

Genesis of Miscegenation in Jean Arasanayagam's *The Legacy*

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Abstract

Colonial Era has passed out and many have decolonised their selves from the past breaking from the colonial matrix. Yet, every writer keeps on redefining in terms of their experience and attitudes. They have tried to embrace the social, economic and cultural experiences of the land. Jean Arasanayagam born in an ethnic community is married to a Tamil another ethnic race in Sri Lanka. This paper entitled Genesis of Miscegenation in Jean Arasanayagam's *The Legacy* deals with the lineage and blood line to which she belongs, she recounts the past histories not on the political aspect of the colonizers but on the personal aspect of the act of miscegenation which was the result of Colonization. She also deals about the transformations in her life as a citizen of Sri Lanka.

Key Word: Colonial Era, cultural, economic, ethnic, genesis, histories, miscegenation, Lineage, social, transformations.

Man as a social animal, must maintain his relationship with the surroundings to survive. The natural selection of a habitat and the means of livelihood is the essential factor of survival. The relationship with the surrounding of a man away from his home is different when compared to the one in homeland. The very act of invasion and colonization has moved many from one's homeland and many have gone away to earn. When immigration takes place, naturally one finds a new home in a new land, and try to mix with the people there. This brings about

miscegenation. Miscegenation is defined as “the mixing or blending of race in marriage or breeding, or interracial marriage”. (Oxford 520)

Jean Arasanayagam a descent of the Dutch Burgher community recalls the historical past of the Dutch and the ways in which they mingled with the indigenous people and gave forth to a new race. Many left the place and she stands one among the few who lives in Sri Lanka, she knows no other home. In spite of all the terror and trauma she has tried to follow both the Burgher culture and the Tamil culture of her husband’s side.

Jean Arasanayagam’s works explore the different forms of alienation, culture, and politics and personal which has become evident after the political problems in Sri Lanka. Her work has multiple forms of culture which can be related to Bakhtin’s observation of Culture:

One must not [. . .] imagine the realm of culture as some sort of spatial whole, having boundaries but also having internal territory. The realm of culture has no internal territory: it is entirely distributed along the boundaries, boundaries pass everywhere, through its every aspect [. . .]. Every cultural act lives essentially on the boundaries: in this is its seriousness and its significance. (301)

Belonging to the Dutch Burger lineage, Jean Arasanayagam takes pride in writing about her identity as a Colonizer. She opines her views in the Introduction thus,

“The Legacy”, a collection of poems is an extensive never ending search for an identity written purely from an individualistic point of view, a self-questioning and self - investigation that is continuous, containing the subtle and by current theorists of subversive elements of my own critiquing of abstruse theorising although I admit to the facts unearthed by current theorists of hybridity and miscegenation engendered by colonialism and imperialism, emphasizing the shades and mutations of those darker aspects as hybrid with all the biological implications leading to the most complex theories of hybridity, linguistic interpretation, literary definitions and theories, cloning, cross breeding, addressed in varied linguistic terms. (Jean, *the Legacy*)

The Burghers are inhabitants of Sri Lanka for several generations. The Burghers are descendants of Europeans. They are easily identified with their physical appearance of fair complexion, tall stature, and have distinctive facial features. Culturally too they are like the Europeans, they have their own dress code and life style. The upper class of Burgher

community speak English as Mother Tongue. At present they are a minority ethnic group. After the Sinhala only act, many Burghers migrated to Canada and Australia. The word “Burg” means city, hence “Burgher” means resident of a city. There were two classes of people who entered into Sri Lanka, one was the official class serving with the VOC (Vereenigde Oost Indische Campaign), and the other class came to Ceylon as merchants or traders. They were collectively called as “*Hollandische Natie*” which means Natives of Holland, during the Dutch occupation of Maritime Ceylon from 1658 to 1796. These people and their descendants came to be called as “Burghers”. (Asiff Hussein, *Zeylanica*)

