

## **Kasturba: A woman of very strong will**

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### **Abstract**

Vrajkunwerba Kapadia of Porbandar, little is known of her early life. In may 1883, 14-year old Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in an arranged marriage, according to the customs of the region. Many years latter Gandhiji wrote, "We were a couple outside the ordinary. It was in 1906 that by mutual consent and after unconscious trial, we definitely adopted self-restraint as a rule of life. She was very strong will which in our early days I used to mistake for obstinacy. But that strong will enabled her to become, quite unwittingly, my teacher in the art and practice of non- violent and non-co-operation. Kasturba and Gandhiji then permanently left south Africa in july 1914 and returned to live in India. In 1922, Kasturba participated in Satyagraha movement in Balsad, Gujrat. As a result of her anti-British activities, Kasturba was arrested and jailed on numerous occasions. Kasturba was arrested and kept in solitary confinement for a month. Her health worsened but Kasturba continued to fight for independence. She was imprisoned in the Aga Khan Palace in Pune. By this time her health had severely deteriorated completely and she breathed her last at the detention camp in Pune.

**Keywords:** Kasturba, woman, strong will, health

### **Introduction**

Born to Gokuladas and Vrajkunwerba Kapadia of Porbandar, little is known of her early life. In may 1883, 14-year old Kasturba was married to 13- year Old Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in an arranged marriage, according to the customs of the region. Recalling the y of their marriage, her husband once said, "As we didn't known much about marriage, for us it meant only wearing new clothes, eating sweets and playing with relatives. However, as was prevailing tradition, the adolescent bride was to spend much time at her parents house, and any from her husband.

Many years later Gandhiji wrote, "We were a couple outside the ordinary. It was in 1906 that by 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. She was woman always of very strong will which in our early days I used to mistake for obstinacy. But that strong will enabled her to become, quite unwittingly, my teacher in the art and practice of non- violent and non-co-operation. The practice began with my own family. When I introduced it in 1906 in the political field it came to be known by the m ore comprehensive and specially coined name of Satyagraha. When the course of Indian imprisonments commenced in South Africa Kasturba was among the civil resisters. She went through greater physical trials than I. Although she had gone through several imprisonments, she did into take kindly to the present incarceration during which all creature comforts were at her disposal. My arrest simultaneously with that of many others and her own immediately following, gave her a great shock and embittered her. She was wholly unprepared for my arrest.

I had assured her that the government trusted my non-violence, and would not arrest me unless I courted arrest myself. Indeed the nervous shock was so great that after her arrest she developed violent diarrhoea and but for the attention that Dr. sushila Nayar who was arrested at the same time as the deceased was able to give her, she might have died before joining me in this detention camp, where my presence soothed her and the diarrhoea stopped without any further impediment. Not sot he bitterness. It led to fretfulness ending in plainly slow dissolution of the body.

The announcement by Gandhiji in May 1933 of a 21-day first "for the purification of himself and his associates" came like thunderbolt to Kasturba and Mira Ben. The latter on behalf of Ba and herself sent the following message to Gandhiji on hearing the news.

"Got news of fast only today. Ba wishes me to say she is greatly shocked and feels decision very wrong but you have not listened to any others, so you will not hear her. She sends her heart felt prayers. I am stunned but know it is the voice of God and in that sense rejoice even in the midst of anguish".

Gandhiji's eyes were wet with tears of joy as he wrote out this telegram to them:

"Tell Ba that her father imposed on her a companion whose weight would have killed any other woman. I treasure her love she must remain courageous to the end. For you, I have nothing but only thanks to god for giving you to me. You must prove your bravery by sustained joy over this newest of God's desirouses for me. Love."

Soon after his return to India early in 1915, Gandhiji accompanied by Kasturba paid a visit to madras. They became the guests of Shri G.A. Natesan; the veteran journalist. It would appear that shri Natesan finding Kasturba in a discomforted mood on more than one occasion brought the

fact to the notice of Gandhiji. According to Shri Natesan, Gandhiji did not pause for a reply but forthwith told him that "it was of her own making", and added, "she wants me to give her money for buying costly clothes for her grand children". On Shri Natesan jocularly observing that Gandhiji was "a cruel husband", the latter quickly retorted as follows:

"Look here, you are hard on me; it is a question of my forsaking my principles if I begin to yield to her wishes in these and other matters. She knows full well my views and is quite acquainted with my way of living. I have more than once implored her to live away from me and save herself from the discomfort and live happily with her children. But she would not. She, like the faithful Hindu wife, insists of following me wherever I go."

Working closely with her husband, Kasturba Gandhi became a political activist fighting for civil rights and Indian independence from the British. After Gandhi moved to South Africa to practice law, she travelled to South Africa in 1897 to be with her husband, Kasturba Gandhi first involved herself with politics in South Africa in 1904 when she helped her husband and others establish the Phoenix Settlement near Durban. In 1913, she took part in protests against the ill-treatment of Indian immigrants by whites and the working conditions for Indians in South Africa, Kasturba was arrested and sentenced to three months in a hard labour prison. Later, in India, she sometimes took her husband's place when he was under arrest.

Kasturba and Gandhiji then permanently left South Africa in July 1914 and returned to live in India. In spite of Kasturba's chronic bronchitis - that had worsened in South Africa - she continued to take part in civil actions and protests across India that were organized by Gandhi. She often took her husband's spot in helping out and serving in ashrams when he was in prison. Kasturba focused on helping improve the welfare of women in Champaran, Bihar where Gandhiji was working with indigo farmers. She taught women hygiene, discipline, health, reading and writing. In 1922, Kasturba participated in a Satyagraha (non-violent resistance) movement in Borsad, Gujarat. However, she could not take part in Gandhi's famous Salt March in 1930, but continued to take part in many civil disobedience campaigns and marches.

As a result of her anti-British activities, Kasturba was arrested and jailed on numerous occasions. In 1939, she took part in non-violent protests against the British rule in Rajkot, after the women in the city specifically asked her to advocate for them. Kasturba was arrested and kept in solitary confinement for a month. Her health worsened but Kasturba continued to fight for independence. In 1942, she was arrested again, along with Gandhi and other freedom fighters for participating in the Quit India movement. She was imprisoned in the Aga Khan Palace in Pune. By this time her health had severely deteriorated completely and she breathed her last at the detention camp in Pune.

Kasturba considered her work above everything and Gandhi wrote about this in his autobiography, "According to my earlier experience, she was very obstinate. In spite of all my pressure she would do as she wishes. 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."

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