

IN PURSUIT OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS: SHYAM SELVADURAI'S *CINNAMON GARDENS*

Although novels authored by Sri Lankans/Ceylonese living overseas have appeared sporadically since the beginning of this century, the Sri Lankan novel of Expatriation *per se* began with the publication of Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* in 1982. Since then, Sri Lankans living in Australia, Canada, and England have proven Rushdie's thesis that "however ambiguous and shifting this ground [the positions that expatriate writers find themselves in] may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles" (16). The variety of patterns, themes, strategies and attitudes adopted, and the acclaim with which many of these novels have been received in the English-speaking world demonstrate that diasporic writing *vis-a-vis* Sri Lanka is both various and healthy. The novelists involved have written about Sri Lanka, sometimes with nostalgia and understanding, and at other times with anger and disapproval. The more sensitive writers combine these and other sentiments in their work which also on occasion appraises the island in relation to the country in which they are currently resident.

A constant in many of these novels is an obsession with the past which is often used to analyze the present and to draw lessons for the future. To cite a few examples, Barry Mundy's Australian experiences in Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* are at one level similar to his grandfather Edward's exploits in the antipodes many years before, but at another they are substantially different. A. Sivanandan, in *When Memory Dies*, generally contrasts the past favourably with an odious present. Gamini Salgado's memoir-novel, *The True Paradise*, begins with descriptions of Sri Lankan peddlers, palmists, balladeers, and snake-charmers that are almost orientalist in conception, but the work as a whole grapples with life in Sri Lanka which through "the treacherous haze of memory [. . .] seem[s] idyllic" (140) despite his "utter enchantment with England" (145). Romesh Gunsekera in both his novels plays with terms like "paradise," and "Eden" in writing about what has happened to Sri Lanka in recent years. And Shyam Selvadurai's first novel *Funny Boy* employs the *bildungsroman* tradition to describe events that had traumatized his growing up in Sri Lanka.

This exchange between the past and the present, then, is almost a given in Sri Lankan expatriate writing. This practice allows these authors to undertake the kind of project that Dolores de Manuel has identified with Asian writers in America:

In writing of the balance between the exiles' physical departure from home and their imaginary returning there, Asian writers in America are working out a pattern of action, tracing a dynamic movement between closeness and detachment, assimilation and distancing. Through this movement, the characters in their works, have made for themselves, a variety of strategies that affirm all the types of sustaining connections between themselves and their homelands that they can find. (46)

Selvadurai's second novel *Cinnamon Gardens* marks a change in Sri Lankan expatriate writing, however. Since his intention appears to be to provide a revisionist account of a period in the island's history, he eschews the contemporary scene altogether. Still, this tactic does not prevent the novel from being "relevant" and the writer from "sustaining connections" between himself and the land of his birth through it. Selvadurai selects as his background the presence of the Donoughmore Commissioners in the island from November 1927 to January 1928 to make a "prolonged, exhaustive, and sympathetic study of Ceylon in all its aspects" (qtd. in Jeffries 48). The report that was compiled after their deliberations led to the break up of established political alliances and the institution of new coalitions. Their hearings, furthermore, provided an opportunity for those representing organised labour, women's movements and others who had thus far been marginalized in colonial society to articulate their grievances openly. Selvadurai's is the first Sri Lankan novel to be set in this period. His temporal distance from these events and his spatial divide from the island allows him to rewrite the socio-political and cultural scene in Ceylon/Sri Lanka from hitherto unexamined perspectives. In addition to examining issues like communal differences, class-consciousness, and the position of women that were concomitant with the period, he also explores the theme of homosexuality that had been his major concern in *Funny Boy*. To this expatriate writer, isolating such an important period in Sri Lanka's history, provides an opportunity to identify the beginnings of the problems that have led to the country's current crises, perhaps the factors which led to his family's immigration--the anguished tone that is evident towards the end of *Funny Boy*, when Argie contemplates the prospect of exile and a home that was razed to the ground by rioters, seems to support such a reading. The critic's task of course is to ascertain whether Selvadurai has translated this experiment into a successful novel.