The Burghers enjoyed high position during the colonial rule, but after Independence, the community started to decline and their position in Sri Lanka was threatened. They faced alienation in the cultural sphere. As Michael Roberts notes, the Burghers were termed as *Lansi* by the majority Sinhalese to identify them as minority space in the postcolonial Sri Lankan society:

. . . *Lansi* could be (can be) employed relatively neutrally in a descriptive sense. Bu the context, the sequential order of face-to-face interaction and/or the intonation could render the term into a pejorative and polemical weapon which in effect cast the *lansi* as aliens in comparison with those deemed to be pure sons of the soil, the *Bhumiputhrayo*, the chosen Sinhala people. (3)

It is within such a discourse of linguistic and cultural marginalization, Jean Arasanayagam investigates her Burgher ancestry. In “An Invasive Inheritance” Jean recalls the ways in which she comes to know of her inheritance. Through letters, autobiographies, letters and facsimile she recounts the memories of the “real flesh and blood” (41) of the forefathers she belonged to. “An Invasive Inheritance” records her inheritance of the Burgher Blood, the race at present has become “illusory imaginations” (41). History speaks of adventurers and colonizers, the colonizers possessed everything they want in the alien land, but the Dutch Burghers were totally different from the rest of the colonizers says Jean,

My people never possessed extensive acres of
Cinnamon land or plantations that brought in
Revenues, although in later years land was purchased,
Houses built by their own individual effort and

No doubt endeavour to provide for large families (42)

Kandy is known for its produce in Cinnamon, but the burghers planned their own ways of survival in the hilly terrain of Kandy. She also adds that, they did not stand aloof as colonizers rather they mingled with the native people. The natives were unaware of the culture of the Burghers. The Burgers took efforts to retain their own identity and clung onto their own culture and tradition irrespective of the land they lived.

As their race was not pure, her blood was diluted and many of lesser fortune started to live simple lives within the forts with their new found families, they never thought of returning home. Thus, their stay in Kandy brought about a new generation,

. . . their progeny, so

Varied beginning the creation of a hybrid

Race, descendants who made their own lives without the

Patronage or sanctions of the VOC, some of them

With a smattering of mixed genes from all corners

Of the world (43)

Many who came as adventurers returned to their homeland but never “reached that El-Dorado” they could not survive against the ordeals of the tiresome journey. These people of El-Dorado did not even know how long their tenure was yet were tied up to their histories, finally their blood intermingled with the “Colonized race of people” (44). The history about their ancestors helps Jean to trace out her roots, she self-questions,

What do I call myself, what do I cling on to,

Why do I, centuries later, search for the roots

Of this mixed identity the blood from the melting

Pot of the nations, poured into my veins flowing

Through my arteries, tinting my complexion? (44)

She traces her “genealogy” (44) to know her roots or else she would be left aloof. Her appearance shows that she is of a mixed race. Though the blood is not pure, she leaves all hesitations behind and survives with the spirit that she explores her ancestors who belonged to

European nations. Jean speaks of the ancestral women, who carried the seed of the mixed race, they were totally forgotten but it is because of them that histories are created. Although they were exploited they gave life to the new generation.

She feels happy to be part of these women, as she lives and writes the histories of her ancestors. These women might have suffered a lot because of the mixed race. The poet adds that whatever complex structure is combined to mark her racial identity, she tries to “protect it from the ravages of time” (45). Though her inheritance and identity is unusual, she scrutinises the worth and value of the generation who are left out in the country with a special identity. These people of the mixed race have worked hard to “give it dignity” (46). She calls her world “*Ultima thule*” as they are off springs of colonial colour. She feels that “New Ideas of miscegenation are now engendered” (46). The poet draws a parallel connection using the simile of a hybridized fish that survives in the ocean, the poet too accepts the truth that no one can deny the link which each individual has with the world. She remarks,

Hybridity had its connection with the natural world
 Each of us dependant on the other, prey and predator
 Fighting for survival or clinging to each other
 In symbolic relationships, parasitic yet hardy
 Survivors. (46)

Fighting for survival has become a predominant factor of miscegenation, as they have to start right from the beginning, they have to get at least their basic amenities in a new land. Later on they tried to acquire wealth and improve their skills in all walks of life. This search continued until they gained everything needed in life. The earlier settlers established their settlements for their own good, later on they left the land and the off springs were left out to proliferate. The poet, towards the end concludes that all personal histories are illusions, whatever may be ones race or ethnicity , they have the right to live wherever they want irrespective of all diversity,

. whatever genus or
 Species we belong to, we all bear names,
 Names that identify us with their connections,

Biological, evolutionary, etymological.

