

Kasturba Gandhi

An Embodiment of Empowerment



• Siby K. Joseph •

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Siby K. Joseph

Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Mumbai

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First Published February 2020
Reprint March 2020

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Published by
Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Mumbai
Mani Bhavan, 1st Floor, 19 Laburnum Road,
Gamdevi, Mumbai 400 007, MS, India.

Website :<https://www.gsnmumbai.org>

Printed at Om Laser Printers, 2324, Hudson Lines
Kingsway Camp – 110 009

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Foreword

Kasturba was with Mahatma Gandhi in his journey from the ordinary to the extraordinary. She shared with him all the hardships and obstacles in his odyssey where every action had to abide by the principles of truth and non-violence. Gandhiji is the person about whom much is written and is being written. However, not much information is available about Kasturba's life and work. Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Mumbai, planned an appropriate publication on this subject as a tribute to Kasturba on the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and Kasturba. We are happy that Dr. Siby Joseph has written this informative and interesting book on Kasturba. He has efficiently collected the relevant material, and has presented his arguments in a cogent manner. This useful book acquaints the reader with Kasturba's sacrifices and contribution to the freedom movement. It clearly brings out the character of Kasturba as a strong support and companion of the Mahatma, an upright person with moral values, a loving mother to her sons, a caring and kind-hearted person looking after all around her, but above all as an individual in her own right with an independent identity who played a prominent role in the freedom struggle.

This book, earnestly written and meticulously researched by Dr. Siby Joseph, is our tribute to Kasturba on the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and Kasturba.

Raksha Mehta

Chairman,

Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Mumbai

Kasturba had not only shared the joys and sorrows of Mahatmaji and, within her limits, his great work of political and social uplift; she had succeeded on many occasions where Mahatmaji had failed. Her natural modesty and her single-minded devotion and unparalleled spirit of sacrifice had lent her a quiet strength that made her name almost as appealing as that of her great husband.

With none of the benefits of modern education, with none of the advantages of a progressive family tradition, Kasturba had, by dint of the great devotion to the cause to which Mahatmaji has dedicated himself, spent herself in the service of the motherland. She was the very best of Indian womanhood and has died, as all Indian women do desire to die, leaving her husband behind. She has left an example that will live in the memory of generations.

Amrita Bazar Patrika
Calcutta

Preface

India and the world is celebrating sesquicentennial birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. Some of the institutions and scholars have a feeling that it should be a joint celebration of Kasturba and Mahatma Gandhi. Perhaps our Institute was the first to publish a book, *Women Power: A Gandhian Discourse* in honour of Kasturba Gandhi penned by Chandrasekhar Dharmadhikari and translated from Hindi to English by Ramchandra Pradhan. The book was released at Pune to mark the beginning of 150th birth anniversary celebrations of Kasturba Gandhi on April 11, 2018. It was the result of an ardent desire of our then Chairman Chandrasekhar Dharmadhikari that it should be a joint celebration of Kasturba and Mahatma as she had played a crucial role in our freedom struggle and in the making of Mahatma's life.

I had an opportunity to give a talk on the life and contributions of Kasturba Gandhi on April 11, 2018 at the historic Sevagram Ashram. Our Institute organized a National Seminar on Gandhian Perspectives in Gender Equality: Power, Potentials and Prospects jointly with Department of Women Studies, Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University, Wardha in March 2019 where I presented a paper viz. Gandhi and Women Leadership in India: Past and Present which was based on case study of three women freedom fighters viz. Kasturba Gandhi, Jankidevi Bajaj and Durgabai Deshmukh and other present day women leaders. Again on April 11, 2019 in collaboration with Sevagram Ashram Prathistan our Institute organized a programme in which I was asked to make a presentation on Kasturba Gandhi. All these events provided me an opportunity to study about the life of Kasturba Gandhi.

I was also invited to participate in the 150th Birth Anniversary celebration of Mahatma and Kasturba Gandhi

jointly organized by Gandhi Development Trust, Durban and Good Governance Africa on the Confluence of Spirituality and Life – Gandhian Legacy for the 21st Century. I made a presentation on Gandhi's lifelong experiments in Education and the Relevance of his concept of Basic Education. The Conference took place in October 2019 at the Phoenix Settlement, the Ashram established by Mohandas and Kasturba in Inanda, South Africa in 1904. This gave me an opportunity to understand the role played by Kasturba Gandhi in South African Struggle and in the running of the Phoenix Settlement. On my way back to India from South Africa I had a meeting in October 2019 with Raksha Mehta, President, Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Mumbai and Usha Thakkar, President, Manibhavan Gandhi Sangrahalaya, Mumbai at Manibhavan. In the course of our discussion, the need for a new study on Kasturba Gandhi was felt by us and the present study is in response to the dialogue I had with them at Manibhavan.

Writing a new and independent book on Kasturba is a challenging task as her life and work is too much intertwined with her husband Mahatma Gandhi. I too found it a challenging task as even her so called biographies ultimately verge on the life and work of Gandhi. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* do not contain any independent references about her life and work. This book is not a comprehensive biography of Kasturba. My primary attempt has been to present Kasturba Gandhi in a nutshell as an embodiment of empowered women who had an identity of her own. It is interesting to note that Ma Sharada, the wife of Ramkrishna Paramahansa has said that it is always a tragedy to be the wife of a great man. As in all such cases the struggle and sufferings of the wife hardly gets noticed. This is true of Kasturba too.

In the execution of this study I am indebted to a number of individuals and organizations. First and foremost I would to thank Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Mumbai for accepting

my proposal to undertake a study on Kasturba Gandhi. I am grateful Raksha Mehta, Chairman, Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Mumbai for her unconditional support in the execution of the study and its publication. She was kind enough to contribute a brief foreword for the volume.

I would like to express my deep sense of gratitude to Shekhar Bajaj, Chairman of the Institute of Gandhian Studies, Wardha with whom I had an opportunity to discuss about this project in December 2019. I am grateful to him and other Members of Board of Trustees especially Rahul Bajaj for his kind support and encouragement in my academic endeavours.

Our Director, Bharat Mahodaya was highly supportive in this regard and offered all possible assistance and provided a congenial atmosphere to work on this area.

My senior colleague and member of the teaching faculty of the Institute, Ramchandra Pradhan is always with me in my academic work and he really enlightened me through stimulating discussions and insights on the life of Kasturba Gandhi especially her role in the India's struggle for freedom. He remains as a constant source of inspiration for all of us who is always ready to guide us in spite of his constant engagement in research and academic writings.

Usha Thakkar, President of Manibhavan Gandhi Sangrahalaya, Mumbai has been highly supportive in this work by availing relevant material and also for her constant encouragement, useful insights and guidance. She was kind enough to go through the entire manuscript and offer valuable suggestions.

My thanks are also due to all staff members of Manibhavan especially the research team for their unconditional support.

I am grateful to William Baskarn, Professor and Dean of Social Sciences, Gandhigram Rural Institute, Dindigul and Ashwin Zala, Faculty of Gandhi Research Foundation, Jalgaon for providing valuable materials and for their useful insights.

Each and every member of the staff of the Institute extended their whole hearted support in the publication of this work. I am thankful to all of them.

My special thanks are also due to Shrikant Kulkarni, former Superintendent of our office. I am thankful to Manohar Mahajan of our Institute for the efficient typesetting of the book.

I am thankful to my elder brother Fr. Joseph K. J., who was kind enough to go through the manuscript of this work and provide useful and critical comments in a record time.

My special thanks are due to B. K. Harish Kumara, Executive Director, Centre for Education Environment and Community, Banugondi, Karnataka for the kind help in the execution of this project.

Last but not least my special thanks are due to my wife Arunima Maitra and my only daughter Almitra K. Siby who have always been a source of support and encouragement in my all academic writings.

Though I got support from a host of eminent personalities, I alone would be responsible for any lapse or lacuna in the present work.

This volume is a humble tribute to Kasturba and Mahatma Gandhi on the occasion of their 150th birth anniversary. It will be launched in Manibhavan, Mumbai on February 22, 2020 coinciding with the death anniversary of Kasturba Gandhi jointly organized by Gandhi Smarak Nidhi and Manibhavan Gandhi Sangrahalaya.

I am sure that like my earlier works this volume too would be welcomed by common readers, academics and researchers working in the field. I hope that this work would help in kindling more research on the life and contributions of Kasturba Gandhi.

Gopuri
February 18, 2020

Siby K. Joseph
Dean of Studies and Research
Institute of Gandhian Studies,
Wardha

Kasturba Gandhi
Indian Womanhood Personified

There was something magnificent in her self-effacement that India associates with her womanhood. Her name has been linked with the most sacred memories of Sita and Savitri but she was something more than even these glorious idols of Indian womanhood.

Amrita Bazar Patrika
Calcutta

1

Early Life

Kastur Kapadia was born in the month of April 1869,¹ in the coastal city of Porbandar of Kathiawar peninsula which comes under the present day State of Gujarat. Her father Gokuladas Kapadia² was a wealthy merchant, dealing in grains, cotton and cloth. He was a prominent citizen and one-time Mayor of Porbandar. Vrajkunwerba, her mother, looked after family matters. Kastur had two brothers elder to her and two younger ones. But Madavdas was her only surviving brother, who was younger to her.³ Being the only girl child, she was the pet of the family and the family members showered lots of love and affection on her.

Mohandas Gandhi, future life partner of Kastur, was also born in the same town as well as in the same year. But he was born in the month of October. He was about 6 months younger to Kastur. The families of Kapadias' and Gandhis' were close to each other. In the year 1876, the parents of both the families decided to knit their bonds further by arranging the betrothal of Kastur with Mohandas. This was Mohandas's third betrothal because his earlier betrothed girls died prematurely. Both Kastur and Mohandas were hardly seven years old at that time. Kastur as a kid was not aware of the significance of betrothal other than the splendid gifts she received on the occasion which made her happy. Mohandas was not present on the occasion. He was informed about his third betrothal at that time.⁴ Child marriage was a usual practice those days. But the fact that both of them got married at the age of thirteen clearly shows the progressive attitude of both families and the concern about the well being of their children. From the writings of Joseph J. Doke, the first biographer of Gandhi, it is clear that

both of them were not strangers at the time of their marriage. Doke wrote “Frequently, in India, the bride and bridegroom are strangers to each other until the wedding-day, and sometimes it happens, when the veil is lifted for the first time, life together begins with a shock of revulsion. In this case, however, custom was ignored. One imagines that the parents involved must have been more liberal in their views than their strict observance of Hindu ritual would suggest.”⁵

Despite the fact that Kastur was born in a rich family and the attitude of parents was progressive in nature, she received no formal schooling prior to her marriage. But Mohandas went to the school at the age of six in Porbandar. In the absence of formal education, she learned from the surroundings and family the art of leading a healthy life and equipped herself to take up the responsibilities in future. There is hardly any record of the early life of Kastur.⁶ Even the biographies hardly throw any light on her early life.

Notes and References

1. In a book edited by R. K. Prabu published during Gandhi’s life time says that the exact date of Kasturba’s birth is a matter of uncertainty. “According to her only brother, Sjt. Madhavdas Gokuldas, she was three or four months younger than Gandhiji, but according to the records preserved by members of the family of Laxmidas Gandhi, the Mahatma’s eldest brother, Kasturba was born in April 1869, about six months before Gandhiji.” See R. K. Prabhu (ed.) *Sati Kasturba : A Life-Sketch With Tributes in Memoriam*, (Bombay: Hind Kitabs, 1944) p.11. Gandhi himself wrote in his *Autobiography* that they were of the same age.

Arun Gandhi in his book, *Kasturba: A Life* writes that “they would sometimes playfully disagree about which one was the older. Arun Gandhi, *Kasturba: A Life* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000), p.1. However in many sources including

Encyclopedia Britannica describe April 11 as birth date of Kasturba Gandhi.

2. Arun Gandhi laments that many biographers of Gandhi used Makanji rather than Kapadia as Kastur's family name, a confusion arising from the common Indian custom identifying sons by the name of their fathers. Kastur's grandfather was Makanji Kapadia, so her father, Gokaldas, as the son of Makanji, was often addressed as Gokaldas Makanji rather than Gokaldas Kapadia.
3. Sumitra Kulkarni, *Anmol Virasat* Vol.III (Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 1988) p.32.
4. Gandhi wrote in his *Autobiography* "I have a faint recollection, however, that the third betrothal took place in my seventh year. But I do not recollect having been informed about it." See M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad:Navajivan, 1940) p.18.
5. Joseph J. Doke, *M. K. Gandhi :An Indian Patriot in South Africa*, (Delhi : Publications Division, 1967) p.28.
6. Arun Gandhi, biographer of Kasturba, went in search of family records of the Kapadia family and came to know that the disastrous floods in the 1930s had destroyed all documents, letters and photographs.

Kastur – The Wife of Mohandas

Kastur's marriage with Mohandas took place at Porbandar in 1882. Mohandas's father was serving at Rajkot at that time. He could not reach Porbandar earlier for the marriage due to his official duties as the prime minister of Rajkot. He got injured in an accident on the way to the wedding of his son in Porbandar. However, he ignored it and somehow reached Porbandar in time. Thus the marriage between Kastur and Mohandas took place as it was planned earlier in his presence. Mohandas's elder brother was already married. However, it was a triple marriage ceremony. The marriage of Mohandas's second brother, Karsandas and his cousin Motilal also took place at the same time. The triple wedding ceremony was purely a question of 'convenience and economy'.

The marriage was celebrated in a traditional manner with pomp and show. In the words of Joseph J. Doke, the wedding day was very merry and full of enjoyment.¹ Later Gandhi himself writes in his *Autobiography* as follows: "Everything on that day seemed to me right and proper and pleasing. There was also my own eagerness to get married. And as everything that my father did then struck me as beyond reproach, the recollection of those things is fresh in my memory. I can picture to myself, even today, how we sat on our wedding dais, how we performed the *Saptapadi*,² how we, the newly wedded husband and wife, put the sweet *Kansar*³ into each other's mouth, and how we began to live together."⁴ As teenagers they may not have understood the implications of the verses⁵ they had uttered at the time of the final ritual of *Saptapadi* or Seven steps. In their long married life they

remained as helpmates, best friends, learning from each other and sharing each other's joy and sorrows. But in the initial stage of marriage problems cropped up in their relationship.

The journey of the married life of Kastur and Mohandas began in Rajkot where Gandhi family was settled at that time. Describing about his first night with Kastur, Gandhi wrote "And oh! that first night. Two innocent children all unwittingly hurled themselves into the ocean of life."⁶ They were too nervous and shy to face each other. But in the course of time, they gradually began to know each other, and could speak freely without any inhibitions. In her new home in Rajkot, Kastur Kapadia got a new name Kasturbai Gandhi.

Gandhi frankly admits that within no time after marriage he assumed the authority of a husband. "I had absolutely no reason to suspect my wife's fidelity, but jealousy does not wait for reasons. I must needs be forever on the look-out regarding her movements, and therefore she could not go anywhere without my permission. This sowed the seeds of a bitter quarrel between us. The restraint was virtually a sort of imprisonment. And Kasturbai was not the girl to brook any such thing. She made it a point to go out whenever and wherever she liked. More restraint on my part resulted in more liberty being taken by her, and in my getting more and more cross. Refusal to speak to one another thus became the order of the day with us, married children. I think it was quite innocent of Kasturbai to have taken those liberties with my restrictions. How could a guileless girl brook any restraint on going to the temple or on going on visits to friends? If I had the right to impose restrictions on her, had not she also similar right? All this is clear to me today. But at that time I had to make good my authority as a husband!"⁷ Gandhi also admits that his severities were all based on love and theirs was not a 'life of unrelieved bitterness.'

Here we see young immature Mohandas as somewhat jealous and irksome husband trying to impose forcefully his ideas on his wife without giving any sort of liberty. But in young Kasturbai we can see a spirited girl with a self-will and determination trying to assert her rights. Describing those days, Arun Gandhi, grandson and biographer of Kasturba Gandhi wrote “Kastur was an enchanting youngster: intelligent, independent, fearless and unusually pretty.”⁸

Young Mohandas was deeply in love with Kasturbai. “I must say I was passionately fond of her. Even at school I used to think of her, and the thought of nightfall and our subsequent meeting was ever haunting me. Separation was unbearable. I used to keep her awake till late in the night with my idle talk. If with this devouring passion there had not been in me a burning attachment to duty, I should either have fallen a prey to disease and premature death, or have sunk into a burdensome existence. But the appointed tasks had to be gone through every morning, and lying to anyone was out of the question.”⁹

After marriage Mohandas was anxious to teach his wife Kasturbai. Those days, due to the customs and practices he never met his wife in the presence of elders and the teaching was done against her will at night. But his youthful efforts were not much successful because his lustful love left no time for teaching. However, the credit goes to Gandhi for teaching Kasturba who was literally illiterate at the time of marriage and it was only because of his efforts she could read and do simple correspondence in Gujarati.

There was another custom which prevailed in Hindu society those days by which parents did not allow young couples to stay together for a longer period. This was true in the case of Kasturbai and Mohandas. During the first five years of their married life, Kasturbai was in her family almost two

years. This practice according to Gandhi helps in diminishing to a certain extent the evils of child marriage.

Mohandas was in high school at the time of his marriage. It resulted in wasting a year. But his studies were continued. At the High School, he made friendship with Mehtab who was originally his elder brother's classmate. Though illiterate, Kasturbai was very intelligent and she had the ability to judge people. She realized that her husband was in bad company and warned him about it. But Mohandas was not ready to listen neither to Kasturbai nor to his mother and the eldest brother.

Kasturbai by her very nature was courageous and she had no fear of serpents and ghosts. She could easily go out anywhere in the dark. On the contrary, young Mohandas was a coward haunted by the fear of thieves, ghosts, and serpents. Darkness was a terror for him and it was almost impossible for him to sleep without a light burning in the room or go out of the room in the darkness. His friend Mehtab knew about all these weaknesses of Mohandas. He prompted Mohandas to eat meat to overcome these fears and to become courageous. In addition to meat eating his friend even took him to a brothel.

He was also responsible for increasing Mohandas's differences with Kasturbai. "One of the reasons of my differences with my wife was undoubtedly the company of this friend. I was both a devoted and a jealous husband, and this friend fanned the flame of my suspicions about my wife. I never could doubt his veracity. And I have never forgiven myself the violence of which I have been guilty in often having pained my wife by acting on his information. Perhaps only a Hindu wife would tolerate these hardships, and that is why I have regarded woman as an incarnation of tolerance. A servant wrongly suspected may throw up his job, a son in the same case may leave his father's roof, and a friend may put an end to the

friendship. A wife, if she suspects her husband, will keep quiet, but if her husband suspects her, she is ruined. Where is she to go? A Hindu wife may not seek divorce in a law-court. Law has no remedy for her. And I can never forget or forgive myself for having driven my wife to that desperation.”¹⁰ At a tender age Kasturba had to face all these challenges which show her capacity for forbearance in the face of adversity.

In 1884 Mohandas lost his beloved father. He was with Kasturba at the moment of his father’s demise. He felt ‘deeply ashamed and miserable’ about that night. More tragedies were waiting in the life of Mohandas and Kasturba. On November 20, four days after the death of his father Karamchand Gandhi, Kasturba delivered a premature baby. Unfortunately their first child could not survive more than three or four days. Thus Kasturba’s happiness of giving birth to a baby was short lived. She somehow bore all these challenges and difficulties. In 1886, she gave birth to another healthy baby and their life was filled with joy again. It was a gift from God and the son was named as Harilal meaning the son of God.

In 1886 Mohandas passed the matriculation examination and was studying at Samaldas College, in Bhavnagar. Learning that he was studying at the College, a family friend suggested for law studies at England which would equip him to take the position of *diwanship*. With this suggestion young Mohandas began ‘building castles in the air.’ Without much persuasion Kasturba gave approximately two and half kilos of gold,¹¹ which she got mainly from her family at the time of marriage for the proposed education of Mohandas in England. She could save only two bangles which Kaba Gandhi had given her in a solemn function after the marriage. Also she had a gold chain and two red bangles made of elephant horns with thin covering of gold. These ornaments she considered as symbols of love and the blessings of her father in law. She gave her gold ornaments without any conditions or

making any enquiries whether this education would provide some special benefit.¹² Her only concern was that her husband was in difficulty and that was the sufficient reason for taking such a bold decision.

It is true that she definitely had the longing for the gold ornaments at that time and it was quite natural for any girl of her age. Despite the fact that she is illiterate, she understood the significance of education. What makes Kasturbai different from others is that she was intelligent enough to discriminate between what is important and her desires. This clearly shows her generous nature, balanced thinking, discriminating wisdom and the respect for husband's desire to undergo higher studies. She proved herself that she would be ready for any amount of sacrifice for her husband and his family. Young Mohandas also had faith in her that is why he looked for Kasturbai's ornaments for his studies. In a sense Kasturbai identified herself with the husband and his welfare was her primary concern than the earthly belongings.

At the age of eighteen, Mohandas went to England for law studies leaving Kasturbai and his hardly two year old son. He was made outcaste for his decision to go to England by his caste men. His immediate family, Kasturbai and his son were also included in the ban.

While Mohandas was in England his mother passed away and he came to know about it only at the time of his return to India. The passing away of mother in law was a great loss for Kastur and she literally lost her loving guardian in the Gandhi family. In the words of Ganpat Rai "This loss was greater to Kasturba, who was all along being guided by her. The mother-in-law was a religious lady who was most influential in her house. She was, in fact, a woman in a thousand. Young Kasturba derived much of her wisdom, foresight and religious bent of mind from her while her

husband was away. She used to console her and the example of her mother-in-law was better than any percept.”¹³

Mohandas on his return from England, due to the insistence of his brother, did some atonement mechanically to please the caste men. Thus the issue of re-admission to the caste was practically over. English life has not changed Mohandas much. He remained as the same person even after his return from England. He could not overcome his jealousy, suspicion and short temper. “My relations with my wife were still not as I desired. Even my stay in England had not cured me of jealousy. I continued my squeamishness and suspiciousness in respect of every little thing, and hence all my cherished desires remained unfulfilled. I had decided that my wife should learn reading and writing and that I should help her in her studies, but my lust came in the way and she had to suffer for my own shortcoming. Once I went the length of sending her away to her father's house, and consented to receive her back only after I had made her thoroughly miserable. I saw later that all this was pure folly on my part.”¹⁴ Kasturbai again happily returned to the life of Mohandas and tried to understand her husband in a better manner.

Mohandas could not establish himself as a barrister after his return from England. Their second son Manilal was born on October 28, 1892. In the words of Manilal's son, Arun Gandhi, “The arrival of another healthy son was a good omen-a harbinger of better times.”¹⁵ Later Mohandas got the offer from South Africa that changed the life of Kasturbai and Mohandas drastically in future.

Notes and References

1. Joseph J. Doke, *M. K. Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa*, (Delhi : Publications Division),p.28.

2. 'Saptapadi' are seven steps the Hindu bride and groom walk together, making at the same time promises of mutual fidelity and devotion, after which the marriage becomes irrevocable.
3. 'Kansar' is a sweet preparation of wheat which the pair partake of together after the completion of the ceremony.
4. M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad :Navajivan,1940) p.21.
5. The vows Mohandas and Kastur took on the occasion of *Saptapadi* were as follows :
 Take one step that we may have strength of will.
In every worthy wish of yours, I shall be your helpmate.
 Take the second step, that we may be filled with vigour.
In every worthy wish of yours, I shall be your helpmate.
 Take the third step, that we may live in ever-increasing prosperity.
Your joys and sorrows I will share
 Take the fourth step, that we maybe ever full of joy.
I will ever live devoted to you, speaking words of love and praying for your happiness.
 Take the fifth step, that we may serve the people.
I will follow close behind you always, and help you to keep your vow of serving the people.
 Take the sixth step, that we may follow our religious vows in life.
I will follow you in observing our religious vows and duties.
 Take the seventh step, that we may ever live as friends.
It is the fruit of my good deeds that I have you as my husband.
You are my best friend, my highest guru,
and my sovereign lord.
 See Arun Gandhi, *Kasturba : A Life* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000), pp. 11-12.
6. M. K. Gandhi , *An Autobiography*, op.cit.p.21.
7. *Ibid*.pp.22-23.
8. See Arun Gandhi, "Kastur – Wife of Mahatma Gandhi," *DEP* n. 37 / 2018, p.174.

9. M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography* op.cit.p.23.
10. *Ibid* .p.38.
11. Sumitra Kulkarni, granddaughter of Gandhi, calculated that the quantum of gold Kasturbai gave to Mohandas for going to England as approximately 273 *tolas* of gold. This calculation she made on the basis of the price of old gold at that time per *tola* which was 11 rupees. The total amount of money Gandhi got from the sale of gold approximately was Rs. 3000/- Gandhi himself wrote in his *Autobiography* “I suggested the disposal of my wife's ornaments, which could fetch about two or three thousand rupees.” For details see Sumitra Kulkarni, *Anmol Virasat* Vol.III (Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 1988) p.35.
12. *Ibid*.
13. Ganapat Rai, *Gandhi and Kasturba: The Story of their Life*, (Lahore: Kasturba Memorial Publications,1945) p. 20.
14. M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, op.cit., p.116.
15. Arun Gandhi, *Kasturba : A Life* op.cit. p.53.

