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KASTURBAI GANDHI

MISS DHAN CHANDRA



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INDIA PUBLICATIONS

LAHORE

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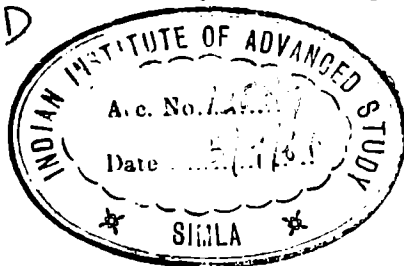
Never once did her feet falter or her heart quail on the steep path of perpetual sacrifice which was her portion in the wake of the great man whom she loved and served and followed with such surpassing courage, faith and devotion.

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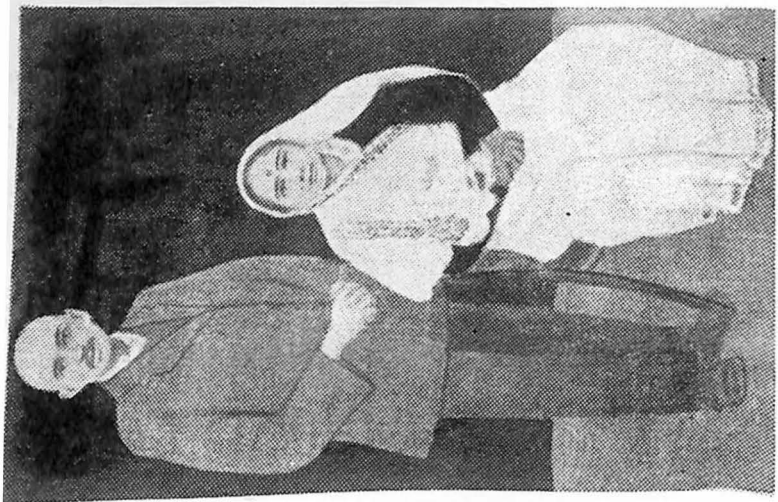
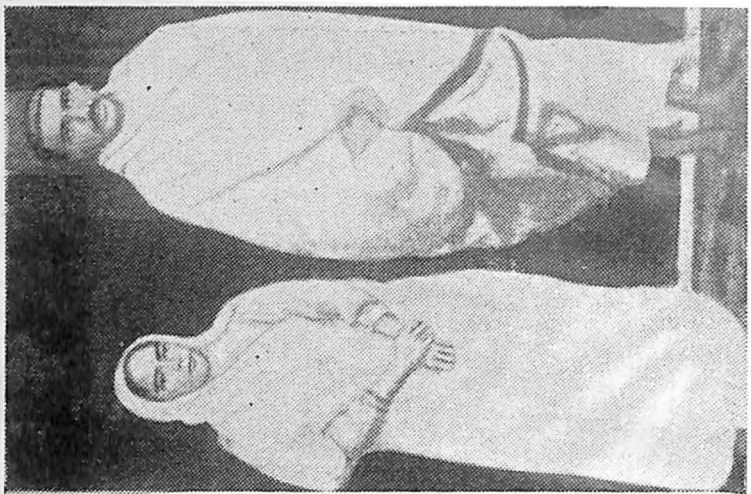
SAROJINI NAIDU



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Mrs. Gandhi



INTRODUCTION?

IF self-abnegation and self-sacrifice are the essential virtues of a *Mahatma* then Mrs. Kasturbai Gandhi must be ranked as such. Her life was an epic of self-denial and suffering. First, she gave up her home comforts and those things which every woman loves, to please her saintly husband. Later, she gave up her husband to the country so that he might serve the people free from domestic burdens.

→ It is at any time a tough job to be the wife of a famous man. It is more so to be the wife of a saintly politician. Kasturbai would not have been able to play successfully the part she had to play, had she not followed in Gandhiji's foot-steps and in the process become a *Mahatma* herself.

→ Kasturbai was not a picturesque personality like either Madame Chiang Kai-shek or Mrs. Roosevelt. Neither had she the benefit of education and political experience as Mrs. de

Valera had. She would not have been blamed if she, like Signora Mussolini, had chosen to remain a passive spectator of her husband's struggle.

→ Kasturbai was made of the stuff of which heroes and heroines are made. She could not remain idle while her husband was undergoing hardships in the cause of his country's freedom. No less than four times she suffered imprisonment and ultimately died in detention.

→ The life of the wife of a great man, as already stated, is not always a bed of roses ; nor is it always a bed of thorns. But in the case of Mrs. Gandhi there were more thorns than roses. She faced all the troubles bravely. No doubt Kasturbai's life was overshadowed by that of her great husband but she will not be dismissed by historians as a mere foot-note to her husband as is so often the fate of the wives of famous men.



1. a story of suffering & sacrifice

MRS. Kasturbai Gandhi was born at Porbunder, in 1869—in the same place and in the same year in which the *Mahatma* was born. She was the eldest daughter of Seth Gokal Das Makanji, a merchant dealing in cotton, grain and cloth. As a young girl she was very shy and retiring. Kasturbai received no schooling but possessed sound common sense.

- At the age of thirteen, when she might well have been playing about, Kasturbai became a wife as was the custom of those days. Little did she guess at that time that Gandhiji, her husband, then a student, would one day become one of the greatest men in the world and that she would have to play the difficult role of the wife of a great man.

- Gandhiji was very fond of his wife. She too was fond of him. One thing Gandhiji didn't like was that she should go out quite often and not care to tell him as to where she

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went. He tried to impose restrictions on her, but the more restrictions he put the more she went out. Like a jealous husband he began to suspect her fidelity and this resulted in the two quarreling, sometimes not being on 'talking terms with each other. But this did not affect their love for each other. Gandhiji wanted to make Kasturbai an ideal woman. It was his cherished wish that she should be educated. He tried to teach her how to read and write but she did not prove an apt pupil. Moreover, most of the early years of her married life were spent in her father's house, she spending only short intervals with her husband.

