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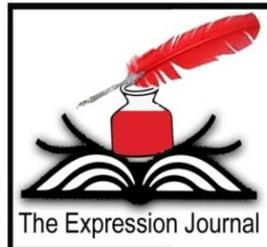
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FUNNY TALES FROM DEVIANT HOMES: A STUDY OF SHYAM SELVADURAI'S *FUNNY BOY*

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Abstract

Funny Boy by Shyam Selvadurai is a bildungsroman modelled on James Joyce's classic "Portrait of Artist as a Young Man". The novel is a delicate blend of the experiences of a young boy Arjie coming to terms with his sexual, ethnic, personal and political identity. The structure of the novel is quite unique comprising of six almost autonomous stories: Pigs can't fly, Radha Aunty, See no Evil, Hear no Evil, Talk no Evil, Small Choices, The best School of All and Riot Journals, connected by the common thread of Arjie being a major feature in all of them if not the central figure. The beauty and power of the novel lies in its skillful exploration and combining of the quest of various dimensions of his identity as he passes the citadel of childhood to pass by the troubled waters of adolescence and adulthood. It is easy to fall in the temptation of classifying this as a novel of identity shaped by the conflict between two strong binaries: Sinhalese/Tamil, heterosexism/homosexuality. Yet to classify the novel as such would be, as suggested by Shamara Ransirini, implies foreclosing the play of various networks of differential power engraved in the novel. The paper argues that various power relations underscore a complex picture of Sri-Lankan nationality and identity that can hardly be mapped by the two binaries. The most appropriate approach to map these representative relations in my opinion is to analyze each story and trace the network of relations individually and then examine the linkages between these networks.

Keywords

Identity, Home, Queer, Sri Lanka, Trauma, Nation.

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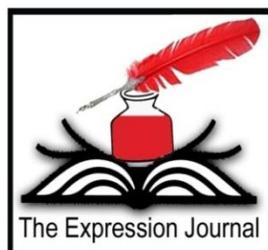
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The first story 'PIGS CAN'T FLY' sets the tone of the novel mapping the various power relations that guide the narrator Arjie's world. The most prominent character in the story is Arjie as at seven he is given his first taste of sexual and identity politics. However before analyzing Arjie it is necessary to examine the identity politics that revolve around other peripheral but important characters nonetheless. Here the threads must be carefully separated lest an erroneous conclusion is arrived at. From a cursory review of the initial lines the agency of action seems to rest completely with feminine. Amma instigates the movement towards the destination of grandparents and in there Ammachi – the grandmother is the agent of all action including beckoning, kissing and renewing a fear psychosis on account of her instrumental conditioning in meting out punishment – the instrument being a large strong cane. Furthermore, Ammachi and Janaki appear as the arbitrators in case of disputes and quite effective at that although cruel by every limit that imagination can conceive. However soon the distribution of power is disrupted and a clear binary emerges between boys and girls. The Boys by virtue of endowed with the exhaustion of hetero-patriarchal power claim the right to the front side of their grandparent's property. This included the front garden, the road, and the field that lay in front of the house. Compared to this spacious area the girls only get the back garden and the kitchen porch. It is essential to note here that gender is based on performative gestures rather than biology because Meera – the girl cousin plays cricket while Arjie – a boy plays with girls. This is an obvious enough point but what is often neglected that this division of territory coincides with the judicial power of Ammachi and Janaki. To simply dismiss the division as an embodiment of patriarchy is to miss the point that it is a desire of avoidance that forces the children to enact a patriarchal division. In other words, a matriarchal setup forces a patriarchal set-up which is quite interesting to observe in terms of the flow of power in Foucauldian sense. It implies that the initial idyllic utopia of feminists and queer theorists about a genderless society is equally oppressive as the gendered society. This fractured setup conditions the whole power framework of the novel which vacillates in differential movements rather than conforming to the simple binary of male (power)/ female

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(powerlessness). Further disruptions will soon follow, but this initial disruption or contradiction sets the tone for the complex power distribution in the novel that repudiates a purely essentialist sexist reading.