3

In South Africa

In 1893 Mohandas received an offer from Dada Abdulla and Company, a Memon firm from Porbandar, which had established extensive business in South Africa. The Company needed the services of a barrister for a year to sort out a complicated case. They would pay a fee of £ 105 and would bear the cost of first class tickets and cover all expenses during his stay. It was difficult for young Mohandas and Kasturbai to think of another parting. In his *Autobiography* Gandhi wrote "This time I only felt the pang of parting with my wife. Another baby had been born to us since my return from England. Our love could not yet be called free from lust, but it was getting gradually purer. Since my return from Europe, we had lived very little together; and as I had now become her teacher, however indifferent, and helped her to make certain reforms, we both felt the necessity of being more together, if only to continue the reforms. But the attraction of South Africa rendered the separation bearable. 'We are bound to meet again in a year,' I said to her, by way of consolation, and left Rajkot for Bombay."¹ Though painful, Mohandas had to leave Kasturbai and children at home while sailing for South Africa.

For Mohandas, life in South Africa was a new experience. In South Africa, he became a victim of racial discrimination which he never faced in England. For instance, when he visited the Durban Court, the magistrate ordered him to take off his *turban* (headgear) which he refused and walked out of the Court. While he was travelling to Pretoria with a first class train ticket, he was literally thrown out of the compartment at the Pietermaritzburg railway station. Despite all these humiliations, he continued his work. In Dada

Abdulla's case, he attempted for a compromise and it was finally accepted by Tyeb Sheth, who was the opposing party. An arbitrator was appointed and he successfully completed his services as a barrister.

Mohandas was preparing himself to return to India to join Kasturbai and children after a year of stay. He was given a farewell party on the eve of his return journey to India in April 1894. It was in the midst of the farewell party, Mohandas came across a news item that had appeared in *Natal Mercury* about the proposed Bill by the Natal Government to disenfranchise Indians. It was on the request of the people of Indian origin gathered in the farewell party that he decided to stay back and take up such a case of racial discrimination. Kasturbai was waiting for the reunion but through a letter from Mohandas she came to know that her husband would extend his stay in South Africa to oppose the unjust law. He took the initiative to form Natal Indian Congress in August 1894 and fought for the Indian cause. He also established himself as a lawyer in Durban.

In 1896, Mohandas decided to go home for six months after more than three years of stay in South Africa to fetch his wife and children, and then return to settle there. In the month of June, Mohandas left Durban for India and reached Rajkot in July. His purpose of return to India was to mobilise public opinion and creating more interest in the Indians of South Africa. Kasturbai got hardly any personal time with her husband during his stay this time. In the month of August, Mohandas, the undisputed leader in the making, of the people of Indian origin in South Africa, published *the Green Pamphlet*, regarding the grievances of the Indians in South Africa. While in India, he addressed a number of public meetings in different parts of the country. In November, he received a cable from Dada Abdulla asking him to return to Natal. On the 30th of November, Mohandas left for South Africa by ship viz. S. S. Courland along with his wife and

children. It was Mohandas's first voyage with family. Mohandas literally dictated what his wife and children would wear and other symbols of western civilization including the use of knives and forks during the journey. The Parsis were then regarded as the most civilized people amongst Indians and Mohandas thought of adopting the Parsi style for his family. Accordingly Kasturbai wore the Parsi-sari, and the boys the Parsi coat and trousers. He also insisted on wearing shoes and stockings. Kasturbai or children were not used to all these things. Those days' passengers were not allowed to land at any of the South African ports before a thorough medical examination. As there was plague in Bombay when they started the voyage, the doctor ordered a five days' quarantine because plague germs took twenty-three days at the most to develop. The white residents of Durban were greatly agitated at that time and they were demanding for the repatriation of Indians. The quarantine order was extended from time to time. It was clear that the quarantine order was not on health grounds but mainly intended to coerce the passengers to return to India by somehow intimidating them or the Agent Company. Mohandas Gandhi was their real target. In Gandhi's own words, there were two charges against him "(1) That whilst in India I had indulged in unmerited condemnation of the Natal whites; (2) That with a view to swamping Natal with Indians I had specially brought the two shiploads of passengers to settle there."² But these charges were not true.³ After a long waiting, both the ships from India were permitted to enter the harbour, and orders permitting the passengers to land were passed. It was suggested to Mohandas Gandhi by the legal adviser of the Company that Kasturba Gandhi and the children should first drive to Sheth Rustom's house, whilst Gandhi along with him follow them on foot. It was on January 13, 1897 at 5 p.m. Mohandas landed on the shore. As soon as he landed, some youngsters recognized him and started shouting 'Gandhi,

Gandhi.' In the course of time, more people joined them. He was badly assaulted by the mob. Jane Alexander, the wife of the Police Superintendent of Durban, was passing by and she literally saved Gandhi from lynching. Later Mohandas arrived at Sheth Rustom's place escorted by the police. But the ordeal was not over. In the night, white crowd surrounded Rustom's house shouting, 'We must have Gandhi.' Realising the danger, the Police Superintendent, Richard C. Alexander, sent a message to Gandhi: 'If you would save your friend's house and property and also your family, you should escape from the house in disguise, as I suggest.'⁴ Mohandas agreed to it and escaped the scene in disguise as a constable and reached safely in the police station.

One can very well imagine the hardships Kasturbai had to face on the voyage and on landing in the South African soil. The first journey with the husband to a foreign land became so miserable and the lives of the whole family were in jeopardy. With nineteen days of sea journey and twenty five days of quarantine, she would have been thoroughly exhausted. She could not even accompany her husband even when they were finally allowed to enter. She had to travel with her children to Seth Rustom's house separately. When her husband joined her, she found Mohandas with bruises all over the body due to the attempted lynching by the mob. Even that meeting was short lived and her husband had to escape leaving aside family at Sheth Rustom's house. She showed extraordinary courage and was ready to undergo any type of hardship. After two days Mohandas could leave the Police Station and join Kasturbai and children at Sheth Rustom's house and that set the scene for moving to their own home at Beach Grove.

Notes and References

1. See M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad:Navajivan, 1940,p.130.
2. *Ibid.* p.234.
3. Gandhi wrote in his *Autobiography* "... I was absolutely innocent. I had induced no one to go to Natal. I did not know the passengers when they embarked. And with the exception of a couple of relatives, I did not know the name and address of even one of the hundreds of passengers on board. Neither had I said, whilst in India, a word about the whites in Natal that I had not already said in Natal itself. And I had ample evidence in support of all that I had said." *Ibid.* p.234
4. *Ibid.* p.238.

Life in Beach Grove Villa

Mohandas started leading his life in South Africa with Kasturbai and children in January 1897 in the beautiful Beach Grove villa, which was in a prominent location. It was described as “an unpretentious semidetached, double-storey building with an iron front gate, a side entrance with a passage, and a verandah under the balcony facing the Durban Bay.”¹ In the downstairs, it was furnished in the European style and young Mohandas thought that such a household was necessary in keeping with his position as an Indian barrister in Natal. The Attorney-General, Harry Escombe lived close to Gandhi. It took some time for Kasturbai to get adjusted to the new house and the environment which was altogether different from their house in Rajkot and its surroundings.

The first question they confronted was of educating the children including the nephew. Mohandas had two options before him. The first was sending them to schools for European children. The second was to send them to schools established by Christian missions. Both options were unacceptable to him. In the case of the former, Indian children were not allowed to attend these schools. As a special case, even if his children were admitted, it would be a matter of ‘favour and exception.’ In the case of the latter, Mohandas was unhappy with the education imparted in those schools through the medium of English or incorrect Tamil or Hindi. Even though irregular, Mohandas attempted to educate them himself through his mother tongue as he could not find a suitable Gujarati teacher. He also attempted to provide education through the services of an English teacher under his guidance. He believed

that “young children should not be separated from their parents. The education that children naturally imbibe in a well-ordered household is impossible to obtain in hostels.”² Kasturbai was in a sense happy because through this experiment the children could get the company of their father which was lacking all these years. At the same time, she was worried because both Harilal and the nephew Gokaldas were not getting formal education. In the case of Manilal, he was too young to undergo schooling.

Gandhi himself admits that the experiments in education with his own children were inadequate, and were not in conformity with what he wanted or desired, but he had no regrets about undertaking such experiments or depriving them of the opportunity to undergo formal education in public schools. It was mainly due to his belief that the training they received at the school of experience, or in constant touch with the parents was invaluable.

During this period, Mohandas’s legal profession progressed steadily. But his mind was agitated and he was constantly thinking of simplifying his life and giving service to the suffering people. His Beach Grove villa was opened to all. He recollects an incident of a person afflicted by leprosy coming to their door. “I had not the heart to dismiss him with a meal. So I offered him shelter, dressed his wounds, and began to look after him. But I could not go on like that indefinitely. I could not afford, I lacked the will, to keep him always with me. So I sent him to the government hospital for indentured labourers.”³ With the help of Sheth Rustom, he made it possible to open a small charitable hospital with Dr. Booth as in charge and played the role of a compounder for one or two hours giving medicines in the dispensary attached to the hospital.

His office clerks often stayed with him at Beach Grove villa. Among them there were Hindus and Christians and they

were treated as members of his larger family. In the villa, the rooms had no outlets for dirty water and chamber-pots were kept in each room. These pots were cleaned by Kasturbai or by Mohandas. The clerks who were like family members and they also used to clean their own pots. One of his new clerks, a Christian, born of *Panchama* parents was staying with them. Kasturbai managed the pots of the others, but to clean those used by a *Panchama* seemed to be beyond her limit. Neither she liked to do this work nor could she bear her husband doing it.

Gandhi vividly recalls the picture of reprimanding Kasturbai in this regard. He frankly admits the fact that he “was a cruelly kind husband.” He wrote in his *Autobiography* “I was far from being satisfied by her merely carrying the pot. I would have her do it cheerfully. So I said, raising my voice: 'I will not stand this nonsense in my house.' The words pierced her like an arrow. She shouted back: 'Keep your house to yourself and let me go.' I forgot myself, and the spring of compassion dried up in me. I caught her by the hand, dragged the helpless woman to the gate, which was just opposite the ladder, and proceeded to open it with the intention of pushing her out. The tears were running down her cheeks in torrents, and she cried: 'Have you no sense of shame? Must you so far forget yourself? Where am I to go? I have no parents or relatives here to harbour me. Being your wife, you think I must put up with your cuffs and kicks? For Heaven's sake behave yourself, and shut the gate. Let us not be found making scenes like this!' I put on a brave face, but was really ashamed and shut the gate. If my wife could not leave me, neither could I leave her. We have had numerous bickerings, but the end has always been peace between us. The wife, with her matchless powers of endurance, has always been the victor.”⁴

This matchless power of endurance of Kasturbai gave him a lesson for future that only by undergoing suffering and

appealing to reason one can win the hearts and not by force or violence. It is clear from this incident that both of them were like any other husband and wife and in the course of their life these personalities gradually grew and moved to greater heights.

Despite these quarrels, Mohandas was a loving husband. He read a book, *Ma-ne Shikhaman-Advice to a mother* written in Gujarati, which provides an account of safe labour and instructions on the care of new born babies. In May 1898, Kasturbai gave birth to their child Ramdas at Beach Grove Villa at the presence of doctor and Mohandas.⁵ After the delivery, Kasturbai was down with anemia and Mohandas took special care of newborn baby and Kasturbai and definitely other children too.

Before the outbreak of Boer⁶ War in 1899, Kasturbai realized that she was conceiving another child. In the war, Mohandas Gandhi had raised 1,100 strong Natal Indian Ambulance Corps out of which three or four hundred were free Indians, and the majority was indentured labourers.⁷ The Ambulance Corps was primarily meant to nurse and serve the wounded soldiers in the war. During the period, Mohandas was away from the house for many weeks and Kasturbai rose to the occasion and undertook all responsibilities without disturbing her husband's work. After the relief work, Mohandas felt that his work was over and he should return to India otherwise his main business might become merely money-making.

On May 23, 1900, Kasturbai went into labour so suddenly and gave birth to their fourth child Devdas.⁸ Ensuring the safe delivery of the baby was a challenging task for Mohandas but the study of the subject through the work mentioned earlier was of great help in this regard. After the birth of Devadas, Mohandas was no more looking at Kasturbai

as an object of his lust and started the practice of self-control which was more or less successful.

On the eve of his departure for India in October 1901 farewell meetings were arranged at different places, and costly gifts were presented to Mohandas Gandhi and his family. The gifts included things in gold and silver and diamond as well. One of the gifts was a gold necklace worth fifty guineas, meant for Kasturbai. Gandhi decided to create a trust and hand over all the gifts in favour of the community. The children readily agreed to his proposal and he wanted the children to plead with their mother. Gandhi recalls the arguments he had with Kasturbai.

“You may not need them’, said my wife.’ Your children may not need them. Cajoled, they will dance to your tune. I can understand your not permitting me to wear them. But what about my daughters-in-law? They will be sure to need them. And who knows what will happen tomorrow? I would be the last person to part with gifts so lovingly given.’....I mildly put in: ‘The children have yet to get married. We do not want to see them married young. When they are grown up, they can take care of themselves. And surely we shall not have, for our sons, brides who are fond of ornaments. And if after all, we need to provide them with ornaments, I am there. You will ask me then. “Ask you? I know you by this time. You deprived me of my ornaments, you would not leave me in peace with them. Fancy you offering to get ornaments for the daughters-in-law! You who are trying to make *sadhus* of my boys from today! No, the ornaments will not be returned. And pray what right have you to my necklace? “But’, I rejoined, ‘is the necklace given you for your service or for my service?’”I agree. But service rendered by you is as good as rendered by me. I have toiled and moiled for you day and night. Is that no service? You forced all and sundry on me, making me weep bitter tears, and I slaved for them!” ”⁹

From this discussion it is clear that it was not that Kasturbai wanted to keep it for herself but she was thinking about the security of the family and keeping in mind future daughter in laws. Even in the case of Mohandas, he could undergo law studies in England due to the gold Kasturbai possessed. Now that Mohandas was in the process of becoming the future Mahatma and was convinced that a public worker should not accept any costly gifts for the services he rendered to the society. Somehow he took consent from Kasturbai and formed a trust for the management of the gifts. On October 18, 1901 he sailed for India with his family, promising that he would return, if community needed his services.

Notes and References

1. Gandhi found this Beach Grove villa on 17 July 1894 for 8 pounds and moved to the same on 7 August 1894. See Paul Tichmann, *Gandhi Sites in Durban*, p.21.
<https://www.hcipretoria.gov.in/docs/Gandhi%20sites%20in%20Durban.pdf>
2. M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1940), pp.245-246.
3. *Ibid.* p.249.
4. *Ibid.* p.339.
5. Arun Gandhi, *Kasturba: A Life* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000), p.86.
6. Boers were the descendants of the original Dutch settlers of Southern Africa.
7. M. K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, (Madras :G.A. Natesan, 1928), pp110-20.
8. Arun Gandhi, *Kasturba: A Life* op.cit .p.86.
9. See M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, op.cit., pp.271-272.

Reunion

It was in the month of December 1901 Mohandas Gandhi and his family returned to Rajkot from South Africa. After a brief stint, Gandhi left Rajkot to set up legal practice in Bombay. Gandhi was back in South Africa in the month of December 1902 leaving aside Kasturba and children in Bombay. Gandhi wanted Kasturba to join him at Johannesburg. In a letter¹ Gandhi wrote to H. V. Vora² on June 30, 1903 from Johannesburg, he expressed the desire that Kasturba should join him by the end of the year. "I told her that either I should return to India at the end of the year or that she should come here by that time. I am most anxious to fulfill the promise. How to do so is the difficulty. To return at the end of the year is out of the question. It however, she would allow me to recede from the promise and not insist on coming here, there is a likelihood of my being able to return to India earlier than I otherwise would. In any case, according to present plans, I must not think of returning for three or four years. Will she consent to remaining there all that time? If she does not, then, of course, she must come here at the end of the year, and I must quietly settle down in Johannesburg for ten years or so. It will, however, be a terrible thing to establish a new home here and to break it up as I did in Natal. Experience teaches me that it would cost a very great deal and, if there were great difficulties about it in Natal, they will be greater in Johannesburg. Please, therefore, consider this thing and, if Mrs. Gandhi is where you are, then you may all consult and let know. I do think, however, that if she would consent to remain there, for the time being at any rate, it would enable me to give undivided attention to public work. As she knows, she had very little of my company in Natal; probably, she would have less in Johannesburg. However, I wish to be

guided entirely by her sentiments and I place myself absolutely in her hands. If she must come, then she may make preparations in October and leave in the beginning of November. Between now and then there will be plenty of time for exchange of news”³

Further in a letter addressed to Chhaganlal Gandhi on November 18, 1903 asked him to bring Kasturba even if she doesn't wish to stay for a long time thinking that it will be good for her. "... I cannot make any sort of promise to your aunt (Kasturba) . I think I shall take another four years. I do not like the idea of her staying there for the sake of the jewellery or any such temptation. If she wishes to stay there, she should live contented and without being a burden to others. But if she cannot do that she has my permission to come over. Read this to her”⁴ Further he wrote in the same letter. "...Bring your aunt here if she wants to come, even if she does not wish to stay here long. I think it will be good. But if you think that you will not feel comfortable on a steamer, I shall not insist that you come braving hardships. In such a case you can make alternative arrangements. I see no harm in [your aunt] coming alone by the S.S. Nadia.”⁵ Kasturba arrived in South Africa towards the end of 1904.⁶ The eldest son Harilal stayed back in India because he was keen to sit for the Bombay Matriculation.⁷ Other sons and two nephews Gokuldas and Chhaganlal accompanied Kasturba.⁸

While Kasturba and children were coming back to South Africa on the ship, their third son Ramdas, broke his arm while playing with the ship's captain. The ship's doctor attended on Ramdas and provided domiciliary treatment and advised that, as soon they reach home, the wound should be dressed by a qualified medical practitioner. Those days Gandhi had deep faith in earth treatment and took the responsibility of treating him. Gandhi could undertake such experiments because Kasturba and his children had deep faith in him. The wound

was completely healed within a month through his treatment which was basically the application of clean earth poultice and regular dressing.

The influence of John Ruskin's work not only resulted in the establishment of Phoenix Settlement in 1903 but also a severe overhauling of Gandhi's Johannesburg household. The Johannesburg villa was also double storied with eight rooms. Therefore, it was easy to accommodate in this modern villa Henry Polak and later his wife Millie with them. Gandhi tried to introduce as much simplicity as possible in the household. As a barrister, it was necessary for Gandhi to have certain amount of furniture in their house. Gandhi family literally stopped buying baker's bread. It was replaced by unleavened whole-meal bread prepared at home taking into consideration 'simplicity, health and economy.' For the same a hand-mill was purchased. The iron wheel of the hand mill was too heavy and it was difficult to operate it by one person but could easily be handled by two persons. Henry Polak, Gandhi and his children used to work on it. Kasturba also occasionally lent a hand in grinding, though it was in conflict with her usual time for commencing kitchen work. No servants were employed in the household and all kind of work including scavenging was done by them including the children. There was no arrangement for private tuition in the Johannesburg household and Gandhi himself undertook the responsibility of teaching the children. He used to walk with the children daily to the office and back home. It not only provided enough exercise but also an opportunity to instruct the children during these walks. Other than the instruction on the occasion of these walks, he could not give time regularly for their literary education. Gandhi always talked to children in Gujarati and Polak felt that his friend is spoiling the future of the children by not talking to them in English. The presence of Millie in their household provided an opportunity to Kasturba to learn spoken English from her in a

natural way. She also taught the children reading, writing and arithmetic.

Gandhi was turning more and more ascetic and he even stopped the payment of insurance policy which he took while in Bombay. Gandhi was keen about the clothes his children and wife should wear when he brought his family first time with him to South Africa. Gandhi was indifferent towards all these now. Kasturba played a balancing act. She used to place before Gandhi the requirements of children through Millie in an indirect way. In the words of Millie Polak 'Mrs. Gandhi, like most mothers, was proud of and ambitious for her children, and, among other things, she wanted them to be nicely clothed. Apart from her, the household wore European clothes, so that, when new shoes or a new suit was wanted for one of the boys and Mr. Gandhi seemed indifferent to the need, Mrs. Gandhi would often say to me: "You ask Bapu for it," and I did.'⁹

Millie further throws light on the strong personality of Kasturba who really defies her husband when it comes to arrogant persons who are not ready to respect the privacy of the people. She gives clear signals of her resentment with such persons. Millie explains such an incident in the following words "On one occasion, some Europeans had invited themselves to dinner. Mr. Gandhi did not know them very well and Mrs. Gandhi not at all. When they arrived, they were frankly and almost rudely curious about the home-life, asking all kinds of intimate questions in a very arrogant manner. Mr. Gandhi answered quite kindly, but laughed at many of the statements about what they thought Indian people did or did not do. Mrs. Gandhi had, from the first, been angry about them, and before we went to the dining-room she disappeared. Mr. Gandhi sent for her, but she did not come. Eventually, Mr. Gandhi went himself in search of his wife, and found her in her room, but she refused to come down. The dinner passed off, Mr. Gandhi giving some explanation for his wife's absence.

The next day when I saw her, she told me that she would not have people come to the house just for idle curiosity and to "make laugh" of her and her home. So that, if they came, they would not see her. Bapu could see them himself. I think Mr. Gandhi tried to reason her out of this mood, but she stuck to her opinion and was not moved by any of our arguments."¹⁰

It was in 1906 that Zulus rebelled against the British. Once again Gandhi decided to raise an Ambulance Corps to serve the wounded involved in the war. He wrote to the Governor and his proposal was immediately accepted. Before that he decided to vacate the Johannesburg home and asked Kasturba to settle at Phoenix. Kasturba never objected to her husband's ideas even if it involved a lot of inconvenience for her. Gandhi wrote in his *Autobiography* "I had her full consent to this decision. I do not remember her having ever stood in my way in matters like this."¹¹ Thus a new life was in waiting for Kasturba at Phoenix.

Notes and References

1. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Vol. 3, (1893-1903),(New Delhi: Publications Division,1901) pp.424-26.
2. Haridas Vakhatchand Vora, a leading lawyer of Kathiawar, who pleaded against Gandhiji's excommunication after return from England in 1891, and later helped him in his early practice at Rajkot.
3. *CWMG*, op.cit., Vol.3., p.425.
4. From the Gujarati original: C.W. 11294.
5. *Ibid.*
6. In many writings including Gandhi's *Autobiography* there is no mention about the year in which Kasturba joined him. Ramchandra Guha mentions it as end of 1904. See Ramchandra Guha, *Gandhi Before India*, (New Delhi: Penguin, 2013), p.177. Rajmohan Gandhi also points out that it took

place in the last quarter of 1904. He wrote “In the middle of 1903, realizing that he was not likely to return anytime soon to India, Gandhi sent for his wife and boys, but difficulty in finding an escort and other hitches delayed their arrival until the last quarter of 1904. See Rajmohan Gandhi, *Mohandas: A True Story of a Man, His People, and an Empire* (Penguin: New Delhi, 2007) p.112. J. N. Uppal in his book says that early in 1905 Kasturba joined Gandhi at Johannesburg. See J. N. Uppal *Gandhi Ordained in South Africa*, (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1995), p.203. In Arun Gandhi’s book *Kasturba: A life* says that Kasturba and her sons arrived in early in 1904. (p.114) Further he states that “one day in March of 1904, Mohandas sent word by messenger to Kasturba that he would not be able to come home until the next morning” (p.115). It was due to outbreak of plague in the location. He further elaborates she played a role in educating the women and mobilizing them to clean a warehouse which could be as a hospital.(pp.116-117) Similarly in Aparna Basu’s work *Kasturba Gandhi* also there is reference to it.

However, it is pertinent note that there is no mention a bout Kasturba’s presence in the Plague site in Gandhi’s *Autobiography* and other major biographies. In Sumitra Kulkarni’s work *Anmol Virasat* there is a chapter dealing with Coolie location and Plague. Here also there is no reference to Kasturba’s presence. Discussion about the arrival of his family is on the chapter “Whom God Protects” in Gandhi’s *Autobiography* which is after the chapters on Black Plague, Phoenix Settlement. Phoenix was established by Gandhi in November –December 1904.

7. Ramchandra Guha, *Gandhi Before India*, p.177.
8. *Ibid*.p.177.
9. Milie Graham Polak, *Mr. Gandhi: The Man*, (Bombay: Vora, 1949), p.22.
10. *Ibid* .p.24.
11. M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1940) p.383.

Phoenix Settlement

In 1903, Gandhi started *Indian Opinion* to consolidate the Indian community and to serve as a platform for raising their issues. Later he got an opportunity to read John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* in a train journey. Reading of this book brought 'instantaneous and practical transformation' in his life. He decided to reorient his life according to the principles outlined in this book which led to the establishment of Phoenix Settlement in 1904. He not only shifted the press of *Indian Opinion* to the settlement but also took a number of steps to lead a life of simplicity and put into practice the principles of dignity of labour and self reliance.

