

The RANI OF JHANSI

A Historical Play
in four acts

by

PHILIP COX

This is a reconstruction in dramatic form of the intensely moving story of the tragic young Hindu Princess, who was fated to take up arms against the British during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. There are 2 female and 12 male speaking parts, besides a crowd. The play is in eleven episodes and requires five sets of scenery.

or not this arresting figure of a royal widow in revolt to Joan of Arc, her claim upon our notice is indisputable of the tribute paid to her by her chief military ally on the British side: "She was the best and bravest of

her portrait has already secured some striking comment. George Bernard Shaw, who generously perused the original MS., has said: "The *Rani of Jhansi* is to be performed at an Indian National Theatre, as soon as they have one." Mr. William Armstrong of the Liverpool Repertory Theatre has stated: "You have written a most interesting play and I enjoyed reading it very much. Sincere, dramatic, well constructed and moving." Mr. Ronald Adams of the Embassy Theatre, London, made this comment after reading the script: "This is a magnificent effort."

LONDON: GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD

The author has brought to this very fascinating study of events and motives in a bygone age, the knowledge of a specialist supported by a varied general experience as advocate, administrator and educationist. During recent years his courses of lectures on India, delivered at Morley College, the Evening Institutes of the London County Council, Toynbee Hall and elsewhere, attracted considerable attention. Born, bred and educated in India, he writes and speaks with imaginative sincerity about his country.

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To

ETHEL

MY SISTER

WHOSE UNSTINTED HELP HAS MADE
THIS WORK POSSIBLE

FOREWORD

THE label "Joan of Arc" has been so indiscriminately applied in historical themes that I hesitate to follow others in using it of a character with the racial background and social setting of the Rani of Jhansi. And yet, no one who studies the very meagre evidence that is available concerning this remarkable woman can help being struck by resemblances between the chequered life of the Rani and the reputed career of the Maid of Orleans. Both of them came on the scene in their respective countries during a period of decadence and disorder. Both of them gave expression to slumbering national sentiment through insistence on dynastic preservation. They both sought—in their widely differing spheres—to arouse the energies of their compatriots by taking a leading part in military operations against the same invading power, England. And in each case a violent death was the precursor of a momentous political development—the establishment of the French national state and the consolidation of the Indo-British connection.

At a time when international understanding has become a commonplace among intelligent people, it has seemed right to me that an effort should be made to present—in a pictorially vivid fashion—some of the salient historical data about the Rani that can be gleaned from the records. The French Maid having achieved immortalisation in England, it is quite conceivable that a sympathetic portrait of the Indian counterpart of Joan of Arc may do something to bridge that gulf of ignorance and prejudice that separates Britain and India.

In offering this dramatic version of events in the Rani's life, I naturally have availed myself of the dramatist's privilege to select, edit, and embellish the available material—all too scanty in this instance—according to my own reading of her character. The play is not intended to be

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an accurate historical representation; and it may well err, therefore, on the side of caution or of exaggeration—according to the taste of the reader. The perfervid Nationalist may not be thrilled by it; and the ardent Imperialist may cavil at certain features of its interpretation. It does not pretend to hold any message for present perplexities, but is merely an individual approach to the reading of a character and period that possess great significance in the history of Indo-British relations.

LONDON

July 1932

HISTORICAL NOTE

THE district of Jhansi, with a chief town of the same name, is situated in the south-west corner of the United Provinces of India—in a tract of country known as Bundelkhand; so called on account of the Bundela Rajputs who migrated there in early times and founded many small but vigorous kingdoms, a few of which are in existence at the present day. In the heyday of the Moguls, these rulers of Bundelkhand were undoubtedly feudatory to the central authority at Delhi; but later on, when the Moslem power weakened, a continuous state of revolt and internecine fighting seems to have been prevalent among the Bundela chiefs. This condition of affairs was intensified by the arrival from the west of warlike Maratha bands, who soon established hereditary kingdoms of their own amongst the Bundelas that looked to Poona (the seat of the Maratha power) for protection and alliance rather than to Delhi.

