

"TO BECOME A MAN": Rewards, Punishments and Masculinities In Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*

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Abstract

Critical literary studies on fiction have drawn far less attention from the domain of Masculinity than Feminism. This paper endeavors to focus on the acts of reinforcements and punishments as a tool to shape the conduct of the male characters in the novel *Funny Boy* (1994) by Shyam Selvadurai, a South Asian novelist. He has made significant contributions to the understanding of sexual diversity through his works. In order to attain research objectives, the theory of operant conditioning formulated by B. F. Skinner, a renowned psychologist, and social philosopher, has been used to frame the discussion. The analysis reveals the fundamental role of rewards and punishments in stimulating certain behaviors, at certain places or situations. Furthermore, Selvadurai's descriptive argument raises questions about the inconsistency of individual approaches to gender. Unlike what the individual approach suggests, gender and its representation in the public sphere are not seen as a natural internal instinct instead, it has been constructed in controlled spaces. The analysis has also revealed modification that is functional only to the behavioral level and not on the characters' perception of their world.

Keywords—Operant Conditioning and Gender, South Asian Masculinity, Reinforcement, Punishment.

INTRODUCTION

Gender, a social category, refers to the attributes associated with the sex of an individual. While sex signifies the biological characteristic of a person, gender is the social construct of its reality. Femininity to female and Masculinity to male is assumed to be natural. Due to association with the science of biology i.e., sex presents gender and the roles associated with it as objective and real. The Masculinity of a person is determined by the cultural norms of society (Stets and Burke). An "individual approach to gender" assumes that gender functions instinctively (Ryle, 2011, p.33). There have been several approaches to understand and define gender and while it is debated to be naturally driven, there is also strong evidence of the cultural influence over it. This would mean that gender exists somewhere within individuals, and it drives people to participate in the world around

them in certain ways. The way in which individuals participate is greatly influenced by the expectations of society. This leads us to another important phenomenon in gender studies: sex role. Talcott Parsons, a functionalist sociologist, explains the existence of differences in roles assigned to men and women. Right from childhood, men are taught to be instrumental while women are taught to be expressive or oriented towards socializing (Bales and Parsons). Therefore, a woman wanting to work outside and earn a living while her husband stays back to take care of the house and children invites a confounding reaction due to the prevailing conjecture about sex roles. A crucial observation here is that the latter is more abhorrent than the former. The existence of stereotypes and associating demands to meet gender norms are as predominant in the male society as female and other genders. However,

studies on men and their problems are less explored.

Masculinity is a social construct that refers to the set of roles, behaviors, and attitudes that are generally associated with the male members of society. Courage, independence, violence, assertiveness, and being career-oriented are a few traits commonly associated with masculinity (Rudman and Mescher; Kimmel, 2013, p.119-141). Heterosexuality, dominance over women, and subjugation of people from lower classes of society are additional traits common in major societies in the world, including South Asia. The idealistic traits of Masculinity are the ones, that "men must aspire to and be prepared to defend" but practically, it is "impossible to live up to" (Beynon, 2001, p.65). It has been observed that Masculinity is dependent on the place of dwelling, family, upbringing, work, and subcultural influences (Edley and Wetherell). These form the society in which men live and they also have a direct influence on men's behavior. Different male characters have been identified in these novels that are associated with violence and dominance and it has been a proud moment for them by achieving this power to govern others. For instance, in a research paper on militant Masculinity in Sri Lanka, violence, valor, aggression, confidence, composure, and honor are found to be qualities associated with militants (de Silva, 2014, p.80). Since they are the protectors of the land, they become the role model, and the above-mentioned qualities, which they possess, become the hegemonic traits of masculinity.

Not all men successfully abide by the norms of Masculinity and depending on the level to which they confirm the traits, the type of Masculinity of an individual is determined. Masculinity is not a linear term; it is a pod of many Masculinities ranging from hegemonic to subordinate type. Hegemonic masculinity was introduced to the field of men's studies in the 1980s and is described as "dominance of particular section of society", not through violence or threats but through "consent to be governed and dominated" by others (Nayar, 2009). The concept of hegemony has been derived from Antonio

Gramsci's analysis in the field of cultural studies on relations. The acceptance of authenticity of male superiority provides room for the actual dominance of a group of men over others. Ensuring Masculine dominance would establish the continuation of the patriarchal system. Therefore, consciously and unconsciously, both men and women modulate themselves and others around them to continue the cycle of the superiority of the male and also ensure that men maintain the basic standards of superiority. Conditioning the behavior, especially in public, could be one of the many tools to do so. Behavior refers to the mannerism and actions of an individual with reference to their communication to themselves and their environment (Hemakumara).

