



A Thematic Study of Ethnic Conflict in the Selected Novels of Shyam Selvadurai.

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to analyse the portrayal of conflict in the conflict-zone fiction of Shyam Selvadurai. His famous novels: *Funny Boy*, *Cinnamon Gardens*, *The Hungry Ghosts* have been selected for this study. This paper would attempt to study the nature, background and consequences of conflict through these three major novels of Shyam Selvadurai. As the study is based on the novels of Shyam Selvadurai so the conflict explained here is, specifically, the conflict based on ethnicity in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka, the native country of Shyam Selvadurai, is a multi-ethnic country with Sinhalese and Tamils as the major groups. These groups are separated by internal divisions. Sinhalese treat themselves as dominant majority suppressing the identity of other groups, thus leading to the generation of conflict. The major assumption of this paper is that the roots of conflict in Sri Lanka lay in the ethnic strife between the two main ethnic groups. The first novel *Funny Boy*, delineates nature of the ethnic conflict. The conflict is in the fictional structure of the narrative. Based on the ethnicity and common culture, the country is divided into groups and the numerical strength decides the dominance. The ethnic differences create a gap between the individuals. The second novel *Cinnamon Gardens* traces back the roots of ethnic conflict. This novel is about the dawn of the ethnic conflict. The ethnic conflict which is shown in the first novel had a background which is discussed in the second novel. *Cinnamon Gardens* explores the past of the country, the period of 1920s when Sri Lanka was under the British rule. The third novel, *The Hungry Ghosts*, brings to light the consequences of the conflict. The conflict that generates and propagates the violence, set the stage for others to intervene in the struggle. The war within the country provides the chance to other countries to interfere.

Keywords: conflict, ethnicity, rift, violence, dispossession.

Introduction

The focal point of this study is the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The paper, therefore, explores the historical facts and the ethnic matrix of the country to understand the genesis of the conflict. At this point, it becomes pertinent to understand the terms 'conflict' and 'ethnicity' in general and in the context of the present study in particular.

The term conflict in general refers to some sort of disagreement or discord. The word 'conflict' comes from the Latin word '*conflictus*', which means collision or clash. There are incompatibilities between people. A conflict can be among individuals, groups, organizations, countries etc. The entities involved in the conflict have negative emotions for one another, and they are uncertain about their power. The conflict arises when the opinions of the members of one group are contradicted by the members of the other group. A situation of conflict, therefore, involves clash or strife between the groups because of the difference in their beliefs and interests. The term conflict also encompasses the conflicts between and within the families. As said by Ho-Wong-Jeong: "The term 'conflict' has been applied to quarrels within a family and workplace arguments as well as violent clashes between states."(6)

The increasing disagreement between the conflicting groups leads to a situation of clash, violence and terror. The ideological extremism has always been a propelling factor in conflict situations. It fosters the feelings of intolerance in one group against the other. Their only aim is to win power and sometimes a separate region, causing separatism. Besides physical destruction, conflict also leads to emotional disturbances. The victims of the conflict have to face the suffering and fragmentation; they are devastated physically as well as emotionally, causing the rise of trauma in their minds. The reasons for the conflict are not limited, and there are multiple causes of the conflict. Difference in goals, difference in perceptions and difference in identity, are responsible for the generation of the conflict. Besides the conflict can arise due to difference in race, ethnicity, language, culture or region.

The meaning of the term 'ethnicity' is elaborated in the *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations* by Ellis Cashmore:

The actual term derives from the Greek *ethnikos*, the adjective of *ethnos*. This refers to a people or nation. In its contemporary form, ethnic still retains this basic meaning in the sense that it describes a group possessing some degree of coherence and solidarity

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composed of people who are, at least latently, aware of having common origins and interests. So, an ethnic group is not mere aggregate of people or a sector of a population, but a self-conscious collection of people united, or closely related, by shared experiences. (119)

