

**Leaving and Arriving: Examining the Impact of War and  
Migration in Select Fiction of Shyam Selvadurai**

Sadhana P

(21PEN012)

A Thesis submitted to

Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for  
Women, Coimbatore 641043

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH**

**May 2023**

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*msj*  
10/05/2023  
Signature of the  
Supervisor

*A. Vijayarani*  
Signature of the *10/05/2023*  
Head of the Department

## DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled "**Leaving and Arriving: Examining the Impact of War and Migration in Select Fiction of Shyam Selvadurai**" submitted by me for the degree of Master of Arts (M.A.) is the record of work carried out by me during the period December 2022- May 2023 under the guidance of Dr. (Mrs.) M. Anjum Khan, Department of English, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women and has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Associate ship, Fellowship or other titles in this University or any other similar institution of higher learning.

*Sanki P*  
10/05/22  
Signature of the Candidate

CERTIFICATE

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I declare that the thesis entitled “**Leaving and Arriving: Examining the Impact of War and Migration in Select Fiction of Shyam Selvadurai**” submitted for the degree of Master of Arts (M.A.) by Sadhana P (21PEN012), is the record of work carried out by her during the period December 2022- May 2023 under my guidance and supervision. This work has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Associateship, Fellowship or other titles in this University or any other similar institution of higher learning.

*10/05/2023*  
Signature of the  
Supervisor

*A. Vijayarang*  
Signature of the  
Head of the Department  
*10/05/2023*

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<b>S. No.</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Pg. No.</b>
1	Introduction	1
2	Identity Crisis: Shivan's Journey	27
3	The Political and Personal Costs of War: An Analysis of <i>Funny Boy</i>	52
4	Conclusion	77
5	Work Cited	82

# Chapter I

## Introduction

The art and craft of writing, known as literature, serves as a medium for human expression and emotional communication. Derived from the Latin word *Littera*, meaning "letters," literature encompasses various forms such as drama, poetry, prose, myth, essay, philosophical dialogues, and epic tales, among others. Initially, literature took the form of poetical meters, which later transformed into diverse genres. Through writing, individuals can convey their own thoughts, experiences, and historical accounts. Published printed materials inform the public about literary works.

The developmental phase of coming of age denotes a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. A novel that belongs to this genre revolves around the protagonist who undergoes emotional upheavals that arise from their life experiences. The novel highlights the loss of innocence, and the transformation into maturity. Typically, the plot of the coming of age novel features a young male or female protagonist who faces various challenges and critical situations. The story centers on the experiences, struggles, and reactions of the young character as they mature and develop emotionally. The character's emotional state is likely to be influenced by their life experiences. The *Bildungsroman* genre is also referred to as a coming of age novel.

Immigrant writing has emerged as an important genre in contemporary literature, depicting the experiences of individuals who leave their home countries and seek a new life elsewhere. In many cases, these narratives also incorporate the coming of age theme, as young protagonists navigate their way through new cultural and social environments,

adapting to different norms and values, and facing a range of challenges along the way. Such works offer a unique perspective on the migrant experience, exploring issues of identity, belonging, and cultural dislocation, while also addressing the universal theme of growing up.

The literature produced by migrants centers on the social context of the narrative and explores the reasons that prompted them to leave their home country. It delves into the subject of migration, the mixed reception that they encounter in the host country, experiences of racism, hostility, the feeling of rootlessness, and the search for identity in a foreign land. On the other hand, immigrant literature reflects on the lifestyle of migrants in their new country of residence. Immigrant writers typically write about their personal experiences and how they grappled with the challenges of adapting to a new environment, coping with the feeling of being an outsider, and dealing with the attitudes of the locals.

The reasons behind immigration from one country to another are numerous and varied. Immigrants may seek a better quality of life than what they experienced in their home country, or they may travel to join family members who have already settled in another location. Historically, immigration has been motivated by factors such as the need for cheap labor in industrialized nations, recruitment for military service, and seeking refuge from war or persecution. For instance, during the 18th and 19th centuries, British people emigrated to other countries to work on farms, factories, and serve as soldiers in wars. Similarly, partition in India and Pakistan in 1947 resulted in the displacement of millions of people, including Hindus who moved to other countries. Additionally, during the era of the slave trade, African people were captured and taken to

live and work in the Americas and other regions. More recently, the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan has led to an influx of people fleeing their homeland.

The process of emigrating from one country to another can be fraught with various challenges. One such challenge is the fear of being mistreated or discriminated against by the host community. Additionally, language barriers can make it difficult for immigrants to communicate effectively and navigate their new environment. Immigrants who arrive as refugees face additional challenges such as finding shelter, employment, and the language barrier. Access to basic necessities such as food, healthcare, and education may also be limited for these individuals. Therefore, it is important for host countries to provide support and resources to help immigrants integrate into their new communities and overcome these challenges.

Canada has a rich literary tradition that reflects the diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds of its population. Immigrant writers in Canada have made significant contributions to this tradition by bringing their unique perspectives and experiences to the forefront of Canadian literature. These writers often explore themes such as identity, displacement, and the struggle to find a sense of belonging in a new country. They offer insights into the complexities of the immigrant experience and the challenges that newcomers face as they navigate their new environment.

Uma Parameswaran is an acclaimed Indo-Canadian literary critic, scholar and writer, known for her work in fiction, poetry, drama, and non-fiction. She was born in 1938 in Madras, India and raised in a Tamil household in Jabalpur. After completing her B.A. at Jabalpur University and a master's degree in journalism at Nagpur University, she received a Fulbright grant to pursue a master's degree in creative writing at Indiana University. In 1972, she obtained a doctorate in English from Michigan State University.

Parameswaran has published several collections of poetry, including *Cyclic Hope*, *Cyclic Pain* (1973), *Trishanku* (1988), and *Sisters at the Well* (2002). In addition, she has written plays such as *Sons Must Die* (1962), *Meera* (1971), *Sita's Promise* (1981), *Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees* (1987) and *Dear Deedi, My Sister* (1989), which were collected in *Sons Must Die and Other Plays* (1998), a part of the South Asian Canadian Literature Series (SACLIT), which she created and edited.

Anita Rau Badami, born on September 24th, 1961, is a writer of Indian origin who resides in Canada. Her family belonged to South India and spoke Kannada, and she was born in Rourkela, Odisha, India. Badami attended the University of Madras and Sophia Polytechnic in Bombay before immigrating to Canada in 1991, where she earned a master's degree from the University of Calgary. Her debut novel, *Tamarind Mem*, was published in 1997.

Kim Thúy Ly Thanh, CQ (born 1968 in Saigon, South Vietnam) is a Canadian writer originally from Vietnam. She won the Governor General's Award for French-language fiction in 2010 for her debut novel *Ru*. When Thúy was ten years old, she and her family were among the more than one million Vietnamese boat people who fled the country's communist regime after the fall of Saigon in 1975. They spent four months at a refugee camp in Malaysia run by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees before being selected for refugee status by a Canadian delegation due to her parents' French-language proficiency. Thúy and her family arrived in Granby, in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, in late 1979 and later settled in Montreal.

Rohinton Mistry, born on July 3, 1952, in Bombay, India, is a Canadian author whose writings delve into the everyday lives of Indian Parsis, who are descendants of Persian Zoroastrians. Mistry's writing style is characterized by its impactfulness, clarity,

and humor. He belongs to a Parsi family, and after earning a degree in science and economics from the University of Bombay (now Mumbai), he moved to Canada in 1975. In the early 1980s, he enrolled at the University of Toronto to study English and philosophy. Mistry's writing career began when he won the university's literary competition two years in a row. He gained wider recognition after winning the Canadian Fiction Magazine's annual Patrons Prize in 1985. His collection of short stories, *Stories from Firozsha Baag* (1987; also published as *Swimming Lessons and other Stories from Firozsha Baag*), was well-received by both critics and general readers for its insights into the complex lives of the Parsi residents of Firozsha Baag, an apartment complex in Mumbai. Mistry's debut novel, *Such a Long Journey* (1991; adapted into a film in 1998), is a detailed story that revolves around a benevolent bank clerk's family and friends set in India during the turbulent times of domestic upheaval and war with Pakistan in 1971. The book received several awards, including the Governor-General's Award, the W.H. Smith/Books in Canada First Novel Award, and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best Book.

Neil Pasricha, an advocate of positivity and simple pleasures, is a Canadian author, entrepreneur, podcaster, and public speaker. He was born on September 17, 1979, and is well-known for his global bestsellers, including *The Book of Awesome series* and *The Happiness Equation*. Pasricha is also a renowned speaker, and his TEDx talk, "The 3 A's of Awesome," has received over 3 million views to date, ranking as the 10th most inspiring TEDx talk. He has sold over 1 million books, and his book and TED talk are based on his blog, 1000 Awesome Things, which has won three Webby Awards and was included in PC Magazine's list of top websites and blogs in 2009 and 2010.

Pasricha was born to a Hindu family in Oshawa, Ontario. His mother hails from Nairobi, Kenya, while his father is from Amritsar, India, and he has one sister. Pasricha attributes his fascination with the world to his immigrant parents and their perspective of discovering everything for the first time in Canada. In his TED Talk, he explains how his father would marvel at the small stickers on fruits and vegetables. Pasricha studied at Queen's University and Harvard University.

Maria Qamar, a well-known artist and author of the book *Trust No Aunt*, gained fame for her Hatecopy paintings created in Montreal for the Wall Painting Celebration 2022. Qamar was born in Karachi, Pakistan to a father from Bangladesh and a mother from Gujarat, India, both of whom are chemists. She grew up exposed to Bengali and Gujarati cultures. When she was nine years old, her family emigrated to Ontario, briefly living in Scarborough before settling in Mississauga where she spent the rest of her childhood. Qamar faced discrimination and bullying against South Asian children in her school, especially after the September 11 attacks. She is recognized for her satirical approach, which explores the blend of South Asian and Canadian culture.

M. G. Vassanji is a Tanzanian-Canadian novelist, born in Kenya in 1950 to parents of Indian origin. He spent his childhood in Tanzania, where he attended school before moving to the United States to attend university. After completing his education, Vassanji worked as a research associate and a nuclear physicist in Canada. In the 1980s, he turned to writing, and his first novel, *The Gunny Sack*, was published in 1989. Vassanji's writing is known for exploring the themes of migration, identity, and cultural displacement. He has won numerous awards for his work, including the Giller Prize for his novel *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* in 2003. Vassanji's novels often draw

upon his own experiences as a member of the Indian diaspora in Africa, exploring the complex relationships between communities and individuals in a rapidly changing world.

Sri Lankan Canadian writers are a significant part of the Canadian literary scene, contributing diverse perspectives and narratives. Michael Ondaatje is a celebrated Canadian author who was born in Sri Lanka and immigrated to Canada in 1962. Ondaatje's works often explore themes of identity, displacement, and the immigrant experience. He is best known for his novel *The English Patient*, which won the Booker Prize in 1992 and was later adapted into an Academy Award-winning film. The novel tells the story of a critically burned man, a Canadian nurse, and a Sikh sapper who are brought together in an Italian villa during World War II.

In addition to *The English Patient*, Ondaatje has written numerous other novels, poetry collections, and works of non-fiction. His works often draw on his own experiences as an immigrant and explore the complexities of identity in a multicultural society. Ondaatje has received numerous awards and honors for his contributions to Canadian literature, including the Governor General's Award and the Giller Prize. His works have helped to shape Canadian literature and have provided a voice for immigrant communities in Canada.

Sharon Bala, a three-time recipient of Newfoundland and Labrador's Arts and Letters award, is a celebrated Canadian author. Her debut novel, *The Boat People*, was a finalist for Canada Reads 2018 and the 2018 Amazon Canada First Novel Award, and it has been translated into French, Arabic, and Turkish. The novel won the 2015 Percy Janes First Novel Award for unpublished manuscripts and was published by McClelland and Stewart and Doubleday in January 2018. *The Boat People* is also part of Penguin Random House's One World, One Book campaign, receiving international recognition.

Additionally, the book won the Harper Lee Prize for Legal Fiction and was selected for the 2015 Fresh Fish Award for Emerging Writers and the 2019 Thomas Head Raddall Award.

Bala's short fiction has also garnered recognition. Her story *Butter Tea at Starbucks* won the 2017 Journey Prize, and her story *Miloslav* was long listed for the 2017 National Magazine Award for Fiction. Her work has been published in various literary journals, including *Hazlitt*, *Grain*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *Riddle Fence*, *Room*, *Prism International*, *Joyland*, and *The New Quarterly*, as well as in the anthology *Racket: New Writing from Newfoundland*. Bala's writing often explores themes of immigration, displacement, and belonging, drawing from her own experiences as a child of Sri Lankan immigrants growing up in Canada.

One another such writer is Ru Freeman, whose debut novel *A Disobedient Girl* was published in 2009. The book explores themes of love, loss, and identity through the story of a young Sri Lankan woman named Latha. Freeman's writing is known for its vivid imagery and ability to transport readers to Sri Lanka. In addition to her work as a novelist, Freeman is also a prolific essayist and activist, working to raise awareness about human rights issues in Sri Lanka.

Another Sri Lankan Canadian writer is David Chariandy, whose debut novel *Soucouyant* was published in 2007. The book is a haunting exploration of memory, identity, and family history, set against the backdrop of Scarborough, Ontario. Chariandy's writing is known for its lyrical prose and its ability to capture the complexities of the immigrant experience. In addition to his work as a novelist, Chariandy is also a professor of English at Simon Fraser University, where he teaches

courses on Canadian literature and critical race theory. His most recent novel, *Brother*, was shortlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize in 2017.

Das Tharmathurai, a man who found his calling, had a challenging start. Despite almost failing his grade 12 English writing class, he never considered becoming a writer. Nevertheless, in July 2019, more than thirty years after leaving Sri Lanka, he published *The Sadness of Geography: My life as a Tamil Exile*, a memoir that chronicles his struggles during the long and brutal Sri Lankan civil war and its aftermath. Tharmathurai bares his soul to the reader, sharing his harrowing journey in a profoundly candid manner, while emphasizing that "hate is a formidable foe."

Tharmathurai was born and raised in Sangkaththaanai, a small town in the Jaffna Region in the northern part of Sri Lanka. At the age of 18, in 1985, he fled the war-torn country, leaving his family behind in search of a better life. His journey took him to Germany, where he was transported across borders to France to reunite with his older brother. In an attempt to travel to Canada with a fake passport, he was caught and sent to jail. Fortunately, his brother was able to bail him out, and his next stop was the United Kingdom. Tharmathurai was fortunate the second time around and arrived in Canada in 1986 with another fake passport.

Devakanthan, who currently resides in Toronto, was forced into exile due to the Sri Lankan civil war. He is a prolific writer of essays, short stories, and novels, and remains an active member of the Toronto Tamil literary community. His work has gained international recognition, with readers and scholars studying his works both in his homeland and among the diaspora. The quintet of novels titled *The Prison of Dreams* is an epic exploration of the ethnic tensions in Sri Lanka, focusing on the marginalization of

the Tamil minority and the trauma of civil war and exile. The first volume of the quintet, *Sacred Army*, was awarded the Tamil Nadu Government's "Novel of the Year."