- At the age of eighteen, Mrs. Gandhi became the mother of a little son, Hira Lal. When her husband went to England for further studies she remained in India. The death of her mother-in-law during that time threw the responsibilities of running the household on her young shoulders. But she bore the burden with her characteristic cheerfulness.

in South Africa

• When Gandhiji went to South Africa for the second time Kasturbai, then a mother of two sons, accompanied him. Mrs. Gandhi, who believed in dressing in comfort, found the Parsee style of putting on a *saree* (as was the vogue in those days) and using shoes and stockings not to her liking. Even more uncomfortable was taking meals with forks and knives in the western style. But she gave in to her husband's wishes for like most orthodox Hindu wives of her times, she believed that what her husband did was right. But this does not mean that she never quarreled with her husband or always said ditto to him. In fact, she had several tiffs with him. In the beginning she did not always like to do what Gandhiji asked her to do but her love for him was so great that she adjusted herself to her husband's ways of living and also learnt to make sacrifices. For instance, while in Natal, Gandhiji received a necklace for his wife. He wanted to hand it over to the trust he had created for the welfare of the Indian community but Kasturbai would

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not part with it because she wanted to keep it for her future daughter-in-law. She thought she had every right to the necklace. So she put up a fight for her rights. But Gandhiji got the upper hand and the necklace was handed over to the fund.

- On another occasion Gandhiji asked her to clean the chamber-pots of his Christian clerk. At first she refused but Gandhiji forced her to do what he desired. When the *Mahatma* saw that Kasturbai was doing her work most unwillingly and noticed the tears rolling down her cheeks, he was so angry with her that he asked her to leave the house. But she tactfully made him realise that what he was doing was not right. "True friendship never runs smooth" and such was the case here.

- Kasturbai showed her strong character during her illness at Durban. The doctor attending on her asked her to take beef tea but she, a staunch vegetarian, refused point blank. When Gandhiji tried to persuade her to take it, as it was a question of life and death she replied that she

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would rather die than do a thing like that. This shows that she valued her conviction even more than her life. Loyalty to conscience had priority over obedience to her husband.

- When Mahatma Gandhi was arrested in South Africa Kasturbai would not remain behind. She too plunged herself into the struggle and got arrested. She was one of the first Indian women to take part in the political struggle and set an inspiring example to the rest of the women of India. She fell ill in prison and was released.

back to India

- When Gandhiji with his family returned to India most of his time was spent in politics and he could not devote much time to his wife and children. Kasturbai willingly sacrificed all her rights and took part with her husband in the struggle for the freedom of the country. No doubt, at first she took part in the political struggle as a mark of loyalty and devotion to her husband. But in due course she began to believe in the cause her husband advocated. When Gandhiji went

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to jail during the Non-co-operation Movement, Kasturbai carried on his work as best as she could. She even made a few political speeches.

- When one of Kasturbai's sons left his religion it was an affectionate mother's imploring poured out in her letter to him which expressed so simply her feelings, that won her son back.

- Kasturbai was chosen a teacher of one of the village schools. Of course, she could not teach the children how to read or write but she gave them lectures on good behaviour. She went round the houses of the poor villagers, enquiring into all their troubles and teaching them cleanliness.

mother of millions

- In Gandhiji's *Ashram* she was put in charge of the kitchen. She not only acted as a supervisor but helped in cooking the food. She never sat down to eat her meals until she saw that all the members of the *Ashram* had been fed. Her kindness and sweet nature drew everybody's heart towards her and they affectionately

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called her "Ba", a name which has stuck to her since. According to an old *Ashramite*, Kasturbai some times lost her temper when unexpected guests arrived at the *Ashram* and she was expected to feed them. Even Gandhiji was afraid to face her on such occasions. Once, after she had finished her work in the kitchen and was resting, when Gandhiji got the news that a few distinguished guests were arriving. As he wanted to give them lunch he quietly asked some of Kasturbai's assistants to prepare the lunch and not to call their "Ba" until she was really needed. While the boys were working in the kitchen, suddenly a bronze plate fell. The sound awoke Kasturbai and she came running into the kitchen to chase the cat out which she thought had found its way there. Great was her surprise when she saw all the preparations for lunch going on. When she was told that some guests were coming she just smiled saying: "Why was I not called?" After the guests had left she went to Gandhiji and asked him why he had not called her to make the lunch and she added: "Do you think I am such a bag of lazy bones?"

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And when Gandhiji told her that he was afraid of her she could not help having a hearty laugh.

- Gandhiji was anxious that Kasturbai should be an ideal woman, and would pull her up whenever Kasturbai was even slightly careless in her work. For instance, once a member of the *Ashram* was down with fever and when Gandhiji heard that Kasturbai knew nothing about it, he rebuked her in front of everybody for not treating the other children as her own. Kasturbai admitted her fault and promised to be more careful in future. On another occasion somebody gave her four annas as a contribution to the Harijan Fund, but she forgot all about it. When Gandhiji came to know he said that it was just as bad as stealing and when he asked her to do penance she did it gladly.

behind the prison walls

- Kasturbai had been to jail a number of times. She was arrested in 1930, during the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Rajkot struggle and again in 1942. During the Rajkot agitation she

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heard that her husband had kept twenty-one days' fast. She was terribly worried but she took it all bravely. When Gandhiji and other Congress Leaders were arrested in August, 1942, Kasturbai was told by the Government that if she promised not to take any part in politics, they would leave her alone. She spurned the offer on the spot and announced that she would address a public meeting. Before she could proceed further she was arrested and taken to the Aga Khan Palace at Poona.

