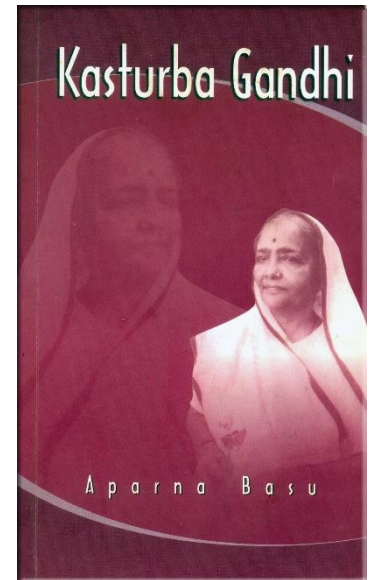


Kasturba Gandhi

Aparna Basu



Published by:

Gandhi National Memorial Society,

Agakhan Palace, Pune

Preface

This small book on 'Kasturba' owes its origin to the thought that the younger generation of boys and girls should come to know as much as possible the struggles, aspirations and hard work of ordinary simple women who have given shape to present day India. There was an extra ordinary galaxy of such women and their efforts should be recorded which will constitute a unique legacy for the future. Kasturba was one of these women who have left such an imprint on society. Gandhi is known all over the world as an apostle of Peace and Nonviolence and volumes of literature in almost all languages is published and followed on a world-wide scale. But very little is known about his wife Kasturba who played an important role of making Gandhi Eternal.

Kasturba was an embodiment of simplicity and compassion. Bapu often used to say that his best workers had passed through kitchen fire under Ba's supervision and passed her test Kasturba took part in every satyagraha campaign and went to jail several times in South Africa and in India.

Kasturba died on the evening of 22nd February 1944 at the Agakhan Palace Detention Camp on Bapu's lap and was cremated in the compound of the Detention Camp on 23rd February 1944. Bapu sat watching the funeral pyre till it was all over. Someone had suggested that he should go and rest He replied "This is the final parting, the end of 62 years of shared life. Let me stay here till the cremation is over! That evening, after the prayer he remarked "I cannot imagine life without Ba".

It is but natural that we should think of Ba before Bapu because she played an important role in the evolution Mohan Das into Mahatma Gandhi. Thus in acquiring freedom of the country Kasturba tops the list of freedom fighters!

During the celebration of 30 years of work being done from this Gandhi national memorial, the Gandhi National Memorial Society has decided to publish two important books:

- (1) "Timeless Inspirator - Reliving Gandhi" released on 2nd October 2010 and
- (2) "Kasturba Gandhi" on 2nd March 2011 being published today, the Mahashivaratri Day, the day of her Nirvan.

We are very grateful to Dr. Aparna Basu, a highly qualified scholar and an earlier Professor of History, University of Delhi for writing this beautiful book on the request of Gandhi National Memorial Society. Dr. Aparniji has been a close friend and I worthy colleague of all of us at the Gandhi National Memorial Society and we will always like to remain indebted to her excellence in the job entrusted to her.

I am also thankful to our printers Rapid Art Press in Delhi who have done a wonderful job in such a short time. In the end, I would like to thank Dr. Raghunath Shevgaonkar, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor of University of Pune to have released the book on this auspicious day!

Shobhana Ranade
Trustee Secretary, Gandhi National Memorial Society
Agakhan Palace, Pune 411006



Kasturba, 1915

Kasturba Gandhi

1869-1944

Introduction

Kasturba Gandhi's life has for so long been overshadowed by the story of Mahatma Gandhi that it is difficult to find out much about her life, her views or reactions to events or people. The history and genealogy of Gandhiji's family has been thoroughly researched and documented, but no scholar has been able to find out much about Kasturba's family background. Gandhi wrote his Autobiography and a hundred volumes of his Collected Works have been published. Innumerable books have been written about Gandhi's life, his philosophy and his work. Kasturba hardly knew how to write and she belonged to a generation of Indian women who were schooled to be silent. Little is, therefore, known about her. Kasturba has been usually portrayed as a passive, pativrata Hindu wife who followed her husband's lead in all things. Gandhiji is partly responsible for this as he portrays himself in his Autobiography as a jealous and domineering husband, condemning his own shortcomings and portraying Kasturba as meek and submissive.

The Story of My Experiments with Truth discloses a great deal about Gandhi and his perception of Kasturba. He spent his whole life experimenting with truth by renunciation, self-denial and pursuing the ideal of non-possession and non-attachment and as he admitted, he could not have done all this without his wife's willing support. At first she resisted his view on money, children's education, caste but over the years, her respect for her husband's ideas grew. She gave up a comfortable life, good food, good clothes, jewellery, her own traditional beliefs and took vows of poverty and celibacy.

There was a deep, unspoken understanding between Gandhiji and Kasturba. His letters and other writings show how much he was dependent on her. He often said that his philosophy of satyagraha was a reflection of the basic quality of Kasturba's character, that she practiced satyagraha in her own person. He said, "I learned the message of Non-violence from my wife Kasturba". She was not only a witness to all Gandhiji's experiments with truth, she also became a full partner in all his political, social and spiritual struggles. Mahatma Gandhi could not have been complete without Kasturba. "Without her, I could not have succeeded in my striving for ahimsa and self-discipline", he said, "She understood me better than anyone else..her loyalty was matchless".

After Kasturba's death, replying to the condolence letter of Lord and Lady Wavell, Gandhi wrote, "I feel the loss more than I had thought I should. We were a couple outside the ordinary. It was in 1906 that after mutual consent and after unconscious trials we definitely adopted self-restraint as a rule of life. To my great joy this knit us together as never before. We ceased to be two different entities. Without my wishing it she chose to lose herself in me. The result was she became truly my better half."

Addressing an early morning meeting, Gandhi was once asked why Kasturba, whom the friend had mistaken for his mother; was not present. He replied, "...I became an orphan and for thirty years she has filled the place of my mother. She has been my mother, friend, nurse, cook, bottle washer and all these things. If in the early morning of the day she had come with me to divide the honours, I should have gone without my food, and no one would have looked after my clothing and comforts. So, we have come to a reasonable understanding that I should have all the honours and she should have all the drudgery". Kasturba was not as spineless, as tolerant of abuse, as helpless as she has often been portrayed. She had great courage, both physical and moral as can be seen from the grave illnesses she

suffered and overcame, the hardships of her early days in South Africa and during her imprisonments. In fact she was a source of strength to her fellow women prisoners. She was not only a loyal wife but also an extremely loving ' mother and grandmother. It is indeed touching and tragic to see her motherly love for her eldest son, Harilal. Her letters to him on his conversion to Islam and his way of life are full of pathos and reveal a mother's concern and love. Till her last days, she asked for him. She was overjoyed when Ramdas and Devdas visited her in Aga Khan Palace. The mention of her grandchildren, brought a smile on her face. Over time, she came to love all the inmates of the Ashram as her own children. As Shri Prakash wrote, "She was really a 'Ba', that is mother to us all. That she should have borne the burden so cheerfully, so steadfastly, so triumphantly, throughout her husband's stormy life, for over 60 years is a record of which any woman can be proud." Ten weeks before his death, Vallabhbhai Patel said, "The love that Ba bore me I never experienced from my own mother. Whatever parental love fell to my lot, I got from Bapu and Ba..."

When Mrs. Shobhana Ranade asked me to write a short biography of Kasturba, I readily agreed, as I felt that the story of this remarkable woman who learnt the art of self- effacement to perfection and whose life was one of selfless service and sacrifice needs to be written.

I have relied for this short biography on Gandhiji's Autobiography, and on Sushila Nayar's, Arun Gandhi's and Ganpat Rai's biographies of Kasturba. I have also consulted B.R.Nanda's biography of Gandhi, Shri Rajmohan Gandhi's The Good Boatman and Mohandas and Louis Fischer's, A Week With Gandhi.

Early Life

Kasturba, daughter of Gokuldas and Vrajkunwar, was born in Porbandar in 1869, in the same year as Mohandas, son of Karamchand and Putlibai Gandhi. Both families were friends and neighbours. Gokuldas was a leading merchant dealing in grains and cloth and cotton shipments to markets in Africa and the Middle East and was one time Mayor of Porbandar. Karamchand was Dewan of Porbandar. Kastur, as she was called, had two brothers-one older and one younger- and grew up as the only daughter of wealthy and indulgent parents. The parents decided to knit the two families closer together by marrying their children. In those days early marriage was quite common all over India and so the engagement of the two children, Kastur and Mohandas, took place when they were only 7 years old. The wedding, however, was celebrated in 1882, when they were both 13 with great pomp and ceremony. "The wedding day", wrote the Rev. Joseph J. Duke, Baptist Minister, Johannesburg, who met Gandhi in South Africa and interviewed him extensively, "was very merry. To save expenses, Mohandas, his elder brother, Karsandas and a cousin were married at the same time. A number of relatives were present, flowers in abundance made the home gay, and as the brides and bridegrooms were but children, every part of the ceremony, from the priestly chanting of mantras to the game of cowrieshells was, was full of enjoyment. Referring to his marriage, Gandhiji later wrote in his Autobiography: "I do not think it meant to me anything more than the prospect of good clothes to wear, drum beating, marriage processions, rich dinners and a strange girl to play with ...little did I dream that one day I should severely criticize my father for having married me as a child. Everything on that day seemed to me right and proper and pleasing. There was also my eagerness to get married..." We do not know what young Kastur felt.

Kastur and Mohandas' early married life was spent in the latter's parental home in Rajkot where Karamchand was posted. Mohandas was passionately fond of his young wife and always wanted her to be near him, more so as meeting during the day was prohibited by family custom. In his Autobiography, Gandhi writes that he was a jealous husband and often without reason suspected his wife of infidelity. He did not allow her to go anywhere without his permission. This often led to quarrels between them as Kastur was a spirited girl who did not want her movements restricted. She insisted on going out whenever she wanted which was to visit friends or to a temple. But Mohandas was suspicious and this led frequently to bitterness and resentment but always ended in greater love. Mohandas attempted to play teacher to his young wife and tried to teach her at night. He wrote, "She was illiterate. By nature she was simple, independent, persevering and, with me at least reticent. She was not impatient of her ignorance and I do not recollect my studies ever having spurred her to go in for a similar adventure. I fancy, therefore, that my ambition was all one sided". He failed to instruct her through private tutors also. As a result, she could with difficulty write simple letters and understand simple Gujarati. During the first five years of their marriage, they lived together for an aggregated period of three years. There would be frequent calls from Kastur's parents and she would go and spend time with them. Gandhi confessed that his wife possessed more common sense than him and also the ability to judge people. She warned him of his friendship with Sheikh Mehtab who taught him various bad habits. He also fanned Mohandas' suspicions about his wife. Mohandas caused Kastur great pain by acting on false information without any proof and wrote, "Perhaps only a Hindu wife would tolerate these hardships, and that is why I have regarded woman as an incarnation of tolerance... The wife if she suspects her husband, will keep quiet, but if the husband suspects her,

she is ruined. Where is she to go? A Hindu wife may not seek divorce in law-court. Law has no remedy for her. And I can never forget or forgive myself for having driven my wife to that desperation.

Mohandas was haunted by the fear of thieves, ghosts and serpents and did not dare stir out of the house at night. He was terrified of darkness and slept with a light in the room. Kastur was much more courageous.