When *Funny Boy* was published in 1994, readers responded favourably not merely because it dealt with homosexuality, a "sensational" theme in a Sri Lankan context, but for "its translucent surface, its unadorned style, and its conversational tone" (Kanaganayakam 1998: 1). Despite some attention to form, it read as a very personal, even spontaneous reaction to a traumatic period in Sri Lanka. This spontaneity is evident in all the episodes, and especially in those events that describe

Arjie's homosexual proclivities, his hatred of school, and the riots that led to his family leaving the island. *Cinnamon Gardens* is a much more ambitious and demanding book which apparently needed substantial research. This was inevitable given Selvadurai's decision to place his novel in the late 1920s. If Sivanandan has lived through more than half of the events chronicled in his tri-generational novel, Selvadurai was born in 1965; that is, more than three decades after the Donoughmore Report was published. While it would be untrue to say that in striving for historical veracity (through research and conversations with people who remembered the life of the times), Selvadurai has totally lost the pleasing qualities that Kanaganayakam identifies in *Funny Boy*, one must concede that the effervescence that characterized his previous novel is absent here.

My reference to Sivanandan is not incidental. In some respects, *Cinnamon Gardens* seems to be a response to *When Memory Dies*. Although Sivanandan's name does not appear in the long list of acknowledgments that is found at the end of Selvadurai's novel, students of Sri Lankan expatriate writing are sure to find commonalities between the two novels. In *When Memory Dies*, Sivanandan presents a cycle of events from the mid twenties to the present with special emphasis on the "lower classes" that are regarded with considerable sympathy. *Cinnamon Gardens* romanticizes the "lower classes," but does so usually through commentary and not action. It concentrates mainly on the upper middle class elite in Colombo. Sivanandan's novel focusses substantially on the industrial action taken by A.E. Goonesinghe who (according to him) eventually betrayed the Labour Movement and colluded with colonial administrators. Goonesinghe is a minor player in Selvadurai's novel but is treated with some approval, even admiration (183). This is not surprising given that the political climate that Selvadurai describes is greatly influenced by Kumari Jayawardena's *The Rise of the Labour Movement in Ceylon*, a book which valorizes labour leaders, like Goonesinghe, and uses every opportunity to belittle members of the Ceylon National Congress who belonged to the elite. Sivanandan's novel was noted for positing subaltern themes. Selvadurai, too, focusses on those who are at odds with upper middle class living and who resist it in small ways. The quotation from George Eliot's *Middlemarch* which serves as an epigraph is particularly important in this regard:

. . . for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rested in unvisited tombs.

Such an epigraph implies that Selvadurai's novel will foreground the actions of men and women whose important but "unhistoric" acts contributed to the well-being of the country. In *When Memory Dies*, men and women from various classes, castes, and

backgrounds fall in love with each other. It is a strategy that allows Sivanandan to suggest that such interrelationships will ultimately provide a more humane and egalitarian world. Selvadurai too makes use of such liaisons for similar artistic purposes. While it would be difficult to claim that Sivanandan has in some way influenced Selvadurai, the points of convergence between the two novels are striking.