The theoretical framework of this paper is an extension of the theory on operant conditioning to the field of Literature. Operant conditioning, also known as instrumental conditioning, was first studied by an American psychologist, Edward Lee Thordike, who termed it Law of Effect. According to him, behaviors followed by satisfying consequences are more likely to be repeated whereas; behaviors followed by unpleasant consequences are less likely to be repeated (Thordike, 1898, p.189). However, Thordike's study was based on the observation of animal behavior and he believed that mental states such as satisfaction were unobservable. B. F. Skinner, the father of operant conditioning, ameliorated this study by extending it to understand human behavior. Skinner explains operant behavior as the one which is emitted and not elicited by any stimulus. These are unmodified actions and responses of individuals to situations around them. Skinner further elucidates that operant behavior can be modified using reinforcements and punishments. Reinforcement and punishment are further categorized as positive and negative. While positive and negative reinforcement strengthens the behavior and increases the probability of its occurrence, positive and negative punishments reduce the probability of the occurrence of the behavior which they follow (Skinner). Skinner has also explained the phenomena of extinction

of behavior due to the absence of reinforcement or punishment.

Rewards and Punishments play a crucial role in conditioning behavior. Studies have also proven the fundamental role of reward-oriented behavior for an individual's well-being and survival (McClure et al.). Rewards could be categorized as primary and secondary based on their need for survival. While the primary rewards include food, water, and sex, secondary rewards include elements such as money and social approval (Beck, 2010, p.9251). Though there is an individual difference in the manner in which people respond to rewards and punishments (Telzer), both men and women are found to be sensitive to these stimuli. Also, men are found to be influenced more through rewards, while women are found to be more sensitive to punishment (Eneva, 2017, p.5). Understanding the possibility of wrong conditioning being the source of bad behavior, such as unruly dominance over another gender, is a crucial advancement towards achieving the bigger goal of gender equality. The study is based on an analysis of Shyam Selvadurai's novel *Funny Boy* a seminal work of fiction with gender playing a crucial role in its plot.

Shyam Selvadurai (1965-) is a Sri Lankan Canadian novelist born in Colombo to a Sinhalese mother and Tamil father, both belonging to the two major conflicting ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. These conflicts are common themes in most of his works including *Funny Boy*. Along with various nominations for his contribution to the field of marginalized literature, and literature of gay studies, Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* has been adopted as text to study sexual diversity in many South Asian colleges. *Funny Boy* is the first novel published by Selvadurai in September 1994 which won the Lambda Literary Award for gay male fiction, and also the Books in Canada First Novel Award. The plot is set in Sri Lanka, and it revolves around the life of a young seven-year-old boy covering till fourteen years of age. At the age of 7, Arjie, the protagonist also learns the ways of the world and makes peace with his own sexual identity.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Arjun Chelvarathnam or Arjie, the protagonist in the novel, *Funny Boy*, guides the readers through six chapters that depict six important events that have made a significant impact on his life and personality. His observation of the people around him and their actions, for seven years old boy, is remarkable. It is also unbiased, as in most parts he is just transferring the knowledge of the events, to the readers without any judgment. This knowledge of the incidents that had taken place at Arjie's house, school, and other significantly important places, is studied and analyzed using the theory of operant conditioning.

The four major elements which modulate behavior and the probability of its occurrence are: "positive reinforcement", "negative reinforcement", "positive punishment" and "negative punishment". The following analysis of Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* is a thematic discussion of the four major elements of behavior conditioning. Here, reinforcement and punishment signify the favorable and unfavorable responses whereas; positive and negative signify the act of introducing or eliminating stimuli to modify behavior. Under each subtitle, the analysis highlights the use of the mentioned element in modulating the behavior of the character discussed based on Masculinity.

