

A Journey of Inheritance: A Study of the Documentary
My Mother's Village by Aaron Burton

Sabreena Niles

ABSTRACT

This research paper is a study of the documentary film titled *My Mother's Village* in which Aaron Burton attempts to portray individuals from several communities in Sri Lanka. The film is linked to the work of Burton's mother Sharon Bell who was an anthropologist and released a documentary titled *The Sri Lankan Series* in 1980, which was filmed by his father Geoff Burton who was a cinematographer.

This research analyses the documentary as a life narrative through assessing the portrayal of Sri Lankans while engaging with the position of Aaron Burton in compiling the film. Therefore the study grapples with the notion of inheritance as Burton argues, "we're both looking at what you inherit. My work is about the next generation – so I look at what I inherit from my mother and father and what the people in the film inherit from their parents". While the study challenges traditional auto/biographical practices related to singular and stable subjects and subject positions, the boundaries between biography and autobiography and notions of autobiographical truth, it also delves into aspects related to women's life writing, caste discrimination and the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

The study draws from feminist auto/ biographical and postcolonial theories, critical theories on life narratives and politics of storytelling in order to assess areas related to intergenerational continuity and construction of memory as aspects of a journey of inheritance portrayed in the selected documentary. While this documentary has been screened in several spaces including the International Centre for Ethnic Studies and the Colombo Art Biennale, limited research has been conducted on its role and function as a life narrative. Therefore this study finds increasing significance in addressing the dearth in literature on Sri Lankan life narratives in general and more specifically on Aaron Burton's documentary film *My Mother's Village*.

Key words: Inheritance, life narrative, auto/ biography, autobiographical truth, intergenerational continuity, memory