

Satyagraha

M.K. GANDHI IN SOUTH AFRICA

1893 - 1914

ACT I

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- Scene 3 The Vow

ACT II

- Scene 1 Confirmation and Rescue
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ACT I

SCENE I: A MYTHICAL BATTLEFIELD

The Kuru Field of Justice

Gandhi:

"I see them here assembled, ready to fight, seeking to please the King's sinful son by waging war." And thus addressed by Arjuna, Krishna brought that splendid chariot to a halt between the two armies. In front of Bhishma and Drona and all the rulers of the world, he said, "Behold Arjuna, these kinsmen assembled here." And the Prince marked on each hand relatives and friends in both armies. Seeing them, all his kinsmen, thus arrayed, Arjuna was filled with deep compassion and turned to Krishna.

Arjuna:

My very being is oppressed with compassion's harmful taint. With mind perplexed concerning right and wrong I ask you which is the better course? Tell me and let your words be definite and clear, I am your pupil and put all my trust in you. So teach me.

Krishna:

BE wise in matters of death and duty. See in this war presented by pure chance a door to paradise. For sure is death to all that's born, sure is birth to all that dies and for this, you have no cause to grieve. Likewise, recognize this war as prescribed

by duty. Hold pleasure and pain, profit and loss, victory and defeat to be the same: then brace yourself ready for the fight. So will you bring no evil on yourself.

Chorus:

To him thus in compassion plunged, to him desponding, Krishna spoke these words: "Whence comes this faintness on you now at this crisis hour? This ill beseems a noble, wins a heavenly state, but brings dishonour, Arjuna. Give up this vile faint heartedness. Stand up, chastiser of your foes!"

Gandhi:

HOLD pleasure and pain, profit and loss, victory and defeat to be the same: then brace yourself ready for the fight. So will you bring no evil on yourself.

SCENE II ~ 1910

Tolstoy Farm

Gandhi:

BETWEEN theory and practice, some talk as they were two — making a separation and a difference between them. Yet wise men know that both can be gained in applying oneself whole heartedly to one. For the high estate attained by men of contemplative theory, that same state achieve the men of action. So act as the ancient of days old, performing works as spiritual exercise.

Miss Schlesen, Kasturbai,
Mrs. Naidoo:

SUCH a one is honorable who gives his mortal powers to worthy work not seeking gain. Do the allotted task for which one is fit, for work is more excellent than idleness and the body's life proceeds not, lacking work. Such an earthly task do free from desire, you will perform a high task.

Kallenbach:

WHEN the motives and the fruits of a man's actions are freed from desire, his works are burned clean by wisdom's fire, the white fire of truth. When he casts off attachment to his deeds, a man embarks on his work ever content, on none dependent. With thought and self controlled, giving up all possessions, he cares for his bodily maintenance without excess; taking what chance may bring, surmounting all dualities, the same in success and failure.

SCENE III ~ 1906

The Vow

Parsi Rustomji:

THE world is not for the doubting man. Let a man by wisdom dispel his doubts. For nothing on earth resembles wisdom's power to purify and this a man may find in time within himself, when he is perfected in spiritual exercise. Then thoughts are steadied and come to rest allowing one to see God in the individual. Knowing this, he stands still moving not an inch from reality. Standing firmly unmoved by any suffering, however grievous it may be.

WHOEVER gives up a deed because it causes pain, or because he shrinks from bodily pain, follows the way of darkness, knowing nothing of self-surrender. But if a work is done because it should be done and is enjoined by Scripture and without thought for great benefits, then that is surrender in Goodness. With doubt cut away, suffused with goodness, the self-surrendered man hates neither uncongenial work nor looks only for pleasant work.

Chorus:

THESE works of sacrifice must be done. From old did the Lord of creatures say that in sacrifice you sustain the gods and the gods sustain you in return. So was the wheel set in motion and who here fails to match his turning living an evil life, the senses his pleasure ground, lives out his life in vain ground, lives out his life in vain.