We have the right to live, to proclaim those

Complex identities and puzzle the world by

Our attributes, our provocative stances. (49)

She furthermore adds that like a hybrid seed that is dispersed and gives forth to young ones, man also has to survive in an overcrowded place, where ethnic problems arise and brutality exposed. And because of the indifference that persists among human beings the “world fragmented is blown apart by wars’ /explosions” (50). Religions pass on the message that God created the world for all species to live happily. According to The Bible when God created Man and blessed him and said “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen 1: 28). God created man, animals and plants to multiply. Thus miscegenation paves way for a new race.

The creation of new race or species occurs when invasion or colonization takes place. History speaks of forts, battles and harbours. All these are on the political aspects of colonization, whereas the personal aspects of colonization does not come to light. The result of colonization is miscegenation. Jean Arasanayagam expresses this in her poem “The Fort” (Galle). Galle is a fort situated in the south west coast of Sri Lanka which was first built by the Portuguese in 1588 and was then fortified by the Dutch in 1667. Fort Galle served as a gateway for the sailors, colonizers and merchants. These people entered into the fort by means of trickery. Their bond with the indigenous people brought forth new race, but the colonizer in no way assured of wealth to the new found family, the subjugated had to survive expecting nothing. The off springs identified themselves with the name of their fathers not by the name of their mothers.

When one overlooks from the fort one can identify the ships waiting,

It’s a clear view of the ocean we now look

Upon, its dazzling azure blue and turquoise

Unmarred by unknown vessels that sailed

In unannounced to begin their onslaughts. (59)

The poet compares them to rats which enter in groups to target food or to catch prey. The colonizers too entered in large numbers and fed on the indigenous and escaped from all kinds of natural disasters. They started to live and breed within the colony. Finally like the unchecked population of the rats, the mixed race increased. They “committed incest” when they came on long voyages, some returned home abandoning the new family and some remained and colonised and set up camps and procreated new species.

Miscegenation would, with certainty

Have taken place too, no doubt.

Hybridity all the rage in those times,

In that age as humans. (60)

No one knows about the origin of miscegenation, there might have been many reasons too for miscegenation. Whatever may be the causes and effects, this intermixing of the races cannot be checked.

In “Chameleon Transformations” Jean interprets that as centuries have passed, the mixed race has lost its identity, and she considers the Burghers as diminishing ethnic group. The Burghers had their own ghettos for maintaining their culture. Of late children have rejected their native tongue and have started to learn the language of the newly inhabited places. The left-behind too intermixed with other people and their language was creolized only to retain the memories of their ancestors in their pockets. The names of their ancestors and “raconteurs” about them were said now and then (61). The names on the tombstones and the signatures on the books or bile and memoirs were the only memories of their ancestors but they have lost their value. The intermixed people have lost all that was once valued and started to adopt to the new environment, as the poet confronts, “ We submit to chameleon transformations/ And so we survive before the Albatross is shot/ Making the telling of that tale an epic tragedy of guilt” (61).

As a marginal, she seeks to redefine her space claims her position with dignity. This can be also described as “Third Space” (207) in Homi K. Bhabha terms. She accepts herself, as a Burgher and moves around within a borderless world. As a citizen of Sri Lanka she wishes to be a part of the land. Arasanayagam’s works reveal the process of “becoming” as stated by Stuart Hall, though she questions her own identity, she is conscious of the value of her cultural

delivered in The British Council Seminar on” Minorities in a Plural society”, she says that she belongs to an ethnic community “that is now almost extinct” (Jean).

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