Soon the bliss of Arjie is disrupted by the arrival of Tanuja – the daughter of foreign returned Kanthi Aunty, who the children nickname Her Fatness. The narratorial adjunct to the statement of labelling is interesting here: “in that cruelly direct way children have.” Shamara Ransirini quotes Noami Woolf in demonstrating how the pejorative labelling constitutes a normative act, considered in many quarters to be alien to the feminine gender: “Girls express intimacy through inclusion and aggression through exclusion”, as compared to boys’ expression of aggression through dominance. In that respect then the transfer of power here is at both ends – the exclusion of Tanuja is executed through the Schowalter’s hegemonic other. True to Foucault’s assertion that resistance is inherent in execution of the discourse of power, Tanuja interiorizes the othering act by shifting to normative loci of power inherent in the patriarchal discourse. Cross dressing as a man she sports a huge bristly fake moustache and a cigarette in her mouth to complete the effect caused by her reverting to the discourse of medieval romance. Reflected upon closely then, this cross dressing becomes a disruption of the hegemonic patriarchal discourse that bride-ride represents and yet is significantly matriarchal in its signification of the bride as the central logos around which the whole cosmos of the paradigm of bride-ride revolves. The reversion to medieval romance set in a faraway English setting is also a temporal disruption since it locates the action in medieval Britain rather than contemporary Sri-Lanka. Therein the act of cross dressing is a multi-layered shift of fluid power from a modern Sri-Lankan matriarchal set up to a medieval British patriarchal set-up. It is interesting to note that Tanuja having come from abroad plays to the oriental notion, rejecting Sri Lanka and considering Britian – her foster country as preferable for her bride. This disruption then raises the question of nationality under the lens of diaspora as to whether Tanuja manifests Bhaba’s notion of hybridity. To a certain level it does seem to be the case though insisting upon it would be, in my opinion, rather an over-reading into the gesture. Suffice to say that the cross dressing represents a power shift as the male Tanuja gets to construct the discourse and hence the gaze of the female sisterhood gravitates towards her, robbing the bride –Arjie of his accustomed attention.

However, the shift of power does not go uncontested as Arjie armed with absolute backing among the sisterhood claims his ‘rightful’ place as the locus of attention. Naturally, Tanuja is offended and tearing apart the pretense of her masculinity counters Arjie at his own level of matriarchy excluding him from normative spheres of masculinity and femininity by labelling him as a pansy, faggot and sissy –derogatory terms for an effeminate man. Sure enough the process is reciprocated by the labelling of Tanuja as fatty-boom-boom and she counters the transfer by appealing to the maternal authority Kanthi Aunty who parades the bride –Arjie in front of the highly tickled gathering and embarrassed parents. This is a typical patriarchal gesture since cross dressing is equated with masculine anxiety of losing power and thus the power rests ultimately with the patriarchal set-up. It ought to be noted that matriarchy is a derivative positionality – a reversal reaction against hegemonic patriarchy. The division of the territory thereof is a

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patriarchal act albeit riddled with fractures that resist this labelling.

The rest of the story is a continuum of this identity power politics as the patriarchal Appa attempts to 'fix' and 'cure' Arjie of his deviant 'tendencies'. The obsession with masculinizing Arjie sexualizes the whole familial discourse and thereof empowers and encourages Arjie to explore and accept his nebulous sexuality further. Ordered to play cricket with Diggy, at the behest of Appa- the patriarch, Arjie circumvents the norm by insisting to open the batting, and thereby manages to wriggle himself out of the game. This is again a complex reworking of the patriarchal heteronormativity where the queer person manages to destabilize the paradigm to his own benefit. This is yet another example of the rupture of the totalizing binary of power/powerlessness that Arjie seems to posit in the concluding sections of the novel. The parading of Arjie before the gathering leads to his banishment and exclusion from observing the sacred ritual of watching his mother dress and play with her jewelry as she dresses to go out. The banishment betrays a typical case of homoerotic panic as Appa is convinced that the cross dressing tendency in Arjie is a result of impressionable aping of his mother rather than any inherent sexual inclination. To cure this tendency Arjie is ordered to play a game thought to be intrinsic to masculinity – cricket on the orders of Amma, though it is clear that she is but following orders. But yet again this patriarchal exhaustion of power faces resistance in the figure of reluctant Amma who does not seem to share her husband's view of cross dressing as aberrant behaviour. Yet by consenting to get the will of the patriarch exhausted, Amma yields to the normative power of masculinity and acceptance of inferiority though not before she has labelled it as stupid- an undesirable other. The ultimate caning of Arjie on account of fighting with Tanuja as she rips the sari apart seems to be a justifiable end to the story as the normative patriarchy is enforced again as Arjie is punished for his first transgression. The overall impression from the first story then is a power struggle between gendered identities and does not allow any nationalistic reading. Although it could be argued in the words of Rajiva Wijesinha that Sri-Lankan society collectivizes to scorn untraditional behaviour”.