Different groups are named on the basis of their common origin and traditions. The groups are ethnically divided and this creates the consciousness of division between them. Ethnic conflict arises when there is clash between the groups existing in the same country or state. There is suppression on the basis of ethnicity, where one ethnic group which is numerically weak is being suppressed by the major group in the country. They fight for their position in the society. Ethnicity is not always harmful. A state with multi-ethnic groups can be at peace if its different ethnic groups are given adequate representation and their identity remains preserved. But when the treatment is unequal and there is unequal distribution of roles and economy, it is obvious that rifts will arise. There is destabilization in the country, when Human rights are violated. All these things collectively become the agents to ethnicity based conflict in the country. One ethnic group which is being suppressed in the society raise their voice against the injustice done to them. The state

is then becomes fragmented. To express their grievances, the minority groups start to protest. Thus the conflict emerges which sometimes can become violent. Violent ethnic conflicts lead to destruction, deaths and displacement of a large number of people.

Stefan Wolf describes the ethnic conflict in *Ethnic Conflict: A Global Perspective* as:

Generally speaking, the term 'conflict' describes a situation in which two or more actors pursue incompatible, yet from their individual perspectives entirely just, goals. Ethnic conflicts are one particular form of such conflict: that in which the goals of at least one conflict party are defined in (exclusively) ethnic terms, and in which the primary fault line of confrontation is one of ethnic distinctions. Whatever the concrete issues over which conflict erupts, at least one of the conflict parties will explain its dissatisfaction in ethnic terms—that is, one party to the conflict will claim that its distinct ethnic identity is the reason why its members cannot realise their interests, why they do not have the same rights, or why their claims are not satisfied. Thus, ethnic conflicts are a form of group conflict in which at least one of the parties involved interprets the conflict, its causes and

potential remedies along an actually existing or perceived discriminatory ethnic divide. (1-2)

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic country with Sinhalese and Tamils as the major groups. Besides these, there are Muslims and Burghers in the country. Sinhalese are the natives of Sri Lanka sharing a common history, culture, religion and language. Most of the Sinhalese are Buddhist, speaking the Sinhala language. They form the majority population of the country. The traditional dress of Sinhalese living in Sri Lanka is Sarong and Kandyan. Tamils, the other important group in Sri Lanka are the people of Indian origin, who are believed to have migrated to Sri Lanka long back. They are numerically weaker than the Sinhalese. They are not the natives of the country. Most of the Tamils are Hindus and speak Tamil and their traditional dress is Sari for Women and Shirt and Dhoti for men. The difference in the history, religion, language and culture thus divides the country by separating the ethnic groups in the country.

Muslims comprise a small portion in the population of Sri Lanka and Burghers (multi-national descendants of European man and Sri Lanka women) make up least part of Sri Lankan population. Tamils were brought as agricultural workers during the colonial period.

That period was the source of the division. Certain commissions and constitutions were framed to enhance the feeling of hatred in the different groups. Before leaving the country the British had sown the seeds of division in Sri Lanka. People were made aware of their strength and weakness. Sinhalese have always been a majority group in the country. This is how the tension escalates between Sinhalese majority and Tamil separatist and the tension was then converted into violent ethnic conflict. The minority of the country were the victims. They were marginalised, so to enjoy proper power certain members of the minority groups formed certain associations like LTTE to protest against the partial treatment. The rift leads to certain violent events which was actually the part of Sri Lankan history. The minority was victimised in the country, there were killings and destruction.

Due to the massive violence and destruction in Sri Lanka, it provided a stage for others to intervene in the process of struggle. Ethnic conflict within the country generated a certain kind of pressure and effected its relation with the other neighbouring countries like India. The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka had serious implications for India owing to the Tamil people. India had certain sympathy with the

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Tamils living in Sri Lanka. The escalating ethnic conflict has been a major intriguing problem in the relations between India and Sri Lanka since 1983.

