
Ethnic Violence in the Select Poems of Jean Arasanayagam's Apocalypse 83

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Abstract

Jean Arasanayagam (1931-2019), one of the leading literary voices in contemporary Sri Lankan literature. Her poetry is unique for depiction of socio-cultural milieus, ambivalence spaces and crisis of identity. Arasanayagam's poetry directly addressed racial violence during the Black July, the anti-Tamil campaign in Sri Lanka in 1983. In addition, her poetry captures alienation, minorities' issues, identity crisis and quest for freedom. In this regard, the paper examines the ethnic violence in "Nallur 1982" and "In the Month of July" is extracted from Arasanayagam's Apocalypse '83. It also demonstrates how innocent Tamils are brutally assaulted by the mob.

Keywords: Arasanayagam, Violence, Black July.

Introduction:

Jean Arasanayagam, a well-known poet and short story writer in Sri Lanka. She is author 50 books. Her writings are highly political and polemical Arasanayagam deal with gender, personal relationships and post-colonialism in her literary works. Many of her poems have been translated into various languages such as Swedish, French, Japanese and Danish. She has received many awards from other countries, been received the Sahityarata award from the Sri Lanka government in 2017, the Premchand fellowship from Sakathiya Academy, India in 2014 and received the Gratian prize which is prestigious literary award in Sri Lanka.

The Wire identities that her poetry represent "quest for meaning belonging and identity in Post-colonial Sri Lanka". Her notable works include: Kindura (1973) Apocalypse 83 (1984), The Cry of the Kite (1984) A Colonial Inheritance and Other Poems(1985), Out of our Prisons We Emerge (1987), Fragments of a Journey (1992) All is Burning (1995) Peacock and Dreams (1996) and Shooting the Florian (1996).

The paper explores the ethnic violence in "Nallur 1982" and "In the Month of July" Jean Arasanayagam's Apocalypse' 83 (1984). Apocalypse is a collection of poems which deals with her experience of ethnic riots in July 1983 in Sri Lanka. It is widely known as Black July. It pictures personal narrative and insight and politics to the violence of the civil war. The essay is divided into two parts; first, it maps the "Black July" and ethnic horrors will be analyzed in the second part by the select poems from Apocalypse'83.

The Text.

Black July is widely known as anti-tamil campaign in Sri Lanka. The anti-tamil campaign had occurred on 24th July 1983. The Sinhalese attacked brutally Tamil minority in Colombo. Sinhalese mobs burned tortured, looted and killed the innocent tamils citizens. As result, 3000 were killed, decimated more than 5000 shops and over 150,000 tamils lost their life. In case of women over 500 were raped and several families were burned alive. Over 500,000 tamils were fled the island. The NGO organization, International Commission of Jurists referred the riots as genocide. It is popularly called ethnic cleansing.

Arasanayagam, delineates the disastrous of racial and ethnical discrimination and political as well in her poem Nallur 1982. The poem opens with alarm that disastrous going to happen. It reflects the contemporary state of Sri Lanka. The conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamil minority is prevalent. In Nallur 1982, the dry trees branches are fallen and no water in the well. It reflects the contemporary state of Nellur is a significant place in Northern province, Sri Lanka. It is where the famous Hindu temple is located named "Nallur Kandasamy Kovil" Lord Murugan presiding deity. The Poet shows that a dark, gloomy and dying Sri Lanka by ethnic violence. The poem opens with a sentence "It's there" which postulates that horror of human violence among two groups.

It's there

Beneath the fallen fronds dry crackling pile of broken twigs,
abandoned wells of brackish water lonely dunes. (1-3).

The images "fallen bonds", "broken twigs" and "abandoned wells" symbolize the absurdity and absence of human life in Nallur at Murugan Temple Premises. Arasanayagam depicts the bloodshed that broke during violence in Nallur. These bloodsheds reveal that the war and violence is anti democratic. The Sinhalese brutally assaulted the Tamil minorities. This poem posts a heap of dead bodies while riots take place. The violence lost the innocent civilians life.

The shadows of long bodies shrunk in death

The leaching sun has drunk their blood and

Bloated swells among the poling clouds. . .

Death smell it in the air

Its odor rark with sun and thickening blood.(6-10)

The poet brilliantly juxtaposes spirituality and barbarity and presents the clangor of temple bells that show religious services have done by innocent citizens in order to save them from bullets and cried of death by merciless soldiers. The citizens called lord's name to save them but efforts are failed and ended in chaos and bloodshed. These incidents represented conflicts between spiritualism and barbarism. And also the poet unveils the gun training by military forces at the entrance of temple premises.

Amid the clangour of

The temple bells, the clapping hands. . .

The zing of bullets

Cries of death

Drowned in the roar

Of voices calling skanda

By his thousand names

Muruga, kartikkeya

Arumuga.....

We pray, we cry, we clamour . (15-22)

The poet criticizes innocent citizens' blind belief on spiritualism which would not save their life and stress that God is not heard of his devotees' weeping. It is evident that all their ended in vain however, brutality and violence is continued at Nallur and her writings crammed with religious symbolism and violence which are central subjects.

Be not like the god

Who does not hear deaf Sandeversan (24-25).

The poet slams that war does not help people to live with harmony. However, war culminating in death, destruction and divides the masses. Arasanayangam also emphasis that religion is not solution to control the war rather one should follow what religion has preached to people. She used metaphors bloody skirmishes of humankind and the rain of bullets have blinded the eyes of gods and closed in darkness.

Turned away from bloody skirmished

Of humankind, the gods are blinded

By the rain of bullets

Six faced Arumugan

All twelve eyes

Closed in darkness. (48-54)

The poem highlights the miserable and brutality of Sinhalese and failure of humanity, the humty number of bullets fired towards Tamils. The depiction of the cremation of bodies showed the nauseating of war and ethnic violence.

Waves of rust swell and billow

Beating into hollow caves and burial urns

Filled with the ash of bodies

Cremated by the fire of bullets. (59-62)

In her, "In the Month of July", is written during the rites occurred. The poem focuses on carnage, about the incomprehensibility of pure evil to understand, hate like that in the the mob knows neither mercy nor solidarity. Hatred politics is explored here and the difference is wild and absolute. With a hard rhythm and rush invocation and some rhetoric a poem can have. Jean Arasanayangam is riveting in its portrayal of pure hell. The fate of man, the suffering of anonymous and innocent people honed. It also depicts the ethnic violence between two groups that results in human nature is failed, childhood games with pebbles converted into mob riots. The sihgalse brutally hit Tamils with stones and burned house of them. Tamils are tried to escape but they are squashed violence by

the mob and beaten to death.
In the month of July
A man fled from his pursuers
He climbed a tree
The mob aimed stones at him
Until they got him down
He probably fell off, his grasp loosen.
Slippery with blood, his body already battered
And then they trampled him to death. (16-24)

Conclusion:

Arasanayagam's poems are expressed vigorously without self-consciousness, contrast clearly with the formalities of an earlier period. "Nallur 1982" is known for the power of imagination and the bold prophetic vision of Arasanayagam. The poem seems to refer to the violence that pervaded the country in July 1983. her poems have been illustrated the loss of humanity through war and violence.

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