



E-ISSN: 2664-603X  
P-ISSN: 2664-6021  
IJPSG 2021; 3(2): 01-05  
[www.journalofpoliticalscience.com](http://www.journalofpoliticalscience.com)  
Received: 06-04-2021  
Accepted: 09-05-2021

**Manish Kumar**  
Ph.D. Research Scholar,  
Department of Political  
Science, Mahatma Gandhi  
Central University, Motihari,  
Bihar, India

## Kasturba Gandhi: Inspiration of today's women

**Manish Kumar**

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.33545/26646021.2021.v3.i2a.92>

### Abstract

If we talk about India's freedom struggle, the name of many women is reflected in our mind, but the woman whose name has become synonymous with freedom is 'Kasturba Gandhi'. Kasturba Gandhi, better known as 'Ba', was the consort of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation and contributed significantly to India's freedom movement. Despite being illiterate, Kasturba had the discretion to recognize the good and the bad. He confronted the evil of old age and on many occasions could not even stop to warn Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi told - "Of those who have come in close contact with me and Ba, the greater number is of those who have many times more reverence for Ba than me." She spent her entire life for her husband and country. Thus, Kasturba Gandhi made a valuable contribution to the independence and social regeneration of the Indian country.

**Early life:** Kasturba Gandhi was born on 11 April 1869 in Porbandar Nagar, Kathiawar. Kasturba's father 'Gokuldas Makanji' was an ordinary businessman and Kasturba was his third child. At that time most people did not teach their daughters and used to get married at a young age. Kasturba's father was a close friend of Mahatma Gandhi's father and the two friends had decided to convert their friendship into kinship. Kasturba was illiterate as a child and at the age of seven she was engaged to Mohandas of 6 years and they were married at the age of thirteen.

Kasturba's early household life was very difficult. Her husband Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was unhappy with her illiteracy and used to taunt her. Mohandas did not like Kasturba's sanjana, decoration, and getting out of the house at all. He tried to control the 'Ba' from the beginning but could not succeed much.

**Life with Gandhiji:** After marriage, the husband, and wife lived together almost till 1888, but after Mohandas's stay in England, she remained single. In the absence of Mohandas, he raised his child Harilal. Gandhi returned from England after finishing his education, but soon had to go to South Africa. After this, Mohandas came to India in 1896 and then took Kasturba with him. From going to South Africa till his death, 'Ba' followed Mahatma Gandhi. He had made his life as simple and simple as that of Gandhi. She was always with him in all of Gandhi's works. Bapu kept many fasts during the freedom movement and she often stayed and cared for him during these fasts.

In South Africa, he supported Gandhiji very well. When she joined the movement in protest against the condition of Indians there, she was arrested and sent to jail with a rigorous sentence of three months. The food found in the jail was inedible, so he decided to make a fruit, but after the authorities did not heed his request, he fasted, after which the officers had to bow down.

In 1915, Kasturba also returned to India with Mahatma Gandhi at every step and supported him. Many times Gandhiji went to jail when he took his place. She also went there with Gandhiji during the Champaran Satyagraha and told the people about the importance of cleanliness, discipline, studies etc. During this time, she wandered in the villages and distributed medicines. Even during the Kheda Satyagraha, the women kept wandering around.

After Gandhi's arrest in 1922, he made a statement like the heroines and called for the abandonment of foreign cloth in protest against this arrest. He also visited villages in Gujarat to spread the message of Gandhiji. When Bapu went to jail after Dandi and Dharsana in 1930, Ba took his place and kept morale of the people. Most of his time in prison was spent in 1932 and 1933 due to revolutionary activities.

In 1939, he also participated in Satyagraha in protest against the princely state of Rajkot. The ruler of Thakur Sahib had agreed to give some rights to the subjects, but later he turned back from his promise.

**Deteriorating health and death:** On 9 August 1942, the British government arrested all the top leaders of the Congress, including Bapu, during the 'Quit India' movement. After this, Ba decided to give a speech at Shivaji Park in Mumbai, but on reaching there, he was arrested and sent to Aga Khan Palace in Poona. The government had also kept Mahatma Gandhi here. She was unwell at that time. His health deteriorated after his arrest and never improved satisfactorily.