Another notable Sri Lankan-Canadian writer is Shyam Selvadurai's sister, Suchitra Selvadurai, who is a poet and literary critic. Her works have been published in various literary journals and anthologies, and she has won several awards for her poetry. Having been born in 1965 in Colombo, Sri Lanka to a Tamil father and a Sinhala mother, Shyam Selvadurai holds a unique position among the group of writers. At the age of 19, he left to Toronto in 1984 due to the Sri Lankan civil war. His father, David Selvadurai, was a tennis coach who has played and won the Davis cup for Sri Lanka. He has also done wildlife safaris in the Sri Lankan jungle. His mother, Christine, was a medical graduate. Selvadurai, himself is of mixed Sinhalese and Tamil heritage, have been educated in Sinhala language until him and his family immigrated to Canada during a riot. He pursued his education in creative writing and theatre, earning a BFA from York University in Canada and an MFA in creative writing from the University of British Columbia. Selvadurai's work predominantly centers on the themes of immigration and displacement, highlighting the political and cultural differences between Sri Lanka and Canada.

Upon moving to Canada, Selvadurai came to identify his sexuality and began writing about his experiences as a homosexual. Through his work, he aimed to raise awareness of his identity and the challenges he faced in coming to terms with it. Mostly of his writing is about immigration, sexuality and refugee. Selvadurai brings out mixed ethnicity, gay identity in his novel. As an immigrant writer, he brings out the experiences and the effect he has on his home land. The cultural in between ness, dual inheritance is

the major theme of his works. Bringing out gay theme in the novel to talk about his own identity. Westernization and modernity play major role.

Even though as an immigrant from Sri Lanka, he feels better to be in Canada, which improved his political mindset, identifying his identity. Exposing local audience to writers about the problems of Palestine and South Africa. Even though it has a theme of sexuality and dislocation, he also focuses on the Buddhist philosophy. Talking about Buddhist philosophy doesn't mean following cultures but accepting it. The trauma faced during immigrating and feeling alienated in their own country.

Shyam Selvadurai 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 in troubled times (*The New York Times*).

This is a book review featured in *The New York Times* which structures upon skills of Shyam Selvadurai as a writer.

Selvadurai's debut novel, *Funny Boy*, was released in 1994 and published in both Canada and Sri Lanka. The book received critical acclaim, winning the WHSmith Books in Canada First Novel Award as well as the Lambda Literary Award in the US.

Structured as a series of six chapters, each representing a year of the 1983 riots, the book is dedicated to Selvadurai's parents, who struggled to provide him with a better life.

Selvadurai wrote screenplay for the movie *Funny Boy*, and won the Canadian Screen award.

The film *Funny Boy* was broadcast in Netflix internationally in the countries like UK, USA, Canada and Australia. Shyam Selvadurai brings autobiographical elements to his stories to bring out the realness to the novel. He mainly focuses on the theme of

immigrant literature like dislocation, the refugee experience, trauma, social responsibility and others. Despite doing theatre, he loves to write fiction. Through his stories he wants to bring out the tradition of immigrant writer. Writing about cultural differences, language and challenging of bringing the sexuality in 1980s.

The deeply moving first novel by Selvadurai, although not autobiographical, is inspired by his experiences as a gay man growing up in Sri Lanka during the height of the conflict between the Buddhist Sinhala majority and the Hindu Tamil minority in the 1970s and early 1980s. It is set in the mannered, luxurious world of upper middle class Tamils in Sri Lanka.

A war between Sri Lankan government and LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), for a separate nation claimed many lives. Arjie a 14 year old boy is the major character and the story revolves around him. He brings the government, political issues, queer youth, racism and carries the story and problem faced by Sinhala Tamil. The novel is about Tamil boy's struggle to negotiate life in Sinhala- dominated Colombo. Arjie Chelvaratnam likes playing bride-ride with his female relative and dressing up in a sari to playing cricket. He gets ejected from the world of the girls when the adults catch him participating in this innocent fun. As a lonely outsider, he bonds with several sympathetic adults, whose own journeys and struggles show Arjie the challenges of following his heart. As the book goes on, civic unrest and tensions intensify, with disastrous repercussions for Arjie's family and their safe environment. As the actual longings of the human heart are repeatedly challenged against the way things are, the transition from the bright simplicity of childhood into the more finely tinted world of adults with its secrets, its injustices, and its capacity for violence is a remarkable one.

While Selvadurai doesn't obviously address issues of lesbian sexuality, his second original *Cinnamon Gardens*, published in 1999, sends equal stories to connect the mistreatment of ladies with that of gay men. His second novel, *Cinnamon Gardens*, was published in the UK, USA, and Canada and translated into nine languages. Set during the 1920s in the all-around obeyed rural areas of (what was then) Ceylon, the clever uncovered the smothering similarity that is the cost of acknowledgment in the well-off regions of Cinnamon Gardens. As written by Asoka Bandarage in her book *The Separatist Conflict In Sri Lanka: Terrorism, Ethnicity, Political Economy*: "Tamil separatist sentiments had first become evident when the majority status that the Ceylon Tamil enjoyed in the Legislative Council was threatened in 1920. (38)

This "richly rewarding novel"(Sunday Times UK) set in 1920s Sri Lanka during the turmoil final years of colonial rule. It takes the reader behind the lavish gardens and polished exteriors of the elite who live in *Cinnamon Gardens*, a wealthy suburb of Colombo, to reveal a world of shattered families, conflicted passions, and lives ruined by class hatred. There are two main characters in the book. Annalukshmi, a passionate young schoolteacher and early feminist, who is caught between her family's expectations that she get married and her own desire for a more independent life. Then there is her uncle Balendran, whose luxurious lifestyle is turned upside down by Richard, a former flame who has returned to England. Their awkward meeting worsens tensions with Balendran's strong father and endangers all he has worked so hard to achieve in his current life. The book examines past and contemporary religious, political, historical, and cultural issues that shaped Sri Lanka's future. However, it effectively captures the grief, annoyance, and despair of married homosexual men—a problem that is all too prevalent in many parts of the world.

Observing the relevance of the region portrayed in the novel, Minoli Salgado writes in his book *Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place*,

The central characters of the novel are all urban, anglicised comprador Tamils who live in the most affluent residential part of Colombo.

Selvadurai's meticulous mapping of the area and his careful historicisation reveal not only that this novel is intended to inform and elucidate those who are unfamiliar with this region and period of Sri Lanka (making it readily accessible to western readers), but also that it is intended to be in alignment with realist perspective. (124)

Selvadurai's third novel, *Swimming in the Monsoon Ocean*, was published in 2005, and focused on Youthful Grown-ups. His book *Swimming in the Monsoon* was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award and is the winner of the Lambda Literary Award in the US, the Canadian Library Association Book of the Year Award and Silver Winner in the Young Adult Category of Fore Word Magazine's Book of the Year Award. He served curator for the Galle Literary Festival for 2 years. Set in 1980 Sri Lanka, the original narratives a fourteen-year-old Sri Lankan kids becoming hopelessly enamored with his meeting Canadian cousin. Amrith's storm tossed infatuation is played out against a school production of Othello, and the play's strong subject of envy gives the scenery to the teen's apprehension. Selvadurai investigates the aggravation and thrill of first love with strange clearness and humor. *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* was a finalist for Canada's most prestigious literary award, the Governor General's Awards, in the category of children's literature. It was honored with a Lambda Literary Award in the same category. This book *Swimming in the Monsoon* was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award and is the winner of the Lambda Literary Award in the US, the Canadian Library Association Book

of the Year Award and Silver Winner in the Young Adult Category of Fore Word Magazine's Book of the Year Award. He served curator for the Galle Literary Festival for 2 years.

In 1980, monsoon season has begun in Sri Lanka. Amrith, a fourteen-year-old, is involved in the activity of the happy, prosperous home where he is being raised by his lively Auntie Bundle and compassionate Uncle Lucky. He makes an effort to block out memories of the "before," when his devoted mother was still alive. Amrith's holiday plans don't look very promising: in addition to learning to write at Uncle Lucky's tropical fish shop, he wants to appear in his school's production of Othello. Amrith's planned existence is then ruined by his cousin's unexpected arrival from Canada. He discovers that he is falling for the Canadian boy. The drama in which Amrith finds himself is set against the backdrop of Othello, a play with a powerful subject of disastrous jealousy.

*Mansions of the Moon* was published on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2022. Shyam Selvadurai introduces us to Yasodhara, a woman of great energy and intelligence who is married to her cousin Siddhartha Gautama, an extremely clever and politically aware young man who will later become "the enlightened one" or the Buddha, in this vast, at once epic and intimate work. *Mansions of the Moon* follows the couple from their early years of love and marriage to the terrible turmoil that overcomes them both as Siddhartha's spiritual calling takes over and the marriage bond completely breaks down. Finally, Yasodhara is compelled to consider what type of life an old Indian woman—even one as well-born as herself—could lead if her husband deserted her. She have a road she can follow to achieve her own kind of enlightenment.

Award-winning author Shyam Selvadurai recreates India in the sixth century B.C., capturing every interesting detail as well as the tremendous intellectual and spiritual

revolution that shaped human thought at the time and whose concepts are still relevant today. Selvadurai also depicts the complex web of relationships, family, and power that surrounds a unique marriage as well as the exceptional woman who, up until this point, has remained a shadowy figure in history. An engaging, vivid, and exciting display of literary imagination is *Mansions of the Moon*.

*Many Roads Through Paradise: An Anthology of Sri Lankan Literature* is edited by Selvadurai. In this collection, Shyam Selvadurai compiles the best poetry and fiction from Sri Lanka. This exquisitely crafted anthology will give a rich sense of Sri Lanka's history, its people, and the stories they have to tell. It includes writers from the Sinhala and Tamil diaspora of the 1950s as well as contemporary writers. The stories range from those of love and longing to those of brutality and death. This anthology on Sri Lankan literature traces a long path from Martin Wickramasinghe's *Gamperaliya* (1944), the first modern Sinhala novel, to the poetry of Puthuvai Ratnathurai, the LTTE's official bard who was one of the thousands of people who vanished after the end of the civil war in 2009.

*Story-Wallah* is a short story collection. As Shyam Selvadurai writes in his introduction:

The stories jostle up against each other ... The effect is a marvelous cacophony that reminds me of ... one of those South Asian bazaars, a bargaining, carnival-like milieu. The goods on sale in this instance being stories hawked by story-traders: story-wallahs.

With their stories, some of the best fiction writers in the world—Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Michael Ondaatje, Monica Ali, etc.—sell their works from various South Asian diaspora locations, creating a virtual map of the globe. Selvadurai also served as editor

for the anthology *Story-Waala: A Celebration of South Asian Fiction*, which was published in the US and Canada. Stories in *Story-Wallah* cover a wide range of experiences, such as a honeymoon in Sri Lanka, the struggles of a Bangladeshi refugee in England, life on a sugar plantation in Trinidad, and an Indian family's attempts to arrange a marriage for their disobedient daughter. These stories explore universal themes of identity, culture, and home.

His fourth novel *The Hungry Ghosts* was published in April 2013 in Sri Lanka, India and Canada. According to Buddhist mythology, if a person has too many desires in their lifetime, they may reincarnate as "hungry ghosts"—spirits with stomachs so big they can never be satisfied. By performing good deeds and generating positive karma, living relatives have a responsibility to release those who are destined for this fate. In his expansive new book, Shyam Selvadurai, writes about a powerful Sri Lankan matriarch whose cunning ways, insatiable desire for land, homes, money, and power, and tragic blindness to the human needs of those around her parallel the volatile political situation of her war-torn nation.

Shivan Rassiah, the beloved grandson who is of mixed Tamil and Sinhalese origin and who also—much to his grandmother's dismay—grows from a lovely youngster to a striking gay man, is the main character of the book. As the story begins in the present, Shivan, a Sri Lankan-born Canadian, is getting ready to fly back to Colombo to save his ailing and elderly grandmother from her once-proud mansion and bring her to Toronto to live out her remaining years. But throughout the night and into the early morning hours of his departure, Shivan struggles with his own hunger and is haunted by persistent ghosts of his own making. *The Hungry Ghosts* is a beautifully written tale about money, family, and the far-reaching impacts of the past. It demonstrates how ethnic, political, and sexual

divides have the power to repeatedly tear apart a nation and the human heart unless the ghosts are fed and set free.

Shyam Selvadurai's writing style is characterized by its vivid descriptions, emotional depth, and an exploration of the complexities of identity and belonging. His works often contain powerful imagery that immerses the reader in the setting and atmosphere of his narratives. Selvadurai's prose is both poignant and introspective, delving into the interior lives of his characters and exploring their personal struggles with issues such as family, sexuality, and cultural identity. He uses a blend of English and Tamil words and phrases, creating a distinct sense of cultural hybridity and reflecting the multilingual nature of Sri Lankan society. Overall, Selvadurai's writing is a powerful reflection on the human condition and the search for a sense of self in a complex and changing world.

Selvadurai's characters are often complex and multi-dimensional, reflecting the diverse cultural and social backgrounds of Sri Lanka. His works feature characters who struggle with issues such as family expectations, societal norms, and personal identity. Selvadurai has a particular focus on characters who are marginalized or oppressed due to their sexuality, ethnicity, or class, and he delves deeply into their experiences and perspectives. His characters are often introspective and contemplative, reflecting the internal struggles that accompany their external challenges. Through his characters, Selvadurai explores themes of love, loss, identity, and belonging, offering a nuanced and compassionate portrayal of the human experience in all its diversity and complexity.

Shyam Selvadurai's works are often centered around the themes of identity, belonging, and cultural conflict. His narratives explore the complex ways in which individuals navigate the competing demands of family, society, and personal desires,

often in the context of Sri Lanka's complex social and political history. Selvadurai also frequently examines the experiences of marginalized or oppressed groups, particularly queer individuals and those from minority ethnic or religious communities. Through his writing, he offers a nuanced and insightful commentary on the ways in which cultural identity and societal expectations shape individual lives, and the tensions that arise when these expectations conflict with personal desires and beliefs. Overall, Selvadurai's work is a powerful exploration of the human experience and the challenges of navigating the complexities of culture, identity, and belonging.

Selvadurai's novels often feature two distinct settings - Sri Lanka and Canada - which serve as a powerful backdrop to his stories. In *Funny Boy*, Selvadurai evokes the sights, sounds, and cultural traditions of Sri Lanka in the 1970s and 1980s, portraying a society in the midst of significant political and social change. The lush landscapes, bustling markets, and vibrant festivals of the island are vividly brought to life, providing a richly evocative backdrop to the struggles and aspirations of his characters. At the same time, Selvadurai's portrayal of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka highlights the tensions and divisions within the country, and the challenges faced by marginalized groups. In contrast, Selvadurai's depiction of Canada in his later novel *The Hungry Ghosts* reflects a more urban, multicultural society, where the characters grapple with issues of identity, belonging, and displacement. Through his exploration of both Sri Lanka and Canada, Selvadurai illuminates the complex interplay of culture, politics, and personal experience that shape the lives of his characters.