Regarding the Sri Lankan Tamils who had raised the call for a separate state as early as 1976, the Indian government remained reticent to such political developments in Sri Lanka. Since 1983, however, India showed its concern for the safety and security of the Tamils, their brethren in Sri Lanka. When the riots broke out between the Tamils and Sinhalese communities in July 1983, India got a chance to interfere in the situation created by the internal political processes in the country. Tamils who live in Sri Lanka were considered as the part of India. India proclaimed that it was her some moral responsibility towards the Tamils living in Sri Lanka. So to ensure their safety, India intervenes in the struggle to prevent the forth coming atrocities on the Tamils. But the role of India came to be ironic in the later years as instead of diffusing the tension, it contributed in the escalation of the conflict to the higher degrees. Not only Sri Lanka was affected, the intervention also had its immediate reciprocating impacts in Tamil Nadu in India where the government and opposition political parties put

pressure on the central government in New Delhi to intervene in Sri Lanka on behalf of the Tamils there. Tamil Nadu political parties supported the Tamil demands of language, federalism, and even for the establishment of a separate state of Eelam. The separatist demand produced a number of Tamil militant groups in Sri Lanka and the leaders of these groups sought refuge in Tamil Nadu. The ethnic riots in Sri Lanka which caused death and destruction brought large influx of Tamil refugees to Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu was sympathetic to the Sri Lankan Tamils thus provided large financial contribution to LTTE. India promised to maintain the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka by supporting the Tamils to obtain equal rights as they were also the citizen of Sri Lanka and offer good office for the negotiations. Contingency plans were made for meeting any emergency.

Certain negotiations were made for the settlement of the country, first with Mrs. Indira Gandhi and then after her assassination with Mr. Rajiv Gandhi attempted to resolve the conflict. Ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka entered a new phase when the LTTE started carrying plans out of the Accord. This provoked the government, and the government stepped against the Tamil guerrillas. With both LTTE

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and Sri Lankan government ignoring the Indian persuasion to stop fighting, the situation further worsened in Sri Lanka.

An agreement was then signed by Rajiv Gandhi and President of Sri Lanka Jayewardene on 29 July 1987 in Colombo to resolve the conflict and maintain the peace and harmony in Sri Lanka. The agreement commonly referred as '*Indo-Sri Lankan Accord*'. According to this accord, India has the powerful role for settling the conflict in Sri Lanka and provided military assistance. Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) guarantees to enforce the peace. But the LTTE opposed the agreement and declare a war against the IPKF, thus gave a new dimension to the Indo-Lanka relation. Moreover Sinhalese also protest violently for the accord building anti-Tamil and anti-Indian feelings. Tamil militants were not ready to surrender their arms, which was needed for the maintenance of peace at that time. So IPKF failed to disarm them. Tamils decided to continue their war for a separate state and did not comply with the Accord. IPKF lost the support and confidence of Tamil masses as it started military campaigns against Tamil guerrillas. In the meantime there was a growing JVP menace in the Sri Lanka with widespread violence, killings and terror. The

JVP had created an anti-India propaganda in Sri Lanka by using the Accord as a symbol of Sinhalese humiliation. India decided to pull out the IPKF from Sri Lanka.

Indo-Sri Lanka relations have made significant improvement since the withdrawal of the IPKF and in the aftermath of the Rajiv Gandhi assassination by the LTTE in May 1990, manifested by the substantial changes in the attitude of India towards the Sri Lankan conflict and the LTTE. Further, the government of India maintains a persuasive anti-LTTE stand after the Rajiv Gandhi assassination.

The role of India is elaborated in K. M. De Silva in his book *Reaping the Whirl Wind*:

Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict of the mid and late 1970s and early 1980s and especially the anti-Tamil roots of 1983 created conditions for India to play a major role in the island's affairs. This was threefold. The first, which began with Mrs. Gandhi's return to power in 1980, was her covert support to Sri Lankan Tamil political activists who were operating from India. This covert support continued until 1987. The second, hinged on the Tamil Nadu factor which has traditionally formed an important facet of India's relations with Sri Lankan affairs. Seldom has a constituent unit (a province or a state) of one country influenced the

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relationship between it and a neighbouring country with the same intensity and to the same extent that Tamil Nadu did and continues to do. Admittedly, India's own role is more complex than merely reacting to the pressures of domestic politics in Tamil Nadu. Nevertheless, concerns about the latter have been an important consideration. Tamil Nadu governments have provided Sri Lankan Tamil separatist activists with sanctuaries, training and bases. Not only did the central government under Indira Gandhi connive in this, but it also tolerated the provision of training facilities and the existence of camps and bases in other parts of the country. The origins of these camps and bases go back to the early 1980s, that is to say, well before the riots of July 1983 in Sri Lanka. (193)

By analysing the history of Sri Lanka it became clear that civil conflict is more dangerous than the international conflict, especially when the conflict is ethnic one providing opportunity to others to interfere in the process of resolution.