In 1884, Kastur gave birth to her first child prematurely who unfortunately did not survive for more than four days. This naturally caused her immense pain and sorrow. In 1888, after Matriculation, Mohandas took admission in Samaldas College, Bhavnagar but quit the College without completing his studies. In the same year, Kastur gave birth to their second child, Harilal. The family was facing financial difficulties and on the advice of Mavji Dave, an old friend of Karamchand, who since the Dewan's death had become a trusted family adviser, it was decided to send Mohandas to England to study law. To cover up the expenses, Kastur agreed 'without complaint' to mortgage her jewellery. Going to England meant making a momentous break with his culture, his past life, and even his marriage because Kastur had to be left behind. As Kastur could not read properly, Mohandas's messages to her were sent in the letters he wrote to his brother Lakshmidas. In the years that her husband was in London, young Kastur must not have had an easy time being the wife of a younger brother in a joint family.

In July 1891, Mohandas returned from England as a Barrister and was admitted to the Bombay High Court. Kastur did not go with him to Bombay. As he did not achieve much success in Bombay, he returned to Rajkot frustrated. His brothers Lakshmidas and Karsandas, were financially supporting Mohandas and his family all through this time. Lakshmidas lost his job and Kastur knew about his worries but Mohandas seemed oblivious of any household problems and did not care about his obligations to his brothers. When Kastur reminded him of his debt to his brothers and spoke about the household expenditure, he was indignant. The next day without explanation, he sent her back to her parents in Porbandar. Many years later, Gandhi wrote, "Perhaps only a Hindu wife would tolerate such hardships. And that is why I have regarded women as an incarnation of tolerance. A servant wrongly suspected may throw up his job, a son in the case may leave his father's house, and a friend put an end to the friendship. The wife, if she suspects her husband, will keep quiet. If the husband suspects her, she is ruined. Where is she to go? And I can never forget or forgive myself for having driven my wife to desperation". Kastur had learnt to put up with her husband's ill temper and went to her parents cheerfully as she had not visited them for some time. She must have realized that her husband's main problem was with himself, not with her and that he would soon ask her to return. She was not surprised, therefore, when he sent for her within a month.

On her return a month later there were "no more lessons, no more suspicions, no more quarrels, a new tenderness on Kasturba's part, as she learnt more of her husband's true worries and insecurities." In 1892, Manilal was born. Mohandas took to drafting and writing petitions and memorials in Rajkot.

In South Africa

A trading firm, Dada Abdullah & Co. offered to engage Mohandas for one year in South Africa and so he left Rajkot for Bombay from where he sailed for Durban in April 1893 leaving behind Kastur with 5 year old Harilal and infant Manilal. In eleven years of marriage, they had lived together for hardly four years. During his stay in South Africa, there was no direct correspondence between them. From Durban, Mohandas proceeded to Natal and then to Transvaal. One year stretched to three and during these years a new philosophy of life dawned on him. He encountered hardships on railway trains and was thrown out of a train at Maritzburg by a police constable for not being a 'white'. He sat in the railway station waiting room shivering in the bitter cold. He came to know that Indians could not enter the station through the main gate and it was difficult for them to purchase tickets. He decided to walk rather than be humiliated in this manner. The local government announced its intention to introduce a bill to disenfranchise Indians. His application for admission as an advocate in the Supreme Court in Natal was opposed on the sole ground that coloured people were not to be placed on the roll. Under these circumstances, he founded the Natal Indian Congress in 1894 to organize the Indian settlers so that they may ventilate their grievances and get the wrongs redressed.

In 1896 he returned to India to collect his family from Rajkot. He had not seen Kastur for almost three years. But his real focus was to educate public opinion and create more interest about South Africa, specially the Natal Franchise Adjustment Bill, among the leading Indian politicians. He had established a fairly good practice and wanted to return to South Africa and settle there. Within a few months he received a cable from Natal requesting him to return immediately. And so Mohandas, Kasturba, Harilal, Manilal and Mohandas's widowed sister's son, Gokuldas, sailed from Bombay for Durban on the SS Courland. He had to think about the dress to be adopted by his wife and children, the food they were to eat and the manners they should adopt suitable to their new surroundings. He decided that Kastur should wear the Parsi style sari, long blouse socks and shoes, as she later said, "What a heavy price one has to pay to be regarded as civilized." The boys wore Parsi coat and trousers. It took them long to get used to the new dress. Shoes cramped their feet and the toes often got sore. They were forced by Mohandas into all this and they had no alternative with ever more reluctance, they adopted the use of knives and forks

. The ship carrying Gandhi and his family together with another ship, Nadir in which indentured labour were traveling was construed to be an invasion of Natal. The 'whites' were told, that Gandhi was importing a large number of skilled labour from India which would oust Europeans from employment. The government of Natal issued orders that the vessels should be detained in quarantine and the ship was detained for 23 days. Kastur and the two little boys were naturally scared. When the passengers were finally allowed to disembark, a hostile crowd of 'whites' greeted them. Mr. Harry Escombe, Natal's Attorney General, tried to pacify the crowd and sent a word to Gandhi that he should land in the evening as by that time the crowd would dwindle. Gandhi was wondering what to do when Mr. Laughton, the firm's lawyer, came to see him and on his advice, Kastur and the children were sent to the house of Mr. Rustomji, a wealthy Parsi merchant friend and client of Gandhi, while he accompanied Mr. Laughton. Gandhi left on foot but was badly beaten by the mob and was saved only by the timely intervention of the Police Superintendent's wife Mrs. R.C. Alexander. Somebody informed her husband of what had happened and he immediately sent some constables to escort him

safely to Rustamji's house. The policemen carried an injured and bleeding Gandhi to Rustamji's house to a frightened and sobbing Kastur. One can imagine her state of mind when the house was surrounded by a howling mob threatening to burn it down and singing: "Hang old Gandhi on the sour apple tree!" The Police Superintendent convinced Gandhi to escape in disguise and take shelter in the police station where he spent two days. Kastur was left alone in a strange country with a family she hardly knew. The Rustamjis being Parsis ate meat and fish and fowl; the men and women ate together and the women did not cover their heads. This was all new and strange to her. This was hardly the sort of welcome she would have expected. She must have realized that she had to prepare herself to face great hardship and suffering. For Kastur and the boys this was a stormy start of a new life.

After two days in Rustamji's house, Gandhi took them to Beach Grove Villa his own house near by. It was a spacious two- story, five bedroom house with an iron gate in the front, a small garden and a big verandah facing the bay. Kastur must have been thrilled to have, for the first time in her married life, a home of her own house with no women to boss over her. She was solely in charge of the house and was henceforth known as Kasturba.

Despite his busy public life, Gandhi took his duties as father and husband seriously. He did not send the boys to school because he considered the education there totally inadequate and after experimenting for a short time with a white governess, decided to teach them himself at home in Gujarati. Kasturba wanted to send them to school but she had to yield to Gandhi.

Gandhi's home was an open house to which all were welcome. Their domestic life was not free from occasional quarrels and squabbles. One day Gandhi insisted on Kasturba cleaning the chamber pot of an untouchable Indian Christian. She could not bring herself to do this. Gandhi writes; "Even today I can recall the picture of her chiding me, her eyes red with anger, and pearl drops streaming down her cheeks, as she descended pot in hand. But I was a cruelly kind husband. I regarded myself as her teacher, and so harassed her out of my blind love for her. I was far from being satisfied with by her merely, carrying the pot. I would have her do it cheerfully. So I said," 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 throwing 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 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 bickering, but the end has always been peace between us. The wife, with her merciless power of endurance, has always been the victor."

Gandhi describes himself as a "cruelly kind husband" and regards himself as his wife's teacher. But the passage shows that even years later he was ashamed of his behaviour and wished somehow to make amends to his young wife whom he so often misunderstood. It also shows Kasturba as a spirited and

defiant woman who was not going to blindly listen to her husband. Gandhi held that a public worker should never accept any money or gifts for service rendered. Gifts were bestowed on him before he returned to India in 1896. The gifts included gold and silver articles as well as diamonds. He felt that he had no right accept these gifts. One of the gifts was a gold necklace worth fifty guineas meant for Kasturba. After a sleepless night he decided that he could not keep any of the gifts and drafted a letter creating a trust of them in favour of the community and appointing Rustomji and others as trustees. The children readily agreed but Kasturba said, "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." He argued that the gifts were given to him, not her. "I agree", she said, "But service rendered by you is as good as service rendered by me. I have oiled 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." Gandhi was unmoved and the gifts were returned. Gandhi himself admitted that they may have not been an ideal couple or that there may not have been complete identity of ideals between them. We do not know whether Kasturba had any ideals independent of her husband. It is possible that she did not approve of everything he did but they never discussed this.' She had the quality of most Hindu wives who willingly or unwillingly followed their husband's footsteps and never stood in their way. But over time, she came to realize that he stood for certain ideals and principles and he would stand by them come what may. Gandhi wrote, "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."

In 1898, Kasturba gave birth to their fourth child, Ramdas. In the absence of an Indian nurse, Gandhi assisted the doctor. As Kasturba was bedridden with anemia, he took care of the mother and the new born baby. Two years later, they had their fifth child, Devdas. Child birth was difficult and Mohandas delivered the baby safely by himself.

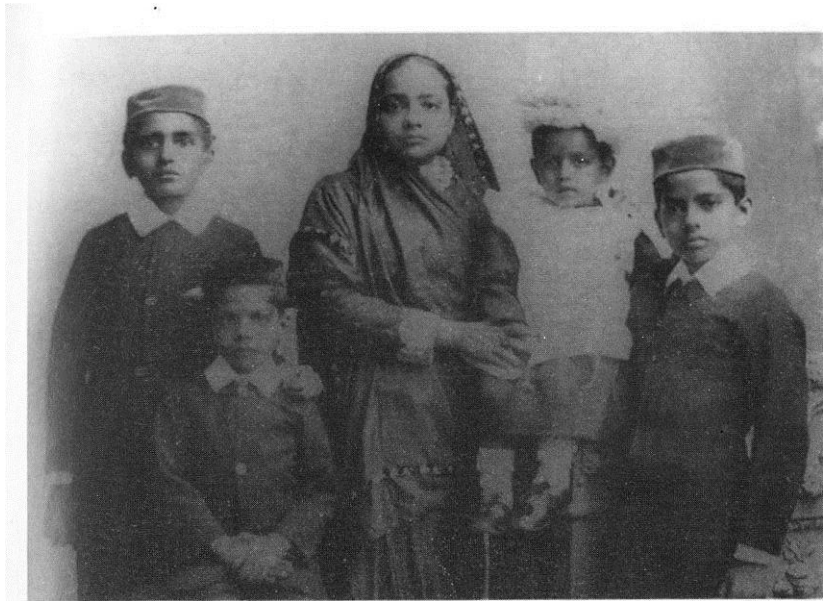
Gandhi was becoming obsessed with the idea of simplifying their lives and announced that they must reduce household expenses. More money was to be spent on public service. All servants were dismissed. He insisted that everyone, including the children must help with the household work. The biggest burden of course had to be borne by Kasturba who had Jo cook for the family and their boarders.

Kasturba was a kind of intermediary between the father and the sons. The boys often did not understand the strict discipline imposed upon them by their father. Gandhi used to take Manilal and Ramdas with him on a five mile walk to his office in the city and teach them on the way. At the office, he kept the boys busy with reading assignments. Once, young Manilal forget to take his spectacles with him and hence could not read. Gandhi asked him to walk back home, get his spectacles and come back. He was hoping that his mother would save him from another ten mile round walking trip. Instead she gave him lunch and explained to him the importance of his father's ideals. She told him the story of how he had made her clean the chamber pot of an untouchable. She spoke of how angry and hurt she had been, but then she understood that he wanted her to get rid of her prejudices against untouchables. She told him that his father wanted him to be a good son and that is why he wanted him to do difficult things.

