

SCRIPT

The Disappearance Commission

a DCS Monologue

Part of the 'Dear Children, Sincerely ...' project



written by
RUWANTHIE DE CHICKERA

Based on interviews conducted through
the DCS theatre research project

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The Disappearance Commission – a DCS Monologue

First public performance 2016

A Stages Theatre Group presentation

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Stages Theatre Group Presentation
First Performed in,
Colombo, Sri Lanka, January 2016,
The International Center for Ethnic Studies

An Introduction to the *DCS Project*

‘Dear Children, Sincerely...’ a conversation across generations

What is the *DCS Project*?

“**Dear Children, Sincerely... a conversation across generations**” (or the *DCS project*) is a research theatre project begun in Sri Lanka in 2015 by Stages Theatre Group. *DCS* collects the stories and experiences of the generation born in the 1930s and takes them to the present-day audiences in the form of storytelling and live performance.

Under the *DCS project*, short performance pieces are created from extensive conversations conducted with senior citizens, with each performance piece not more than 15 minutes long. These stories stand alone as individual performance pieces and can also be linked together to create longer theatrical productions.

Between 2015 and 2020, through the *DCS project*, over 70 senior citizens of Sri Lanka were interviewed and performance pieces created from these conversations.

The *DCS project* has also been implemented in Rwanda, Palestine, Pakistan, the UK, Serbia and DRC.

The *DCS Monologues*

The monologues under *DCS project* (the *DCS Monologues*) are personal stories of individuals who belonged to the generation born in the 1930s. Each *DCS monologue* tells us the story of one such individual. Together they give us some historical perspective on what people consider important, what people easily forget and what they find unforgettable.

A Tamil sportsman who left the country after securing a Gold Medal for it, an old lady displaced for the first time at the age of 90, a faithful butler who observed the infamous attempted Military Coup, a woman lawyer heading the country’s first Disappearance Commission, a doctor who trusted her family inheritance to a riotous drunk... These are but some of the *DCS Monologues*.

The Disappearance Commission is one such monologue.

An Introduction to *The Disappearance Commission*

This *DCS Monologue* is based on conversations with Manourie Muttetuagama.
Interview conducted by Deanne Uyangoda and Ruwanthie de Chickera.

About the Monologue

The Disappearance Commission captures the observations of Manourie Muttetuagama – one of the lawyers who served on a public commission, set up in the 1990s by President Chandrika Bandaranaike, to inquire into the disappearances of thousands of young men and women who were abducted and killed during the two JVP insurrections in the 70s and 80s. The Disappearance Commission was one of the first of such commissions set up by the State and marked a significant moment in the democratic journey of this country.

However, in spite of the hope that it brought people and the precedent it set within the justice system, the results it bore in terms of justice and reparation, were ultimately inadequate. Manourie Muttetuagama, reflects on the complex nature of the Disappearance Commission, the expectations it created, the very specific challenges it had to deal with and the social breakdown that occurs with widespread disappearances of people within a country.

Performance History

First directed by : Tracy Holsinger

First performed in English by : Ruwanthie de Chickera
Colombo, Jan 2016

Then performed in both English and Sinhala by : Viranthi Cooray
Colombo 2017, 2018, 2020
Chilaw, Kuliypitiya, 2017

For more detailed insights on this play, including the back story about how it was made, an analysis of all its design elements, its production video, soundtrack, publicity campaign, all press reviews and audience comments, and more, please visit its production page on the Stages Theatre Group website www.stages.lk

The Disappearance Commission

Character A stately woman in her 80s.

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A stately woman sits at a desk stacked high with files and folders. She is going through them. She suddenly pauses. Something in one of the files catches her eye. Her expression softens, becomes nostalgic, full of sadness. She speaks directly to the audience – taking great pains to explain something complex to them in a manner that they would understand.

This ‘Down-South’ woman, “*my son loves rice for breakfast that day he ate only five mouths.*”

She was old... my age now, I should think. About 78, 79... Very upright, very gaunt, very timid... All those... “*My son loves rice for breakfast – and that day...*” ... Now, of course, this was entirely irrelevant, but this is how they start.

I would tell my juniors. Give them a little time to say it all. Once they open up it’s like flood gates.

The sorrow is very immediate.

Darling, these are very poor families, to them these boys that they lost, they were their only treasure. These are *very* poor families.

Now, we have all suffered loss in our lives. We all know what death means, we all know what pain is, but *five, six* years down the line; *ten, twelve* years down the line and it is as if it happened *yesterday*, to those mothers, those wives...

You know... it’s interesting how in the families, the way the *men* break. This picture of them as the guardian of the family ... and they’ve fallen to *bits*. Because they *couldn’t* – you know, they *couldn’t*... It’s as if your inner-self *collapses* – and then just *leaves*... you know, when your children are taken away from you.

So it was the women. These women who had never set foot outside their own little village. These women would get together and ... what would they do? Huh? What would they *do*? They would *write* - there would always be one who was literate – *they would write*. And who do they write to? To the Hague, to the ICC, to the ICRC... the structures of that time – the structures of *justice* but also the structures of *suppression*... now, *I* know that and *you* know that but *they* didn’t know that... and so, they would *write*.

Good *lord* the tenacity of these women. Their hope, their *smiles*... these women of the south – have you seen them? In their blouses, you know those big neck blouses with the cloth? So they would walk up to you and the first thing they do is they plunge their hand into their blouses and they are rummaging around there and you are wondering *what on earth* is going on and then they pull out this most *precious*... what is it? What is it? *What is it? Ah?* It’s that *letter* from the ICRC. So precious...