He suffered a heart attack twice in January 1944. On his request, the government also arranged for a doctor of Ayurveda and for some time he got some rest, but on 22 February 1944, he again suffered a severe heart attack and left Baa forever.

**Keywords:** Kasturba Gandhi, today's women

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Manish Kumar**  
Ph.D. Research Scholar,  
Department of Political  
Science, Mahatma Gandhi  
Central University, Motihari,  
Bihar, India

## Introduction



Fig 1: Kasturba Gandhi

**It is said that a woman's hand is behind every male's success:** On the one hand, she takes care of the responsibilities of the household and protects the man from trivial matters, while on the other hand she supports every activity along with an impartial advisor. From Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary to his death anniversary, he is celebrated with great pomp in the country and abroad, but the woman who supported him throughout his life contributed immensely in making Bapu a Mahatma ... no one remembers him. So today let's talk about Kasturba Gandhi, the religious wife of Gandhiji, who had a death anniversary on 22 February.

Kasturba Gandhi was the first female participant of Mahatma Gandhi's 'Freedom Kumuk'. She had a vision of her own; she knew the value of freedom and the importance of education in women. He also imagined the bright future of independent India. Introduced his leadership qualities. When Gandhiji went to jail, she remained a pioneer in all non-violent efforts in the freedom struggle. No one remembers 'Ba' today, but it should not be forgotten that if she did not stand behind Gandhiji, freedom could slip away from us. If Gandhi ji is the father of the nation, then indeed Kasturba is the mother-nation, who, while simultaneously discharging her obligations to both her husband and the country, gave up her mortal body in this soil. He had his death anniversary on 22 February.

Kasturba Gandhi (born: 11 April 1869; died: 22 February 1944 AD), wife of Mahatma Gandhi who is known as 'Ba' in India. There are so many stories of sacrifice in India's glorious history that the number of stars falls short. If we sit down to discuss our history, we will see huge contribution of women, whether it is culture, tradition, politics, economy, war, peace or anything else, no woman has remained untouched by women's touch. If we talk about our freedom struggle, then the name of countless women is reflected which is very active. The first woman whose name has become synonymous with freedom is 'Mrs. Kasturba Gandhi'. Kasturba Gandhi was the wife of Mahatma Gandhi. From the same day Gandhiji stopped using salt. Gandhiji became a motivator of his own talk. By the way, in all the diseases that humans have, there is more faults of food and drink by them.

### Six months older than her husband, child marriage took place

Born on April 11, 1869 in Porbandar, Kathiawar in Gujarat, Kasturba's father Gokuldas Makanji was an ordinary businessman. Kasturba was his third child. In those days,

instead of teaching girls, they were married at a young age. So Kasturba was also illiterate as a child and at the age of seven she was engaged to a six-year-old Mohandas. At the age of 13, both of them got married. At an age when children do mischief and depend on others, at that age Kasturba started discharging family responsibilities. Despite being illiterate, Kasturba had the discretion to recognize the good and the bad. He confronted the evil of old age and on many occasions could not even stop to warn Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi said, "Of those who have come in close contact with me and Ba, the greater number is of those who have many times more reverence for Ba than me". She spent her entire life for her husband and country. Thus, Kasturba Gandhi made a valuable contribution to the independence and social upliftment of the country.

### Bapu also called him 'Ba'

It is said that Bapu tried to keep a check on him from the beginning and wanted Kasturba not to go anywhere without permission from him, but the more she pressed him, the more she would get freedom and go wherever she wanted. She always remained with him in Gandhi's religious and patriotic services. This is the essence of all his life. In many of Gandhiji's fasts, 'Ba' was often with him and continued to fulfill his responsibilities. Whenever Gandhiji was arrested in the war of independence, the whole Daromdar fell on the shoulders of Kasturba. If Gandhiji remained healthy and kept a regular routine among all this, then Kasturba was behind him, who would take care of every little thing and take all the trouble on himself. That is why Gandhiji described Kasturba as his mother, who used to take care of him like a child. That is why Bapu also used to call him as 'Ba'.