- Once again in prison she heard about Gandhiji's fast and once again she "took it like a man." All the same the prolonged ordeal of the fast must have affected her health especially as it came after the death of Mahadev Desai who was more than a son to her.

her last trial

- Kasturbai's health got bad from September, 1942, and she never became herself again. In December, 1943, her condition became serious. She had had two heart attacks during one week. On February 20, 1944 her kidneys had

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failed to function and she had contracted pneumonia. Her youngest son Devdas Gandhi went to see her. She appeared terribly weak. She had refused to take either water or medicine and only opened her mouth for a drop of the *Ganges* water. Gandhiji attended on her during her illness and when she saw him she seemed pleased. On the following day she was more at ease and said to her son: "I must go some day, why not to-day?" She sat up in her bed and said a little prayer. Kasturbai breathed her last at about 7.35 p.m., on Tuesday, February 22, 1944

from dust unto dust "

• Mahatma Gandhi, Hira Lal and Devdas, (Mahatma Gandhi's eldest and youngest sons) Hiralal's daughter—Kasturbai's favourite grand-daughter—and another lady relative of the Gandhi family were among those who were by the side of Kasturbai during her last moments. The funeral ceremony took place at 10-40 a.m. on Wednesday in the Aga Khan Palace compound next to the spot where

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Mahadev Desai was cremated about eighteen months back. Kasturbai's last rites were performed quietly by her youngest son Devdas Gandhi. Gandhiji and more than a hundred relatives and personal friends of Gandhiji who had been allowed to enter the Aga Khan Palace were present at the ceremony. Had she died outside, millions would have attended her funeral, as a mark of their love and regard for this great lady.

- After the preliminary rites of cremation had been performed and the body placed on the pyre Mahatma Gandhi beckoned to the priest to allow him to conduct a brief service. Recitations from the *Koran*, the *Bhagavat Gita* and the *Bible* were made. Some members of the *Ashram* sang in chorus a few *Bhajans*. Dr M. D. Gilder recited a passage from the Zoroastrian sacred text while Mira Ben recited a Psalm. The service over, Mahatma Gandhi directed the priest to continue the ceremony and he himself stood leaning on his staff. Sandal-wood was piled on the body and *ghee* was poured.

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• Devdas Gandhi with fire in hand went round the body three times and amidst cries of "Govinda, Govinda, Govinda," lit the funeral pyre. In less than half an hour, fanned by an easterly breeze the flames leaped up. Mahatma Gandhi and the congregation then withdrew a short distance and squatted under a tamarind tree watching the mortal remains of Kasturbai being consumed by fire. Every heart was sad. Their dear "BA" for whom everybody had great love, had passed away Even Gandhiji who tried to put on a brave face had his eyes full of unshed tears.

the world mourns

• The news of the death of Mrs. Gandhi came as a shock to the whole country. The Council of State, the Sind Legislative Assembly, the Bengal Assembly, the Orrisa Assembly and many other public bodies mourned Kasturbai's death. Touching references to her death were made in the Punjab Assembly. The British Government's regret at the death of Mrs. Gandhi was expressed by Mr. Butler,

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President of the Board of Education, in the House of Commons on March 1, on behalf of Mr. Amery. He added : " When it occurred, she was in detention in company with Mr. Gandhi. She was receiving all possible medical care and attention, not only from her regular attendants, but from those desired by her family, and was able to see her near relatives. No request for her release was received and the Government of India considered that it would be no act of kindness to her or to her family to remove her from the Aga Khan Palace." The English and American papers flashed the sad news of her death and a number of messages of sympathy were received by Mahatma Gandhi, whose sorrow is shared by the whole world.

• Thus passed away one of the greatest women in India. No doubt the high position which she came to occupy in Indian nation was mainly due to the fact that she was the wife of a great man. But she was not a mere spectator; she was a participator in the drama of his life,

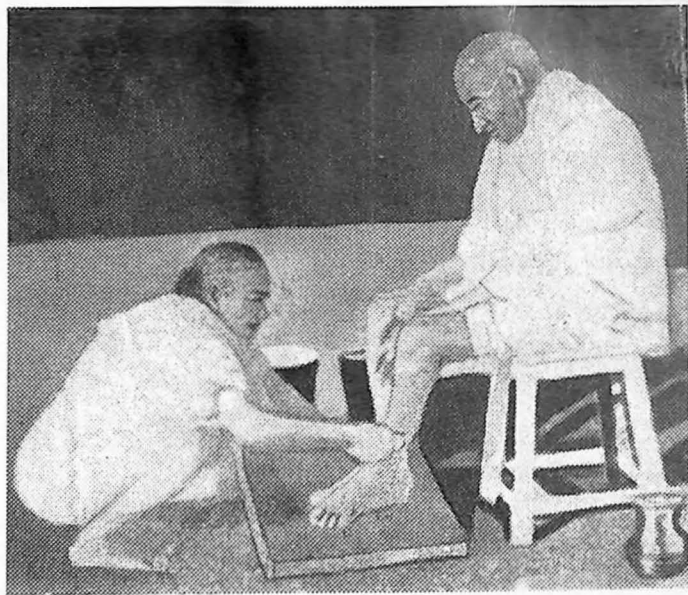
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sharing his sufferings and trials. It is doubtful whether Gandhiji would have been able to do his great work without the support and loving care of this woman.