Shyam Selvadurai's literary works, particularly his novels *Funny Boy* and *The Hungry Ghosts*, have been the subject of considerable scholarly attention due to their exploration of themes such as identity, sexuality, and displacement within the context of

the Sri Lankan Civil War. Selvadurai's portrayal of the Tamil community and his ability to convey the complexities of Sri Lankan society, both before and during the conflict, have garnered critical acclaim. However, Selvadurai's treatment of the war and its aftermath has also sparked debates regarding the representation of politically charged histories in fiction. This review of literature will examine the key debates and insights that have emerged from critical discussions of Selvadurai's works, with a particular focus on his portrayal of the Sri Lankan Civil War and its impact on Tamil identity and culture.

The article entitled "*Negotiating Cultural Hegemony in Shyam Selvadurai's The Hungry Ghosts*" discusses the intricate portrayal of the cultures of two nations and the stark contrast between the opulence of wealth and the profound depths of poverty in Sri Lanka as presented in Selvadurai's novel. Similarly, the scholarly article titled "*The Betrayals of Neoliberalism in Shyam Selvadurai's Funny Boy*" examines the interplay between neoliberal economic policies and the Sri Lankan civil war, which was fueled by conflicts surrounding ethnic nationalism, homophobia, and other social forces.

The interview entitled "*Narratives of Home: Interrogating Selvadurai's Representation of Home in Funny Boy, Cinnamon Gardens and The Hungry Ghosts*" delves into Selvadurai's depictions of homing desires, love-hate relationships, and the intricate connections with Sri Lanka in his novels. The interview explores the complexities of Selvadurai's representations of home and the diverse emotional responses it elicits, which range from nostalgia and longing to alienation and estrangement.

The scholarly article titled "*Daughters in Sri Lankan Diaspora: War, Violence and Women in Shyam Selvadurai's The Hungry Ghosts*" by Soumi Goswami discusses the intricate relationship between mothers and daughters, the emotional violence that ensues, and the portrayal of three generations of a Sinhala family in Selvadurai's novel.

The article delves into the complexities of the diaspora experience, and the impact of war and violence on the lives of women, specifically on their familial relationships.

The article entitled "*The Impossibility of Leaving: Queer Migration and Shyam Selvadurai's The Hungry Ghosts*" sheds light on the contextual and political factors that inform Selvadurai's representation of queer migration in the novel. Building on the themes explored in previous scholarship, the article examines the interplay between mythological notions of the promise of the West and sexual desires, which underpin the struggles and journeys of the characters. The article adds to the discourse on Selvadurai's representation of the diaspora experience and the impact of sexual identity on migration.

The interview titled "*Home, Ethnicity, and Sexuality in Shyam Selvadurai's The Hungry Ghosts*" explores how Shivan, a brown sexual minority, seeks refuge in Toronto and is perceived as exotic. Meanwhile, in the interview "*Tamils at the Crossroad of Globalization: Representing Tamil Diaspora Lives in Shyam Selvadurai's The Hungry Ghosts*," the focus is on the impact of economic or political migration on Tamil lives, highlighting the upper-middle-class status of Tamil characters and the differences in their stories.

Gayatri Gopinath's article "*Ambivalence in the site of authority: Desire and difference in Funny Boy*" examines the intersection of privilege, gender, and post-colonial struggles in Shyam Selvadurai's novel. Gopinath argues that the novel challenges traditional notions of visibility, revelation, and sexual subjectivity in a post-post-colonial context, highlighting the complexities of desire and difference within a male-dominated, privileged class.

In the interview conducted by Jeff Colvin, Shyam Selvadurai discusses the political situation in Sri Lanka, the challenges of being an immigrant and feeling

alienated in one's own country, and the idea that following Buddhism does not necessarily equate to following cultural traditions. During the launch of *The Hungry Ghosts* in London, in conversation with Minoli Salgoda, Selvadurai emphasizes the significance of bringing autobiographical elements into his stories to render them more authentic. The themes of cultural hybridity and dual inheritance are central to his works.

In a scholarly interview titled *An Exploration of Greys*, author Shyam Selvadurai discusses his efforts to introduce his books to readers in Sri Lanka and his aim to enhance the quality of education in the country. During the interview, titled *The Hungry Ghosts*, Selvadurai explores the experiences of immigrant writers and the complexities of cultural differences and language. He also highlights the challenges of addressing sexuality in the 1990s. In the scholarly blog titled *Deepa Mehta on 'Funny Boy': It's a Story About the Oppression of Others*, the director discusses the challenges of adapting a book into a movie and the profound impact of Arjie's love on his life. In the scholarly review titled "Amitav Ghosh's Review of *Penguin for Funny Boy: An Extraordinarily Powerful, Deeply Touching Novel*", the author explores the theme of racism prevalent in society.

In two scholarly articles, the first titled *Pigs Can Fly: Sexuality, Race, and the Geographies of Difference in Shyam Selvadurai's 'Funny Boy'* and the second titled *Breaking the Narrative Ties That Bind in Shyam Selvadurai's 'Funny Boy'*, the authors explore various themes in the novel. The first article focuses on the struggles of a Tamil boy living in a Sinhala-dominated Colombo as he navigates his sexuality and identity. The second article delves into the protagonist's political activism, exploration of queer youth, and encounters with racism, as well as the negotiation between individual desires and the collective public body.

In the article, *Writing Sri Lanka, reading resistance: Shyam Selvadurai's Funny Boy and A. Sivanadam's Where Memory Dies* by Dennis Austin's, his observation on Sri Lankan literature, the relationship between historical events, historiography and literary fiction. The author analyzes two works of literature, Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* and A. Sivanadam's *Where Memory Dies*, to demonstrate how they engage with the historical context of Sri Lanka. The article explores how both works address themes such as gender, sexuality, and identity, and how they resist dominant narratives of Sri Lankan history. Additionally, the article discusses how the works illustrate the complexities of Sri Lankan identity, with its multiple ethnic and linguistic communities. Overall, the article offers a fascinating perspective on the intersection of history and literature in Sri Lanka.

While the scholarly articles on Sri Lankan civil war and sexuality provide valuable insights into the cultural and political landscape of Sri Lanka, there appears to be a research gap regarding the intersection of war and its consequences, specifically migration. While migration is a key issue in the aftermath of any conflict, few studies have explored this topic in the context of Sri Lanka. Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap by examining the experiences of Sri Lankan refugees who have migrated to other countries in the aftermath of the civil war. The study seeks to explore how the war and its aftermath have shaped the migration experiences of Sri Lankan refugees, including their sense of identity and belonging in their new countries. By filling this research gap, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the long-term effects of conflict and displacement on individuals and communities.

The Sri Lankan civil war was a protracted conflict that lasted for over two decades, from 1983 to 2009. The war had its roots in the tensions between the country's Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority. The LTTE, a militant group fighting for an

independent Tamil state in the north and east of the country, waged a brutal guerrilla war against the Sri Lankan government. The conflict resulted in a significant loss of life, with estimates ranging from 70,000 to 100,000 people killed. The war not only affected Sri Lanka but had broader regional and global implications, as it involved international actors such as India, Pakistan, and the United States. Moreover, the conflict generated a significant refugee crisis, with over a million people displaced from their homes. Many Sri Lankan refugees fled to other countries, including India, Australia, and the United States, in search of safety and a better life. The Sri Lankan civil war had a profound and lasting impact on the country and its people, as well as on the wider region and the world.

In today's political climate, marked by the rise of populism and nationalism, the risk of civil war breaking out in different parts of the world is ever present. It is important to recognize that civil wars have a devastating impact on human lives and communities, as they often result in widespread violence, displacement, and destruction. Civil wars often lead to the breakdown of social and political institutions, as well as the erosion of human rights and democracy. Moreover, the refugee crisis that follows in the aftermath of civil wars can have far-reaching and long-lasting consequences, as millions of people are forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in other countries. It is therefore crucial to take measures to prevent the outbreak of civil wars and to work towards peaceful resolution of conflicts. The international community must remain vigilant and engaged, providing support and resources to countries in crisis and working towards a more just and equitable world.

This scholarly examination delves into the Sri Lankan civil war and the imminent refugee crisis, with a focus on the works of Shyam Selvadurai, namely *Funny Boy* and *The Hungry Ghost*. The study takes into account the contemporary relevance and

implications of civil war and migration and seeks to analyze the impact of these issues on individuals and societies. Through a critical analysis of Selvadurai's literary works, this inquiry aims to gain insights into the representation of civil war and migration, as well as the intricate connections between race, sexuality, and politics. By doing so, the study intends to contribute to a deeper understanding of the potential of literature in engaging with these pressing issues in a transformative manner.

The present study focuses on the analysis of Shyam Selvadurai's novels *Funny Boy* and *The Hungry Ghost*, examining how they engage with the contemporary and socially relevant issues of civil war and migration. Specifically, the thesis aims to explore the challenges faced by individuals and communities in times of conflict and how these challenges impact human lives and societies. Through a close examination of Selvadurai's literary works, this study will investigate the intersections of sexuality, race, and politics, and critically examine the representation of these issues. The ultimate goal of this study is to contribute to a deeper understanding of civil war and migration as important social and political phenomena, and to explore the potential of literature to engage with these issues in transformative ways.

Introduction discusses about what literature is and how it evolved from century to century. Then it focuses on South Asian Immigrant Writers, their works and their style. Background of Civil war and the cause of the war, how Sri Lankan government faced the economic crisis and won the nation back from LTTE. It also discusses about Shyam Selvadurai's life, background, his writing style and his other works. Review of literature on selvadurai's fiction *The Hungry Ghosts* and *Funny Boy* is also explained.

In chapter 2, Identity Politics: Shivan's Journey, discusses about the fiction *The Hungry Ghosts* deals with the protagonist Shivan's journey as an immigrant to Canada

and the struggle he goes through the war in Sri Lanka. It further explains on their life as an immigrant in a different country and how they go through the mental trauma, struck with past memories. How Shivan and his family immigrate to Canada and they live in a surroundings and each one of the family is going through their own problems and suffer their own problems are discussed.

In chapter 3, *The Political and Personal Costs of War: An Analysis of Funny Boy*, discusses the Civil war and how it affects the life of Tamil people and homeless natives. Arjun Chelvaratnam(Arjie), the protagonist and his family gets affected by the riot and plans to leave Sri Lanka are explained. It also discusses about the family encounter with the riot.

Conclusion focuses on the immigration, the similarities between the selected fiction and the major theme of the both fiction. Moreover, findings through the discussion from each chapter and scope for further studies are discussed.

## Chapter II

### Identity Politics: Shivan's Journey

The impact of the Civil War on Sri Lanka is still irreplaceable. The Civil War was a conflict between the minority Tamil people and the Sri Lankan government. When the British gave independence to Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan government made their language the national language. In 1972, Ceylon became Sri Lanka, with Buddhism installed as a state religion. The conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE endured for almost thirty years. It is quite possibly the longest-running nationwide conflict in Asia. Generally known as the Tamil Tigers, the LTTE seeks a free state for the island's Tamil minority. Following a furious, drawn-out military hostility, the Sri Lankan government claimed in May 2009 that it had crushed the nonconformist gathering (*New York Times*) and killed its leader, Vellupillai Prabhakaran. However, the group may continue to carry out guerrilla-type attacks on the country. For lasting peace, experts say the government should find a political solution to the ethnic struggle between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils that have plagued the country since its independence. The European Union and Canada have joined the US, India, and Australia in designating the LTTE a terrorist organization, making it harder for the group to receive support from abroad. The nationwide conflict has killed almost 70,000, and watchdog groups have accused both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan military of major human rights violations, including kidnapping, extortion, and the use of child soldiers.

In *The Hungry Ghosts*, Selvadurai portrays the longing desire of his characters to return home. The love-hate relationship between Shivan and his grandmother may be symptomatic of Selvadurai's complex relationship with Sri Lanka. The book's central

theme is the Civil War, and the author focuses on how the Tamil minority people are affected by the war and feel like refugees in their own country. In an interview with Shyam Selvadurai by Jeff Colvin, Shyam don't believe there has ever been a period when he didn't anticipate includes the Civil War in one of his contemporary works. Even *Cinnamon Gardens*, a historical fiction he wrote, depicts the start of this battle in the 1920s. Shyam suppose the primary cause of this is that the civil war that compelled us to flee Sri Lanka and immigrate to Canada had a significant impact on both my personal life and the lives of his family and friends. Hence, politics has always been personal in that sense. Politics, in his opinion, is similar to salt. A story benefits from a little bit of flavor, but too much might ruin it. He's trying to say that one shouldn't make up scenarios or characters just to hector the reader. The emotional growth and goals of the character must be directly related to the Civil War. They must include it in their individual path.

In this book, Selvadurai discusses how Tamil people lived in Sri Lanka, leaving their country behind to live in a different one. *The Hungry Ghost* explores how people gave up the Tamil language to assimilate, losing their identity in their own country, and the challenges they faced during immigration. In Sri Lanka, Tamil people were always under threat because others did not want them in their country. People harbored hatred towards Tamils and wanted them to leave. Organizations were established to protect people from riots, but NGOs opposed the government, which failed to protect its people and was oblivious to the riots.

The main reason for the riots was the government's silence over the war and its disregard for the people. The war lasted for decades and ended in the twenty-first century. The oscillation between the present and the past highlights Sri Lanka's governmental issues intertwined with Buddhist stories. The past is a critical component of the book, and

the precepts of Buddhism are akin to the impacts of one's Karma's weight from a past life on their current life. The past follows the characters unless they make amends. An individual can only achieve salvation once they eliminate the baggage of past deeds. The narrative revolves around Shivan's family's journey to escape ethnic violence in the country. The story also portrays the predicament of Shivan Rassiah, a gay man unable to reconcile his lifestyle and identity, leaving him ultimately isolated.

According to Raju Ta, the narrator (Shivan) experiences the impact of globalization, which disrupts traditional ways of life and brings an increased presence of American influence in foreign markets. The narrator indulges in the fantasy of tourism, allowing himself to assume various social roles in an exotic setting (90). Shivan who immigrates to Canada suffers from new surroundings, people and he takes time to adapt to its culture. The novel's interpretation extends to the aftermath of the ethnic clash as it portrays the consequences of ethnic violence. Due to the conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, different nations can interfere in the country's political battle. As depicted in the novel, India intervenes in the struggle for its benefit, worsening the situation. The story also reflects the role of JVP, government oppression, and LTTE in the country's corruption. As shown in the novel, India initially enters the country as the protector of the Tamil Tigers. However, it later becomes a common enemy of both Tamils and Sinhalese and is, therefore, forced to withdraw from the country.

