

stages
theatre
group

Directed by JAYAMPATHI GURUGE



WALKING PATH

வோகின் பாத் வெகிஷஸ் சாஸ

a play without words, devised along the walking paths of Colombo

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RESOURCE PACK
WALKING PATH - A PLAY WITHOUT WORDS

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Devised along the many pristine walking paths of the city of Colombo

WRITTEN BY Ruwanthie de Chickera

A Stages Theatre Group presentation

Directed by Jayampathi Guruge

First performed in July 2014

Lionel Wendt Theatre

Colombo, Sri Lanka



WALKING PATH

வோகின் பாத் வெளிநிலை சாதி



A PLAY WITHOUT WORDS

CONTENTS

01

WALKING PATH

THE PLAY AND
THE RESOURCE PACK

02

WALKING PATH

THE BEGINNINGS OF AN IDEA

- SELF-MOTIVATION
- GOVERNMENT CENSORSHIP AND SELF-CENSORSHIP
- CHANGING CITIES AND SILENCED PEOPLE

03

WALKING PATH

SURVEYING THE LANDSCAPE

- LOSING THE WORDS
- EXPANDING THE CONCEPT
- EXPLORING THE WALKING PATHS
 - OBSERVING THE WALKING PATH SUBCULTURE
 - RECORDING WALKING PATH CONVERSATIONS

04

WALKING PATH

CONSTRUCTING THE PLAY

- THE CHARACTERS
- THE CHOREOGRAPHY
- THE 17 SCENES

05

WALKING PATH

GETTING PERMISSION, CHANGING THE PLAN

- CENSORSHIP
- POLITICAL CLIMATE
- FIVE YEARS ON

01

WALKING PATH

THE PLAY AND
THE RESOURCE PACK



WALKING PATH



THIS RESOURCE PACK was written, six years after creating the play WALKING PATH.

WALKING PATH - a play without words is the first wordless play created in Sri Lanka (WALKING PATH is not a mimed play, it is simply a play in which no words are required.)


WALKING PATH deals with the aggressive beautification drive that the capital city Colombo was subjected to immediately after the end of the 03 decade long civil war in Sri Lanka. As soon as the war ended, the Sri Lankan Government's Urban Development Authority started a project of beautifying the cities, through the Sri Lankan military. Accordingly, places like Independence Square | Viharamahadevi park | Diyawanna | Urban Wetland park (Nugegoda) were transformed into pristine walking paths at remarkable speed.

In addition to the theme of gentrification, the play also addresses issues of militarization of public spaces and censorship of human behaviour and cultural expression.

WALKING PATH was created through the devised technique. It was collectively created by a team of artists who observed the sub-cultures that were building up within the walking paths of the city.

WALKING PATH - a play without words won several awards including the Best Director and Best Play at the 16th edition of the international youth theatre festival Thespo in Mumbai, India.

The aim of this resource pack is to discuss the experiences and challenges faced by the theatre group in creating WALKING PATH.



WALKING PATH started with a few simple questions such as...


- Why have these places been created?
- Who have they created these places for?
- Who are the people in these places?
- Why are they running?
- Who are people watching people running?
- Why is everything so silent?
- What are we allowed to do here?
- What are we not allowed to do here?
- Why are these places so clean?
- How do humans behave in such places?

02

WALKING PATH

THE BEGINNINGS OF AN IDEA





THE AIM OF THIS CHAPTER is to discuss the major factors that led towards the creation of this play . In it you will discover how the director of the play Jayampathi Guruge was searching for a style of wordless theatre and how, concurrently the militarization of public spaces and the silencing of people was taking place in the city of Colombo.

SELF-MOTIVATION



Jayampathi Guruge created three plays without words during his undergraduate period in the Aesthetic University of Colombo. He was mainly interested in researching if it was possible to use the body, rather than words as the main medium of communication in theatre.

■ The drama “11 Chairs” that he created during his first academic year discusses a person’s internal conflict with self and how he/ she attempts to suppress it.

■ “Frames” which Jayampathi created during his third year in university could be interpreted as an attempt to display how an artist (a painter) views the world and how he incorporates it into his creations. This was based on the life story of the artist Vincent van Gogh.

■ “Mujari”, which he created in his final academic year, discusses the monotonous nature of human life, how people become helpless due to their own internal pressure, how they follow someone without questioning and how people control themselves and censor themselves in response to outside political pressure.



SILENCING OF PEOPLE

With the beginning of the post war period (2009-2014) Government censorship and self-censorship were prevalent in Sri Lankan society. Below is a note written by Jayampathi Guruge on this.

"During the war period and in the post war period, the basic human right of expression was violated within Sri Lanka in various ways. In several instances, it was revealed that those who expressed their opinion freely, artists, civil society activists and journalists had vanished, been kidnapped and threatened. The trust in the law was broken. The practice of following the popular view and staying within one's limit was observed to be rooted in society.

