom and ethical relationships. Whether or not such a society ever existed is utterly beside the point. To Salud and her fellow rebels it was real. Consciously or unconsciously they struggled to create a moral world. Like most idealists, their only transgression in an age of realists was the sin of simplicity.⁶

This is the realm of myth and legends, where the dream world reigns supreme. In Salud’s memory of tales told long ago, the image of a golden bell is interwoven with a river. An enormous golden bell fell into a river and it plummeted deeper and deeper as though it were being sucked into the center of the world’s oceans. So huge was this bell that when it is rung from the deep, the current becomes so strong and pregnant women swimming in the river may well experience miscarriages. People say that it probably fell where the *Engkanto*⁷ dwells and that it might have been placed under a spell. It is also said that the old name of Kabuyaw is Tabug or Tabuk which means a kind of *dalandan*⁸ or *kabuyaw*. “In the olden days, Kabuyaw used to be prosperous. When the governor used to visit Kabuyaw, the people would fry the palay and strew them on his path.”⁹ Because of this extravagance, the people were punished with seven years of drought and the people were reduced to eating only the seeds of the *amorseko*¹⁰ and those of the *sampalok*.¹¹ The people fried and pounded these and ate them. There are seeds inside the amorseko like grains of wheat. These are extremely minute, just tiny, very tiny particles.

On the other hand, Salud remembers a story that seems to have been fabricated to frighten away trespassers and has been woven into

another tale that was preserved as part of their oral literature. Catalino, who bought the land near the Kampana River in Banle, Kabuyaw narrated this to some interested person and the story spread around that when the sun sets, music plays where there's a bell. Every new year, something flashes like a skyrocket that can be seen from the sugarcane farm that Salud and her husband tills, making them suspect that there are gnomes around the land. There is a whirling fire like St. Elmo's Fire. There is a related story that if one digs in the proper spot, one will find a golden jar of buried treasure. Under the altar in the Kabuyaw Church is a golden cow. Various other tales are mingled in her recollection. There was also a tale told of a cow couple that usually passed by the land of Salud Algabre's uncle. People drink from the river and the water turns red like blood or rust. Then again others say the water is colored rust or Mars gold because the cow couple is made of gold. And there, near the Church in Putol before Banli, there used to be a natural well that gushes morning and night time, flowing without end. The well was so strong and so huge that it could serve the need for water of two barrios. But they cemented it and closed it up.

One can see how in the imagination of the people there is a land of plenty. Justice is usually exacted whenever somebody commits a transgression. In this manner, it is quite likely that people with such a world view would exert themselves to attain such an idyll. Salud Algabre, being made of a heroic mold, is just such a person.

Endnotes

¹ A primer for children

² Allowance

³ A two-wheeled chaise. Cf. *karomata*, (Sp. *carromato*) a horse-drawn passenger vehicle with two wheels and covered with a tilt. Also, *karitela*.

⁴ Shoot, shoot, shoot!

⁵ A mythological creature in Philippine folklore

⁶ David Sturtevant, *Popular Uprisings 1840-1940*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 287.

⁷ In Philippine folklore, a supernatural being (spirit) who has the power to enchant people.

⁸ A generic term for some species of oranges, the most common is *dalanghita* (*naranghita*), also called *sintores* or *sintunis*.

⁹ It is interesting how this tale is intertwined with other tales of the same subject as in the case of the curse Lipa receives due to the extravagance of the ruler and the rich people of Lipa, where a blight descends on the coffee plantations of Lipa.

¹⁰ Burry love-grass (*Chrysopogon aciculatus* Retz.)

¹¹ Tamarind.