Selvadurai's work reveals the social aspects of Canada with its diverse community, highlighting the Tamil community's upper-middle-class status and the differences within it. *The Hungry Ghosts* explores the complex relationships between mothers and daughters as they struggle with their differences and emotional turmoil. The novel also portrays the life story of three generations of a Sinhala family. The book traces

the journey of three female characters - Shivan's grandmother, mother, and sister - who are victims and products of the patriarchal structures that dominate Sinhala and Tamil societies. In an article *Home, Ethnicity and Sexuality in Shyam Selvadurai's The Hungry Ghosts* Rajorshi Das, all three of the significant ladies in the protagonist's life, who together make up his biological family, are tough to get along with. Shivan's mother rejects his sexuality as an illness that "would have strangled you at birth," (129) whilst his sister Renu accepts it on the grounds that he too is a victim of the patriarchal regime. His difficult connection with his mother may be traced back to his early years, when he refers to her as "Mother Fairest" for supporting his sister (42) despite the fact that he was lavished with attention from his grandmother at the time. Shivan claims that his concern about Aacho is what led him to decide to return to Sri Lanka, but it appears that this trip will instead be about his search for the perfect partner.

The protagonist, Shivan, is invested in the mythological promises of the West, hoping it will offer him sexual freedom. However, he needs to acknowledge the contextual and political specificities around him. Shivan finds refuge in Toronto as a brown sexual minority, treated as an exotic other. The story is set against the backdrop of the contemporary Sinhala-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka. In the article, *A "Just Hearing": Reading Shyam Selvadurai's The Hungry Ghosts as Counter to State Practice* Arun Nedra Rodrigo, characters in *The Hungry Ghosts* seek to give their pasts, and by extension their presents, the meanings that statist violence has thus far taken away from them by straddling the actual and the ghostly worlds. They discover authority, responsibility, and a version of "justice" that is unconstrained by the state's legal procedures in these worlds of meaning. The form and content of *The Hungry Ghosts* allow the refugee to enter the body politic as bios through a complex engagement with

trauma and truth claims that counter the self-endorsing practices of the state, in contrast to the refugee narratives elicited by the state, under constraint and compulsion.

The protagonist of the story, Shivan Rassaiah, faces several challenges such as riots, relocation to a different country, and struggles with his identity. Shivan was born to a Tamil father and a Sinhala mother and lived with his sister until their father's death. Being of mixed ethnicity, he struggled to choose his identity and even learned Sinhalese to avoid future problems. After his father's death, they moved into his grandmother's house. The story revolves around Shivan, who immigrates to Canada with his mother and sister after the 1983 riots. It portrays the challenges faced by a homosexual Sinhala Tamil man in Sri Lanka. Shivan also experiences the cultural, linguistic, and political differences between Canada and Sri Lanka. Initially, he struggles to stay at his grandmother's house, and later, he faces difficulties staying in Sri Lanka due to the escalating conflict between the Tamil Tigers and the government.

In the story, Shivan reminisces about his past in Sri Lanka and his time spent with his grandmother. He reflects on his thirteenth birthday when his grandmother gifted him a bicycle and introduced him to her property. Shivan discovers his grandmother's secret account in an English bank and visits her other properties. His grandmother's advocate, Sunil Maama, helps her manage her account and property. Shivan's grandmother wants him to learn about her schedule and take care of the property. Shivan also remembers the political turmoil in Sri Lanka during his childhood and the discrimination his Tamil father faced. Despite their fights, Shivan's parents always aimed to provide a better life for their children.

After moving into his grandmother's house, he has yet to talk to her. She eats food in her room and avoids them. Renu and Shivan are preparing for the entrance exam to get

into Colombo's prestigious school. Their grandmother sits near Shivan, notices his mistakes, and tries to correct them, but he doesn't fix them. Out of anger, she scolds him and says, "Look at this child" (34) and "Cow dung in his head" (34). At first, Shivan didn't have a good relationship with her, but later they started sharing a good bond rather than with his mother. Shivan's grandmother would buy books for him, but he would hide them from his mother because his mother was not happy that Shivan and his grandmother were getting close to each other. Shivan knows the political condition of his country; his life and his family's lives are in danger because of the rising riots between the Tamil Tigers and the government.

Shivan, who had no friends in school, suddenly becomes friends with Mili Jayasinghe and visits Mili's home in Cinnamon Gardens. Shivan knows that Mili wants to make Sri Lanka a better place. "Our very own Sri Lankan Gandhi. You will ride in a bullock cart, to show you are a humble man of the people. Women will let down their hair and swoon when you pass" (72). Shivan talks about Mili and how he wants to make a change in his motherland rather than leave his country for a better life. Shivan possesses knowledge regarding the political state of Sri Lanka, including his recollection of the 1977 disturbance which did not harm Colombo, despite other areas of the country being attacked. The loss of Tamil lives during this time strengthened the Tamil Tigers' resolve to fight for their own independent territory, and their actions evolved from attacking soldiers to robbing homes and ultimately increasing their use of suicide bombings. To protect the people from the Tamil Tigers, the government enacted the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which allowed for warrantless arrests in cases where the suspect's identity was unknown. In 1981, another clash between Tamil and Sinhala during a sports event sparked riots, which resurfaced again in 1983 when the Tamil Tigers began attacking

soldiers and police in Jaffna. In retaliation, some soldiers and Sinhalese mobs targeted Tamil-owned shops and destroyed their homes in Trincomalee. The Tamil Tigers also burned down the Jaffna train.

Since childhood, I had been aware of an escalating tension between the Sinhalese and Tamils. In 1977, riots Blared in part of the island, though Colombo remained unaffected. The loss of Tamil lives, homes and businesses only gave strength to the Tamil Tiger rebels and their fight for an independent homeland. As I grew into my teens, the rebels began to bomb state institutions, rob banks and kill policemen. (76)

Shivan's grandmother's community members informed them that 13 soldiers had been killed by the Tamil Tigers, and their bodies were interred in Kanaththa cemetery, which was located a mere ten-minute drive from Shivan's residence. Concurrently, Sinhala mobs set fire to Tamil-owned shops and houses along their street. In response, Shivan's grandmother tasked Chandralal with safeguarding their home from the approaching mobs. Chandralal promptly placed his golayas in front of the house to prevent any damage or destruction to the property:

And so for that week we stayed at home while the waves of violence crashed around us, then withdrew, only to surge forward again. We could not go out, and even avoided standing at the gate, fearing unfriendly neighbours or their servants might recall we were Tamil and inform the mobs (78).

The constant threat of violence and instability caused immense anxiety for Shivan's family. They were faced with the difficult decision of leaving their home, family, and friends to seek refuge in a foreign country. Despite the challenges associated

with emigrating, they ultimately believed it was the best choice to secure their future and protect their loved ones:

Sri Lanka is finished. It's time to get out. If so much rioting was caused by the death of thirteen soldiers, what is going to happen when twenty are killed?" My mother moved a ring up and down her finger. "And many more will be killed. This riot has only made the Tigers more powerful, more determined to get what they want. There is going to be a lot more violence. And Colombo Tamils are sitting ducks." She caressed my sister's arm. "Just think, Renu, you can go to a better university. One that isn't constantly shutting down because of student hartals. (82)

Shivan's grandmother expressed the view that Tamil people who leave Sri Lanka are more likely to have successful careers as doctors and lawyers, earning dollars instead of rupees, while Sinhalese children suffer from limited opportunities, unable to attend university due to frequent student strikes. She laments this disparity, saying, "While our Sinhalese children cannot even go to university with all the student hartals happening here. Those Tamils will end up doctors and lawyers making dollars, not useless rupees" (160). Her frustration and disappointment with the situation in Sri Lanka is evident, as is her envy for the perceived success and wealth of Tamils who have left the country.

The Sri Lankan civil war had a profound impact that extended beyond the two opposing sides. The conflict resulted in the loss of countless lives, shattered hopes, and destroyed wealth. The trauma and lasting impact of the war can be felt by individuals and communities throughout Sri Lanka, regardless of their affiliation. These themes are powerfully conveyed in the novel, which highlights the human cost of the conflict and the toll it took on the people of Sri Lanka. The characters in the novel are not immune to the

violence and destruction of the war, and their experiences illustrate the profound impact of war on all those caught in its wake. The author's portrayal of the war's effects on both sides of the conflict underscores the devastating consequences of civil war and the importance of seeking peaceful solutions to conflicts.

Emigration eventually becomes a harsh reality as individuals must flee Sri Lanka to escape the ongoing conflict. Shivan, from a young age, was aware of the ethnic tensions in the country, having knowledge of previous uprisings such as the 1977 riots. However, when Shivan turned eighteen, Sri Lanka faced yet another wave of violence, known as the 1983 riots, where brutality spread throughout the nation, resulting in the killing and displacement of Tamils by the government.

Shivan recollects:

During June and early July of 1983, when I was eighteen and about to take by A-level exams, the violence speeded up. Tamil Tigers frequently attacked soldiers and policemen; in return, more Tamil civilians were tortured and disappeared.(63)

As the situation in their country deteriorated, the brutality inflicted on ordinary citizens gradually intensified. Being Tamil, they lived in fear of losing their lives as the Sinhalese, with government support, were killing and driving Tamils away from the country. However, they were fortunate enough to have Daya, a Sinhalese individual, who was protecting them. Daya enrolled the grandmother's residence as a Sinhalese house, and Chandralal assisted Daya in safeguarding her children. Despite this, the riots had a profound psychological impact on the family. The 1983 riots made it clear to them that

Tamils had no future in Sri Lanka. The family's situation in the country represents the experience of millions of Tamil families at that time.

After a prolonged period, the riot eventually came to an end. However, the brutality and chaos left a lasting impact on the people's psyche. For Shivan, the prospect of emigration was now a source of comfort. When his friend Mili discussed the issue of displacement, he remained resolute. Mili viewed resettlement as a loss for the Sinhalese. As a member of a civil rights organization, Mili addressed Sinhalese individuals who were aware of the consequences of displacement and opposed discrimination. Shivan made a conscious decision to pursue his passion for English literature and found a better life overseas, leaving his home country of Sri Lanka. He was aware of the political tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities, which led to riots in various parts of the island in 1977. Although Colombo remained unscathed, the burning of Tamil homes prompted the Tamil Tigers to seek revenge against the government. These riots had a widespread impact on both Tamil and Sinhalese people, with trade declining and expenses skyrocketing, ultimately affecting the country's economy. The civil war not only disrupted the lives of citizens but also had a significant impact on the government's finances, "The government, under pressure from the World Bank and the IMF, had opened up the economy and devalued the rupee. A pound of chilies quadrupled in price while salaries remained the same" (76). When the riot started in parts of Sri Lanka, the economical price broke, and the government was already suffering.

Shivan's grandmother made arrangements with Chandralal to provide protection from the violent mob as the riots escalated. Fearing for his safety, Shivan contemplated leaving the country and suggested moving to Canada. Mili inquired about the well-being of their family and broached the subject of emigration. As the

riots persisted, the American and Canadian embassies offered immigration assistance to the affected Tamil community, which inspired Shivan to consider immigrating abroad. As observed in the book, "'Emigrate' 'Yes, don't you know? The American and Canadian embassies are offering to fast-track immigration for Tamils who want to Sri Lanka'." (68)

Upon hearing Mili's suggestion of immigration, Shivan becomes eager to leave Sri Lanka in search of a better life. He is so determined that he visits the Canadian High Commission and obtains the necessary paperwork for relocation. Shivan considers his mother's initial reluctance to leave the country, but ultimately convinces her when they both contemplate the long-term effects of conflict on their future. This, in turn, convinces Renu to also consider emigration as an option. He says, "Sri Lanka is finished. It's time to get out. . . Think, Renu, you can go to better universities. One that isn't constantly shutting down because of student hartals." (69)

Shivan engages in discussions with his mother regarding the prospect of migrating to Canada, resulting in the dissemination of the idea of leaving their homeland. Through a challenging process, they successfully acquire refugee status and embark on a journey to a foreign land, characterized by a distinct cultural, environmental, and societal landscape. Upon arrival, Shivan and his family experience a sense of security and elation, having found a new home in Canada.

Following their relocation to Canada, Shivan and his family enter a new chapter of their lives, which is portrayed in the second section of the book. The author utilizes a distinctive approach to commence each part of this section, featuring Shivan's efforts to organize the cluttered basement of his Toronto residence. While engaged in cleaning, Shivan reflects on his past experiences in both Sri Lanka and

Toronto. The mess he is addressing is a remnant of his recent migration. Initially, Shivan and his family stay with Hema's former schoolmate, Shireen Subramaniam, who welcomes them with feigned generosity, marking the commencement of their new life in Canada. The children are initially taken aback and restless by the unfamiliar customs and trends of their new home. However, they gradually acclimate to the new lifestyle. Shivan grapples with the foreign culture and populace as a refugee in Canada. Unlike in Sri Lanka, he finds it difficult to make friends in college and is compelled to work part-time to make ends meet. Moreover, the situation is particularly challenging for his mother, who must adapt to a drastically different way of life.

In an article by Soumi Goswami , *Narratives of home: Interrogating Selvadurai's Representation of Home in Funny Boy, Cinnamon Gardens, and The Hungry Ghosts* they receive no relief from their circumstances in the home that Shivan creates in Canada with his mother and sister, that idealized place of freedom. He becomes restless due to his forced living situation in a damp, dark cellar, his limited access to career prospects, and his poor socialization skills. His mother and sister Renu have less success than he does in forging friendships with other Sri Lankans living in Canada. The ties to one's own country are never entirely severed. As Shivan's grandmother suffers her first stroke, he is unable to resist its call and returns to Sri Lanka.

Shivan and his mother, Hema, were struggling to adjust to their new surroundings, while Shivan's sister Renu found solace in a new friend and spent time with them. Shivan accompanied his mother to the mall for shopping, and they eventually moved into a new house to start afresh. Upon immigrating to Canada, everything seemed foreign to him, and he had to discover his identity and start a new life. However, his past traumas caught up with him, making it challenging to move forward. While Canada

provided a sense of security, Shivan felt disillusioned and undervalued. Eventually, he had to return to Sri Lanka after learning of his grandmother's stroke, "Sunil Maama spoke, emphasizing each word: "Nobody can tell at the moment. Daya is in intensive care" (160).

Following his return to Canada, Shivan ceased all communication with his grandmother, refraining from responding to her letters. However, upon learning of her deteriorating condition, he succumbed to emotions and experienced a breakdown. Shivan grappled with a sense of self-discovery and underwent significant personal changes during this period, resulting in an altered persona. Shivan gains insight into the persistent conflict with his grandmother, realizing it will continue through multiple lifetimes unless he resolves it in this present life. He is willing to sacrifice his love for Michael to fulfill this task. Shivan understands the ultimate truth of Karma, where one cannot evade the consequences of their wrongdoings and must face them in this life or the next. The overarching message is to follow Buddha's advice of compassion to cleanse past resentments instead of seeking revenge.

The story of Shivan's mother, Hema, is one of heartbreak, loss, and confusion. Hema's role in her son's life is minimal, and she seems to struggle to connect with him on an emotional level. This lack of emotional connection becomes apparent when Shivan needs her the most, and she is absent from his life. Hema's life has been marked by significant challenges, starting with her decision to marry a Tamil man against her mother's wishes. Her marriage does not bring her the happiness she had hoped for, and when her husband dies, she is left alone to raise their two children. Unsure of what to do, Hema turns to her mother, Daya, for support. However, Daya

is less than welcoming, having experienced her own struggles as a young widow with a daughter.