The novels of Shyam Selvadurai succeed in bringing the reflection of the miseries of Sri Lankan civilians as a result of the conflict. Shyam Selvadurai has secured an incredible position as a novelist. He draws the stimulus for his works from his personal experiences. Shyam Selvadurai

presently lives in Toronto with his partner Andrew Champion, was born in 1965 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. He was born to a Sinhalese mother and a Tamil father. He spent his childhood in Sri Lanka. However, at the age of nineteen, the ethnic riots in Sri Lanka made him to leave his native country. He and his family then migrated to Canada like most of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. At a very young age, he started to write. The two conflicting ethnic groups, and the troubles between them become one of the major themes in Selvadurai's works.

Certain renowned and acclaimed magazine, newspapers praises the novels, applauding their features. *The Independent* comments on the conflict in the novel *Funny Boy* as: "Shyam Selvadurai's butterfly-delicate first novel is both a simple coming-of-age tale and an intricate study of cultural conflict Sparsely written and suffused with winsome humour, this is a magical debut." (n p) *Books in Canada* give a huge acclamation to the author: With the publication of the subtle and deeply humane *Cinnamon Gardens*, Shyam Selvadurai has established himself firmly as an important chronicle of the complexities of social and cultural difference Selvadurai's examination of difference is almost total free of naïveté. *Cinnamon*

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Gardens is a successfully novel because the author manages to critique the foolishness behind the prejudices of his characters while acknowledging the great difficulties facing anyone who attempts to simply shrug off the demands of their culture . . . *Cinnamon Gardens* is a fine novel that is both delicately written and very, very wise. Selvadurai has definitely delivered on the promise of *Funny Boy*, and asserted himself as a gifted and sensitive writer.(n p)

The Atlantic Monthly praises *Cinnamon Gardens* as: “*Cinnamon Gardens* is a considerable accomplishment. It demonstrates that Selvadurai has the ability to create a naturalistically detailed fictional world.”(n p) Kaustav Bakshi in his article, “The queer ‘outsider’: Family and sexuality in Shyam Selvadurai’s *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*” comments:

The expatriate Sri Lankan Tamil writer, Shyam Selvadurai occupies an important position in the South Asian literary canon. In Selvadurai’s novels, discourses of ethnic and sexual identity politics coverage to provides an alternative perspective on the recent history of his homeland. The novels are remarkably informed by the increasing visibility of self-identified gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersex and transgender people and the

articulation of same-sex desire in adherence to a global libretto of sexual identity politics. (171)

The first novel *Funny Boy* analyses the conflict in Sri Lanka and the trauma of dispossession as a product of the ethnic strife. Shyam Selvadurai’s novel *Funny Boy* is written in six discrete chapters each with a specific title. Every chapter throws light on the ethnic rift and the consequent deprivation of the characters. The novel entails certain events from the history of Sri Lanka like the riot of 1983 which shook the whole nation. It depicts the pathetic situation of the Tamils. The novelist unveils the clash and the social circumstances of Sri Lanka through the protagonist of the novel, Arjun Chelvatranam. The novel is a perfect blend of history and fiction. Jameela A Begum in her essay. “Locating the Exile’s culture: Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*” comments on the blend of history and fiction:

What one finds very interesting about a book like *Funny boy* is not just the retelling of the history/culture but the way of telling it. Literature would cease to be literature if it is nothing more than a factual history survey of a particular period in the history of a nation and people. The discourse the narrative strategies that Shyam Selvadurai employs, creates a textual space in

which fantasies and realities coexist.
(140)