Millie Polak graphically depicts ideals and principles of the Settlements and its work. "Phoenix ... comprised about a hundred acres of fertile land and was situated about fourteen miles from Durban, in the midst, at the time, of the sugar-cultivated lands of the north coast of Natal. Here a colony had been established on Tolstoyan principles. The original members, who had been induced by Mr. Gandhi to become pioneer settlers, comprised a small group of Indian and European idealists who intended to work together and put their ideals into working practice. Here had been set up the printing press where *Indian Opinion* was printed, published and dispatched to various parts of South Africa and overseas.... The colony was to be as much as possible self-supporting, and life's material requirements were to be reduced to a minimum. Each member or householder of the community was to have two acres of land for his own use and cultivation and a simple house to live in. Should any member vacate his house or holding, it

could not be sold, but was to be passed on to another member.”¹

“There was to be a school organized on very simple lines, where pupils should be taught elementary school subjects, but where the main teaching, should be for the purpose of character-building and to find God in natural beauty and in their own inner selves. No dogmas of any kind were to be taught, and even the few set subjects were to be sufficiently elastic to allow for complete individual freedom.”²

“There was also to be a house of healing, where only so-called "natural" means of healing were to be resorted to.”³

Although Gandhi started the Settlement at Phoenix, he could not stay there regularly as it was anticipated. On the wake of Zullu Rebellion in June 1906, Kasturba and children moved to Phoenix. Millie recollects the experiences of their first day in the Settlement. “My first view of Phoenix disappointed and depressed me. Mrs. Gandhi, too, did not feel happy at being transplanted from the town, with its domestic and human amenities, to the more primitive conditions which prevailed at the settlement. She and I shared a little room the first night we arrived, and lay awake talking and grumbling for hours. We were probably overtired, both nervously and physically; for we had had two days and a night in a train, and at the end of that a long two-mile tramp along a badly constructed road across difficult country, our path lighted only by a flickering lamp, and the fear of snakes constantly in our minds. The youngest boy also had become tired and commenced to cry miserably. When we reached our destination, we had to set to work to make beds ready, and all the arrangements for the night.”⁴

Ramdas Gandhi, third son of Gandhi and Kasturba, in his reminiscences of the Phoenix wrote: “Some awareness of the moral splendor of Ba and Bapu began to penetrate into my

mind between 1906 and 1909, when I was in the Phoenix Ashram in South Africa. The knowledge of their uncanny effulgence percolated not only into my mind, it also dawned upon my two elder brothers and Devadas, my younger brother. Phoenix is thirteen miles from Durban. These days, communication between Phoenix and Durban is easy, and there has been a lot of new settlement in the stretch of land lying between the two cities. But when Bapu was in Phoenix, things were different. Tall grass used to grow all around the town. It all looked like a vast forest. Living in such a secluded spot was rather queer and inconvenient not only for Ba, but also for those who had taken the pledge of social service along with Bapu. It was hard test for all of us. It is a proof of the fearless mettle of Ba and Bapu that they carried on their social experiments here, and also created bonds of love and sympathy amongst all their Ashram colleagues.”⁵

Ramdass was just ten years old at that time. He further succinctly describes the rigorous religious life Kasturba followed in the settlement. “Ba’s devotion to God and to Kuldeo left a deep impress upon my mind. She used to be the first to rise in the morning, and the earliest to take her holy bath and get ready for the morning. There was a small room near her bedroom and although it occasionally housed convalescing patients, it was Ba’s prayer room. Here she used to pour Ghee into a beautiful brass lamp-stand, make wicks out of a swab of cotton, and light the lamp. Here she recited the prayers and songs she had learnt from her grandmother. This was followed by offerings to the Sun of holy water, rive and Kumkum. Through happy days and through unhappy ones she followed this pattern rigorously-even while she fell sick. This infallible, invincible regularity almost like that of the moon and the stars, could not but leave a deep mark on our lives.”⁶

In May 1906, Harilal, their first son, got married to Gulab in India with the blessings of Gandhi’s elder brother

Lakshmidas Gandhi. Harilal was 18 years old at the time of marriage, and Gulab only 15 years. Gandhi expressed his displeasure over Harilal's marriage. Undoubtedly Kasturba was also not much happy at the turn of events.

It was during the Phoenix phase, after completing his services as a stretcher bearer in the Zulu Rebellion, Gandhi took the vow of *Brahmacharya* in 1906. On returning to Phoenix in month of July, he broached the subject of *brahmacharya* with Chhaganlal, Maganlal, West and others. All of them appreciated the necessity of taking the vow. At the same time, they also pointed out the practical difficulties in undertaking this task. Gandhi took the plunge and decided to observe the vow of *brahmacharya*. Gandhi wrote "After full discussion and mature deliberation I took the vow in 1906. I had not shared my thoughts with my wife until then, but only consulted her at the time of taking the vow. She had no objection. But I had great difficulty in making the final resolve. I had not the necessary strength. How was I to control my passions? The elimination of carnal relationship with one's wife seemed then a strange thing. But I launched forth with faith in the sustaining power of God."⁷ From the words of Gandhi, it is clear that he had mature deliberation and discussion with others on this matter and not with his wife Kasturba. Consultation with her in this matter took place only at the time of taking the vow. Gandhi admits the fact that even though the matter was not discussed with her she had no objection in this regard.

Gandhi's experiments in self restraint could be traced from the year 1900 and it took a concrete shape in the form of a vow in 1906. It was a difficult task for Gandhi to arrive at such a decision. But that was not at all a difficult path to follow in the case of Kasturba. It shows the strength and qualities she possessed. Gandhi had that realization that is why he wrote "... she is blessed with one great quality to a very considerable degree, a quality which most Hindu wives possess in some

measure. And it is this; willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, she has considered herself blessed in following in my footsteps, and has never stood in the way of my endeavour to lead a life of restraint. Though, therefore, there is a wide difference between us intellectually, I have always had the feeling that ours is a life of contentment, happiness and progress.”⁸

On August 22, 1906 the draft Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance was published in Transvaal Government Gazette. It sought to make it compulsory for every Indian above the age of eight living in Transvaal to register himself/ herself, failing which they would be facing all types of consequences including deportation. There was a great stir among Indian community against the Ordinance and Gandhi termed it a ‘Black Act.’ A meeting was held at the Empire theatre building of Johannesburg on 11th of September 1906. It was unanimously decided to resist this highly discriminatory Act irrespective of its costs and consequences. They decided to struggle against it ‘in the name of God’ or with’ God as witness.’ That decision is taken to be the birth of *Satyagraha*. These momentous decisions in his life had a lot to do with his experiences as a stretcher bearer during the Zulu rebellion.

Gandhi was no more a family man. He dedicated his life for the cause of people of Indian origin in South Africa and led a number of *satyagraha* struggles in the course of time and he was hardly available to look after the affairs of the settlement. In the absence of Gandhi in the settlement, Kasturba had to bear all the responsibilities and with her motherly love she played an important role in running the settlement. That is why she is aptly described as an “anchor in the Settlement.”

Ramdas Gandhi further throws light on Kasturba’s keenness on more matters relating to education. Her life was always filled with love and strict discipline. “But while he was writing ‘Hind Swaraj’ he had clearly realized that the

prevailing curriculum was positively harmful for Indians. It was therefore decided that we received our early education at home. The responsibility for arranging this came on the shoulders of illiterate Ba. Bapu used to do the pedagogue when he got time. Chhaganlal bhai also tutored us at times. But our more regular tutors were Kashiben Gandhi and Santoshben Gandhi. Like every mother, Ba was worried about our progress in education, and she was especially worried when Bapu was absent from Ashram. Although Ba was full of love, she was something of a disciplinarian as well. When she came to learn that I am lagging behind in my studies, she fretted and fumed and cursed herself. She was all set to deliver me harsh words and a hearty spanking, I kept avoiding her for hours, and played hide and seek till lunch. Her temper had cooled off by then. Bapu used to assert that there always was a noble purpose underlying Ba's anger, and one who has seen her heart of gold would always respect her anger too."⁹

Harilal along with his wife Gulab arrived in South Africa in April, 1907. After living with his father for a while at Johannesburg, Harilal moved to Phoenix where his wife was. Kasturba for sure was happy because both of them joined her at Phoenix. But her happiness was short lived. In response to the Asiatic Act, *satyagraha* was initiated under the leadership of Gandhi and he was arrested on January 1908 and sentenced to jail for two months. In October he was again arrested and sentenced for the second time to imprisonment with hard labour for two months. Kasturba expressed her solidarity with her husband by eating the same plain cornmeal porridge that he was being fed in the Volksrust prison. When Gandhi came to know that Kasturba was gravely ill he wrote a letter from the prison on November 9, 1908.¹⁰

Beloved Kastur,

I have received Mr. West's telegram today about your illness. It cuts my heart. I am very much grieved but I am not in

a position to go there to nurse you. I have offered my all to the Satyagraha struggle. My coming there is out of the question. I can come only if I pay the fine, which I must not. If you keep courage and take the necessary nutrition, you will recover. If, however, my ill luck so has it that you pass away, I should only say that there would be nothing wrong in your doing so in your separation from me while I am still alive. I love you so dearly that even if you are dead, you will be alive to me. Your soul is deathless. I repeat what I have frequently told you and assure you that if you do succumb to your illness, I will not marry again. Time and again I have told you that you may quietly breathe your last with faith in God. If you die, even that death of yours will be a sacrifice to the cause of Satyagraha. My struggle is not merely political. It is religious and therefore quite pure. It does not matter much whether one dies in it or lives. I hope and expect that you will also think likewise and not be unhappy. I ask this of you.

Mohandas

Gandhi was once again arrested on January 16, 1909 at Volksrust on his way to Johannesburg after seeing Kasturba who was seriously ill at Phoenix. However he was released on bail. As the struggle was continuing he was arrested and imprisoned for the third time for three months in February 1909.

It was in this context that Joseph Doke the first biographer of Gandhi described Kasturba as a heroic wife. "Mrs. Gandhi has been a true-hearted, heroic wife. During these months of trouble, she has suffered severely. It has been her affliction to be unable to share her husband's imprisonment, but she has fasted and wept until her health has broken under the strain; while she has, reluctantly but heroically, given her eldest son to be with him, and like a true and loyal Indian wife, the little bride of Porbandar has done her duty. She lives now

with three of her sons, a daughter-in-law, and a grand-child, in the settlement of Phoenix. Her eldest boy, Harilal, father of the little one, is now awaiting his trial, as a passive resister, in Volksrust Gaol."¹¹

Kasturba had an unusual capacity to bear suffering to any extent. She was suffering from haemorrhage and an operation was suggested in her case. But she was too weak to withstand the effects of chloroform and she had to undergo it even without chloroform. Referring to this Gandhi said to Mahadev Desai "At the time of the operation I stood a little away from the operation-table. I was trembling. The surgeon's knife was at work. Ba's face visibly showed how much she was suffering. But not even once did any cry of pain escape her lips. I could not bear the painful sight, though outwardly I went on asking Ba to keep up her courage." Mahadev Desai observed, "It was, indeed, a miracle of human capacity to bear suffering." Gandhi rejoined, "Yes, anyone else in her place would have raised such hue and cry. But Ba showed exemplary calm and courage."¹²

After the operation, Gandhi returned to Johannesburg and she was under the care of the doctor. As the condition of Kasturba was worsening the doctor telephoned Gandhi and asked his permission to give beef tea to his wife. Though Gandhi was not in favour of giving beef tea he asked the doctor to consult Kasturba and made it clear that if she wished to have it she could. Taking note of the precarious condition of Kasturba the doctor asked him to come over. He rushed to Durban and consulted her. Her reply to Gandhi shows her determination and commitment to values which she considered important. "I will not take beef tea. It is a rare thing in this world to be born as a human being, and I would far rather die in your arms than pollute my body with such abominations.

I pleaded with her. I told her that she was not bound to follow me. I cited to her the instances of Hindu friends and acquaintances who had no scruples about taking meat or wine as medicine. But she was adamant. 'No,' said she, 'pray remove me at once.'¹³ Finally she was shifted to Phoenix with much difficulty. After couple of days of her arrival at Phoenix a Swami visited her and pleaded with Kasturba to take meat. He tried to convince her on the religious harmlessness of taking meat, citing verses from the *Manusmriti*. However, her faith was unshakable. She said to Swami: "whatever you may say, I do not want to recover by means of beef tea. Pray don't worry me anymore. You may discuss the thing with my husband and children if you like. But my mind is made up."¹⁴

In 1913, Kalidas Gandhi, an elder member of the family, came to the Phoenix to stay there for a few days. At the time of taking meal with Gandhi, he observed that Kasturba was engaged in cleaning up the kitchen which was done by servants even in the case of an ordinary businessman. So he told Gandhi "You have made such a radical change in your life and introduced such austere simplicity, too, that poor Kasturbai never seems to have got any chance to enjoy life." Gandhi replied, "But I have never prevented her from doing so." Kasturba intervened and said in somewhat teasing manner "But tell me, have I ever had any luxury or pleasures in your home?" Gandhi responded in the same strain, "But have I even once dissuaded you from wearing silk and ornaments? And when you wanted to wear golden bangles, did I not get these made for you?" Kasturba replied, "Of course, you gave me all those things. But how could I use them when I saw you leading a life of self abnegation? I had, therefore, no other alternative but to fall into line with you."¹⁵ Thus we can see that Kasturba as an ideal wife embracing the life of renunciation which her husband was rigorously following.

Swami Bhawani Dayal, Hindi editor of the *Indian Opinion* depicts Kasturba as an embodiment of service, with strong reasoning ability and a fighter for human rights while sharing his reminiscences at the Settlement. He wrote : “More than thirty one years ago, the very day of my arrival in the Union of South Africa , I saw Mata Kasturba for the first time at Phoenix...The Phoenix Ashram was what one might call a laboratory in which Bapu made his experiments with truth along his life-partner Ba. In this Ashram I lived for a few months in 1914, after my release from prison, as the Hindi editor of the *Indian Opinion*, a weekly journal founded by Bapu in 1903. Here I saw a good deal of Ba, and the more I saw the more I liked her. Though she did not have the benefit of schooling, owing to her early marriage, she was more than a match to any educated person in her understanding, power of reasoning and national spirit in fighting for our human rights in South Africa.

After her release from prison, my wife fell seriously ill in Durban and the doctors who attended on her were unable to effect a cure. Bapu kindly invited her to Phoenix. To meet her at the station Bapu waited himself with a hand-cart. He very tenderly helped her into it, pushing the cart alone, having refused all assistance, a distance of two and a half miles back to the Ashram. Ba was entrusted with the work of looking after her and she actually saved her life by the tireless nursing, even though the health of Ba herself was almost shattered in the prison, and I can still remember what a distressing sight it was. After a week’s treatment in which only mud plasters had been applied, my wife was able to walk about. In addition to his multifarious duties Bapu was also the ‘medical officer’ and Ba gladly helped him as a matron of the Ashram.

The memory of those days will ever remain fixed and fresh in any mind. My close association with Bapu and Ba in Natal changed the course of my life. I went there with an

ambition to amass wealth and lead a comfortable life, but the day I saw Bapu and Ba at Phoenix a divine inspiration forced me instantly to dedicate my life to the cause of my countrymen abroad according to my own lights.”¹⁶ Gandhi and Kasturba were inseparable and they remained as a source of inspiration for many in devoting their life for noble causes.

Notes and References

1. Milie Graham Polak, *Mr. Gandhi: The Man*, (Bombay: Vora, 1949), p. 35-6.
2. *Ibid.*, p.36.
3. *Ibid.*, p.36.
4. *Ibid.*, p.38.
5. Ramdas Gandhi, “A Paragon of Motherly Love”, in *Kasturba Memorial* (Indore: Kasturba National Memorial Trust, 1962) p.135.
6. *Ibid.* p.135.
7. M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad :Navajivan, 1940), p.256.
8. *Ibid.*, p.340.
9. Ramdas Gandhi, “A Paragon of Motherly Love”, op.cit., p.135.
10. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Vol.9, (September 1, 1908 - November 12, 1909), (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1963), p.106.
11. Joseph J. Doke, *M. K.Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa*, (Delhi : Publications Division), p.29.
12. See Mukulbhai Kalarthi *Ba and Bapu* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1988), p.11.
13. M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, (Ahmedabad : Navajivan, 1940), p.396.
14. *Ibid.* p.397.
15. See Mukulbhai Kalarthi, *Ba and Bapu*, op.cit.p.5.
16. Ganapat Rai, *Gandhi and Kasturba: The Story of their Life*, (Lahore: Kasturba Memorial Publications, 1945), pp.49-51.

Tolstoy Farm

Tolstoy Farm, which Gandhi established during the second *satyagraha* campaign against the Asiatic Registration Bill was a corollary to the Phoenix settlement. But it differed from Phoenix in certain aspects. The most appropriate description of Tolstoy Farm would be a “sort of co-operative commonwealth”.¹ It was difficult for Gandhi to accommodate *satyagrahis* and their families in Phoenix because it was very far from the Transvaal, where the resistance movement was centered around poor Indians living there. It was Hermann Kallenbach, a Lithuanian-born architect and close associate of Gandhi, who bought a farm of about 1100 acres, 21 miles from Johannesburg and offered it to Gandhi and the *satyagrahis* rent-free on 30 May, 1910,² with the condition that the settlers withdrew on the termination of the struggle. On June 4, 1910 Gandhi and Kallenbach shifted to Tolstoy Farm. Kasturba along with Ramdas and Devdas joined them later when accommodation was ready. Though the number of women in the Farm was less, Kasturba had the company of Veeramal, wife of Thambi Naidoo and others. With Rambhaben she could communicate in Gujarati.

Like in Phoenix, arrangements were made for the education of children at Tolstoy Farm too. During this period Gandhi was of the view that, under ideal conditions, true education could be imparted only by the parents. Gandhi wrote in his *Autobiography* “.... Tolstoy Farm was a family, in which I occupied the place of the father, and that I should so far as possible shoulder the responsibility for the training of the young.”³ He further wrote: “I had always given the first place

to the culture of the heart or the building of character, and as I felt confident that moral training could be given to all alike, no matter how different their ages and their upbringing, I decided to live amongst them all the twenty-four hours of the day as their father. I regarded character building as the proper foundation for their education and, if the foundation was firmly laid, I was sure that the children could learn all the other things themselves or with the assistance of friends.”⁴ At Tolstoy Farm, efforts were made to provide literary education through the medium of the vernacular languages of the pupils. Gandhi went a step further by adding useful vocations like sandal making and simple carpentry. In the course of educational experiments at the farm, Gandhi realised that spiritual training could not be imparted through religious books. According to him, “the exercise of the spirit entirely depended on the life and character of the teacher”.⁵ His experiment in co-education at Tolstoy Farm was of the most fearless type and he encouraged the boys and girls to do everything together, including taking baths at the nearby spring. But Gandhi’s eyes always followed the girls like that of a mother. At the Farm, youth came from diverse social backgrounds and some of them were ‘bad and unruly.’ Kallenbach and Kasturba feared that Gandhi’s children pick up bad habits from these boys. Gandhi on the contrary believed that his children will learn to discriminate between good and evil.

From a letter Gandhi wrote to Maganlal Gandhi on March 9, 1911⁶, he shared the information about the illness of Kasturba which was withheld so far. It also depicts the sense of humor and their experiments in diet. He was so concerned about the health of Kasturba that he took the same food with her. He always asked the people to follow his ideals and ideas after he put them into practice in his day to day life.

He wrote: “Ba became nervous when she had a sudden attack of acute pain. I was busy and could not go to see her a

second time. She must have got angry and when I went to her she burst into tears and made it appear as if she would die. I felt somewhat awkward, but immediately recovered myself and said to her with a smile, "Nothing to worry about if you die. There is plenty of wood. We shall cremate you on this Farm itself." At this she also laughed. Half the pain disappeared with the laugh. Then I decided that very strong remedies were called for. Earth alone would not do. So I suggested to her that she should give up vegetables and salt altogether. She should live on wheat and fruits only. She might take, if she wanted, saltless rice with ghee. She said, "Even you cannot do it." I said, "From today I give up salt, vegetables, etc." How could she take these things then? The result is that for the last one month both of us have been taking food without salt, vegetables and pulses. As for myself, I have no desire for other food. Ba has it sometimes. Once when she could not restrain herself, she took a little gavar. Otherwise it appears she has lived on this diet. There was a miraculous change for the better. The bleeding stopped immediately. I got the incidental benefit of extra self-control. This is my argument [as regards the eschewing of salt]: Salt is a powerful chemical. Even a little when added to something changes its quality and taste. Its effect must be to thin the blood. So far as I can think, salt is bound to have an instant effect on the sick—and mostly adverse at that. When I first read the writings of Mrs. Wallace and others [on the subject], they had little effect on me. On this occasion I felt all the time that it would be fine if the doctor could be kept away. Thereupon, it occurred to me to note the effect of saltless diet. Even though Ba may continue her [saltless diet] throughout this month, she won't keep it up beyond that. I think of carrying on the experiment as long as possible."⁷

Harilal Gandhi's elder son was a great resister and spent most of his time in prison from June 1909 to January 1911.⁸ At the Farm, he used to work and learnt the art of sandal

making and used to join others in the long walk to Johannesburg and back. But this 23 year old father of two was unhappy and he wanted to go the Punjab to complete his studies. One day in May 1911 he simply ran away from the farm. It affected the whole family and Kasturba's condition was pitiable. She could not control her emotions and wept badly. Gandhi failed to understand the feelings of his son and tried to read his mind on his return. Harilal was having a feeling that Gandhi suppressed all his four children. After long discussion Gandhi accepted his decision to continue his studies but advised him to study in Ahmedabad rather than Punjab. Harilal left finally the Tolstoy Farm on May 17, 1911.⁹

Kasturba played an important role in running of the the kitchen at the Farm. In 1912, Gandhi in a letter to Rattan Tata wrote the following: "No paid servants are kept on the farm in connection either with the school or the kitchen. Mrs. Gandhi and Mrs. Sodha, assisted by two or three of the pupils, who are changed every week, attend to the whole of cooking. Non-smoking, non-drinking and vegetarianism are obligatory on the farm."¹⁰

In September 1912, Kasturba who was not in good health returned to Phoenix with Devdas. Gopal Krishna Gokhale reached Cape Town on October 22, 1912 with the knowledge of Indian government, primarily to investigate the whole Indian question in South Africa for himself. Gandhi chalked out Gokhale's tour and accompanied him till he left for India on November 29, 1912. In January 1913, after Gokhale left, Gandhi closed the Tolstoy Farm near Johannesburg and moved to the Phoenix Settlement in Natal. He felt that a final settlement between the Indian community and the government would be possible. He also shifted the school at Tolstoy Farm to Phoenix. Some of the youth accompanied him to Phoenix.

Notes and References

1. M. K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa* (Madras: S. Ganesan, 1928), p.357.
2. *Ibid.* p.358.
3. M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1940), p.407.
4. *Ibid.* p.408.
5. *Ibid.* p.414.
6. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Vol. 10: November 18, 1909 - March 31, 1911), (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1963) p.446-7.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 446-7.
8. Uma Dhupelia –Mesthrie, *Gandhi's Prisoner: The Life of Gandhi's Son Manilal* (Delhi:Permanent Black, 2005), p.100.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *The Modern Review*, June1912, p.679. See also Ganapat Rai, *Gandhi and Kasturba: The Story of their Life*, (Lahore: Kasturba Memorial Publications, 1945) p. 48.

Invalidation of Indian Marriage

It was on 14th March 1913, Justice Searle of the Cape Supreme Court, in a judgment pronounced that marriages not celebrated according to Christian rites and/or not registered by the Registrar of Marriages were invalid in South Africa. During those days, in India there was no law which makes it obligatory to register marriages. Marriages solemnized according to various religious traditions were considered valid. The same custom prevailed in the case of Indians settled in South Africa as well. Gandhi wrote in his work *Satyagraha in South Africa* about this “This terrible judgment thus nullified in South Africa at a stroke of the pen all marriages celebrated according to the Hindu, Musalman and Zoroastrian rites. The many married Indian women in South Africa in terms of this judgment ceased to rank the wives of their husbands and were degraded to the rank of concubines, while their progeny were deprived of their right to inherit the parent’s property. This was an insufferable situation for women no less than men, and the Indians in South Africa were deeply agitated.”¹ When Kasturba came to know about it, she volunteered on her own to become a *satyagrahi* and court arrest in protest against this judgment despite her poor health.

On April 19, 1913, Gandhi wrote to Gokhale about the decision of Kasturba. ‘Mrs. Gandhi made the offer on her own initiative...’The *Indian Opinion* of October 1, 1913 carried a report about it: “The ladies [in Phoenix] were allowed to join the struggle after great effort was made by them to take part in it. When Mrs. Gandhi understood the marriage difficulty, she was incensed and said to Mr. Gandhi: ‘Then I am not your wife,

according to the laws of this country.’ Mr. Gandhi replied that that was so and added that their children were not their heirs. ‘Then,’ she said, ‘let us go to India.’ Mr. Gandhi replied that that would be cowardly and that it would not solve the difficulty. ‘Could I not, then, join the struggle and be imprisoned myself?’ Mr. Gandhi told her that she could but that it was not a small matter. Her health was not good, she had not known that type of hardship and it would be disgraceful if, after her joining the struggle, she weakened. But Mrs. Gandhi was not to be moved. The other ladies, so closely related and living on the Settlement, would not be gainsaid. They insisted that, apart from their own convictions, just as strong as Mrs. Gandhi’s, they could not possibly remain out and allow Mrs. Gandhi to go to jail.”²

This judgment provided a historic opportunity for Gandhi to understand the hidden strengths and potentials of women. Gandhi never imagined that Kasturba had such a power and ready to face any consequences or even facing arrest and going to prison. It was an insult to womanhood and there was no question of looking back or rethinking about it. The women folk in Phoenix expressed solidarity with Kasturba and joined her in their mission. The first batch of *satyagrahis* went from Phoenix to the Transvaal border on 15 September 1913. The Phoenix group consisted of twelve men and four women. Out of four women, three were from the Gandhi family- Kasturba Gandhi, Kashi Chhaganlal Gandhi, Santok Maganlal Gandhi and the fourth one Jayakunwar Manilal Doctor, was the daughter of Pranjivan Mehta, - a friend of Gandhi in London. They were arrested for crossing the border without permits. On the 23 of September, they were sentenced to three months with hard labour. On the 21 of October eleven Indian women were arrested at Newcastle who peacefully advised miners to suspend work and were sentenced to three months’ hard labour. Thambi Naidoo, born in Mauritius, one of the

founders of the Transvaal Indian Congress was a leader of the Tamil community who escorted these women to Newcastle. This group was mainly Tamilian except Bhawani Dayal. It included the wife, sister and mother-in law of Thambi Naidoo.

