



Epitome Journals

International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research

ISSN : 2395-6968 | Impact Factor = 0.565

**Reflection of Culture, Gender and Ethnic Identity in
Selvadurai's "Funny Boy"**



Mr. Kushaba Salunke

Department of English,
Padmabhushan Vasantdada Patil College,
Patoda, Dist. Beed (MS) India
Email : kushsalunke@gmail.com

Abstract :

This research work deals with the cultural crisis, racial conflicts, Gender and ethnicity in the novel. The novel 'Funny Boy' is written by Sri Lankan novelist Shyam Selvadurai. The writer, in spite of dealing with a single aspect, has dealt with various aspects in the novel. While studying novel we easily find the above elements. This novel presents vivid sketches of family members and friends. The large Tamil family and its arguments and discussions reflect a specific culture, while in many aspects the problems are universal.

Keywords : Culture, Gender, Ethnicity, Race, Conflict.

Research Paper :

Introduction :

This novel is set in Sri Lanka where Selvadurai grew of *Funny Boy* is constructed in the form of six stories about a boy called Arjun Chelvaratnam (Arjie). Coming to age, within wealthy Tamil family in Colombo between the ages of seven to fourteen, he explores his sexual identity and Sinhala–Tamil cultural tension leading up to the 1983 riots. In this novel, we see that there are many obstacles faced by the protagonist. At the beginning of the novel, the cultural conflict between the Sinhala–Tamil has been displayed. Selvadurai portrayed the journey from the luminous simplicity of childhood into the more intricately shaded world of adults with its secrets, its injustice, and its capacity for violence. The author writes as sensitively about the emotional intensity of adolescence as he does about the wonder of childhood. He also paints an affectionate picture of an imperfect family in a lost paradise, struggling to stay together because of the different cultural values.

The novel begins with spend–the–days in which the grandchildren were sent at Ammchi and Appachi’s home. Arjie, the protagonist and his female cousins, as usual play the game of ‘Bride–Bride’, which is interrupted when their cousin Tanuja refuses to indulge Arjie’s desire to be bride. The adults ultimately discover their game, and someone tells Arjie’s father, “You have a funny one here.”(14) In the second story in the novel, we find Tamil –Sinhalese cultural conflict when Radha aunty returns from America and falls in love with a boy from Sinhalese, Anil Jaiysinghe who also involves in Radha aunty. The extended family warns Radha and encourages her to put an end to the relationship only because Anil is from Sinhalese group. Eventually, she becomes engaged to Rajan. It is through the friendship between Radha aunty and Anil we begin to understand the cultural conflict the between the Tamil and Sinhalese

With the cultural conflict, the internal play between the sexuality and Gender is an important underlying theme in the novel, and it is most apparent at the start of story. At the beginning when all the girls play the game of Bride–Bride, Arjie plays the role of Bride. All the children are blissfully unaware of the disjunction between Arjie’s male gender and the traditionally feminine role until the arrival of their cousin. “Her fatness, she starts that, A boy cannot be the bride, A girl must be bride.”(11) The rest of the family finds out Arjie’s activities and how he behaves at the particular stage of life. Marriage appears several times throughout the course of the novel, as it is something Arjie is fascinated with. In ‘Pigs can’t Fly ’

Arjie and his female cousins reenact a Sri Lankan marriage in the games of Bride–Bride. The most exciting part of the game is the transformation in to the bride. The draping of the white sari, allows him to “leave the constraints of self and ascend in to another, more brilliant, more beautiful self, a self to whom this day was dedicated.”(5) Marriage serves as a source of bonding with Radha aunty, who is due to marry Rajan Nagendra.

One of the important characteristics we find in the novel is Ethnic identity. As we found cultural complex that the Tamil group faced at various moment, the Ethnic identity is peeped out at several time. As the novel is set during and at the start of Sri Lankan civil war, the characters are impacted and constrained on the individual level by the tensions between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority, which includes Arjie and his family. For example, the relationship between Radha and Anil cannot progress because Anil is Sinhalese. Arjie’s father foresees the difficulties of being minority Tamil and enrolls his son in Sinhalese language classes at school, so that future opportunities are not limited to them. Arjie’s father is optimistic and is eager to see the tensions between the two ethnic groups, and is reluctant to see that the best option for his family is to immigrate to Canada.

Thus, the origin of many important themes in ‘Funny Boy’ is the increasingly serious tensions between Tamil and Sinhalese while Arjie is growing up in Sri Lanka. This underlying conflict leads to many of the novel’s elements of Diaspora, identity, and ethnicity found in several sections of the novel. The broader ethnic tensions in Sri Lanka are addressed and manifested themselves through various instances and interactions in Arjie’s life. Additionally, in ‘The Best School of All’ chapter, Arjie experiences this tension firsthand in many interactions at school. These themes continue throughout the novel, and importance in Arjie’s life continues to increase until his family is forced into Diaspora due to the instability in Sri Lanka and start of the civil war.

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