### From going to South Africa till his death, 'Ba' continued to follow Gandhiji

After marriage, the husband and wife remained together almost till 1888, after Lankin Mohandas's stay in England, she remained single. In the absence of Mohandas, he raised his child Harilal. After returning to education, Gandhi returned from England but soon had to go to South Africa. After this, Mohandas came to India in 1896 and then took Kasturba with him. From going to South Africa till his death, Baa followed Mahatma Gandhi. He had made his life as simple and simple as that of Gandhi. She was always with him in all his works. Bapu kept many fasts during the freedom movement and she often stayed and cared for him during these fasts.

### Bapu became the inspiration for Kasturba

What Gandhiji used to say, he used to do it himself, it was unbreakable truth. There are many motivational themes related to them, but such an episode is being described here which is highly inspiring.

Kasturba Gandhi used to stay ill. One day Gandhiji advised him that if you stop eating salt, then it will be good.

**Kasturba said-** how to eat food without salt.

**Gandhiji said -** look at it right except salt.

**Kasturba said while retaliating -** First you leave and see?

**Gandhiji said while pledging -** just left.



**Fig 2:** Statue of Mahatma Gandhi and Kasturba Gandhi, Birla House, Delhi

### Officers had to bow down in front of Ba

One incident is a reflection of Kasturba Ba's sustenance and rituals. When he was arrested and sentenced to three months imprisonment for organizing a protest against the pathetic condition of Indians in South Africa. In fact, South Africa passed a law in 1913 that followed Christianity. This law invalidated the recognition of marriages other than those recorded here with the officer of the Marriage Department. Gandhiji tried hard to repeal this law, but when he did not succeed, he decided to do Satyagraha and called upon women to join it. He discussed this matter with other women, but did not discuss it with Ba. He did not want his wife to go to the satyagrahis at his behest and then, after facing difficulties, present the odd situation. When Kasturba saw that Gandhiji did not discuss any participation in Satyagraha with her, she became very sad and then voluntarily joined Satyagraha and went to jail with three other women. Non-vegetarian food was available in the jail, so he decided to make fruit, but if the authorities did not accept his request, Baa fasted. Finally, on the fifth day, the officers had to bow down. But the fruits given were not enough to fill their stomachs. Therefore, Kasturba had to stay in jail for three months on half stomach food. When she came out of jail, her body structure was left only, but there was no lack of encouragement.

### Struggle with Gandhi

The husband and wife lived together almost till 1888 AD, but after Babu's stay in England, for the next twelve years, the two were often separated. Babu had to travel to Africa shortly after returning from England. When he came to India in 1896, he took Ba along with him. Since then, she has been following the footsteps of Babu. He made his life as simple as that. She was always with him in Babu's religious and civil services. This is the essence of all his life. In many of Babu's fasts, Ba was often with him and continued to take care of their essence. When Babu started fasting in Yerwada jail in 1932 on the question of Harijans, Baa was in Sabarmati jail at that time. At that time she became very restless and got rested only when she was sent to Yerwada Jail.

Rites of religion were deep-seated in Ba. She was not ready to corrupt the Manus body by consuming meat and alcohol at any stage. He refused to drink meat broth even in a state of difficult disease in Africa and persevered for a lifetime.

In South Africa, a law was passed in 1913 that recognized marriages other than those conducted in accordance with

Christianity and those recorded with the Marriage Department official. In other words, marriages of Hindus, Muslims, Parsis etc. were declared illegal and the status of such married women became more like a mistress than a wife. Babu tried hard to get this law canceled. But when they did not succeed, then they decided to do Satyagraha and called for women to join it. But they discussed this matter with other women but did not discuss it with Ba. They did not want Ba to go to the satyagrahis at their behest and then present difficulties in a difficult situation later. They wanted them to go as they wish and to persevere. When Ba saw that Babu did not talk to him about taking part in the Satyagraha, he became very sad and gave a blessing to Babu. Then she voluntarily joined the Satyagraha and went to jail with three other women. The food he got in the jail was inedible, so he decided to make fruit. But when his request was not heeded, he started fasting. On the fifth day, officers had to bow down. But the fruits given were not enough for the whole meal. So Ba had to stay in jail for three months on half stomach food. When she got out of jail, her body was left stagnant.