This trend ties together the second story “Radha Aunty” to the main narrative. Radha Aunty – a US studied aunt of Arjie arrives to the general excitement of the Chelvaratnam household. Radha aunty is supposed to acquiesce to a proposal of marriage forwarded by Nagendras on behalf of their son Rajan who had been besotted by Radha at a dinner party in US where they had met briefly. True to the oriental image, Arjie imagines her in the mould of a matinee actress and is disappointed to find her completely contrary to his expectations. Invited to participate in a play, *The King and I*, by a family friend Aunty Doris – a burgher i.e. people of Dutch origin who retain the features of their ancestors but are natives now, Arjie is soon drafted as a child actor to play one of the children of King Siam. The play is patriarchal to the core summed up in Amma's remark that, “most people marry their own kind”, when Arjie demands to know why King Siam did not marry the governess. However soon Radha aunty catches the attention of her young neighbours Anil who falls for her. This leads to a series of complications that are the first signifiers of the strong racism in Sri-Lanka. Sri Lanka comprises of two primary groups – the Sinhalese speaking Buddhists and the Tamil speaking minorities concentrated in the districts around Jaffna. After the

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independence of Sri-Lanka formerly Ceylon, the tensions between the two groups flared up accompanied by horrific riots and loss of property and life. This led in the late 70's to the formation of a separatist movement LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ellam) who resorted to an armed movement against the state to establish a separate county Ellam. The interaction between Radha Aunty – a Tamil and Anil – a Sinhalese sparks off tension and aggression between the families as both accuse each other of encouraging prohibitive behaviour.

The interaction is conditioned largely in patriarchal racist terms as the whole family unites to oppose the affair. Radha Aunty is put under constant scrutiny as the family disapproves of her relationship. The reason for this antagonism is traced back to the riots that took place during the 50's where Amachi's father was hacked to death by a violent mob. Nonetheless Radha aunty continues to meet Anil undeterred by her familial disapproval thereby exerting her individual will against patriarchal chauvinism. This resistance is not without resistance from the society, however. In the shape of Doris Aunty she is warned against transgressing the familial norm as it can lead to isolation and alienation from family. She recalls her own experience wherein her family completely disowned her for marrying a Tamil and now in her old age after the death of her husband she feels lonely. This is a typical patriarchal posture as it warns against resistance to hegemonic categories of race and ethnicity and thereof reeks of strong racist biases. The deep alienation between the minorities- Tamils and Burghers on one hand and the minorities and Sinhalese majority on the other hand naturally results in a fractured political system where mistrust, hatred and violence remain the defining features of the political system. It is no surprise then to see then that the deeply ingrained racial biases have the final word as Radha Aunty decides against marrying Anil. The rebuttal of Anil comes after the train she was travelling by to home was attacked by Sinhalese extremists. This immediately sets Radha aunty against Anil as she realizes that the match would invite the wrath of the Sinhalese majority against an already beleaguered Tamil minority, since it would be perceived as an ambitious attempt by the Tamils to destabilize and mitigate the identity of Sinhalese majority. Thus patriarchal cowardice is concealed under the label of militant linguism and ethnicism. This is a prominent feature of the Sri-Lankan society wherein the different ethnic groups fiercely maintain their ethnic markers and resent any attempt to dilute them or amalgamate them within the larger mainstream society. The representation of the subaltern Tamil is further qualified in Arjie as his queer sexuality begins to assert itself prominently. Radha Aunty seems to recognize this aspect of Arjie and rather than discouraging such behaviour offers her covert support by applying makeup to him. This is in sharp contrast to the other family who consider Arjie as a deviant – 'a funny boy' to quote Appa and an object of mirth to the rest of family. Arjie thereof finds succor in the foreign educated aunt who gives him his first lessons in resisting against the totalizing patriarchal society that will later confront him on his sexuality. Whether this can be viewed as conforming or not to the oriental myth of the western as enlightened is debatable, for Radha Aunty after all has been in US for merely four years and is a native vulnerable woman in all other aspects including acquiescing to an arranged marriage and allowing herself to be driven around by her father.