The novel is about the journey of Arjun into his own identity, his growth, development and exploration of his surroundings. Through his journey he is exposed to the social rigidity and the communal violence going on in his native land; his realisation is used to unravel the crisis in Sri Lanka. The narrative keeps shifting between the past and the present to build the theme of exile as a result of conflict. The reason behind his exile was the communal violence created by the ethnic conflict between the Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri-Lanka. Arjun and his family have moved to the new land but they do not belong there. He confesses that he was suffering from 'the loss of his home country'. One section of the novel titled "Radha Aunty" unearths the nature of communal rift in Sri Lanka. Arjun is exposed to the ethnic conflict by the adults of his family, he gathers the information about the history and the past happenings which introduced the rift in his life. The conflict in the country as well as in the mind of Arjie is well portrayed in the novel's third section "See No Evil, Hear No Evil". The feeling of dispossession was growing up with the mental growth of Arjie. Conflict was not limited to the physical violence, it rather caused inner

turmoil also. Besides the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict, there was another conflict called conflict between Sri Lankans and Burghers. The Burghers were the English people who were living in Sri Lanka but left the country when the government of Sri Lanka made Sinhala the national language and cornered the other languages. "When the government made Sinhala the national language in the 1950s many of them left because they only spoke English." (116) While exploring the havoc of the country, Arjie was detached from the miseries of his deviant sexual self. Minoli Salgado portrayed the writer's objectives in his book *Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place*: From its opening story on the cross-dressing boy narrator, Arjie, who gravitates to the 'girls' territory during playtime, to the final story of his homosexual relationship with a Sinhalese school friend, Shehan Soysa, it is clear that the cultural coordinates of identity in the novel are marked along exclusionary lines determined by ethnicity and gender identification. It seems that Selvadurai positions desire an unpredictable force field which threatens both to disrupt the established order of an ethnically divided society while simultaneously offering it its only means of redemption.(119)

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The last section of the novel “Riot Journal: An Epilogue” reveals the zenith of turmoil, and chaos in Arjie’s life. It is a journal written by the narrator about the 1983 riot of Sri Lanka. The section is an important part of the novel without which novel would be fragmented and incomplete. This section is based on the actual event of the history, the 1983 riot of Sri Lanka. The 1983 riots shook the whole nation. The year of 1983 gave disgraceful and irremovable blots to the history of Sri Lanka. The turmoil of 1983 uprooted many people not only physically but also emotionally. The section is based on the writer’s own experience. The migration and uprootedness shown in this section is based on the author’s own journey. He was forced to leave the country, and then he migrated to Canada to live a life of exile. Excessive violence, bloodshed, turmoil, and chaos are portrayed in this section. The novelist has drawn a lucid picture of the darkness that exists in that period. Scores of common people were crumpled between strong forces and the innocent people lost their lives, family and property. They were compelled to leave their native-land. The section unearths the agony of the novelist. The crisis not only affects a single community rather it put the whole humanity at stake. People of both the races had to

suffer. In this section the writer depicts the pathetic condition of Tamils, they were left as the breathing entities without any possession. Horrifying scenario of Sri Lanka in the year 1983 is depicted. The riot of 1983 which broke out in the month of July was known as Black July, because of the darkness it spreads. The hatred between the two groups reached its zenith. This section is a proof that there is no resolution for the conflict. In fact a way is found to escape the conflict, which comes as Migration. People migrate to the new land with pain and sorrow and longings to return back to their mother-country.

The diary entry of the narrator is used as the epilogue of the novel. It is in the form of journal, the writer uses the first person to uncover the shock and horror of Black July. “But I haven’t been able to sleep. I have tried to read, but that is impossible, too. The only thing for me to do is write.”(287) The violence and terror is conveyed with much immediacy. The writer had furthermore presents the time also, to make the section more effective. “6:00 A.M. Two hours ago the phone rang in the hall...”(286) This section is set against the escalating turmoil between Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka which led to the Civil War of 1983. The reference of the event in this novel serves for displaying the

instability of the country. The racial riot of 1983 was the real villain, it forced the Tamil natives to become exiles.

The next thing that happened in the novel was the end product of the conflict. The sufferings forced the family to think of emigration. The rift had played the role of a catalyst to start the process of emigration. To end the sufferings, one must cut the thread which connects him to the sufferings. So they decided to break their ties with the mother country as it was the only option left for them.