Except for going to jail in South Africa, he probably did not participate in any public work there, but after coming to India, Babu shared all the tasks he took, like an experienced soldier. During the Satyagraha of Champaran, Ba also lived in Tiharwa village and roamed in the villages and distributed medicines. In this work, the white people got a sense of politics. They set up their hut in Ba's absence. Children used to study in that hut of Ba. He did not like to close this chatsala even for a day, so he woke up all night and set up another hut of grass. Similarly, at the time of Kheda Satyagraha, women wandered around and encouraged them.

The statement he gave when Babu was arrested in 1922 and was sentenced to six years, distinguished him as a heroine. He called upon the people to renounce foreign clothing to protest against Gandhiji's arrest. Like youths, they roamed the villages of Gujarat to tell Babu's message. In the days of the raid of Dandi Cooch and Dharasana in 1930, Babu continued to fill Babu's absence in a way when he went to jail. She was patient, assisting the people suffering from the atrocities of the police. He spent most of his time in jail in 1932 and 1933.

In 1939, Thakur Saheb of Rajkot agreed to give certain rights to the subjects, but later retracted. The public decided to do Satyagraha to express their protest against it. When Ba heard this, he felt that Rajkot was his own house. It is their duty to participate in the Satyagraha to be held there. He obtained Babu's permission for this and as soon as he reached Rajkot, was put under house arrest in the case of civil disobedience. At first he was kept in a secluded village in Sunsar where the atmosphere was not favorable to him at all. The public agitated that their health is not good; it is inhuman to keep them away from medical facilities. As a result, she was kept in a palace, 10–15 miles from Rajkot. Shortly after Ba's departure, Babu also decided to participate in Satyagraha and started fasting there. When Ba got the news of this, he decided to have a meal at one time. She always used to do this during Babu's fast.

Two or three days later, the Rajkot government, forgetting that they could go to meet Babu, sent them to Babu. But when no one came to take them back to the place of detention in the evening, it was found that they had been released from this deception. Babu did not tolerate this. He

sent Baa back to jail at one o'clock in the night. The Rajkot government did not dare to allow them to stay on the road all night. She was taken back to the palace and thereafter she was released the next day.

After Bapu Adi was arrested on 9 August 1942, Ba decided to give a speech in the meeting at Shivaji Park (Bombay), where Bapu himself was going to give a speech, but reached the park entrance. Was arrested on two days later, she was sent to the Aga Khan palace in Poona. Bapu was already arrested and sent there. She was unwell at that time. On 15 August, when Mahadev Desai suddenly did Mahaprayan, why did he keep saying Mahadev again and again; why not me? Later, the shrine of Mahadev Desai became like a temple to Shankar-Mahadev for him. She would go there regularly, praying for samadhi and saluting him. She also lit a lamp on him. His health deteriorated again on the night of his arrest and he did not improve satisfactorily and finally he finished his career on 22 February 1944.

### Conclusion cum Personal Opinion

Unfortunately no one remembers Kasturba today, but it should not be forgotten that if she did not stand behind Gandhiji, freedom could slip away from us. If Gandhi ji is the father of the nation, then indeed Kasturba is the mother-nation, who, while simultaneously discharging her obligations to both her husband and the country, gave up her mortal body in this soil.

**Role model for Indian women:** Gandhiji became highly devoted to politics and the country from year to year. During this time Kasturba stood with Gandhi ji like a pillar and supported her. At that time, only so many women were involved in politics and patriarchy except Kasturba Gandhi and could be counted on her fingers. The thinking of that era was such that if women do all these things then they will not be able to do household chores properly, or will stop doing. Somewhere the women of the country had also done all these things at home. Mahatma Gandhi knew the importance of connecting the women of the country in the freedom struggle. He always introduced Kasturba as a role model to understand that running a house and fighting for the country can be done together. Kasturba Gandhi inspired many women and gave a new dimension to the movement.