Despite Daya's initial reluctance, Hema moves in with her, hoping to find the love and support she has always longed for from her mother. However, Hema still struggles to find her place in the world, raising her two children on her own while trying to provide them with a good education. She works hard, but her job keeps her busy, and she does not have as much time to devote to her children as she would like. As a mother, Hema wants the best for her children, but she finds it challenging to balance her work and family responsibilities. She wants to provide them with the love and care they need, but often falls short. In the end, Hema finally receives the love and acceptance she has always craved from her mother, but it comes too late to repair the emotional distance between her and her son.

The story of Hema and her family highlights the complex interplay of relationships between mothers and their children. It also illustrates the ways in which life's challenges and traumas can impact a person's ability to connect with others, particularly their children. Hema's struggles to find her place in the world and her attempts to provide her children with a better life resonate with many people, making her story relatable and poignant.

In the same way that she yearned for her mother's affection, her children felt the same longing. While residing in her mother's abode, she experienced heightened levels of stress and desired to establish a deeper connection with both her children and her mother, yet was unable to do so. Renu, her daughter, spent time away from home, aiding her mother in comprehending the value of autonomy and engaging in social activism.

Hema and her family underwent hardship due to the ethnic strife prevalent in their country. While they held their nation in high regard, they sought a better future elsewhere, prompting their relocation. Shivan, a victim of conflict and haunted by memories of his past, confides in Michael about a different chapter of his life that reveals his homosexuality. Unlike the author's previous works, the novel openly depicts this aspect of the protagonist without any ambiguity. Shivan finds himself trapped in three distinct periods of his life: life in Sri Lanka, life in Toronto, and life in Vancouver, without any semblance of contentment in any of them. Hema had to make the difficult decision to leave her country behind and move to Canada with her children, in order to ensure their safety. However, despite her efforts to make a new home in Canada, she struggled to feel a sense of belonging. Despite this, she did find some solace in her new life, making friends and even finding a job. Initially, she was pleased that her children were able to lead a safe and secure life, but over time, her own struggles began to take a toll on her mental health.

Renu, a person in her life, seemed to be doing much better than her, and this caused Hema to spiral into depression. Her own struggles were compounded by her mother's first stroke, which added to her already overwhelming sense of despair. All in all, Hema's experience highlights the challenges that many people face when they have to leave their homes and try to make a new life elsewhere. The struggle to feel at home in a new place, the difficulty of starting over, and the challenges of dealing with mental health issues can all make the transition to a new country incredibly difficult. Shivan remembers, "My mother wiped her face on her dressing gown sleeve, then tugged at the bangles on her wrists" (150).

Hema had found herself in a situation where falling into depression had made it incredibly difficult for her to escape. Despite her best efforts, she felt trapped and unable to find a way out. One of the primary reasons for this was that she had no friends in Canada anymore. This made her feel mentally and physically weak, and she desperately needed support from her children. While her children were facing their own problems, Hema felt like she had no companion and was left feeling alone. She stopped talking to her kids and lived her life miserably, unable to find joy in anything. It was a difficult time for Hema, and she felt like she was drowning in her depression.

However, one day, things began to change for Hema. She found a partner who could help her escape her depression, and he became an important person in her life. David was someone she met in a yoga class, and he was always there when she needed a family. With his help, Hema began to find joy in life again. David was someone who understood what she was going through and provided her with the support she needed. He helped her to see that she was not alone and that she had someone who cared about her. With his encouragement, Hema began to open up to her children again and started to rebuild the relationships that she had lost. At the conclusion of the novel, Hema endeavors to fulfill her roles as a dutiful mother and daughter. Despite her awareness of the harm inflicted upon her and her children by her mother, Hema finds herself unable to pardon her mother's actions, yet she still offers her assistance.

Renu, the sister of Shivan, maintains distance from her family and avoids getting entangled in any conflicts. Instead, she is constantly engaged in social work aimed at improving the lives of women in Sri Lanka. Her objective is to empower

women to pursue education, independence, and mutual support. Following a riot, she relocated to Canada where she is pursuing her PhD and frequently socializing with friends, preferring to spend her weekends away from home. In Sri Lanka, she was with Sriyani, her professor, who had an organization to help people who needed help and security.

Daya, Shivan's grandmother, plays a crucial role in his life and serves as a custodian of culture in the narrative. Along with her financial success, Daya faces issues related to her property holdings. She possesses a substantial portfolio of real estate in Colombo, ranging from mansions rented to American diplomats, who pay the rent in dollars deposited into her offshore account in London, to a slum that she "monitors" with the aid of a hired thug, as legally evicting delinquent tenants is not an option in Sri Lanka. Her endeavors prove fruitful enough for her to reside in a sizable mansion and own a Bentley with a driver to visit her properties.

Being a mother and grandmother, Daya did not prioritize family and was always focused on money. The family's property holdings are approaching an uncertain future as another one of Daya's shortcomings is her estrangement from her daughter Hema, who is Shivan's mother. In her teenage years, Hema seemed destined for success, ranking first in the Senior School Certificate exam results. This led to a brief agreement with her mother that Hema would attend medical school after completing her Higher School Certificate exams. However, the compromise began to unravel when Hema overreacted and failed those exams. It completely fell apart when she chose to date and eventually marry a Tamil, which placed the couple at the center of the fiercely divisive debates that plagued Sri Lanka in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly since the family is Sinhalese. Shivan remembers:

My mother's face flushed. "Eleven years I have lived under your roof, and in all that time, you have never sat at the table and had a meal with me."

Her right hand sliced out a rhythm on her left palm. "You call that being a mother? I have hated every minute in this house, and so have my children. Never mind your past life; you will pay for this in your future life. And no amount of Bana and danas and donations for bells and robes at the temple will make up for what you have done. (87)

In this passage, Hema expresses her pent-up anger towards her mother. She is upset that her mother has never shared a meal with her in the eleven years that they have lived together. Hema believes that her mother has failed in her role as a mother and taps her left palm with her right hand to emphasize her point. She further expresses her displeasure with living in the house and believes that her children have felt the same. Hema makes it clear that no amount of good deeds or donations can make up for her mother's neglect and that she will be punished in her future life. This passage highlights the complex relationships that can exist between family members and the deep-seated emotions that can be revealed during moments of conflict.

Daya's maternal abilities and support towards her daughter were lacking. Despite not displaying a great deal of emotional investment, she made efforts to provide for her children by paying their fees when they visited her home, and contributing financially to their pursuit of a better life in Canada by sharing her savings towards the purchase of a home. The grandmother's interactions with the outside world are limited to managing her business, maintaining a loyal employee named Chandralal, and having a relationship with the local Buddhist temple. She copes with her sense of despair by making generous donations to the temple and constructing an elaborate sermon hall

for its use. Despite her efforts to shape Shivan into a ruthless exploiter, he becomes angry with her attempts to control him and rejects her devout practices and criticisms. In an attempt to further manipulate and isolate Shivan from his beloved Mili, the grandmother resorts to more aggressive tactics, which lead to Mili's death and the loss of her control over Shivan. He ultimately returns to Canada, but their bond remains unbroken.

Chandralal plays a significant supportive role to the grandmother in *The Hungry Ghost*. As her hired thug, he faithfully serves her and eventually becomes a wealthy property developer and government official. Unlike the grandmother, Chandralal is not resigned to a life of despair and isolation and has an insatiable hunger for wealth and power. He is adept at exploiting the prevailing political climate to his advantage. During the 1983 riots, he protects a Tamil family with two young children from looters, while the grandmother uses the opportunity to purchase their property at a steeply discounted rate. The grandmother does everything in her power to break Shivan's friendship, "She was frightened-not for Mili, because she trusted Chandralal, but at the enormous gamble she had taken. This abduction could shake her grandson to his sense or cause him to break from her completely" (280). Despite Shivan's grandmother's faith in Chandralal and her belief in his abilities, she prioritized his well-being over her own grandson's happiness.

The novel delves into the complex interplay between various societal factors such as race, politics, and sexuality that impact human existence within a capitalist culture, ultimately leading to the emancipation of ghosts. The concept of the "hungry apparition" or peréthaya is drawn from Buddhist teachings. According to Buddhist mythology, an individual can be reborn as a peréthaya as a result of committing unwholesome deeds or karma during their human life due to their insatiable desire or craving (tanha) for material

possessions. This is reflected in everyday Sinhala as *karume* or *karmam* in Tamil, which refers to the negative consequences of past actions. In Buddhism, an action is considered unwholesome or wicked only when it is accompanied by a deliberate intention or aim (*chethana*). The novel thus explores these profound philosophical concepts and their impact on the characters' lives, as they strive to overcome their own personal demons and achieve liberation.

Despite facing isolation and rejection from her own family members, including her daughter who denies her friendship, Shivan's grandmother makes a valiant effort to connect with her grandson. She channels all her energy into nurturing Shivan and providing him with every possible advantage. During his childhood, she lavishes him with toys and attention, and as he grows older, she assists him with his student loans and even secures a house for him in Canada when he moves there. She goes to great lengths to ensure his financial security, making him the primary beneficiary of her wealth. To Shivan's grandmother, he is like the "rain soaking a parched land," a source of joy and purpose in her life. She even shares with him the inspiring story of Lord Nandaka, using it as a metaphor for how he can help her overcome her despair and loneliness. Despite her difficult circumstances, Shivan's grandmother exhibits an unwavering commitment to her grandson, demonstrating the depth of her love and the extent of her sacrifice.

Shivan, a Sri Lankan living in Canada, is depicted as being deeply invested in the political and social events taking place in his home country. Despite being physically removed from the conflict, he is still closely following the news and updates from Sri Lanka. He expresses his concern and fear regarding the current state of affairs, particularly regarding the political figure Chandralal who is known for his involvement in dirty work and promoting Sinhala nationalism.

Shivan's observations about the situation in Sri Lanka highlight the complexities of national identity and the impact of political ideologies on people's lives. He is disturbed by the fact that Chandralal, who espouses harmful rhetoric, has become a prominent figure in the government. Shivan's sense of dread is further compounded by the threat of violence and terrorism, which has become a pervasive reality for many Sri Lankans. Despite these concerns, Shivan is torn between his commitment to his life in Canada and his desire to contribute to the betterment of his homeland.

In his internal monologue, Shivan reflects on the story his grandmother told him about King Nandaka, whose path forward was unclear until he overcame his fear and continued on his journey. This story serves as a metaphor for Shivan's own predicament - although he is hesitant and unsure about what the future holds, he feels that turning back is not an option. The sense of uncertainty and unease that Shivan experiences speaks to the challenges faced by many immigrants and diaspora communities who are caught between two worlds, struggling to reconcile their past with their present:

The only person I have discovered much about, because any reading of Sri Lankan news brings one ultimately to his name, is Chandralal. He has switched sides and is prominent in the current government, no doubt arriving there by doing the dirty work of the powerful. He is occasionally quoted making pious platitudes about the triumphant destiny of the Sinhala race, making declarations about embracing the Tamil race as part of Mother Lanka. Sahodara, sahodari-brother, sister-he calls them, while at the same time valorizing the War for peace. I shudder to think that I am willingly committing myself to a place where the derangement of a

Chandralal is seen as sanity; committing myself to a world of security checks, disappearing Tamils and suicide bombers. (447)

Shyam Selvadurai, while managing the conflict and violence of Sri Lanka in the 1980s and 1990s, keeps on mirroring the Sri Lankan culture, particularly the enslavement of females and gay people. His books have never been liberated from these subjects as he has encountered segregation. His characters are dependably the agents of those enslaved and the smothered Tamils. He uncovered the general public of Sri Lanka around then. Shyam Selvadurai's writing is characterized by a deep engagement with the socio-political realities of Sri Lanka in the 1980s and 1990s. Through his work, Selvadurai grapples with the violence and conflict that defined this period, while also drawing attention to the cultural and social norms that perpetuate inequality and oppression.

One recurring theme in Selvadurai's writing is the plight of women and LGBTQ+ individuals in Sri Lankan society. His characters often find themselves trapped in oppressive systems that deny them agency and freedom, and Selvadurai's writing brings to light the ways in which these individuals are marginalized and silenced. Selvadurai's commitment to depicting the experiences of marginalized communities has not always been well-received by the broader society. He has faced criticism and censorship, particularly in Sri Lanka where his work has been deemed controversial and provocative. Despite these challenges, Selvadurai has remained steadfast in his commitment to speaking truth to power and bringing attention to the injustices faced by Tamils and other marginalized groups in Sri Lanka. In this sense, Selvadurai's work can be seen as a form of activism, a way of challenging the status quo and pushing for change. His writing serves as a powerful indictment of the societal norms that perpetuate oppression and inequality, and encourages readers to critically examine their own biases and

assumptions. By exposing the harsh realities of life in Sri Lanka, Selvadurai has played an important role in raising awareness and promoting social justice.

Shyam Selvadurai's books often grapple with the complex and painful history of Sri Lanka's ethnic struggle. This conflict, which began during Sri Lanka's fight for independence from British rule, has had far-reaching consequences for the country and its people, resulting in numerous deaths and displacements. In his writing, Selvadurai explores the impact of this conflict on individuals and communities, highlighting the lasting trauma and divisions that it has caused. Through characters like Shivan, Selvadurai demonstrates the importance of coming to terms with this difficult history and learning to move forward in a way that acknowledges the past while also embracing the present. In the end, Selvadurai's novels often offer a message of hope and resilience, showing how individuals can overcome the challenges of their past and build a better future. This is certainly true of Shivan, who, by the end of the novel, has grown and developed into a more self-aware and confident person. Through his experiences, Shivan has come to understand the importance of leaving the past behind and embracing the possibilities of the present.

At the same time, Selvadurai's writing never shies away from the difficult truths of Sri Lanka's history, and he remains committed to highlighting the ongoing struggles faced by Tamils and other marginalized groups in the country. Through his work, Selvadurai encourages readers to confront the realities of the past and work towards a more just and equitable future for all Sri Lankans. Throughout the narrative, a thread of pathos is woven from beginning to end, seemingly by design. While the author could have orchestrated reconciliation between Shivan and his grandmother, transforming *The Hungry Ghost* into a contented one, such a simplistic, happy ending would have diverged

from the central theme of the story - the inexorable logic of karmic cycles and human experiences.

The novel presents a nuanced perspective on the ramifications of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, delving into the aftermath of violence between Tamils and Sinhalese. The book highlights how external powers can intervene in the political strife of the country, as illustrated by India's involvement in the conflict, which ultimately worsened the situation. The story also sheds light on the role of various groups, including the JVP, government oppression, and the LTTE, in exacerbating the country's decay. Initially portrayed as a protector of the Tamil Tigers, India eventually emerges as a common adversary of both Tamils and Sinhalese, leading to its eventual withdrawal from the country.