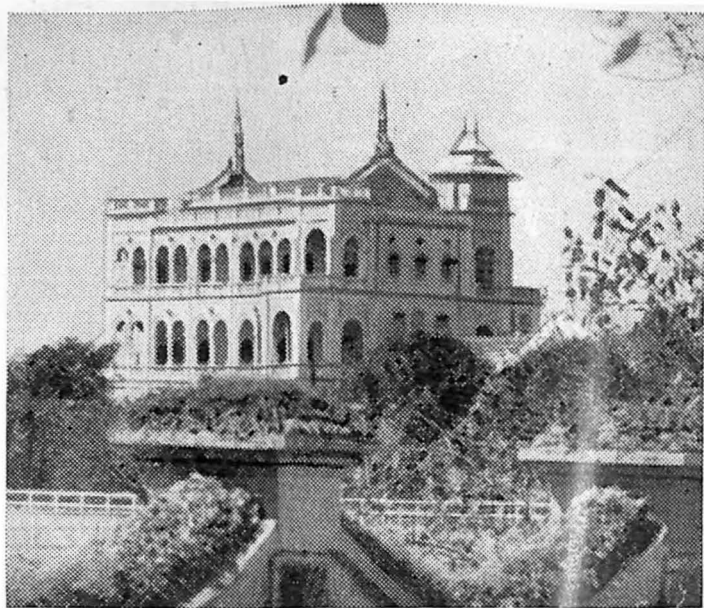




"Comrades-in-arms"



Service without Servitude



**The Aga Khan Palace where Kasturbai
breathed her last**

2. last moments of Kasturbai Gandhi

MR. Devdas Gandhi describing the last moments of Kasturbai in the course of a statement to the Press said :

o “ The numerous messages of fellowship and sympathy that have been addressed to me and to my father direct at his detention camp address, call for something more than a public acknowledgment of gratitude. So many of them are elaborately worded and yet they do not express all that their authors would wish to say. The out-pourings of sorrow are of so heart-rending a character as to make sympathy mutual between them and those of us who are directly bereaved. It would, I think, be improper for me to keep to myself the treasured and sacred memory of my mother's last moments and not share them, in so far as they can

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be publicly shared, with the vast concourse of my fellow mourners. I am as yet deeply moved and afflicted, momentarily I am sure, with a strange loss of faith in destiny. I have suddenly become mother-less, but I shall hope to fight my way out of this mental condition.

- “ She never completely lost consciousness till the last moment. When the Government *communiqué* on Sunday pronounced her condition to be grave, she was still hoping against hope to survive the last phase of her illness. The kidneys had failed to function during the last few days due to the feeble action of the heart and this was complicated by pneumonia without fever. The blood pressure had come down to 75/52. The doctors had given up the struggle. When I reached on Monday evening, she was in distress, which only the devoted nursing of her fellow-detainees could superficially relieve. It was against medical expectation that she survived the night that was the last night of her earthly existence, every second of which she received the ministrations of all her companions and of Gandhiji.

is she your mother ?

• “ In a semi-conscious state, she would answer questions in monosyllables or by gently shaking her head. Once when Gandhiji came near her, she raised her hand and asked, ‘ Who is it ? ’ and then seemed greatly comforted when he attended to her for nearly an hour. Beside her, he looked several years younger, although his hands shook. The scene reminded me of the incident in South Africa nearly 32 years ago when mother had just emerged a complete physical wreck from a course of three months’ imprisonment there. A European acquaintance, meeting both my parents at a railway station, said : ‘ Mr. Gandhi, is this your mother ? ’

• “ In the morning, she looked worse, but peaceful. On Monday, she had clung to a lingering hope. On Tuesday, she seemed to be resigned. The mind was at peace and clearer in spite of the gathering effects of uraemia.

• “ She had refused all medicine and even water since Monday, but she opened her mouth

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wide for a drop of *Ganges* water at mid-day on Tuesday. It comforted her for a while. Then, at about 3 p.m. she sent for me and told me that she was going. 'I must go some day, why not to-day?' she pleaded. I, the last child she had given birth to, was evidently holding her, but with this remark and other tender and sweet words, in the presence of all the others, she tore herself away from me. Never did her articulation sound clearer, or her words appear choicer to me.

• "Almost immediately after this, she joined her hands together, sat up unaided, and with her head bowed low, she prayed for several minutes in the loudest tone she could manage. **'GOD, MY REFUGE, THY MERCY I CRAVE.'** That is how I would translate into English the winged words which went up from her again and again. When I left the room to dry my tears, Pencillin had just arrived in the verandah of the Aga Khan Palace. The doctors had little desire to try it. Pneumonia was only a contributory factor. The final failure of the kidneys would not have been relieved by Pen-

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cillin and besides it was too late. Yet, this wonder-drug for pneumonia was being mechanically got ready.

- “ At about 5 o'clock, I gathered courage to face mother again. Now she smiled. It was the smile which had spoiled me these 43 years, but it was also a dying mother's last pensive smile to cheer her son.

- “ My mother was intensely human. On her behalf I crave the forgiveness of all those who have come into close contact with her for the extra share of affection she reserved for me. God surely will condone the frailties of one who otherwise lent glamour to His creation.

sweet wrangles

- “ This smile, however, revived my interest in Pencillin and I thought it my duty to pursue the matter with the doctors. They were willing to try it, but offered little hope of success. When Gandhiji came to know that I had approved the idea of giving painful injections to mother, he sacrificed his evening walk in the garden to reason with me. ‘ You can't cure your mother now, no matter what wonder-drugs you may

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muster. I will yield to you if you insist, but you are hopelessly wrong. She has refused all medicines and water these two days. She is in God's hands now. You may interfere if you wish to, but I advise against the course you are adopting ; and remember you are seeking to cause physical pain by an injection every 4 or 6 hours to a dying mother.' Then it was not for me to argue. The doctors felt most relieved. Just when the sweetest of all wrangles, I have ever had with my father was over, word came that mother had called for him. He immediately took over from those who were giving her restful support. He leaned her against his shoulder and tried to give her what comfort he could. As I stood in front, watching along with the others, I saw that the shadow on mother's face had deepened, but she spoke and moved her arms about for fuller comfort.

