



ABOUT

The Jungle and the Sea is a new play written and directed by S. Shakthidharan and Eamon Flack.

SETTING

The action of the play moves back and forward in time between three years: 1995, 2009 and 2022, and is set in various locations in the north of Sri Lanka and Sydney, Australia. The year in which each scene takes place is indicated on the stage on a physical signpost. The play is performed on a revolving stage, which turns constantly, at different speeds, during the show.

CHARACTERS

The central characters in the play are a Sri Lankan Tamil family of six:

Gowrie (*amma*) – the mother (who is Hindu)

Sivapalan (Siva) (*appa*) – the father (who is Christian)

And their children:

Abirami (**Abi**) (*akka*) – older sister (who is Hindu)

Madhu (*akka*) – older sister (who is Christian)

Lakshmi (*thangachi*) – younger sister (who is an atheist)

Ahilan (*thumbi*) – younger brother (who is Hindu)

Other characters in the play include Himal (a family friend, who is Sinhalese and Buddhist), Kishan (his father, who is Sinhalese and Christian), Salim (a young Tamil man, known to the family, who is Muslim), Father Joseph (an older Tamil Catholic priest), Devla (an older woman who lives in the jungle in the north of Sri Lanka), local people, government officials, UN workers, members of the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) and members of the Sri Lankan Armed Forces.

THE JUNGLE AND THE SEA

காடும் கடலும் ஐக்கிழந்து

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

THE SRI LANKAN CIVIL WAR

The Jungle and the Sea is set during and after the Sri Lankan civil war.

The Sri Lankan civil war was fought in Sri Lanka from 1983 to 2009 (over 25 years). The war was fought between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (the LTTE also known as the Tamil Tigers). The LTTE fought to establish an independent state called Tamil Eelam in the north-east of Sri Lanka due to decades of discrimination and persecution of the minority Tamil people by the Sinhalese-majority Sri Lankan government. In Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese people are the majority, and the Sri Lankan Tamil people are the minority.

The Jungle and the Sea makes reference to the following key locations and events that took place during the Sri Lankan Civil War:

Bombing of the Saint Peter and Saint Paul Church in Navali church in 1995

On the 9th July 1995 the Sri Lankan Air Force bombed the Saint Peter and Saint Paul Church in Navali, in northern Sri Lanka. It is estimated that 125 Tamil civilians who were taking shelter in the church were killed.

Ponnampalam Memorial hospital bombing (PTK Hospital Bombing)

In February 2009 Sri Lankan Armed Forces bombed the Ponnampalam Memorial Hospital in Puthukudiyiruppu in the Mullaitivu District in the north of Sri Lanka. The hospital was destroyed.

Mullaitivu Beach and Nanthikadal Lagoon (also Nanthi Lagoon / Nandikadal Lagoon)

In 2009, during the final days of the Sri Lankan civil war, around 300,000 civilians were trapped on Mullaitivu Beach between the Indian Ocean and the Nanthikadal Lagoon.



THE JUNGLE AND THE SEA

காடும் கடலும் ஓசைநிலை

SYNOPSIS

The Jungle and the Sea is in four parts.

The show opens with a dance called *Bharathanatyam*, performed by Anandavalli, who plays the character Gowrie (amma).

PART ONE

In Part One we meet the family in 1995, we see them as a family unit, teasing each other, sharing their ambitions, on the way to a beach near their home in Navali on the Jaffna peninsula in the North of Sri Lanka.

We also meet **Himal**, a family friend who is Singhalese and Buddhist (through his mother), and who likes Abi, the eldest sister. Himal's father, **Kishan**, a government officer, is also known to the family. Kishan is Singhalese and Christian. Kishan's brother attends the same church as Siva, the family's appa.

As the family walk to the beach leaflets are dropped from a government aircraft flying above. The leaflets indicate that the Sri Lankan army will be coming to the area to 'take back the North from the Tigers'. The leaflets tell people to take refuge in churches and temples around Navali.

The family are at first unsure what to do. Kishan indicates that places of worship will be safe. The family and others take shelter in the church. However, the church is bomb and we see the family and other victims in the hospital afterwards. Madhu loses her thumb; Siva loses his eyesight. We learn that a baby has died.

Ahilan (brother) is shocked and angry after the bombing and is approached by a member of the LTTE (Tigers). He is convinced by a Tigers Commander to join, although at first he is resistant.

The LTTE want Siva to leave the area as he has publicly criticized them. Many in the village blame Siva for telling people they would be safe in the church. And they are suspicious of him for having Singhalese government friends.

The family prepare to leave Sri Lanka for Australia

But Gowrie cannot leave Sri Lanka without her son. Gowrie tells Abi and Madhu to learn what they can from local 'Tiger boys' about the whereabouts of Ahilan and then they will go and find him and bring him back. Gowrie states that she will wear a blindfold and not remove it until she finds her son again.

We see time passing in a montage of tableaux and short, silent scenes on the revolving stage.

PART TWO

It is 2009, 14 years have passed.

We see Lakshmi and Siva at an expensive restaurant in Sydney, Australia. Lakshmi has just graduated from a Law degree and Siva is now completely blind, due to the injury he sustained in the bombing of the church in Navali.

At dinner, Lakshmi comes out to her father as gay, in a humorous scene.

As Lakshmi and Siva go to leave the restaurant Lakshmi receives news from Sri Lanka via a text message from her sister Abi. The family are in an area being bombed by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces. Lakshmi relays news of what is happening in Sri Lanka to her father by



THE JUNGLE AND THE SEA

காடும் கடலும் ஓசைகளிடுது

reading the messages she is receiving on her phone, including the bombing of a hospital and the use of heavy artillery. Lakshmi expresses concern that the government is using heavy artillery on its own citizens. Lakshmi becomes increasingly concerned about their family in Sri Lanka particularly when she learns from a text message that people are trapped on a beach between the ocean and a lagoon which is being bombed. Lakshmi doesn't know if her mother and older sisters are there on the beach and declares that she will go to Sri Lanka. Siva says he knows she will and Siva says he will arrange for his friend Kishan, the government official, to assist her. Siva asks her to promise him she will bring their family back.