Return to India

In 1901, Gandhi with his wife and children returned to India. During the five years she had been away, both her parents had died. At first they settled in Rajkot and Kasturba was quite happy. Then, Mavji Dave, the same family friend who had suggested that young Mohandas should go to London to study law, now suggested that he should move to Bombay. At first Gandhi took a small house in Girgaum. Their son Manilal fell seriously ill and after he recovered, they decided to move to a better house in Santa Cruz, a suburb of Bombay. Kasturba, essentially a traditionalist, was very happy, surrounded as she was by Gujarati speaking Hindus from Kathiawar as neighbours. In South Africa their neighbours had been White South Africans. Many of Gandhi's co-workers and friends had been Muslims or Christians. While Kasturba had welcomed all, she had often not been able to communicate with them. At her husband's request, she had broken all caste rules of eating, drinking, washing, wearing shoes inside the house and so on. She never spoke of how much these things troubled her till she returned to India and told her sister-in-law Nandkunwarben, Lakshmidas's wife. Nandkunwarben told her that in South Africa she was being a good wife and "As long as you are a good, wife, you can do many things forbidden by dogma." They had almost settled down, when Gandhi received a cable from the Indian community in South Africa begging him to return immediately. When Kasturba protested against again upsetting the home, Gandhi said he would go alone and return in a year. But he was worried about leaving his family alone. To ensure their financial security, he bought a Rs. 10,000 insurance policy with Kasturba as the beneficiary. When he showed the policy to Kasturba, she threw away this piece of paper which promised her money if he died. She did not even want to think of such a possibility.

Gandhi left for South Africa leaving Kasturba and the boys behind, arranging for his nephew Chhaganlal, his wife Kashiben and their little son to stay with her and promising to be, back in a year. Kasturba was happy as she got along well with Kashiben.



Kasturba Gandhi with Gokuldas (M.K. Gandhi's sister's son),
Manilal, Ramdas and Harilal, in 1903, South Africa



M. K. Gandhi with Kasturba and others at the end of the struggle
in Johannesburg, 1914

Back in South Africa

After a few months, however, he decided to enroll himself as a barrister in the Transvaal Supreme Court and stay there permanently and, therefore, sent for his wife and children. Kasturba, with the three younger sons, joined Gandhi (Harilal remaining behind to study) in Johannesburg, where he had set up his law practice.

Bubonic plague, then incurable and highly contagious, broke out in the Indian location. There were no hospitals or nursing facilities for Indians in the city. Gandhi undertook to look after the patients and Kasturba volunteered to help. He suggested that she should visit the homes in the Indian location and talk to the women about basic health and hygiene measures and explain how to detect plague symptoms. She went to the location with Gandhi and visited the homes of Indians and talked to the women.

Gandhi was informed that there was a big empty warehouse that could be used as a hospital but the city corporation would provide no staff, equipment or supplies. Kasturba asked some of the women she had met earlier to help her scrub and clean the building. Next day they went from house to house in the location and collected mattresses, pillows, bedding, pots and pans to turn the warehouse into a functioning hospital. She started becoming a helpmate to Gandhi in public service. Gandhi's friend, Henry Polak gave him John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* in 1904. Ruskin wrote that mankind's future belonged to those who were willing to give up outward wealth for the sake of inner happiness and to those who made "the first possession self-possession." Gandhi read it on his train journey from Johannesburg to Durban and it had an electrifying effect on him. He was convinced that the only life worth living was that of a simple craftsman or tiller of the soil. It was a call to selfless labour and service.

He wanted to move out of Durban and start a kind of community living experiment. He advertised in the paper for a suitable; piece of land near Durban and not far from a railway station. A landowner in Phoenix responded the next day. Gandhi went to see it 20 acres of rich farmland, with a spring, and a small orchard of orange, mango and guava trees. He decided to purchase it straight away. He moved the weekly *Indian Opinion*, which he had started a few months earlier, from Durban to Phoenix. Gandhi's law practice continued to grow but he was moving towards voluntary poverty, continence and increasing involvement in public service. Kasturba was not surprised when Gandhi announced his vow of life long poverty. Gandhi invited Henry Polak to become a member of the Gandhi household. Kasturba welcomed him. Soon Polak's young wife also moved in. Kasturba accommodated her but sharing the kitchen with a European whose food habits differed from theirs and whose language she did not speak must not have been easy. She, however, adjusted herself.

Meanwhile Harilal and Gulab were married in Rajkot by Gandhi's elder brother Laxmidas without the consent or knowledge of Gandhi or Kasturba. They were both naturally very upset.

The Zulu rebellion broke out in June 1906 and Gandhi decided to lead an Indian Ambulance Corps to assist the government and so he shifted his family from Durban to Phoenix Settlement.

This was a drastic change for Kasturba as Phoenix was a snake infested place in the midst of wilderness. The nearest link to civilization was the railway station which was two miles away. Kasturba was not keeping well. Gandhi left Phoenix for Zululand. While there, he finally decided to take the vow of brahmacharya. When he mentioned it to Kasturba, she said that she had no objection.

Biographers of Gandhi writing about this, have said that faced with an accomplished fact, Kasturba had no option. She knew it was no use arguing with her husband. As an obedient wife she accepted this decision as she accepted so many others.

B.R.Nanda in his biography of Gandhi contrasts the reactions of Kasturba and Tolstoy's wife who faced a similar announcement. Tolstoy's wife became hysterical and threatened to kill herself. She could not appreciate the ideals of her husband, much less adopt them. "Kasturba was sustained by the faith of a Hindu wife, she followed in the footsteps of her husband, however much it went against her grain.. The changed attitude to sex did not introduce a discordant note into the life of the Gandhis; Gandhi himself had no doubt that it sweetened and enriched it." The Transvaal government introduced the Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance on 22.6.1906 imposing severe restrictions on the entry and living of Indians. Over 3000 Indians assembled in the Empire Theatre in Johannesburg under Gandhiji's leadership and took a vow not to submit to this 'Black Ordinance'. The Black Act was passed requiring all Indians to register. Gandhiji was now constantly on the move. He was awarded two months' imprisonment for leading a boycott against the Act. Kasturba got the news while she was in Phoenix celebrating Harilal and Gulab's arrival and Gulab's pregnancy. Kasturba had prepared a delicious meal, had served everyone and was about to eat herself when a telegram from Johannesburg arrived informing of Gandhi's arrest and sentence of two months' imprisonment. She immediately pushed her plate away. From then till his release, she decided to eat the same food that her husband would get in jail - unsweetened, unsalted unflavoured cornmeal mush.

In the absence of Gandhiji, Kasturba tried to keep up the spirit of everyone in the Phoenix settlement. She began to exert very gently and in a dignified manner her authority and won the respect and cooperation of everyone. Though uneducated, she maintained the accounts accurately. She was extremely self-disciplined and soon became everyone's mother or Ba. After an understanding was reached with general Smuts, Gandhi was released after three weeks in prison. Ten days later, however, while going for registration, he was beaten up by Indian opponents of voluntary registration. Kasturba did not go to see him as she did not want to use the Phoenix money for 'selfish needs' and she had no money of her own. She wrote to him, "I have been preparing myself to face the worst ever since you took to public life. You must not be burdened with worries about me or the family." Alone she wept. The birth of Rami, daughter of Harilal and Gulab, Kasturba's first grandchild must have delighted her in the midst of all this sorrow.

Smuts did not withdraw the Black Act and satyagraha resumed. Gandhi was once again arrested and sentenced to two months' imprisonment. In prison, he received news of Kasturba's failing health. He wrote that he could not come to see her as he could not be released. He asked her to be brave, told her that he loved her and would always love her even after she was gone. "You must have faith in God and set your soul free. Your death will be another great sacrifice for the cause of Satyagraha... I hope you will understand and not be offended. This is all I ask of you."

After his release when he saw Kasturba, she looked very tired and listless and decided to take her to Dr. Nanji, a Parsi doctor in Durban, who was a personal friend. He advised that an operation be done

at once and Kasturba agreed, even though the doctor explained that he could not give any anesthetic because of her weak condition. He performed the surgery without chloroform. Kasturba bore this with exceptional bravery. Leaving her, Gandhi went to Johannesburg. Dr. Nanji felt that a strictly vegetarian diet could not give Kasturba the nourishment she needed and suggested that he give her beef broth. Gandhi returned to Durban and though against beef broth, asked Kasturba to decide and she refused. The doctor was furious, "What a callous man you are! You should have been ashamed to broach the subject to her in her present condition." He refused to take any further responsibility and asked that she be removed. He warned that she might die on the way. But Gandhi took the great risk of taking her from the doctor's house to the station by rickshaw, from there by train and the final two miles from the station to Phoenix in a hammock. Kasturba kept on saying "Nothing will happen to me don't worry." Gandhi who was always experimenting with diets, suggested that she give up salt and pulses. Kasturba loved good food. She was not willing to do this and said, "Why don't you give up beans, peas or lentils before advising others to do so". He took up the challenge and said that he would give up salt and pulses for one year. Kasturba pleaded with him but having said so, he was not prepared to go back on his word and so Kasturba also gave up both these items from her diet. She started recovering whether from this or something else one does not know.

The struggle of Indians in South Africa was expanding and Gandhi decided to lead along march of thousand of striking miners and their families in defiance of the law to Tolstoy Farm set up by him in the land donated to him by his friend H. Kallenbach. Kasturba shifted home from Phoenix to Tolstoy Farm. There were no servants, not even for farming or building. Everything from cooking to scavenging was done by the inmates.

Harilal wanted to go to London to study law on a scholarship but Gandhi selected Chhaganlal. When Chhaganlal failed to go, he selected Sorabji Shahapuri Adjanina even though Harilal had obtained higher marks in the essay competition for this scholarship selection. Harilal was naturally both angry and disappointed and disappeared from Tolstoy Farm. He was brought back and he and his father argued for two days and finally the son left saying, "He just does not care for us, any of us." Kasturba was, needless to say, very sad and unhappy by this whole episode.

In March 1913, the Supreme Court ruled that any marriage not solemnized according to Christian rights was not legal in South Africa. All marriages of Hindus, Muslims and Parsis were declared invalid. Children of such union would be illegitimate. Gandhi wrote to General Smuts that marriages of all religion were recognized in India and thus by Dominion law should be honoured in South Africa. But his request was ignored. When Kasturba said that this was appalling, Gandhi said that women should do something about it, "You must go to jail just as men do."

Gandhi started thinking of satyagraha as a mass movement. By mobilizing all Indians, including the poorest and most vulnerable, he realized that he could transform them as well as the movement. On September 13, a contingent of sixteen Gujarati speaking Indians, twelve men and four women boarded a train at Phoenix and headed for the Transvaal border. They were led by and included Kasturba, Kashiben, Santokben, Chhaganlal Gandhi and Ramdas. The party included his white secretary Sonja Schlesin, along with his Tamil friend Thambai Naidu and Herman Kallenbach. They intended breaking the immigration law by crossing from Natal into Transvaal without permits. They were all arrested and Kasturba and the other women were sentenced to three months' hard labour. This was Kasturba's first imprisonment and she and the other women were sent to Maritzburg jail where the

food was of the worst kind and they were given laundry work. She looked after the younger prisoners and led the prayers every evening. Gandhi received Kasturba when she was released from jail. She was very ill and he feared that she may die. But she recovered and insisted on accompanying him to Cape Town.