• “ Then in the twinkling of an eye, the collapse came. Tears rolled down from several eyes, while Gandhiji forced back his. The entire group stood in a circle and chanted the favourite prayer which they had been used to

say so long in her company. Within two minutes, she was still. As one of the inmates remarked to me, she waited for us to finish our meals. The last meal of the Detention Camp is taken at about 6. She died at 7-35 p.m.

last journey with mother

• “ I am on my way to Allahabad, as I write these lines, with her remains which will be consigned to the *Ganges* on Monday. These consist literally of a handful of tiny motherly bones. They were collected on Friday by the inmates of the Camp with due ritual from the ashes of the pyre. They were then laid out on a banana leaf and after being decorated with flowers and vermilion and incense and after a consecration ceremony, they were prepared for the last journey. I am thus travelling in the company of my mother, but after tomorrow I know I shall never travel with her again.

• “ It was Gandhiji’s clear decision that this ceremony of immersion in the confluence of the two great rivers be performed. ‘ What crores of Hindus do as sacrament is what will please

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your mother,' he said to me. The decision was reinforced by a telegram from the revered Pandit Malaviyaji, expressing a wish that this should be done. The bulk of the ashes were, according to custom, consigned to the river Indravani near Poona. I am not sure of the scientific propriety of this latter course and would have welcomed any other form of disposal. But in the absence of a considered alternative, customs prevailed.

- “ For me and that little company which visited the river side before sunrise on Friday morning it was a solemn and uplifting ceremony.

- “ A small quantity of ashes, collected on the second day after the cremation, has been preserved in the Detention Camp and these include the five glass bangles which formed part of the funeral pyre and were subsequently found intact and unbroken.

trying ordeal of detention

- “ The illness dated from September, 1942, in the Detention Camp. It was then for the

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first time that heart symptoms were noticed. She had never had heart attacks before, although she had been in indifferent health for the past four or five years. But after the initial setback in September, 1942, she never regained normal health. It is no exaggeration to say that both physically and mentally she was not equal to the strain of incarceration. She had been through terms of imprisonment before, notably one which included solitary confinement in a village in the interior of Rajkot when she came to the verge of disaster, but this last one was throughout for her the most trying of ordeals in which both the spirit and the body withered. The palatial surroundings and atmosphere were the antithesis of what she was used to. The barbed wire fences and the sentries completed the picture. I do no injury to the memory of my dear mother when I tell the public that she pined to get back to what she herself described to me last year as the low-roofed cottages of Sevagram. The fact of indefinite detention weighed still more heavily upon her and not all the creature

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comforts of the realm could give her peace of mind and spirit. The thought of thousands of others, some of them intimately known to her, suffering similar restraint made her misery more acute and one of her silent prayers, to which she had dedicated herself during the past year and a half, was that she and Bapu may be kept permanently in detention if only the others could be freed.

no offer of release by Govt.

- “ Would her release from prison during the last serious stages of her illness have helped? It would have helped, if she had been also offered the option of returning to the Detention Camp when she desired to do so. That would have constituted a complete formula of ‘ kindness,’ but the fact remains that she never had the benefit even of the psychological aspect of an offer of release, except the last merciful one from the Maker.

- “ I was, therefore, shocked and amazed to find that the agent of the Government of India in America has made a statement to the effect that the Government of India had wished on

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several occasions to release her, but that she had refused to avail herself of the offer. This is even contrary to the official announcements made on the point in India and I have seen no explanation so far for the different version put out in America.

- “On behalf of my three brothers, other relations and myself, I express our deep sense of obligation to all those who have either taken the trouble to send us messages or have borne the sorrow with us in silence. We have no other brothers or sisters save the millions of kindred spirits who share our bereavement in equal measure.

- “I apologise most humbly to any who may hold the view that by this lengthy public statement, I have been guilty of occupying too much time or newspaper-space. The occasion is one for tolerance. I cannot help feeling that if I should fail to send out this detailed open letter or grateful acknowledgment, I would merit the just reproach of millions of fellow-mourners.

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• “ I ought to add a word as to how Gandhiji has stood this ordeal. He grieves over this tragic gap, which has come into his life, for she in a large measure is responsible for what he is to-day. But he maintains a philosophic calm and keeps his emotions under the control expected of him. The atmosphere around him was one of the sadness without gloom and when my brothers and I parted company with the Camp on Friday, he cracked his customary jokes as a substitute for tears.”



3. Gandhiji's reminiscences

MAHATMA Gandhi in his *Autobiography* writes :—

• “If I should be pledged to be faithful to my wife, she also should be pledged to be faithful to me. The thought made me a jealous husband. Her duty was easily converted into my right to exact faithfulness from her, and if it had to be exacted, I should be watchfully tenacious of the right. I had absolutely no reason to suspect my wife’s fidelity, but jealousy does not wait for reasons. I must needs be for ever on the look out regarding her movements, and therefore she could not go anywhere without my permission. This sowed the seeds of a bitter quarrel between us. The restraint was virtually a sort of imprisonment. And Kasturbai was not the girl to brook any such thing. She made it a point to go out whenever and wherever she liked.