All these developments stirred the heart of the Indians in South Africa and India as well to its very depths. Sir Pherozechah Mehta, “the lion of Bombay” who was till then little impressed with the *Satyagraha* movement in South Africa came to the forefront. A public Meeting was held at the Town Hall, Bombay, on 10th December, 1913 to pass resolutions in reference to the treatment of Indians in South Africa pressing for an inquiry into the allegations of ill-treatment of strikers in Natal and expressing gratitude to the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge and Lord Ampthill for the way in which they had championed the cause of the Indian Community in South Africa. H.H. Aga Sir Sultan Mohammed Shah, the Aga Khan, presided over the meeting. Sir Pherozechah Mehta was entrusted with the task of moving the first Resolution before this Meeting.³

In the speech Sir Pherozechah Mehta delivered while moving the resolution, he described Kasturba as one of the foremost heroines in the whole of the world and roared that his blood boiled at the thought of these women lying in jails herded with ordinary criminals and declared that India could not sleep over the matter any longer. The extracts from his speech are given below:

“Now the situation has developed in a way in which has caused intense pain and agony to people in this country. Look at the way in which this aggressive Union Government of South Africa treats the Marriage Laws of the Indians settled there in their superiority. ...

As the Chairman has said there was a time when Indians were highly civilised when Boers and Britons were unknown. And denying that everything must be recognized by religious

custom, they say that Indians married according to their own rites and customs are not to be considered as married at all. (Cries of “Shame, shame”).

I tell you, ladies and gentlemen, what I feel sincerely, that there has been no more touching episode in the whole history of this campaign that the conversation which Mrs. Gandhi had with her husband before she cast in her lot with him in the Passive Resistance Movement. After the decision of the Supreme Court there, denying the legitimacy of Hindu and Mohammedan marriages, she asked him:- “Am I your wife or not? I am not your wife if this decision stands, and if I am not your wife, I am not a woman of any true womanhood in the estimation of my own sex, and my children are illegitimate,” Mr. Gandhi must have known what it was to expose tender women to the hardships of the campaign, but in spite of his pleadings, that brave lady decided to cast in her lot with those men who were fighting for the cause. History records the deeds of many heroines, and I feel that Mrs. Gandhi will stand as one of the foremost heroines in the whole of the world. (Loud applause.).....

I mean to tell you one reason why we are feeling so intensely on the present situation. While we are speaking and speechifying, those mild and gentle women who have enrolled themselves with husbands and brothers, under the banner of Passive Resistance, are lying in jails herded with common criminals. (Loud cries of “Shame,shame”). And surely with all the advice about moderation dinned into our ears, does not our blood boil at the thought that while arguments are being set forth and negotiations carried on, these women in South Africa are suffering the lot of ordinary criminals? And if a way is not found to end these sufferings, I will not say what the consequences might be. But, Gentlemen, the Pagan and Greed theory of the Nemesis, is founded on absolute truth, and acts like these must rebound on their authors, and therefore it is

that we implore our rulers in the interests both of England and India, to bring about out a reasonable and speedy solution of the question (Loud and prolonged cheers). With these words I move the first Resolution. (Loud applause.)”⁴

Gandhi stood firm in his demands for a new law validating the Indian marriages and abolition of £3 tax. Subsequently in November, several circumstances forced Gandhi to take out a Great March consisting of 2,037 men, 127 women and 57 children, from Charlestown to Transvaal.⁵ Gandhi was arrested in the course of the March and was imprisoned. But the march continued.

The courage and bravery of the ladies including Kasturba were highly remarkable and they had undergone a lot of hardships in the prison. Gandhi wrote the following words about them.

“The women’s bravery was beyond words. They were all kept in Maritzburg jail, where they were considerably harassed. Their food was of the worst quality and they were given laundry work as their task. No food was permitted to be given to them from outside nearly till the end of their term. One sister was under a religious vow to restrict herself to a particular diet. After great difficulty the jail authorities allowed her that diet, but the food supplied was unfit for human consumption. The sister badly needed olive oil. She did not get it at first, and when she got it, it was old and rancid. She offered to get it at her own expense but was told that jail was no hotel, and she must take what food was given to her. When this sister was released she was a mere skeleton and her life was saved only by a great effort.”⁶

According to E. S. Reddy, “the “sister” was obviously none other than Kasturba.”⁷ C. F. Andrews who saw Kasturba after her release from prison wrote: “These ladies return from prison with their health in many cases utterly broken down in

the hard prison life which they had been obliged to endure. Mrs. Gandhi suffered most of all, and when I saw her for the first time after her release, it seemed to me that she would be unable to get strong again, owing to her shattered health”⁸

Finally on 11th December 1913, South African Government appointed a Commission under the chairmanship of Sir William Solomon, a Supreme Court judge, to look into the grievances of Indians. On the recommendation of the Commission, Gandhi, Henry Polak and Hermann Kallenbach were released from prison at Pretoria on 18 December. He addressed a mass meeting in Johannesburg. It was decided to boycott the Commission unless it was expanded⁹ and all *satyagrahis* were released. On December 21 Gandhi received a cable from Gokhale not to boycott the Commission. Kasturba and her party of *satyagrahis* were released from prison on 22 December. The Indian community planned a huge procession in Durban to welcome them. However it was dropped taking into consideration health condition of Kasturba. On February 7, 1914, Indian's Women Sabha was inaugurated in Durban. Kasturba Gandhi and Millie Polak were its patrons. Gandhi and Kasturba went to Cape Town to bid farewell to C.F. Andrews and to follow the developments on the Indian question. Kasturba's health condition further deteriorated and it was matter of grave concern for Gandhi.

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6. M. K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, *op.cit.*p.430
7. E S Reddy, “Kasturba Gandhi and the Satyagraha in South Africa”
<https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/kasturbaandsatyagraha.htm>
8. Ganapat Rai, *Gandhi and Kasturba: The Story of their Life*, (Lahore: Kasturba Memorial Publications, 1945) ,p.49.
9. The two other members of the Commission were Ewald Esselen and J.S. Wylie, two prominent advocates, who were known for their anti-Indian stand. The Indian community demanded the expansion of the Commission by including two members acceptable to the Indians.

Between Life and Death

After the release from the imprisonment, Kasturba's health worsened. Devadas Gandhi narrates an incident when his parents were travelling together. Kasturba was mistaken as Gandhi's mother. "She was no longer the Ba we knew."¹ She was in a state of hanging between life and death. Gandhi was trying his level best to bring her life back to normalcy by providing intensive nursing care. The seriousness of the case is evident from Gandhi's constant references to Kasturba's health in a number of correspondences during that period.

Gandhi wrote in a letter to Hermann Kallenbach from Cape Town on February 25, 1914 "I do not know what is going to happen to Mrs. Gandhi. She hovers between life and death. Her appetite seems to be coming to her. But she has again developed the ominous swellings which frightened Dr. Gool who asked to examine her urine. His examination has led to no results. And the swelling persists."² He further wrote to Kallenbach on 27th of February "If anybody should have died it was Mrs. Gandhi. There is no guarantee even now that she will live. But she seems to be rallying and would certainly have succumbed under the orthodox treatment."³

Gandhi's second son Manilal was staying in Johannesburg with Hermann Kallenbach at that time. It was "most likely to avoid contact with Jeki at Phoenix"⁴ Gandhi wrote to Manilal on February 28, 1914. "I know that you are sorry. You haven't the courage to answer when someone asks you why you went away. It shouldn't be difficult for you to say that you were sent away to live by yourself because fathers did not like your ways. You should realize that in releasing you

from attendance on Ba and asking you to go, without thinking of my personal convenience, I must have acted with the purest of love. More than your services, I want good behaviour from you. If you become so good that you will never make a slip, I should ask for no more. I would tell Ba too that it was as well you had left.”⁵ He closes his letter by asking him to consider the full meaning of this letter and ponder over it. Kasturba had to face the departure of Harilal and now it was the turn of Manilal. Only a mother can understand the pain of children living away from her.

On March 1, 1914, Gandhi further updates Kallenbach on the health condition of Kasturba. “Mrs. Gandhi wanted medicine. She had it in the mildest form from Dr. Gool and she is now laid up with fever, aches all over and pain in the stomach. The crisis may have been coming and the medicine may have nothing to do with this serious relapse. Anyhow the latter is there and there is no escaping it. For her death will be the finest deliverance. But we are in God’s hands. Let His will and not ours be done. I am by her side day and night. I commenced today reading the Ramayana to her. ...She is certainly most resigned and has commenced fasting again.”⁶

Medicines could not produce any effect on Kasturba. On the contrary her condition became very bad after two or three doses of medicine. Both of them believed that medical treatment she underwent had altogether an adverse effect. She could hardly take any food. They were ready to face anything. “Even if the end is death, we have made up our minds to have no fear of it.”⁷

But hope again revived as Kasturba slowly responded to natural treatment. At this phase, Gandhi introduced the practice of the counting of beads. Singing of hymns and reading of Ramayana to her became the part of his daily routine. Gandhi kept away from all his activities and fully immersed in nursing

Kasturba. Kasturba had a fatal illness and he even feared that it may be stomach cancer. Gandhi was not sure whether his wife will survive or not. He wrote to Gokhale from Phoenix on April 1, 1914 in response to one of his cables. "I doubt whether Mrs. Gandhi will survive the settlement. I am writing this by her bed side. I have to be her doctor, nurse and everything. I would, therefore, grudge having to go to London unless you consider it absolutely necessary. If you do, I shall certainly come if Mrs. Gandhi dies or is better—so well, that is to say, as to permit of my being away from her, I suppose, at least for two months."⁸

Practically Kasturba was fasting and only thing she was having was wheat coffee without milk or sugar in addition to the infusion of the leaves. The swelling was coming down gradually. Kasturba was dependent on her husband due to her very pathetic state of health. She could not withstand absence of her husband even for an hour. She was feeling utterly helpless without him.

Gandhi wrote to Kallenbach on April 10, 1914 "Just now I am nothing but an efficient nurse devoting my whole energy to my task. Mrs. Gandhi is my sole consideration and she claims me. If I am away from her for any length of time she cries bitterly. I do not know what is to become. She may recover but there is not much chance. She will linger on for a while but cannot survive this illness. She has to be helped to do everything. I am only praying that there may be no imperative public call on me whilst I am doing this work"⁹

Despite the poor health Kasturba had an eye on what was happening in Phoenix. She was intelligent and had strong reasoning ability. She told Gandhi that she suspected Jeki of still having romantic feelings for Manilal. Gandhi straightaway rejected her speculation thinking that she was excessively prejudiced against her. On the other hand Kasturba felt that her husband was always shielding Jeki. This led to fierce

exchanges of words between the two that never happened in their life before or after that. Perhaps the poor health conditions and the disturbed state of mind of both of them may have contributed to it. This incident happened on April 11, 1914.

In a letter written by Gandhi to Hermann Kallenbach on April 12, he opened his mind and expressed whatever feelings he had at that time. He thought his intimate friend is the only person to give vent to his deep emotions. Even though Gandhi blames Kasturba, he brings into limelight both positive and negative sides of Kasturba. The relevant part of the letter is reproduced in total.

“Mrs. Gandhi is much better but an event happened yesterday which once more proved what I have told you, namely, that she has both the devil and the divine in her in a most concentrated form. She made yesterday a most venomous remark: “Who has opened Devdas’s drawer?” suggesting that Jeki had tampered with it. She spits fire on Jeki. I gently remarked that I had opened it. “Why?” was the growling query. I said, “In order to see whether I could find a sheet for you.” “That does not contain sheets,” was the retort, so much as to convey to me that I had not opened the drawer but I was telling a fib to shield Jeki. This was too much. And I again gently but rebukingly remarked that she was sinful in her thought and that her disease was largely due to her sins. Immediately she began to howl. I had made her leave all the good food in order to kill her, I was tired of her, I wished her to die. I was a hooded snake. The manner of the delivery of these remarks was most vicious. I told her even though she was ill, I could not pity her in her sins. The more I spoke the more vicious she became. I kept completely self-possessed. I apologized to her and told her that henceforth even to that extent I would not remonstrate with her. Nor would I. She has a character and she has none. She is the most venomous woman I have ever met. She never forgets, never forgives. She is quite normal today. But yesterday’s was

one of the richest lessons of my life. All the charges she brought against me she undoubtedly means. She has contrary emotions. I have nursed her as a son would nurse his mother. But my love has not been sufficiently intense and selfless to make her change her nature. What wonder if Anglia and others cannot respond to my skin-deep love? What wonder if they misunderstood me? Truly she has so far been my best teacher. She teaches me emptiness of the world, she teaches me patience, forgiveness, greater need for self-sacrifice, for love and charity. The incident leaves me, I hope, a better, wiser, more loving man if it also leaves me sadder. Yes, a man who wishes to work with detachment must not marry. I cannot complain of her being a particularly bad wife or bad woman. On the contrary no other woman would probably have stood the changes in her husband's life as she has. On the whole she has not thwarted me and has been most exemplary. But how can a leopard change his spots? And yesterday's incident would probably not have happened either in an ordinary household. My point is that you cannot attach yourself to a particular woman and yet live for humanity. The two do not harmonise. That is the real cause of the devil waking in her now and again. Otherwise he might have remained in her asleep and unnoticed."¹⁰

Ten days after this quarrel Jeki was found making sexual overtures to another man, not Manilal. Gandhi was deeply hurt and angry and he made up his mind to send her back. The letter which Gandhi wrote to another friend from Phoenix on April 22, 1914 speaks loudly the unspeakable agony he was undergoing. He wrote ". . . Never perhaps have I spent such days of agony as I am doing now. I talk and I smile, I walk and eat and work, all mechanically these days. I can do no writing whatever. The heart seems to have gone dry. The agony I am going through is unspeakable. I have often wanted to take out the knife from my pocket and put it through the

stomach. Sometimes I have felt like striking my head against the wall opposite, and, at other times, I have thought of running away from the world. But then again I reflected: “The simple fellow that you are! Foolish one! Why do you go crazy in this fashion? If you do not preserve your balance of mind at this hour, full of agony though it be, what use is the little wisdom you have come by?” And so I pass my days at present. I want just now to inform my well-wishers, “See here, my friends, J. has committed terrible sins.”

“When I knew all this, I thought I must atone for my own sin in putting my faith in one who did not deserve it. I was about to resolve on a fast for 15 days, but checked myself. I thought of Ba. If I fasted for 15 days, that would mean Ba’s death. I gave up the idea for the time being, deterred only by this fear. However, I decided afterwards that J. must leave for. . . . To go and live there was the only right thing . . . could do . . . would come to no good by remaining here. . . . I do not know what evil there is in me. I have a strain of cruelty in me, as others say, such that people force themselves to do things, even to attempt impossible things, in order to please me. Lacking the necessary strength, they put on a false show and deceive me. Even Gokhale used to tell me that I was so harsh that people felt terrified of me and allowed themselves to be dragged against their will out of sheer fear or in the attempt to please me, and that those who found themselves too weak assumed an artificial pose in the end. I put [he said] far too heavy a burden on people. He, too, [he added] strained himself to do things beyond his capacity when he was asked by me.”¹¹

Gandhi found Jeki a liar and ‘finished hypocrite.’¹² In the month of May, he made arrangements for departure to Fiji. As atonement Gandhi undertook the fast for two weeks. It was for Jeki’s lapse and his own inadequate supervision of the inmates of the Ashram. He wrote to Kallenbach about the fast on May 18, 1914. “This fast has brought me as near death’s

door as possible. I can still hardly crawl, can eat very little, restless nights, mouth bad. But it would be all right. The fast was a necessity. I was so grossly deceived. I owed it to Manilal of Fiji, to Dr. Mehta, and to myself. It was one of the severest lessons of my life. The discipline was very great. Everyone around me was most charming. Mrs. Gandhi was divine. Immediately she realized that there was no turning me back, she set about making my path smooth. She forgot her own sorrows and became my ministering angel. And she still remains the same. The result is that she is better in health. I appealed to all not to go in for fasting but to rejoice that one of themselves was trying to purify himself. All caught the fire and I was helped all along.”¹³

The fast cleared the minds of all in the Phoenix. And Gandhi realized that Kasturba was the real angel who made the path of her husband smooth. Amidst these personal crises, the negotiations with the government were going on and a settlement was reached which led to the passage of Indian Relief Bill on 26th of June, 1914 and termination of the struggle which had started in 1906. With final settlement Gandhi decided to return to India via London. Gandhi and Kasturba left South Africa for London on July 18, 1914. When Gandhi reached London First World War broke out. On August 13 a circular signed by Gandhi, Kasturba, Sarojini Naidu affirming resolve to tender unconditional service to the British Empire was issued for signature by supporters. On September Gandhi met Gokhale in London. On December 19 Gandhi and Kasturba finally sailed for India.

Notes and References

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3. *Ibid.*
4. Uma Dhupelia–Mesthrie, *Gandhi's Prisoner: The Life of Gandhi's Son Manilal* op.cit.p.119. In July 1913, Gandhi came to know that his second son Manilal developed a secret relationship with Jeki, (nickname of Jayakunwar), daughter of Pranjivan Mehta. Gandhi had a hand in arranging her marriage with Manilal Doctor who occupied an important position in the public life of Mauritius. When her husband migrated to Fiji, Jeki stayed in Phoenix as an inmate. Upset by the news, Gandhi decided to fast for seven days without food or water, and rely on just one meal a day for the next four-and-half months. Deeply disturbed by his father's decision and perhaps as a sort of repentance, Manilal decided to join his father in fasting.
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Back In India

Gandhi and Kasturba landed at Bombay on January 9, 1915. During their return journey to India, Kasturba had the rare opportunity to be alone with her husband for a long period of time, which she perhaps never got before or after that. But her husband was busy with learning Bengali on the board. His Phoenix party was already at Tagore's Shantiniketan. A public reception was arranged at Mount Petit, Bombay on January 12. Over 600 distinguished citizens were present at the reception including Europeans. Sir Pherozeshah Mehta presided over the meeting. Bombay Chronicle reported Gandhi's speech at Public Reception, Bombay, "... during the three days that they had passed in Bombay, they had felt—and the thought he was voicing the feelings of his wife, too—that they were much more at home among those indentured Indians, who were the truest heroes of India.... They had also honoured Mrs. Gandhi as the wife of the great Gandhi. He had no knowledge of the great Gandhi, but he could say that she could tell them more about the sufferings of women who rushed with babies to jail and who had now joined the majority than he could. In conclusion, Mr. Gandhi appealed to them to accept the services of himself and his wife for, he said they had come to render such service as God would enable them to do."¹

Another meeting was convened by the Bombay National Union at Hira Baug on the 13th of January to welcome Gandhi and Kasturba. Bal Gangadhar Tilak was present, at the meeting and it was attended by about 250 persons. Tilak while addressing the gathering said that "they were only doing their duty in honouring Mr. and Mrs. Gandhi, as they had fought for the honour of India in a distant land. He said that India ought to

produce more men and women of the self-sacrificing spirit of the honoured guests, and impressed upon the audience that this was the lesson they had to learn from the career of Mr. Gandhi.”²

Gandhi and Kasturba arrived at Poona on February 8 and Gandhi held discussions with Gokhale about joining the Servants of India Society and settling down somewhere in Gujarat with his Phoenix family. Kasturba was given a reception by the Poona ladies in Napa Wada buildings on the 13th of February.³

On February 17, 1915, Gandhi along with his wife Kasturba came to Shantiniketan for the first time and they were accorded a warm welcome in the traditional manner. However, Rabindranath Tagore was in Calcutta at that time. On February 19 Gokhale passed away and Gandhi and Kasturba along with Maganlal Gandhi rushed to Pune and returned to Shantiniketan on March 5 and met Tagore for the first time. With the approval of Tagore, Gandhi experimented with the daily regimen of Shantiniketan in West Bengal by applying the principles of self-help for a short period.

On May 25, 1915 Gandhi established his Satyagraha Ashram at Kochrab on the outskirts of Ahmedabad. Accommodation of the inmates was arranged in the bungalow of Jivanlal Desai, a barrister in Ahmedabad. At the time of establishing the Ashram, the question of untouchability was naturally among the subjects Gandhi discussed with his friends at Ahmedabad. Gandhi made his stand on untouchability very clear to them that he would admit an untouchable candidate at the first opportunity if he/she was otherwise worthy. The removal or eradication of untouchability was one of the vows Gandhi prescribed for the inmates of the ashram. He wrote: “The so-called untouchables have equal place in the Ashram with others.”⁴

Gandhi came face to face with the problems of untouchability soon. Thakkar Bapa requested Gandhi to admit an untouchable family in the ashram. The family consisted of Dudabhai, his wife Danibehn and their one and a half year old daughter Lakshmi. Some of the inmates of the ashram including Kasturba were not happy with Gandhi's decision regarding the admission of an untouchable family. It created a flutter amongst the friends who were helping the Ashram. They deserted him and the monetary help to the ashram was almost stopped.

Gandhi wrote to his friend Hermann Kallenbach on September 24, 1915. "You know what a Pariah is. He is what is called an untouchable. The widow's son whom I have taken is a Pariah but that did not shock Mrs. Gandhi so much. Now I have taken one from our own parts and Mrs. Gandhi as also Maganlal's wife were up in arms against me. They made my life miserable so far as they could. I told them they were not bound to stay with me. This irritated them the more. The storm has not yet subsided. I am however unmoved and comparatively calm. The step I have taken means a great deal. It may alter my life a bit, i.e., I may have to completely take up Pariah work, i.e., I might have to become a Pariah myself. We shall see."⁵ However, she could overcome her inhibitions, and treated Dudhabhai family as her own family. Later they returned to Bombay. Gandhi and Kasturba decided to adopt Lakshmi as their daughter when she will be little grown up.

Lakshmi in one of her interviews said "Around 1920-21, when I was five, Gandhiji had come to Bombay. He called my parents and told them he would now take me with him to the Sabarmati Ashram. When I came to Ashram I did not know anybody. But I remember that Devadas used to take care of me. Kasturba also was very kind. She would bathe me and comb my hair. I became Gandhiji's Harijan daughter."⁶ She was married off to a Brahmin from Madras. Gandhi and Kasturba

were in prison at that time. After her marriage also she used to have affectionate relationship with Gandhi and Kasturba. She said in the same interview. “Kasturba would always give me something in the traditional fashion of mothers giving something to daughters.”⁷ This indicates Kasturba’s journey from citadels of orthodoxy to a real liberator with her husband fighting against the curse of untouchability.

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Champanan

Rajkumar Shukla, a person from Champanan had approached Gandhi at the session of Lucknow Congress in 1916, and brought to his notice the problems faced by peasants of Champanan in Bihar. Gandhi had promised him to come to Champanan after some time to see the conditions with his own eyes. The problem of the peasants of Champanan was related to the forced cultivation of indigo at the behest of planters. The Champanan tenant was bound by law to plant three out of every twenty parts of his land with indigo for his landlord. This system was known as the *tinkathia* system. Shukla was successful in taking Gandhi to Motihari in April 1917. Gandhi's work was not limited to *tinkathia* system and other related acts of injustices which were perpetuated on the peasants. Along with political action, he was equally determined to carry out the constructive social action for the upliftment of the villagers. The villagers were confronted with problems like lack of cleanliness and sanitation, absence of medical care, lack of work ethics and absence of proper facilities for education of children. When Gandhi gained more experience of Bihar, he "became convinced that work of a permanent nature was impossible without proper village education."¹ Kasturba played an important role in his Champanan mission.

Gandhi in consultation with his co-workers decided to open primary schools in six villages. Identifying teachers for the same was a challenging task as he was not ready to entrust children to commonplace teachers. The emphasis was on the moral fibre of teachers rather than literary qualification. Gandhi issued a public appeal for the same and he got some response.

In addition, he called the members of the ashram including his son Devdas and Kasturba. He wrote to the district magistrate in Champaran, Bihar on 19 November, 1917 about the objective of imparting education. "The chief thing aimed at is contact of the children with men and women of culture and unimpeachable moral character. That to me is education. Literary training is to be used merely as a means to that end. The industrial training is designed to give the boys and girls who may come to us an additional means of livelihood."² Women folk were effective in their work. Kasturba without having any formal qualification proved very effective in entering the hearts of village women and teaching them basics of health, hygiene and sanitation. She helped Gandhi in understanding the harsh realities prevailing in the villages by surveying the conditions of village women.

