



Funny Boy- (Third Lecture)

Ethnic Identity and the Conflict



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- To mention the historical context of the Tamil diaspora and the Sri Lankan civil war is important to discuss issues of ethnic identity in *Funny Boy* as well as considering issues of gender norms, sexuality, and queerness.
- There is always a divide between the Tamil community and the Sinhalese.

The start of the Sri Lankan civil war can best be dated on 23 July 1983 (a month that would eventually be called Black July), when the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (aka LTTE, or more commonly the Tamil Tigers) instigated acts of insurgency against the government of Sri Lanka.

The LTTE wanted two things: 1) an end to the persecution of the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka by the Sinhala majority, and 2) more importantly, the creation of an independent Tamil state (called Tamil Eelam) in the northern and eastern areas of the island.



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To be continued:

- The conflict lasted for nearly 26 years, until May of 2009 when the Sri Lankan military defeated the insurgency and brought the civil war to an end.
- The tactics used by both sides have come under heavy criticism during and since the conflict.



At one point, the Tamil Tigers were listed as a terrorist group by the UN; similarly, the Sri Lankan government has been accused of many human rights violations. Both sides frequently prevented international journalists from reporting the events of the war. As a result of all of this, the conflict had many civilian casualties, probably over 100,000.

Because the events of this text take place during the start of the civil war, the conflict between Tamil and Sinhalese groups plays a major role in the novel; it not only functions as a major plot point, but also serves as the reason for conflict between the characters and on the level of individual character identity.



Textual References:

- Ethnic conflict is central to the relationship between Radha Aunty and Anil, neither of whose families can accept a relationship between Radha (a Tamil) and Anil (a Sinhalese).
- Though these young people appear to be unbothered by the conflict, the eventual interference by their families forces secrecy between them and eventually has them forcibly separated.
- Radha Aunty only changes her own feelings about their relationship when she herself is attacked on a train returning home.

Arjie's feeling:

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)



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His Kanathi aunty discovers him dresses like bride and drags him in front of his parents.

His parents are embarrassed and others make fun of him. At this point Cyril uncle make fun of him and sarcastically remarks, "looks like you have a funny one here" (14).

He realises that his father is angry with him. Appa refuses to let his son play with girls.

Appa is a man who is concerned with his social reputation in society.

If the villagers ever discover that Arjie is "funny", the representation of the Chelavaratnam family will be lost.

He takes up the matter of Arjie very seriously. He decides to send him to British-style public school The Victorian Academy in Colombo where he will be forced to become a real man.

He is troubled by his son's lack of interest in sports and other traditional male pursuits.

But Arjie completely disagrees with this idea. Appa is a man of traditional values; his values of life create confusion for Arjie.

• 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 Shehan curiously 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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Conclusion:

Selvadurai shows through his characters in the novel, Funny Boy that conflict of cultural values are responsible for alienation and confusion in individuals.

There will be some sort of discrimination somewhere but world will be better place of living. If people will understand that true beauty is in differences and diversity.

Selvadurai has given this message through the novel, Funny Boy that respecting differences of others will result into formation of better society.

He is optimistic about it. The reading of the novel suggests that it is only possible through inculcating tolerance among people in society.

In absence of tolerance society will be chaotic society and human relationship will be complex human relationship.



Thank you.