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• “ More restraint on my part resulted in more liberty being taken by her, and in my getting more and more cross. Refusal to speak to one another thus became the order of the day with us, married children. I think it was quite innocent of Kasturbai to have taken those liberties with my restraint on going to the temple or on going on visits to friends. If I had the right to impose restrictions on her, had not she also a similar right? All this is clear to me to-day. But at that time I had to make good my authority as a husband.

severities based on love

• “ Let not the reader think, that ours was a life of unbelieved bitterness. For my severities were all based on love. I wanted to make my wife an ideal wife. My ambition was to make her live a pure life, learn what I learnt, and identify her life and thought with mine. I do not know whether Kasturbai had any such ambition. She was illiterate. By nature she was simple, independent, persevering and with me at least, reticent. She was not impatient

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of her ignorance and I do not recollect my studies having ever spurred her to go in for a similar adventure. I fancy, therefore, that my ambition was all one-sided. My passion was entirely centred on one woman, and I wanted it to be reciprocated. But even if there were no reciprocity, it could not be all unrelieved misery because there was active love on one side at least."



• "I have already said that Kasturbai was illiterate. I was very anxious to teach her, but lustful love left me no time. For one thing the teaching had to be done against her will, and that too at night. I dared not meet her in the presence of the elders, much less talk to her. Kathiawad had then, and to a certain extent has even to-day, its own peculiar, useless and barbarous *Purdah*. Circumstances were thus unfavourable. I must therefore confess that most of my efforts to instruct Kasturbai in our youth were unsuccessful. And when I awoke from the sleep of lust, I had already

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launched forth into public life, which did not leave me much spare time. I failed likewise to instruct her through private tutors. As a result Kasturbai can now with difficulty write simple letters and understand simple Gujrati. I am sure that, had my love for her been absolutely untainted with lust, she would be a learned lady to-day ; for I could then have conquered her dislike for studies. I know that nothing is impossible for pure love.

I listened to others!

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

friend may put an end to the friendship. 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 a law-court. Law has no remedy for her. And I can never forget or forgive myself for having driven my wife to that desperation.

- “The canker of suspicion was rooted out only when I understood *Ahimsa* in all its bearings. I saw then the glory of *Brahmacharya* and realized that the wife is not the husband’s bond-slave, but his companion and his helpmate and an equal partner in all his joys and sorrow—as free as the husband to choose her own path. Whenever I think of these dark days of doubts and suspicions, I am filled with loathing of my folly and my lustful cruelty, and I deplore my blind devotion to my friend.

my folly

- “My relations with my wife were still not as I desired. Even my stay in England had not cured me of jealousy. I continued my

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squeamishness and suspiciousness in respect of every little thing, and hence all my cherished desires remained unfulfilled. I had decided that my wife should learn reading and writing and that I should help her in her studies, but my lust came in the way and she had to suffer for my own shortcoming. Once I went the length of sending her away to her father's house, and consented to receive her back only after I had made her thoroughly miserable. I saw later that all this was pure folly on my part."



• "In Natal, before returning to India, I was given some gifts. I knew that I should have some difficulty in persuading my wife, and I was sure that I should have none so far as the children were concerned.

• "You may not need them,' said my wife. 'Your children may not need them. Cajoled they will dance to your tune. I can understand your not permitting me to wear them. But what about my daughters-in-law? They will be sure to need them. And who knows what will

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happen tomorrow ? I would be the last person to part with gifts so lovingly given.'

• "And thus the torrent of argument went on, reinforced in the end by tears. But the children were adamant. And I was unmoved.

• "I mildly put in : ' The children have yet to get married. We do not want to see them married young. When they are grown up, they can take care of themselves and surely we shall not have for our sons brides who are fond of ornaments. And if after all we need to provide them with ornaments, I am there. You will ask me then.'

• " " Ask you ? I know you by this time. You deprived me of my ornaments, you would not leave me in peace with them. Fancy you offering to get ornaments for the daughters-in-law ! You who are trying to make *sadhus* of my boys from to-day ! No, the ornaments will not be returned. And pray what right have you to my necklace ?'

• " But, I rejoined, is the necklace given to you for your service or for my service ?'

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• “I agree. But service rendered by you is as good as rendered by me. I have toiled and moiled for you day and night. Is that no service? You forced all and sundry on me, making me weep bitter tears, and I slaved for them.’

• “These were pointed thrusts, and some of them went home. But I was determined to return the ornaments. I somehow succeeded in extorting a consent from her. The gifts received in 1896 and 1901 were all returned. A trust-deed was prepared and they were deposited with a bank to be used for the service of the community, according to my wishes or to those of the trustees.”



• “In Durban the house was built after the Western model and the rooms rightly had no outlets for dirty water. Each room had therefore chamber-pots. Rather than have these cleaned by a servant or a sweeper, my wife or I attended to them. The clerks who made themselves completely at home would naturally clean their own pots, but the Christian

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clerk was a newcomer, and it was our duty to attend to his bedroom. My wife managed the pots of the others, but to clean those used by one who had been a *Panchama* seemed to her to be the limit, and we fell out. She could not bear the pots being cleaned by me neither did she like doing it herself.

- “Even to-day I can recall the picture of her chiding me, her eyes red with anger, and pearl drops streaming down her cheeks, as she descended the ladder, pot in hand. But I was a cruelly kind husband. I regarded myself as her father, and so harassed her out of my blind love for her.

- ““ I was far from being satisfied by her merely carrying the pot, I would have her do it cheerfully. So I said, raising my voice : ‘I will not stand this nonsense in my house.’

- “The words pierced her like an arrow.