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The third story 'See no Evil Hear no Evil' offers another instance of the disruption and maintenance of patriarchy. Daryl uncle – a burgher, makes a sudden entrance after twenty years into the life of his former sweet heart Nalini – Arjie's amma. His entrance coincides with the absence of Appa who has gone on a long tour of Europe to promote his newly started hotel business. The advent of Appa into business after quitting his job as a banker is a consequence of the liberalization of Sri Lankan economy departing from its earlier strict socialist governance. The liberalization of economy is an important aspect that further aggravates the fissures between the two societies as the mainstream Sinhalese feel threatened by the rise of Tamil entrepreneurship like Appa's rapid progress as an hotelier. Daryl Uncle establishes a deep intimacy with Arjie unlike Appa who always finds fault in him. During the course of interaction, Daryl Uncle encourages Arjie's reading habits and compliments him on desiring to read the sequel to Little Women, unlike Appa who dismissed reading and specifically reading Little Women as a girlish novel. Daryl Uncle thereof serves as a disruption in the male patriarchal paradigm that categorizes actions like reading as intrinsically feminine and thereof unsuitable for the masculine. In the typical Foucauldian way however, this exertion of the patriarchal discourse ensures an anxiety about sexual identity which in turn leads to a rudimentary realization of queer sexuality that destabilizes the whole gendered discourse. The censure by Appa, for example, leads Arjie to examine and introspect further on his identity and seek validation from without for his 'deviant' identity leading to the establishment of Daryl Uncle as a quasi-father figure.

The thrust of the story however is on the demarcation of ethnic identity which strongly informs the novel plot after this juncture. The story reveals how the social gaze forced Nalini – Amma, to forsake her relationship with Daryl – a burgher and opt for Appa instead. As Daryl uncle points out the Tamils and Sinhalese considered Burghers to be intrinsically foreigners owing to their origins and lifestyle, while the Burghers considered the Tamils and Sinhalese to be too dark-skinned and thereof inferior to them. The failure thereof to achieve a nation-language: a language evolved by the imperialized under or after imperial rule, manifests itself in the militant Tamil secession movement which has now erupted as a serious threat in Jaffna and surrounding areas. Daryl, who now works as a journalist for an Australian newspaper, has come to investigate allegations of government sanctioned reign of torture and killing in the Tamil regions. His arrival, however, sparks a clandestine affair with Amma – his former lover much to the resentment of her elder sister Neliya Aunty and the children Sonali and Diggy. Their strong resistance is a marker of the interiorizing of the patriarchal element that views any transgression from the accepted norm of fidelity as promiscuity completely ignoring the complex nature of emotion and sexuality. However, like Radha Aunty, Amma pursues the relationship despite all odds circumventing the familial gaze by deciding to put up in a hill station for some days under the pretext of allowing Arjie to convalesce from a strong bout of infectious hepatitis. This is an important milestone in Arjie's discovery of his identity as he realizes the pressures of social gaze need to be circumvented in order to sustain a 'deviant' sexuality. After a few days of bliss, Daryl returns to his assignment to investigate the Jaffna allegations promising to be back within a week. The week lapses but since there is no sign of Daryl, Amma at a great risk to her life, reputation and marriage lodges a missing