Gandhi narrates one of the soul searching incidents as follows: "Bhitiharva was a small village in which was one of our schools. I happened to visit a smaller village in its vicinity and found some of the women dressed very dirtily. So I told my wife to ask them why they did not wash their clothes. She spoke to them. One of the women took her into her hut and said: 'Look now, there is no box or cupboard here containing other clothes. The *sari* I am wearing is the only one I have. How am I to wash it? Tell Mahatmaji to get me another *sari*, and I shall then promise to bathe and put on clean clothes every day."³ Kasturba had to face many challenges in her work. S. L. Soman and Kasturbai were in charge of the school at Bhitiharva. The school was set on fire at one night probably by some of the neighbouring planters' men. Rajendra Prasad, the President of India wrote about this incident "For some days the school worked nicely, but one day an ill tempered indigo planter had the school set on fire, and it was burnt to ashes. Then Dr. Dev, advocate Somanji and Kasturba decided to construct a pucca structure to house the school in place of a

thatched hut. In a few days the work started, but the remarkable thing was that Ba, along with others, helped in the construction of the building, by hauling bricks and stones, doing physical labour and by toiling and sweating”⁴

The planters tried their best to remove Gandhi from the scene. A prominent planter viz. Irwin launched a malicious attack through the *Statesman*. He even criticized Kasturba stating that under the shallow pretence of opening a school, she started a bazaar in the *dehat* (interior). Irwin’s letter of January 8 was published actually on January 11.⁵

Gandhi in his lengthy reply wrote that Irwin had “unchivalrously attacked one of the most innocent women walking on the face of the earth (and this I say although she happens to be my wife).”A word only for my innocent wife who will never even know the wrong your correspondent has done her. If Mr. Irwin would enjoy the honour of being introduced to her he will soon find out that Mrs. Gandhi is a simple woman, almost unlettered, who knows nothing of the two bazaars mentioned by him, even as I knew nothing of them until very recently and sometime after the establishment of the rival bazaar referred to by Mr. Irwin. He will then further assure himself that Mrs. Gandhi has had no hand in its establishment and is totally incapable of managing such a bazaar. Lastly, he will at once learn that Mrs. Gandhi’s time is occupied in cooking for and serving the teachers conducting the school established in the *dehat* (interior) in question, in distributing medical relief and in moving amongst the women of the *dehat* with a view to giving them an idea of simple hygiene. Mrs. Gandhi, I may add, has not learnt the art of making speeches or addressing letters to the Press.⁶

Champan provided an opportunity for Gandhi to test his weapon of *Satyagraha* for the first time in the Indian soil. The beauty of Champan mission is that here he combined

Satyagraha with constructive action and Kasturba proved her mettle through her active involvement in the constructive work. It expanded scope of Kasturba's work from the routine ashram activities into larger social action and understanding the harsh realities prevailing in the Indian villages.

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3. *Ibid.* p.516.
4. Rajendra Prasad "My Homage to Kasturba" in *Kasturba Memorial*, Indore: Kasturba Memorial Trust, 1962), p.19.
5. However, Gandhi in his letter addressed to *the Statesman* states that Irwin's letter was published on the 12th.
6. Gandhi's reply appeared on *the Statesman* on 19-1-1918.

Gandhi on Death's door

When Gandhi was engaged in Champaran mission, trouble was brewing in the textile industry of Ahmedabad. In August 1917, in some cases a bonus equivalent to 80 percent was paid to labourers as an incentive during the outbreak of plague. When the epidemic was over the employers wanted to discontinue the bonus and workers resisted the move citing the increase in cost of living during the war. Gandhi while trying to solve this issue, had to deal with another conflict which was waiting for him in Kheda district in the presidency of Bombay. The conflict was between the peasants of Kheda and the local administration on the remission of land revenue. As stated earlier, First World War broke out during his sojourn in England. After the Provincial War Conference in June 1918 Gandhi was fully absorbed in the recruiting campaign. B. R. Nada the biographer of Gandhi wrote: "There was something comic in this votary of non-violence touring the villages of Gujarat to secure recruits for the British Indian army to fight in the battlefronts of Europe and the Middle East."¹

In the midst of all these struggles led by Gandhi, the responsibility of running the day to day life of the Ashram was naturally in the hands of Kasturba. She successfully conducted the affairs of the ashram with motherly love. In a letter to Sonja Schlesin² from Nadiad on June 23, 1918 Gandhi wrote "My life has become very complex. You must have read at least my important public letters. Now I am entering upon a big recruiting campaign. My work has involved constant railway travelling. I am longing for solitude and rest. They may never be my lot. Mrs. Gandhi has developed remarkably. She has

beautifully resigned herself to things she used to fight. But I must [not] describe things. You must see them for yourself.”³

Kasturba’s daughter-in-law Gulab with her children came to stay in Sabarmati Ashram. When they left for Rajkot, Kasturba felt very lonely. She expressed her desire to join Gandhi who was in Nadiad at that time. In the midst of his campaign, Gandhi advises her how to overcome that in a letter he wrote to Kasturba on July 29, 1918 “Beloved Kastur, I know you are pining to stay with me. I feel, though, that we must go on with our tasks. At present, it is right that you remain where you are. If you but look upon all the children there as your own, quite soon you will cease to feel the absence of the latter. This is the least one can do as one gets older. As you come to love others and serve them, you will have a joy welling up from within. You should make it a point to visit early in the morning all those who may be sick, and nurse them. Special food should be prepared or kept apart for anyone who needs such food. You should visit the Maharashtrian ladies, amuse their children or take them out for a walk. You should make them feel that they are no strangers. Their health should improve. You should converse with Nirmala on useful subjects, that is, on religious matters and the like. You may ask her to read out the Bhagavat to you. She will even find the thing interesting. If you thus keep yourself busy in the service of others, believe me the mind will always be full of joy. And you must not omit to look after Punjabhai’s meals and other requirements.”⁴ Gandhi was aware of the fact that what kind of situation he was putting his wife into. Kasturba followed the advice of her husband. At the same time, she was worried about the health of her husband. She never came in his way and tried to find solutions in her own way.

Unable to get carts Gandhi and his colleagues had to march on foot in the villages that put a great strain on his health. He was down with dysentery and was not ready to take

injections. His friend Ambalal Sarabhai took him to his palatial house in Ahmedabad. One day even when he was suffering from high fever, he insisted on shifting to the Ashram. Gandhi believed that he was nearing death's door. But Kasturba was not ready to give up hope. She was with her husband all the time. The ice therapy produced some effect and it infused him with fresh energy. Doctor prescribed cow's milk for his recovery. Kasturba tried to reason with him that his vow not to take milk applied to cow's milk and not in the case of goat's milk. Finally Gandhi succumbed to Kasturba's suggestion.

In his letter to Maganlal on January 10, 1919⁵ Gandhi wrote "I simply cannot bear to look at Ba's face. The expression is often like that on the face of a meek cow and gives one the feeling, as a cow occasionally does, that in her own dumb manner she was saying something. I see, too, that there is selfishness in this suffering of hers; even so, her gentleness overpowers me and I feel inclined to relax in all matters in which I possibly may. Only four days ago, she was making herself miserable about milk, and, on the - impulse of the moment, asked me why, if I might not take cow's milk, I would not take goat's milk. This went home. When I took the vow, I was not thinking of the goat at all. I knew nothing, then, about the use of goat's milk and it was not a goat's suffering which was so vividly before my mind. My vow related only to cow's milk. I was not thinking about the buffalo either. But taking buffalo's milk would kill my chief aim [in taking the vow]. It was different with goat's milk, and I felt I could relieve friends of much of their concern. I, therefore, decided to take goat's milk."⁶

Millie Graham Polak recalls in her book *Mr. Gandhi: The Man* about this incident as follows. "During my stay in India a day arrived when the sands of Mr. Gandhi's own life seemed running out. For weeks he had been ill with some intestinal trouble. Two doctors were in constant attendance

upon him, and were at their wits' end to know how to feed him. They believed milk to be the only thing to keep him going, but as he had taken a vow about the taking of cow's milk, neither the arguments of the doctors nor the absolute pleading on her knees of Mrs. Gandhi would make him break his vow. So those of us who loved him watched him sinking. I was at the time two days' journey away from him, but was kept constantly advised of his condition. Then I received a little note of farewell, dictated by him to an amanuensis. He was dying and wished to send me a word of affection ere he passed out. Something within me told me it was not the end, and I wrote telling him so, adding that I knew his work for India was not yet finished, and that it was not "goodbye".

He recovered under conditions of which he himself told me much later. He was content to leave the fleshly body that worried and hampered him so, and if milk was the only thing to save his body, he refused to break his vow by taking it. Then he said: "It was Ba (Mrs. Gandhi) who discovered a way. She said to me: 'Your vow was taken against the milk of the cow, but it was not against the milk of the goat, so you can take goat's milk and still keep your vow.' You women are very persistent and clever," he added, with a twinkle in his eye and an intonation in the voice, as though he almost admired Mrs. Gandhi for the subtle distinction she had been able to make use of to restore him to health. The goat's milk had proved a great success, fortunately, and he gradually became himself again."⁷

Here we can see an intelligent woman trying to save the life of her husband by applying her strong common sense and without creating an embarrassment that he had to break his vow which he had taken earlier in this regard. Kasturba's loving persuasion was an important determinant in diluting his vow.

Notes and References

1. B. R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi: A Biography* (Delhi : Oxford University Press,1989)p.169.
2. Sonja Schlesin was Gandhi's Secretary during the early days in South Africa
3. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Vol. 14, (October 9, 1917 - July 31, 1918), (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1965), p.447.
4. *Ibid.* p.514.
5. *Gandhi Dinwari* (Gujarati) (p. 68.) mentions that he started taking goat's milk in Bombay on 8th January 1919. It is believed that Gandhi started taking goat's milk at Mani Bhavan. Gandhi's letter to Maganlal dated 10 January 1919 was from Bombay and he must be at Mani Bhavan.
6. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Vol.15, (August 1, 1918 to on or after July 1919) (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1965), pp.70-71.
7. Millie Graham Polak, *Mr. Gandhi: The Man* (Bombay :Vora, 1949), pp.141-42.

Sarladevi

A series of events placed a great strain on Gandhi's loyalty to the British Empire. The first shock came in the form of the Rowlatt Act followed by Jallianwala Bagh massacre. In October 1919, the restrictions imposed earlier in April prohibiting Gandhi's entry into Punjab were removed. On the 24th of October Lahore citizens accorded a warm reception to Gandhi. Gandhi was put up in Pandit Rambhuj Dutt Choudhri's house. This provided Gandhi an opportunity to understand more about Choudhri's wife, Saraladevi Ghosal Chaudhurani, the niece of Rabindranath Tagore, whom he had met earlier in 1901. Both of them became close friends during his stay in Lahore. Gandhi was very much impressed by her 'learning and sincerity.' He even felt that "a merger with her might bring him closer to winning all of India to *satyagraha*."¹ Gandhi completed his tour of the Punjab in connection with the work of the Congress Inquiry Committee on the Punjab disorders in February 1920.

Gandhi introduced Saraladevi to the readers of *Navajivan* in February 1920.² His closeness with Saraladevi continued. Gandhi wrote to Kallenbach, on August 10, 1920. "I have come in closest touch with a lady who often travels with me. Our relationship is indefinable. I call her my spiritual wife. A friend has called it an intellectual wedding. I want you to see her. It was under her roof that I passed several months at Lahore in the Punjab. Mrs. Gandhi is at Ashram. She has aged considerably but she is as brave as ever. She is the same woman you know her with her faults and virtues."³

Gandhi in his letter of December 17, 1920 to Saraladevi analysed his love for her and true meaning of spiritual wife. The relevant text is as follows: "I have been analysing my love for you. I have reached a definite meaning of spiritual wife. It is a partnership between two persons of the opposite sex where the physical is wholly absent. It is therefore possible between brother and sister, father and daughter. It is possible only between two *brahmacharis* in thought, word and deed. I have felt drawn to you, because I have recognized in you an identity of ideals and aspirations and a complete self surrender. You have been 'wife' because you have recognized in me a fuller fruition of the common ideal than in yourself. For this spiritual partnership to subsist, there must be complete coincidence not from faith, but from knowledge. It is a meeting between two kindred spirits. This partnership can take place whilst either party is physically married to another, but only if they are living as celibates. Spiritual partnership is possible even between husband and wife. It transcends physical relations and persists beyond the grave. It follows from what I have stated that spiritual partners can never be physically wedded either in this life or a future, for it is possible only if there is no carnality, latent or patent. Are you spiritual wife to me of that description? Have we that exquisite purity, that perfect coincidence, that perfect merging, that identity of ideals, that self-forgetfulness, that fixity of purpose, that trustfulness? For me I can answer plainly that it is only an aspiration. I am unworthy to have that companionship with you. I require in me an infinitely higher purity than I possess in thought. I am too physically attached to you to be worthy of enjoying that sacred association with you. By physical attachment I here mean I am too much affected by your weaknesses. I must not be teacher to you, if I am your spiritual husband, if coincidence or merging is felt. On the contrary there are sharp differences between you and me so often. So far as I can see our relationship, it is one of

brother and sister. I must lay down the law for you, and thus ruffle you. I must plead gently like a brother ever taking care to use the right word even as I do to my oldest sister. I must not be father, husband, friend, teacher all rolled in one.”⁴ In 1933, Gandhi admitted “that he had been prevented from rushing into hellfire by the thought of Kasturba and because of interventions of his son Devdas, his lifelong secretary Mahadev Desai and another young relative, Mathuradas...”⁵ Rajmohan Gandhi further states that Devdas Gandhi, Mahadev Desai, Mathuradas, Rajagopalachari were among the people who questioned him and asked him consequences for Kasturba, people like them and Gandhi himself if he continued the special relationship with Saraladevi.⁶ He also cites Rajagopalachari’s correspondence with Gandhi in this connection. Definitely Kasturba was aware of Gandhi’s attachment with Saraladevi. As Gandhi had stated Kasturba was really a brave lady and she was not affected by false allegations made by others. It is evident from a letter Kasturba wrote to Lilavati cited below. In the original handwritten letter of Kasturba in Gujarati, only the day, that is Friday, is mentioned and not the exact year and the date. This letter helps one to understand Kasturba’s mind.

“Eternally Blessed Lilavati,

I have been deeply pained by your letter. We have never met each other to talk over such matters. So I do not know how you have concluded that Gandhiji has made my life miserable! Did you ever visit me and found me looking sad or being denied proper food? No other women in the entire world got a husband like mine. He is worshipped all over the world for his persistent pursuit of Truth. Thousands of people come to seek his counsel. He has never pulled me up without a valid reason. Whenever I cannot think far ahead or I display small mindedness he tells me that is the way generally the world goes. Gandhi discusses such things in newspapers whereas other husbands create scene in the family itself. If I am held in high esteem in the eyes of

the people it is because of my husband. There is very cordial and loving relation among our relatives. I am held in high esteem by our all friends. Love me deeply. When you accost me with false allegations nobody is going to believe. I am not a modern woman like you who wants to lord over husband and enjoy all kinds of freedom. So our ways are entirely different from each other. Such things do not behoove to a *Sanatani* Hindu wife. Parvati has taken a vow that Shankar would be her husband life after life.

Kastur Gandhi ⁷

Sumitra Kulkarni rightly observes that from the Gujarati version of this letter it is crystal clear that the language and thought behind it is that of Kasturba. She further states that only a simple and straight forward person like Kasturba could write like that. A modern educated woman could never write in a direct and clear manner. My grandmother (Kasturba) wanted this letter to be published in newspapers so that all deluded persons could change such false views. Bapuji (Gandhi) never wanted to give explanation for such false views; hence he did not give it to the newspapers. But Mahadev Desai saved this letter from being destroyed and put it in his files.⁸ It is interesting to note that after the demise of Kasturba, Gandhi wrote foreword for the book "*Amaran Ba*" (Our Ba) on February 18, 1945 in which this hand written letter was published. It also appears in Sumitra Kulkarni's work *Anmol Virasat*.⁹

The relationship between Gandhi and Sarla Devi would have to be viewed not in physical but in spiritual terms which was the hallmark of Gandhi's entire life. It would be unfair to all the three Gandhi, Kasturba and Saraladevi to take things out of context and make comments and interpretations by unnecessarily reading between the lines.

Notes and References

1. Rajmohan Gandhi, *Mohandas: A True Story of a Man, His People, and an Empire* (Penguin: New Delhi, 2007), p.230.
2. M. K. Gandhi, *Navajivan*, 29-2- 1920.
3. From the original: *Gandhi-Kallenbach Correspondence*, National Archives of India.
4. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Vol. 19: November 19, 1920 - April 13, 1921, (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1966), p.138.
5. Rajmohan Gandhi, *Mohandas: A True Story of a Man, His People, and an Empire*, op. cit., p.230.
6. *Ibid.* p.231.
7. Sumitra Kulkarni, *Anmol Virasat*, Vol.- III (Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 1988), p.38.
8. *Ibid.*, p.40.
9. *Ibid.*, pp.38-40.

Aftermath of Non-Cooperation

Gandhi had launched his noncooperation movement on 1st August 1920 and had called for seven types of boycott virtually cutting all relationship between government and the people. The people of India both classes and masses had responded to his call in a big way. Kasturba took an active part in the Non-Cooperation Movement launched by her husband. After the unfortunate incidents of Chauri Chaura in February 1922, Gandhi withdrew the movement. Gandhi went on a fast for five days as a penance for Chauri Chaura incidents. It commenced on the 12th of February and terminated on the 17th. On hearing about the fast Kasturba joined Gandhi at Bardoli on the 15th of February and remained with him serving till the end of the fast. On 10th of March Gandhi was arrested and lodged in Sabarmati jail. Kasturba and other inmates were permitted by authorities to accompany him to the jail. He was awarded six year imprisonment on 18th of March. On 20th midnight he was taken from Sabarmati jail to Yervada Central Prison and for two days his whereabouts were not known to Ashram inmates including Kasturba. In such a critical moment of life Kasturba displayed a rare kind of firmness, determination and bravery. Instead of being subdued she made a statement¹ giving a clarion call to the people of India to engage in different kinds of Constructive works instead of being caught in the slough of despair.

My dear Countrymen and Countrywomen,

My dear husband has been sentenced to-day to six years simple imprisonment. While I cannot deny that this heavy sentence has to some extent told upon me, I have consoled myself with

the thought that it is not beyond our powers to reduce that sentence and release him by our own exertions, long before his term of imprisonment is over.

I have no doubt that if India wakes up and seriously undertake to carry out the constructive programme of the Congress, we shall succeed not only in releasing him but also in solving to our satisfaction all the three issues for which we have been fighting and suffering for the last eighteen months or more.

The remedy, therefore, lies with us. If we fail, the fault will be ours. I, therefore, appeal to all men and women who feel for me and have regard for my husband to wholeheartedly concentrate on the constructive programme and make it a success.

Among all the items of the programme, he laid the greatest emphasis on the spinning wheel and *khaddar*. Our success in these will not only solve the economic problem of India in relation to the masses, but also free us from our political bondage. India's first answer, then, to Mr. Gandhi's conviction should be that:—

- (a) All men and women give up their foreign cloth and adopt *khaddar* and persuade others to do so.
- (b) All women make it a religious duty to spin and produce yarn every day and persuade others to do so.
- (c) All merchants cease trading in foreign piece-goods.

Kasturbai Gandhi”²

The above statement of Kasturba appeared in *Young India*, March 23, 1922.

With her husband being in jail she became more active and visited Ajmer in October 1922 to preside over Ajmer District Political Conference. A big procession was taken out in

Ajmer which was watched by thousands of people. The Hindus and Muslims of Ajmer had joined hands to fight for the independence of India. So much so that Conference was being held in Ajmer *Idgaha* and even Veda mantras were being recited in the Conference. Both Hindus and Muslim leaders addressed the meeting from the same platform. One of the Muslim leaders introduced a resolution condemning Hindu-Muslim riot which had taken place earlier. Kasturba also addressed the meeting and reminded the people of Ajmer of their promise that they would invite Gandhi to Ajmer only when all of them would come to wear Khadi. Ramdas Gandhi read out the speech of Kasturba. (For the text of the speech See Appendix-1)

During the same time, Kasturba also visited Rajasthan Seva Sangh and inspired its leaders and workers. In addition, she also addressed a meeting of women organized by Gulab Devi, who established the *Kanya Pathshala* and devoted the whole life in the service of women. Some Marvadi people also invited her. There also she pleaded with the women to accept *Khadi*. She visited Pushkar, a holy place of Hindus and many religious leaders expressed their faith in *Khadi* and some of them were wearing pure *Khadi*. In her brief address, she appealed to the religious men and women to wear *Khadi*. One of them took an oath to wear pure *Khadi*. The chief priest of the Brahmaji Mandir showed Kasturba the *Khadi* dress made for Brahmaji. While Kasturba was taking the holy dip in Pushkar the chief priest uttered a mantra, that was, *Gandhi Manwantare* instead of *Vaivaswat Manwantare* and *Swarajya Praptatyartha* instead of *ShrutiSmriti Purnokta Phalaprapatyartha*.³

Despite the merger of her personality with Gandhi Kasturba usually acted on her own when Gandhi was away from the scene. Her visit to Rajasthan and the remarkable work she did there could be cited as an illustrative case. Unfortunately such defiant activities are neither recorded nor

much talked about. Here she presents a picture of a highly empowered woman capable of boldly facing difficult situations and inspiring others to follow the path of Gandhi, which he had placed before the Nation.

Notes and References

1. *Young India*, 23-3- 1922.
2. *Ibid.*
3. The details regarding the Kasturba Gandhi's visit to Rajasthan were taken from the book *Gandhi aur Rajasthan* written by Shobhalal Gupt, published by Rajasthan Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. This book was published in the Gandhi Centenary year.

Borsad Satyagraha and Gandhi's Operation

From March 1922 to January 1924 Gandhi was in Yeravda Central Jail, Poona. Kasturba played an important role in awakening the women in Borsad Satyagraha of 1922-23. It was against the "Haidiya" a punitive tax imposed on the entire population of Borsad by the Government. In 1922, Kasturba received an express telegram from Borsad in Kaira district of Gujarat. She was in a small village called Maroli near Navasari. It was a frantic call from women in Borsad who were highly distressed. "We want Ba with us." that was the appeal of many women dressed in bandages after the police lathi charge. "We want her here to inspire confidence in the town".¹ Mithuben Petit, her hostess at Maroli, Surat pleaded "You are suffering from anemia Ba. The doctor wants you to rest. Let me attend to Borsad instead"² Kasturba was not ready to accept her suggestion. She said "I must see those women who have so bravely faced the lathi charge of the police. I must be with them to give support. Babu would have been with them today. But he is not free."³

She was so swift in her action and without wasting any time she dictated a brief message for Borsad to Mithuben Petit and requested her that a translation of this should go to the press immediately. Here she was behaving like a seasoned leader handling the issue with maturity and efficiency. Kasturba responded to the call and rushed to the Borsad by the next available train in the third class compartment with Mithuben. Here is the eye witness account of her work.

“It was a new Kasturba who revealed her personality to me as we journeyed by every manner of transport to Borsad and a hundred other villages in Kaira. She was no more the meek woman who sat quietly in her hut at Maroli, spinning at the ‘Charkha’ for long hours while some volunteer read the daily paper and gave her a list of events. She was totally different from the Kasturba who visited the neighbouring villages of Maroli every evening to explain to the peasants the value of khaddar, not as Gandhiji the leader would explain to them, but as a mother would explain to her children the beauty of an article she would like them to preserve. Here was the wife of India’s chosen leader, deputizing for him in the absence of all leaders. She was wanted here, there, — wherever something unusual happened in the first flush of mass enthusiasm. She was like some unknown warrior at the front forced by circumstances to step into the breach following the capture of a general.”⁴

Further it was stated “It was a pleasure to see Kasturba at work at Borsad. She had forgotten her anemia. She was on her feet from morning till nightfall. Local leaders had to be met, details of the incidents in the town to be studied, statements to be issued wherever necessary, *Satyagrahis* in hospitals to be interviewed and cheered. Deputizing for the leader of the vast Congress organization was no easy task. Kasturba attended to every item with leader-like devotion.”⁵

At Nadiad the doctors examined and advised her immediate rest. Her answer was “I feel fit”. It was an inner urge. She further stated “After all I do nothing in my life, except follow Bapu, from place to place, observing the ashram rules, and taking rest. These moments when I have to work like Bapu are so rare. I cannot think of rest...”⁶ This indicates Kasturba’s very nature. She was not considering the important task of managing ashram as a work at all. It was a part and parcel of her life and she was duty bound. She was like Gandhi

ever ready to suffer for others. The pain of her husband being in jail never affected her mission. She was fully immersed in the work with utmost devotion.

It was a task in itself for Kasturba to meet Gandhi in Jail. She had to apply and wait for over twenty days⁷ for an interview with Gandhi. Kasturba could finally visit Gandhi in jail on January 27, 1923. In April 1923 Gandhi had severe stomach pain. Subsequently on May 5, 1923 he was examined by British Col. (Dr.) Maddock, Surgeon General and it was followed by him on the 15th. As a result he was transferred to European Ward and Kasturba and others were summoned to be briefed about Gandhi's health status. Despite his poor health, he started writing *The History of Satyagraha in South Africa* on the 26th of November. On January 8, 1924 once again he had severe stomach ache and he passed a sleepless night. He was shifted to Sassoon Hospital, Poona on January 12.