- “She shouted back : ‘Keep your house to yourself and let me go.’ I forgot myself and the spring of compassion dried up in me. I caught her by the hand, dragged the helpless woman to the gate, which was just opposite

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the ladder and proceeded to open it with the intention of pushing her out. The tears were running down her cheeks in torrents, and she cried : ‘ Have you no sense of shame ? Must you so far forget yourself ? Where am I to go ? I have no parents or relatives here to harbour me. Being your wife, you think I must put up with your cuffs and kicks ? For Heaven’s sake behave yourself and shut the gate. Let us not be found making scenes like this ! ’

true comradeship

• “ I put on a brave face, but was really ashamed and shut the gate. If my wife could not leave me, neither could I leave her. We have had numerous bickerings but the end has always been peace between us. The wife, with her matchless powers of endurance has always been the victor.

• “ To-day I am in a position to narrate the incident with some detachment, as it belongs to a period out of which I have fortunately emerged. I am no longer a blind, infatuated husband,

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I am no more my wife's teacher. Kasturbai can, if she will, be unpleasant to me to-day, as I used to be to her before. We are tried friends the one no longer regarding the other as the object of lust. She has been a faithful nurse throughout my illnesses, serving without any thought of reward.

- “ The incident in question occurred in 1898, when I had no conception of *Brahmacharya*. It was a time when I thought that the wife was the object of her husband's lust, born to do her husband's behest, rather than a helpmate, a comrade and a partner in the husband's joys and sorrows.

followed my footsteps

- “ Let no one conclude from this narrative of a sacred recollection that we are by any means an ideal couple; or that there is a complete identity of ideals between us. Kasturbai herself does not perhaps know whether she has any ideals independently of me. It is likely that many of my doings have not her approval even to-day. We never discuss them,

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I see no good in discussing them. For she was educated neither by her parents nor by me at the time when I ought to have done it. But she is blessed with one great quality to a very considerable degree, a quality which most Hindu wives possess in some measure. And it is this : willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, she has considered herself blessed in following in my footsteps, and has never stood in the way of my endeavour to lead a life of restraint. Though, therefore, there is a wide difference between us intellectually I have always had the feeling that, ours is a life of contentment, happiness and progress."

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• "Thrice in her life my wife narrowly escaped death through serious illness. The cures were due to house-hold remedies. At the time of her first attack *Satyagraha* was going on or was about to commence. She had frequent hemorrhage. A medical friend advised a surgical operation, to which she agreed after some hesitation. She was extremely emaciated

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and the doctor had to perform the operation without chloroform. It was successful, but she had to suffer much pain. She, however, went through it with wonderful bravery. The doctor and his wife who nursed her were all attention. This was in Durban. The doctor gave me leave to go to Johannesburg and told me not to have any anxiety about the patient.

• “ In a few days, however, I received a letter to the effect that Kasturbai was worse, too weak to sit up in bed and had once become unconscious. The doctor knew that he might not, without my consent give her wines or meat. So he telephoned to me at Johannesburg for permission to give her beef tea. I replied saying I could not grant the permission but that if she was in a condition to express her wish in the matter, she might be consulted, and she was free to do as she liked. ‘ But,’ said the doctor, ‘ I refused to consult the patient’s wishes in the matter. You must come yourself. If you do not leave me free to prescribe whatever diet I like, I will not hold myself responsible for your wife’s life.’

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• ‘ I took the train for Durban the same day, and met the doctor who quietly broke this news to me. ‘ I had already given Mrs. Gandhi beef tea when I telephoned to you.’

“ Now, doctor, I call this fraud : ’ said I.

• “ No question of fraud in prescribing medicine or diet for a patient. In fact we doctors consider it a virtue to deceive patients or their relatives, if thereby we can save our patients,’ said the doctor with determination.

• “ I was deeply pained, but kept cool. The doctor was a good man and a personal friend. He and his wife had laid me under a debt of gratitude, but I was not prepared to put up with his medical morals.

• ““ Doctor, tell me what you propose to do now. I would never allow my wife to be given meat or beef, even if the denial meant her death, unless of course she desired to take it.’

• ““ You are welcome to your philosophy. I tell you that, so long as you keep your wife under my treatment, I must have the option to give her anything I wish. If you don’t like

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this I must regretfully ask you to remove her. I can't see her die under my roof.'

- "Do you mean to say that I must remove her at once?'

- "Whenever did I ask you to remove her? I only want to be left entirely free. If you do so my wife and I will do all that is possible for her and you may go back without the least anxiety on her score. But if you will not understand this simple thing you will compel me to ask you to remove your wife from my place.'

- "I think one of my sons was with me. He entirely agreed with me and said that his mother should not be given beef tea. I next spoke to Kasturbai herself. She was really too weak to be consulted in this matter. But I thought it my painful duty to do so. I told her what had passed between the doctor and myself. She gave a resolute reply: 'I will not take beef tea. It is a rare thing in this world to be born a human being, and I would rather die in your arms than pollute my

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body with such abominations.’ I pleaded with her. I told her that she was not bound to follow me. I cited to her the instances of Hindu friends and acquaintances who had no scruples about taking meat or wine as medicine. But she was adamant.

- “‘No’ said she, ‘pray remove me at once.’”

- “I was delighted. Not without some agitation I decided to take her away. I informed the doctor of her resolve. He exclaimed in a rage: ‘What a callious man you are ! . . .’”

nothing will happen

- “Kasturbai needed no cheering up. On the contrary, she comforted me, saying: ‘Nothing will happen to me, don’t worry.’”

- “She was mere skin and bone, having had no nourishment for days. The station platform was very large, and as the rickshaw could not be taken inside, one had to walk some distance before one could reach the train. So I carried her in my arms and put her into the compartment. From Phoenix we carried her in the hammock, and there she slowly

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picked up strength under hydropathic treatment.