Towards the conclusion of the novel, the impact of each character on Shivan's life becomes apparent, along with how they have shaped his struggles and haunting memories from the past. Despite initial difficulties, Shivan and his family manage to adjust to their new life in Canada and strive for familial unity. While Shivan wishes to retain his memories of the past, he cannot bring himself to forgive his grandmother for her actions and is hesitant to bring her to Canada. As she approaches her deathbed, Shivan is conflicted between wanting to preserve his new life and not wanting to forgive his grandmother for the past. Shivan introspects:

My days will be as dull as they were before I met Mili-long evenings of sitting at the dining table, caring slowly and reading to make the hours pass. All those people knew those actors in the drama of that long-ago summer-I have no idea what has become of them, who among them is alive. (447)

In the novel, Shivan reminisces about his past in Sri Lanka, recalling fond memories of spending time with his grandmother, enjoying peaceful evenings in the garden, and keeping secrets from his mother. He also remembers his grandmother taking him on rides to collect rent. However, he realizes that those days are gone forever, and he feels a deep sense of longing for the people he knew and the time he spent with Mili.

In conclusion, Shivan's journey in *The Hungry Ghosts* offers a poignant portrayal of the Sri Lankan conflict and its impact on individuals and communities. The novel highlights the political dynamics, identity politics, and societal oppression that fueled the war and how it affects the daily lives of those who lived through it. Shivan's story shows how individuals navigate the complexities of displacement, migration, and cultural adjustment in their pursuit of a better life. The novel provides a powerful commentary on the challenges faced by immigrants in adapting to new surroundings, preserving their cultural heritage, and finding a sense of belonging in a foreign land.

Overall, *The Hungry Ghosts* is a significant contribution to Sri Lankan literature, presenting an insightful portrayal of the human experience in times of conflict and displacement. The novel resonates with the themes of identity, displacement, and cultural hybridity that are relevant to contemporary global society. Through Shivan's journey, the author presents a nuanced understanding of the complexities of migration and the impact of political conflict on individuals and communities. The novel encourages readers to reflect on the universal themes of trauma, loss, and cultural adaptation and serves as a reminder of the importance of empathy, understanding, and reconciliation in creating a more compassionate world.

## Chapter III

### **The Political and Personal Costs of War: An Analysis of *Funny Boy***

The Sri Lankan Civil War was a conflict between ethnic groups that wanted to preserve their identities. *Funny Boy* by Shyam Selvadurai is an attempt to portray the difficulties, cruelty, and crises of war through his stories. The protagonist, Arjun Chelvaratnam, was born as a Tamil in Sri Lanka and went through trauma as a young boy. Since the riots of 1983, life has changed in Sri Lanka's northern and eastern regions, where most Tamil people live. These changes in lifestyle have inevitably been reflected in Sri Lankan Tamil. The state, the general population, and property have suffered significant losses due to these riots. Additionally, people's sentiments and emotions were broken, forcing them to depart and live in hopelessness without their families. The civil war in Sri Lanka is a prolonged and complex conflict that has profoundly impacted the lives of those caught in its crossfire. *Funny Boy* delves into the effects of the war on the Tamil and Sinhala communities in the country, shedding light on the political and social ramifications of the conflict.

The present chapter aims to explore the depiction of the conflict between two communities and the civil war in the novel *Funny Boy* by Shyam Selvadurai. Through a detailed analysis of the events and characters, this chapter seeks to showcase the impact of the civil war on both sides of the conflict and on the daily lives of citizens. Additionally, this chapter aims to examine the factors that are pushing people out of the country, as depicted in the novel. By delving into these themes, this chapter hopes to provide a comprehensive understanding of the social and political complexities of the Sri Lankan civil war and its aftermath.

The story centres around Arjun Chelvaratnam (Arjie), a young Tamil boy growing up in Colombo who provides a lens into the experiences of those affected by the war. Through his story, the novel sheds light on the injustices faced by the Tamil people, including struggles for identity, inequality, and the impact of violence and brutality. The book captures the human toll of the war, highlighting the struggles of families and individuals to maintain their dignity and survival amidst the conflict. This research aims to explore the impact of the civil war on the lives of those affected by it, mainly focusing on the struggles faced by the Tamil community. The chapter aims to examine the impact of the war on families and individuals, including the effects of violence, brutality, and injustice. *'Funny Boy'* provides valuable insight into these struggles, illuminating the challenges faced by people amid conflict and reminding us of the importance of standing up against injustice and fighting for human dignity.

In the novel *Funny Boy*, Shyam Selvadurai takes the reader through the history of Sri Lanka's Sinhala-Tamil Conflict, which began in the early 1980s. While the book undoubtedly follows Arjie, the protagonist, on his personal journey of maturation, each episode also highlights the conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese and the increasing turmoil it caused in the country. Arjie's path can be seen as a metaphor for the nation's progression toward social instability and violence, which ultimately culminates in the novel's events. At the start of the book, Arjie is a young child immersed in his imaginative world, but as he grows older, he becomes aware of the reality of his social surroundings, various assumptions, and beliefs, and gradually comes to understand the world around him. In the end, he reaches his own conclusions, aware that society may not accept them.

Migrating can also trigger the psychological phenomenon of nostalgia, which helps immigrants cope with the hostility brought on by current difficulties. It can also protect their ego from observed shortcomings. Ruth M. Lijtmaer explains that 'the complex components of nostalgia come from positive ones such as joy and gratitude, connected with sadness about the associated loss of security, familiarity, and historical continuity.' Although Arjie begins with a nostalgia for his youth, he quickly realizes that his past was far from perfect. He feels uncomfortable around his grandparents and their intimidating house and cherishes his experience there not necessarily because his family is present. Ammachi and Appachi respond to the children in ways consistent with gendered familial affection stereotypes: Ammachi smothers them with maternal love, and Appachi is remote and uncaring. The children have total freedom to spend their days without the formalities they must exchange with their grandparents. As his family eventually leaves Sri Lanka due to the conflict, and those Sundays guide him "towards the precarious waters of adult life," (5) Arjie looks back on the spend-the-days and longs for the innocence of his boyhood.

The family's priorities for marriage, which are stability, social respectability, and a steady income, are revealed by their excitement over Radha's engagement. They value these factors more than passion or emotional compatibility in their children's partners. Arjie can more freely imagine Radha Aunty's ideal wedding when she is not present, which makes his infatuation more understandable given his ongoing punishment of being forced to do boring housework instead of playing with his cousins. Arjie's utopian view of love is also depicted in Sinhala love comics, which he likely believes he would be excluded from due to his sexual orientation. These comics also showcase Arjie's ability to

fluidly move between Tamil and Sinhalese social situations, a trait that eventually disappears under social pressure, much like his femininity.

In olden days, inter-caste or community marriages were perceived as taboo and socially unacceptable in most South Asian countries. In case a few attempts were made to marry people from other castes, against the norms and restrictions, they were highly criticized by society. When Radha Aunty falls in love with a Sinhalese boy named Anil and decides to elope with him, her family immediately plans to send her to Colombo. Through her conversation with Mala, the author brings out how familial restrictions put an end to her relationship:

Radha Aunty did not answer for a moment. 'Until a few days ago, I only thought of Rajan, but now I find myself thinking of Anil as well.'

Mala Aunty sighed. 'It'll never work.'

'But other Sinhalese and Tamil people get married.'

'I know,' Mala Aunty replied, 'but they have their parents' consent.'

'If two people love each other, the rest is unimportant.'

'No, it isn't. Ultimately, you have to live in the real world. And without your family you are nothing'(78).

In this situation, Radha is denied the ability to make her own decisions, including whether or not she can marry the love of her life, as that power is in the hands of her parents. Radha seems to be a woman who could fight for her rights, but she is silenced by her parents. Without her consent, her family forces her to go to her cousin's place in Colombo to reduce her interest in a Sinhalese man. Unfortunately, while returning to her hometown, she is brutally attacked by a mob for being a Tamil woman. Arjie finally

meets Radha's aunt on the first day after she returns to Sri Lanka, only to be shocked that Radha's aunt appears to be "as black as a laborer".

Even after Radha's return, her parents are still afraid that she might look for Anil and plan to marry her off to Rajan Nagendra, an engineer from their own community. It is clear that Radha Aunt is not interested in marriage, as she laments, "A woman who was on the brink of marriage could look like this and play the piano so badly" (47). Radha always defends Arjie whenever he is criticized or punished by his family members.

Issues related to racism occur in every country, and Sri Lanka is no exception. When Radha's love for Anil came to light, Ammachi was shocked and upset to learn that he was of Sinhalese descent. She complained to Appachi about the supposed terrible morals of Sinhalese men and worried that people would talk, which could jeopardize Radha's engagement with Rajan. Radha referred to her mother as a "racist," a term that Arjie was unfamiliar with. When Arjie follows Radha away, he wonders what is wrong with being Sinhalese, as he is learning Sinhala at school, and many of his friends, as well as his parents' friends, are Sinhalese. According to Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2016 report on Sri Lanka, "Tamils report systematic discrimination in areas including government employment, university education, and access to justice. . . . Ethnic tensions occasionally lead to violence" (Freedom House 2016).

Arjie questions his father about the meaning of "racist" and the circumstances surrounding the body. Appa initially dodges the question but eventually reveals that the body was that of Ammachi's father, who had been murdered in the 1950s for being Tamil. Despite his initial hesitation, Appa explains that the Sinhalese's attempt to establish their language as the sole official language caused riots and killings to occur. As Arjie listens to the adults around him, he gradually becomes aware of the Tamil Tigers'

attempt to establish a separate state, which Ammachi supports. However, Appa sends Arjie to a Sinhalese class, where he observes conflicts between Tamil and Sinhalese children.

Selvadurai identifies two significant, mutually reinforcing elements that shape most of Arjie's experience but are hidden for most of the book: the changing Sri Lankan economy and the social class of the Chelvaratnam family. Sri Lanka was classified as a middle-income group country by the World Bank in 2012, and its economy and GDP rates were increasing daily, affecting the people. The riots were a result of the economic conditions, which the author represents through scenes of people destroying Tamil shops and resources, leading to a loss of production and imports. Prior to the riots, Tamil people were mostly wealthier and had a more peaceful life, but the violence destroyed many lives.

The impact of changes in economic status during the civil war has affected the lives of innocent and poor natives, as well as every Tamil person. The Chelvaratnam family is extraordinarily affluent and has several privileges that the majority of Sri Lankans do not have, despite the prejudice and violence that Arjie's family must endure. However, as Arjie later discovers, the family's wealth also links it to certain misdeeds. Sadly, Appa's sudden fortune only increases his distance from the family, as his business demands more of his attention. Despite the fact that the Chelvaratnam family is relatively well-off compared to other Tamil families, they still suffer from economic suppression. It is difficult for Tamil people to maintain ownership of a resort in Sri Lanka under so much pressure, but in the end, a Sinhalese mob destroys their livelihood. Due to the riots, the Chelvaratnam family suffers greatly, losing their home as the mob burns it down, leaving them with nothing in their own country.

Analyzing from a historical perspective, many of Sri Lanka's Burghers emigrated in the 1950s due to the government's declaration of Sinhala as the only official language. Daryl explains to Arjie the history of the Sri Lankan civil war and the reasons why they could not simply intermarry with Sri Lankans. During their stay at the hill bungalow, Daryl's presence provides Arjie and Amma with more knowledge about their own country than ever before. Arjie gains a better understanding of why hate pervades in the entire country towards Tamil people. However, just before they leave for Colombo, Daryl and Amma have a heated dispute over his plans to travel to Jaffna, where he feels compelled to cover the conflict despite his love for her.

Not only did Radha suffer from intercommunity marriage, but also Arjie's Amma. She fell in love with a Burgher man, but her family did not accept the relationship and instead married her to a Chelvaratnam. Both Radha and Arjie's Amma are victims of patriarchal dominance and had to accept what their families chose for them. Tamil families generally did not want their children to marry into other communities, including Sinhalese families. Arjie's Appa also becomes a victim of societal norms when he overhears his father's conversation with Jagen, where he shares his past experiences of falling in love with an English girl while he was a university student, but not being able to marry her due to societal norms in Sri Lanka. Appa fears that if his parents divorce, his family will be shunned by the neighborhood, and he has dreams about his family being characters from *Little Women*. Arjie and Amma return to Colombo the following morning after Daryl departs early, where they run into Sonali, Diggy, and Neliya Aunty. However, Arjie feels a sense of distance at the house.

The brutality of the civil war not only affected natives but also killed many other immigrants who came for business, including Daryl who was from the Burgher

community. Daryl planned to visit Jaffna, but Amma stopped him as she feared the ongoing war might injure him. As Arjie heard reports of terrible rioting, he wonders if Daryl might still be in Jaffna. Daryl did not return for a week since he left Amma and Arjie. Despite her anguish and trembling, Amma is sure about Daryl's return. The brutality of the civil war had reached its peak when the police officers began to violently attack people instead of protecting them from the riots. When Radha Aunty returned from Colombo, she was attacked by both the police officers and mobs. Additionally, when the police set fire to the Jaffna library, Amma expresses her desire to check on Daryl Uncle the following afternoon as he is struck in Jaffna. At Somaratne, a servant boy at Daryl's home reports that Daryl has not returned or left a note. Amma searches his room and discovers that it is disorganized, with drawers and clothing scattered around. They quickly leave and informs Neliya Auntie, who strongly maintains that there is no proof that anything has happened and advises them not to speak to the authorities. Neliya, however, is undoubtedly also worried for Daryl.

White privilege is a never-ending societal preference that favors white people over other non-white people. When Amma drives Arjie to the police station the following day to report Daryl's disappearance, the officer immediately changes his tone and begins taking her seriously only after she informs him that the missing person is a white man. He then asks her to fill out a form. When the officer's boss arrives and addresses Amma in English, they assure her that it is simply a case of burglary. They eventually meet at Daryl's home, and Amma shares Daryl's actual occupation and her genuine concern for his future.

False accusations of crimes that one did not commit can destroy their domestic life as well as their business or work reputation. In police investigations, if the officers

cannot find the criminal, they easily accuse inferior people who have no or little link to the crime. Somaratne, who works as a servant for Daryl, is being doubted for Daryl's disappearance and is accused just because he is a low-caste boy. Without proper evidence, he is arrested and beaten up like a slave. Even though Arjie's Amma was unhappy with the police's behavior and asked them to stop, Somaratne had no idea about Daryl's condition and was going through the struggle because he is a servant from a lower caste. The other police officers bring in Somaratne, whom they saw fleeing, and identify him as the culprit to blame for Daryl's room's condition. The boy and Amma are adamant that he is innocent, but when the police bring him in for questioning, they unintentionally knock off his sarong, exposing him. Arjie questions whether it was wise to put his faith in the police. The police officers claim that although they have not located Daryl, they have established that the houseboy, Somaratne, was stealing from him. After a few days, Amma gets a call informing her that they have found Daryl's body.

Amma and Neliya Aunty must locate Daryl Uncle's body in the morning after it "washed ashore on the beach of a fishing village" (135). While everyone else around him goes about their daily business, Arjie tries to comprehend the shock of Daryl's death. Upon their return, Amma and Neliya Aunty inform him that Daryl will be cremated and shipped to Australia. Amma reveals that he was killed and thrown into the sea, where Arjie and she both come to the realization that he is no longer there. Amma adamantly demands that they take action against the democratic tortures.

