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FUNNY BOY

THEMES

Gender and Sexuality:

Interplay between sexuality and gender is an important underlying theme in the novel, and it is most apparent in the spend-the-day events at the start of the story. Here Arjie and his cousins enact a marriage scene in their “bride-bride” game. As the leader of the group, Arjie plays the bride, and the children are blissfully unaware of the disjunction between Arjie’s male gender and traditionally feminine role until the arrival of their cousin “Her Fatness”. She states that, “A boy cannot be the bride. A girl must be the bride”. The rest of the family finds out about Arjie’s activities and are horrified at the notion of him dressing up in bridal attire. Interestingly, “Her Fatness” is described as large and booming with masculine traits throughout the scene. It is almost as if her masculinity is innocuous, whereas his femininity is a point of contention. Sexuality and gender play an important role in defining the relationships between the characters and their perceptions of one and other.

Marriage:

Marriage appears several times throughout the course of the novel, as it is something Arjie is fascinated with. In “Pigs Can’t Fly”, Arjie and his female cousins reenact a Sri Lankan marriage in the game of “bride-bride”. Arjie assumes the most coveted role, that of the bride. The most exciting part of the game is the transformation into the bride. The draping of the white, sari allows him to “leave the constraints of [his] self and ascend into another, more brilliant more beautiful self, a self to whom this day was

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dedicated". Marriage serves as a source of bonding with Radha Aunty due to marry with Rajan Nagendra.

Ethnic Identity

As the novel is set during the start of the Sri Lankan civil war, the characters impacted, and constrained, on an individual level by the tensions between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority, which includes Arjie and his family. For example, the relationship between Radha Aunty and Anil cannot progress because Anil is Sinhalese. Arjie's father foresees the difficulties of being a minority Tamil and enrolls his sons in Sinhalese language classes at school, so that future opportunities are not limited to them. Arjie's father is optimistic and is eager to see the tensions between the two ethnic groups end, and is reluctant to see that the best option for his family is to immigrate to Canada.

Sexual Identity

Stripped to its most fundamental form, the novel documents Arjie's journey to sexual identity. His sexuality, while a topic of discussion for his family, is not confronted directly. Instead he is always referred to as "funny". He recognizes that this term carries a negative connotation, but doesn't understand its complexity, stating that "It was clear to me that I had done something wrong, but what it was I couldn't comprehend". Throughout the novel, Arjie is also increasingly aware of his feelings towards the boys in his school, accepting that he thinks of the shorts they wear and longs to be with them. However, he only fully grasps his sexual identity and its familial implications after a sexual encounter with one of his male classmates. Arjie then understands his father's concern and "why there had been such worry in his voice whenever he talked about me. He had been right to try and protect me from what he feared was inside me, but he had failed".

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