What can I do within this country?

I don't know the boundaries I should follow in this country. I observed a majority of the public prioritizing a safe and trouble-free life. Groups tried to make others agree with the prevailing system willingly or unwillingly. Ethnic minorities faced discrimination. People spread myths. Social classes ran after money. Media institutions sacrificed self-respect in the face of power. The educated people were silenced. Society was undergoing militarization slowly.

Once my dad phoned me and said;

"Son, you cannot change this system alone. I am 69 now. This is the way the politicians have been acting from the times we remember. Please do not act on impulse just because you are young. If something happens to you, nobody around you will be there for you. There is no point even if they stick together with you anyway. I am not going to prevent you from doing anything. But this is how things were in this country all along."

I am just a common man, but my family was worried about me. The majority took steps to protect their closest kin. Whether it is the general public or people close to you, the atmosphere seemed to push everyone towards self censorship. Being with the minority who expected a change would threaten one's existence. I observed my colleagues trying their best to continue their art and to display the political reality through their creations. In such a context, I was stuck in the conflict: "what do I really want to do?" It motivated me continuously to incorporate that conflict into a new creation.

Jayampathi Guruge

After the Sri Lankan civil war ended in 2009, a city beautification project was implemented by the government. Under this project, a rapid change of the outlook of cities began to take place, and new subcultures began to immediately manifest themselves.

There was no public discussion around the gentrification process. There was no discussion about whether this was right or wrong, or how it should be done. People, instead stood back and observed the drastic changes to their landscape and culture. The artists of Stages Theatre Group were watching these newly emerging social systems, like many others in society. They started discussing the deeply-rooted silence within the country about these imposed changes. Those discussions circled the following topics:

- The cleaning of the cities by the military
- The modernizing of old buildings
- The removal of street people
- The killing of stray dogs
- The destruction of urban low-income living areas (Wattas)
- The artificial changing of culture
- The redesigning of public spaces of tourist and upper middle class use
- The appropriation of land in the country by foreign investors or foreign governments
- The appropriation of community kids' playing areas
- The laying down of jogging tracks within parks

WALKING PATH is a play which was created when all these ideas and these situations converged. Jayampathi's interest in creating a play without words resonated with the silence with which people were watching their cities and their lives being transformed. The militarization of public spaces and the creation of walking paths led to a dramatic change in public behaviour which was immediately visually arresting. All these things came together and in the idea to create a wordless play about the sub-cultures of the walking paths of Colombo.




03

WALKING PATH SURVEYING THE LANDSCAPE

- LOSING THE WORDS
- EXPANDING THE CONCEPT
- EXPLORING THE WALKING PATHS





IN THIS CHAPTER we will discuss the initial stages of the creative process which were rooted in an exploration of the potential of a wordless performance and in observations and the gathering of information around the walking paths.



LOSING THE WORDS

AFTER THE IDEA of creating a wordless play was mooted, the decision was taken to explore the performance potential of this decision.

A seven-day workshop was conducted to select artists for a word-free play. The main devising team consisted of seven members. (It is worth mentioning that the majority of that team had no previous experience in the devising process or in creating a wordless play.)

During the first few days of the workshop, the team took part in an intense process of improvisation and devising. The artists were encouraged to break from their tendency to resort to mime and explore a physical language for a wordless performance. The aim was to evaluate the possibility of creating an impression through fine moments, facial expressions and interactions. Some moments that were created were created without words. Some were initially created with words and then gradually stripped of words.

EXPANDING THE CONCEPT

THE NEXT PART of the process was applying the techniques being developed in creating a wordless performance to the subcultures of the walking paths. What was initially required was to find out how much the artists already knew or had observed about the sub-culture within the walking paths.

Improvisations were done on the sub-cultures within these parks and the nature of human relationships within them. The artists shared stories about:

- **Couples**
- **Parents and children**
- **Extramarital affairs**
- **The maintenance staff of the walking paths**
- **The relationship between the army and the civilians**

By the end of this process the team realized that their knowledge on the subcultures of the walking paths was insufficient. Most of the improvisations created were based on assumptions. This was possibly due to the fact that the majority of the artists had not embraced the culture of the walking paths and had not developed the habit of spending time within them.

Therefore, it was decided that the whole team would visit and spend time in the walking paths around Colombo and observe the human behaviour there.



EXPLORING THE WALKING PATHS

THE ARTISTS STARTED visiting the walking paths around Colombo in the mornings and the evenings and capturing the behaviour of people within it.