• “ In two or three days of our arrival at Phoenix a *Swami* came to our place. He had heard of the resolute way in which we had rejected the doctor’s advice, and he had, out of sympathy, come to plead with us. He held forth on the religious harmlessness of meat, citing authorities from *Manu*. I knew that some of these verses from *Manusmriti* were interpolations. But Kasturbai’s faith was unshakable. To her scriptural texts were a sealed book, but the traditional religion of her fore-fathers was enough for her. *Swamiji*, she said : ‘whatever you may say I do not want to recover by means of beef tea. Pray don’t worry me any more. You may discuss the thing with my husband and children if you like. But my mind is made up.’

love melts obstinacy

• “ Now it happened that Kasturbai who had a brief respite after her operation, had again begun getting hemorrhage, and the

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malady seemed to be obstinate. So when all remedies failed, I entreated her to give up salt and pulses. But she would not agree. She challenged me, saying that even I could not give up these articles if I was advised to do so. I was pained and equally delighted—delighted in that I got an opportunity to shower my love on her: ‘You are mistaken. If I was ailing and the doctor advised me to give up these or other articles I should unhesitatingly do so. But there! Without my medical advice I give up salt and pulses for one year, whether you do so or not.

• “She was rudely shocked and exclaimed in deep sorrow: ‘Pray forgive me. Knowing you, I should not have provoked you. I promise to abstain from these things, but for Heaven’s sake take back your vow. This is too hard on me.’”



THE CONGRESS CASE

JAG PARVESH CHANDER

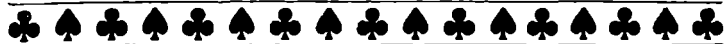
Mr. K. M. Munshi in an introduction to this book says :—

Mr. J. P. Chander has in a concise form stated not merely the Congress Case but has also exposed the fallacy of the British claims that Gandhiji or the Congress High Command was either pro-Japanese and falterers on the path of non-violence. Logic, however irrefutable, has little chance before official propaganda during war time. But that is no reason why we should not remind ourselves that our case is true and our cause just.

Of all the wicked things which have been said of Gandhiji, the most wicked is that he approved, connived at and sanctioned the use of violence in the Quit India Campaign. It is a tendacious propaganda intended to remove him from the pedestal which world opinion erected for him as the Prince of Peace.

But the fact that his presence during war time outside a jail is unsufferable in the eyes of those who want to wage the war, establishes that if he came out he would become the rallying centre of pacifism. No higher tribute could be paid to a Christ than the Cross. No higher tribute could be given to Gandhiji than that wars could not be safely waged without his being entombed.

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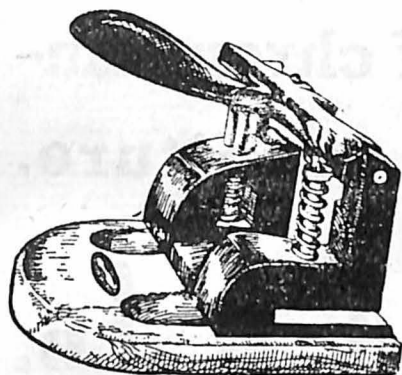
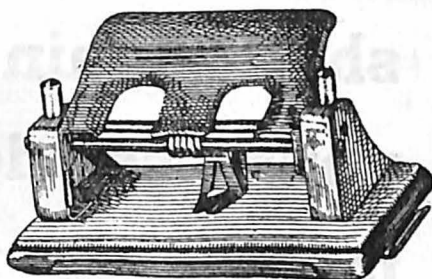
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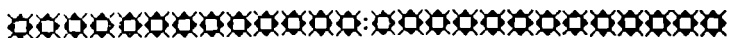
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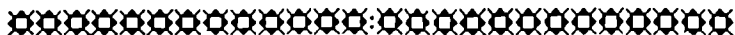
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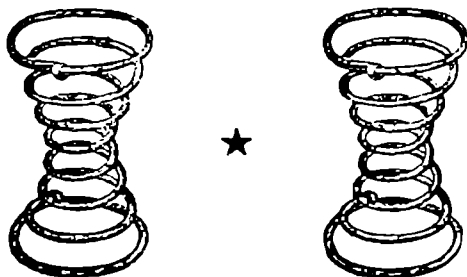


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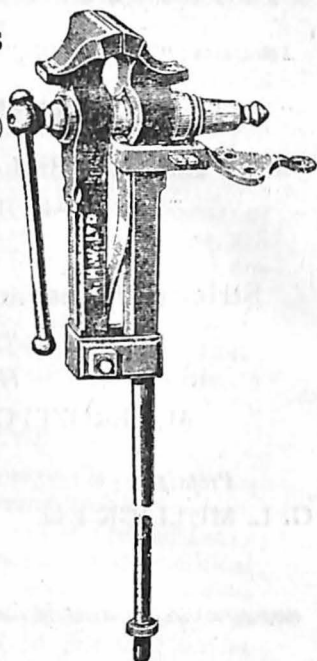
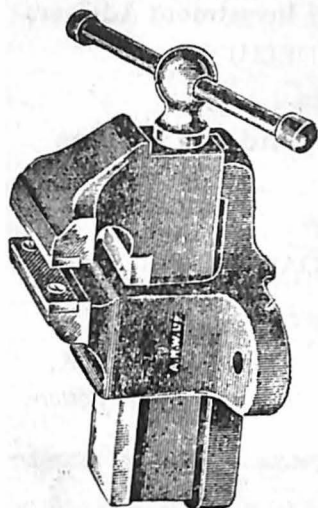


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