In 1914, after 8 years, the Indian Relief Bill was passed abolishing the poll tax, recognizing non-Christian marriages and relaxing the immigration laws. Gandhi had made his point. His Satyagraha had been successful and it was time for him to return to India. Gandhi and Kasturba were felicitated, garlanded and presented with mementos. It was so different from Kasturba's first days in South Africa.. In July 1914, Gandhi and Kasturba, together with the children and Kallenbach sailed for England on board RMS Kilfauns Castle. They were going to England as Gokhale was there. On the ship, he recited the Gita or Ramayana for Kasturba every day for one hour. Two days before they arrived in London, the First World War broke out and Gandhi felt that Indians should support the British government. He organized the Indians in London into a Voluntary Ambulance Corps and both he and Kasturba joined a hospital training course for nurses' aides. Kasturba had just recovered from a serious illness and Gandhi who had just completed a fourteen day fast got pleurisy. Gokhale by this time arrived from Paris and after a stay of a few weeks in London left for India. Gandhi and Kasturba followed him.

Return to India

Gandhi and Kasturba arrived in Bombay and were given a rousing welcome. Sir Pherozeshaw Dinshaw Petit gave a part for them in his palatial house. Gandhi came dressed in a kathiawadi dhoti, angarkha and a pugree. Kasturba went barefoot in a plain sari and glass bangles given on her wedding day. They were invited by the Governor of Bombay.

After a hurried trip to Rajkot and Porbandar, both of them went to Shantiniketan to meet Rabindranath Tagore. After two weeks they received news of Gokhale's death and so they left for Poona traveling by third class in the train. At Kalyan station, where they reached dead tired, Gandhi allowed Kasturba to have a bath in an upper class waiting room.

Gokhale had asked Gandhi to "Go round the country, see, observe and listen. Your views will correct themselves, and then you can get involved." So Gandhi embarked on a yearlong tour of India and Kasturba accompanied him as far as possible.

Ashram Life

Kochrab Ashram

Gandhiji and Kasturba were looking for a place in India to settle down and decided finally on Ahmedabad. With 25 men, women and children, they set up their ashram at Kochrab near Ahmedabad in a house offered by a local attorney. Gandhi laid down nine vows for the ashramites: truth, nonviolence, aswad (control of palate), aparigraha (non-possession) swadeshi, abhaya (fearlessness) and non-observance of Untouchability. Dudabhai and his wife Daniben with their daughter Laxmi, an Untouchable family were admitted by Gandhi into the ashram. Donors refused to give funds and many of the inmates, including Kasturba, were unhappy. Gandhi noticed that many inmates avoided contact with Dudabhai's family. If they entered the kitchen, they scrubbed and cleaned it. Among them were Maganlal's wife Santokben and Kasturba. At his prayer meeting, Gandhi announced that those who could not accept the Untouchable family, could pack up and leave. Kasturba had no doubt that he meant what he said. She realized that her prejudice against Untouchability, the belief that they were unclean, was so deeply ingrained in her that she had not yet been able to overcome it. Her attitude started changing and one day when she saw little Laxmi playing, she realized that she was no different from other children and she hugged her like her own granddaughter. From then onwards she remained as committed to the eradication of Untouchability as her husband.

Sabarmati Ashram

While Gandhi was in Champaran, news reached him that plague had broken out in Ahmedabad. He hurried back to Kochrab Ashram and decided that they must move to a safer location. After some search, he found a suitable place on the opposite bank of river Sabarmati. From Kochrab, Gandhi shifted his ashram to this treeless, road less, 150-acre plot of land. The location appealed to him, he said in his Autobiography, because it was near Sabarmati jail and jail going was normal for a satyagrahi. The land was purchased within a week and a tin shed was built to serve as kitchen. While the pucca houses were being built the forty or so inmates lived in tents. Gandhi was touring all around India and was in and out of prison. Kasturba, therefore, became the manager of the ashram. She controlled the kitchen and looked after the cooking and feeding of her husband, the inmates of the Ashram as well as the guests who often arrived without prior intimation at unexpected hours. As Gandhi's fame spread, a continuous stream of visitors came to Sabarmati Ashram. For Gandhi, the whole world was his family and Kasturba came to accept this. Mr. Ramachandran writes, "The biggest problem was that of guests arriving without prior notice to see Bapu. The lunch would be over and everything washed up and put away and Ba would be resting and we her cooking assistants would be in different parts of the Ashram.. I distinctly remember the day when Pandit Motilal Nehru arrived with a number of friends unexpectedly on a afternoon after lunch was over. Lunch had to be prepared again Bapu did not call for Ba who was lying down for her short afternoon nap. He called me and asked me to call also one of the others who was then on the kitchen staff...But Ba heard the noises in the kitchen and woke up earlier and found out what was going on.. She then went straight to Bapu asking why she was not called and if Bapu thought she was such a lazy old person The next moment Ba made herself busy and Motilalji and his friends were served a splendid hot lunch in record time.

When Motilalji complemented her she beamed with delight". Ba looked after the comforts of the inmates and guests. Sushila Nayar recalls, "If there was anybody with whom I felt at ease, it was Ba. She talked to me sweetly in her broken Hindustani and looked after my needs. I never knew her to say or do anything which could inspire awe in others. With all her greatness she had a mother's simple heart and her motherliness pervaded the atmosphere around her. Most of the girls and women in the Ashram worked in the kitchen department for an hour or so every morning. There they all sat, talking and laughing, cleaning grain, cutting vegetables or making flour chapattis. Ba sat there, radiant and smiling, and finished more than her full quota of work. She was an extraordinarily active person. Whatever she did was done with amazing agility and neatness and this trait she retained till the very end." Kasturba taught young Sushila how to wash clothes and draw water from the well.

Sushila Nayar hardly ever saw her sitting near Bapu. But she kept a constant watch and saw that all his needs were fulfilled. Mr. G. Ramachandran who spent the whole of 1925 in the Satyagraha Ashram in Sabarmati writes, "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 grandchildren...Ba ruled the kitchen with a measure of stern discipline and a larger measure of maternal love... She was a hard task master, particularly to herself. It was not as though Ba was simply supervising the little community kitchen...She cooked and cleaned and swept and served the like 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..."

In July 1933, Gandhiji and party returned to Ahmedabad but as he had resolved not to return to Sabarmati Ashram, they went to Sheth Ranchhoddas's bungalow. He disbanded the Ashram where he and Kasturba had lived for the last 18 years. He announced his decision to march to Ras along with 33 companions among whom was Kasturba. Before they could start the march, both Gandhiji and Kasturba were arrested.

Sevagram Ashram

Gandhiji had declared that he would not return to Sabarmati Ashram until swaraj was won and so he shifted to Sevagram near Wardha. Sushila Nayar stayed there and "saw Ba labouring from morning till night at all sorts of domestic chores, visiting the sick, talking to workers about their domestic affairs and personal difficulties, and looking after Gandhiji's needs." Their youngest son, Devdas, fell ill, "the patience and deep understanding with which she looked after him were extraordinary..."

In the Ashram Ba had one small room, a bathroom and a verandah. Sushila Nayar came there to look after the Mahatma who was ill. Kasturba asked her to stay with her in her and sleep in the verandah. In the morning, Ba would roll up Sushila bedding and put it away. She got up at 4 am to take part in the morning prayers. Gandhiji often used to have a short nap after that. But Kasturba spent the time getting his breakfast ready. She had it then carried it to him by one of the girls and would near him when he had his breakfast. While Gandhiji had his morning walk, she would have her bath and spend one to one and a half hours reading the Ramayana or the Gita. Then she went to the kitchen to prepare Gandhiji's lunch and supervised the meal being prepared for everyone. Gandhiji had his meals with everybody. She would serve him and those near him. She carried a fan in her hand to keep flies and other insects away so that he could have his meal in peace. After the meal she followed Gandhiji to his hut and rubbed his feet as he lay down for his mid-day rest. After he went to sleep, she herself rested in her own hut. After her rest she sat down to spin. She felt that if she could not help

her husband in reading or writing or other political work, she could help his cause by spinning. In the evening she would again go to the kitchen to prepare Gandhiji's evening meal. For years she had given up having an evening meal and usually had only a cup of coffee. While Gandhiji went for his evening walk, she went around visiting the sick and others in the Ashram. Soon after the evening walk would be the evening prayers in which Kasturba always took part. Including the singing of the Ramayana for which she prepared herself beforehand. After the evening prayer, according to Sushila Nayar, Ba had her durbar where all the ladies in the Ashram would sit round her and exchange the news and gossip of the day. After an hour or so, she could get up to prepare Gandhiji's bed and then her own. She also looked after Ramdas Gandhi's little son Kanu while his mother was studying. Kanu was deeply attached to his grandmother.

Once Gandhiji had high blood pressure and the doctor asked him not to sleep in the cold. Gandhiji had for years slept in the open. Miraben offered him her room but he would not accept it. Finally after much discussion, the matter was brought to an end when Kasturba said, "Bapu will sleep in my hut." She vacated her room for him and slept in the verandah. Next morning while having breakfast in bed, Bapu said, "Poor Ba has never had a room to herself. This hut I had specially constructed for her use... I thought she should have some privacy and comfort in her old age and now I have taken possession of it myself.. .Wherever I go, the place becomes like a dharamshala It hurts me but I must admit that Ba has never complained I can take away from her whatever I like, I can impose upon her any guest I like she always bears with me cheerfully and willingly." Ba came in as he was talking and said, "That is as should be. If the husband says one thing and the wife another life becomes miserable. Here the husband has only to say a thing and the wife is ready to do it." Perhaps she had learnt the hard way that rather than argue and put up resistance and create unpleasantness, it was better to comply with his wishes. Kasturba was an ideal nurse and nursed Gandhiji through his fasts and illnesses never thinking about her own health.

Satyagraha and Prison

"The women of India should have as much share in winning swaraj as men. Probably in this peaceful struggle woman earn outdistance man by many a mile. We know that she is any day superior to man in her religious devotion. Silent and dignified suffering is the badge of her sex. And now the government has dragged the women into the line of fire. I hope that women all over India will take up the challenge and organize themselves."

It was in words such as these that the Mahatma appealed to the women of India to join the struggle for freedom. "If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with women." If the women of India arose, he said, no one could stop the country's march to freedom.

Kasturba was one of the first to join the battle for freedom. Early in 1917, while Gandhi was on a visit to Muzaffarpur and Motihari, the government banned his entry, Gandhi defied the ban and was prosecuted. On the first day of his trial, he filed a statement pleading guilty to the charge and stating the reasons for the defiance of the ban. When the hearing was resumed, the prosecution case was withdrawn and he was now free to conduct his enquiry into the condition of the Indigo plantation workers. He started working for the uplift of the workers in Champaran and called for volunteers. He dispensed with all servants and made those who had joined him do all manual work including cooking and other household work. Kasturba had not gone with him initially to Champaran, when she arrived, he placed the entire burden of cooking on her. Rajendra Prasad writes, "We were about fifteen or

sixteen persons living together, and unaided by a servant it was not an easy task to cook food. We acquainted Bapu with this fact, but he was firm in his decision and silenced us by telling that she was accustomed to work in that manner. Thus Ba used to look after this big family. While living there, Bapu used to go outstation, and then Ba accompanied him. Bapu always travelled in a third class compartment, and Ba and we did likewise. Ba treated us with motherly affection and looked after us. On going to the villages, she would meet the women and instruct them about cleanliness, etc."

Gandhi opened schools in three or four places. He had opened a school in Bhitiharva in the north-western part of Betiyal Division bordering Nepal. Its management was under Dr. Devi and Kasturba. For some time the school worked well but then an angry indigo planter set it on fire and burnt it down. Dr. Devi Somaji, an advocate and Kasturba decided to construct a pucca building to house the school in place of a thatched hut. She along with the others, helped in the construction of the new structure by hauling bricks and stones, doing physical labour and toiling and sweating. The seeds of the Non-co-operation movement were sown in Champaran with the work of Gandhiji and Kasturba.