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report with the police. The interaction at the police station is interesting since it is evident that the police machinery appears to have no interest in the besieged regions, thereof pointing to their complicity sanctioned by the government in the extra judicial reign of terror. The servant boy of Daryl becomes a metaphor of this government sanctioned terror as he is picked up for alleged theft and tortured so brutally in custody as to leave his right arm completely paralyzed. Amma makes this shocking discovery after the drowned bloated and tortured body of Daryl is found by some fishermen a few days after the lodging of the missing report. Amma determined to unravel the real cause of Daryl's death comes across a strong patriarchal block – the police officer who insinuates her 'promiscuity' while issuing a veiled threat to disclose it to her husband who he has discovered is a fellow squash player at the club. Still undeterred, Amma visits the mountainous village of the servant boy only to meet with a violent and hostile response wherein she is portrayed as a manifestation of the unfeeling urbane class that treats the rural poor class as non-entities. These interactions are important since they signify the various manifestations of fractured Sri Lankan identity which revolves more around ethnic and localized identities than the unitary nationalistic discourse. This foreshadows Arjie's realization that his queer sexuality sets him apart from the unitary identity of normativity and familial acceptance. The visit to the village proves to be the straw that breaks the camel's back and Amma decides to close the chapter for the sake of preserving the safety of her life, marriage and family. She blandly lies to the journalist who has come to investigate Daryl's death thereof embodying the advice given by the former civil rights lawyer QC Uncle: see no evil, hear no evil, and talk no evil. The evil thereof is invested with a strong ironic tinge as the silence is the price that the regressive prescriptive normativity demands for its maintenance. Any transgression invites the whole collectivizing totalizing social gaze that exerts such a heavy pressure that it is hard not to buckle under it.

The fourth and fifth stories 'Small Choices' and 'The best school of all' share a common structure: Arjie's conscious realization and acceptance of his sexuality and the power relations entailed by ethnic differences. It revolves around Jagan Parmeshwar- a former disillusioned LTTE member and a talented accountant. Appa offers him an opening in his hotelier business for the sake of his late Buddy Parmeshwar – once a 'bosom friend' of Appa. There are strong indicators that the bosom friendship is a cover for a deeper queer relationship signified by the mingling of blood on the declaration of the friendship. This could then account for Appa's anxiety about the sexuality of Arjie thereby indicating a strong internalized homophobia. Nonetheless Jagan soon rises in favour of Appa and rises quickly through the ranks to be promoted to a supervisory position. This ruffles quite a few feathers in the Sinhalese section of the staff who perceive Jagan as a threat to their progress and thereof bear strong resentment towards him. The resentment is inadvertently transacted in the ethnic differentiability as it assumes the tone of Tamil vs. Sinhalese. As a consequence, Jagan is forced to silently bear and tolerate challenges to his authority as in the case of the peon who after being censured for delivering a parcel to a wrong address gets peeved immediately setting off a clash of ethnicity in the Sinhalese dominated office forcing Appa to side with the peon. These transactions indicate the fluid nature of power and resistance wherein the power rests with the lower provided it is conscious of the potential of resistance. To qualify the

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assertion even though Appa has the financial power and Jagan's position allows him supervisory powers, in reality they are still dependent upon the acceptance and legitimization of this power by the staff. When the Sinhalese staff refuse to legitimize this power especially after Jagan's LTTE affiliations are in the open, the fluid nature of power is quite evident. Foucault points out that discourse shapes identity and not the other way around. The case of Jagan Parmeshwar attests his claim as Appa is forced to fire him, much against his will, on account of his 'transgressive tiger' identity that is detrimental to his business which relies on acceptance of normative values to exercise power lest the wrong people get antagonized. As Raj Rao points out Appa is "torn between his maleness masculinity on one hand" as a patriarch of the family and head of his business, and his ethnic minority identity on the other. In fact, his masculinity is constructed around his relationship with Sri Lanka, in that it is his minority status that causes him to be anxious about his masculinity"