The walking paths visited were,

- THE INDEPENDENCE SQUARE
- VIHARAMAHADEVI PARK
- WATER'S EDGE
- DIYAWANNA WALKING PATH
- URBAN WETLAND PARK (NUGEGODA)

THIS RESEARCH WITHIN THE WALKING PATHS WAS DONE IN TWO WAYS:



Observing The walking path subculture



Recording walking path conversations

OBSERVING

THE WALKING PATH

SUBCULTURE

For this activity, the artists simply watched what was happening and noted it all down. They did not interact with anyone within the parks. Listed below are some of the observations of the artists.

LUXURY VEHICLES AND TRISHAWS

- o People arriving in luxury vehicles
- o The majority of people arriving in cars
- o A small number of people arriving by three wheelers and motorbikes

OBESE BODIES AND SKINNY BODIES

- o Obese teenagers walking or jogging with difficulty
- o Overweight people eating at nearby restaurants after exercising
- o Overweight seniors and skinny aides following them carrying their water bottles, towels and phones

OVERWEIGHT POLITICIANS AND THEIR BODYGUARDS

- o Obese politicians surrounded by their bodyguards
- o Bodyguards assisting politicians in their exercises

COUPLES AND WHISTLING SECURITY PERSONNEL

- o Couples hidden under the cover of umbrellas
- o Security personnel watching couples
- o Security personnel using loud whistles to draw attention to couples

PARENTS AND CHILDREN

- o Overweight parents and skinny children.
- o Children on new bicycles, skates, roller blades
- o Parents texting while their children play
- o Parents taking photos of their children playing

EXERCISE CLASSES

- o Fit young women conducting Zumba classes for middle-aged, struggling people
- o Yoga fashions (clothes/equipment)
- o Yoga classes
- o Individuals doing yoga under tress

MILITARY PERSONNEL

- o Soldiers dressed in track bottoms, T-shirts and canvas shoes
- o Soldiers with brooms, ekel brooms, and dust pans cleaning up the paths
- o Soldiers with catapults chasing away crows in trees
- o Police officers checking Identity cards of people who are relaxing

RUNNING FASHIONS

- o Branded sports and running kits and matching luminous/spandex attire
- o Sports attire that reveal most of the body
- o Women in clothes that make walking and exercising difficult (long lungees, long skirts, Muslim Hijabs etc)
- o People in uncomfortable running shoes

SELFIES AND WALKING HEADSETS

- o People running or walking with camera phones in their hands
- o People taking photos of themselves while exercising
- o People staring at their phones
- o People running or walking while wearing headsets

ISOLATED PEOPLE

- o People withdrawn into themselves
- o People who don't pay attention to the others nearby

MARGINALIZED VENDORS

- o Vendors who stand at the boundaries of walking paths

SIGNS AND INSTRUCTIONS

DO NOT WALK ON THE GRASS

NO SMOKING

DO NOT SIT ON THE GROUND

DOGS ARE NOT ALLOWED

BEHAVE DECENTLY

NO PHOTOGRAPHS

DO NOT TOUCH THE LION

DO NOT TOUCH THE TREES

RIDING BICYCLES IS PROHIBITED

IDLING IS PROHIBITED

DO NOT PUT YOUR FEET UP ON THE BENCHES

FOOD IS NOT ALLOWED

HAWKING IS PROHIBITED

DO NOT LITTER

MAKE NO NOISE



RECORDING WALKING PATH CONVERSATIONS

For this activity, the artists initiated conversations with people in the walking paths, or noted down conversations that they observed or were drawn into. Given below are a few conversations noted down in the walking paths.

CONVERSATION 1 (VIHARAMAHADEVI PARK)

A security personnel is on duty. A luxury vehicle pulls up, a man gets down and tries to enter the park through the lawn. The security personnel stops him,

Security personnel: You can't step on the grass

Man: Why?

Security personnel: Can't you see it's just been planted? We are going to make this place just like Singapore.

Man: Oh...I thought I was in Sri Lanka.

The man gets into his vehicle and leaves.

Security personnel (to the watching artist) - I felt terribly ashamed sir. What to do? This is the duty they have assigned us to.

CONVERSATION 02 (VIHARAMAHADEVI PARK)

(NOTE - The guards of the park are all given whistles which they blow loudly when they hear people 'misbehaving'. Drawing attention to young lovers sitting close together is something that the guards seem to love doing.)

Artist: Why do you whistle like that?

Security personnel: If we do not whistle and control them they would probably be stripping by now.

Artist: Come on, they are young people.

Security personnel: That's no excuse for going wild. There is something called culture. And there are other people around too. There are children here. Anyway couples are allowed into the park only until two.

Artist: Why?

Security personnel: Kids and families arrive.

Artist: Don't you think that there should be places in the city where lovers could be left alone?

Security personnel: That is true. That would be convenient for us as well. They should reserve an area, build a wall around it for security and put on as many lights in it as possible.

CONVERSATION 3 (VIHARAMAHADEVI PARK)

Two male artists and a female artist are seated on the ground having a discussion. One of the male members leaves for a while, to fetch water. Within a moment, a whistle is heard.