In the summer of 1918, Gandhi was busy recruiting volunteers in Kheda district to fight in the First World War. His efforts were not too successful and he was utterly exhausted. Kasturba wanted to join him but he wrote, "Beloved Kastur, I know you are longing to be with me. But we must continue to do our work. It is therefore best that you remain where you are. If you consider all children in the Ashram as your own you will not miss yours. As you learn to love others and serve them with the same affection, you will experience joy welling up in your heart..."

Two days later, he again wrote, "Beloved Kastur, Your unhappiness makes me unhappy. If it were possible to take ladies along I certainly would have taken you. Haven't we learnt to find happiness in separation? We will meet again if God wills..."

Influenza epidemic spread in India after the War ended. Tragedy struck the Gandhi family. Harilal's wife Gulab died and soon afterwards their three year old son Shanti also succumbed to influenza. This was a terrible blow to Kasturba. In the midst of this tragedy came the news that Gandhi was also not well and he finally agreed to go to Bombay for treatment. The doctor wanted to perform surgery but said that he could not do so till Gandhi's physical condition was better. He wanted Gandhi to drink milk but Gandhi had taken a vow not to drink cow's milk. Kasturba then came up with the suggestion that he could drink goat's milk and her suggestion was accepted.

In 1918, the British government, afraid of terrorist plots, appointed a committee under Sir Sydney Rowlatt to assess the dangers of revolutionary uprisings. The committee's main recommendation was that the government should extend its wartime emergency powers. To Gandhi this proposed suppression of basic human rights was a betrayal of his hopes of self-government after the end of the war. Once the Rowlatt Bill was passed into law, any Indian could be tried for sedition secretly without a jury and condemned without right to appeal. Gandhi decided to oppose the Rowlatt Bill. With Kasturba, his grandchildren, all his attendants and the goat, he returned from Bombay to Sabarmati Ashram and started planning for satyagraha. He asked the people all over India to protest against the Rowlatt Act by a one day strike or hartal on April 6 1919. The British imposed martial law in Punjab and General Dyer, the Governor, ordered the firing on the unarmed crowd in Jallianwala Bag, Amritsar. The annual session of the Congress was held in Amritsar with Motilal Nehru presiding and Kasturba went to Punjab.

In September 1920 the Non co-operation resolution was put before the Indian National Congress session in Calcutta. It was ratified in Nagpur in December of the same year. The Non-co- operation movement was launched in 1921. It was a mass movement led by a commanding personality who inspired devotion in India's millions. Gandhi taught them not to be afraid, to straighten their backs and raise their heads. He moved from village to village in Gujarat accompanied by Kasturba and Anasuya Sarabhai appealing to women to boycott of foreign cloth and liquor, take to spinning on the charkha and wear khadi. Kasturba presided over the Gujarat Provincial Conference in 1922. After ChauriChaura, Gandhi withdrew the movement and went on a five day fast as penance. As soon as Kasturba got the news, she rushed to Bardoli with Anasuyaben Sarabhai and Mrs. Santanam. For the rest of the fast period, she was with Gandhiji looking after him. On 10th March he was arrested. After the 'Great Trial', Gandhiji was sentenced to six years, imprisonment. Kasturba sat in the court through the trial and rode with him as he was taken to jail. He was lodged in Sabarmati jail for about ten days and then suddenly removed in the middle of the night without any prior information. Kasturba was naturally in a state of panic but she bore all this bravely. She issued an appeal to her countrymen and women, published in Young India on 23.3.1922, urging them to carry out the constructive programme, specially spinning. "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 Gandhiji'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; ©All merchants cease trading in foreign piece goods." In January 1924, Gandhiji was brought from Yeravda jail to Sassoon Hospital in Poona and operated for appendicitis. Because of her duties in the Ashram, she sent Devdas to look after him. He had passed all these 22 months in jail while Kasturba was looking after the Sabarmati Ashram. She along with Anasuyaben went to Poona and was allowed to remain with him to nurse him. After his release, he concentrated on restoring communal harmony as a series of communal riots had broken out. Gandhi announced his decision to go on fast of 21 days and once again Kasturba with their son Ramdas, Shankerlal Banker and Anasuyaben went to Delhi and she remained with him till the end of the fast serving him day and night.

Kasturba played an active role in the Borsad satyagraha of 1923-24 and the Bardoli satyagraha of 1928. Bardoli set a new example as this was the first time that simple unsophisticated rural women participated in the freedom struggle. The year 1930 began with the pledge of independence and in March of that year, Gandhiji announced that he would break the salt law and march from his Ashram in Sabarmati to Dandi, a small village on the sea coast about 241 miles away and make salt there, thus defying the government monopoly of salt manufacture. Gandhi did not include any women in the batch of 79 who marched from Sabarmati Ashram on 12 March 1930. On the day the March began, Kasturba, as usual woke up at 4 am and was ready to send off the satyagrahis among whom apart from her husband, were her son Manilal and her oldest grandson Kanti. She made a round of the ashram at that early hour and woke up everyone for prayers and supervised the preparations for the food to be carried by the marchers. She applied the red kumkum on Babu's forehead and then blessed each of the marchers by putting a kumkum dot on their foreheads. The; women of the Ashram, bidding goodbye to their husbands were naturally apprehensive as Gandhi had told them the previous day that they must be prepared to die. Manilal's young wife, 'Sushila started to cry. Kasturba asked them all to be brave. "Our men are warriors," she said, "We are warriors' wives. We must give

the men courage. If we are brave, they will be brave." Initially, Gandhi had included no women in the Dandi March. Women protested and said that no marches, no imprisonments, ' no demonstrations should take place without them. Seeing the determination and enthusiasm of women, Gandhi had to yield. As Gandhi marched through the towns and villages of Gujarat, women gathered in thousands to cheer him and greet him with garlands..

Sushila Nayar went to Sabarmati Ashram at this time and found that Kasturba was going from town to town and village to village on foot or by bullock cart visiting workers and urging women to picket liquor shops, spin and wear khadi. She looked like a soldier of satyagraha engaged in a grim fight. She did not understand politics but her faith in her husband and the cause he was fighting for was implicit. During the Salt Satyagraha, her husband and three sons were in jail.

Gandhi was not arrested at Dandi. From there he went to Karadi a dusty village, and informed the Viceroy that he was going to raid the government salt depot at Dharasana. He was arrested at Karadi. After Gandhi's arrest, Abbas Tyabji was the second in command and hurried to Kardi with a batch of volunteers. Kasturba applied tilak on the foreheads of Tyabji and the other satyagrahis. She marched with Tyabji from Karadi but they had advanced only a short way when a cordon of policemen with lathis and rifles surrounded them. The District Magistrate declared the procession unlawful and asked them to disperse. But everyone stood firm and Tyabji and 58 others were arrested. Tyabji bid a tearful farewell to Kasturba and asked the others to carry on the struggle.

Manilal was part of the satyagrahis who took part in the raid on Dharasana and was beaten up by the police. He was carried away and for days there was no news of him. Then news came that he was in Surat prison hospital with a fractured skull. From there he was taken to Sabarmati jail. Kasturba with Manilal's wife Sushila went to meet him and Ramdas in jail. She went to Punjab to see Devdas in jail there. Much against her wishes, she was given a rousing reception and taken in a procession through the town. With the Ashram men in jail, Gandhi wrote from jail, "I have put all my hopes in you women." After his release, Gandhi was invited to Simla for talks with the Viceroy and Kasturba accompanied him. She was invited by Lady Willingdon to the Viceregal Lodge. This was the first time that a Vicerine, had invited the wife of an Indian leader and Kasturba went accompanied by Anasuya Sarabhai who could act as an interpreter. When Lady Willingdon said that she would like some coarse hand spun khadi that Gandhi had popularised, Kasturba said that she would send her some. "I want to get in closer touch with the Indian people that way", said the Vicerine, "Could you send me something in mauve?" "Certainly, I'll send you lots of mauve. And by the way, I like your idea of getting in closer touch with the Indian people by sampling our homespun materials. You would also know them better if you lived down in the plains, where they dwell, instead of up here on these mountain heights", said Kasturba.

Gandhiji left for the Second Round Table Conference in London. Kasturba did not go with him. The news of the breakdown of the conference led to spontaneous protests and a new phase of the civil disobedience movement started. Gandhi was arrested in Bombay. Kasturba could no longer stay' confined to the Sabarmati Ashram. Along with Maniben Patel she went round the villages of Gujarat addressing meetings. She was arrested and put in Sabarmati jail for six weeks. The other members of her group were sentenced to three and a half months' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 100 or two months' further imprisonment in case of default. Kasturba asked the Magistrate, "Why this discrimination? Why only one and a half month's simple imprisonment for me? Do you want me to

come again to teach my countrymen to receive lathi blows? I cannot bear coming out of jail, leaving my daughters behind I Can't you award a similar sentence to me?" The Magistrate replied that he was helpless and the order could not be changed. She was ordered to be treated as an 'A' Class prisoner and all the facilities including the supply of a vernacular newspaper, Jam-I-Jamshed. She cheerfully underwent the term of imprisonment and spent her time spinning and reading. Five days after being convicted she was proud to learn that her son Ramdas had been arrested at Surat.

After release, the first thing she did was to contact the young inmates of Sabarnmati Ashram who were still in jail. She tried to meet her husband who was in Yeravda jail but he had refused to meet any visitors because he said, "imprisonment means absence of rights." He wrote to Devdas, "Ba will feel the shock most. But she is used to endure shocks. All those who form or keep connections with me must pay a heavy price. Ba has to pay the heaviest."

While Gandhiji was in Yeravda jail, in August 1932, the government announced separate electorates under the Communal Award. Gandhi was immensely agitated and went on a fast unto death "to sting the Hindu conscience into right religious action". Kasturba, who at that time was serving her term of imprisonment in Sabarmati jail was allowed to be with Gandhi in Yeravda jail. In order to avoid any publicity, she was asked to get down at Kirkee station and taken from there to Yeravda jail in a closed car. She was accompanied by Mr. C. W. Cordon, Superintendent of Police. On arrival, she took charge of nursing Gandhi and gave him her constant attention till the fast was over. As usual, she cut down her own food intake to the minimum.

As Gandhi's health started deteriorating and people feared that he may not survive, the Yeravda Pact was signed under which, "Henceforth no one is to be regarded as an untouchable". When Gandhi agreed to end the fast, apart from Kasturba, Sardar Patel and Sarojini Naidu were there. Rabindranath Tagore also reached Yeravda and sang a song from - Gitanjali-jibano jhakhano, shukaye jay, karuna dharai esho-(when life has dried up, come to me in the form of mercy). Kamla Nehru crushed two sweet limes in a glass and Col. E. E. Doyle, I. G. Police, insisted that the fruit juice must be given by Kasturba to Gandhi.

Leaving Gandhi in the Ashram, Kasturba went to Madras in December 1932. She was received at the station by a large number of people and profusely garlanded. In the evening a public meeting was held in Triplicane on behalf of a number of associations including the Madras Harijan Sevak Sangh. Kasturba represented Gandhi and from there went on a tour of the region to plead for the rights of Harijans and appealing to her audience to remove all disabilities against them. Orthodox Hindus did not approve of Gandhi's stand on untouchables. In 1934, when he and Kasturba were going in a car to address a meeting against untouchability in Poona, a crude bomb was thrown at them which hit a car behind them and injured seven persons.

Gandhi had announced his decision to march to Ras with 33 companions including Kasturba but before they could start, they were arrested in the middle of the night. The police came when they were asleep. Gandhiji was taken in the car of the District Superintendent of Police and Kasturba and Mahadev Desai in the car of the Deputy Superintendent. While Kasturba was taken to Sabarmati jail and kept as an 'A' class prisoner in the women's; ward, Gandhi and Mahadev Desai were taken to Yeravda. Kasturba was released on condition that she agreed to abstain from all acts of civil disobedience and as she refused to do so she was rearrested.

