

## CONFLUENCE OF HYBRIDITY IN THE COLONIZER: A STUDY OF JEAN ARASANAYAGAM'S POETRY

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### Abstract

In the past Asian countries have been colonies for the European Countries, a large scale of immigration, often motivated by religious, political or economic reasons. The colonizers started to follow the culture of the native people and also had a powerful influence on the imperial country. Jean Arasanayagam, in her poems explore her dual identity – the Jean Solomons and the Jean Arasanayagam she became. Her childhood takes her to the Colonial past and beyond her lifetime lies that of her ancestors – the conquerors who became the history. It's a history she cannot slough off because she is bound to it by birth and family. She recounts her identity in her collection of poems *The Legacy*. Culture is revealed to be hybrid, and this hybridity provides the space from which subaltern agency can be enabled. In this paper titled **Confluence of Hybridity in the Colonizer: A Study of Jean Arasanayagam's Poetry** the researcher has analysed the concept of Hybridity in the works of Jean Arasanayagam. Her Genesis is different yet she unravels her thought as she is of dual identity. Though she belongs to the Dutch Burger race she now lives in Tamil Culture. The poems maintain a complexity of judgement and a poised ambivalence of feeling.

**Keywords:** colonies, culture, dual identities, hybrid, colonizer, complexity

Colonialism is the process of settlement of Europeans in Asia, Africa and South America. Colonization found its moment during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. It paved way for exploitation – economic exploitation of resources, the use of native people, the conquest of territories and markets based on culture, forms of knowledge, technological advancement and political systems between the Europeans and Natives. Post colonialism focuses on race within colonialism and shows how race enables colonial power to represent, reflect, refract and make visible native cultures in particular ways. Many colonizers have settled in the colonized country and have become one among the colonized. Thus have double or hybrid identity what the Post-Colonial situation brings into being. The colonizer started to see themselves as natives and started to work differently from that of the European genres. All Post colonial literatures seem to make a sort of transition.

Jean Arasanayagam, the Sri Lankan writer was born in a Dutch Burger family but settled down in Sri Lanka as one among them. She is different in her way of thinking and utterance. She is aware of the difference that has shaped her as well as her historical imagination. Her genesis is different from the present situation she lives in, and her experiences have been inspired by the country of her birth. She finds many analogies between colonial antecedents and her hybridity. David Unwenn remarks of Jean Arasanayagam's poetry in the Introduction to her Collection of poems *The Colour of My Mind*, "hers is a voice which is Post-colonial in commitment and post-modern in motivation and stylistics, rather than formed

around the premises of modernity"(8). The colour of the mind, the notion of double or divided identity, which is the characteristic of the Post-Colonial writer can be seen in the poet's work. Born as a Dutch-Burger and married to a SriLankan Tamil, she lives the life of a Tamil. As a writer she explores herself and the society of Post-Colonial land.

Culture is revealed to be hybrid, and this hybridity provides the space from which subaltern agency can be enabled. Hybridity is generated by dominating discourses. As Homi K Bhabha says in the Location of Culture,

If the effect of colonial power is seen to be the production of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs. It reveals the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority and enables a form of subversion founded on that uncertainty that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention. (Bhabha, Location 173)

Even hybridity arises from contact, it is hybridity within what was coherent and a unity that he calls up. In this way, hybridity gestures more directly to the unequal position of power within which hybridity gestures more directly to the unequal position of power within which hybridity is created.

*The Legacy*, is a collection of poems in her never ending search for an identity, she has written it purely in an individualistic point of view. She admits the facts unearthed by current theorists of hybridity and miscegenation engendered by colonialism and imperialism emphasizing

the darker aspects of hybridity. She says in the Introduction to *Genesis / The Legacy*,

I felt no disparity in my ways of thinking with that load of connotations concerning identity. I would have been regarded as innocuous, without racial bias or prejudice and that is the way in which I feel even to this day inspite of all the traumas of naming myself as I now do – left behind, hybrid, minoritarian and numerous other names as a result of being allied to ‘the other’ by my marriage.(12-13)

Jean Arasanayagam thinks of “The Legacy” which cannot be refused, for it has been part of her inheritance. She recalls the situation how the colonizers were and their interest in colonizing. Since childhood she has heard of narratives of their original culture and the dual culture they have inherited through the passage of time. The Sri Lankan Tamil culture has become part and parcel of her life that she feels her own culture as ‘alien heritage’(20). Some live a nomadic life and started to migrate to different places leaving over the ‘tid-bits of a hybrid race!’ (30-31). Forgetting the homeland is not so easy, yet time cures the wounds of displacement.

Will they forget or push back their memories  
Of an abandons homeland into the dark niches  
Of the mind or will the older generations still  
Recount largely imagined feasts and banquets,  
That largesse of food and drink either revived or fading

Away and memory vanish. (36-41)

Their new abode refills their emptiness and silence  
and openly gives a ‘friendly shelter’ for ultimate legacy.

Everyone’s existence is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival living on the borderlines of the present. Homi K.Bhabha has said the ‘beyond’ is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past. Beginning and end may be maintained as a sort of myth but in the middle time and transit can produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inclusion and exclusion and this is how Jean has produced a different identity for herself.