Srinivas Shastri of Servants of India was informed by Dr. V. B. Gokhale, who was in charge of Sassoon Hospital about the admission of Gandhi in the hospital. He told him that Gandhi was about to be operated for appendicitis. He went to meet Gandhi and came to know that Kasturba was not informed about the latest development.⁸ Gandhi himself gave the consent and was operated by Col. (Dr.) Maddock on the same night. However, after the operation Kasturba was informed about it through a telegram and she reached the Hospital along with Anusyuaben on the 14th January.⁹ She was permitted by the authorities to be with him and nurse him back to health. While Gandhi was convalescing in the Hospital he was unconditionally released on 5th of February. But he continued to be in the Hospital till 10th of March when he left for Bombay. Gandhi and Kasturba thanked Col. (Dr.) Maddock, nurse and the entire medical team for their support and successful operation despite the failure of power supply during the operation. A photograph was also taken with the

Surgeon, the Nurse, Gandhi and Kasturba in the front row.¹⁰ It took some time for Gandhi to recover and finally returned to the ashram from Bombay on the 29th of May.

Notes and References

1. N. R. Malkani, "Kasturba" *Kasturba Memorial*, (Indore: Kasturba Memorial Trust, 1962, p.125.
2. *Ibid.* p. 125-26.
3. *Ibid.* p. 126.
4. See R. K. Prabhu (ed.) *Sati Kasturba : A Life-Sketch With Tributes in Memoriam*, (Bombay : Hind Kitabs, 1944), p.53-54.
5. *Ibid.* p.54.
6. *Ibid.* p.54.
7. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Vol.23, (March 4, 1922 - May 7, 1924), New Delhi: Publications Division, 1967), p.154.
8. *Ibid.* p.189.
9. Arun Gandhi in his book *Kasturba: A Life* says that Ba wanted to go her husband's bedside at once, but she could not leave to her ashram duties on such short notice, so she sent her son Devadas to Poona instead. But Ganpat Rai in his book *Gandhi and Kasturba: The story of their life* specifically mentions the date of Kasturba's arrival in Poona with Anusyuaben and other details. The photograph of Gandhi with his surgeon Col. Maddock, his nurse and his wife Kasturba, taken sometime in February 1924 when he was still in the hospital at Poona supports Ganapat Rai's version that Kasturba had gone there to look after Gandhi. See also A. Annamalai, "Gandhi's Experiments with Health" *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, 2019 Jan; 149 (Suppl. 1):S57-S61.doi: 10.4103/0971-5916.251658
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6515737>
10. *Ibid.*

Communal Harmony

In September 1924 riots took place in Sahranpur and Kohat areas. On the 13th of September Gandhi left Ahmedabad for Delhi in the wake of Hindu Muslim riots. In Delhi, he commenced his fast at Mahomed Ali's House on the 17th of September to bring amity among Hindus and Muslims. His fast for "penance and prayer" was for 21 days. Kasturba along with Shankar Lal Banker, Anusuyaben and Ramdas Gandhi reached Delhi on the morning of 21 September. She remained with Gandhi throughout the period of fast. Now onwards communal unity was one of the important items in Gandhi's writings in the pages of *Young India*. G. Ramachandran recalls his first meeting with Kasturba during Gandhi's fast. He was taken there by his Professor, C.F. Andrews, who was then playing the 'role of *Chowkidar* at the door of the fasting Mahatma.' He described Kasturba as a wonderful nurse to Gandhi during the time of fasting.

G. Ramachandran wrote: "They were days of extreme anxiety and agony for Ba. I had the privilege of cooking for her or taking the food to her from time to time. I did so with awe and reverence. But Ba put me at my ease with her kind words and looks. She lived practically on fruits and milk during those days except for wheat rusks which she sometimes broke into her milk. Suddenly she would look up and say a word or two about Bapu's health as he lay fasting and then the tears would come to her eyes. She was a wonderful nurse to Bapu in his physical weakness arising from the fast. My heart went out to Ba as she endured her agony without a murmur. When Bapu broke his fast at last Ba was smiling and shedding tears at the

same time, and how everyone went and congratulated her on the occasion.”¹

He further added “Bapu took up the fiery cross again and again in his life for a cause. But Ba took up her cross simply to share in Bapu’s sorrows and penance. No one can say who bore the greater burden, the great Field Marshal of non-violence as he let his people in one peaceful revolution after another and living in a continuous blaze of publicity or the meek and indomitable woman who lived in the shadows and wept in silence. I have an idea that Ba bore greater burdens throughout her life than Bapu and that without a murmur.”²

G. Ramchandran also shares his experience with Kasturba and Gandhi in the Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmati. It helps us to understand Kasturba’s love and care for everybody and efficient running of the community kitchen. He spent the whole of 1925 at the Ashram mainly assisting Kasturba in the community kitchen. He describes Kasturba as a ‘hard taskmaster’. “The house was Bapu’s, but his writ did not run in the kitchen. It was Ba who ruled it. There were some 20 Ashramites eating in her kitchen including some grand children. Ba ruled the kitchen with a measure of stern discipline and a larger measure of maternal love. We were three or four of us helping Ba in cooking and serving. She was a hard taskmaster, particularly to herself. It was not as though Ba was simply supervising the little community kitchen. How many of us are not merely supervisors these days? But she cooked and cleaned and swept and served like the rest of us working with her. She demanded punctuality, scrupulous cleanliness, good manners and participation in some work or other from every one eating in her kitchen. She worked with them and they saw her work and so everybody worked. Ours was thus a happy little kitchen community.”³ Thus Kasturba was a different type of taskmaster taking all responsibilities by herself and setting the standards by her personal example for others to follow. She

managed the community kitchen with lots of love considering the needs of all.

Only special privilege she was enjoying in the community kitchen was taking coffee. The drinking of tea and coffee was against the rule of the ashram. But she used to prepare tea and coffee for the guests and others. A question was raised by an inmate why Kasturba has been given the privilege of taking coffee. Gandhi's reply was "But you have no idea of how much Ba has already given up. This is the only luxury or habit which she has. Were I to compel her to abandon even this, then I would be a tyrant indeed."⁴ But she gave up this practice later on her own will. She used to give to the people whatever she kept even for her husband when somebody was not keeping well. That much identification she had developed in the course of time forgetting the special needs of her husband. She identified with every inmate and considered them as her own family. She never gave Gandhi an opportunity for complaint once he brought small lapses to her notice. She never repeated it. Her management of kitchen was a learning experience in community living. That is why G. Ramchandran wrote, "*What I learnt under Ba in that little kitchen in Satyagraha Ashram were lessons in strict punctuality, spotless cleanliness, unfailing good conduct, cooperation and strict obedience to rules.*"⁵

Notes and References

1. G. Ramchandran "The Ba in My Heart", *Kasturba Memorial*, (Indore: Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, 1962), p.127.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. Mukulbhai Kalarthi, *Ba and Bapu* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1988), p.29.
5. G. Ramchandran "The Ba in My Heart", op. cit. p.128.

Salt Satyagraha

In the years that followed, Gandhi's focus was not on political matters but on important task of nation building 'from the bottom up.'¹ At the family side, engagement of Ramdas Gandhi with Nirmala was arranged in 1926 and the actual marriage took place on 27th January 1928 at the Sabarmati Ashram. The marriage function was marked by utter simplicity without having music, wedding party and without having any ornaments. It was a really moving moment in the life of Gandhi and Kasturba.

The Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress held in December 1928 gave an ultimatum to the British Government that dominion status should be granted by the end of 1929. Otherwise the Congress would launch a struggle against the Government. Gandhi's resolution of Complete Independence was adopted at the Lahore Session of the Indian National Congress in December 1929. On February 15, 1930, a meeting of the Congress Working Committee was held at Sabarmati Ashram. It authorized Gandhi and others who believed in non-violence to launch Civil Disobedience.

On the 9th of March at a prayer meeting, Gandhi declared that Civil Disobedience campaign would start on the morning of 12th March. Gandhi with a band of 78 Ashram people commenced the historic Dandi March to break the Salt Law. Gandhi and his team reached Dandi on April 6 after a march of 24 days covering a distance of 200 miles. When he took a handful of salt to break the law the whole nation was electrified. It shook the very foundation of British Empire in India.

Gandhi was arrested on the very next day but the movement was in full swing throughout the country. Government tried to control the situation with an iron hand. The fight continued for nearly six months. During those days Kasturba could not remain as a silent spectator despite the fact that Gandhi and Congress leaders were behind the bars. Though the *satyagraha* was started by men the most striking feature of the campaign was that women belonging to all sections of society came in the forefront of the struggle. Even the aged Kasturba Gandhi and Swarup Rani Nehru, wife of Motilal Nehru participated in the picketing. Due to the successful picketing, revenue fell by about seventy percent.² Kasturba undertook a tour of Bardoli to carry forward the mission of her husband. She fearlessly started the organization and supervision of *satyagraha* camps in various places.³

In the course of her tour during 1930, Kasturba visited Jabalpur and Onjar camp along with Mithuben Petit and other volunteers. She reminded the people that the entire nation had started a 'war of truth and peace.' She also called upon them to take the vow of prohibition, boycott foreign clothes and popularize spinning and *Khadi*.

Kasturba was on the move. On the 5th of May she addressed a meeting at Navasari and reminded people of Gandhi's message of truth and non-violence which was followed by the bonfire of big heap of foreign clothes. Moving forward to Khardad and Panar she told people that the government would be brought to its knees if the battle is joined by a large number of our countrymen. She also asked people to boycott law courts and revive *panchayati* system to settle disputes. As result of Kasturba's initiative a large number of lady volunteers were enlisted to picket liquor shops.

Kasturba also graced the occasion when 59 volunteers led by Abbas Tayabji marched towards Dharasana on the 12th

of May. She blessed them and was present when they were being arrested after reaching Dharasana.

Subsequently she along with Miraben visited Yervada Central Prison on the 21st of May. In her meeting with Gandhi, she sought his permission for women to join the Salt Satyagraha in a big way. Reaching Dharasana she called upon the members of Bombay Legislative Council to give up the membership of the council.

In the course of whirlwind tours she reached Delhi on the 20th of June on her way to Gujarat where her son was lodged in a special jail. She was accorded a tumultuous welcome by the people at Delhi Railway Station and a procession comprising twenty thousand people took her to the house of Lakshmi Narain Gadodia. Next day a public meeting presided over by Paravati Devi was attended by 25,000 persons of whom 3,000 were women. Here also she appealed for boycott of foreign clothes, prohibition and appreciated the participation of women volunteers in the non-violent struggle for the freedom of the country. In Amritsar, a mile long procession was organized before the mammoth public meeting at Jallianwala Bagh. She focused on the importance of communal harmony in her address.

On the 23rd of June she addressed a meeting organized by the women at Gujarat in which she urged the women to take the spinning as their mission to achieve the goal of economic independence and freedom. She also participated in a procession of 7000 women dressed in *Khadi* singing patriotic songs. Meerut was her next destination. In all places other than her homeland she spoke in simple Hindustani focusing on key areas which was dear to husband's life and mission. Her appeal was from the bottom of her heart and it created a deep imprint on the minds of the people.

Notes and References

1. See the Chapter “From the Bottom up “in B.R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi: A Biography*, (Delhi: Oxford, 1989), pp.262-268.
2. <http://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-articles/salt-satyagraha-and-dandi-march.php>
3. The heroic work undertaken Kasturba Gandhi after the Salt Satyagraha presented in this book were mainly taken from the Ganapat Rai’s book *Gandhi and Kasturba: The Story of their Life*, (Lahore: Kasturba Memorial Publications,1945), pp.68-73.

Second Civil Disobedience Movement

In January 1931 Gandhi was released unconditionally from the Yervada Prison as a result of some understanding. On the 5th of March Gandhi-Irwin Agreement was signed. As per the agreement, Congress would participate in the next session of Round Table Conference for discussion on constitutional reforms. The Civil Disobedience Movement would be discontinued and reciprocal action would be taken by the Government which included the release of prisoners arrested during the movement and withdrawal of ordinances and prohibitory orders etc.

The Second Round Table Conference was held in London from 7 September 1931 to 1 December 1931 with the participation of Gandhi as the sole representative of the Indian National Congress and other Indian leaders representing different sections of the people. At the conference, Gandhi had claimed to represent all sections of the people of India. However, this view was not shared by other delegates. The Conference failed to produce any substantial result regarding India's constitutional future.

When Gandhi was away in London participating in the proceedings of the Second Round Table Conference, Kasturba decided to visit Rajasthan¹ during November 1931. She again visited Ajmer and stayed in Hatundi Gandhi Ashram. At that time Congress led a *satyagraha* struggle against the British government. Ajmer, Mirwada, Rajputana and Central India extended full cooperation in the struggle. Ajmer, Mirwada were British subjects and it became the centre of the struggle. Near about 500 *satyagrahies* were in jail. On 23rd and 24th of

November 1931 the local Congress Committee of Mirwada, Rajputana and Central India organized a meeting of political Council and Kasturba presided over it. She came along with Kaka Kalelkar. She was warmly welcomed by the people and marches were organized both in Ajmer and Pushkar. It was in Pushkar the meeting took place. Chandra Shankar Shukla read out the text of Kasturba Gandhi's speech. (For the text of Kasturba Gandhi's Speech See Appendix-2)

The political Council passed two dozen proposals on the then political, economic, and social situations. Beawar's Congressmen were divided for some time at that time. Her visit became a potent force for bringing unity among the Congress workers. Along with the political council, Jaynarayan Vyas and his colleagues also organized the Marward Praja Parishad in Pushkar. However, an attempt was made by the agents of Princely State to disrupt the meeting. Kasturba hardly escaped without being hurt. After this mess, Kasturba's speech was read out in the meeting and appealed to the people to remain calm at all costs. A Conference of women was organized in Pushkar during her visit. Kasturba addressed the women and appealed to all women to participate in the freedom struggle. A proposal of social reform was passed in the Conference. The presence of Kasturba gave a new impetus to the activists and thousands of men and women received the message of *Swarajya* and *Satyagraha* from her.

Meanwhile, civil unrest had spread throughout India and Gandhi hurried back to India. Gandhi and Sardar Patel were arrested on 4th January 1932 and taken to Yervada Central Jail. Kasturba was with him at the time of arrest. This was followed by indiscriminate arrest of political workers all over the country and in some cases police firing also was resorted too.

At such a critical juncture of national movement and Gandhi being in jail Kasturba decided to take on the mantle. She set out on a tour visiting and addressing many meetings accompanied by Maniben Patel. She was arrested on 11th of January and taken to Sabarmati Jail. Kasturba was awarded one and half months of simple imprisonment where as others were given three and half months of rigorous imprisonment. Kasturba protested against this kind of discrimination and asked for same kind of treatment for herself. She spent her jail term engaged in lot of spinning. While she was in Jail her son Ramdas was arrested on the 18th of January. She was released on the 29th of February and went to see Gandhi at Yervada Jail. Meanwhile Devadas Gandhi was also awarded six months imprisonment. She reached Ahmedabad on the 12th of March and proceeded to Bardoli to carry on no tax campaign. In the course of protest, she along with other volunteers was arrested. She was given six months imprisonment and taken to Sabarmati Jail.² Kasturba was fully conscious of the role she had to play in the absence of her husband and put her heart and soul into it. She was a really an empowered woman who was ready to take up the cudgels for the society.

Notes and References

1. The details regarding the Kasturba Gandhi's visit to Rajasthan were taken from the book *Gandhi or Rajasthan* written by Shobhalal Gupt, published by Rajasthan Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. This book was published in the Gandhi Centenary year.
2. For details refer Chapter 9, Jail life in Ganpat Rai's book. See Ganapat Rai, *Gandhi and Kasturba: The Story of their Life*, (Lahore: Kasturba Memorial Publications, 1945), p. 87.

Communal Award and Harijan Uplift

The British Government led by Ramsay Macdonald announced Communal Award on August 17, 1932 providing separate electorate system for the depressed classes. In protest Gandhi sat on a fast unto death on the 20th of September which led to a nationwide stir. Kasturba, who was serving her sentence at that time in Sabarmati jail, was very much anxious about her husband and told her fellow sister-prisoners, "We have read the Bhagavata, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata, but nowhere do we come across any reference to fasts like those which Bapu undertakes now and again. But, then, he is a type apart. However, will he be able to go through his fast this time?"¹ Her worries were over when she was shifted from Sabarmati Jail to Yervada Jail on the 22nd. Soon after her arrival she was fully immersed in the service of her husband.

Pyarelal, the Secretary of Gandhi wrote in his work "*The Epic Fast*" in the following words about Kasturba "She was superb. Calm and collected as ever, she did not betray the slightest trace of agitation or grief. "Again, the same old story," she remarked as she greeted him with forced banter that could, however, hardly conceal what must have been to her a terrible ordeal of the soul. She promptly took charge of Gandhiji's little improvised nursing establishment. Shrimati Kamala Nehru and Swarup Rani Nehru came to see him on the 25th. "Newspaper men have insulted me," the former protested to Gandhiji in her characteristic manner, "by giving out that on hearing the news of your fast I had fallen ill and taken to bed. How could I afford to fall ill when the supreme need of the hour was action and more action?"²

Ultimately there was an agreement between Gandhi and Ambedkar on the 26th of September which came to be known as Poona Pact with the intervention of many prominent leaders including Madan Mohan Malaviya. Kasturba was released on the 30th of September and was allowed to be with Gandhi for some time in Jail. Soon she went to the Ashram. During November 1931 Kasturba decided to tour Madras Presidency. She reached Madras on the 29th of November and she was welcomed by a number of associations including Madras Harijan Sevak Sangh. In response to her welcome, she pleaded for abolition of untouchability. In the course of her tour in Madras Presidency, Kasturba addressed meeting at Bangalore and Calicut. After successful completion of the tour she returned to Gujarat.

However, she was not in a position to take rest for a longtime. She soon joined the ongoing struggle and was arrested on February 4, 1933 in the village of Ras. She was tried and was given six months imprisonment and a fine of Rs.500/-. She was taken to Sabarmati Jail where she was joined by Miraben. Meanwhile Gandhi decided to go on 21 days fast from the 8 of May. However, the Government released him on the first day of his fast. Gandhi initially suspended the Civil Disobedience for six weeks on account of his premature release from the jail. Soon Kasturba was also released from Sabarmati Jail and brought to the Ashram. Soon she joined her husband in Poona where Gandhi persisted with 21 days fast. He broke his fast on 29th May by taking orange juice from the kind hostess, Premlila Thackersey.³ Gandhi in his message before breaking 21-Day Fast on May 29, 1933 wrote: "Within a minute or two I am going to break the fast. In His name and with faith in Him was it taken, in His name it terminates. My faith is not less today, but more. You will not expect me to make a speech on this occasion. It is an occasion for taking the name and singing the glory of God. ... I am glad that Harijans are here with us

today. I do not know exactly what work God expects from me now. But whatever it may be, I know that He will give me the strength for it.⁴

Kasturba in her statement on the occasion said “I am deeply thankful for the successful termination of the fast. God has heard the prayers of the nation. I am grateful especially to my sisters in India and abroad, who have joined with me in continuous prayers. While I rejoice today, it would be a great joy if Harijans are soon restored to a fuller life in the Hindu society than is at present permitted to them”⁵

In June 1933, Devadas was married to Lakshmi daughter of C. Rajagoplahari. Gandhi and Kasturba blessed the couple. The marriage was marked by utter simplicity. On the 18th of July Gandhi accompanied by Kasturba reached Ahmedabad. But they did not go to Sabarmati Ashram as per Gandhi’s earlier pledge.

On the 31st July Gandhi made an announcement that he along with 33 companions was going to march to the village Ras. He also intended to go further if allowed by the government. In the same breath he made it clear his decision to disband the ashram. He was arrested along with Kasturba and Mahadev Desai on 1st August 1933. Kasturba was kept at Sabarmati Jail and Gandhi and Mahadev Desai were sent to Yervada Jail. He was released on the 4th of August but was asked to not leave Poona city. He defied the Police order and was rearrested on the same day. He was tried and sentenced for one year simple imprisonment. Kasturba along with other volunteers were released from Sabarmati on the 7th of August and was asked to remain in Ahmedabad. She and other volunteers were rearrested on the same day. They were accused of defying the law. They put up no legal defence rather Kasturba pleaded guilty. The court gave her 6 months simple imprisonment. Gandhi was not allowed to do Harijan service

from the jail as it was done earlier. He went on a fast unto death on the 16th of August as he was not happy with the limited facilities for Harijan service offered by the government. Meanwhile Kasturba was taken from Sabarmati to Yervada Jail on the 20th of August. Kasturba was released on the 21st of August. She went to Sasoon Hospital, Poona where Gandhi was admitted. However, Gandhi was released on the 23rd as the Government feared for his life. Gandhi went to Parnakuti Poona. Kasturba had reached there to make arrangements though she was living on a reduced diet. She continued to be with Gandhi till 15th of September. After that Gandhi and Kasturba left for Bombay on the way to Wardha. On 2nd October 1933, a meeting was held at Nagpur to celebrate Gandhi's birthday in the presence of Kasturba. She was presented with an address couched in a silver cascade. In response Kasturba asked the people present in the meeting to discard foreign goods and resort to *Swadeshi*. It was on the 7th of November that Gandhi commenced his all India tour for the collection of funds for Harijans. He started his tour from Wardha in the presence of Kasturba, Jamnalal Bajaj and others. Kasturba was arrested on November 28, 1933 from Nadiad when she along with other volunteers including Maniben Patel was proceeding towards Ras. They were put under arrest and taken to Anand where the Magistrate asked them to restrain from no-tax campaign. On noncompliance of that order they were rearrested. Maniben Patel was sentenced to 16 months rigorous imprisonment and Kasturba was brought to Sabarmati Jail to complete her remaining period of sentence which was relaxed at the time of Gandhi's fast. She was released on 16th of May 1934. Thus we find that Kasturba played a crucial role during the Civil Disobedience Movement from 1932 to 1934. During the same period she also played the role of a true Hindu wife who served and nursed Gandhi whenever the occasions so demanded.

While Gandhi was engaged in the work of Harijan uplift several attempts were made to take his life by a section of Orthodox Hindus. But that hardly deterred him and he continued with his mission. He reached Ajmer on 5th of July 1934 along with Kasturba. Soon he left for Karachi and reached there on the 7th of July. At Karachi he was presented with a civic reception by Karachi Corporation which was also attended by Kasturba. It was from Karachi that Gandhi announced his decision to fast for a week on his return to Wardha. On the 11th of July he held a Press Conference in response to a question whether Kasturba felt uneasy at the idea of his fast. Gandhi's answer was "It has been my rare fortune that in all such matters she has never worried me, never argued with me, and has allowed me to have my own way, although she has felt the distress. Therefore although she is my wife, I have not hesitated to say that she is one of the bravest women I have ever met in this respect."⁶

They had reached Lahore on the 12th of July in the course of his tour of Harijan uplift. On 13th of July 1934 a special function was held in honour of Kasturba on behalf of the women of Punjab. She was presented with a silver pot. During that meeting a sizeable amount of fund was collected for Harijan uplift. On the 16th of July she left for Dinanagar to perform the opening ceremony of Rambhuj Dutt Bhavan. She addressed a large gathering and called upon people to work for Gandhi's mission of Harijan uplift. Gandhi along with Kasturba visited many places like Calcutta, Kanpur, Benares, Patna and finally reached Wardha on 4th of August. As announced earlier he commenced his fast on 7th of August. Kasturba constantly looked after him and fast was terminated on 14th of August. Meanwhile in May at the AICC meeting at Patna Gandhi suspended the Civil Disobedience movement for good. Kasturba continued with her Harijan uplift work and presided over fifth session of Punjab Achhut Udar Conference on 21st

March 1936. (For the text of the Speech See Appendix-3) After the suspension of Civil Disobedience Movement many events moved fast on the political front. Congress had allowed council entry; Gandhi had left Congress for good; Gandhi and Kasturba made Wardha as their home from 1934 onwards. Meanwhile the British Government had come out with Government of India Act of 1935. After staying sometime at the premises of Mahila Ashram where Vinoba Bhave's Satyagraha Ashram was located he shifted to a bungalow with 20 acres of land donated by Jamnalal Bajaj which was made as the headquarters of All India Village Industries Association. As Gandhi wanted to devote his remaining life in village service he finally shifted to the village Segaon which was later renamed as Sevagram.

Notes and References

1. Mukulbhai Kalarthi, *Ba and Bapu*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1988), p.31.
2. Pyarelal, *The Epic Fast* (Ahmedabad:Navajivan, 1932)p.49.
3. *Harijan*, 3-6-1933. Mahdev Desai says that "he (the Harijan boy) did not turn up, and the orange juice was supplied not by him but by the kind hostess, Lady Thackersey, who perhaps felt the luckiest woman that day..." However, Ganapat Rai says that Kasturba gave orange juice to Gandhi to break the fast See Ganapat Rai, *Gandhi and Kasturba: The Story of their Life*, (Lahore: Kasturba Memorial Publications, 1945), p. 87.
4. *Harijan*, 3-6-1933.
5. Ganapat Rai, *Gandhi and Kasturba: The Story of their Life*, p.87.
6. *The Tribune*, 13-7-1934.

Sevagram Ashram

It goes to the credit of Jamnalal Bajaj, who was regarded as the fifth son of Mahatma, for persuading Gandhi to settle down in Wardha and support Gandhi in the establishment of Ashram at Sevagram. Gandhi started his first village development work at a small village known as Sindi when he was staying in Maganvadi, Wardha. Gandhi wrote in *Harijan* on September 7, 1935 “I am really and literally drained dry. I have no gift for weaving messages to order. This village work is so taxing and so baffling that if I could help it, I would stop all writing and simply bury myself in a village and there work away for all I am worth, and that I should love to do in perfect silence.”¹ Thus it is clear that Gandhi was determined in his work in the village and his team made substantial progress in the work in Sindi under his guidance. But he was in search of a typical village and it was Madeline Slade (Miraben), a disciple of Gandhi from Britain, who selected the village Segaoon, about four miles to the east of Wardha town. There was another place known as Shegaon and the letters addressed to Gandhi went there. Therefore, in 1940 the village was renamed as Sevagram.

