

'Jagadamba'

A One-Woman, Two-Act Play

By

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Historical background: Act I



Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Kasturba were married at the tender age of twelve. She came from an orthodox Hindu family, and according to the custom of the times, she was not given any formal education.

Gandhi went to England to become a barrister; returned to India where he was ostracized by his community for having ‘crossed the ocean.’ His legal practice in India did not succeed. By sheer chance, in his hometown of Porbunder, he met a trader from South Africa who asked Gandhi to come to South Africa to help resolve his dispute with another trader. Gandhi became more and more involved with the treatment of the Indians in South Africa. Realizing he would have to remain in South Africa for a long time, he returned to India to fetch Kasturba and his sons.

The Asiatic Registration Law (known as the Black Act) was passed in South Africa in March 1907, requiring all Indians, young and old, men and women to get fingerprinted, and to keep registration documents with them at all times. Gandhi organized opposition to the Black Act using the concept of ‘SATYAGRAHA’ (literally ‘Truth-force’) or passive resistance. Many of the protesters were beaten and arrested, including Gandhi. This was the first of Gandhi’s many jail sentences. It took seven years of protest, but in June 1914, the Black Act was repealed. Gandhi had proved that non-violent protest could be immensely successful.

Another very important aspect that came into being in South Africa was ‘BRAHMACHARYA’, literally ‘celibacy’, but in a broader sense, ‘renunciation.

Gandhi was greatly influenced by Leo Tolstoy. In South Africa, he founded the Phoenix Ashram, and later the Tolstoy Farm, where people of all races, religions lived and worked together.

Kasturba had to face extraordinary circumstances in this foreign land.

Act I shows how she coped with the many challenges, her growth, her reactions as a wife, a mother and ultimately as a human being.....

Historical background: Act II



Act II is set against the background of Gandhi's non-violent struggle in India for freedom from British rule. The British East India Company came to India to trade and stayed on to rule. The British Crown took over the administration of the country from the Company in 1858, and Queen Victoria became the Empress of India in 1877. Although the British called India 'The Jewel in the Crown' of their Empire, for most Indians, British rule meant a lack of freedom, decreased economic opportunities and increasing poverty. The Indian National Congress, established in 1885 to seek more rights for Indians in their own country, adapted Gandhi's principles of 'Satyagraha' after 1919 in their fight for Independence from the British.

Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in 1915 and led his first significant ‘Satyagraha’ movement in the Champaran district of Bihar in North Eastern India, to protest the exploitation of the poor peasants by the indigo planters (mostly British). The other major movements he led included the ‘Salt March’ in 1930, which protested against the British-led government’s monopoly on salt, a staple of the poor man’s diet. The ‘Quit India’ movement was launched in August 1942, resulting in Gandhi and Kasturba’s arrest and imprisonment at the Aga Khan Palace in Pune, Central India, where Act II takes place. Kasturba and Gandhi’s secretary Mahadeo Desai breathed their last during this incarceration. Gandhi lived to see India obtain Independence on August 15, 1947, only to fall to an assassin’s bullet on January 30, 1948.