The story marks the transition of Arjie towards a conscious acceptance of his sexuality. Jagan's strong physique and friendly behaviour induces a deep sexual stirring in him such that he has night fall after vague erotic dreams featuring Jagan. However, the assertion of his queer sexuality has Appa more worried who confides his anxiety in Jagan much to the embarrassment of Arjie and later delight as Jagan defends him. This is a typical south Asian behaviour where sexuality is treated as a communized attribute fit for public discussion rather than an inherently private discretion performed by the individual. It is ironic then that Appa is willing to overlook the clearly homoerotic transactions by foreigners that constitute a significant part of his clientele. This speaks great volumes about the sexual hypocrisy of the Sri Lankan society which on one hand ridicules queerness as an aberrant prohibitive behaviour and on the other hand approves the clandestine queer transactions when foreigners are involved; the lure of foreign currency is sufficient to outclass any notion of morality proving the essential absurdity resident in the subjective notion.

'The Best School of All' plays on the notion of what Sedgwick pointed out as a cluster of sites for contestation of meaning "quite indelibly marked with the historical specificity of homosocial/homosexual definition, notably through not exclusively male, from around the turn of the century". Anxious to masculinize Arjie, Appa transfers him from St. Gabriel School to Victoria School that holds the impregnable reputation of churning out men. The School is headed by a towering patriarchal figure known as Black Tie because of his habit of wearing a black tie over a white suit. Black Tie is presented as a typical phallic figure symptomatic of the heterosexist and normative-patriarchal Tamil figure with his erect posture, reliance on caning, and rigid Victorian morality. At the school, Arjie learns that he has been admitted to a Sinhalese class rather than the tamil section since Appa wanted him to learn Sinhalese. This points out to two important tendencies: first the inherent acceptance of ethnicity as a divisive marker of identity and thereby separate sections for Tamils and Sinhalese – a kind of native apartheid and crucially the link between the mainstream majority and masculinity. The division marks out Tamils as a category that are inherently different from the majority and thereby cements their subaltern minority status with less representation embodied in the figure of the vice principal: Sinhalese

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Lokubandara –a political appointee, who is engaged in a tussle of power with the Tamil Black Tie over converting the school into a Buddhist school from its westernized secular nature. It is largely predicted that he will emerge victorious sooner or later thus excluding the Tamils altogether from the school pushing them outside the normative boundaries set by the school and thus depowering them completely. In other words, it entails that power rests with the normative majority and Sinhalese emerges as a major symptom of this exhaustion of power. Linking this symptomatic paradigm to Appa’s desire of making Arjie a male, it is evident then that the discourse of ethnicity is a discourse of patriarchy since maleness is associated with power accrued through speaking Sinhalese. The mapping of the power discourse then is clear with the patriarchy operating through Sinhalese ethnicity being a site of totalizing hegemonic masculine power.

However, having been trained in the discourse of power and resistance throughout his childhood, Arjie finds a way to destabilize this patriarchal discourse. The inspiration comes in the form of Soyza alias Shehan – an effeminate handsome boy who makes no bones about his queer sexuality. Brought together by necessity and temperament, Soyza emerges as a key factor in Arjie’s acceptance of his sexuality. The circumstances that lead to their bonding trace their origin to Black Tie’s last gamble of appealing to the softer side of a cabinet minister – an ex- student of the school who will preside over the prize distributing ceremony at the annual day. Black Tie chooses Arjie to recite “Vitae Lampada” and “The Best School of All” knowing full well that these poems are of significant importance to the minister who won the “All Island Poetry Recital contest” as a student by reciting these poems. Black Tie hopes that these poems will impress upon the minister the need to preserve the old cherished values of the school and thereby frustrate Lokubandara’s plan. Coincidentally Black Tie chances to find Arjie’s comfort level with Soyza outside his office as Arjie recites the poems after being supplied with the first line by Soyza. However, at the office, the sight of the cane induces a mortal dread in Arjie who forgets the poems repeatedly thereby inviting punishment for both himself and Shehan. This brings the two closer and Arjie senses the tension of desire building between them but desists owing to the pressures exerted by internalized societal normative values. Therefore, for some time, Arjie is caught between the opposite pressures exerted by his sexuality and his morality – a typical product of the awareness of the collectivizing alienating social gaze that he has witnessed in the previous four stories. However, the desire is too overpowering and he yields to it in the garage of his house where he and Soyza are hiding from Sonali- Arjie’s younger sister, during a hide and seek game. This sexual interaction induces a crisis in Arjie on account of the strong internalized homophobia inculcated by the patriarchal setup in which he was raised. He views himself as defiled and detestable unable to adjust the pressures of the body with the repression of morality. Ultimately however he comes to realize that morality is a patriarchal construct useful for the advancement of prescriptive divisive society that ensures the non-transference of power relations, and accepts that Shehan offered him his love and not degradation. This immediately empowers him as realizes that the exhaustion of power by the center is conditional upon its acceptance by the subaltern. Consequently, he comes up with a scheme to sabotage the plan of Black Tie and executes it successfully mixing the two poems in front of a packed auditorium causing great distress and embarrassment to Black Tie.