Security personnel: Couples can't sit on the ground here.

Artist: We are just friends. Not a couple

Security personnel: How do I know that? Anyway, you can't sit here and talk.

Artist: There is another friend with us. We are a drama team. We are just having a chat here. (The member who went to fetch water returns)

Security personnel: If you need to have chats, please go and find another place. You can't sit on the ground here.

Artist: That's pretty crazy. Who says so?

Security personnel: We are doing our duty here. If you have any problem, go and talk to the Ministry for National Security.

Artist : So we have to contact the Ministry of National Security just to sit here.

Security personnel: We are doing what we were asked to do. So please find another place.

CONVERSATION 04 (INDEPENDENCE SQUARE)

Some members of the theatre group are seated on the floor of Independence Square with an open laptop. A security guard approaches them.

Security personnel: You can't sit on the floor inside the building. Laptops are not allowed either.

Team member: Why?

Security personnel: This is a National Heritage. You can't sit here. Those benches down there are for the people who need to sit.

Team member: That is ridiculous. This is the Independence Square. Whose permission should we get to relax here?

Security personnel: Please mister! Just get up and leave. If not, get permission from the Ministry of National Security.

CONVERSATION 05 (INDEPENDENCE SQUARE)

Six young women are playing basketball at Independence Square. They are approached by a plainclothes army officer. The girls then pick up their bags and prepare to leave. An artist who is observing this approaches them.

Artist: What did he say?

Girl 1: He says that we can't play on the grass.

Artist: Didn't you ask him why?

Girl 2: Oh no. Never. No need to get into trouble. We are returning to the campus.

Artist: You have a right to play here. Tell him that.

Girl 2: No point of talking.

CONVERSATION 06 (INDEPENDENCE SQUARE)

A team member is about to take a photograph inside Independence Square. A security personnel approaches.

Security personnel: You can't take photos here.

Team member: Why? They are taking photos. (points to a bridal couple in a photo shoot nearby)

Security personnel: They have taken permission.

Team member: From whom should we get permission?

Security personnel: From the Ministry of National Security.

CONVERSATION 07 (URBAN WETLAND PARK- NUGEGODA)

A member of the theatre group is seated on a short cement wall constructed in the Urban wetland park in Nugegoda. He is chatting with another artist. After a while, he removes his shoes and folds his bare feet under him. A Navy Officer on duty (in uniform) approaches.

Navy officer: Put your feet down.

Team member: Why?

Navy Officer: Can't you see the board?
(Showing two signs)

"Behave decently"

"Don't put your feet up on the wall"

CONVERSATION 08 (DIYAWANNA WALKING PATH)

Some members of the theatre group are having a chat in the parking area of the Diyawanna walking path. After a while a jeep stops by the roadside close to them. There are three people in the jeep. A person in the front seat of the jeep speaks out.

Man in Jeep: What are you doing here?

Artist: Hanging out.

Man in Jeep: Find another place to hangout. This is a high security zone. No hanging out here.

CONVERSATION 09 (INDEPENDENCE SQUARE)

A group of members of the theatre group are having a discussion, leaning on one of the lion statues. A security personnel arrives.

Security personnel: Hey you! These are not here to be touched. They are national heritages.

CONVERSATION 10 (PASSING INDEPENDENCE SQUARE / INDEPENDENT ARCADE)

An artist is passing Independence Square in a three wheeler. He taps the driver on the shoulder.

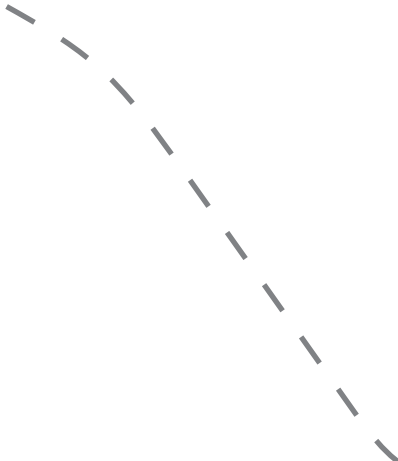
Artist: Beautiful places are being built around Colombo, no?

Driver: Such places are not for people like us sir.

04

WALKING PATH
CONSTRUCTING THE PLAY





WALKING PATH - a play without words grew into a play comprising 17 short scenes. In this chapter we will take you through the creation of the play from the creating of characters to the choreography to the devising of the 17 scenes.

THE CHARACTERS



THREE DISTINCT GROUPS of characters can be identified in WALKING PATH.

THE MAIN ENSEMBLE

This main ensemble comprise 07 actors – 05 male and 02 female. The general public that visit the walking paths are represented through this main ensemble.

THE MILITARY

The actors portraying the military were 06 in number. They play different characters that police the park, from soldiers returning after the war to guards who regulate and maintain the walking paths.