PART THREE

Part Three begins in Vanni (in the north eastern) in Sri Lanka, in 2009, at the same moment in time as Part Two ended.

We see Abi, Madhu and Gowrie, still together. Again leaflets are dropped from Sri Lanka aircraft flying overhead. The leaflets tell the Tamil civilians to leave the LTTE controlled areas of the north and enter government-controlled areas and indicating the government is planning a final war against the LTTE in the north-west of Sri Lanka.

Himal asks Abi to marry him. We learn he has left his mother and father to come to the north to find Abi. Abi agrees to marry Himal and Madhu finds a local Catholic priest to conduct the ceremony.

Directly after the wedding ceremony is conducted we hear the sound of bombing close by. The family need to decide whether they are going to stay in what has been their temporary home for over fourteen years or move away to stay safe and to continue their search for their brother Ahilan. The family decide to try to cross over into the government controlled areas and away from the frontline of the war. They set out on foot carrying all their possessions. The family meet a UN worker who tells them they are in a safe zone, a no-fire zone. When they arrive at the safe zone they discover it has been bombed. They are told the safe zone has been bombed by the government.

The family decide to travel to Puthukkudiyiruppu in the East. They need to find a hospital as Abi needs more Ventolin.

A bus carrying a recruiter for the LTTE stops near the family. The UN Worker tells Himal to run into the jungle. The family tell him to meet them at the Nanthikadal Lagoon however Himal doesn't run into the jungle fast enough and the recruiter orders him onto the bus.

The family arrive at the hospital in PTK (Puthukkudiyiruppu) and are told it is a new No-Fire Zone. There is reference to a wall of photos showing the injured and dead – for the purposes of relatives looking for their family members. Suddenly, we hear loud noises. The hospital is being bombed. The family manage to escape.

The family start walking again and learn that there is a new No-Fire Zone, which is Nanthikadal lagoon. There is another No-Fire Zone on the other side, on the beach between the lagoon and the sea. Abi describes what the family passes by, including that they pass a 'dead boy'. They are describing what they see for Gowrie.

The family arrive at the strip of sand, there are many people crowded there.

Out at sea there are some lines operating for the Red Cross. People tell the family that they should try to get onto one of the boats even if it involves 'asking a soldier to shoot you in the leg'. The LTTE won't let people leave this area and the government are pushing people to the beach and closing in on the LTTE.



THE JUNGLE AND THE SEA

காடும் கடலும் ஸ்தலத்திலுள்ள

The family are trapped by the sea on one side and the lagoon separating them from government-controlled area on the other side.

The family decide to cross the lagoon to the government-controlled area at night and in the crossing discover their son and brother Ahilan is guarding the crossing for the LTTE. A Commander appears and tells Ahilan that the family cannot leave. A Sri Lankan Armed Forces officer appears and raises his gun. Madhu, Ahilan and the LTTE Commander are shot and killed. This is represented on the stage by each actor taking a blood capsule and rubbing in over their faces and exiting the stage neutrally.

PART FOUR

2009. Part Four opens a few hours after the events at the end of Part Three.

Kishan, Siva's government friend, is present. He tells Gowrie and Abi that he is a government representative and they are in his compound and that they are safe. Kishan informs them that the LTTE have surrendered.

Kishan tells Gowrie and Abi that Himal is alive and in a government camp for displaced people. Kishan tells Gowrie and Abi that he has a car coming from Colombo (the capital of Sri Lanka) soon and they must get in the car and leave.

Abi asks about funeral rites for Madhu and Ahilan. Kishan tells her that Father Joseph will perform funeral rites for Madhu but the government has said there must be no commemorations for any LTTE. Abi cannot accept that her brother's body will be dumped in a mass grave in the jungle

Lakshmi arrives in the car from Colombo and Kishan tells Gowrie and Abi that Lakshmi will take them to Australia.

Kishan explains that if Abi performs the funeral rites she will be arrested for treason. Abi resists this and insists on performing the funeral rites for her brother. She leaves the compound and after a short time is dragged back in by a Sri Lankan Armed Forces soldier, followed by Devla, an older local woman who lives in the jungle. Kishan is angry. Abi and Himal argue with Kishan about Abi's actions. Kishan wants Abi to apologise to the soldier. The soldier wants to take Abi away. Kishan says he will place her in his own prison. Devla speaks to Kishan Devla tells Kishan to '...Wash your face, clear your head, step back, think again...' Devla speaks prophetically to Kishan and tells him he is causing disruption in nature. Kishan suddenly relents and Abi, Himal. Kishan and Gowrie leave the stage to give Ahilan a funeral.

We hear the sound of gunfire. Abi, Himal and Kishan are shot. Abi and Himal are killed, this is represented by each actor taking a blood capsule and rubbing in over their faces and exiting the stage neutrally. Kishan is injured and arrested by the Sri Lankan army.

PART FIVE

2022

Siva is in Sydney, Australia, he is now completely blind. Siva visits Salem at mosque in Guildford, Sydney and asks him for forgiveness and a place to stay while Gowrie and Lakshmi return to Sri Lanka to take back the remains for the bodies of his children.

Gowrie and Lakshmi return to Nanthikadal, Sri Lanka as the remains of the bodies of the children have been found. They meet Kishan in Sri Lanka, Lakshmi asks Kishan to help her with a legal case about the end of the civil war.

Gowrie dances the Bharathanatyam and the play ends.