**Role in the freedom movement:** Although Kasturba Gandhi may have lived in the domestic world for a long time; she was very much influenced by Gandhiji's thoughts and supported him shoulder to shoulder. Significantly, where Gandhi ji was not able to give time to his sons due to his political preoccupation, Kasturba held both ends of the door very closely. Kasturba Gandhi was striving to be a good worker as well as a good mother.

It was from South Africa that Mahatma Gandhi formed the basis of his movement, and here Kasturba supported him well. Kasturba Gandhi, like all other activists, used to torment the government by fasting and going on hunger strike.

Significantly, in 1913, for the first time, he was jailed for raising questions about the status of Indian laborers in South Africa. During this three-month sentence, care was taken to ensure that the sentence was strict and that Kasturba would not dare to raise her voice again, but the attempt to intimidate Kasturba was a complete failure.

**Bapu himself caught torch after going to jail:** Even after returning to India, she remained very active with Gandhiji. At the time of Champaran's Satyagraha, she stayed in the

village of Tiharwa and roamed in the villages and distributed medicines. In this work, the white people got a sense of politics. They set up their hut in Ba's absence. Children used to study in that hut of Ba. He did not like to close his school even for a day, so he woke up all night and set up a second hut of grass. Similarly, at the time of Kheda Satyagraha, women wandered around and encouraged them. When Bapu started fasting in Yerwada jail in 1932 on the question of Harijans, Baa was in Sabarmati jail at that time. At that time she became very restless and got rested only when she was sent to Yerwada Jail. After Gandhiji's arrest in the year 1922, he made a statement like heroines and called for the abandonment of foreign cloth in protest against this arrest. He also visited villages in Gujarat to spread the message of Gandhiji. When Bapu went to jail after Dandi and Dharsana in 1930, Ba took his place and kept up the morale of the people. Most of his time in prison was spent in 1932 and 1933 due to revolutionary activities.

**Ba left the world forever:** In 1939, he also participated in Satyagraha in protest against the princely state of Rajkot. The ruler of Thakur Sahib had agreed to give some rights to the subjects, but later he turned back from his promise. On 9 August 1942, the British government arrested all the top leaders of the Congress, including Bapu, during the 'Quit India' movement. After this, Ba decided to give a speech at Shivaji Park in Mumbai but upon reaching there he was arrested and sent to Poona's Aga Khan Palace. The government also kept Gandhiji here. She was unwell at that time. On August 15, when Mahadev Desai, the private secretary of Gandhiji, did the Mahaprayan, he kept saying the same thing again and again - Why did Mahadev go, why did I not? Later, the shrine of Mahadev Desai became like a temple to Shankar-Mahadev for him. She would regularly go there, praying for samadhi and saluting him. She also lit a lamp on him. It was not just a lamp for her, but she was also seeing the flame of freedom coming in it. Kasturba's heartfelt desire was to see the country free, but after her arrest, her health deteriorated, which eventually led her to death and on February 22, 1944 she went to sleep forever.



There are also achievements of Kasturba's life that enable her to keep a separate identity for herself, but due to the size of Gandhiji's personality, all those achievements are often covered.

Just as Mahatma Gandhi was known throughout the country as Bapu, as the wife of Gandhi, and a strong female representative in the Congress, the whole country called Kasturba "Ba." Ba means mother in Gujarati. Frequent Greetings/Naman to "Ba"!

### In short

In this way, Kasturba Gandhi played an important role in the

freedom movement during that period and became an inspiration to many women, during which women were not allowed to leave the house.

On the other hand, if a self-sacrificing personality like 'Ba' was not with Gandhiji, then perhaps all the non-violent efforts of Gandhiji would not have been so effective. Kasturba Gandhi, while showing her leadership qualities, remained a pioneer in all non-violent efforts in the freedom struggle.

Kasturba Gandhi's sacrifice, sacrifice, and dedication will always be remembered.

Kasturba was the woman who supported her husband throughout his life. While women were not given much importance in the days of independence, Mahatma Gandhi never stopped Kasturba from doing social service at that time.

Even after getting married at an early age, Kasturba did not run away from her responsibilities, she continued to perform her duties till the end, and continued to serve her society.

Certainly, Kasturba is the inspiration of today's women.

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