THE RUNNERS

The runners symbolise the general mass culture and the public trends within the walking paths. The runners are seen only in the opening and at the end of the play. They represent the mindless adherence to a monotonous routine and stringent controls on behaviour which were taking place within the country.



THE CHOREOGRAPHY

THE CHOREOGRAPHY for WALKING PATH drew from the following factors.



THE PHYSICAL BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS OF THOSE WITHIN THE WALKING PATHS

- WALKING
- JOGGING
- PHYSICAL EXERCISES
- ZUMBA CLASSES
- YOGA AND MEDITATION
- CLEANING
- PATROLLING



THE PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE WALKING PATHS

- DESIGNATED PATHS FOR WALKING
- THE SHAPES OF THE PATHS.
- THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE PATHS.
- THE DIRECTION OF THE WALKING.
- THE SEPARATE AREAS FOR EXERCISE, SITTING, GATHERING.

The choreography of the play was strict and regimented as was movement in the real walking paths. All entrances and exits on stage were limited to certain wings. Actors always moved in straight lines.

The characters of the Military changed the sets on stage – just like the military constructed and maintained the actual walking paths.





THE 17 SCENES



Devising was done parallel to rehearsing. At the early stage of the rehearsals, acts were built up through improvisations.

We will now take you through the manner in which the 17 scenes of the play were created.



SCENE 1 THE BAD TIMES ARE OVER ! THE DAWN OF A NEW AGE

CONCEPT

Following the end of a 30-year war, at the dawn of a new era that idolized war heroes, the citizens embraced a new, vibrant culture that emerges from the cities.

THE SCENE

The curtain opens to the image of a line of frightened people waiting to be shot dead.

There is a gun shot. And then several more. The people in the line struggle.

The sounds of the gun shots continue but morph into the sound of fireworks and finally the sound of balloons popping. The struggling people, are no longer struggling, but they are wriggling and contorting in excitement.

A troop of smiling soldiers appear. They are accompanied by a crowd carrying water pistols and balloons.

There is widespread celebrations. People take photos, light fire crackers, pop balloons. And while this is taking place, the walking paths are created silently on stage.

DEVISING THIS SCENE

This scene was devised around the following questions.

- What is the nature of the relationship between the soldiers who returned after war and the civilians?
- What would be the response of people when pushed into a sudden culture of beautification?
- How would people first explore the walking paths?



SCENE 2 OPEN SPACES...

FREE RELATIONSHIPS

CONCEPT

The beginning of a new human community. A new kind of frequently changing, casual relationship is being created within the open spaces.

THE SCENE

The isolated people in the new free spaces attempt to initiate fresh relationships.

People utilize these places for a while, exercise and then leave.

The repetitiveness of exercises and constant changing of eye contact symbolizes how feelings, intentions and relationships change in these open spaces of sudden freedom.

DEVISING THIS SCENE

This scene was devised around the following questions.

- What fitness exercises could be attention seeking?
- What is the connection between movement and inertia? Can a new language of movement be created within this context?
- Can we explore a new language of movement through the repetitive nature of fitness exercises?



SCENE 3 WHO CHANGED THE LION? GRRR

CONCEPT

When the lion, the symbol of the Sinhala race, growls in its majestic voice, the value of our voices and our freedom diminish within the free spaces.

“Independence Square” has a new meaning.

THE SCENE

One of the actors is in the middle of the stage, imitating the posture of the lion statue in the Independence Square premises.

The other actors approach the lion character from time to time. The lion’s attitude towards these actors changes from benevolence to aggression. The lion does not like to be touched. The increasing ferociousness of the familiar lion statue is puzzling to people. It makes them uneasy and apprehensive.

DEVISING THIS SCENE

This scene was devised around the following questions.

- What was the relationship between the general public and the lion statues of Independence Square before gentrification?
- How did this relationship change?
- What happens when the public is suddenly prohibited from touching the statues?



SCENE 4 UP UNTIL THE LAST DROP

CONCEPT

When the discipline of the much idolized war-hero switches with the duty of a cleaner, the free spaces become spotlessly clean.

The dirt of the rulers can then be hidden beneath the clean surfaces.

THE SCENE

The Military meticulously cleans the walking paths before the public arrives.

DEVISING THIS SCENE

This scene was devised around the following questions.

- How do soldiers, who are used to holding weapons, hold cleaning equipment?
- What happens when soldiers feel bored with the monotonous cleaning routine?
- What could happen if the pride of the new job begins to diminish?



SCENE 5 BEWARE OF ... BIRDS

CONCEPT

Even though duty is sacred to a soldier, he might become human within a lonely moment.

THE SCENE

A lonely and bored soldier doing his duty during the day tries to build a relationship with a bird that he is supposed to chase away.

A shrill whistle, meant to chase the bird, is aimed at warning the soldier as well...

