

Non hanno capito niente!

A play in 10 scenes

Dramatic days in India in the life of Maria Montessori

Characters

Maria Montessori (ca. 70)
Mario Montessori (ca. 40)
Major Stephen (ca. 50)
Lieutenant Holmes (ca. 27)

Rajjesh, a servant
Vanisha, a course participant
Rauha, a course participant

Dr. Arundale, Principal of the Theosophical Society
His wife
A man, an emissary of Gandhi
First wife „
Second wife „
Third wife „

Ria and Achmed, Indians
Soldiers of the British Army

The play begins at the start of the Forties in India. Maria Montessori arrived in the then-British colony in Autumn 1939 at the invitation of the Theosophical Society with her son Mario and was, as an Italian, immediately arrested. After the end of the war she returned to Europe for approximately two years. She then spent the years from 1947 to 1949 back in India.

Maria Montessori lived from 1870 until 1952. Her son took over her work until his death in 1982.

1 – Prologue

When the lights are dimmed, some white-covered figures scurry across the stage. A loud, "Halt!", then several shots ring out. Two of the figures fall to the ground as if shot, the others disappear nervously, with suppressed cries.

2 – In the Villa's Garden

Light. Three soldiers of the British colonial army in India lower their weapons and stare at the two bodies lying half atop each other. Two young people, one woman, one man. An officer charges over.

Lieutenant Holmes confronts the soldiers involved in the shooting, demanding to know why they shot. The soldiers claim they had to shoot, as they had orders to fire on rebels. Holmes orders them to bring the bodies inside.

Maria Montessori comes out, to find out what has happened. Holmes apologises, as he was upstairs when it happened.

Major Stephen comes over and demands an explanation. Holmes promises a report before midday. The two officers discuss Montessori's status, as an internee, and how she must follow the rules imposed upon her. The two officers then move to discuss the situation with Montessori.

3 – In Maria Montessori's Room

Major Stephen apologises for the disturbance. Maria Montessori names the victims, Ria and Achmed, to which the Major responds that it is war, and the soldiers are obliged to protect her. Montessori argues that the war in India is due only to the presence of the British - there are no German, Italian or African soldiers.

The discussion moves to the cause of the gathering in the park - Ria's birthday. Major Stephen states that gatherings are banned, regardless of the reason, then excuses himself and leaves Lieutenant Holmes to continue the discussion.

4 - In the Park

Maria Montessori prays earnestly for the forgiveness of the soldiers who killed Ria and Achmed, and prays for the strength to forgive them herself. She prays further for the strength to break the cycle of violence and revenge - where everyone speaks of peace, even while they make war.

Montessori reflects on the history of her schools; how they have been disbanded, or corrupted, and the children are no longer free to learn in peace. She asks God why this happened - was it a punishment for her pride in her work, or for how she treated Mario in his childhood? Or was it to refine her, and her ideas, in order that her work can continue and grow? She prays that God will welcome Ria and Achmed in heaven, and ends by looking forward, to her new children.

5 - In Maria Montessori's Room

Maria Montessori moves to light the candles. Lieutenant Holmes prevents her, reminding her of the ban on lights at night. They discuss the nature of rules, and war, and how war is not part of human nature - but caused and inspired by ideologies.

Holmes admits he attended a Montessori school in Brighton. Montessori reminds him that he learned something other than following orders. They discuss the trust in their own abilities that is nurtured in children. Holmes suggests that circumstances are against peaceful growth, and that nobody is at fault. Montessori argues that there are no "circumstances", only people. They continue to discuss how war twists things, and people, and how fear rules in war.

Montessori wonders if her method is false, insufficient to prepare children. Holmes disagrees, arguing that the weight of history was against peace at this time.

6 – In Maria Montessori's Room, the Next Day.

A delegation arrives from Mahatma Gandhi, to see Maria Montessori. They ask to be trained in Montessori theories. Montessori argues that she has no theories; she has ideas, she has experience, and has learned from these. She has observed children, and seen that they need to be given the freedom and support to develop naturally.

The Indian delegation pleads with Montessori to come with them, to train them and strengthen them in their fight for freedom. Montessori asks how a European can support and strengthen Indians in their struggle for their country. The delegation replies that she can offer training to teachers, to teach the children.

Montessori agrees, if it can be arranged, and the delegation leave.

7 – Outside, Overlooking the River

Maria Montessori watches the cremation of Ria and Achmed with two of her students, discussing how the deaths came about. Montessori reads a letter, from Mahatma Gandhi, in which he writes that he will come to discuss training courses when he is released from prison. They discuss Gandhi's non-violent opposition to the war.

Montessori hopes that Gandhi does not come too late - as the education of peace must come early in the life of a child, so that they will never forget it. The two students support Montessori, encouraging her that her schools are spreading across India - even though they have been swept away in much of Europe by the war.

Encouraged, Montessori repeats that it is the smallest, youngest children who must be taught - and that they are volcanoes, full of power, and that the child is the father of the man. Traditional schools teach conformity, discipline, crime and punishment - and that is what the children live as adults. Montessori offers a better life.

One student reports that her mother says the time of foreigners ruling India will pass, and they should be ignored. The other argues that they are everywhere, and cannot be ignored. Montessori agrees with the student's mother - although they should be resisted.

8 - In Maria Montessori's Room

Maria Montessori finds Mario in her room, and calls him to her and embraces him. He tells her that he has been allowed to visit to celebrate Montessori's birthday with her. He reads her a telegram from the British Viceroy, granting her a visit from her son on her birthday - and shares the news that she is no longer forced to remain in one place, but is free to travel within India.

Montessori discusses Mario's childhood with him, and shares her regret that she took so long to tell him that he was her son. Mario defends her decision, telling her that it is in the past and he has forgiven her - although he does not feel he needs to forgive her.

They discuss their life, what has happened to Montessori's schools in Europe, and Mario's wife and children. Montessori states that Ada (Mario's wife) should stay with the children, rather than risk a journey to India during wartime.

Dr Arundale and his wife come to congratulate Montessori on her birthday. Montessori takes the opportunity to present Mario to the couple, for the first time, as her son.

9 – In the Park

Maria Montessori enters the garden with Mario, and sees more soldiers guarding the garden. Major Stephen and Lieutenant Holmes are there. Stephen claims the soldiers are there as a precaution, to protect Montessori, as it has become known that she plans to meet Gandhi - and that his enemies may become hers.

Holmes interrupts with the news that Stephen has been promoted. Montessori mocks Stephen, then they discuss nationalism and its implications in war.

Montessori's Indian servant comes, alarming the guards. Holmes orders that nobody should shoot, and Montessori jokes that she needs new guards - as the current ones are too dangerous!

Montessori returns to her argument on the dangers of nationalism - and imperialism. Montessori argues the cause of India, free from British domination. She states that nationalism and imperialism are relics of the "old man" - and grant order at the price of peace. Montessori goes on to argue that people need to discover their cosmic task - which is not part of the supra-nature they construct, a construction that sets them apart from all other living things. Stephen counters her arguments of the guilt of warmakers with the guilt of a mother who lied to her own child ...

10 - Montessori's House

Mario arrives with news for Montessori: the guards are leaving, as they feel the threat has eased.

Montessori declares that she has thought of a title for the article which she has been writing, and reluctantly thanks the British for forcing her to refine her thoughts - and that Montessori schools need to be schools for peace, so that war will become unthinkable. They need to show that all things are connected, using cosmic education as the tool ...