ACT II

SCENE I ~ 1896

Confrontation and Rescue

Mrs. Alexander:

THE devilish folk, in them there is no purity, no morality, no truth. So they say the world has not a law nor order, nor a lord. And, thinking this, all those dark minded ones of little wit, embark on cruel and violent deeds, the curses of their kind. Maddened by pride and hypocrisy, not caring right up to death, they have no other aim than to satisfy their pleasure, convinced that is all. So speak fools.

Chorus:

THIS I have gained today, this whim I'll satisfy; this wealth is mine and much more too will be mine as time goes on. He was an enemy of mine, I've killed him, and many another I'll kill. I'm master here. I take my pleasure as I will; I'm strong and happy and successful. I'm rich and of good family. Who else can match himself with me?

SCENE 2 ~ 1906

Indian Opinion

Kallenbach and Miss Schlesen:

WITH senses freed, the wise man should act, longing to bring about the welfare and coherence of the world. Therefore, perform unceasingly the works that must be done, for the man detached who labors on to the highest must win through. This is how the saints attained success. Moreover, you should embrace action for the upholding, the welfare of your own kind. Whatever the noblest does, that too will others do: the standard that he sets all the world will follow.

**Kasturbai, Mrs. Naidoo
and Parsi Rustomji:**

ACT as God does, for the sake of others: "In the three worlds there is nothing I need do, nor anything unattained that I need to gain, yet action is the element in which I move. If I were not tirelessly to busy Myself with works, then would men everywhere follow in my footsteps, sinking back. If I were not to do my work these worlds would fall to ruin and I would be a worker in confusion."

SCENE III ~ 1908

Protest

Gandhi's Prayer:

THE Lord said:

LET a man feel hatred for no being, let him be friendly, compassionate; done with thoughts of "I" and "mine," the same in pleasure as in pain, long suffering.

HIS self restrained, his purpose firm, let his mind and soul be steeped in Me, let him worship Me with love, then will I love him in return.

THAT man I love from whom the people do not shrink and who does not shrink from them, who is free from exaltation, fear, impatience, and excitement.

I love the man who has no expectation, is pure and skilled, indifferent, who has no worries and gives up all selfish enterprise, loyal-devoted to me.

I love the man who hates not nor exults, who mourns not nor desires, who puts away both pleasant and unpleasant things, who is loyal-devoted-and-devout.

I love the man who is the same to friend and foe, the same whether he be respected or despised, the same in heat and cold, in pleasure as in pain, who has put away attachment and remains unmoved by praise or blame, who is taciturn, content with whatever comes his way, having no home, of steady mind, but loyal-devoted-and-devout.

BUT as for those who reverence these deathless words of righteousness which I have just now spoken, putting their faith in them, making Me their goal my loving devotees, these I do love exceedingly.

ACT III

SCENE I ~ 1913

New Castle March

Kasturbai and Mrs. Naidoo:

IN what for others is night, therein is the man of self-restraint wide awake, separate from passion and hate, self-possessed and drawing near to calm serenity. This is the athlete of the spirit, whose ground remains unmoved, whole soul stands firmly on it. This is the fixed, still state which sustains even at the time of death the athletes of the spirit, who even then set forth, some to return, some never to return. Outstanding is he whose soul views in the selfsame way comrades and enemies, loving all alike.

Gandhi:

THE Lord said, I have passed through many a birth and many have you. I know them all but you do not. Yet by my creative energy, I consort with Nature and come to be in time. Whenever the law of righteousness withers away and lawlessness arises, then do I generate myself on earth. I come into being age after age and take a visible shape and move a man with men for the protection of good, thrusting the evil back and setting virtue on her seat again.

Philip Glass Satyagraha

Opera in three acts

Vocal text by Constance DeJong
adapted from the *Bhagavad Gita*

Book by Philip Glass and
Constance DeJong