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

This article has focused on the description of operant conditioning based on the novel "Funny Boy" by Shyam Selvadurai. Shyam Selvadurai's significant debut novel "Funny Boy" delivers historical fiction that deals with an individual's psychological and moral growth. It was published in 1994 and identified as one of the powerful presentations of the trauma of "prevailing ethnic tensions". The entire novel revolves around the character of the protagonist Arjie. According to Skinner, rewarding behavior with a pleasant stimulus increases the probability of its occurrence, in a similar situation or similar place. Various instances from the novel provide an understanding of the impact of positive reinforcement on the behavior of the characters from the text. Arjie, who was too young to

discover his identity and inclination to gender norms, finds it fascinating to play make-belief games with girls, rather than outdoor games with boys. In Sri Lanka, in the midst of the political turmoil, Arjie has discovered his sexuality (Bakshi, 2019, p.42). Arjie was well accepted and respected amidst the female cousins, whereas he was mocked by the male cousins, with the moniker: "girlie-boy" (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 25). During their monthly visit to their grandparent's house, the male and female cousins would split up and occupy different portions of the yard to play. While Arjie deviated from the general norm and joined the girl's group, his female cousin Meena joined the male group. On one hand, the deviation of a female from the traditional feminine behavior is acceptable, while on the other the feminine behavior of a male becomes an object of scorn. Similarly, Arjie holds an important position in the girls' group and though he is portrayed as a shy boy in most parts of the novel, he finds himself leading the group of girls during their games. He says:

The reward for my leadership was that I always got to play the main part in the fantasy. If it was cooking-cooking we were playing, I was the chef; if it was Cinderella or Thumbelina, I was the much-beleaguered heroine of these tales. (4) Along with the admirations from his cousins for the skilled performance Arjie gave, the power to "leave constraints" and ascend into "an icon, a graceful, benevolent, perfect being upon whom the adoring eyes of the world rested" (ibid 4-5) fuelled his behavior of performing acts during the game, a behavior stereotypically considered to be feminine. Basically, the story remains a bittersweet journey of accomplishing maturity as well as the sexual arouse of a child. It is a coming-of-age novel that is built up in the form of six poignant stories. The story is about a boy coming to age in Colombo within an affluent Tamil family. Eventually, Arjie explores his sexual identity and experiences the "Sinhala-Tamil tensions" foreshadowed by the 1983 riots between the ages of seven and fourteen. The evolution is captured against the backdrop of Masculinity that highlighted the male-dominant

impact on society. However, what strengthened this behavior was the pleasure he gained as a result of participating in the girls' group while living in a Masculine society. Therefore, "positive reinforcement" from the female cousins, with comments such as, "Arjie is the best bride of all," (ibid 10) strengthened his behaviors of indulging in activities, often considered feminine. Arjie is shamed and humiliated with the moniker "funny one" (ibid 14) while Meena's participation in boys' group and outdoor games was not even mentioned. Men and boys, in a patriarchal setup, are doomed with the norms of masculinity to an extent that even games played by kids could bring the fear of non-conformity among adults.

Recent scientific studies on young schoolboys have shown significant, yet negative influence of patriarchal gender-role orientations on boys' educational success (Hadjar et. al., 2015). School as an institution is equally, if not more, important as compared to other institutions such as family, in a boy's gender orientation. In the fifth chapter, Arjie is forced to attend the Queen Victoria Academy, a school that Arjie's father believed would force him "to become a man" (ibid 210). Educational institutions, which are supposed to liberate individuals through knowledge, thus became the centre of manipulation of behavior. Here, academic understanding is not the only learning; instead, it is the preparation of men who would safeguard the patriarchal functioning of society by ensuring the plantation of superior and dominant traits of masculinity, in adolescent boys.

It has been analyzed that femininity to females and masculinity to males is assumed to be natural in contemporary society. After his transfer to the new school, Arjie faces many difficulties, apart from the usual adjustment problems any child of Arjie's age would encounter in a new environment. Along with bullying senior boys, the principal of the school, Mr. Abeysinghe, often called "Black Tie" (Selvadurai, 1994, p.211) also gave Arjie a hard time in the school. Initially, when Arjie asks his elder brother, Diggy, about complaining to parents about the appalling methods of punishments, the principal

adopted, Diggy's "eyes grew wide. "Once you come to The Queen Victoria Academy you are a man. These all incidents are indicating the different aspects of Masculinity in contemporary society. Either you take it like a man, or the other boys will look down on you" (ibid 211). Masculinity is a social construct that has been identified as setting behaviors, roles, and attitudes interconnected with male members of the family of this novel. Besides Arjie, there are other boys who kept their problems to themselves as that gave them the reward of becoming a man. There is the presence of both reward as well as punishment, as being self-reliant brought the reward of being a man, while the opposite brought shame and rejection from others. Throughout the entire novel, the factor regarding social change and Masculinity has come in a repetitive manner that highlights the contemporary class discrimination area.