In “The Hybrid Genesis” Jean again recalls her origin and how they varied in colour, names, language and culture from that of the natives. The belongings they have proved of their legacy. The colonizers though superior were only a minority, they acclimatised themselves as best as they can and they were eager to fly off to different places for invasions. The eagerness of invading is in their blood hence they cannot stay idle, they keep on moving from one place to another. Even when they have lost their foothold the memories still remain. Generation after generation ‘escutcheons’ are preserved and the forgotten heritage are retold to the new generation who have the

slightest hold of inheritance. The poet who is one among the forgotten heritage feels alienated in a land which she lives, she stands aloof though she has become one with the colonized. She is not aware what the future would be,

How do I make a watertight case for the possession  
Of even a minimal space, am I an occupant whose  
Future is uncertain, never knowing when I will be  
Thrown out onto the street to become a vagrant and  
Vagabond of a questionable much debated right of  
Ownership, I question myself time and time  
again...(54 – 59)

In a war torn country like Sri Lanka when the natives themselves find a way of escape and flee to some other country, the poet leads a contended life. No one can guarantee a peaceful stay anywhere, she questions ‘is exile sweet or do they sit and weep/ by the waters of Babylon?’ (73-74). She continues philosophically, “Who knows man’s fate?” (75), human beings engage in endless surmise throughout their life engrossed in thoughts and escaping from one situation to another, one suffering is overcome by the other and where does the question of identity lie in this world of predators. Life is full of journeys and “ironical allusions” the so-called conquerors have been crushed and crumpled, due to their arrogant notions of being the inheritors of conquerors and imperial conquest (84), hence she calls identity as ‘sham’,

Identity is what we ourselves create

For ourselves to provide some rationale or justification  
For the loss of power as the disinherited, but was  
That spurious power even a bestowal of that  
Living breath, our humanness, our desire to survive,  
So we carry our racial markers distinguishing our  
Ethnicity, documenting the legal statutes and status of  
Identity . . .(91-96)

She calls the place she lives as home, this home cannot deprive or dispossess her and their ancestral histories are vanquished histories.

Hybridity when carefully considered in its material reality, reveals itself to be a history of slavery and colonialism inherited in terms of race. It is a difficult and painful history of interracial identity. It joins up with issues of choosing one’s affiliation or having one’s affiliations thrust upon one. Today any account of hybridity must contend with this history. Hybridity is intimately linked to the questions of resistance to homogenization or assimilation and it thus implies an engagement with what we might broadly call subaltern agency. This concept can be seen in her poem “That Hybrid Seed” which speaks of uprootedness and the firm grip in the alien soil. For a diaspora there is always a lifelong quest, a longing for the

native soil, but like a transplanted plant they try to fix their roots in the new soil and flourish well with a new genesis and as a new breed still to be named, and a history also to be created,

By the progeny engendered out of alliances  
That took place haphazardly, in some instances  
Without permanency or legitimacy between the  
Colonizers and the colonized, scripting and  
Documenting the archival thombos of inheritance.  
(19-23)

The poet has become part of 'that new found race', her blood mixed with that of the native people. Yet she cherishes the memories of her ancestors and the vision of the poet's world has changed. She is open minded and she bears the hardships patiently and the 'stamp of hybridity'. Hybridity not only in traditions but also in creating new histories. To her hybridity, is no longer a question of mixing of races but revelations. She belongs to an enclave and bears a label of hybridity with all the connotations that the term bears.

Miscegenation.

Hybridity.

Identity neither forded not counterfeit

To which do these minor facts of life matter?(98-101)

In "Hy – Breed" she fondly remembers the creation of a new genesis and the old travel narratives and adventures of her forefathers. Her memory is faint as ages have passed and so she wonders what might have been their personal motive in colonizing and what might have been their occupation. She muses colonizers, it is not easy to move away from one's own country to an alien land. As she says, "conquest as it was then was no tropical carnival/but a matter of life and death taking absolute/possession through gainful and exploitative treaties"(84-86). The colonizers have compelled the natives to serve them. She raises questions as to how they could be called "as left-behinders?/As outsiders?"(97-98), but all her questions are open ended with no one to answer. Yet the hybrids want an identity for themselves. Survey is conducted and critically theorizing of hy –

breedity. They too have undergone many threats and have taken effort to overcome all the scoffs. She accepts herself as an engendered being in the long drawn never ending search of her identity. She looks back at the powerful symbols of conquest,

. . . miscegenation occurs along the way,  
Proclaiming the propagation  
Of a new breed rooted in this land  
Which bears a name, an identity  
However mixed with diverse racial strands. (155 -159)

Through *The Legacy* she finds importance to herself and to her family and to others who are interested in their historical origins and roots. She considers her genesis of hybridity as an adventure in a country of her own which she has created. She has created an identity for her in the Post Colonial land through her writing and has achieved name and fame inspite of her hybridity. The Confluence of the East and West is the speciality of her writing. She has brought about a transition in the Post Colonial Writing in Sri Lanka.

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