Next day she was tried under section 14 of the Bombay Special Powers Act for breach of the District Magistrate's notice. She said that she fully understood the meaning of the notice, refused to cross examine any witnesses and pleaded guilty. She was sentenced to six months' simple imprisonment. Kasturba was rearrested in February 1933 in the village of Rasas she together six other women had attempted to hold a 'dictators' conference' in the village. About hundred local women had assembled to hear her. As they started walking in a procession, they were stopped by the police. Kasturba and the six women were taken into custody while the other women dispersed. The arrested women were taken to Borsad and locked up in the police station. They were tried and Kasturba was sentenced to six months' imprisonment and a fine of Rs.55 or in default to six weeks further imprisonment. The other women were sentenced to one and a half year's imprisonment and a fine of Rs.200. Kasturba was ordered to be placed in 'A' class while the other women were all recommended 'C' class. All the women were put in Sabarmati jail. A cycle of arrests, jails and releases continued for Gandhi and Kasturba.

In May 1933, Gandhi suddenly announced that he was embarking on a 21 days fast for self-purification and to urge greater effort on behalf of Harijans. He was released unconditionally and taken to Parnakutir, the bungalow owned by Lady Premilila Thackersey. Five days later, Kasturba was released from Sabarmati jail. Ramdas received her at the jail gate and brought her to Sabarmati Ashram. She had been living on fruit and milk since the commencement of Gandhi's fast but was now persuaded by friends to resume her normal diet. She went to Poona via Jalgaon where she was received by Lady Thackersey who took to Parnakutir by car. As soon as she reached the bungalow, she was taken to see Gandhi who greeted her with a smile. Both of them were obviously very happy to see each other and started talking about the Ashram and other topics. The next day the Associated Press of India issued the following report: "Asked by pressmen whether there were any emotional scenes when Ba saw Gandhiji lying on the couch: Mrs. Sarojinji Naidu laughed and said", "Emotional scenes? Of course not. But why should there be any at all? They were married these fifty years and more. Trained and disciplined by Mahatma Gandhi himself for years, Kasturba Gandhi is quite used to such things and she can well bear the greatest of ordeals as a matter of course".

Kasturba remained most of the time with Gandhi and was seldom seen outside Parnakutir. Replying to a press reporter who asked her about Gandhi's health, she replied, "What can I say? In the circumstances he is quite all right. He talks little, but his voice is quite clear, though low." "Do you think he will pull through?" asked the press man. "God's will be done and I have full faith in Him." Was her reply.

The 21 days fast ended by Gandhi taking a glass of orange juice which was offered by Kasturba? She was naturally much relieved and very happy. In commemoration of the fast she planted a mango tree of the best Alfanso variety in front of Parnakutir. She issued a message: "I am deeply thankful for the successful termination of the fast. God has heard the prayers of the nation. I am grateful specially to my sisters in India and abroad who have joined with me in continuous prayers. While I rejoice to-day, 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". She also had been fasting for the previous two days and broke it only after Gandhi broke his. In May 1933, Kasturba was released and the next month much to her joy, Devdas and Lakshmi, daughter of C. Rajagopalachari were married.

Narayan Desai, son of Mahadev Desai, has described how during one of Kasturba and Gandhi's journeys, at Katni railway station, suddenly, their eldest son Harilal appeared in rags, looking old and ill and shouted "Mata Kasturba ki jai" while the crowd was shouting "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai" "He was emaciated," Desai writes, "His front teeth were gone. His hair turned gray. From the pocket of his ragged clothes, he took out an orange and said, "Ba, I have brought for you." Breaking in, Bapu said, "Didn't you bring anything for me?" "No nothing for you. I only want to tell you that all the greatness you have achieved is because of Ba. Don't forget that." "Ba promised to eat the orange. Then she pleaded with Harilalkaka to come with us. Harilalkaka's eyes were full of tears. "Leave off such talk, Ba. There's no way out of this for me." As the train pulled away, Kasturba remembered that neither she nor anyone else had offered Harilal anything. "He must be dying of hunger," Kasturba said. From outside the compartment amidst cries of "Gandhiji ki jai," another faint cry could also be heard, "Mata Kasturba ki jai." She met Harilal in Nagpur, alcoholic and in debt and she was deeply moved by his condition and pained at the letters he had written to the press denigrating his father. In May 1936, news came that Harilal had converted to Islam with Abdullah as his new name. Kasturba addressed one letter to Harilal and another to the press.

On October 2, Kasturba attended a meeting held in Nagpur over which N. B. Khare, President of the Indian National Congress, presided to celebrate Gandhi's birthday. An address of welcome was presented to her in a silver casket on behalf of women who expressed their appreciation of the services she had rendered to her country. In her brief reply, Kasturba appealed to women to discard foreign cloth and buy swadeshi articles. In November 1933, Gandhi started his tour from Wardha for collecting funds for the uplift of Harijans as well as doing propaganda against untouchability. He was accompanied by Kasturba, Thakkar Bapa, Seth Jamnalal Bajaj, Gangadhar Rao Deshpande and others.

Kasturba along with Maniben Patel was arrested at Nadiad station while they were preceding to Ras. They were taken by a motor bus to Anand where they were produced before a District Magistrate. Kasturba stated before the Magistrate that they were going to Ras to carry on Congress propaganda and had already informed the authorities accordingly. The Magistrate asked them to abstain for a period of one month from preaching nonpayment of taxes or defiance of any laws and leave Kaira district at once. As they refused, they were rearrested. The Thakore saheb of Rajkot having agreed to give certain political rights to his people went back on his word and as a result the people launched a satyagraha. As soon as Kasturba heard this, she went to Gandhi and asked his permission to go to Rajkot. He wrote in the Harijan, "My wife feels so much about sufferings of the people that, though she is as old as I am and much less able than I myself to brave such hardships as may be attendant upon jail life, she feels she must go to Rajkot". She left with Mridula Sarabhai and was arrested on arrival. At first she was kept in a small village all by herself, she did not complain but there was a public outcry and she was moved to the royal summer palace in the village of Trumba, 10 or 15 miles away from Rajkot city and kept in solitary confinement. Gandhi wrote letters to her every day, "You are being put to a severe test. Be brave now.. We all feel your absence Rama has always been with you" and so on. After seven days she was released from solitary confinement and Maniben Patel and Mridula Sarabhai were sent there to be her companions in detention. Gandhi went to Rajkot to meet her and found her weak and tired. He then went on a fast which upset her very much. Sushila Nayar informed her of Gandhi's fast and offered to take her to him but she refused as it was against the principles of satyagraha. She decided to eat only fruits and have milk as long as he fasted. Thakore Saheb's deputies released Kasturba and escorted her to Gandhiji's bedside. Since Maniben and

Mriduala were not released, she went back to the place of her imprisonment and next day all three were released. An agreement was reached and the Rajkot satyagraha ended.

On her return to Sevagram, Kasturba had cough, cold and malaria and Gandhi sent her to Devdas in Delhi and asked Sushila Nayar, who was finishing her medical studies in Lady Hardinge Medical College, to look after her. Kasturba shifted to Sushila's hostel and had bronchial pneumonia. She was back in Devdas's house under Sushila's care she recovered and went with Gandhi to the North West Frontier Province to help in the campaign for Hindu Muslim unity.

Last Phase

Kasturba accompanied Gandhi to the All India Congress Committee meeting in Bombay after the Congress Working Committee passed the Quit India resolution according to which India could participate in the Second World War on the side of the Allies provided India too could "feel the glow of freedom".

Gandhi said "Leave India to God-or anarchy". The Quit India resolution was passed by AICC on 8th August 1942 and Gandhi gave the mantra "Do or Die". In the early hours of the morning of 9th August Gandhi, Mahadevbhai and Miraben were arrested; Kasturba and Pyarelal were told that they could accompany® Gandhi if they so wished. Gandhi told Kasturba, "If you cannot live without me, you may accompany me. But I would rather you and Pyarelal stayed behind and carried on my work"., Without any argument, she decided to stay behind. Gandhi was to address a public meeting in Shivaji Park in Bombay that evening and Kasturba now offered to take over his place. There was a rumour that she would be arrested on her way to the meeting. She, therefore, dictated to Sushila Nayar her message for the public. "Gandhiji poured out his heart to you for two hours at the All India Congress Committee meeting last night. What can I add to that? All that remains for us is to live up to his ideals. The women of India have to prove their mettle. They should all join in this struggle, regardless of caste or creed. Truth and nonviolence must be our watchwords." On the way to the meeting, they were stopped and the police officer pleaded with Kasturba not to proceed. One lakh people at Shivaji Park went wild with enthusiasm to see Kasturba but she and Sushila Nayar were arrested and taken to Arthur Road Prison in Bombay. Kasturba said to Sushila, "I have a feeling I will not come out alive." The cell she and Sushila Nayar were taken to was dirty, stuffy and smelly. It was damp and dark. Kasturba fell ill, she had a severe attack of diarrhoea and they had no medicines and no money to buy fruit. After a couple of days, they were removed to Aga Khan Palace in Poona where Gandhi, together with Mahadev Desai and Miraben, was detained. This was to be her last prison sentence. Kasturba had a sense of impending death, and repeatedly said that she would not see the world outside again.

Kasturba was very weak after her diarrhea but she and Sushila Nayar were taken by train and then by car to Aga Khan Palace. Gandhi asked Kasturba in a rather sharp tone, "Did you request the government to send you here or have they sent you on their own?" Kasturba could not quite understand the question, so, Sushila Nayar replied, "We have been arrested and brought here." Now Kasturba understood and said, "No, No, I did not make any request." Hearing that Kasturba had not been well, Mahadevbhai immediately started getting a bed ready for her. The next day Kasturba felt better and began her routine of looking after Gandhi. There were mosquitoes and other small insects in Aga Khan Palace. Gandhi usually fell asleep during his massage but could not now do so because of the insects. So Kasturba sat in an arm chair near where Gandhi had his massage and continually fanned him. She walked around the house, peeped into the kitchen and spent a good deal of her time in prayers and reading religious books.

Suddenly on 15th August Mahadevbhai had a heart attack that proved to be fatal. He had served as Gandhi's aide and confidant for 25 years. Kasturba felt she had lost a son, she tried to be brave and joined in the prayers but tears were pouring down her cheeks. The body was taken downstairs for cremation in the compound of the Palace ground. Kasturba insisted on going to the cremation. She

sat on a chair and with folded hands kept on saying, "Mahadev, may God bless you wherever you are. May He always keep you happy my son. Your service to Babu has been unique in every way". Every now and then she added, "Why should Mahadev have gone and not I? Is this God's justice?"

Mahadevbhai was a Brahmin and Kasturba was deeply concerned that Gandhi had launched the struggle and forced Mahadevbhai to jail and hence they were responsible for his death and guilty of Brahmahatya. Sushila Nayar tried to tell her that the Government was responsible since it had put them all in jail and Mahadevbhai had died in the service of the country but Kasturba was not fully convinced.

Kasturba was a deeply religious woman. She fasted on ekadashi, purnima, amavasya, shivratri and so on. During all her imprisonments, she had the Ramayana and the Bhagwat Purana read to her daily. In the Aga Khan Palace, they used to recite two stanzas of the Tulsi Ramayana regularly at the evening prayers. Kasturba would sit down with the Ramayana and read these verses with the explanatory notes. The notes were in Hindi and her Hindi was not very good and Gandhi would often explain to her the verses in Gujarati. Everyday she worshipped the tulsi plant. Miraben had a small image of Balkrishna in her room, which she had put on a table and around it she used to arrange flowers. Kasturba worshipped there also daily. Her third temple was Mahadevbhai's samadhi. On Gandhi's birthday, 2nd October, Sarojini Naidu arranged to have illuminations all over the house. Kasturba told Sushila, "Don't forget to put a light in Shanker's temple." Sushila for a moment did not quite understand and then said, "You mean Mahadevbhai's samadhi?" "Yes of course", Ba replied, "That is Shanker's-Mahadev's temple, isn't it?"