In later parts of the novel, it is observed that Arjie is encouraged into keeping secrets for many other characters like Radha aunty who was involved in a romantic relationship with a man from the enemy caste, Anil; his father's friend's son: Jegan, who kept contacts with the violent Tiger group; his mother who had renewed her contacts with her old lover, Daryl; and his friend Shehan who was homosexual, in the land which considered it sin and crime. Keeping these secrets had brought him friendship and favors such as books from Dary Uncle, permission to play with her makeup items by Radha Aunty, being treated with respect by Jegan, a holiday trip, and absolute attention by his mother and, love and sexual gratification from Shesha. It has been experienced that the concept of masculinity involved independence, assertiveness, courage, violence that impacted the female members of the individual families. Although, the entire novel represents different types of outlines of family members, schoolteachers, friends, and their arguing, living, co-operating, and loving. The wide Tamil family and its disagreements, as well as conversation, has throwback a particular culture, while several aspects of the issues are universal. In this novel, Selvadurai conducts together with the wrestle of ethnicity, sexuality, and class. Thus, all the obstacles in this novel

have been shown with the development and leading of the protagonist (Lo, 2018, p.44). The domain of masculinity than feminism is the main reinforcement of this novel.

In the chapter "Small Choices," Jegan, a family friend and employee of Arjie's father, reacts violently towards a man who was sticking posters on the wall of Arjie's house. Despite several warnings, when the man refused to listen, Jegan "caught the man by his arm and, with a quick twist, threw him to the ground" and insulted him "pariah" which means an outcast (ibid 168). This violent behavior of Jegan was appreciated and reinforced by other family members like Perera Aunty with compliments: "Good work" (168) which encouraged the violence in him as an acceptable trait of masculinity. Here, violence and dominance over people of the socially subordinate class have been encouraged, resulting in the formation of learning of this behavior and ensuring its re-emergence in a similar situation. Arjie, the speaker, too expresses his "admiration" (ibid 169) for the action. There is an individual difference between the manner and lifestyle of men and women and for this purpose, there required a serious change in the society. Male dominance environment that has been found as daily activity and male power has successfully created a vast impact on society. Understanding social behavior is essential to describe a specific social condition and gather knowledge to protest against it. Accompanied with major gender norms of the society, the protagonist of this novel Arjie has understood the pain of social rejection and eventually becomes a good secret keeper. In addition, the adolescence of Arjie has experienced the hurdles to the civil war that created a negative situation for the minority Tamil community (ibid 172). In this condition, Sri Lanka's Sinhalese majority move against the minority Tamil community and it departed the two communities.

NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT

In the contemporary patriarchal culture, Arjie experienced a serious negative impact on society as being gay. Through the leading story the readers have found that from the earliest days,

Arjie fails to meet his family's assumption as a boy rather he prefers to play with his female cousins. He always enjoyed the company of his female cousins instead of male cousins. Following these, the parents of Arjie started to worry regarding his funny sexuality, all reacted with shame and embarrassment to accept the truth of Arjie's belonging as a gay. During the upcoming novel, it has been seen that Arjie did not control to find the acceptance to go away from his family, not acceptance of his sexuality (Chatterji, 2020, p.338). His family continues to pressurize him to follow in other men's footsteps. After several incidents and realization, Arjie comes to a decision that he will go with his heart's desire. Finally, the achievement of Arjie was the capability of simply learning to accept himself, in contrast to denying his family's demand and rejecting shame.

Thereby demonstrating the manner in which the removal of an unfavorable stimulus such as legal action encouraged the anti-social behavior among the white men in the contemporary masculinity society. The hegemony of white males is also an important aspect of this consideration. The importance given to white men over dark-skinned local men is evident in the way how contemporary society influenced class discrimination. The removal of the threat of being attacked by anti-Tamil thugs signifies the removal of an unfavorable stimulus, and it encouraged Arjie's father and his business partners to hire and listen to Singhalese staff. Deviating from the teaching of his family to stay away from Singhalese, he appoints Singhalese for prominent jobs at his hotel as he was reinforced into doing so by his experiences of removal of threats on his life and his property. Consequently, the life of Arjie has been spent in a society that was rigid gender roles that are entirely different from the concept of masculinity. There are several movements that have been mentioned in this story of the novel that helped to bring a change in contemporary society. These actions are a direct threat to the existing social system which functioned on the dominance of men, maintaining the difference in

caste and ethnicity, subordination of women, and hegemony of heterosexuality (Oli, 2019, p.200).