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Thereof he extracts his revenge on Black Tie and by extension patriarchy for mistreating and alienating Shehan who symbolizes all transgressive behaviour including queer sexuality. In one stroke Arjie destabilizes the whole phallogentric-nationalistic discourse by pointing that it is ultimately a performative act and not an inherent reality.

The final story "Riot Journal: An Epilogue" is a harrowing and heart breaking record of the trials and tribulations of the Tamils who are exiled from their own country. The chapter records the systematic elimination and targeting of Tamils in connivance with Government machinery as the patriarchal anxiety of the Sinhalese community finally takes the form of a totalitarian violence. In the process the Tamils are stripped of all their property, dignity and freedom as they are reduced to houseless and penniless refugees. The chapter set in 1983 starts with a description of an ominous phone call informing the *chelvaratnam* family of the trouble in Colombo where all the tamil houses near Kanatha cemetery were torched by a rampaging mob to avenge for the death of thirteen soldiers at the hands of Tiger cadres. This incident sparks off a series of escape plans as the *chelvaratnam* family realizes that the danger is too close to be ignored now. The original plan is to move to the house of Sena Uncle – the Sinhalese partner of Appa but the plan can't materialize as some thugs steal the petrol from Sena's van while he is on his way to pick up the family.

Therefore, a second plan is devised: to hide in the storeroom of their Sinhalese neighbour Parera Uncle by climbing up a ladder set against a side wall and jump into the back garden of Pareras when the inevitable mob comes. The mob arrives soon despite a curfew being in force thereby establishing the complicity of the government which has given the riotous elements a free reign to destroy and demoralize the Tamil population. The mob leaves in its wake a trail of destruction and arson causing great emotional distress to the family who realize that they are homeless now. Soon the news of the death of Ammachi and Appachi at the hands of a rampaging mob, reaches them at Sena Uncle's place where they have been set up by Sena Uncle who finally managed to procure petrol and curfew pass and absolutely refuses to let the *chelvaratnams* to move to a refugee camp. Appa finally applies for refugee status once the situation calms down which is accepted by the Canadian embassy. A final meeting of Arjie and Sozaya beckons wherein Arjie realizes that despite their commonality the gulf created by their ethnicity is far too wide to be breached, thereby echoing Amma's line: "because most people marry their own kind". Subsequently their last session of love making is devoid of any passion and joy but is rather conditioned by a sad realization of the gulf that has appeared between them. This is the Sri Lanka of 1980's where the country lost all the gains of its liberation and created such deep wounds between its people that refuse to be healed till now.

This is the Sri Lanka that is deeply divided and hostile to its own people where the generals are tried for war crimes and a significant segment of population lives either in exile or under constant pressures of imperial militarization. This Sri Lanka is representative of Arjie who must accept his queer sexuality and compromise with the social tensions and alienation it will accrue as the pressures of heterosexist social patriarchal gaze will be focused fully on him.

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