In the essay quoted at the beginning of this study, Rushdie also says that "[t]he Indian writer, looking back at India, does so through guilt-tinted spectacles" (15). Such a claim could perhaps be made for other expatriate writers as well. But Selvadurai wears neither "guilt-tinted" spectacles nor "'rose coloured glasses" for that matter in perusing the Ceylonese elite of the 1920s in Sri Lanka. His condemnation of this class from which emerged the "patriots" who are honoured on "Independence Day" is searing, even vitriolic at times. The conclusion that could be drawn from a reading of this novel is that many of Sri Lanka's current woes could be traced to the parochial ideologies and chauvinistic actions of this gentry. The Mudaliyar and his peers are deemed to be self-centred, hypocritical, out-of-touch with the times, caste-ridden, tasteless, and determined to ensure that Sri Lanka after British occupation becomes an oligarchy rather than a democracy. Mudaliyar Navaratnam represents a patriarchal order whose decrees have to be followed at all costs. There is little that is endearing about him. He banishes his eldest son for wanting to marry a servant woman's daughter when he [the Mudaliyar] had used her mother for sexual gratification. He is appalled to discover that his second son Balendran is having a homosexual relationship with Richard Howland in England and he heartlessly destroys this relationship; still, he has no compunction in asking Balendran to have Richard intercede on behalf of the Tamils when Richard accompanies the Donoughmore commissioners to Sri Lanka. Navaratnam had been invited to the US on the strength of a dubious book he had written on Tamil culture and during this visit, as Sonia ruminates, he "had passed himself off as a great Hindu sage" (55) when he knew nothing about Hinduism or Tamil culture. Finally, he hires Miss Adamson to function as his secretary, ostensibly, but more importantly to serve as his mistress.

These are just some of the double standards that Mudaliyar Navaratnam is guilty of. As long as they refer to the Mudaliyar as an individual, the only quarrel that one could have with Selvadurai is that he has overdrawn a major character. It becomes patent before too long, however, that the entire Cinnamon Gardens crowd, of whom the Mudaliyar is very much a representative, is being castigated for the larger role its members played as leaders of their community and as politicians. Consider the Mudaliyar's response to the prospect of the vote being given to all:

People like Dr. Shiels do not understand what it [universal adult franchise] would mean to an Oriental society like ours. It would put

the vote in the hands of the servants in our kitchen, labourers, the beggar on the street. Illiterate beings to whom the sophistication of politics is as incomprehensible as advanced mathematics to a child. It would lead to mob rule. (70)

It is a truism, even a cliché, to declare that the British created a local elite to function as a barrier between themselves and the general populace. There is also no disputing that this elite was in many ways alienated from the "lower" classes. That the Congress voted to oppose the granting of Universal Adult Franchise has also been recorded in many historical and political commentaries. Selvadurai suggests in this novel that all Mudaliyars and Ceylonese members of the State Council who negotiated Constitutional Reform with the British were narrow-minded and self-seeking, however. Considered from an "enlightened," late twentieth century perspective, the objections to the granting of Universal Adult Franchise to the marginalized in Sri Lanka could be viewed in a pejorative light and Selvadurai is correct to point out that these objections were fraught. But in his anxiety to prove his thesis, the author is unable to capture the complexities of the issues involved. Many individuals who had fought relentlessly for progressive reforms in several spheres during the first two decades of this century were genuinely concerned that those "who had not yet reached an educational or cultural stage enabling them to take a responsible part in politics" (Jeffries 51) would not be able to exercise the vote properly and that they could be exploited by self-seeking politicians. Some of them also favoured a gradual system of enfranchisement: for instance, E.W. Perera (who appears briefly in the novel) uttered these sentiments in 1926: "Evolution rather than revolution is the creed of the Congress and a violent whirlwind agitation which will sweep like a tornado through the country, inflaming passion and against the government [sic] is the last thing the Congress would welcome" (qtd. in Jayawardena 261). Then again, even Sir Charles Jeffries who had worked in the Colonial Office and been involved with the negotiations that led to Independence from Britain in 1948 concedes that the "Civil Service Government" that administered the colony during the first third of the twentieth century "did little positively either to further the political education of the general population or to draw the several communal elements together into a nation" (33). Michael Roberts' claims, in fact, that the leaders of the Congress *had* examined ways of educating the masses. He says, "[It] would be erroneous to infer that no thought was given to the idea of politicising the populace and that the Congress leaders turned their backs on this notion as deliberately as they rejected militant or revolutionary courses of action during the period 1915--1928. Indeed the evidence is to the contrary" (cix).

