

Perethaya’ a Buddhist mythology juxtaposed in Shyam Selvadurai’s

The Hungry Ghost

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Abstract:

In *The Hungry Ghosts*, Shyam Selvadurai fictionally depicts the social and political upheaval in Sri Lanka. The Buddhist mythological concept of "perethaya" serves as the inspiration for this novel, which examines the mental anguish of a society that has become like "perethaya," a being who cries out for a peaceful existence but never seems to find it. A hungry ghost is one whose thirst and hunger are eternal because of the wrongs he committed in a previous life. A perethaya's life will be filled with unending restlessness and the misery of unsatisfied hunger and thirst. The author incorporates this myth into the novel very deliberately in order to reflect symbolically on the problem in Sri Lanka produced by power mad parties and the resultant crisis and discontent, in the minds of the people, boiling slowly with a feeling of hopelessness and unfulfillment. The themes of homosexuality and immigration reappear throughout this book.

Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to analyse how Selvadurai juxtaposes the Buddhist story of 'Perethaya' with the novel's themes of ethnic crises, homosexuality, and immigration. More than that, this article is an analytical endeavour to comprehend and investigate the whole range of power politics in relation to these concerns.

Keywords: The Hungry Ghosts, Perethaya, Despair, Fulfillment

Introduction:

This novel, like his first two, deals with the war between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, but it also addresses other topics, such as the oppression of women and homosexuals, social stratification, and the compulsion to move. Buddhist mythology plays a significant role in the story. The work demonstrates Selvadurai's deep understanding of Buddhist mythology and dogma. There are a total of 29 chapters spread across 4 parts in this novel set in the 1980s and 1990s. Author Shivan Rassiah and his grandma Daya provided inspiration for the story. The major character vacillates between two opposing ideologies, making this a story of political and theological conflict. The Buddhist legends in the background illustrate the ebb and flow of the political climate in Sri Lanka. The novel focuses heavily on the past. Buddhism's core beliefs, include how actions in a previous life can have a negative impact on the present. Unless they make amends, the characters' pasts will catch up with them. No one can be saved unless and until their sins are forgiven. Shivan and his family had to leave their homeland because of the ethnic violence that was occurring there. In addition, the novel shows how gay character Shivan Rassiah struggles to reconcile his sexual orientation with his cultural background and ends up feeling out of place. Because the work deals with the aftermath of an ethnic schism, it can be read in light of the effects of that conflict. Conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka has given opportunity to other colonies to meddle in the internal politics of the country. The narrative depicts India's intervention into the conflict for her personal gain, which only serves to exacerbate the situation.

In the novel, India initially enters Sri Lanka to protect the Tamil Tigers, but it quickly becomes the enemy of both the Tamils and the Sinhalese and is forced to leave.

The novel's title is an allegory, referring to the protagonists as "ghosts" who have become perethaya because their previous actions have prevented them from living fully in the present. Before Hema and Shivan ever leave for Canada, they have a talk full of tension. For twelve years, Sri Lanka had been troubled by fighting between its two largest ethnic groupings. Civil war broke out as a result of the tension between these two groups, which was rooted in their shared ethnic background. The war being fought in the country is affecting their dialogue.

Almost every chapter concludes with a Buddhist parable that has some relevance to the events of the chapter and the characters' lives. In her narrations to her grandson, Grandma, a devout Buddhist, often included Buddhist symbolism that reflected the lessons she wanted him to learn from each story. As the narrative progresses, the author transports the reader to the past, to Shivan's childhood. After Shivan's father passed away, the family moved in with his grandmother, but she did not take well to their presence because she hated Shivan's mother for marrying a Tamilian against her wishes. As a Sinhala woman, Grandma's treatment of the Tamils is illustrative of the racial tensions in the country. Because he was Tamil, your grandmother disapproved of me marrying your father. And because you're part Tamil, she despises you. (20).

Shivan, who had been following the news, explained that the family wasn't shocked to learn that "someone despised us for being Tamil" because of the violence. For by the early 1970s, tension had already been rising between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils, with the latter's demand for a separate state being a major source of contention. (20). His parents' marriage was strained as a result of the stress surrounding them. Hema and her spouse had a tumultuous marriage, and he eventually died. While it's tragic, his death has altered her.

