

**ADDRESS BY THIRU BANWARILAL PUROHIT, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF  
TAMIL NADU AT THE 150<sup>th</sup> BIRTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS OF  
KASTURI BA AND PRESENTING SARVODAYA STREE SAKTHI HARMONY  
& EMPOWERMENT AWARDS AT SRS SARVODAYA GIRLS HOSTEL,  
CHENNAI ON 07.08.2018 AT 11.00 AM**

**Anaivarukkum Kaalai Vanakkam**

**Prof.Sankar Kumar Sanyal,  
All India President, Harijan Sevak Sangh**

**Thiru.Subramaniakumar,  
Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer,  
Indian Overseas Bank**

**Dr.K.S.Babai,  
Vice President, Harijan Sevak Sangh**

**Thiru. Maruthi,  
State President, Harijan Sevak Sangh, T N**

**Thiru. Umapathy,  
Secretary, Harijan Sevak Sangh**

**Dr.S.Pandian,  
President, Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya Samithi**

**Distinguished Invitees**

**Ladies & Gentlemen**

It fills me with a sense of happiness and inner fulfilment to be participating in the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of Kasturi Ba Gandhi being organised by the Harijan Sevak Sangh at which the Sarvodaya Stree Sakthi Harmony and Empowerment awards are being distributed. Kasturi Ba Gandhi was an inspiring personality of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century who through her

sense of devotion to the nation, the spirit of sacrifice which she espoused and her total commitment to all the causes which the Mahatma pursued, serves as a role model for Women in India and abroad.

If Mahatma Gandhi was like a huge Banyan tree whose multiple branches spread out in many directions, Kasturba Gandhi was mother earth which held the banyan tree firm and erect.

Kasturba was married to Gandhiji at the tender age of thirteen, She had very little of formal education and schooling. In fact it was Gandhiji who taught Kasturba to read and write. But her hand writing was like that of a little child. She would write each letter of the alphabet separately and the spacing between the letters would be irregular.

Gandhiji advised her to practice writing. Kasturba asked for a notebook. But Gandhiji gave her a loose sheaf of papers and told her that she could have a note book only when her writing improved. Kasturba was deeply hurt at this action of her husband.

After this incident, when someone else sent her a notebook Kasturba. But refused to use it and quietly put it in the cupboard.

Gandhiji, who realized his mistake, tried to persuade her to use the notebook but she replied in a dignified manner, “What do I need a note book for?”

This was the spirit that Kasturba was made of. Though true and obedient to her husband she did not give up on her self-respect and dignity.

In India, we have names like Sita-Ram, Radha-Krishna, Radhe-shyam, Lakshmi-Narayan and the like where the feminine name precedes the male name. We can say that like the man-woman form of Ardhanareeswara, these names signify the combination of the male and female principle in an individual, with the female principle taking precedence. Likewise, one cannot think of Mahatma Gandhi without thinking of Kasturba Gandhi.

While for learning how to read and write, Mahatma Gandhi may have been her teacher Kasturba was the person who taught Gandhiji the greatest truths in his life. Gandhiji himself would say, and I quote, 'I learned the lesson of non-violence from my wife. Her determined resistance to my will on the one hand, and her quiet submission to the suffering my stupidity involved, on the other hand, ultimately made me ashamed of myself and cured me of my stupidity'. Unquote.

Kasturi ba was a Woman of Steel who never hesitated to speak her mind even with the British. It was her fearlessness which gave Gandhiji greater strength in the pursuit of the freedom struggle.

When Gandhiji went to Shimla for talks with Viceroy Willingdon, Kasturba accompanied him to the hill station. She was invited by Lady Willingdon to the Viceregal Lodge and at that time Lady Willingdon expressed a keenness to understand that true nature of the Indian people. For this Kastur Ba told her, “You will know the Indian people better if you lived down in the plains where they dwell, rather than in these mountain heights” !

Kasturba Ba was also a leader endowed with native wisdom and enormous common sense.

When the Quit India movement gathered momentum, Gandhiji was imprisoned before he could address a public meeting near Bombay. He wanted Kasturba to take his place.

Kasturba had the presence of mind to realize that the police would stop her and jail her too, and quickly dictated a message to the public. Her message was, and I quote -- “Gandhiji poured out his heart 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 must prove their mettle. They should all join in this struggle, regardless of caste or creed. Truth and non violence must be our watchwords.” Unquote.

Just as Kasturba had foreseen, she was stopped on the way to the meeting, where more than one lakh people had gathered to see her. She was taken prisoner and sent to jail.

Kasturba Gandhi first involved herself with politics in South Africa in 1904 when she helped establish the Phoenix Settlement near Durban. Then in 1913, she took part in protests against the ill-treatment of Indian immigrants in South Africa, for which she was arrested.

While imprisoned, Kasturba encouraged educated women to teach the uneducated women how to read and write.

Kasturba and Gandhi then permanently left South Africa in July 1914 and returned to India. The majority of her time was dedicated to helping out and serving in the ashrams. Here, Kasturba was referred to as "Ba" or Mother, because she served as the mother for all the inmates of the ashrams.

In 1917, Kasturba focused on helping improve the welfare of women in Champaran, Bihar where Gandhi was working with indigo farmers. She taught the women hygiene, discipline, health, reading and writing. In 1922, Kasturba participated in a *Satyagraha* (nonviolent resistance) movement in Borsad, Gujarat.

In 1939, Kasturba took part in nonviolent 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, when she was arrested, along with Gandhi and other freedom fighters for participating in the Quit India movement. Her health deteriorated completely and she breathed her last at the detention camp in Pune.

Gandhi wrote about Kasturba “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 feelings of caste from her mind and regarded a Harijan girl with no less affection than her own children.

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".

On this occasion of the commencement of Kastur Bai 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary Celebrations I feel particularly delighted to be conferring the Sarvodaya Stree Sakthi Harmony and Empowerment Awards on those who have contributed for the development of women.

By her life of motherliness, sacrifice and patriotism Kastur Ba is a beacon light for Indian Womanhood. Though uneducated she realized the importance of education for women and pursued that as a mission. She stood by her husband like a rock in all his moments of sorrow, sacrifice and despair. She underwent long years in jail like a true Satyagrahi and finally succumbed to pneumonia when imprisoned after Quit India movement. At the same time she brought up her children with love and affection sometimes even quarrelling with Gandhiji to give them a better deal.

Kasturi Ba's life will remain a lesson for many generations to come. I congratulate the Harijan Sevak Sangh for having organised this function to commemorate her 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary. My praise and appreciation is reserved for the award winners of today who I am sure will serve as torch

bearers of the message of Kastur Ba's life. May the name of Kastur Ba be etched in all our hearts and may her life be an inspiration for generations to come.

Nandri Vanakkam...

Jai Hind....