POSITIVE PUNISHMENT

Positive punishment refers to the introduction of an unpleasant stimulus after a behavior or action has occurred to reduce the probability of its occurrence in the future, in the same space, or in the same situation. Arjie's guise as a bride for the game he and his female cousins played was discovered by his aunt, Kanthi. Kanthi Aunt dragged Arjie to the elder's gathering and mocked him for being the "funny one" (Selvadurai, 1994, p.14). The concept of masculinity also has been found while the author introduced the factor that Arjie and his numerous cousins have the right to play freely always slip up by gender. Based on the basic thinking process of the masculinity society, women are predicted to get weddings only. Throughout the character of Arjie's cousin Tanuja, it has been found that she also has a deep sense of masculinity. As she called Arjie "sissy", "pansy", and "faggot" that is identified as the important role of males in society (Intersections, p.258). The term masculinity has been considered as "learned behavior" and not "operant" in nature. It was a reaction to Arjie's rudeness towards her daughter, Tanuja who was given the moniker, "Her Fatness" (ibid 5) by the children who were subconsciously aware of the considered superiority of slender women over the fatter ones. Unveiling Arjie's inclination towards femininity had changed the course of actions and reactions from significant people in life.

Apart from this, a clear concept of social caste division has also been highlighted in this novel by Shyam Selvadurai. It has been found through the characteristics of Jegan who remains a friend of Arjie's father who reacted violently when he found a man striking posters outside of Arjie's house. Despite warning the man several times he did not listen, at that moment to control the situation Jegan accused him of being a "pariah" which means belonging to a lower caste (ibid 168). The incident highlights the contemporary time and the social structure of having gaps

between castes and classes. Thus, class division is a socially subordinate class that has been encouraged, resulting in the formation of learning of this behavior and ensuring its re-emergence in a similar situation. Following the incident, Perera Auntie compliments Jegan as he did such excellent work by making the man realize that he belongs from a lower caste background (Masitha, 2020, p.119). Again, in this area, encouraging the trait of masculinity has been seen and it also has been shown that violence and dominance over people remain a common factor in the contemporary class division. In a society where masculinity is the main focusing factor and females are continuously dominated by the males, the life struggle of a homosexuality holder how can be cruel and difficult has been highlighted throughout the entire story of this novel.

The author has highlighted a continued fear that tease Arjie's father for Arjie for not being funny. Rather it has been seen that Arjie's father has continuously pushed masculinizing his son. It showed that the mentality of Arjie's father is also associated with masculinity which believed that only males can exist in society. Eventually, Arjie's departure from masculinity conducts his family towards a sense of shame. In addition, the Chelvaratnams have been found to make fun of Arjie of for being different in a repetitive manner. In this novel, "funny" has been identified as a term that lets down both families' anxiety regarding disclosing the potentialities of having a gay son as well as highlights their homophobia depending on instinctual revulsion, unjustified, and wave to the cultural norm (Pradhan, 2020, p.208). In the middle part of the novel, the author mostly heightened Arjie's sexuality. Accompanied with the realization, denying the social rituals, Arjie more create a challenging scenario against the contemporary society to live according to his heart's desire. From the perspective of masculinity, it can be observed that it can serve a new thinking process to the young boys in order to frame their identity.

NEGATIVE PUNISHMENT

Negative punishment is associated with the removal of a pleasant stimulus, after a behavior

has occurred, to reduce its occurrence in the future. Arjie's cross-dressing for the make-belief games he played with his female cousins had brought shame to his father. In reaction to this behavior, Arjie was restricted from entering his mother's room while she dressed up as his father believed that it was his mother who encouraged "all his nonsense" (14) by allowing him to enter the room while she was dressing and let him play with her accessories. This new rule has pulled away from the experience he considered "almost religious" (ibid 15) and made him realize the damage caused by his behavior.