Amma is filled with regret for not being able to save Daryl Uncle, whose body was so disfigured that she could only recognize him by his wallet. That night, she falls ill with a headache and questions why she had been so optimistic about the new government and ignored what Daryl had warned her about the conflict. Arjie wishes his mother would

cry because it would be more natural. Arjie has a dream about Little Women and finally accepts Daryl Uncle's death. Despite Amma's request for an investigation into Daryl's death, Q.C. Uncle rejects it, stating that her priority should be protecting her family from harm.

The idea of being traditionally superior and "pure" to others is common in the caste/community system. Thus, the act of intercaste marriage supports the maintenance of the hierarchy and, in the event of violence, will result in violence against the other group. Like Radha Aunty, Amma was also denied the opportunity to marry Daryl, and her parents sent her away to stay with Q.C. Uncle for three months, just as Radha Aunty was sent to Colombo.

The false accusation has brutally affected Somaratne, causing his arm to become paralyzed by the time he reaches his village. Somaratne is a poor young boy from a small village, who has already lost his elder brother in the war and has a mother who suffers from heart issues. Despite Amma's insistence that all they want is Somaratne to assist them in finding Daryl's murderer, his mother discloses that Somaratne returned home with a paralyzed arm and that the army killed her first son in 1971. Moreover, the villagers throw stones at Arjie and Amma, thinking that they are some rich people from Colombo who have come to abuse them. On the other hand, Amma and Arjie blame each other for the situation that almost got them killed. Fortunately, they escape from the chaos and return to their place, admiring the mountains whose "beauty and serenity seemed with all that had happened" (149). When they return to their house around dusk, Neliya Aunty tells them that an Australian reporter from Daryl's newspaper had come looking for Amma during the day. She also cautions her against becoming involved in whatever the journalist seeks.

Analyzing psychological perspective, civil war has affected mental health of many innocent people. People suffered either by losing their loved one or by losing their properties. They immigrate to different countries to seek asylum, which affects their mental health. Arjie's grandmother, who has lost her father to civil war, created a huge impact on her. After that incident she never believed or trusted any Sinhalese. Even when people want to help she avoided them. Losing her father had drastic change and she never let her family members get involved with any Sinhalese or problems. As well Daryl's death affects Arjie's Amma, she was normal until Daryl came back to her life and left her all alone again. Even though she moved on with her life she has feeling for him. When she receives the news of Daryl's death she is totally shattered. Arjie feels lost because he lost his companion and a friend. He thought the news would affect Amma but she starts her daily routine and is normal that anything didn't happen. But she also wants to bring justice to Daryl's death.

When a reporter reports about the death of Daryl, Arjie and his mother realize that "Daryl Uncle's killer will never be brought to justice" (153), which causes Arjie to experience terrible sadness. Little does he know about the upcoming death of Daryl, Arjie starts to love him more than his real father. Thus, the death of Daryl becomes an unbearable pain for him.

It is clear from the context that to escape from his harsh reality, Arjie continuously reads a novel, *Little Women*, and admires the characters with whom he can relate. Through reading, he feels that he is not the only one who suffers, and after the death of Daryl, he begins to doubt the book's morals and the tidy world, "where good was rewarded, and evil was punished." Although Appa only does what is necessary, Arjie's observation about his customary distance raises the possibility that this feeling of

obligation is just how he is; he frequently withdraws from situations involving anything other than necessity.

Jegan, who is the son of an old friend of Arjie's Appa, comes into their lives and brings unwanted attention to the family. He was a member of the Tamil Tigers when he was in his hometown. Arjie is shocked to learn that this friend immigrated to Canada while Jegan enrolled in the Tamil Tigers, but he decides not to mention it. Since then, Jegan has left the Tigers because he could no longer tolerate their intolerance of disagreement. However, he believes that the Tamils need their state. As Arjie and Jegan grow closer, they begin running every evening when they return to Colombo.

During the civil war, the Tamil Tigers trained people to gather information from the government. The Tamil Tigers lived in the forest and hid from the government. To get information, they sent well-trained people to the city to find out what was happening in the country. Jegan, a member of the Tamil Tigers, comes to Colombo and meets with his associates from the group. Jegan's association with the Tigers brings trouble to Chelvaratnam's family and business. People working for Chelvaratnam start fighting against him.

One day on the track, Jegan mysteriously starts a conversation with two odd individuals who call themselves "old school friends." However, he is concerned because there are also three other suspicious individuals and an official-looking automobile outside the track occupied by uniformed men. Arjie later discovers that the man in the tracksuit is a Tamil government politician in the media. The following day, Jegan begins visiting a different park.

Arjie eventually discovers what is troubling Jegan after a few days. Throughout the day, the police come to the family's home to speak with him. Arjie is devastated by

this information, and when Jegan and Appa get home from work, Appa inquires about Jegan's past involvement with the Tigers. Jegan describes his relationship with them. When Appa phones a friend who works in law enforcement, the friend promises to "look into it" but suggests they go to the police station, indicating Jegan's innocence. He advises Jegan not to worry but also "not to mention this Tiger business." Appa's automobile finally arrives at the gate at night after the family has waited all day for Jegan and Appa to return. Although Appa assures them that this is "just routine stuff," Jegan is not present and says he is spending the night at the police station.

As the family deliberates on Jegan's association with the Tamil Tigers and the suspicious encounter at the racecourse involving two alleged assassins, Appa interjects and urges Arjie to provide a precise account of the incident. Despite Amma's defense of Jegan's innocence, Appa emphasizes the importance of keeping a distance from the situation to avoid any implication of complicity in terrorist activities. Appa's focus on safeguarding his business and his cautious approach precludes any efforts to intervene and aid Jegan.

During the civil war in Sri Lanka, the government took measures to control the riots that were happening throughout the country. The riots first started in the Jaffna area where Tamil Tigers were killing policemen and attacking military camps. The violence spread throughout the country, but the government remained silent. Even the police and military were attacking Tamil people during the riots. Sri Lanka's government lacked military forces, and other countries were providing aid. During a government referendum, armed thugs led by a Member of Parliament "stuffed the ballot boxes with false ballots" while Amma and Appa were casting their votes. The rigged referendum resulted in the

government's "victory" and six years of rule. One evening, Amma brings up immigration again, but Appa rejects the idea, as shown in the following conversation:

"You know," she said, "I've been thinking about emigration."

My father looked at her in shock.

"Canada and Australia are opening their doors. It would be a good time to apply. For the sake of the children."

My father shook his head emphatically. "I'll never emigrate. I've seen the way our people live in foreign countries."

"It's better than living in this terrible uncertainty."

He turned to Amma angrily. "How can you want to emigrate? You saw the way our friends lived when we went to America. They come here and flash their dollars around, but over there they're nothing."

"It's not a question of wanting or not wanting to go. We have to think about the children."

"Don't worry," my father said. "Things will work out."(195-6)

Appa's intentions for enrolling Arjie in Victoria Academy are quite clear; they are just a new version of his past attempt to make Arjie play cricket during his childhood. While Appa's earlier efforts to "convert" Arjie were cruel, Diggy's portrayal of the school's persistent masculinity as more like a culture of cruelty challenges the idea of masculinity as strength. This includes the ability to endure suffering and injustice without speaking up. "The Academy will compel you to become a man," he stated. Sonali, Amma, and Neliya Aunty all smiled sympathetically at me before resuming their meal. Diggy's expression conveyed that he understood all the things that my father left unsaid.

The colonial past, which Black Tie expressly references through his attire, is where Queen Victoria Academy (as its name suggests) draws much of its status and strict disciplinary standards. This illustrates the strange paradox of post-colonial Sri Lanka: despite the country's pride in its freedom from brutal, exploitative colonial rule, colonial traces continue to generate attention and inspire imitation, and association with the former colonial government still affords status and power. While there is no doubt a Tamil-Sinhala gap at Victoria, the reader is once again made aware that Arjie is not your typical Tamil and has spent his entire life around Sinhalese students and the Sinhala language. This demonstrates that easy tales about ethnic differences have no validity, along with Salgado's apparent inconsistency.

The chapter in question plays a crucial role in the book by providing readers with a deeper understanding of Sri Lanka's history and Arjie's narrative voice in relation to the other chapters. However, it is unique in that it consists of diary entries and is the only chapter in which Arjie writes in the present tense, as events unfold. This approach creates a sense of urgency and requires readers to fill in the gaps between entries. In this chapter, Arjie reflects on his instinctive desire to write as a means of finding solace when overwhelmed by fear and anxiety, shedding light on his motivation for recounting his background. Arjie also acknowledges the long-standing concerns of his family regarding the potential for violence in Colombo, recognizing that these fears have materialized and could have significant consequences for their future. As readers may already know, the Sri Lankan Civil War erupted in July 1983.

After gaining insight into Amma's character flaws, moral struggles, emotional history, and questionable decision-making throughout the book, Arjie sees through her attempts to appear normal. Given his understanding of the potential for violence and his

memories of visiting Somaratne's village, Arjie no longer trusts Amma to protect him; he is now old enough to recognize that nothing can guarantee their safety. Despite their fears of being perceived as a monolithic representation of their ethnicity, their faith in their neighbors suggests that human connections can serve as a counterbalance to the reductionism of nationalist violence. Arjie realizes that these interpersonal relationships are crucial for humanizing them as complex individuals, even though the possibility of others seeing them as homogeneous representatives of their ethnic group remains a constant source of anxiety.

At 11 a.m., Arjie overhears the adults discussing private information in the yard. They reveal that there is no curfew, the police are attempting to quell the violence, and there is no information on the radio because the government is supporting the riots. In reality, the mobs were provided with electoral lists by the government and used them to track down Tamil families. As a result, Arjie's family must evacuate their home if they wish to avoid further danger. At 12:30 p.m. on July 25th, Arjie becomes frightened as Sena's Uncle has not yet arrived to pick up the family, and their phones are not functioning. Arjie concludes that the government is not accountable for the riots, as he writes at 1 p.m. However, Sena's Uncle is unable to collect them due to the curfew. Despite Appa and Arjie's belief that the crisis will

Arjie reports that at 3 p.m., the curfew had failed to quell the disturbances. He then describes an incident involving Appa and one of his employees. Appa cautiously leaves the house to meet the man, who has stopped at the front gate. The employee informs Appa that thugs have stolen all the petrol from Sena Uncle's van. He left work quickly upon hearing about the riots, as he saw police standing idly by while he was on his way there. Appa's colleague observed a man searching for a match as people poured

oil from Sena Uncle's van onto a car containing a family. After informing Arjie's family, who can't stop thinking about the family in the car but are trying to go about their day as usual, the employee left as quickly as possible.

On July 26 at 3 p.m., the family learns that Ammachi and Appachi's home has been destroyed by fire. The entire neighborhood, with burning homes lining the streets, appears as though it has been bombed. Ammachi and Appachi spend the night at Kanthi Aunty's home. Arjie is overcome with emotion as he remembers walking by their destroyed home during his childhood. (294)

“But post-war reconstruction is incomplete, with hardly any jobs or meaningful development. The grim reality here is making families hopeless especially during the crisis.” Thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils fled the island's civil war in the 1980s and 1990s and found refuge in Tamil Nadu. Several others, who had the means, went as far as Europe and Canada.

Arjie documents in his diary on July 25th that his parents provided the children with instructions on how to evacuate their home in case the mob came to their doorstep at 6:45 p.m. They would use a ladder to access the Pereras' home next door, where the family had already gathered their belongings and important documents. Despite not knowing when the mob would come, the family was "confident" that they would. Arjie, feeling anxious and unable to wait, wished for the mob to arrive and put them out of their misery. Everyone wore their pyjamas, ready to flee at a moment's notice, and nobody slept. The adults would wake the children if the mob arrived during the night. Later that night, Aunty woke Arjie up and they moved stealthily to the dining room as the mob's chanting approached. The family then escaped to the backyard, where they took turns

using the ladder to jump into the Pereras' yard. After hiding the ladder, they sought refuge in the Pereras' storeroom, which had a small high-up window.

On the evening of July 26th, when Sena Uncle refuses to allow Amma and Appa to leave for a refugee camp, they come up with an alternative escape plan: sneaking into Sena Uncle's mother's home through a hidden entrance and hiding in her library (300). Arjie is exhausted from the constant need for escape and just wants everything to be over. Two hours prior, around 11 p.m., the family had another scare when a group of men knocked on the door. They hid in Sena Uncle's mother's library for an hour until the men left after supper. Although the men claimed to be collecting funds for a sports meet, Arjie is convinced that "something odd is going on." Despite Sena Uncle's suspicions, Appa and Amma still want to go to the refugee camp.

The article *Refugee camps in Sri Lanka: old and new challenges faced by the people* highlights that refugees in Sri Lanka do not receive any support from the government in terms of housing, food, and other living expenses. While they have access to primary healthcare through hospitals, they are unable to afford more serious healthcare needs and external medication due to financial constraints. The article also notes that refugees face challenges such as prolonged periods of stay as an asylum seeker or refugee, uncertainty about their future, and lack of basic needs, which can result in trauma for many refugees and their families. As a result, many require counseling and mental health care to cope with their situation.

Continuing with the same issue, the family receives a call from Lakshman, an uncle residing in Canada, who informs them about the protests against the riots in Canada, India, and England, and suggests that they can apply for refugee status and travel to Canada. Despite the family's optimism, Appa advises them to "monitor the situation

for some time before deciding." However, Arjie overhears Appa later urging Amma to apply for the kids' passports. The family received an email from Arjie at 8 p.m. on July 28, revealing that Appa's hotel had been attacked and almost burned down, despite the guests having been evacuated. According to a copy of the president's speech, he showed no sympathy for the Tamils' suffering, nor did he condemn the actions of the perpetrators. In the garden, Appa tells Amma that "it is abundantly clear that we no longer have a place in this country." Appa admits that he should have anticipated this outcome in hindsight, but wonders how Amma foresaw the violence so clearly. They decide to prepare for Canada once the violence has subsided.

During the riot in Sri Lanka, many Sri Lankans chose to immigrate to Canada, with a significant number settling in Toronto and Montreal, although there are still notable communities in British Columbia and Alberta. In Ontario, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Saskatchewan, there are several organizations dedicated to assisting Sri Lankan Canadians to integrate into Canadian society while preserving their Sri Lankan traditions and supporting Sri Lanka. The primary goals of these associations are to aid immigrants, promote cultural heritage, and provide aid to Sri Lanka.

In a letter written by Arjie on August 25, he reveals that after receiving his passport, he and his family would be leaving Sri Lanka for Canada in two days. Despite having childhood fantasies about other places, he is aware of the challenges they will face in their new country. Appa will remain in Sri Lanka for a while to resolve some issues, while the rest of the family will be staying with their distant relative, Lakshman Uncle. However, they are facing financial difficulties as they have very little money with them. Arjie expresses concern that they might end up in a similar situation as a beggar they encountered at a stoplight in Canada.

Internal displacement in Sri Lanka has been characterized by its dynamic nature, which corresponds with the fluctuating intensity of the conflict [9]. Those who have been forced to leave their homes due to conflict have undergone traumatic migration experiences, with some being displaced for several decades. These experiences have a lasting impact on the health of displaced populations, particularly their mental health, which is at a heightened risk of developing disorders.

