

SCRIPT

Menik Farm

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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group

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Menik Farm – 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*.

Menik Farm is one such monologue.

An Introduction to *Menik Farm*

This *DCS Monologue* is based on a conversation with Dr. Vimala Ganeshanathan.
Interview conducted by Ruwanthie de Chickera.

About the Monologue

Created from the original poem of Dr. Vimala Ganeshanathan, who wrote and spoke about her experiences serving as a GP amongst the displaced communities of Menik Farm, this monologue brings together the gentle observations of an elderly Tamil lady, who is struggling to come to terms with the horrendous reality of long term displacement that affected large communities of Tamil people of the North, at the end of the Civil War.

Menik Farm, made notorious by its rumored inhuman conditions which lasted for months, then years, became held up as proof of the deep structures of indifference, racism and violence within the State system against the Tamil people, as at the end of the war, civilians of the North were subject to, possibly one of the biggest challenges of the 30 year civil conflict.

Performance History

First directed by : Tracy Holsinger

English language performances : Selvi Satchithanandam (Colombo, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019
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

Menik Farm

Character An old, upper-class Tamil lady. Gentle and soft spoken.
She prays as she talks.

•

A female voice chants a prayer in Tamil off stage.

Slowly, an elderly woman enters the stage, with a small shrine in her hands.

She lays it down on a table and continues to chant and pray.

She uses flowers and incense as she chants.

She ends her prayers and peers into the audience.

I think it's my eyes. My eyes are too old for this.

I no longer understand what I see...

I will tell you, and maybe you will tell me, if your younger eyes can understand it all.

So tell me...

How do 5,000 people disappear in an instant?

The sky lit up with this strange light – phosphorous light – and then... there was phosphorus rain.

And then 5,000 people... disappeared.

(Maybe there were 5,000 drops of phosphorus rain.)

It was like magic.

I remember being asked to run.

I remember not being able to run.

I remember being carried.

I remember, as people ran, they discussed if the phosphorus rain was of Indian, Chinese or American make.

It's strange what younger people find interesting these days.

Don't you think?

The people all ran.

The rich clutched their gold.

The poor clutched their children.

And ran...

... into the Army.

Who first held us. Then herded us, bundled us, drove, dragged and emptied us...

There.

Very fast

Lock. Lock. Lock. Lock. Lock.

Now, that I didn't see. I didn't see them lock us in.

Because it happened very fast.

I think it's my eyes. My eyes are too old for this.

I don't understand the barb wire fences.

We were not captives. We were just displaced.

*We who used to pray in temples, with sweet smelling jasmines entwined in our hands,
there we continued to pray...*

I watched the young faces around me grow ashen, old and strange.

It must have been the constant wind that whipped dust into their eyes, dust into their skin.

Ah, there was dust everywhere – on bodies, on clothes, on eyelashes, on hope, on promises, on children, on ice-cream...

Oh! I didn't tell you.

The ice-cream vans came in. Along with the supermarkets. And the super banks. And the super brands.

Supermarkets in a refugee camp...

It must be the age of my eyes, because I don't understand it.

It looked... a little... vulgar.

Though their employees dressed so nicely.

For us, I suspect.

But I had more pressing needs than ice-cream.

There was no place to... you know... there were no ... toilets. Just pits.

Or one had to find a tree.

I stopped eating. I could not bear the shame of it.

And then – god help me, the horror of this I just cannot bear – there were little children, toddlers, babies who fell into those pits.

Little children that died. Drowning in this filth. In our filth. Little children choking and dying in this... filth... this filth... we... god help us!

We who had prayed in temples, with sweet smelling jasmines entwined in our palms, with no god in sight, there we continued to pray...there we continued to pray...

“Death is normal in camps” the World Health Organization said.
They must know something I don’t’.
The dead were taken out one by one. No one knew where to.
Families stood at the fence and wept.

I. Just. Don’t. Understand. That. Fence.
I’m not being a trouble maker; but I felt like a zoo animal.
Because groups “visited”. And there were “tours”.

The president Rajapakse’s family came.
And left quickly. Because people threw stones.
Yes. I saw who threw the stones. But I will never tell you.

Foreigners came on tour too – from the UN, from the embassies...

But now, only to the fence. (There were rumors that people were now calling it a farm).
And through the barb wire fence they smiled.
And took pictures.

One must smile back.
It’s only polite.

The foreigners left and the soap arrived.
I always loved abroad soap. My children always brought me abroad soap.
The foreigners sent us so much soap - scented soaps, luxury soaps, handmade soaps of every brand.
...but, (bless them bless them bless them) ... these young people – even foreigners - forget the basics.

Where was the water?

I find it difficult here. This place they call a farm.
I got lost there.
‘Zone A’, ‘Tent B’, ‘Space C’.
Or is it ‘Zone B’, ‘Tent C’ and ‘Space A’?

.....

I don't know.

And I don't know...

what they mean when they say -

“Weapons found! Mines galore! Buried in your back yard. Back home.”

What does that mean?

That they actually dug up mines in our back yard?

Or... that our homes have been taken away.....?

I'm sorry.

I'm so old.

And it is just so very complicated.

The questioning continued on and on. People taken in one by one.

Young girls always after dusk.

My eyes have seen enough to understand why.

We who had prayed in temples, with sweet smelling jasmynes entwined in perfumed fingers, here with no god in sight we continue to pray... we continue to pray

I'm sorry if I don't remember that you came.

You may have come... many did come...

And you may have then left suddenly. Feeling sad or nauseous or faint.

I understand that.

I do understand that.

And I do understand this.

Yes. My eyes *were* too old. Too old to see what I saw. Too old to understand what I didn't see.

But let me tell you this, my dear children.

I understood one thing, clearly.

That was not. A goddamn. Farm.

END

Production Credits

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

CAST

Selvi Satchithanandam

DESIGN TEAM

Director	Tracy Holsinger Ruwanthie de Chickera
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) Sanjeewa 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

Sponsors	Pemanthi Fernando
	Sanda Wijeratne
	Gehan Gunatilleke
	Radhika Hettiarachchi
	Rebecca Owen
Publicity/Media Team	Sanda Wijeratne
	Gihan de Chickera
	Deandra Bulner
	Pemanthi Fernando
	Pia Hatch
Graphic Design	Venura Navod Balasooriya (2016)
	Ruvini 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 Samarakoon
	Insert
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

Dr. Vimala Ganeshanathan

DCS Researcher

Ruwanthie de Chickera

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