

## The Theme of Homosexuality in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*

**Dr. Chaitra Pandurang Naik**

Faculty, Department of English

Gangavathi P G Centre

Koppal University

Email id: naikc155@gmail.com

### Introduction:

All of Selvdurai's novels have a subtle and deeply humane style, wit and perspicacity that establish him as not only as an important chronicler of the complexities social and cultural difference but also ensure his place as a significant figure in post-colonial and gay writing. *Funny Boy* announced Selvadurai as a major new voice in Canadian, post-colonial gay literature.

The novel is moving and harvest coming out story of Arjie Chelvaratram as he grows from a ridiculed "Funny Boy" more content to dress up as "bride-bride" with his female cousins than play cricket with the males to an intelligent, reflective teenager dangerously awakened by his love for Shehan.

Shyam Selvadurai's novel gives a brilliant portrait of the anxieties aroused by gender non-conformity in the patriarchal society.

### Themes of Homosexuality in *Funny Boy*

Protagonist Arjie Chelvaratanam as his nation hurdles towards civil war At the same time as he watches Sri Lanka's Sinhalese majority gradually turn against his minority Tamil community, Arjie comes to terms with the consequences of being gay in a patriarchal culture and family from his earliest days, Arjie fails to meet his family's expectations of a boy; when his parents start openly worrying about his "funny" sexuality and Arjie realizes that he is indeed gay.

Arjie's deviation from traditional masculinity leads his family to continuously shame him, and he quickly internalizes this shame and begins to think of himself as inherently flawed. Chelvaratnams repeatedly call Arjie "funny"- a word that both betrays the family's anxiety about admitting the possibility of having a gay son and shows that their homophobia is based on an unjustified, instinctual revulsion, tied to the cultural norm of heterosexual marriage and families. While he is too young to understand his family's conviction that he is

being punished for simply being himself and following his desires, things over which he has no control. Although Arjie's sexuality mostly falls out of view during the middle part of the book, when he goes to Victoria Academy, he befriends and falls in love with a boy named Shehan, about whom his brother Diggy repeatedly warns him.

Ultimately, however, Arjie does manage to overcome his shame, and this shows the groundlessness and arbitrariness of the conventional gender roles his family tried to squeeze him into. When Arjie's Amma forces Arjie to play with the boys rather than the girls, she reveals that she does not completely believe in the restrictive notion of masculinity she is enforcing. "Because the sky is so high and pigs can't fly", as though gender separation is just an inherent and necessary feature of the world. Arjie's personal story about desire and sexuality is interwoven with politics and ethnicity in years of turmoil.

Critics have grappled with the intricate relationships between queerness, homosexuality, ethnicity, and post-coloniality in the novel. The subversive potential of Arjie's relationship with his boyfriend Shehan, W.Perera, talks about this is not their same-sex love, but their friendship implies that "racial harmony can be achieved among the marginalized". On Arjie's "homosexuality", Robert Aldrich argues that it seems lesser sin than heterosexual violation of ethnicity, caste and religion and the consequences to status and bloodiness that such misalliances engender.

Shifting the emphasis from sexuality to socio-economic analysis, Emily S. Davis argues that it is the effects of neo-liberalism that shape Sri Lanka's "governmentality, consumerist fantasy, and global economic mandate" in the postcolonial period. Taking these ideas as a point, this paper probes the word "funny" in *Funny Boy* to show that meaningful criticism relies not on a close reading of the character, but rather on text itself.

Selvadurai's novels always present at some level of consciousness the interaction between the personal and the political context. This awareness in which the personal and the political are intertwined not only intrigued Shyam but has enabled him to reveal the capacities of racism, homophobia, sexism and other injustices and hatreds which are present all levels within a society. He clearly has a deep concern with his country of birth and its troubled history. Privacy and secrecy are stressed as important factors in certain socially accepted institutions that often harbor the hidden third natured sexual behavior. Marriage is seen as one such institution which acts as a safe transitory alternative that helps to generate a

facade of heterosexuality.

### Conclusion:

Arjie's sexuality, while a topic of discussion for his family, is not confronted directly. Instead, he is always referred to as "funny". Arjie's "critical funniness" includes turning upside down of the colonial order. Though Arjie may be expelled from Sri Lanka, his narratives radical funniness nonetheless insists on returning through the sexual tendencies. Arjie recognizes that the term "funny" always carries a negative connotation, but doesn't understand its complexity, stating that "it was clear to me that I had done something wrong, but what it was I couldn't comprehend".

Dr. Jeffery Mayers writes the homosexual writers see the path of fate in an even more pessimistic light than the normal ones. They have felt within themselves that the justifications provided by Plato or seen in the story of David and Jonathan give no protection against descent in to an even deepening corruption. The writers of Homosexual writings, they tell us, no true love is possible and there is no escape from loveliness. Abu Sinfield has suggested that the central argument in studies of sexuality has ultimately sought to resolve outstanding problems which converge on and surround the notion of sexual identity.

Shyam Selvadurai gives a brilliant theme of Homosexuality in his work "Funny Boy". It shows the different attempt he done with his work. This work is an excellent example of LGBT studies.

### Works Cited

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