DEVISING THIS SCENE

This scene was devised around the following questions.

- Is it possible for soldiers on duty to build bonds with others?
- How are soldiers monitored?



SCENE 5 IT WASN'T ME !

CONCEPT

An invisible, authoritative force with the power to control a human relationship through a short shrill blast of a whistle.

THE SCENE

Four couples enter the stage. They are in love. They want to sit close to each other.

Each of the couples is prevented from being affectionate (holding hands, sitting close, kissing, hugging) by the warning of a shrill whistle.

The constant pressure on the couples begins to change their relationships.

The constant sound of the shrill whistle is publicly humiliating. Soon the couples turn on each other – and are aggressive towards any of the lovers who might be breaking the rules and drawing public attention to them all.

DEVISING THIS SCENE

This scene was devised around the following questions.

- What is the behaviour of couples in public places?
- What is the power in public humiliation and voyeurism?
- What happens when civilians begin policing each other?
- How do civilians face injustice when confronted by a group of military men?



SCENE 7 'JING JING THAARAA'

ME AND MY PHONE

CONCEPT

The balance of human relationships, the limits, the freedom of the other or the right to interrupt. How human behaviours change frequently when everything is governed by an inanimate phone.

THE SCENE

A Zumba instructor's phone rings non-stop interrupting her class.

A vibrating phone in a group-meditation class disturbs everyone but the owner of the phone.

DEVISING THIS SCENE

This scene was devised in the following manner.

- The nature of human behaviour within the Zumba dance culture
- The distraction of phones during meditation.



SCENE 8 MEMORY IS OLD FASHIONED

CONCEPT

Getting rid of the memorials which depict the horror and the destruction caused by war or simply relocating them in places where they are not noticeable (using beautification as an excuse) and replacing them with flashy memorials.

THE SCENE

An isolated soldier is on duty near an old, broken-down statue. He feels a connection with the broken statue – it reminds him of the pain and the chaos of his previous life. He continues his duties amidst those memories.

This old statue full of memories is suddenly replaced by a new shiny statue of a military man, who looks just like the soldier.

The lone soldier, misses his old familiar statue. He hates the new shiny one he is forced to clean.

DEVISING THIS SCENE

This scene was devised around the following questions.

- What sort of relationship could exist between an isolated soldier on duty and a tumbledown statue?
- How would crowds gather around a newly constructed war memorial?



SCENE 9 **MY SELFIE**

WITH MY FRIENDS

CONCEPT

A projection of a new human civilization where people are attractive, attentive, cheerful and eager to explore new horizons in cyberspace. And yet they remain so distant to each other in the real world.

THE SCENE

The scene begins with a couple who sit next to each other without any interaction between them.

A third actor enters the stage. He sends a text message to the couple. The inactive couple become active all of a sudden.

As the other actors join the group, they all interact through their phones, while sitting close to each other.

DEVISING THIS SCENE

This scene was devised around the following questions.

- What are the behaviours of people addicted to mobile phones?
- What are selfie poses?
- What are attention seeking behaviours?



SCENE 10 SEX IN THE CITY

CONCEPT

Morality and decency in these new 'free' public places are redefined. The barriers to expressing love and sexual desire have to be re-negotiated.

THE SCENE

This scene was choreographed around movements that stimulate attraction, sexual desires and sensuousness. Some people engage in these routines, while others watch.

DEVISING THIS SCENE

This scene was devised around the following questions.

- What are the moves of fitness exercises that simulate the act of sex?
- What are sexual movements which could pass off as exercise routines?



SCENE 11 BATTERY BABIES

CONCEPT

The competitiveness that is bred in places of freedom. The exhibitionism and the comparison that takes place publicly. Family relationships around these values.

THE SCENE

The prop used for this scene is a remote controlled car. All actors have a car they control. The cars follow the people or the people run behind the cars.

The cars are pushed to compete with each other. The relationship between the people and their cars becomes like the relationship between parents and children.

This scene also depicts the brief meeting of a separated couple who then exchange their child (a car) in the park.

DEVISING THIS SCENE

This scene was devised around the following questions.

- What is the relationship between parents and children in these public spaces?
- How does competition creep into places where many people share a common area?
- What are the modern challenges to parenting?



SCENE 12 AFTER ALL THAT NOISE

CONCEPT

An isolated military man in a lonely moment of silence when there is no one watching and no one is controlling.

THE SCENE

This scene consists of several short snapshots.
The military men change duty and change the set.
The monotony and loneliness of the job is allowed to grow.

DEVISING THIS SCENE

This scene was devised around the following question.

- If one's duty was to stay alone doing nothing, what would a person do?



SCENE 13 THE WORLD IN MY PHONE

CONCEPT

There are worlds within phones which can be kept secret from everyone else. There is no way to determine what world the person next to us is living in.

THE SCENE

The scene comprises people exercising and listening to their phones.