On April 30, 1936, Mahatma made this village Segaoon as his home and stayed in a makeshift arrangement under a guva tree there as his hut was not ready at that time. On his first visit, he stayed here only for a couple of days. It is pertinent to note that his concept of ashram underwent drastic changes during the Sevagram phase. He was 67 years old and he was not in favour of creating ashram as a community of people away from the village. In fact he wanted to convert the whole village into an ashram. He wanted to stay alone in the village and Kasturba could join if she wanted. But in the course time it

was taking the form of an ashram. Not only Kasturba many people joined Gandhi at Sevagram.

The Sevagram phase clearly depicts Gandhi's ideological evolution and changing approach to life and philosophy. This ideological transformation is evident from his writings during that period. Gandhi wrote in *Harijan*: "You may be sure I am living now just the way I wish to live. What I might have done at the beginning, had I more light, I am doing now in the evening of my life, at the end of my career, building from the bottom up. Study my way of living here, study my surroundings, if you wish to know what I am. Village improvement is the only foundation on which conditions in India can be permanently ameliorated."² He wanted to identify with the common man that is why made it a condition that the hut to be made for himself and Kasturba should be built using the materials available within the radius of 75 kms. and the cost should not exceed more than hundred rupees. The hut was built as per his wish and his first hut was renamed as *Adi Nivas* after his death. This hut was used by both Kasturba and Gandhi initially. In the course of time a new hut was built for Kasturba due to large number of visitors in Gandhi's hut. However, Kasturba used this hut for everybody.

Kasturba was the guiding spirit of the ashram along with Mahatma. There was no personal life for Kasturba like Gandhi and she dedicated her ashram life in the service of others. She accommodated everybody in her hut and maintained it in a nice manner. Dr. Sushila Nayar recollects her days with Kasturba in the Ashram "When I joined Sevagram Ashram, I saw how she managed to keep her own belongings tidily and those of her little grandsons and several girls like myself in one small room without overcrowding."³ Prabhavati Jayaprakash Narayan recalls Kasturba's service mentality and her motherly love "During winter days in Sevagram, I used to go into Ba's room after early morning 4 o'clock prayer. And Ba always insisted:

Prabha, Go and sleep for some time.” Even in the freezing weather Ba used to sweep the room; then would heated water for the bath, and after cleaning and dusting were over she would come to wake me up. Warm water was always ready for my bath.”⁴

She further stated: *“Ba’s life was one replete with love, dedication, and also renunciation. When little girls like us, who attended on Bapu, want to tend on Ba, she sent us away laughingly, “I don’t need anything. Don’t tire yourself”. Even in rains Ba used to carry and clean her own chamber pot.”*⁵

In 1937 during a visit to Calcutta Gandhi was suffering from illness and he came back to the Sevagram. In those days, Gandhi used to occupy his room along with others. Taking note of his difficulty Kasturba offered her room to him. Gandhi and his attendants also stayed there. Kasturba and her grandson slept in the verandah, without thinking that it was only her right to share the room with Gandhi and not of others. Next morning at the time of breakfast Gandhi told to those who were present at that time, "This room was built specially for Ba and now I have taken possession of it! Never before did she have a separate room. For, whatever she has, she always shares with others. Even after she got this room, which was built to give her a little more comfort and quiet in her old age, she has been doing this. For example, quite a number of girls, after whom Ba has been looking, have stayed here. But if I stayed here, then Ba would have to go. The fact of the matter is, that wherever I happen to go, the place is turned into a wayside inn. And this makes me feel very uneasy. But Ba has never complained even once. And so I can have from Ba whatever I need. Indeed, she has invariably acquiesced in my wishes and put up in her room, whomsoever I have sent to her."⁶

Then he added: "And all this is as it ought to be. Is it not? If the husband says one thing, and the wife another, then

their life becomes unpleasant. But in the present case, to whatever the husband has said, the wife has always consented."⁷ Hearing this even Kasturba could not control her laughter.

In 1937, the All India Educational Conference was held at Wardha and in which Gandhi came up with Basic education scheme. The Sevagram Ashram was the testing ground for his educational ideas and it was implemented later throughout the country.

It was during his Sevagram phase, he became more convinced about the efficacy of constructive work along with *Satyagraha* and in 1940s he came up with his constructive programme for the reconstruction of Indian villages. Sevagram witnessed many important meetings and discussions which determined the future of India. The idea of Quit India movement took its shape in the first meeting held here. Similarly the preliminary deliberations of Individual *Satyagraha* were also held in the Ashram. Kasturba was a silent partner in all his initiatives.

Notes and References

1. *Harijan* 7-8 1935.
2. *Harijan*, 8-8-1936 / *Bombay Chronicle*, 7-3-1937.
3. Sushila Nayar "Ba and Bapu" in *Kasturba Memorial*, (Indore: Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, 1962), p.137.
4. Prabhavati Jayaprakash Narayan "She was 'Ba'" in *Kasturba Memorial*, op.cit., p.137.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Mukulbhai Kalarthi, *Ba and Bapu* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1988), pp.33-34.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Rajkot Satyagraha and Quit India Movement

During the British days India was divided between two groups British India and Princely India. Rajkot was one of the princely States. Kasturba and Gandhi had a very close relationship with Rajkot. Not only had his early education there but also his father was a *Diwan* to the Rajkot State for many years. Initially Congress did not start any democratic movement in respect of Princely India. It confined its struggle only in respect of British India. However by the later part of 1930s people of Princely States had their own stirrings for democratic rights. In 1938 people of Rajkot started demanding democratic rights under the leadership of Sardar Vallabhai Patel. Ultimately an agreement was signed between Patel and ruler of Rajkot State. As per the agreement an amnesty was to be granted to political prisoners and a committee of 10 out of which 7 members were to be nominated with the consent of Sardar Patel. The Committee had the mandate to frame a scheme of political reforms. Subsequently the ruler of Rajkot went back on his word and refused to take any proper step in this regard. It became evident that the ruler had the support of the colonial power working through its political agents. This is what provided the background to the Rajkot *Satyagraha*.

Kasturba along with Maniben Patel wanted the said agreement to be honoured and implemented. So she decided to intervene in the matter though she was not keeping in good health. Sardar Patel in a statement said that it was much against his own inclination, he had to yield to Kasturba's insistence on the struggle. On 3rd February 1939 Kasturba reached Rajkot along with Maniben Patel. Both of them were arrested on their arrival and kept in police custody in a very inhospitable

condition. Not only that, Maniben was soon to be separated from Kasturba. Latter was lodged at Tramba.

Maniben Patel describes about it as follows: “In 1938 the *sayagraha* movement was going on in Rajkot. Princely administration let loose a reign of terror over the people. Kasturba was greatly moved with these sufferings of the people. Bapu was not keeping well in those days. On the other side she could not help the feeling like going to Rajkot considering the suppression to which the people there were subjected.

Bapu never insisted on her participation or non participation in the Rajkot Satyagraha. He remained completely neutral in this matter. Sardar Vallabhbhai tried his level best to prevent Ba from participating in the movement, but when the satyagraha was resumed, he had to allow Ba to go to Rajkot.”¹

Gandhi visited her on the last day of February 1939. Gandhi told her in the course of meeting with her that he would not leave Rajkot before this mission was fulfilled. Gandhi announced his intention to go on fast from 4th of March 1939. Kasturba continued to be in police custody and was much worried about Gandhi's fast. Dr. Sushila Nayar had met her and enquired whether she wanted to be with Gandhi during his fast. But she refused saying that God had taken care of him and he will do the same this time too. However, on the 5th of March Kasturba was released so that she could be with Gandhi. Gandhi fast ended on the 7th of March. Later Gandhi blamed himself for breaking the fast through the intervention of Viceroy. Actually the ruler of Rajkot had duped him. The formation of the reform committee involved protracted polemics. Gandhi came to the conclusion that he should not have sought Viceroy's intervention which vitiated the entire process of negotiation. He felt that he should have continued with his fast which might had resulted in the melting of the

heart of the Rajkot ruler. As a matter of repentance he decided to forgo the advantages given by the award at the Viceroy's instance and made a fervent appeal to the Rajkot ruler to give the best possible deal to the people of Rajkot. People became very critical of Gandhi's decision though he continued to hold his ground.

Many things were happening at the level of India and the world. The Government of India Act of 1935 paved the way for provincial autonomy. Consequently, elections were held for provincial legislatures in early part of 1935. And after prolonged negotiations in July 1937 Congress governments took office in several provinces. Things were equally moving fast at the world level. Hitler had come to power in Germany and his actions were preparing the background for Second World War which actually ensued in September 1939. The British Government had dragged India into the War without any consultations with the national leaders. All this had created crisis inside the Congress as well. Subhas Chandra Bose had been elected as the President for the second time at Tripuri Congress despite the opposition from Gandhi. An ideological conflict had arisen on the point of means to be adopted for the achievement of Indian independence. Subhas Chandra Bose had never looked as *ahimsa* as his creed which Gandhi had always stood by. That conflict finally resulted in the expulsion of Subhas Chandra Bose from the Congress which led to the launching of Indian National Army for the independence of India in an armed struggle.

The Congress tried to negotiate with the government and to give conditional support to the British war efforts provided some concrete commitment was given towards the independence of India at the end of the war. There was no positive response from the government. Hence the Congress continued to hang between cooperation and struggle. During this period Gandhi had become a stickler for *ahimsa* and was

opposed to any idea of war. So he excused himself from the Congress leadership. But the negotiations between Congress did not move forward so Gandhi resumed the leadership position and launched the Individual *Satyagraha* towards the end of 1940 making Vinoba as the first individual *Satyagrahi*. The movement lasted for a year and came to an end in 1941.

Meanwhile the situation on the war front was going against the allied powers and Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and was knocking at the door of India. The British Government had sent Cripps Mission on March 1942 at the instance of President Roosevelt of America. However, Cripps Mission failed to thaw the ice which formed the background for Quit India Movement. Gandhi launched Quit India Movement on 8th August 1942 with the slogan "Do or Die." The clarion call of Gandhi was so irresistible people jumped into the vortex of freedom. It was a fight to the finish.

Soon after the launching of the movement Congress leaders including Gandhi were arrested. He was lodged in Aga Khan Palace. Gandhi was to address a public meeting at Shivaji Park at Bombay but had been arrested before he could address the meeting. Kasturba instantaneously announced that she would be addressing the public meeting at the same place and at the same time which Gandhi was supposed to address. Before she could address the meeting she was arrested and shifted to Aga Khan Palace, Poona. In her message to the women on the occasion, she said: "Gandhiji poured out his heart before you for 2 hours in the All India Congress Committee meeting last night. What can I add to that? All that remains to us is to live up to his instructions. The women of India have to prove their mettle. They should all join in this struggle irrespective of caste or creed. Truth and non-violence must be our watchwords."²

Kasturba along with Gandhi was greatly grieved at the premature demise of Mahadev Desai on 15th of August 1942,

while he was undergoing incarceration along with them at the Aga Khan Palace in Poona. Kasturba could hardly withstand the shock from the demise of Mahadev Desai. After that she came to know about Gandhi's intention to fast for 21 days in February 1943. Though she had faced many grim battles, Gandhi's fast at the age of 73 was too much of a suffering for her to bear. On the top of it, she herself was not keeping good health. She had to face anxiety and mental worry during the 21 days fast of Gandhi which virtually gave her a mortal blow. Kasturba had a premonition that she would not survive this final ordeal and had even made a sort of a will for distributing her things among friends. At the conclusion of the fast, she had suffered a heart attack but recovered from it. Her condition did not ameliorate much. A proposal came before the Government to release her on health grounds which was finally rejected. By the end of December 1943, Kasturba's health condition further deteriorated. It became alarming when she had another heart attack. Gandhi was quite anxious on her score. Kasturba had expressed her desire to call Kanu Gandhi and Prabhavati, the wife of Jayaprakash Naryan, to nurse her and *Vaidyaraj* Shiv Sharma of Lahore to treat her in respect of her ailments. The government had considered this request after great deal of dilly dallying. Prabhavati arrived on 12th of January 1944 and Kanu Gandhi on the 1st of February and Vaidyaraj Shiv Sharma on the 11th of February. All these efforts could not produce any desired results. Everybody felt that Kasturba would not be able to survive this crisis.

Notes and References

1. Maniben V. Patel "The height of Devotion" in *Kasturba Memorial*, (Indore: Kasturba National Memorial Trust, 1962), p.139.
2. Sushila Nayar, *Kasturba – A Personal Reminiscence* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1960), pp.32-33.

The Road to Martyrdom

Dr. Sushila Nayyar, a medical doctor and sister of Pyarelal- Gandhi's Secretary, was with them in the entire period of incarceration in Aga Khan Palace in Poona. She was all the time monitoring Kasturba's health. Apart from her, doctors like Dr. Dinshah Mehta and Dr. Gilder were called to provide special care. Seeing her end coming, her sons were called to pay their visit. On 19th of February 1944 Kasturba became restless and she had oxygen throughout the night.

Dr. Sushila Nayar vividly describes Kasturba's conditions during the last few days of her life. She wrote: "Gandhiji sat on her bed almost throughout the day. His proximity gave her a strange peace of mind. He sent for Dr. Gilder and me. 'Please stop all medicines now. Ramanama is the sovereign remedy. I am inclined to say stop all food also except honey and water. If she asks for food, we shall see what to do. I do not believe in medicines. I refused to give them to my children during their most serious illnesses, but I have not forced this rule on Ba. Today she herself is disinclined to take medicines. She has no peace without Ramanama. I have heard nothing but Ramanama come from her lips since this morning. It is a most touching scene, but I love it. I would certainly stop all medicines while she is in this frame of mind. If God wills it, He will pull her through, else I would let her go, but I won't drug her any longer." Penicillin had been sent by airplane from Calcutta. Col. Shah and Col. Bhandari brought the news that it had come. Gandhiji had made us stop all medicines. Ba herself was disinclined to take them. What was our duty under the circumstances? Devadasbhai was keen on penicillin being

given a trial. He talked to Dr. Gilder and me about it and was about to go out to consult a military doctor. Dr. Mehta was to go with him. Just then Ba called out, "Where is Mehta? Tell him to come and give me a massage." Dr. Mehta was called from the doorsteps. He did not think it advisable to give her massage in that condition. However, in view of Ba's insistence, he gently massaged her arms and legs for 15 minutes, using powder instead of oil, and then went away. She was still resting in my lap in a drowsy condition. After sometime she again called out: "Where is Mehta? Call him. He will do everything for me." Could there be a better certificate for Dr. Mehta from Ba?"¹

On the 20th of February her health condition further deteriorated and her blood pressure had come down; the kidney had almost failed and her heart was in a very bad shape. She refused to take any medicine and appeared quite ready to start her eternal journey. Gandhi was called and he spent most of the night by her bedside. Dr. Sushila Nayar further describes the developments of the 20th night.

"As I went in I saw Dr. Gilder sitting in the chair by her side. Ba was again asking for a dose of castor oil. Dr. Gilder was trying to dissuade her. "The purgative will increase your weakness, Ba. You must not have it." "What does it matter?" replied Ba. "I am nearing the end in any case." "Why do you talk in that fashion, Ba?" Dr. Gilder said coaxingly. "Your sons are coming to see you. Devadas will be here today. Ramdas will come tomorrow. You must live." Ba smiled at the mention of her sons. Then she became serious. "Why have you sent for them?" she said. "You are all my children, aren't you? If I die, you will cremate me. As for Ramdas, he should be told not to come. Travelling is expensive and the trains are overcrowded these days."²

Dr. Sushila Nayar also describes Harilal's visit to Kasturba who was almost on death bed as follows: "Ba had

been asking for Harilal every day. Everyone was searching for him, but he could not be found. At last, on the 20th, Swami Anand succeeded in tracing him. Harilalbai told the Superintendent on the telephone that he would have come during the day but for the fact that he had overslept in the afternoon. We all understood what oversleep in the afternoon meant in his case. Ba was angry. Gandhiji pacified her. At last, on the 21st afternoon, Harilalbai came. Ba was deeply grieved to see his drunken state and she began to beat her forehead. Harilalbai had to be removed from her sight.”³

Towards the end Kasturba was suffering from pneumonia which is a contagious disease so Kasturba did not allow Gandhi to be with her for a long time. But he used to visit her several times during the night. Dr. Sushila Nayar wrote: “With all this background, how could I dare suggest his not sitting with Ba during the last days of her life out of fear of catching pneumonia? Dr. Gilder saw my point. “Well, let him sit near her but let him not keep his face so near hers,” he said. But no one dared say even that to him. The best course I felt was to say nothing. Dr. Gilder also agreed in the end. “Yes, let him do as he likes. After 62 years of partnership, he sees the parting is coming. How can he keep away from her and how can we ask him to do so?” His eyes were moist as he spoke.

One day, before the final phase of Ba's illness, she told Gandhiji that she would like to try hydropathy. Gandhiji took a very keen interest in naturopathy. From the very next day he took up her case and started giving her alternate cold and warm hip baths and sitz baths. He spent nearly an hour over it every afternoon and it tired him. One day she said: “Please go and attend to your work. You have such a lot to do. Sushila will give me the bath.” “Don't worry about my work,” he replied and continued giving her the treatment. One day he just mentioned how hard pressed he was for time. I said to him: “Bapu, you know I am always ready to serve Ba. So you can

save this one hour whenever you like." "I know you are ready to do anything for Ba," he replied. "But God has given me this rare opportunity to serve her in the evening of my life. I consider it invaluable. So long as Ba will accept my services, I will gladly spare the time for her."⁴

On February 22 morning her condition further deteriorated and she expressed a desire to be taken to Gandhi's room and he was called by Dr. Sushila Nayar. He sat on her bed stroking her head and hands. Earlier Kasturba would always ask him to go for a walk or go to sleep or do his work. But this time when Gandhi asked her whether he could go for a walk. She gave an emphatic "No." Dr. Sushila Nayar describes the last seen as follows: "So he sat down on her bed. She rested her head on his breast and leaning against him lay quietly with closed eyes. There was ineffable peace and satisfaction on the faces of both. It was a sacred sight. Reverentially we all moved away on tiptoe. Gandhiji sat with her till 10 a.m. Every now and then he told her to take shelter with Ramanama. Whenever she coughed, he stroked her and soothed her."⁵ It was only at 10 a.m. Kasturba allowed Gandhi to leave. Soon he came back and asked Ba to open her mouth and poured a spoonful of *Gangajal* along with Tulsi brought by Devdas. She was told Ramdas was coming and she said why should he come? Perhaps she could not think of Ramdas undergoing any kind of inconvenience and suffering. She told Gandhi: "Do not sorrow after my death. It should be an occasion for rejoicing." Then she closed her eyes, and folded her hands and began to pray, "O, Lord! I have filled my belly like an animal. Forgive me. I pray for your grace. I want to be your devotee and love you with all my heart. I want nothing else."⁶ Devadas wanted to give penicillin injection to Kasturba and Gandhi did not like this idea. It was during those last moments that her brother Madhavdas came up. There were tears in Kasturba's eyes. But she could not speak. Dr. Sushila Nayar describes the last scene

as follows: “She put her head on his lap and lay back. The eyes began to lose their luster. There were a few hiccups and a gurgling sound from the throat. She opened her mouth, three or four gasps, and all was still. She was at last free from all bondage. Gandhiji had wondered in whose lap she would pass away. Who would be the fortunate one to render her this last service. None deserved it better than he.”⁷ She died exactly at 7.35p.m. Devadas wept like a child and even there was a tear in a corner of Gandhi’s eyes despite all his *Anasakti Sadhana*.

Friends and relatives of Kasturba wanted public funeral outside the jail. Gandhi was prepared to give an assurance to the Government that no violent demonstrations would take place if permission for public funeral was given. However, the Government did not allow permission for public funeral.

Dr. Sushila Nayar describes the last rites of Kasturba in the following words.

“On the 23rd of February, friends and relatives started coming in from 7 a.m. There was a collection of about 150 people. Manu Mashruwala offered "Arati" to the dead body. Everyone made obeisance. There was a heap of floral offerings. Friends of every community—Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Christians and Englishmen were present. The Brahmin who had performed the last rites for Mahadevbhai arrived. Devadasbhai was selected by him to perform the last rites for his mother. After the body had been placed on the funeral pyre, Gandhiji offered a short prayer. It consisted of bits of Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Parsi prayers. Devadasbhai lighted the fire.” She had been cremated on the side of the Mahadev Desai’s *Samadhi* whom both Gandhi and Kasturba treated as their own son.

In the preceding pages an attempt was made to give an overview of the life, and work of Kasturba Gandhi, a highly empowered and inspired person. In the course of her life she really turned out to be the mother of Indian nation. It is not for

nothing she was addressed by people as *Ba* (mother). As this study shows that though Kasturba as a true Hindu wife mostly lived under the shadow of Gandhi, she had an independent mind and personality of her own which she had displayed from the days of her childhood when she was married to Gandhi. She tried to merge her personality with Gandhi and stood by him in all his struggles. Yet she retained her independence both in terms of thinking and action. On critical moments she engaged in daring acts on her own. Thus she became a source of inspiration to thousands of men and women who put everything at the stake in the fight for Indian independence. As she died a martyr's death like Mahadev Desai and thousands of others she continued to inspire people as much during her life as after her death.

Notes and References

1. Sushila Nayar, *Kasturba – A Personal Reminiscence* (Ahmedabad : Navajivan, 1960), pp.86-87.
2. *Ibid.* pp. 88-9.
3. *Ibid.* p.89.
4. *Ibid.* p.91.
5. *Ibid.* p.94.
6. *Ibid.* p.95.
7. *Ibid.* p.97.

Appendices

Appendix-1

Speech of Kasturba Gandhi at Ajmer

(In October 1922 Kasturba Gandhi presided over Ajmer District Political Conference. Ramdas Gandhi read out the text of Kasturba's speech.)

In our country, when the political movement has become intense, you should have chosen someone skilled in politics as the president of this meeting. I am neither a person involved in political movements nor familiar with this province. I understand only this much that you have given me this position to express my strong faith in Gandhiji and the means recommended by him. I follow him considering it as my duty. It seems to me that thoughts and experiences of Gandhiji are relevant today and his path is always beneficial and peaceful. What message can I give you today except faith and determination? Gandhiji's message is the eternal message of religion.

You have declared your non-cooperation against the government. But that will be successful only when there is complete cooperation among you. I believe that mutual cooperation among the people is self-rule-*Swaraj*. When our mutual cooperation falls apart, we are forced to bow our heads before the rule of others.

I heard that there are people knitting handmade yarn in and around your province. With the help of them you can prepare pure *Khadi*. You must now understand that trading in foreign clothing is equivalent to enmity with the country. Wearing a foreign garment is like a betrayal of spirit of self-rule or *Swaraj*. If you have any sort of kindness for the poor person in your mind, you will definitely wear only *khadi*. I pray to my sisters that you wear only pure *Khadi*. The poor people of the

country will get their livelihood from it. It will help the sisters who live in poverty to protect their sanctity and religion.

Please do not think that foreign cloth is less bad than alcohol. To remove alcohol you put lot of efforts but to get rid of the foreign cloth you should work more earnestly by visiting the houses of your relatives and friends who are wearing foreign clothes and pursue them to give it up.

I just met Gandhiji in Yervada jail. There also he is doing the work of *Khadi*. He himself is preparing cotton and spins the yarn. If you want to satisfy Gandhiji and to achieve *Swarajya* as soon as possible, then you should engage in production and sale of *Khadi*, by promoting it from house to house. In *Khadi*, there is self rule of all communities; it also includes cow protection of Hindus and defense of Khilafat of Muslims.

Your city is the place of a great Muslim monk who first set foot in *Hindusthan* and whom all Hindus and Muslims look upon with great respect. I consider that the unity of Hindus and Muslims is safe under his shadow. This place is such that it should be a model for Hindu-Muslim unity for the whole of India.

In Punjab, in the face of police atrocities, the brave Akalis have presented an example of their determination for peace and love of religion. In this condition, there is no need to tell separately how much peace is needed in our battle and how easy it is to maintain it. If *Swarajya* means the happiness and peace of thirty crore Indians, that can be attained only by peace. One can never get peace by using the means of disturbance.

And I pray to you all and especially that of the Hindu brothers and sisters. It is our religious duty to adopt our untouchable brothers. Even though everybody understood this matter, adequate efforts have not been made in this regard. After three months, if I could convey to Gandhiji that the untouchability is

completely removed from the province of Ajmer, then his happiness would be equivalent to the attainment of *Swaraj*.

Before I conclude my speech, I want to remind you one thing. You have promised to Gandhiji that you would call him here when half of Ajmer, at least 15 thousand Ajmer residents wear *Khadi* from head to toe. If you have called me as a representative of Gandhiji, I assume that you have fulfilled your promise.

Let me conclude my short speech by praying that may God bless you with all the strength to bear all kinds of suffering and ability to forgive each other's mistakes for self-rule.

Source: Shobhalal Gupt *Gandhi aur Rajasthan* (Hindi) (Bhilwara: Rajasthan Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, 1969), pp.26-28.

Appendix-2

Speech of Kasturba Gandhi

(On 23rd and 24th of November 1931 the local Congress Committee of Mirwada, Rajputana and Central India organized a meeting of political Council and Kasturba presided over it. Chandra Shankar Shukla read out the text of Kasturba's speech.)