After Mahadevbhai's death everyone was depressed. Gandhi said that the answer was that they should all keep so busy that there was no time for idle thought or depression. He started giving lessons to Kasturba teaching her Gujarati, Gita, some geography and history. In the afternoon as he laid down to rest, he would read out to her something and explain its meaning. [Kasturba studied all these things eagerly but she was no longer that young. When Gandhi questioned her on the previous day's lessons, she often failed to answer. Sushila recalled how one day he taught her the names and locations of the rivers of Punjab. She then went to Sushila and requested her to write down the names on a slip of paper. She carried the paper throughout the day but even then on the following day when Gandhi asked her, she could not remember.

Gandhi taught her geography and explained to her about latitude and longitude. Everyday after lunch, he would bring an orange and show her the latitude, longitude and equator on it. Manu, treat granddaughter of Gandhiji's uncle Tulsidas, had been brought to Aga Khan Palace by the government at Kasturba's Bequest as Ba's nurse. One day when Pyarelal was teaching her about latitude and longitude, he did not know the Hindi equivalents and mixed them up. Kasturba corrected him and she was right.

Gandhi used to read the Gujarati 5th Grade Reader with Kasturba. There were several poems and songs in the book and the ragas in which they were to be sung were written on the top of each. Gandhi taught her two of these songs and every night after prayers both of them sat down and sang the songs together. Sarojini Naidu joked about the honey-mooning couple.

Gandhi taught her the names of the various provinces of India and the names of the big cities in each province. She tried to memorize them but found it difficult to do so. Slowly her enthusiasm began to

wane. She claimed that due to constant ill health, her brain had lost the capacity to memorize. She spent more time now studying the Gita. She read the Gita with Gandhi in the afternoon and recited it with Sushila at night after the evening prayers.

After Mahadevbhai's death, Kasturba used to often accompany Gandhi on his morning and evening walks. He leaned on her shoulders and walked briskly. After a month or so, she could not keep pace and complained of chest pain. After she was a little better, she used to have a stroll on the verandah and then sit on a chair watching Gandhi walking below. Sitting on the chair she would read the Ashram Bhajanavali or Anashakti Yoga. She often read newspapers or Anashakti Yoga aloud in a sing-a-song manner. When Gandhi asked her to correct this, she was a bit offended and stopped reading aloud.

She was interested in current affairs and in the afternoon would take the newspaper to Sushila or Pyarelal and ask them to read it to her. She was hurt by the false propaganda made by the British against her husband. She once said, "Look at the lies they tell. If Mr. Amery the Secretary of State for India, were to come before me I would certainly ask him how he dare perjure his soul like that".

Kasturba's hand writing was like that of a little child. She wrote each letter of the alphabet separately and the spacing between the letters was irregular. Gandhi tried to improve this and advised her to practice writing. Everyone had asked for a notebook and Kasturba also asked for one. Gandhi gave her a loose sheaf of papers and told her that she could have a note book when her writing improved. She was deeply hurt. Sarojini Naidu sent for a notebook and Sushila took it to Kasturba who refused to take it and quietly went and kept it among Gandhi's books. Everyone, including Gandhi who realized his mistake, tried to persuade her to write in the notebook but she replied in a dignified manner, "What do I need a note book for?" On 10 February 1943, Gandhi started a fast for three weeks in protest against the British Government spreading falsehoods against the Quit India movement. Kasturba as usual started taking only one meal a day of milk and fruit. At the insistence of Sushila Nayar and others, she increased it to two meals a day. She used to take a cup of hot water and honey two or three times a day. During Gandhi's fast she spent most of the time by his bedside and would sit with her cup near him and if anything needed to be done, she would put it down on his table. Dr. Gilder felt that this was not right as officials who were hovering round might think that this hot water and honey was being given to Gandhi secretly. When Dr. Gilder suggested that she should not leave her cup like this, Kasturba replied, "No one can entertain such doubts about Bapu".

On the third day of the fast, Gandhiji started having nausea and Kasturba suggested that he should have a little sweet-lime juice with his water. He refused, his condition became worse but she did not repeat her suggestion as she must have felt that it was useless arguing with him and wasting his strength. Gandhiji's condition started deteriorating fast and Kasturba who looked after him day and night was naturally very worried. She spent most of the time sitting in front of the tulsi plant or the image of Balkrishna praying.

During the fast, the gates of Aga Khan Palace were opened and throughout the day there was a stream of visitors coming to see Gandhi. He was too weak to talk to most of them but they would sit with Kasturba and talk to her. She was amazingly brave and kept a cheerful and smiling appearance. She was particularly happy when her children and grandchildren came to visit. Gandhi's instructions were that during the fast no visitors were to be served any refreshments. Kasturba found it hard not to give; any food or drink to her grandchildren but she had to observe the rule.

Kasturba had been denied so many pleasures in her life. She was an excellent cook and fond of good food and liked to serve it to others. But there were strict diet restrictions in the Ashram, the food was tasteless and drab but she never complained. In Aga Khan Palace, she had good dishes prepared for Dr. Gilder's breakfast. One day she asked Manu to prepare puranpoli and said that she would like to eat it. She asked Manu to go and ask Bapu whether he would eat it. He feared that this may cause her indigestion which was not good for her health and so he said that he would eat them, if she did not. "All right I won't eat it", said Ba. On another occasion, she asked Manu to prepare brinjals in a special way in ghee. Sushila, as a doctor, felt ghee was not good for Ba's heart she was very angry and complained to Bapu. He said, "You should control your palate for the sake of your health." She was very hurt and refused to have any cooked food and went on a diet of fruit and milk for 15 days. Manu and Sushila tried to explain that they had prevented her from eating these items only for the sake of her health but she would not be pacified.

Kasturba had probably never seen a film. One day Sushila Nayar mentioned to her that there was a film called Bharat Milap and when they were in Delhi next, she would take her to see it. Kasturba liked the idea and for a moment forgot that they were in detention and not in Delhi. "How can I go to see pictures when Bapu does not go?" Sushila told her that this was a film about Ramayana, a religious theme, and Bapu may not go himself but would not prevent her from going and they would take Tara, Mohan and Ramu with them. A mention of her grandchildren brought a smile on her otherwise sad face.

Kasturba had never had a chance to play games. In Aga Khan Palace there was a court and Sushila and others regularly played badminton and tenniquoit. Gandhi and Kasturba had inaugurated the court by tossing a shuttlecock over the net with their rackets. Kasturba sitting on her chair in the verandah watched the game with great interest. If anyone played foul, she would shout and check them. At night, Miraben, Dr. Gilder and Dr. Kateli used to play carrom. Kasturba used to go and watch them play and slowly herself started playing. She became so interested that she used to practice for half an hour every afternoon. Miraben was the best player and Kasturba, always wanted to be her partner, as like a child, she wanted to win! If she lost, she was very upset. So after a time all the others decided that they must allow her to win. She thought that getting the queen was very important and if she got the queen and lost, she thought the game was a draw! Towards the end, when she became too weak to play, they took the carrom board to her room and played near her bed to cheer her up. Kasturba tried her hand at ping pong also but she could not manage as she became breathless.

Gandhiji's fast came to an end on 3rd March. Three or four days after that the government stopped allowing Ramdas and Devdas to visit their father as he was recovering satisfactorily. Kasturba was naturally very sad as she looked forward to these visits from her sons.

2nd of October was Gandhiji's second birthday in jail. Despite her failing health, Kasturba distributed food to the convict prisoners with her own hands. With great difficulty she got the red bordered sari, that had been made out of yarn spun by Gandhi, brought from Sevagram and wore it. The imprisonment this time oppressed her as never before. After Mahadevbhai's death, she came to feel, even more strongly, that she was not going to leave the jail alive. At times she became skeptical of Gandhi's struggle. Once she remarked, "Why did Bapu pit himself against such a mighty government? They have unmeasured strength at their disposal and how can Bapu hope to win against such an adversary"? Sushila replied, "Ba, Bapu does not depend on human assistance. After all, God is there,

"But even God seems to be against us at present", said Kasturba, "Otherwise why should he have carried away Mahadev"? Gandhi heard this and said, "Mahadev's death is one of the purest sacrifices on the altar of freedom. It is bound to bring the day of India's deliverance nearer".

Kasturba was not convinced. One day when she was feeling particularly depressed, she told Gandhi, "Did I not tell you not to pick a quarrel with the government? You did not listen to me and now we have all to pay the penalty. The government is using its limitless strength to crush the people. How long can the people bear it? What will be the result of all this"? Gandhi tried to argue with her but she was in mood to listen. Finally he said, "What would you want me to? Would you like me and you to write a letter to the government and ask for their forgiveness"? Kasturba was even more angry, "Why should we ask for anybody's forgiveness? There is nothing for us to do now but to put up with the result of your own doings. We will suffer with you. Mahadev has gone. Next it will be my turn". After a few days, she again asked Bapu, "Why did you ask the English to quit India? Our country is vast. We can all live here. Let them stay if they like, but tell them to stay as our brothers." Gandhi replied, "What else have I done? I want them to quit as rulers. Once they cease to be our rulers, we have no quarrel with them".

After Gandhi's fast was over, Kasturba's health started to deteriorate. She could not sleep because of breathlessness. In December, 1943, she had two heart attacks. A hospital bed was brought so that she could be made to sit up and recline. An oxygen cylinder was provided. A request was made to allow her to be examined by Dr. Jivraj Mehta and Dr. B. C. Roy. Dr. Mehta came but Dr. Roy was never brought. Nursing her became more and more difficult. The government only provided an ayah who ran away after a week Kasturba asked for Kanu Gandhi and Jayprakash Narayan's wife Prabhavati. Both of them came and looked after her.

Gandhi wrote to the government that Kasturba and other detenus should be allowed to see their relatives. As her illness became more serious, Ramdas and Devdas were allowed to come and see her and that made her feel much better. Weekly interviews were requested for and permission was granted. If the sons could not come, other relatives were allowed.

Kasturba wanted a naturopath and Dr. Dinshaw Mehta was ' allowed to come. An Ayurvedic doctor, Pandit Shiv SharmaJ was also called and his medicine improved things for a day but then her condition worsened and Pandit Sharma pleaded helplessness.

When Harilal came to see her, she was very happy. He was given permission to see her only once but she protested that no discrimination should be made between the sons and so the authorities relented but Harilal could not be found.

On the 19th February Kasturba was given oxygen throughout the night. From the morning of the 20th she became very restless and continued saying 'Rama, he Rama? Gandhi came and sat on her bed and the morning prayers were recited there. Bhajan and Ramdhun were sung. She was very fond of the song, 'Shriram bhajo dukhmen sukhme Gandhi sat on her bed almost the whole day. He wanted all medicines to be stopped, Ramnam, he said, is the only remedy. Penicillin had been brought from Calcutta and Devdas was keen that it should be given a trial. But Gandhi was against it, nor was Kasturba keen. Two days before her death she asked for a dose of castor oil. Dr. Gilder and Sushila Nayar tried to dissuade her saying that purgative would weaken her. Kasturba replied that it hardly mattered now as she was nearing her end in any case. Dr. Gilder said that she should not talk like that

and Devdas and Ramdas were coming to see her. She smiled at the mention of their names. Then she said, "Why have you called them? You are all my sons. If I die, you will cremate me. As for Ramdas, he should be told not to come. Travelling is expensive and the trains are over-crowded these days". As she was insistent, Sushila agreed to give her a dose of castor oil mixed with paraffin.