Accompanying sound tracks alert the audience to what the different characters are listening to.

As the characters emotionlessly pass each other on stage, sit next to each other, exercise close to each other, the audience is privy to the secret worlds they inhabit.

DEVISING THIS SCENE

This scene was devised around the following question.

- What do people listen to on their headphones?
- Does what you are listening to have an impact on your physical behaviour?
- Are people able to monitor their responses to what they are listening to?



SCENE 14 FOOTPRINTS ON THE RUNNING PATH

CONCEPT

The walking paths are places of freedom for a certain class of people. There are invisible walls that are set up and the constant monitoring of persons discourages certain people from using the walking paths.

THE SCENE

A man without shoes has entered the walking path. With all the rules in place, it is difficult for him to use any of its facilities. He is uncomfortable.

He leaves and returns with a pair of new shoes.

However, he then realises that the stigma against him is not dependent on his shoes. It is more to do with how he is perceived by others.

DEVISING THIS SCENE

This scene was devised around the following question.

- Is it possible to enter the walking paths without running shoes?
- How would people respond when they spot a person without shoes in the walking path?
- What would a person feel when entering a place, that they know is not for them?



SCENE 15 'SOMETHING' IS PROHIBITED

CONCEPT

This is a time when anything could be prohibited, anything can happen to anyone, at any moment... Minding your own business, not asking questions, and complying without resistance would be the best way to exist.

THE SCENE

There is a sign on stage which is blank. There are no words on it. However it feels like it is an important sign.

The blank sign creates tension in the people. They have no idea what they are not supposed to do or what they are being warned against.

DEVISING THIS SCENE

This scene was devised around the following question.

- What is the comfort that people derive from knowing exactly what they are allowed to do and what they are not allowed to do?
- What are the limits to which people can be pushed to follow rules that cannot be justified?



SCENE 16 ALONE IN A CROWD

CONCEPT

How can places, built for pleasure, recreation and freedom turn into places of deep loneliness?

THE SCENE

The scene depicts how loneliness has to be borne alone when in a crowd. And how this impacts on the individual.

DEVISING THIS SCENE

This scene was devised around the following question.

- What would happen if a person has to live in isolation without any form of interaction with other human beings?
- What would people do within walking paths to release their stress?



SCENE 17 **DON'T TAKE** STUPID DECISIONS SO ...

CONCEPT

There are limits to conformity. And though it can last a long time, human nature is such that there is a breaking point.

THE SCENE

One person tries to stand up against the system and is beaten and crushed by the military. The public around him mostly look away. However there is hope that at least one of them will stand with the man against the military.

The runners, who run as a herd, run in the direction they are told. They trample the beaten man to the ground. But one person pauses by him.

The soldiers with balloons in their hands, watch.

DEVISING THIS SCENE

This scene was devised around the following question.

- What would happen to a person who tries to challenge the prevailing system, in public?
- What would happen to the people who speak for him?
- What happens to the people whose duty it is to suppress him?

A person with dark hair, wearing a white tank top and white pants, is sitting on a dark ledge. They are holding a puppet with a brown, bird-like head and large eyes. The person's right hand is near their face, and their left arm is extended, holding the puppet. The background is dark with vertical lines.


05

WALKING PATH
GETTING PERMISSION,
CHANGING THE PLAN



THE AIM of this chapter is to shed light on some of the surrounding political realities within which WALKING PATH was created. In this chapter we will discuss the severe censorship that was prevalent at the time the play was created and also the change in political climate that occurred during the run of the play.

CENSORSHIP



DURING THE TIME that WALKING PATH was created, (the Rajapaksa regime which had come into being in 2005), there was very little room for the show of public dissent or even critique of the govt. Censorship was stringent and intimidation tactics were not uncommon.

The procedure of obtaining a performance license for the play required the passing of the script through a censor board. A play critiquing the Sri Lankan military or the Urban Development Agency would not be tolerated on the public stage.

The wordless nature of this play was a response to this very stricture. Since nothing was said everything could be inferred. This was exploited when submitting the script to the censor board.

Only very brief descriptions of the action on stage was given. The submitted script was written in a manner that was accurate but which left out the power of interpretation. The script could not be interpreted as a criticism against the government or the prevailing system. It simply read like a pantomime – describing action on stage in a simple and straight forward manner.

As a result, it was very easy to get the approval of censor board.



POLITICAL CLIMATE

THE OPENING SHOW of the WALKING PATH- a play without words was on 26th and 27th of July 2014. This was a time when the power of the Rajapaksa regime was very high.

Because WALKING PATH was advertised as a wordless play, a mixed crowd composed of Sinhala speaking, English speaking and Tamil speaking people gathered in the audience.

The audience was able to connect to the wordless critique of the government with ease. However, during this time there was a deep sense of helplessness felt amongst the people against the all powerful government.