You didn't call me here because I understand something special in political matters. You wanted to express your complete faith in Gandhiji. You wanted to endorse your belief that your interests are safe in Gandhiji's hands. That is why you have given this position to me.

You have to consider the problems of both the British territory and the princely states together because princely states are spread all around you. Thus literally speaking our country is one. We are one people. So there may be distinction between the British territory and princely states, but it is not for us. We are one people, similarly the works to be done before us are the

same. We have to get bread for the starving people. We have to teach the oppressed people how to uplift themselves and overcome their evil customs and to attain self-purification. When true and real power will be in the hands of people, many of our entanglements will disappear on their own. If we are strong, then the people around us also will become powerful by themselves.

Often I have been hearing about the harassment caused by the kings. It deeply hurts me. I wonder, why should our kings do like this? Like the British, they have not come here from some foreign countries. Our princely kings are our own. They are born here and their marriages took place here. All their relatives are from here only. Their final resting place is also here only. Then why don't they make their subjects happy? If power is generated in the people, it will be for the good of the kings also. I have heard that some people are agitated against the kings. It is true that some kings made adverse comments in the Round Table Conference in London. What else could those helpless persons do? Where will they say what is in their hearts? Without the support of the government they cannot survive even for a single day. But Gandhiji is not disappointed with the matter regarding the kings. Only when fear is driven out of the hearts of the kings, they will be able to do a lot for the people.

But we do not have to depend on kings. So many tasks that require to be done are before us. Take the work of *Khadi*. *Khadi* was almost getting destroyed. Due to the efforts of Charkha Sangh, *Khadi* was again revived. If you decide, then Rajasthan alone can produce *Khadi* for the whole of India. But I have heard that you do not wear *Khadi* to the extent you produce it. This cannot be called good. When you have *Kamdhenu* like *Khadi* in your home why do you need cloth from outside?

The poverty stricken sisters are getting employment from *Khadi* work. Therefore, all women should wear *Khadi*. Right from the queen to school girls, everyone should wear *Khadi*. I am happy to know that the work of self-reliance in cloth is going on in Bijolia and Ringas. Most of the farmers of Bijolia are preparing clothes as per their requirements. And in Ringas also, this experiment is progressing. It will be good, if by such experiments Rajasthan can place an example in self sufficiency in cloth before the whole country.

We should not take the work of boycott of foreign cloth lightly. Our freedom lies in removing this sin completely from the country. We have stopped the fight against the government, but the fight against foreign cloth is going on and so is the fight against alcohol. We women only will be able to do good work to stop the consumption of alcohol. Now our sisters in Rajasthan should come and take such works into their own hands.

But there is no end of the practice of veil or purdha here. Old people marry girls who are like their daughters. Boys and girls in their childhood are married away like dolls. This sin is horrendous. How long will you tolerate all these evil practices?

Unless and until we end these evil practices it will be impossible to purify our self. All over India the women are awakened. In such a situation, how can it be tolerated if Rajasthan alone lags behind?

I have heard something the thought of which makes me jittery.

In such a situation how Rajasthan remains alone backward, "I have also heard such a thing, just recalling about it will make me clumsy. It is said that in Rajasthan there is a custom of keeping servants. At the time of marriage, these people are also given in dowry. I earnestly hope that this is not true. Last year

you fought with the government bravely, why don't you fight with these social evils in the same manner?

Nowadays your attention would be towards the London. Some people fear that British India will get Swaraj. But the subjects of the princely states will remain like this only. But do not keep such fear in mind. If we remove our faults and continue to serve the people day and night, we can attain self-rule automatically. Everyone will get light after sunrise. One should not lose faith in this matter. We should make the people powerful ourselves by removing social evils and serving the people. Here I cannot help saying something to the princely kings. Taking into consideration the changes are taking place today, they should fulfill at the earliest the aspirations of the people in terms of happiness and freedom. Otherwise it may result in losing centuries old faith in the king from the hearts of the people; the people will become frustrated and consider the king as their enemy. It is up to the kings to make the heart of the people their throne. The days of strengthening one's throne by suppressing the people are gone forever. The problem of *Harijans* (untouchables) is such that you should solve it immediately. Only then will you get God's blessings. It is true that the question of untouchability is not severe in cities, but this problem remains fierce in villages.

The message of *Swarajya* has reached every village. Many groups of villagers have gone to the jails, still the Congress workers have not reached the villages in sufficient numbers. If we do enough work in the villages, the task of achieving *Swaraj* will become very easy.

This is the work of the youth of the country. Taking note of the patriotism of the young men and women of India, whose heart will not be filled with joy?

To protect the honor of the flag young men have had their heads bashed and women have also endured the beating with

the canes. Now you have to reach each and every village and do solid work. The work in the villages is arid, but once you enter the hearts of innocent people of the villages, then you will never feel like leaving the villages. The key to Swarajya is in our villages only. I have seen days of happiness and sorrow. But it is certain that the self-rule will become a reality, my tired eyes are eagerly awaiting to see self-rule. Therefore, I tell the youth not to waste their energy but to channelize it to work and to merge their strength with the strength of the Congress. In the end, you have to administer self-rule.

The country has made amazing progress in these years. We have talked a lot about the shortcomings of Rajasthan, but it doesn't mean that we have forgotten the fact that Rajasthan is a heroic land, a land of sacrifice. Sacrifice life and property was the biggest festival your ancestors. Character was more important than their lives and properties, it was written by your ancestors with their blood on Dhara-Tirtha, and history is a witness to it. Since ancient times you have been bearing the responsibility of attaining *Swaraj*. Make the flame shine brighter, and be determined with a devotion to achieve the supreme ideal. I bless you all.

Source: Shobhalal Gupt *Gandhi or Rajasthan* (Hindi) (Bhilwara: Rajasthan Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, 1969), pp.30-33.

Appendix-3 **Speech of Kasturba Gandhi**

(Kasturba Gandhi presided over the fifth session of Punjab Achhut Uddhar Conference on 21st March 1936 and delivered a speech on the occasion. This is the text of Kasturba's speech.)

“The Harijan movement has become part and parcel of our life. It is now deeply impressed on our hearts that we cannot move a step forward on the path of truth and *Dharma* by keeping untouchability with us. Fortunately, this problem is not so acute

in the Punjab as it is in some other provinces, particularly in Southern India. Endeavours have been made from time to time for the removal of this curse. The Sikh Gurus allowed their followers to drink the nectar of equality, Swami Ram Tirath preached his message of love for all. Guru Nanak never allowed for a moment considerations of high and low caste to sway him. The Arya Samaj also did good work in this direction according to its own light. That is why the problem is not so complicated here as you see it in other parts of India. But you cannot say that untouchability has been completely wiped out from the Punjab. We have been able to shake the roots of untouchability, but have not succeeded in eradicating it. The sin of untouchability is not an ordinary sin. We can only cleanse ourselves from this great sin by service and sacrifice, but the service has to be selfless. Mahatma Gandhi declared time and again that there is nothing political in this movement; it is purely a service of humanity; an expiation of a great sin. True and selfless service is true devotion to our ancient religion.

“I feel pained when I hear that everyone wants to convert Harijans with a view to having them in a particular fold. These endeavours are not truly religious. All religions equally preach the greatness of truth. There must be no use of force. Every one of us has a right to serve the poor and the down-trodden but overpowered by greed, it is not man’s right to seize another’s property and make it his own.

“The man who changes his religion for mundane gains cannot find solace in the religion he adopts. We are not concerned about other religions. We have got to look to our own shortcomings and drawbacks. If we can but purify our souls, the Hindu *Dharma* will be free from this curse, and nobody will ever think of leaving the fold of this purified religion. Whosoever follows this religion will not discriminate between Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs because this discrimination is after all another form of untouchability. This

is the reason why I feel that service of Harijans will cut at the roots of communalism.

“It is satisfactory to note the Punjab’s efforts in the Harijan movement. The province has hitherto contributed about Rs. 5,000 for the *Pani* Fund opened by the Harijan Sewa Sangh. In this direction our indefatigable sister, Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru has done sufficient work. Her noble example of zeal and service should be followed by others. But the water trouble is very severe in the hilly tracts of Kangra. This contribution is not even a drop in the big ocean. Whatever you contribute in this fund is too small.

It should be duty to open wells and temple for Harijans.

“I am delighted to see that the Punjab Sanatan Dharma Pritinidhi Sabha has done much in this direction. There cannot be any greater injustice that that Harijans should feel thirsty in this land of five rivers. Likewise there cannot be any greater irreligious action that that the doors of temples should be closed to Harijans. You must put an end to this.

“I have a message for Harijans. Those who drink should abstain from this pernicious habit. I have come to know that most Harijans are addicted to gambling. This bad habit should also be done away with. Our Harijan brothers should observe cleanliness, abstain from drink and gambling, remember their God and stand on their own feet.

It is not possible that in this address I should not utter a few words to my sisters and daughters. Women can achieve greater degree of success in religious reform than men. You can teach your Harijan sisters in their homes to read and write, to sew and generally help to uplift the.

“I must conclude not. May God light such a flame in your hearts as will wholly consume untouchability!”

She gave the following message to the women of the Punjab:

“My message to the women of this land of five rivers is that if we, women take up earnestly the mission of the removal of untouchability with all its attendant evils, we can do it much easier than men alone can. So let us, women, concentrate upon fraternizing with our neglected brothers and sisters.”

Source: Ganpat Rai, *Gandhi and Kasturba*, (Lahore: Kasturba Memorial Publications) pp.103-105.

Appendix-4 **Kasturba's letter to Harilal**

(The following letter was written by Kasturba Gandhi sometime in September 1936 to her eldest son, Harilal expressing her anguish about his improper behavior.)

My dear son Hiralal,

I have heard that recently in Madras policemen found you misbehaving in a state of drunkenness at midnight in an open street and took you into custody. Next day, you were produced before a bench of magistrates and they fined you Re. 1. They must have been very good to treat you so leniently.

Even the magistrates showed regard for your father in thus giving you only a nominal punishment. But I have been feeling very miserable ever since I heard about this incident. I do not know whether you were alone that night or accompanied by some of your friends, but in any case you acted very improperly.

I do not know what to say to you. I have been pleading with you all these long years to hold yourself in check. But you have been going from bad to worse. Now you are making my very existence impossible. Think of the misery you are causing to your aged parents in the evening of their lives.

Your father says nothing to anyone, but I know how the shocks you are giving him are breaking his heart. You are committing a sin in thus repeatedly hurting our feelings. Though born as a son, you are indeed behaving like an enemy.

I am told that in your recent wanderings you have been criticizing and ridiculing your great father. This does not behove such an intelligent boy as you. You little realize that you only disgrace yourself by speaking evil of your father. He has nothing but love in his heart for you. You know that he attaches the greatest importance to purity of conduct. But you have never paid any heed to his advice. Yet he has offered to keep you with him, to feed and clothe you, and even nurse you.

He has so many other responsibilities in this world. He cannot do more for you He can only lament his fate God has given him great will-power and may God grant him as long a life as he may require for fulfilling his mission on this earth But I am a frail old woman and unable to stand the mental anguish you are causing me

Your father daily gets letters from people complaining about your conduct He has to suffer all this disgrace. But you have left no place for me anywhere. For sheer shame, I am unable to move about among friends or strangers. Your father will always pardon you, but God will not tolerate your conduct.

At Madras you were the guest of some prominent person. But you abused his hospitality by leaving his roof and misconducting yourself in the manner reported. It cannot but have embarrassed your host.

Every morning, I rise with a shudder to think what fresh news of disgrace the newspapers will bring I sometimes wonder where you are, where you sleep and what you eat. Perhaps, you take forbidden food .That and other similar thoughts give me sleepless nights. I often feel like meeting you .But I do not

know where to find you. You are my eldest son and nearly 50 years old. I am even afraid of approaching you lest you humiliate me.

I do not know why you changed your ancient religion. That is your affair. But I hear that you go about asking innocent and ignorant people to follow your example. Why will you not realize your limitations? What do you know about religion? What judgment can you exercise in your mental condition? People are liable to be led away by the fact that you are your father's son. You are not fit to preach religion.

In time to come if you go on like this you will be shunned by all alike. I beseech you to pause and consider and turn back from your folly.

I did not like your conversion, but when I saw your statement that you had decided to improve yourself, I felt secretly glad even about conversion hoping that you would now start leading a sober life. But that hope too is dashed to pieces.

You know how unhappy your son is on account of your behaviour. Your daughters and your son-in-law also bear with increasing difficulty the burden of sorrow your conduct has imposed upon them.

To his Muslim friends

Kasturba addressed also the following letter to the Muslim friends of Hiralal:

I am only referring to those of you who are taking an active part in my son's recent activities. I have not been able to understand your action. I know and I am glad to think that a large number of thinking Mussalmans and all our life-long Muslim friends condemn the whole of this episode.

Instead of redeeming my son I find his so-called change of faith has actually made matters worse. Some people have even gone

to the length of supplying the title of 'Maulvi' to him. Is this fair? Does your religion permit such persons as my son being called Maulvi?

I do not understand what pleasures you find in sometimes lionizing him. What you are doing is not at all in his interest. If your desire is mainly to hold us up to ridicule, I have nothing to say to you. You may do your worst.

But the feeble voice of a stricken mother will perhaps quicken the consciences of those who may be in a position to influence you. I feel it my duty to repeat to you what I am telling my son, namely, that you are not doing the right thing in the eyes of God.

Source : R. K. Prabhu (Ed.) *Sati Kasturba: A Life Sketch* (Bombay: Hind Kitabs, 1944), pp. 65-67.

Appendix-5

Margaret Sanger's interview with Gandhi in November 1936

I suppose you know that all my life I have been dinning into the ears of women the fact that they are their own mistresses, not only in this but in all matters. I began my work with my own wife. While I have abused my wife in many respects, I have tried to be her teacher also. If today she is somewhat literate it is because I became her teacher. I was not the ideal teacher because I was a brute. The animal passion in me was too strong and I could not become the ideal teacher. My wife I made the orbit of all women. In her I studied all women. I came into contact with many European women in South Africa, but I knew practically every Indian woman there. I worked with them. I tried to show them they were not slaves either of their husbands or parents, that they had as much right to resist their husbands as their parents, not only in the political field but in the domestic as well. But the trouble was that some could not

resist their husbands. I feel that I speak with some confidence and knowledge because I have worked with and talked with and studied many women. But the remedy is in the hands of the women themselves. ...

I have identified myself with my wife to the same extent, but she observes certain decencies with me, which I have not done with her. I intimately know her. I have made use of her. But I do not suppose there are many women who can claim to have followed their husbands so slavishly as she has. She has followed, sometimes reluctantly, but her reluctance has had a tinge of obedience in it, for she is a good Hindu wife. I have often challenged her and asked her to lead her own independent life but she will not do so. She is too much a Hindu wife for that.

Source: *Asia* Vol. 26, no. 11, Nov. 1936, pp. 698-702.

Appendix-6 **Why Kasturba Gandhi?**

(Gandhi wrote in *Harijan*, explaining his critics about Kasturba's motive to join Rajkot Satyagraha)

Segaon,
February 6, 1939

I had not intended to say anything about my wife having joined the Rajkot struggle. But some cruel criticism I have seen about her intervention prompts an explanation. It had never occurred to me that she should join it. For one thing she is too old for such hardships as are involved in being in civil disobedience struggles. But strange as it may appear to critics, they must believe me when I say that though she is illiterate, she is and has been for years absolutely free to do what she likes. When she joined the struggle in South Africa or in India, it was of her own inner prompting. And so it was this time. When she heard of Manibehn's arrest, she could not restrain herself and asked

me to let her go. I said she was too weak. She had just then fainted in her bathroom in Delhi and might have died but for Devdas's presence of mind. She said she did not mind. I then referred her to Sardar. He would not hear of it either.

But this time he melted. He had seen my grief over the breach of faith by the Thakore Saheb induced by the Resident. The reader must realize my ancestral connection with Rajkot and the intimate personal relations I had with the present Ruler's father. Kasturba is a daughter of Rajkot. She felt a personal call. She could not sit still whilst the other daughters of Rajkot were suffering for the freedom of the men and women of the State. Rajkot is no doubt an insignificant place on the map of India. But it is not insignificant for me and my wife. As a child she was brought up in Rajkot though born in Porbandar. And, after all, neither she nor I can be unconcerned in a struggle which is based on non-violence and in which so many reliable co-workers are involved.

The success of the struggle in Rajkot will be a stage forward in the fight for freedom. And when it ends in success, as it must sooner or later, I hope that Kasturba's share will count as a humble contribution towards it. Satyagraha is a struggle in which the oldest and the weakest in body may take part, if they have stout hearts.

Source: *Harijan*, 11-2-1939.

Appendix-7

Foreword to "Amaran Ba"

(Gandhi wrote this foreword for the book *Amaran Ba* (Our Ba) written by Vanamala Parikh and Dr. Sushila Nayar on February 18, 1945.)

Since I am writing this foreword to the book perhaps it will be appropriate if I say something about Ba. I certainly intend to write more fully about Ba when I have the time. Here I shall

only answer the question, if I can, why Ba was able to attract people to her. Ba's chief virtue was her voluntary identification of herself with me. I did not draw her forth. The quality blossomed in Ba on its own when the time came. I never knew that Ba had this thing hidden in her. My earlier experience showed her a very stubborn person. If I tried to compel her in any way she would do exactly what she herself wanted. This led to bitterness between us—short or prolonged. But as my public life gradually developed, Ba blossomed more and more and freely merged herself in me, that is, in my work. In time no distinction remained between me and my work—which was service. Ba too became one with that work. This quality perhaps most naturally arises from the Indian soil. At least that seems to me the chief reason for Ba's sentiments.

The reason why this virtue reached its pinnacle in Ba is to be found in our brahmacharya. It came more naturally to Ba than to me. In the beginning Ba was not even aware of it. The idea came to me and Ba took it up and made it her own. In the result the relationship between us was as one between true friends. Since 1906—in fact since 1901—all the time Ba was with me, she had nothing outside of my work. She could have lived apart. There would have been no difficulty in her living apart from me. But being a friend she yet considered it her duty as a woman and a wife to merge herself in my work. Ba gave the paramount place to the service of my person and till death never ceased from the task of attending on me.

Source: *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Vol. 79, January 1, 1945-April 24, 1945. (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1980), pp.132-133.

Appendix-8

Foreword

(Originally Gandhi wrote this foreword for a biography on Kasturba Gandhi first published in the United States of America in 1948.)

It seems to me that the root cause which attracted the public to Kasturba was her ability to lose herself in me. I never insisted on this self-abnegation. She developed this quality on her own. At first I did not even know that she had it in her. According to my earlier experience, she was very obstinate. In spite of all my pressure she would do as she wished. This led to short or long periods of estrangement between us. But as my public life expanded, my wife bloomed forth and deliberately lost herself in my work. As time passed, I and my service of the people became one. She slowly merged herself in my activities. Perhaps Indian soil loves this quality most in a wife. Be it as it may, to me this seems to be the foremost reason for her popularity.

What developed the self-abnegation in her to the highest level was our Brahmacharya. The latter turned out to be more natural for her than for me. She was not aware of it at first. I made a resolve and Ba, as she was affectionately called, accepted it as her own. Thence forward we became true friends. From 1906, really speaking from 1901, Ba had no other interest in staying with me except to help me in my work. She could not live away from me. She would have had no difficulty, if she had wished, in staying away from me. But as a woman and wife she considered it her duty to lose herself in me ever after. She did not cease looking after me till her last breath."

Source: Sushila Nayar, *Kasturba: A Personal Reminiscence* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1960)

Appendix-9 **My Teacher in Non-violence**

M.K. Gandhi

I used to let loose my anger upon her. But she bore it all meekly and uncomplainingly. I had a notion that it was her duty to obey me, her lord and master, in everything. But her

unresisting meekness opened my eyes and slowly it began to dawn upon me that I had no such prescriptive right over her. If I wanted her obedience, I had first to persuade her by patient argument. She thus became my teacher in non-violence. And I dare say, I have not had a more loyal and faithful comrade in life. I literally used to make life a hell for her. Every other day I would change my residence, prescribe what dress she was to wear. She had been brought up in an orthodox family where untouchability was observed. Muslims and untouchables used to frequent our house. I made her serve them all regardless of her innate reluctance. But she never said 'no'. She was not educated in the usual sense of the term and was simple and unsophisticated. Her guileless simplicity conquered me completely.

Source: Pyarelal, *A Pilgrimage for peace: Gandhi and Frontier Gandhi among N. W. F. Pathans*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1950), pp. 87-91.

Appendix-10
She Stood Above Me
 M. K. Gandhi

Ba was not behind me in any essential respect. If anything she stood above me. But for her unfailing co-operation I might have been in the abyss. . . . she helped me to keep wide awake and true to my vows. She stood by me in all my political fights and never hesitated to take the plunge in the current sense of the word, she was uneducated; but to my mind she was a model of true education. She was a devoted Vaishnava. But she had obliterated all feeling of caste from her mind and regarded a harijan girl with no less affection than her own children. She personified the ideal of which Narasimha Mehta has sung in the Vaishnavajan Hymn. There were occasions when I was engaged in a grim wrestle with death. During my Aga Khan Palace fast, I literally came out of death's jaws. But she shed

not a tear, never lost hope or courage but prayed to God with all her soul.

Source: *Kasturba Memorial* (Indore: Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, 1962), p.142.

Appendix-11

Subhas Chandra Bose on Kasturba Gandhi

Homage to mother of the Indian people

“Shrimati Kasturba Gandhi is dead. She has died in British custody in Poona at the age of 74. With 388,000,000 of my countrymen at home and with my compatriots abroad I share the deepest bereavement over the death of Kasturba. She died under tragic circumstances, but for a member of an enslaved nation no death could have been more honourable or more glorious. India has suffered a personal loss. Kasturba Gandhi is the second fellow prisoner of Mahatma Gandhi to die under his very eyes in custody since he was imprisoned in Poona a year and a half ago. The first was his life-long fellow worker and private secretary, Mahadev Desai. This is the second personal bereavement that Mahatma Gandhi has suffered during his present imprisonment.

I pay my humble tribute to the memory of that great lady who was a *mother to the Indian people*, and I wish to express my deepest sympathy for Gandhiji in his bereavement. I had the privilege of coming into frequent personal contact with Shrimati Kasturba, and I would sum up my tribute to her in a few words. She was the ideal of Indian womanhood — strong, patient, silent, self-sufficient.

Kasturba was a source of inspiration to the millions of India’s daughters among whom she moved and whom she met in the struggle for the freedom of her motherland. From the days of the South-African Satyagraha she has shared with her great

husband the trials and sufferings which have been their lot for nearly 30 years now. Her many imprisonments seriously impaired her health, but jails held no terrors for her even in her 74th year. Any time Mahatma Gandhi launched a civil disobedience movement, Kasturba was at his side in the forefront of the struggle, an outstanding example to India's daughters and a challenge to the sons of India not to lag behind their sisters in the fight for India's independence.

Kasturba has died a martyr's death. She had been suffering from heart disease for over four months. But the callous British Government turned a deaf ear to the humanitarian pleadings of the Indian nation to release Kasturba on medical grounds. The British probably hoped that by subjecting Mahatma Gandhi to such mental anguish they could crush him body and soul and beat him into surrender. I can only express my contempt for those brutes who profess to fight for freedom, justice and morality and yet perpetuate such cold-blooded murder. They have not understood Mahatma Gandhi. They have not understood the Indian people.

No amount of mental torture and physical suffering that the British can and may inflict on Mahatma Gandhi or the Indian nation will make him budge an inch from the stand he has taken. Mahatma Gandhi called upon the British to quit India and save India from the horrors of modern war. The insolent reply of the British was to throw him into prison like an ordinary criminal. He and his noble consort would rather die in prison than come out free in an enslaved India. The British were determined to see that Kasturba died of heart disease in custody under the very eyes of her husband. They have had their criminal desire fulfilled, and it is nothing short of murder. But to us Indians at home and abroad, Shrimati Kasturba's sad death in prison is a grim reminder that the British are bent on disposing of our leaders one after another in the most heartless manner.

As long as the British remain in India, these atrocities against our nation will continue unchecked. There is only one way in which the sons and daughters of India can avenge the death of Shrimati Kasturba Gandhi, and that is by the complete destruction of the British Empire in India. A special responsibility lies on the shoulders of Indians in East Asia who have launched an armed struggle against the British rulers in India. This responsibility is shared in particular by all our sisters here. In this hour of sorrow we will renew our solemn pledge to continue the armed fight until the last Britishers driven out of India.”

Source: Chandrashekar Dharmadhikari, *Women Power: A Gandhian Discourse*, Translated and edited by Ramchandra Pradhan, (Wardha: Institute of Gandhian Studies, 2018), pp. 241-242.

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The life of Kasturba and Mahatma Gandhi are so intertwined that it is difficult to separate them from each other. Kasturba often played the role of an empowered and independent woman on her own. She came out on critical moments of national life displaying a rare kind of grit and determination. This was more so when Mahatma was away from the scene. However, her life and multifaceted role both in South Africa and India have remained unexplored. This study is a modest attempt to do justice to Kasturba as an individual independent of Mahatma. It attempts to present some aspects of Kasturba's life and struggles which have remained under the shadow of Mahatma.

This book, earnestly written and meticulously researched by Dr. Siby Joseph, is our tribute to Kasturba on the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and Kasturba.

Raksha Mehta

Chairman

Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Mumbai



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