

## Shyam Selvadurai's Novels: A Study of Hurdles in Following Queer Desires

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper focuses on the socio-cultural and historical hurdles that act to restrict queer tendencies. This paper is mainly based on Shyam Selvadurai's novels *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*, *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens*. This paper highlights the significance of the prejudices that the characters of Shyam Selvadurai's novels are made to face. It also deals with the great difficulties and hurdles that the queer folk have to endure to satisfy the demands of their culture. This paper also looks into how sex and queer desires were subject to a whole range of repressions. It also discusses the social, cultural and political hurdles that make a queer man's life in utter difficulty. The paper also examines how society and state institutions intervened to create so many hurdles for the gay community.)

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### I. INTRODUCTION

During the nineteenth and twentieth century, homosexuals were invisible. Indeed, literature doesn't tell much about the representations of homosexuals. Anyway they were considered deviant in history. Black lesbians and gay men were very crucial in the literary revival associated with the Harlem Renaissance at the beginning of the twentieth century. There are so many hurdles in the life of a queer personality. Sexuality is usually a place for moral and cultural conflict. But, in a modern and progressive society sex and sexuality is a vital issue in mainstream debates on civic values and citizenship.

In our society traditional authorities, such as religion, family, marriage and customs are very much powerful. Balendran in *Cinnamon Gardens* by Selvadurai is a character who struggles very hard with his homosexual identity against the structures of family, marriage and tradition. He wanted to satisfy the social and cultural expectations and so he enters into a sexually unfulfilling marriage.

He is a weak individual and many times he feels guilt feelings for neglecting his wife for having betrayed his feelings for his gay lover, Richard. But at last, Balendran is able to see through the hypocrisies of his society. Though remaining bound by his marriage and family, he acknowledges his love for Richard. Selvadurai through Balendran tries to portray what sexual pleasure is and what is our loving and romantic relationship with others. In the novels of Shyam Selvadurai we can see protagonist's conflicts with his family members and social and cultural codes in the society they live in. His novels remind the price that a non-conformist has to pay against conformity.

Love. He rolled the word around in his mind. He knew that his love for Richard was long dead. The passing of twenty years, a wife whom he loved in his own way, and a son, whom the very thought of filled him with happiness, insured that. As for the type of love Richard and he had had, he accepted that it was part of his nature. His disposition, like a harsh word spoken, a cruel act done, was regrettably irreversible. Just something he had learnt to live with, a daily impediment, like a pair of spectacles or a badly set fracture (Selvadurai 1998: 38).

Arjie in *Funny Boy* is totally unaware of gender roles and performances that a society demands in the beginning. He loves to clad in sari. Family and friends make him understand that being 'funny' is unaccepted and wrong in the society in general. As a child and a young adult Arjie shows some feminine tendencies and it makes his father tense. He calls Arjie 'funny' and says the ways men and women are expected to behave. He learns about the territories involved with gender from his cousins. During leisure days at their grandparents' house the boy cousins use the front garden, the road, and the field for playing cricket. The girls belong to the back garden and kitchen. Arjie is inclined towards the back garden where the girls play games. The pleasure the boys had standing for hours on a cricket field under the swelling sun, watching the batsmen run from crease to crease was incomprehensible to him.

Selvadurai portrays Arjie with several hurdles to jump including family conflict, political realities, racial hatred and his own queerness. In his family, intimacy and an appreciation of beauty are looked down as feminine attributes.

While he hates sports and enjoys wearing his aunt's jewellery, his own family try to force him do masculine works. This was another hurdle for him.

Another character of Selvadurai is Amrith in *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*. The hurdles he had to endure are mainly from his own friends like Suraj Wanigasekera who continuously embarrass him over his friendship with Nires. Selvadurai explores and projects the feelings Amrith who faces the complexities of being a queer in the sea of his life. As he passed into his teenage years, Amrith felt that his mind is separated from his body, causing him to detach within himself. Selvadurai depicts the deception and social hurdles that curtail many tendencies that are outside the confines of culture. As Amrith becomes aware of his tendencies

He did not know what to do about this thing within him, where to turn, who to appeal to for comfort. He felt the burden of his silence choking him (Selvadurai 2005: 204).

Amrith's love for Nires strengthens. Amrith wondered about the feelings he was beginning to have for his cousin Nires. He can't think of the problem to having it exposed to his family. He thinks of the dangers and hurdles of being a gay in a society that traditionally considered it uncultured and sinful. Amrith battles with himself. Amrith's parent's marriage was not accepted by either of their families. Therefore, when his parents died in a motorcycle accident, Amrith's remaining blood relatives refuse to support him. In addition with being a gay, Amrith feels unwanted product of his parents. He is adopted by his mother's friend. Amrith grows jealousy towards Mala over the attentions of Nires. Amrith becomes aware of his own homosexuality in a swim in the monsoon sea, in which Amrith nearly drowns Mala over her growing friendship with Nires. The world that Amrith lives in is emotionally driven.

The character of Lucien in *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* is portrayed to show the societal and cultural attitude towards gay people. Selvadurai depicts the character of Lucien Lindamulage in *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* to highlight social scandal that results from being gay in a society that did not even dare to talk about it openly. The term 'Ponnaya' which was used to describe Lucien's odd character sent chills down the spine of Amrith when he realised that it disparaged him as a man. This is another hurdle for him for a self acceptance as a queer man.

Lucien Lindamulage's secretary was waiting for him – a young man in his mid-twenties with an olive skin, glossy black hair, and full lips. As Amrith looked at him, he remembered how he had once heard boys in his school mention Lucien Lindamulage's secretaries and refer to the old man as a 'ponnaya' – a word whose precise meaning Amrith did not understand, though he knew it disparaged the masculinity of another man, reducing him to the level of a woman (Selvadurai 2005: 60).

The best example of making hurdles before gay person can be seen in *Funny Boy* during the game of bride-ride when Her Fatness says, 'A Bride is a girl, not a boy' (Selvadurai 1994: 11) and she openly calls Arjie 'A Faggot' and 'A Sissy'. As Arjie is caught as bride in the bride-ride game he is taken to the drawing room as a culprit by his aunt and exposed for cross dressing. Selvadurai, hereby, through his characters depicts the hurdles and the difficulties that a queer person has to go through to find his true self in a country where orientation is submerged under family pressures, traditions and culture.

There are so many hurdles and issues for same-sex relationships. It is by the state and the church. They see it as the practice as a minor sin, to repressing it through law enforcement and death penalty.

Since they are considered 'different' or 'funny' or 'ponnaya' and some are rejected by their family and society for being gay, many gays dare not to come out as gay. There are so many hurdles such as marriage, traditions, politics, and society and so on. Arjie in *Funny Boy* is sent by his father to Victoria Academy to force him to become a 'man'. This is another hurdle they want to face the family try to correct their queerness. Balendran in *Cinnamon Gardens* had abandoned Richard, an advocate under pressure from his father. The return of Richard to Ceylon awakens feelings in Balendran. His gayness which was sacrificed for the cause of his father's position is at last rejected by Balendran as he goes to meet Richard. On the other hand, Amrith in *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* goes to his mother's grave to reveal that he is 'different'.

Modern countries and laws in most developed countries accept same-sex relationships and even marriages. So, the hurdles are reduced for the gay. Many government organisations have established formal structures for confirming legal relationships between people of the same-sex. Yet in many cultures it is still considered unnatural, a perversion outlawed and in Muslim nations it remains a capital crime.

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