Kasturba asked for Harilal every day. Everyone was searching for him but he could not be found. At last he was traced and he came but Kasturba was very sad to see him in a drunken state. The excitement brought chest pain.

Gandhi came to see Kasturba several times during the day and sit on her bed. She used to lean against him as she could not sit up on her own. Dr. Gilder was afraid that pneumonia was contagious and Gandhi should not sit for so long near her. But no one dared to tell him. Finally Dr. Gilder also felt that after 62 years of being together, when the parting was so near, how could he be away from her and how could anyone ask him to do so? Kasturba said that she would like to try hydropathy. Gandhi had great faith in naturopathy and he started giving her alternate warm and cold hip bath and sitz baths. He spent nearly an hour every afternoon doing so and felt tired doing so. Kasturba asked him to attend to his work and said that Sushila could give her the baths. "Don't worry about my work. 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", he said, and continued to give the baths. On the 21st February, Devdas, Manu (daughter of Harilal) and Santokben arrived. Kasturba was very moved to see them and started crying. She told Devdas, "The burden of looking after the family will have to be borne by you. Babu is a saint. He has to think of the whole world. And you know all about Harilal. So the care of the family must fall to your lot." Manu sang hymns and Kasturba like it very much.

On 22nd morning, the end seemed near. Uraemia had set in and she was mentally confused. She asked Sushila to take her to her room. Sushila said "Ba, you are already in your room. Here is your favourite picture." Suddenly she asked, "Where am I going? Am I dying?" Sushila said, "Ba, we must all die one day. Some will go earlier, some later. What difference does it make when we go". She replied, "Yes" and closed her eyes. Soon Gandhi came stood by her side and stroked her head and hands. "May I go for my walk now?" he asked. In the past she would have never prevented him from going for his walk. But today she said, "No". So he sat down on her bed. She rested her head on his breast and leaning against him quietly closed her eyes. He kept on telling her to take shelter in Ramnama. He poured some gangajal into her mouth which Devdas had brought. After his bath and light meal, Gandhi again sat down beside Kasturba. Visitors started coming and in order to give them a chance of being near her, he went and sat on a mat nearby. To Devdas, she said, "You have served me well, now do your duty towards your family". "What have I done for you Ba"? replied Devdas, "I came last night only. It is your companions here who have been serving you". But she was very happy that he was with her in her last hours. "Ramdasbhai is coming", said Devdas. "Why should he"? said Kasturba who did not want Ramdas to take so much trouble.

Looking at Gandhi, she said, "Do not sorrow after my death. It should be an occasion for rejoicing", then she closed her eyes and began praying, "Oh 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". In the evening the doctors came to ask Gandhi his opinion regarding giving Kasturba penicillin. He said if Dr. Gilder and Sushila said it should be given, they should do so. His own view was that she should be

given no medicine and should be allowed to die in peace. Devdas and Sushila felt that even if there was a thin chance of her surviving, why not give penicillin. However, when Gandhi learnt that penicillin had to be injected, he was definitely against giving it. Kanu wanted to take a last photograph of Gandhi and Kasturba but he did not allow this. Just then Kasturba's brother, Madhavdas arrived. She recognized him and there were tears in her eyes but she could not speak. She put her head in Gandhi's lap and breathed her last at 7.35 pm. Devdas put his head on her breast and wept like a child. Sushila saw a tear swelling in Gandhi's eye. Gandhi, Manu, Santokben and Sushila bathed the dead body, washed and combed her hair and wrapped her up in the sari made of Gandhi's yarn which she had wanted to be put on her in her last journey. Santokben put Gandhiji's yarn on her hands as bangles and a necklace of fine Tulsi beads around her neck and covered her head with sandalwood paste. She was cremated inside Aga Khan Palace near Mahadevbhai's samadhi. Gandhiji sat there for nearly six hours. Late that night, as he lay down to sleep, he said, "After sixty years of constant companionship, I cannot imagine life without her."

Jawaharlal Nehru wrote, "Kasturba died that day. But out of the flames that went up to the skies, rose one that has lived ever since in this monumental memorial and served as a beacon light to many a serving sevika. Kasturba, though illiterate, had an intrepid heart in her frail body, an unflinching devotion to Gandhiji and the cause that he espoused which made greater and even greater demands on her sacrifices; the last of which she could offer was her own life on 22nd February, 1944 in imprisonment in Aga Khan Palace".

Kasturba's life was indeed one of sacrifice. She gave up so much for the sake of her husband and what he believed in. She stopped eating food she liked, wearing good clothes, jewellery. She took a vow of voluntary poverty and brahmacharya. She was the embodiment of a true Hindu wife, a pativratastree who placed her duty towards her husband above everything else. For her true religion was to follow her husband. Kasturba was a woman of courage and in her early years resisted the domination of her husband. As Gandhi said, "She was a woman always of strong will which in early days, I used to mistake for obstinacy. But that strong will enabled her to become unwittingly my teacher in the practice of non-violent non-cooperation." In South Africa she displayed this courage when she took shelter in Rustamji's house with her two young sons and let Gandhi escape by the back door when a white mob was threatening them. She lived alone in Phoenix farm in the midst of wilderness in a strange land. Physically also she was very brave and bore so many illnesses. Gandhi wrote, "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".

Amidst all her activities and interests, the center of her thoughts was always Bapu. She saw to his smallest needs. She knew that many people were keen to serve him. She took their help but she supervised them when they cleaned his utensils, cooked his food or made his bed.

During Gandhiji's fasts she herself had only milk and fruit and that also once a day. She wanted to remain fit to serve him and yet share his penance.

In 1947, three years-after Kasturba's death, while speaking to a visitor from South Africa Gandhi said, "It is because of her (Kasturba) that I am what I am." He added, "It was that illiterate woman who helped me observe all my vows with utmost strictness and kept me ever vigilant. Similarly in politics also she displayed great courage...She was a devout Vaishnav [who] regularly observed sacred days...but she loved the Harijan girl (in the Ashram) as much as she loved Manu or Devdas or Tara...In the fast of 1943...I was nearly at death's door, but she never cried or lost courage, but kept up other people's courage and prayed to God. I can see her face vividly even today."

Kasturba came from an orthodox family where untouchables were regarded as impure and one would not eat food cooked by them or drink water touched by them. It was difficult for her to give up untouchability but she had to give up all these prejudices. Gandhi made her clean the chamber pot of an untouchable in South Africa, an incident which reduced her to tears. He admitted an untouchable family in Kochrab Ashram, Kasturba was not happy but had to accept it. Over time she started looking after the couple's daughter, Lakshmi as her own daughter. In Sevagram she treated the Harijan servants like members of her family. She went round India to different places with Gandhiji to collect funds for Harijans. She addressed meetings appealing to Hindu women to give up their prejudices against Harijans. In Punjab, addressing a meeting, Kasturba said, "The Harijan movement has become a 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...We can only cleanse ourselves from this great sin by service and sacrifice, but the service has to be selfless".

If she gave up her prejudice against untouchables, Sushila Nayar relates how Kasturba retained her reverence for Brahmins. In Aga Khan Palace, one of the sepoys helping them in the kitchen was a Brahmin and Kasturba treated him with special respect. Often, she gave him milk and fruit. She would not scold him even he made a mistake saying that after all he was a Brahmin!

When Kasturba's grandson, Kantilal married a South Indian Brahmin, it was an inter caste, inter provincial marriage but she raised no objections. She had completely given up caste and caste distinctions. It was a long journey in her pilgrimage with Gandhi when she, who earlier believed in caste, at last gave up caste altogether.

Reading stories about Muslim invasions and atrocities, she would be upset but Sushila Nayar says how then she would think of Dr. Ansari, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and his brother Khan Sahib, Maulana Azad and others who were near and dear friends. In the Aga Khan Palace there were one or two Muslim sepoys and she allowed them to help in the kitchen she would remember Muslim festival days and give them sweets and fruit.

Kasturba was a loving mother and loved all her four sons. She was particularly concerned about Harilal and his sad life and till the last kept on asking for him. Her letters to him after his conversion to Islam and his way of life are full of pathos and demonstrate a mother's love. Gandhi made no distinction between his sons and other boys in the Ashram and never wanted to be seen favouring them. Kasturba was more understanding and gave them the love they needed.

Kasturba had learnt the art of self-effacement. She willingly gave up her conjugal rights, domestic happiness and a comfortable life because of her husband and lived all her life in his shadow. She seldom had him to herself and willingly shared him with the world. She was not possessive or jealous. While Kasturba nursed and served Gandhi, there were other women in the Ashram who also performed intimate tasks for him. There were women who could share his intellectual and political interests more than she could but Kasturba never bore any resentment and managed to get along with them and with some of them, like Sushila Nayar and Prabhavati she developed close bonds. When Gandhi went to the Round Table Conference, Sarojini Naidu went with him. No one must have asked Kasturba whether she would like to go, nor would she have expressed her desire. She and Gandhi were seldom alone together. In his book, *Week With Gandhi*, Louis Fischer wrote, "Kasturba with sunken face, straight mouth and square jaw seemed to listen attentively, but I did not hear or see her say a single word to her husband during the entire week, nor he to her. At meals and prayers she sat slightly behind his left shoulder fanning him solicitously. She always looked at him; he rarely looked at her yet he wanted her nearest to him and there; appeared to be perfect understanding between them". "The love between Kasturba and Gandhi seemed to deepen over the year, writes Rajmohan Gandhi in his book, *The Good Boatman*, "Sometimes it showed in little gestures. Gandhi might pat Kasturba's cheek when the moment of separation arrived, which thanks to his treks and prison going, was often. Or, in her illness, he would caress her head or be found 'running his fingers through her hair.' Or, and this was very seldom, he would recall how during their marriage ceremony, when each was thirteen, they had held each other's hands 'lovingly and for long.' Or, and this happened very often, when Kasturba tenderly served him a meal, or nurse and massaged him." The eighteen months they spent in Aga Khan Palace brought them even closer. Kasturba was ill and certain that she was not going to see the outside world again. Sushila Nayar relates how once when Dr. Gilder was allowed to receive some mangos for his wedding anniversary, Kasturba asked Gandhi, "How many years have we been married?" "Why", Gandhi replied, "Do you want to celebrate your anniversary?" Kasturba laughed along with the others, but writes Rajmohan, "All the rich sadness of a life squeezed into a mission was summed up in the question and the laughter."

Kasturba died, her head resting on Gandhi's lap. He missed her more than he thought. He took the little stool on which Kasturba used to rest her head as, sitting up, she coughed in her bed. For the rest of his time in Aga Khan Palace, he used it as his dining table. "If I had to choose a companion for myself life after life", Gandhi said, "I would choose only Ba." Despite all the hardship and cultural and other shocks she had to endure, Kasturba would probably have given the same answer.

Gandhi wrote that Kasturba was not behind him 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 Vaishnav. 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 Narsimha Mehta has sung in Vaishnavajana 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 the death's jaws. But she shed not a tear, never lost hope or courage but prayed to God with all her soul".

Sarojini Naidu described her as "the living symbol of Indian womanhood. Never once did her feet falter or her heart quail on the steep path of perpetual sacrifice which was her portion in the wake of the great man whom she loved and served and followed with such surpassing courage, faith and devotion. She has passed from mortality to immortality and taken her rightful place in the valiant assembly of the beloved heroines of India's legend, history and song".



Kasturba spinning a charkha at the age of 69, Sevagram



Last Moment of Kasturba, Aga Khan Palace, Pune

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