The Jhansi *raj* in Bundelkhand (annexed by Britain in 1854) was one of these Maratha states; and it had been held by its Maratha rulers for quite a hundred years, before it was absorbed in British India. Great Britain's contact with it came about as a result of the Treaty of Bassein (1802), which assigned to the British power in India all the rights, privileges, and duties in regard to subsidiary states, which had previously been exercised by the Peshwa (on behalf of the Maratha Confederacy). Thus the fealty that the Jhansi rulers had originally accorded to Poona was transferred to the Governor-General at Calcutta.

The subsequent incorporation of the Jhansi *raj* in British India was brought about by the application to this feudatory state of the much criticised "Policy of Lapse," which Lord Dalhousie's administration was responsible for. By virtue of this policy, the principle of escheat—whereby in English Law all property that is left without an heir reverts to the Crown—was held to apply in cases where a Hindu ruler,

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having no direct heir, sought to adopt a son in conformity with Hindu precept and practice. Three such adoptions were effected during the régime of Earl Dalhousie; the states concerned being Satara, Nagpur, and Jhansi—each being under the rule of a prominent Maratha family. In all three cases the Board of Directors of the East India Company, acting upon the recommendation of the Governor-General, refused to recognise the title of the adopted heir and ordered the annexation of the territories, with suitable payments to the dependants of the last ruler.

CHARACTERS IN THE ORDER OF THEIR APPEARANCE

MAMA SAHIB (Moroo Bulwant)	The father of Rani Lakshmi Bai.
NARA SINGH	<i>Dewan</i> or Chief Minister to Gangadhar Rao, the last Raja of Jhansi.
LALA LAHORI MULL and LALA TATTI CHAND	Two other Ministers of the Jhansi <i>raj</i> or state during Gangadhar Rao's régime.
ANUND RAO	The young adopted heir of Gangadhar Rao.
RAO APPA	A Maratha retainer of the Jhansi ruling family.
RANI LAKSHMI BAI	Widow of Raja Gangadhar Rao, last ruler of the Maratha state of Jhansi.
GANGA BAI	A previous consort of Gangadhar Rao.
MAJOR ELLIS	British Political Officer in Bundelkhand in 1853.
MIRA BAI	Dancer in the Jhansi ruler's Palace.
J. A. DORIN and FRED. J. HALLIDAY	Members of the Executive Council of the Governor-General in India during the year 1854.
J. P. GRANT	Secretary to the Government of India under Lord Dalhousie.
COLONEL JOHN LOW	Another Member of the Governor-General's Executive Council in 1854.
MILITARY SECRETARY	At Government House, Calcutta, in 1854.

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EARL DALHOUSIE	Governor-General in India from 1848 to 1856.
BAKSHISH ALI	<i>Daroga</i> or Officer-in-Charge of the jail at Jhansi in 1857.
JEMADAR LALL BAHADUR	Leader of the rebel <i>sepoys</i> from the 12th Regiment of Native Infantry.
RISSALDAR LALL MUHAMMAD	Leader of the rebel <i>sowars</i> from the 14th Irregular Cavalry.
GENERAL SIR HUGH ROSE	Commander of the British forces in the Central India Campaign of 1858.

Guards, Wrestlers, Acrobats, Female Attendants, Towns-
men, Elders, Maratha and Afghan Warriors, *Sepoys*,
Huntsmen, Camp Followers, and British Soldiers.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I—1853

SCENE ONE. The Private Garden of Rani Lakshmi Bai on the afternoon of December 24, 1853.

SCENE TWO. The Courtyard of the Rani's Palace at sunset on the same day.

SCENE THREE. The Durbar Room in the Palace—an hour later.

ACT II—1854

SCENE ONE. The Council Chamber at Government House, Calcutta, on March 1, 1854.

SCENE TWO. Five minutes later on the same afternoon in the Council Chamber.

ACT III—1857

SCENE ONE. The Durbar Room on June 5, 1857—in the morning.

SCENE TWO. Same as in Scene One. Two days later—in the evening.

SCENE THREE. Same as in Scene One. Three days later—at nightfall.

ACT IV—1858

SCENE ONE. The Palace Courtyard on the evening of March 3, 1858.

SCENE TWO. The Durbar Room shortly after midnight on April 2, 1858.

SCENE THREE. A Flower Garden at Kotah-ki-serai, near Gwalior, on the evening of June 17, 1858.

FINAL TABLEAU