

Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* as a rendition of Ethnic tension and Segregation

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Abstract:

Funny Boy, written by Shyam Selvadurai, is an engrossing tale that tackles the topics of ethnic conflict as well as apartheid. In addition, the primary focus of my paper is on the way in which the Sinhalese and Tamil characters in the book serve as focal points for the unfolding of the country's ethnic conflict. It's a far more intricate story than that, with multiple themes in various aspects on several levels, the back bone of which is an ethnic catastrophe. In addition to this, he has utilised the theme in such a manner that has made it possible for the protagonist to find a different path in the process of discovering his identity as a comedic individual. The author Selvadurai's goal in writing the novel Funny Boy was to shed light on the racial tensions that existed in Sri Lanka at the time.

Keywords: Funny Boy, Identity, Ethnic conflict, apartheid

*Research Paper***Introduction:**

When referring to a group of people, the term "Ethnic Crisis" denotes a strong feeling of solidarity based on shared characteristics such as ancestry, language, history, culture, race, or religion. Ethnic crisis and ethnic disputes are pervasive in *Funny Boy* and have a significant impact on the lives of the characters. As a result, the violent history of the country is crucial to comprehending the novel. Different groups in Sri Lanka can be identified from one another based on their ethnicity, religion, and spoken language. There are, however, two major ethnic groups who call Sri Lanka home: the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Between the years 1000 and 1400, people survived with as little strife as possible. The Tamils did not begin to feel unfairly discriminated until the British arrived and split the country. It was after the British withdrawal in 1948 that the community conflict became entrenched.

The Sinhalese mobs' attacks on the Tamil separatists escalated in 1981. The orders had been to go to Jaffna and put down the Tamil movement there so that they wouldn't win their independence or be able to enter Eelam. There was a rise in militancy and occupation in Jaffna. After raids on villages that sheltered Tamils and sexual exploitation of women, thousands of people fled to Christian missionary convents. Consequently, the Tamil people were uprooted from their homeland. In his book *Ambivalence at the Site of Authority*, Andrew Lesk discusses the raging dispute over the figure of Arjie as a witness of enslavement suffered by many different groups, including but not limited to gays and women, at the hands of the majority Sinhalese.

As a result, his concept of home becomes a safe haven from the racial discrimination he faces in Sri Lanka. Simply put, he attaches a great deal of significance to this location. When he is expelled, he will lose his safe haven. There are two approaches to quantify the effects of losing a home. First, when Arjie is fighting with his own homosexual emotions, he learns that home will not be a safe haven. When he comes to terms with his sexuality, his family represents the oppressors, and his own home takes on the characteristics of a sex- and gender-specific space. Secondly, at the novel's conclusion, he will know what it's like to be homeless. This is because the Sinhalese had stolen from the family by torching their home, leaving them with nowhere to go and no means of rebuilding.

From what Arjie has said, it is obvious that the novel we are about to read follows a character through a period of growth and change, including aspects of an ethnic issue at home and in the country. This means that religious and cultural institutions, as well as the larger social structure, are inextricably intertwined with the exercise of authority. Throughout *Funny Boy*, there are multiple ties between religion and ethnic crisis and the levers of power, and these ties ultimately determine how people in the story live their lives. It has an impact on them as individuals and on their interactions with others. The novel demonstrates how the protagonists' attitudes and assumptions about how to treat and interact with others who are not Tamil or Sinhalese have been shaped and determined by cultural and historical factors. Extreme racism is a result in some circumstances. This happens when Radha's and Anil's families find out about their romance. Radha's mom and Anil's dad both have strong opinions about their kids getting together. Radha accuses Ammachi of racism because of her comment. She doesn't understand why her mom can't just forget about it. While she is sad over the loss of her grandfather, she does not hold a blanket prejudice towards all Sinhalese because of it. On top of that, Radha does not have her mother's shared history and its influence on her behaviour. They both would have acted differently if she had seen her grandfather's damaged body. Her current attitude and broad perspective are products of her extended time spent overseas. Because of this, she now has doubts about fundamentals like racial conflict.

The novel's protagonist and protagonist's love interest eventually realise that getting married would cause them to be disowned by their families and forced to live apart. What's your opinion on having your kid marry a Sinhalese? The answer is yes. What about you? What? How about the Sinhalese? Radha Aunty gave him a short look before turning to I merely meant that in theory I would agree with you (82). But now she knows that life is not as easy as she had hoped. We understand from this passage that she battles with her values even if she does not have her mother's encyclopaedic knowledge of the past.

According to Marecek, there are many distinct identities within any ethnic group due to characteristics including language, religion, caste, geography, and urban vs. rural lifestyle (32). Representatives from all these distinct ethnic groups and languages can be found in *Funny Boy*, and they, in turn, are splitting the country. The novel provides evidence of such a link, and thus supports the central thesis that the Sinhalese constitute the dominant power bloc, while the

Tamils are a marginalised minority.

Funny Boy's dual language support (Sinhala and English) opens up a lot of doors. However, in a society where the Sinhalese are the majority, there are few opportunities for people who speak Tamil. In a country where Tamils are in the minority, many people are intimidated by the language and wish they were Sinhalese instead. In light of these facts, Arjie's dad understands how they must proceed if they are to survive. He's been having to break the news to his loved ones that we're a minority in this country.

The portrayal of Sinhalese and Tamil values and identities that is provided by Selvadurai places a strong emphasis on the concept of languages of power and the ways in which different individuals and groups are positioned inside or outside of them. Consider not only the language of ethnic crises but also the language of sexuality if you want to have a full grasp of the significance and the options or absurdities that the choice or inability to choose of language affords. Only then can you completely appreciate the significance and the options or impossibilities that the choice or absence of language gives. It has been said that if Sinhalese is the speech of masculinity and power, then Tamil must be the language of sexuality that defies definition and is hence the silent language. This shows how the novel creates a vocabulary of possibility when an ethnicity crisis and sexuality are brought together, despite the characters' regular difficulties communicating owing to their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

At the conclusion of the book, the focus changes from the languages and words that were spoken to those that were written down. Arjie keeps a journal in which he records his reflections and emotions because, as he puts it, "writing is the only thing left for me to do." (298) In a country that is wracked by violence, he writes in his home, which is currently under attack by a Sinhalese mob. Arjie is attempting to connect the dots and make sense of the violence that has plagued both his family and the nation of Sri Lanka, where he was born and raised, at a time when the world is undergoing profound upheaval. Even when he and his family are confronted with the charred remains of their home, he is unable to experience any feelings of regret.

Conclusion:

He tries to wrap his head around the fact that they will never return to live in that house, but something in his heart just won't let him. They do not let themselves cry because they know that once they start, they would never be able to stop. In the middle of all of the misery, Arjie's

chance encounter with Shehan is one thing that has the potential to brighten his mood. The novel should be read through a set of translucent screens, and both the ethnic crises and apartheid are evident in those screens. Their coexistence, also known as simultaneity, ushers in a period of exile for the narrative. This is a literal exile that Arjie is compelled to enter as a result of the ethnic crisis he is experiencing.

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