The family moved into their grandmother's house and into the arms of her venom. She despises both her own daughter and her granddaughter, but she has a soft spot for the latter. She was deeply in love with Shivan, but a painful occurrence caused her to lash out at him, driving a wedge between them and further complicating her relationship with her daughter. She let out a yell, and the slipper hissed its way through the air to land on my arm. It hurt so bad, yet I yelled at the fire and ran away. (29)

Hema was stuck with her bitter mother and couldn't run away. Due of their time at Daya's, Shivan had to forego some of his usual pleasures. He grew accustomed to her demands and frequently accompanied her on her property visits, earning the affection of his mother. Daya's true self emerged while he was living with his grandmother. He quickly becomes spoiled by his grandmother's company. He became apart from his mother and sister as a result of his enjoyment of his grandmother's favouritism. Shivan's homosexuality also drove a wedge between him and his grandma. At the age of seventeen, the protagonist Shivan has his first sexual awakening. At the age of seventeen, Shivan, an avid reader, made the decision to study the biography of Montgomery Clift, which revealed the actor's love for men. The actor's life was where he came to terms with his sexual identity, and the realisation of this identity threw his life into disarray. The culture in which he was raised did not permit such displays of emotion, so he was unable to do so. Homosexuality was illegal in countries like Sri Lanka. As a result, being gay had only made his life more difficult, as he explained.

For this reason, he begins to consider leaving the nation. So that he can gather data on programmes and scholarships, he joins the American Centre Library. In his mind, he is in the United States of America, free at last. In this narrative, Shivan stands in for all individuals who were persecuted in their home nation and were ultimately forced to flee for safety. In the Library, he meets a young man named Mili Jayasinghe, who would go on to play a significant role in his development. Known as Mili Jayasinghe, he is the heir of Sri Lanka's largest fortune. There is a group he belongs to that advocates for human rights, and he is a member of that group.

Soon, the plan to flee Sri Lanka to avoid the unrest becomes an urgent necessity. From a young age forward, Shivan was aware of the country's racial tensions. Although he was eighteen years old at the time, he was aware of earlier riots such as the 1977 uprising and the impending 1983 riot. The country is gripped by a wave of violence. When I was eighteen years old, in June and early July of 1983, while I was preparing to take my A-level exams, the killing and displacement of Tamils accelerated. It was common for Tamil Tigers to launch attacks on military and police; in response, many more innocent Tamil civilians were tortured or vanished. (63)

The situation in his country is deteriorating, and the everyday citizens are increasingly exposed

to danger. There was a genuine fear for their life as Tamil people because Sinhalese, aided by the government, were murdering Tamils and forcing them to leave the country. They lucked out, too, since the Sinhala persona of Daya was coming to their rescue. Even if Chandralal helps Daya save her children and the grandmother's house is on record as Sinhalese, the riot leaves internal scars on all of them. They realised after the violence in 1983 that they had no future in Sri Lanka and that they should leave. Hema and her family were forced to leave their home country because of the ethnic violence there, but they remained loyal to it and hoped for its future.

Shivan, a victim of violence and the ghosts of his past, tells Michael about his life before the war. Because of his sexual orientation as a whole. Unlike in his other works, this author doesn't spend much time explaining why the protagonist is homosexual. Without showing any signs of contentment in any of the three eras of his life—his time in Sri Lanka, his time in Toronto, and his time in Vancouver—Shivan is trapped. Shyam Selvadurai continues to reflect Sri Lankan society, in particular the enslavement of females and gays, despite his focus on the turmoil and brutality of Sri Lanka in the 1980s and 1990s. Because he has been on the receiving end of prejudice, he has never been able to shake these issues from his fiction. His protagonists consistently stand in for the repressed and enslaved Tamil people. By doing so, he has shed light on the culture of 1970s Sri Lanka.

Conclusion:

Shyam Selvadurai's writings rehash the past in order to show the repercussions of the ethnic strife. Millions of people died or were forced to leave Sri Lanka because of the ethnic war that began during the country's fight for independence from the British and has lasted to this day. The book concludes by depicting Shivan maturing into a guy who can deal with his challenges; he has become a wise man. The novelist succeeds in illustrating the fallout of the fight and the significance of moving on in Shivan's story. Not Shivan's departure, but his return to his life and the peace he found in Sri Lanka marks the novel's conclusion.

Research Paper

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