Arjun was rejoiced by the idea of migration, he no longer wants to be the part of the nation where they could not feel safe. The home is no longer a home for him. Arjun could understand his exile. He would be exiled from his home country which has been degraded by the ethnic tensions. Besides the external exile he was exiled internally also as he had to end the relation which was dearest to him and which helped him to explore his real self. The inner conflict of Arjie was complementing the outer conflict going on in the country. The hopelessness of Arjie was shown in the end of the novel when he could not control his emotions. He laments the loss of his mother country as well as for the life he had spent there. He was left dispossessed and desolated with bareness everywhere in his life.

The second novel *Cinnamon Gardens* attempts to trace the roots of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. This novel explores the causes of the conflict and the ethnic disagreements which culminated into the situation of civil war in Sri Lanka taking thousands of lives and mass migration of Tamils. The novel, therefore, is a fictional rendering of the genesis of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The conflict in Sri Lanka did not generate in vacuum, it had a past. The novels of Shyam Selvadurai are often set in the past weaving meticulously the historical facts into the fabric of his narrative. The novel *Cinnamon Gardens* is set in the period of 1920s when the country was under the British rule. It reflects upon some very important historical facts which gradually lead to the situation of crisis in Sri Lanka.

Cinnamon Garden is a volatile narrative of crisis, conflict and ethnic tensions. The novelist depicts the situation of crisis at multiple levels—from personal and familial to socio-political and ethnic.

Shyam Selvadurai has purposefully set his novel against the backdrop of The Donoughmore Commission's arrival in Sri Lanka. The novel depicts as to how the Commission was responsible for the present condition of the country. The story of the novel is set in 1920s,

more specifically in the year 1927. It is a story of two characters namely Annalukhmi and Balendran. It has two parallel narratives; one is about Annalukshmi and other about Balendran. It is through their narratives that the novelist reflects upon the political struggle of Sri Lanka to liberate itself from the colonial influence. The novel is divided into two books having twenty six chapters in total. The chapters deal alternatively with the characters of Annalukshmi and Balendran. The theme of colonialism amply resounds in the structure of the novel.

Annalukshmi Kandiah, a 22 year old independent girl and her middle aged uncle Balendran who is a gay are the protagonists of the novel. Both live in an upper class region of the Ceylon called Cinnamon Gardens which form the title of the novel, Cinnamon Gardens refers to the colonial residential territory of the upper class Sri Lankans representing the social complexity of the country. 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)

Shyam Selvadurai has embedded the political struggle of Sri Lanka within the two narratives of Annalukshmi and Balendran. The setting of the novel depicts a crucial period of the country when the seeds for future ethnic strife were sown. The idea of a balanced nation becomes an irony as the fractures were inherent in the idea of a balanced nation itself. In her article "Confirmity And Conflict: Reading Identity In Shyam Selvadurai's *Funnyboy* and *Cinnamon Gardens*" Kalaichelvi panchalingan writes "To further emphasise the reality of his plot, Selvadurai uses authentic historical events as a backdrop in both his texts." (67-68)

The novel is replete with the instances of ethnic conflict. Enumerating the grounds of fragmentation in Sri Lanka Asoka Bandarage in her book; *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka: Terrorism, ethnicity, political economy* writes:

The fault lines between the Sinhala and Tamil communities that show up in the modern Sri Lanka conflict

were drawn during the period of British colonization from 1815 to 1948.

Colonialism integrated the previously separated regions of the island within a highly centralized colonial state. But by the inherently uneven and unequal manner of integration into the polity, British colonial policies contributed to new forms of ethno-religious competition and stratification. Undermining the fluidity and inter-mixture that had prevailed in ancient Sri Lanka, colonial rulers promoted an essential approach which saw ethnic groups as inherently separate. Divide and conquer was a key to conquest, consolidation and maintenance of colonial regimes. In that sense, contemporary global policies of ethno-regional separatism and political fragmentation represent a continuation of the strategies of classical colonialism. (29)

