

Ethnic Crisis and Queerness a Study of Shyamsevadurai's Funny Boy

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Abstract

The Sri-lankan author Shyam Selvadurai colors his imagination the social experiences, gender hierarchy, and ethical society. He has also presented the conflict between the Tamils and Sinhalese in the novel *Funny Boy*. This novel describes the sensitive issue of race and gender troubles. The violence between Buddhist Sinhala majority and the Hindu Tamil minority group's Arjie affairs with a Sinhalese boy and becomes a critique both of his own ethnicity and of the nationalism that has driven rioters to destroy Tamil property and burning the houses. Such a large paramount of violence represents the sexual and patriarchal of the Tamil families. Colonial forces haunted by the former colony to construct ideologies of sexuality and gender. This paper further probes into the discussion on Ethnic Crisis and Queerness in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*.

Keywords: gender, hierarchy, ethnicity, nationalism

Selvadurai was born on 12th February 1965 in a Sri-Lankan Tamil family. This novel *Funny Boy* (1994) won the Canadian first novel award. He currently exists in Toronto with his male partner Andrew champion. Selvadurai was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka to a Sinhalese mother and Tamil father. Both members are under the control of the conflicting ethnic groups. Ethnic riots in 1983 made the family immigrate to Canada when selvadurai was nineteen. He studied Creative and professional writing in a Bachelor of Fine Arts program at York University. Selvadurai recollected his memories of the discomfort he and his partner experienced during a period spent in Sri-Lanka in 1997.

It is a much more complex story which aspects on several themes in various aspects on several levels, concerning Ethnic Crisis and Queerness is a backbone. In addition, he has used to identify as a homosexual person. The aim of Selvadurai's novel *Funny Boy* dedicated the racial difference that existed in Sri Lanka. (D.saraswathi). Ethnic crisis as a term designates a sense of collective belonging which could be based on common descent language, history, culture, race or religion. In *Funny Boy* Ethnic Crisis and Queerness are uniformly present and they play a major part in how character exists in their lives therefore, order to fully underscore the theme of country violence's background. Sri-Lanka is a country with many ethnic groups that differ from one another's culture,

religious and linguistic grounds. However, there are two larger groups, the Sinhalese and Tamils. Some minor conflicts arose between the tenth and fourteenth centuries. After the departure of the British in 1948, the communal conflicts were set in Sri-Lanka.

The novelist conveys how a society creates a hidden code of conduct and anything that falls out of it is considered to be falls and unacceptable. He explores the pathetic plight of the identity crisis in his own identity as a homosexual person. At the age of seven, Arjie a Tamilboy avoids cricket. He has an admiration of playing dressing – up with his girlfriends. His father is worried that arjie may turn out “funny” like that Rankotwera a boy if he turns out to be the laughing stock of Colombo. His father said in a tone of finality.

In 1981, the Sinhalese mobs increased violence against the Tamil minority people they had been given orders to go to Jaffna and crush the Tamil movement so that they could not get independence and gain access to Eelam. Jaffna became a combative and occupied area. Villages that helped and hid Tamils were attacked and women were abused, and thousands of Tamil took refuge in Christian missionary convents to escape the attackers. Thus the Tamils have existed from their own country. (D.saraswathi)

Andrew Lesk in his work ambivalence at the site of authority, the fire of controversy is discussed with the

character of Arjieas witnesses of subjugation not only of Tamils to the majority Sinhalese but of various other groups, notably homosexuals and women. Thus, the idea of home becomes a place for him where he can take shelter from the racial oppression that takes place in Sri Lanka. In other words, it is a place which is important to him, unfortunately; he will soon lose his shelter when he is exited from it.

The novel demonstrates how at moments of intense national self-scrutiny the private world of love is called upon to symbolize public national values. Arjie's narrative illustrates in a microcosm the power negotiations of class, gender, and sexuality that marked Sri-Lanka in the twentieth century. (RithikaDaskupta)

In 1983, the chapter "Riot Journal" an Epilogue presents Arjie's loss of home which can be identified in two different ways. Firstly, Arjie discovers that home will not provide shelter while he is struggling with his own homosexuality. In discovering his own sexual identity, his family stands for the misery. Secondly at the end of the novel, Arjie literally loses his home. Sinhalese have burned down the family's house, and later he realizes that the house was not the only burnt but also the things were robbed.

"Front door," Amma whispered.

Then other sounds started.....

"Fire", Neliya Aunty said in a Panicked voice. "Oh God, they are

Setting the house on fire".

In the funny boy, religion and ethnic crisis are linked with one and another in their lives of the Tamil minority. It affects them personally in their relationship with others. Arjie realizes strangeness in the nature land when he heard the news about his grandparents was burnt inside the car. The colonial riots turn into the communal violence to kills the Tamil people in some cases, it even leads to outspoken racism. This is the case when the families of Radha and Anil hear about their relationship both Radha's mother and Anil father are very outspoken in their feelings about their children's romance. Ammachi's remark makes Radha call her a racist. She does not feel that her grandfather's murder is a reason to hate shaped her mother's behavior. If she would have had the memory of her grandfather's brutally mutilated body then she also would have behaved differently. As it is now, her behavior and open mind have been influenced by her living abroad for a longer amount of time. It has made her start to quest in issues like an ethnic crisis. (D.saraswathi)

Marecek agrees that within the ethnic group, cross-cutting factors such as language religion, caste, region and urban versus rural residence make for multiple identifications (32) the core of the novel as representatives from all these ethnic groups and languages can be found in and turned into the dividing the country. The novel enforces the ideas of the Sinhalese as a majority which holds all the power, and the Tamil has limited possibilities in a society which is dominated by the Sinhalese. Tamil minority people have been under the control of Sinhalese afraid of speaking Tamil. Arjie's father is aware of these circumstances and realizes how to survive and decided to move to Canada. If Sinhalese is represented as the language of masculinity and power, Tamil becomes the unspoken language associated units sexuality.

At the end of the novel, the focus shifts from the spoken words and languages to the words that are written down. Arjie writes down his thoughts and feelings in a diary because as he says: the only thing for me to do is write down.

"When this all over, we'll start to make plans for Canada, I am glad he said that because I Long to be out of his country.

I don't feel at home in Sri-Lanka any longer, will never feel safe again."(Funny Boy 304)

It is in a moment of extreme change that happened in Arjie's life. He tries to understand that they will never again live in the house, but his heart refuses to understand this one thing that can gear up Arjie is when he meets Shehancuriously enough, the fact the Arjie is a Tamil is not the only reason why he would never actually feel safe in Sri-Lanka. As the boundary between male and female in Sri-Lanka seems to be clearly defined and not negotiable, Arjie's transgressions within the realm of gender and desire would put him into an exposed and unsafe position.

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