Hope doesn't die darling.

And this becomes a *challenge*. It becomes a *challenge* when you are on that Commission sitting. These women will pawn their ear studs, they will pawn their *daughters’* ear studs, they will pawn their *granddaughters’* ear studs and they will get on that bus into Colombo. This is what they live for no? Nothing else makes sense no? And so they *keep turning up*. The *next* hearing. The *next* hearing. The *next* hearing. They just keep *turning up*...

It was *full time. Full time.* The Commission. Full time. Full time. *Twelve* hours a day, *seven* days a week followed by *another* twelve hours.

I had to visit the graves. They dug their own graves and they were shot. You know that *now* don't you darling? At Suriyawewa, at Suriyakantha... God, the *economy* with which those bodies had been packed. No amount of scientific or forensic evidence was *ever* going to be able to distinguish one body from the other. Our people don't have *dentist* records darling...

So, just imagine now... if you *didn't* know? If you didn't know that your brother, or your son, or your husband, dragged away so *suddenly* in the middle of the night, so *suddenly* in the middle of your life... if you *didn't* know he was dead. Why he *could be* alive then no baba? He could be *alive*...

There are *structures* in place to help us with pain. With loss. Our *culture* has this, our society has this - the support of *people*, the strength in *numbers*, the acknowledgement that grief is *physical*, it's *physical*. I mean these young under-graduates, govt. servants today... what happens when they get news of a funeral - not even someone they know, in the next faculty, in the next department - what do they do? They put leave, they take a holiday, they hire a bus - and they visit.

Seven days of funeral ceremonies. People coming and going and coming again, and eating and playing carom and chatting all night... The 1 week almsgiving, the 1 month almsgiving, the 3 month almsgiving, by which time you are supposed to have picked yourself up, and gotten on with your life.

These are the structures of grief and these *wretched people* were deprived of *all* of it.

It was very *stark* darling. These were a new brand of rodiyas. Social exiles.

If a funeral is paid for by the State, what does that mean? *What does it mean?* That the *people* of the country *accept* that a wrong had been done to you. *And they are saying sorry.*

It's not about the *money*. It's never about the money.

My whole *life* was shaped by the Disappearance Commission.

I would have been 65 or something. I had already been a member of the Human Rights Commission, but when the *Disappearance Commission*...

It was *enormously, enormously difficult*... It called upon *all* the forces I could command in myself, all the things I had been through by then... the husband I had lost... my darling son... my father detained for six years - I was just a little *girl* darling... (*what did I know?*)... all these things.

Hope doesn't die darling.

When my darling son died, *I interred him*, I collected his ashes and placed them in our family grave, next to my... his father. But *still*, I will be walking down the road and suddenly... a turn of a head, and... "*It's him!*" It's like *that*, your insides *refuse* to accept *that which you know*.

You have to understand.

I used to tell those wretched juniors, (*wretched* juniors all of them) get the legal necessities over and done with but *please* give the people a little time to talk.

Because when they start *talking*, they start *talking*.

Give them a little *time* to say it all.

END

Production Credits

The Disappearance Commission was first performed at the **International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Colombo, Sri Lanka** in January 2016, with the following cast and crew.

CAST

Ruwanthie de Chickera (2016)
Viranthi Cooray (2017, 2018, 2019)

DESIGN TEAM

Director Tracy Holsinger
Designer Tracy Holsinger
Jayampathi Guruge
Composer/ Sound Design Ranil Goonawardene

PRODUCTION TEAM

Stage Manager Akalanka Prabhashwara
Backstage Prabhath Chinthaka
Praveen Tilakaratne
Lights Jayampathi Guruge
Saman Malalasekera (2016)
Sounds Pemanthi Fernando
Make-up Nilmini Buwaneka (2016)
Sanjeeva Upendra (2016)
Jayampathi Guruge (2017)
Front of House Sanda Wijeratne
Production Team Nilmini Buwaneka (2017)
Malshani Delgahapitiya – 2016
Anila Sadasivan Krishnamma – 2016
Admin Team Miranga Ariyaratne
Pemanthi Fernando

Sponsors	Sanda Wijeratne
	Gehan Gunatilleke
	Radhika Hettiarachchi
	Rebecca Owen
Publicity/Media Team	Sanda Wijeratne
	Gihan de Chickera
	Deandra Bulner
	Pemanthi Fernando
Graphic Design	Pia Hatch
	Venura Navod Balasooriya (2016)
	Ruvin de Silva (2016)
	Deshan Tennekoon (2020)
Souvenir Team	Ruwanthie de Chickera
	Dharini Priscilla
	Pemanthi Fernando
	Piumi Wijesundara
	Praveen Tilakaratne
	Venura Navod Balasooriya
Photography	Prauda Buwaneka
	Pramila SamarakoonInsert
Video	Prauda Buwaneka
Video Editor	Jithendra Vidyapathi
Producer	Radhika Hettiarachchi (2016)
	Pemanthi Fernando (2017)
	Dharini Priscilla (2017)

The following artists contributed to the making of this script:

Writer	Ruwanthie de Chickera
DCS Interviewee	Manourie Muttetuagama.
DCS Researchers	Deanne Uyangoda Ruwanthie de Chickera
Translators	Kumari Kumaragamage (Sinhala translation) Shiranee Mills (Tamil translation)

For more detailed insights on this play, including the back story about how it was made, an analysis of all its design elements, its production video, soundtrack, publicity campaign, all press reviews and audience comments, and more, please visit its production page on the Stages Theatre Group website www.stages.lk

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