Even in the first chapter, it has been found that Ammaji forced Arjie to play with boys instead of girls. It showed that she was also influenced and convinced by the contemporary social structure. Following the beliefs and activities, it is generally identified that "gender separation" is just a basic and essential element of the world (Gairola, 2021, p.219). The author wanted to highlight the contemporary social gaps based on masculinity. Along with this, he not only focuses on the difficult living situation of females but also introduces the life of homosexuality. Associated with the male identity and heterosexuality has been dominant over people of another ethnicity. Therefore, it was somehow a belief of the contemporary period that is associated with masculinity and awareness of discrimination. Arjie's struggle and fight against the contemporary social structure have been described and portrayed by the author to make sure about his identity. Arjie, a young seven year old boy failed to comprehend the fault in his behavior:

It was clear to me that I had done something wrong, but what it was I couldn't comprehend. I thought of what my father had said about turning out "funny." The word "funny" as I understood it meant either humorous or strange, as in the expression, "that's funny." Neither of these fitted the sense in which my father had used the word, for there had been a hint of disgust in his tone. (Selvadurai, 1994, p.17)

In the chapter "Radha Auntie", Radha, a Sri Lankan Tamil girl involves in a serious relationship with a Sinhalese man, Anil. The incident was contemporary to communal clashes

between the two groups of ethnicities and thus invited strong disapproval from both families. Radha's decision to fight all odds and unite with her lover was discouraged by her mother, Ammachi, through the removal of all favorable stimuli around Radha. Ammachi said, "We are sending you to Jaffna to stay with my cousin Nages. Hopefully, after a month you will come to your senses." (ibid 77) She even agreed to marry Rajan Nagendra who befitted her family's standard of masculinity as "he had a tall, powerful physique and strong features" (ibid 98).

The novel unconsciously highlights class discrimination besides the impact of masculinity. It also has been pointed out that males are the only living-beings who have the right to make any decision. On the contrary, the female has no right to expose their own desire to live accordingly. Thus, within behavior modification, the specifics of approaching masculinity have been identified as a condition that is able to keep positive the standards of masculinity. Following the story of this novel, it can be stated that not only the male characters who supported masculinity are responsible for the typical social structure, but those female characters are equally responsible for making the impact of masculinity strong. It has also been noted that men who are not confirming the hegemonic masculine qualities are considered deviant and unnatural. Accompanied with heteropatriarchal spaces, Arjie's sexual transgressions have made the challenge to establish his identity out of the social normalcy. In the fifth chapter, Arjie had reached his adolescence and was constantly in conflict with his sexual identity. He had unconsciously projected behaviors that had given hints of his sexual inversion to himself and the world around him, but these behaviors were soon controlled and hidden by his parents' strict rules in a way that his sexual identity remained a question to everyone including Arjie. The introduction of Shehan to his life shook Arjie's dismissal of his real identity.

The masculinity spikes the violence and throughout the entire novel, the aspect of

violence and gaps has been found. For Selvadurai, queer sexuality is one of the effective features that support communal warfare. Though accompanied by a masculinity agenda of nationalism, queer human rights conversation has become difficult and complicated (Nightingale, p.273). As in this novel the protagonist, Arjie has been considered as deferring from the masculine gender, making the novel exceptional compared to the other existing novels. Thus, the novel has shown that despite having male power in society, how Arjie wanted to make his individual identity. It can be mentioned as an example that militant masculinity in Sri Lanka, violence, valor, aggression, confidence, composure, and honor are found to be qualities associated with militants. It is the main reason for creating the novel based on violence and dominant activities in the Sri Lankan background.

While Arjie was involved with Shehan in an intimate sexual relationship, he still did not accept the true nature of his sexual inclination. Though the physical intimacy gratified him, Arjie's behavior showed the opposite because of the learning from his past wherein he had suffered severe punishments for projecting deviant behavior. Shehan initiates an intimate relationship between both of them by kissing Arjie and after their first kiss at the school; Shehan invites Arjie to his home. Shehan takes Arjie to his bedroom and waits for Arjie to take the next step. "He was looking at me as if waiting for me to do something" (ibid 252) says Arjie, the first time he hesitates to express himself to Shehan. This lack of response from Arjie disappoints Shehan, who "drew his breath" (ibid 253) and left the bed where he and Arjie were sitting. This removal of the pleasant stimulus of Shehan's company, made Arjie realize that he "had disappointed" Shehan (ibid 253). The second time, Arjie and Shehan indulged in a sexual relationship at Arjie's garage, Arjie responded to his feeling. He says, "Before I quite knew it, I was responding to the prompting of his tongue ... I was aware of my mouth in a way I had never been before, aware of its power to give and receive pleasure" (ibid 258-259).