Within this environment, the final scene of the play portrayed one person trying to stand up against the system and then being beaten down by the military, and the general public of the walking paths mindlessly jogging over his body.

However, when a re-run of WALKING PATH was performed it was November 2014 (later that same year). This was during the run up to a crucial Presidential Election. Though still entirely controlled, the vibe in the country was beginning to change. While aware of the tremendous odds against change, people were also daring to hope.

When rehearsing, there was a request from the cast to change the final act – to provide hope for resistance. And so, accordingly, the final scene of the play was changed. The person who dares challenge the system is beaten by the army and the person who comes to assist him pays for this with his life but as the runners start to run over the man who originally resisted, he picks himself up and stands looking at the audience. Then one of the general public running past him in the herd, stops running and stands by him. Just one person from within the masses. But the entire play changed tone with this.

The second show of WALKING PATH was held on 21st and 22nd of November 2014. The 21st of November was the day on which nominations for the Presidential election were submitted. As the show of WALKING PATH drew to a close, the audience was buzzing with a very unexpected news. Mr Maithripala Sirisena had submitted his nomination for the 2015 presidential election.

This immediately challenged the feeling that the prevailing system could never be changed.

As history would have it, Mr. Maithripala Sirisena went on to defeat Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa in the presidential election and a National Government formed under the UNP leader, Ranil Wickramasinghe, which promised to bring back democracy and freedom to the country.






FIVE YEARS ON

This resource pack is being written in 2020. It is five years since the unexpected change in regime.

However, in spite of the many promises made by the National Govt. they were not able to rise above their differences and live up to peoples' expectations. Once again, through a presidential election and a General election, the country has returned to the control of the Rajapaksa regime with Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksha, the founder of the walking path becoming the eighth Executive President and his brother Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa being appointed as prime minister..





WALKING PATH

வோகின் பாத் வெகின்ன சாத்



A PLAY WITHOUT WORDS

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This resource pack was produced as part of the 'Artist Research, Archiving and Documentation Project' of Stages Theatre Group.

Through this project, practicing artists engaged in systematic and critical analysis of their own work, analysing a decade worth of theatre productions and processes of Stages Theatre Group. The decade spanned the immediate ten years after the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka (2009 to 2019).

Sixteen resource packs, such as this one, were created for publication in Sinhala, Tamil and English. Each resource pack, written and researched by artists, examines the surrounding socio-political context within which these productions were created and analyses the creative decisions taken within the process. Supporting video material was also created as part of this initiative. All material produced through this research project can be found at www.stages.lk

Resource Packs

Editor (Writing): Ruwanthie de Chickera

Editor (Video): Malith Sulara

Language Editors: Nipuni Sharada Pathirage (S) King Ratnam (T)

Writers: Ruwanthie de Chickera, Pemanthi Fernando, Jayampathi Guruge, Nadie Kammallaweera, Nalin Lusena, Nipuni Sharada Pathirage, Piumi Wijesundara

Layout and Design Editors: Malshani Delgahapitiya, Rajitha Pavithra Madhubhasha

Proofreaders: Asha Abeykoon, Geetha de Chickera, Pemanthi Fernando, U. D. R. H. K. Gunasinghe, Tracy Holsinger, Aravinda Jayasekara, Nadie Kammallaweera, Nipuni Sharada Pathirage, Sudeshna Ranmuthugala, King Ratnam, Thilaka Subasinghe

Layout and Graphic Designers: Prasad Aluthwattha, David Cotterrell, Sanjaya Ekneligoda, Rajitha Pavithra Madhubhasha, Venura Navod, Deshan Tennekoon

Layout Assistants: Kiyas Ahamed, Malshani Delgahapitiya, Janith Harshana

Research Assistants: Kaushalya Attyagalle, Nalin Lusena, Rajitha Pavithra Madhubhasha, Akalanka Prabhashwara, Dinushika Seneviratne

Translators: Hiranyada Dewasiri(S/E), Arundi Jayasekara(S/E), Manuli Lavanya(S/E), Lihini Nilaweera(S/E), Jinadani Parameshwaram(T), Shamala Vedanayagam(T), Piumi Wijesundara(E)

Video Crew: Venura Navod, King Ratnam, Pramila Samarakoon, Kasun Ukwatta

Web Design and Developer: Ransaka Galmangoda

Administrators: Malshani Delgahapitiya, Mahesh Lakmal

Stages Theatre Group

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Written by: Ruwanthie de Chickera, Nipuni Sharada Pathirage

Assisted by: Akalanka Prabhashwara

Layout and Graphic Design by: Venura Navod

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Written by: Piumi Wijesundara

Assisted by: Akalanka Prabhashwara

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Written by: Ruwanthie de Chickera

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Assisted by: Kaushalya Attygalle, Rajitha Pavithra Madhubhasha

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