Arjie returned to his family's burnt-down house to retrieve something he had forgotten at Shehan's house. He was devastated to see that anything that had not been burnt was now stolen, including doors, furniture, and even the rain pipes. The garden was stripped of its flowers, likely taken for prayer purposes. Overcome with frustration and grief, Arjie sobbed uncontrollably until he was exhausted. He left the gate open and rode back to Sena Uncle's house as it started to pour heavily. From a hilltop, he caught a brief glimpse of the desolate house before the rain obscured it completely.

The situation depicted in the protagonist's home country of Sri Lanka is similar. The other police officers bring in Somaratne, a servant boy who was seen fleeing and accuse him of causing damage to Daryl's room. The Boy and Amma believe in his innocence, but when the police bring him in for questioning, they accidentally expose him by knocking off his sarong. This leads Arjie to question whether trusting the police was a wise decision. The country was initially peaceful, but as the riots began, the situation deteriorated. The conflict plays a critical role in all significant events related to the impending riots and in all key relationships in the text, as pointed out by Alexis Goldberg in the article *Discussion of the Sinhalese/Tamil conflict throughout Funny Boy*.

The Conflict, which serves as the driving force behind the events in the narrative, breaks down the linear form of the novel when it becomes the central focus of the story.

As a result, the reader no longer has a cohesive point of reference through which to view events. In the final chapter, presented as a journal entry, the narrative becomes fragmented and disjointed, with certain events omitted and absences deliberately highlighted. Arjie's personal struggles and family conflicts unfold amidst the backdrop of the ongoing civil war in Sri Lanka, which is rooted in the tensions between the dominant Sinhalese and minority Tamil populations. The two groups have distinct languages and religions, and the Government's declaration of Sinhala as the official national language has exacerbated the already existing tensions. The emergence of the Tamil Tigers, a rebel group advocating for a separate state for Tamils, has further fuelled the conflict between the Sinhalese Government and the Tamil Tigers.

Arjie's family and ordinary Tamil civilians are caught in the middle of the conflict between the Sinhalese government and the Tamil Tigers. The violence escalates and results in the death of Daryl Uncle, Arjie's mother's boyfriend, and the estrangement of Jegen Uncle, who was once affiliated with the Tigers. The novel presents varying perspectives on how to deal with the situation, with Arjie's father preferring to maintain the status quo and avoid aggravating tensions, while Jegen Uncle and Arjie's mother advocate for taking a more proactive approach to fight injustice. Despite their privilege and wealth, the family is ultimately impacted by the Conflict and forced to flee, relying on the help of their Sinhalese friends to escape to Canada and start anew with an uncertain future.

Arjie reflects on the tension between the Tamil and Sinhalese communities in Sri Lanka, wondering why it causes such upheaval in his family's life despite their daily interactions with Sinhalese individuals. He later discovers that a Sinhalese person was responsible for the death of a family member. Despite this, Auntie Radha remains open-

mindful and advocates against racism, arguing that the past should not be used to justify hatred towards an entire race. Arjie's father explains the concept of racism and the Sinhala-Tamil conflict, including the riots that occurred after Sinhala was made the national language in 1959 and the emergence of the Tamil Tigers in Jaffna. As an educated middle-class Tamil, Arjie's father disagrees with Ammachchi, an ignorant Tamil who sympathizes with the Tamil Tigers. He exposes his children to Sinhala from a young age and ensures that they receive education in schools where Sinhala is the primary language to help them adapt to the country's needs. Despite his efforts, conflict eventually erupts in Jaffna.

Several Tamils set fire to the market, sparking an outbreak of violence in the region. The following day, the Night Mail is scheduled to bring Auntie Radha back to Colombo. Arjie becomes alarmed when he notices numerous vehicles parked outside his grandparents' home, and a crowd gathered inside. They are worried because the Sinhalese in Anuradhapura retaliated against the Tamils in Jaffna by attacking the Night Mail. After dropping Arjie off, Anil goes to see his family. In contrast to the others' indifference, Arjie's mother treats Anil kindly. She informs him that Auntie Radha is safe, and he verifies this. Arjie is uncertain about the racial violence that erupted two days earlier.

The Sri Lankan Government plans to call for a referendum in order to extend their tenure by six years without holding elections. The referendum presents two options: a lamp for the proposition and a pot for the opposition. Voters who are in favour of elections move towards the pot, while those who support the Government move towards the lamp. The Government promotes the lamp through posters displayed all around the area in an attempt to exert control. One man is caught posting a poster on the Chelvanayagam family's wall, and Jagan and his family come out to watch. Arjuna's

father informs the man that hanging posters on private walls is illegal, but he disregards the objection. Jagan steps in on behalf of the Chelvanayagams, and the man is attacked, causing the poster to be torn. The man warns them that it is government property, making everyone fearful of his intimidation.

While Arjun's mother defends Jagan, his father regrets that he got into an unnecessary fight with the man. Jagan's this brave and promising words moved Arjie so much:

If you become a Tiger, you cannot question anything they do.... on the other hand, what is the alternative? We cannot live like this under constant threat from the Sinhalese, always second-class citizens in our country. As my father used to say, "It is small choices of rotten apples. Here you can be killed by the Sinhalese, and there you can be killed by the police or the Tigers. (176)

In "Riot Journal: An Epilogue," the culmination of both the narrative structure and Arjie's life results in heightened tension. As a result, the journal's continuity is disrupted, and the tension can no longer function as the narrative's cohesive element. The entries in the journal become fragmented, appearing further apart, which reflects Arjie's involvement in the disturbances.

As time elapses, the protagonist experiences periods during which he is unable to write, leading to a reduction in the narrative's typically meticulous attention to detail. Instead, the events are summarized briefly. Following the destruction of their home and belongings, Arjie reflects:

I observed all this with not a trace of remorse, not a touch of sorrow for the loss and destruction around me. Even now, I feel no sorrow. I try to

remind myself that the house is destroyed, that we will never live in it again, but my heart refuses to understand this Chitra Aunty was free to cry. We couldn't, for if we started, we would never stop. (p. 298)

After Arjie's struggle against the Conflict reaches its conclusion, it becomes apparent how devastated he is by the loss of all his possessions during the riots:

Then, I began to cry for our house for the first time. I sat on the verandah steps and wept for the loss of my home, for the loss of everything that I held to be precious. I tried to muffle the sound of my weeping, but my voice cried out loudly as if it were my only weapon against those who had destroyed my life. (p. 311)

Once the Conflict erupts, it can no longer function as the binding force that links the specifics of Arjie's life to the events in the novel. As a result, the Conflict between the Tamil and Sinhalese communities intensifies throughout the entirety of *Funny Boy*. This conflict becomes the focal point of the novel, overshadowing the other characters.

In conclusion, *Funny Boy* provides a vivid portrayal of the civil unrest in Sri Lanka during the 1980s and 1990s, depicting how the Conflict between the Tamil and Sinhalese communities led to widespread violence, loss of life, and forced migration. The novel showcases the devastating impact of this conflict on individuals and communities, highlighting the human cost of such conflicts.

Through its portrayal of the main character Arjie's coming of age, the novel illustrates how the Conflict affected the everyday lives of Sri Lankans. It depicts how the conflict undermined the sense of community and led to divisions between people of different ethnicities. The novel shows how, in such a situation, even personal relationships are challenged, and individuals are forced to make difficult choices.

Moreover, *Funny Boy* also sheds light on the plight of those who were forced to leave their homes and migrate to other countries due to the conflict. The novel portrays the challenges faced by refugees and immigrants and highlights the difficulties of adjusting to life in a new country. It underscores how the loss of home, community, and cultural identity can have a profound impact on individuals and their sense of self.

In summary, *Funny Boy* is an important work of literature that portrays the devastating impact of civil unrest and ethnic conflict. It illustrates how such conflicts can lead to the loss of humanity and eventually force individuals and communities to leave their homes and migrate to new countries. By bringing attention to these issues, the novel reminds us of the importance of promoting peace, understanding, and compassion in a world that is all too often characterized by violence and division.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Conclusion**

The Sri Lankan civil war has been a significant historical challenge for immigrants, compelling many Sri Lankan people to seek a better quality of life by immigrating to Canada. Shyam Selvadurai, a Sri Lankan Tamil who suffered from the conflict, migrated to Canada during his teenage years and shares his personal experiences through autobiographical narratives to shed light on the struggles endured by Sri Lankan Tamils who were forced to flee their homeland for safety. The conflict arose when the Sri Lankan government declared Sinhalese as the national language, disregarding the Tamil community, which led to the formation of their own political party and fighting for their identity. The LTTE, led by Vellupillai Prabhakaran (also known as Captain Prabhakaran), spearheaded the Tamil cause. Sri Lankan Tamils were compelled to emigrate to other countries to escape the war, and Selvadurai highlights the challenges they faced during and after their migration. The Sri Lankan government was criticized for not taking adequate measures to safeguard civilians.

Selvadurai illuminates his personal struggles during the civil war in which being a Sinhala Tamil became unlawful. He experienced a feeling of displacement within his own motherland, which eventually led to his emigration to Canada as a refugee. The effects of the civil war and his migration to a foreign land have left a profound imprint on Selvadurai's life, which he vividly depicts in his literary works. In 2016, Selvadurai was bestowed with a unique honor of having a goblin spider species named after him, known as "Brignoliashyami."

Chapter 1, entitled "Introduction," provides an overview of the Sri Lankan civil war and its political context. The chapter delves into the formation of the LTTE, its struggle for identity, and the devastating impact of the war resulting in the loss of numerous lives. The chapter also explores Selvadurai's family background, his upbringing, his experiences as a refugee, and how these disparities motivated him to write novels. Additionally, the chapter offers an in-depth analysis of Selvadurai's background, writing style, and his other literary works. Furthermore, the chapter provides a comprehensive survey of Canadian immigrant writers, with a specific focus on Sri Lankan-Canadian writers. It offers insights into the contributions of these writers to Canadian literature, and the unique perspectives they bring to bear on the immigrant experience.

Chapter 2, titled "Identity Politics," provides an in-depth analysis of *The Hungry Ghosts* novel. The chapter focuses primarily on Shivan Rassiah, a character who migrated to Canada due to the war and his subsequent struggles after emigrating. It highlights Shivan's relentless fight for his identity as a Sinhala Tamil in his own country, as well as the psychological trauma he experiences after resettling in Canada. The chapter delves into the immigrant experience and the sufferings endured by the major characters such as Shivan, Hema, Daya, Renu, David, among others, as a result of the civil war. With a specific emphasis on the political climate in Sri Lanka, the chapter also delves into the personal lives of the characters mentioned above.

Chapter 3, titled "The Political and Personal Costs of War: An Analysis of Funny Boy" chronicles the story of Arjun (Arjie), a seven-year-old child who becomes aware of the ongoing riots and their impact on the country. The chapter explores the harsh realities of life during the war, including its brutal consequences on the protagonist's family. It

delves into the political, societal, and psychological perspectives of the novel, providing an in-depth analysis of themes such as forbidden love, nationalism, ethnicity, and justice for humanity.

Selvadurai highlights the commonality of the struggles faced by children who suffer due to their Tamil identity in both of his novels. Arjie and Shivan experience the trauma of political policies and riots from a young age, and Selvadurai masterfully portrays these characters as being acutely aware of the political conditions in their country and the riots occurring around them. Both characters possess a sense of not belonging within their Sinhala families due to their mixed identities, and they are keenly aware of their differences in their respective novels. The mental impact of the war takes a toll on them, causing them to struggle to move forward with their lives. Ultimately, both characters leave their country behind and emigrate to Canada in search of a new beginning.

*The Hungry Ghosts* and *Funny Boy* share several common themes such as civil war, political issues, the struggles of innocent people, and identity crisis. *The Hungry Ghosts* portrays how ethnic, political, and sexual divides can repeatedly tear apart both a nation and the human heart, unless the ghosts that haunt them are fed and ultimately set free. In *Funny Boy*, Selvadurai touches on themes such as masculinity, forbidden family and love, nationalism and ethnic conflict, violence, justice, and power.

The two literary works vividly depict the harsh realities of warfare and its devastating effects on civilian populations. The novels delve deeply into the experiences of characters who suffer the consequences of civil conflict, including economic downturns, loss of peace within their communities, disruption of employment and

education, and pervasive disturbances. Furthermore, the works offer poignant insights into the psychological and sociological implications of war.

The Sri Lankan legal system, which favored the Sinhala population over both ethnic groups, was a primary factor in instigating the Tamil Eelam War, as individuals began to fight for the interests of their respective communities. Identity emerges as a major theme in the analysed novels, with Tamil individuals being viewed by some within the Sinhalese community as inherently problematic. While certain members of the Sinhalese population actively discriminated against and treated Tamil individuals as criminals, others provided them with shelter, food, and assistance.

At the outset of the riot, apprehension regarding personal safety prompted emigration among affected individuals, who faced a countrywide conflagration in which anti-Tamil sentiment precipitated incendiary attacks on residential abodes and property. The root cause of the resultant predicament in Sri Lanka is primarily attributable to the civil war. As the riot raged on, the Tamil community found itself imperiled and compelled to seek refuge abroad. Notably, the protagonists in *The Hungry Ghosts* and *Funny Boy* both undertake emigration to Canada. An additional significant motif explored in both of the novels pertains to the state of being a refugee. These literary works depict individuals who are compelled to flee their residences and homelands due to the ravages of civil strife, and subsequently undertake arduous journeys to find safe havens in foreign lands such as Canada. The narratives delve into the formidable obstacles that are encountered in the quest for refuge, as well as the enduring emotional repercussions that result from such forced migration, including a persistent sense of longing for their former homes.

The portrayal of civil war and immigration in both *The Hungry Ghost* and *Funny Boy* highlights the immense struggles faced by individuals during times of political turmoil and societal upheaval. Both novels showcase the devastating effects of violence and displacement on personal identity and relationships, and shed light on the complexities of navigating new cultural and political landscapes. Furthermore, these novels highlight the importance of empathy and understanding towards individuals who are forced to flee their homes and leave behind everything they know. They serve as a reminder of the resilience and strength of the human spirit, and of the transformative power of storytelling in bringing about greater awareness and understanding of the experiences of others. In this way, both "*The Hungry Ghost*" and "*Funny Boy*" offer powerful and thought-provoking insights into the human condition, and the challenges and opportunities that arise in the face of adversity.

The novels under consideration present a range of fruitful avenues for further academic inquiry. Possible research directions include feminist analyses, investigations into sexuality and gender studies, and explorations of cultural variances and historical contexts. Postcolonial perspectives could be employed to examine the novels' reflection and response to postcolonial themes and issues, while trauma and memory studies could further investigate the representation of trauma and the ways in which memory is constructed and transmitted. Additionally, diaspora studies could explore the experience of migration and displacement and the role of literature in mediating connections between diasporic communities and their home countries. Comparative studies could examine the intersecting and diverging perspectives offered by the novels on Sri Lanka's history and culture, and literary analysis could provide insights into the authors' use of language and narrative techniques to convey their themes and ideas.

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