Somehow this incident indicates Arjie's challenge to contemporary society and to show his ability to flow against the contemporary flow. Being getting out of his normative sphere of masculinity, Arjie was labeled as faggot, pansy, and sissy which also showed that Arjie was different from normal people and someone so funny (ibid 169). Arjie's cross-dressing for the make-belief games he played with his female cousins had brought a difficult situation for his family members to deal with society. It has been shown in the behavior of Arjie when he stated:

"Of the three of us, I alone was allowed to enter Amma's bedroom and watch her get dressed for special occasions. It was an experience I considered almost religious, for, even though I adored the goddesses of the local cinema, Amma was the final statement in female beauty for me." (Selvadurai, 1994, p.15)

In the contrast, by introducing the gender role in the novel the author makes sure about the social discrimination regarding Sri Lankan background, the war has been brought to highlight the matter in a better way. In this regard, the quotation *"the sky is so high, and pigs can't fly,"* indicated that gender roles as inevitable in the contemporary social structure (Selvadurai, 1994, p.17). Thus the characteristics of Arjie proved that discrimination is associated with the core of the mind of the people of that society. Accompanied with the rejection of accepting the contemporary flow of society, Arjie challenges the societal structure and culture. Based on the power of masculinity, "British imperial values" challenge the education policy (Funny Boy, p.235). Arjie's being different from others and making himself with the identity that show that he is critical funniest character among them all, the carnivalization has been established to make the differentiation so clear and unique. The withdrawal of Shehan and his love resulted in the following introspection in Arjie:

Right and wrong, fair and unfair had nothing to do with how things really were. I thought of Shehan and myself. What had happened between us in the garage was not wrong. For how could loving Shehan be bad? ... I thought of how unfair this was and I was reminded of things I

had seen happen to other people, like Jegan, or even Radha Aunty, who, in their own way, had experienced injustice. How was it that some people got to decide what was correct or not, just or unjust? (Selvadurai, 1994, p.273-274)

The politics of power and hegemony of certain people results in the bifurcation of right and wrong. Later, Arjie also admits to Shehan that: "I did it for you," I said. "I couldn't bear to see you suffer anymore." (ibid 284) Embarrassing the Principal in public had also ensured the withdrawal of the unpleasant stimulus i.e., removal of Black Tie, from his position of the Principal. The swift shift in Arjie's behavior is an example of the conditioned nature of 'masculine' behavior. Men in general, like Arjie, are "conditioned" throughout with "rewards" and "punishments" to behave in certain ways that are in symmetry to the gender role associated with the male identity. Heterosexuality, dominance over people of other ethnicities, submission to elder male members of the society, and emotional independence, are a few characteristics associated with masculinity in the novel.

CONCLUSION

In the specifics of approaching masculinity through behavior modification, it has been observed that conditioning individuals to live up to the standards of masculinity is a life-consuming process. Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* has proven to be a representation of the true nature of the social functioning of the patriarchal system. Women and other subordinate genders are not the only victims, but also those men who fail to conform to the norms of masculinity. It has also been noted that men who are not conforming to the hegemonic masculine qualities are considered deviant and unnatural, like Arjie in the novel. Punishments and rewards are used as a tool to modify the way the characters behave in public. The characters have shown significant change in their behavior in public spaces after the conditioning was done using rewards and punishments. However, conditioning has been functional only on people's behavior in public and it did not change the way in which these individuals perceived the

world around them. Besides highlighting the shift in behavior due to conditioning, the paper also demonstrates the existence of incongruities in determining the right reaction to behavior. While some characters are found encouraging a behavior with rewards, it has also been observed that similar behavior invited punishments by other characters. Also, gender is a social construct that is not rigid and requires constant conditioning to ensure its existence in the form desired by those in power. Behavior conditioning is found to be a tool to achieve this goal. This theoretical paper also concludes that the social environment to which a child has exposed drives individuals' perception towards self and others. This paper has also attempted to analyze Selvadurai's work in a new light and therefore it is hoped that this attempt will further inspire future researchers to critically analyze various other approaches to understand the concept of gender and behavior.

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