Selvadurai through the narrative of *Cinnamon Gardens*, depicts as to how the inability of the ethnic leaders in handling the situation of crisis paved the way for the gradual disintegration of the country. The selfish interests of different ethnic groups and the persistent intolerance for one another unleashed and new chapter of communal violence which actually took place in the colonial period, later led to Civil War and migration

of thousands of people. A distorted sense of ethnic consciousness based on the idea of majority should rule actually proved to be the cause of the devastation of the country. Reflecting on the negative side of ethnic assertions, Earl Conteh-Morgan in his book; *An Introduction to the Theories and Cases of Violent Conflict* writes: “While ethnicity has a positive dimension-defining identity and fostering self-determination it is at the same time very destructive to human life and can cause untold suffering.” (192)

Based on the life of its protagonist Shivan Rassiah and his grandmother Daya, the novel *The Hungry Ghosts* depicts a mixture of political and religious struggle with the back and forth movement of its central character. The narrative oscillates between the present and the past describing the politics of Sri Lanka with the Buddhist stories in the background. Consequent to the continued clashes between Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, other colonies get the chance to interfere in the political struggle of the country. The narrative brings in as to how India interferes in the struggle for her own advantage, making the conditions worse. India as depicted in the narrative comes in the country as the protector for Tamil Tigers but later it proves to be a common enemy of both Tamils and Sinhalese and is,

therefore, compelled to quit the country.

Writing on the India's intervention, Asoka Bandrage in her book *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka* comments as under:

Until India's Intervention, there was only limited international financial and ideological support for the Eelam separatist struggle. The birth of a Tamil diaspora-insurgent network and support from a host of INGOs and other external institutions also damaged Sri Lanka's image and further internationalized the Sri Lankan conflict. (116)

She further writes in her book *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka* "Apart from its professed sympathy for the Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian was keen to preserve its own 'perceived interests' . . . The Indian government was concerned about Indian business and Tamil interest in Sri Lanka."(111)

The situation in Sri Lanka created an opportunity for India to enter the scene. K. M. de Silva in his book *Reaping the Whirlwind* has explained the role of India in the Sri Lankan conflict:

It has been seen how Indian intervention began as a comparatively low-key business, giving aid to some of the participants in Sri Lanka's conflict-the Tamil separatist groups. Assistance was

given in order to encourage the continuation of the struggle, in order to compel or persuade the Sri Lanka government to change some features of its foreign policy. The next stage in the escalation of Indian involvement came in India's decision to help resolve the conflict itself by acting as a mediator, in the course of which it sought to apply sanctions to some or all parties, and eventually ended by underwriting a settlement negotiated with the Sri Lankan government. The Indian intervention reached its denouement in 1987 with the mediator transformed into a combatant . . . (247)

The analysing of the novel reveals the sufferings of people. The ethnic rift is coupled with the multiple issues of the country. Bloodshed, turmoil, chaos and unrest are present in the novel. The feature which makes this novel different from others was the portrayal of Buddhist mythology, notably the Karma philosophy. Reckoning with the past is the vital feature of the novel. The key political events which throw light on the impacts of the conflict are entangled in the narrative. Tyranny of the Sri Lankan government, and certain other parties like JVP, LTTE, is exposed. Not only the two groups are responsible for the conflict and chaos, in fact many other agencies contributed a lot in the deterioration

of the nation. India interfered for the peace-building but her role proved to be ironic, making the conditions worse.

Conclusion

The novels of Shyam Selvadurai trace the gradual process of the disintegration of Sri Lanka both under the foreign influences as well as its own insurgent groups. His narratives depict as to how pedantically Selvadurai's novels expose the entire gamut of power politics which victimised the innocent people of Sri Lanka. The focal point of this study is the ethnic clashes in Sri Lanka. Shyam Selvadurai delves into the deeper realities of the common people of Sri Lanka. He takes into account the socio-political history of Sri Lanka to delineate the roots of conflict and crisis. What is the meaning of the term conflict? What triggered ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka? And what were its repercussions? are the key questions addressed in the paper. The three novels *Funny Boy*, *Cinnamon Gardens*, *The Hungry Ghosts* are the answers to these questions and the chronological account of the events provides the background in detail.

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