Selvadurai, unfortunately, trivializes the positions adopted by members of the Congress. Their major representative in the novel Navaratnam enunciates the

views of this body in this pompous, neo-fascist fashion when he speaks to Richard on the assumption that the latter has some influence with the Donoughmore Commission:

I have always felt that the problem with modern Europe is that it has forgotten its aristocracy and the obedience to its will. If every man's voice is to count equally, the voice of those who think will be drowned out by those who do not think, because they have no leisure to think. This position leaves all classes alike at the mercy of unscrupulous opportunists. (136)

Selvadurai chooses to ignore that the island would not have been on the verge of achieving Universal Adult Franchise with the Donoughmore reforms in 1931 (the first non-white British colony to do so) had it not been for the Manning and Manning-Devonshire Reforms instituted over the previous twenty five years or so which were made possible because of the initiatives taken and agitations carried out by the class that he is deriding. In what is supposed to be a sympathetic approach to the Mudaliyar's predicament, Balendran concludes,

His father belonged to the old breed of statesman who had come of age at a time when even the mention of self-government would bring the mighty fist of the British Empire down on them. They had learnt to negotiate themselves within this tyranny. His father was like a prisoner who had spent so much of his life in a penitentiary that he was unable to accommodate himself to a life outside of it. (30)

The colonial encounter did of course produce lackeys and stooges, but Balendran's slanted account ignores that some of those who belonged to the "old breed" were not as effete as suggested here. When Buddhist leaders were wrongfully jailed by the British in the 1915 riots, Christians, Hindus and some Buddhists who were spared risked their well being (even their lives) in trying to have them released. Jeffries, in admitting the excesses of the Governor in 1915, adds

Fortunately for Ceylon, she now had leaders who could speak with effect for her people in this emergency. The efforts of Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, Sir James Peiris, Mr. E.W. Perera, Sir Baron Jayatilaka and others met with a sympathetic response from Sir John Anderson, who succeeded Chalmers as Governor in 1916. (36)

Some of these individuals confronted the empire in its capital, alerted public opinion to what was taking place in the island, and achieved their objectives. As W. Thalgodapitiya asserts:

Ramanathan returned to Ceylon in 1916, but E.W. remained in England to continue the struggle. He was joined there by D.B. Jayatilleke, and the two of them waged an incessant fight for redress, [. . .] . In their main task they were successful. The Buddhist leaders were released; the Governor Sir Robert Chalmers who blundered so miserably was recalled; Brigadier-General Malcom was replaced, and a great humane administrator Sir John Anderson was sent as Governor. (118)

These are hardly the actions of people who were crushed by the "mighty fist" of the British Empire. One could argue of course that Balendran's views are not necessarily those of the author. But it is apparent that Selvadurai uses characters like Balendran, Annalukshmi and Sonia occasionally to propound views that are consonant with his own. One way of discovering the points of convergence between the author and the characters involved is to read such pronouncements along with narratorial views that are not filtered through a character. Consider the following comment about the homes of the Sri Lankan elite:

They were the homes of the best of Ceylonese society, whose members had thrived under the British Empire and colonial economy. This gentry had attained an affluence they never could have foreseen, through trade in rubber, coconut and plumbago, and--this a well-covered fact--the distilling of arrack. The drawing rooms of these homes were appointed with the best that Europe had to offer, the finest chandeliers, Waterford crystal, curtains from Paris, damask tablecloths, Steinway pianos. Everything that made the occupants faithful servants of the British Empire or, if not the Empire--as this was the age of agitation for self-rule--at least loyal to the principles of the colonial economy that had placed them where they were. (11-12)

The tenor of this passage is very much like that of the previous piece given to Balendran which makes it patent that the narrator (who is never shown to be "unreliable") and Balendran share similar ideological positions in their questioning of the probity and the motives of the elite.

In his essay on Selvadurai, Raj Rao proposes a reading of *Funny Boy* " from the angle of race, sexuality, and gender" which "show[s] that a subaltern identification exists in the minorities in these groups, who constitute the 'other' of the male fanatical self" (117). That such a binary is problematic was apparent from the discussion that ensued after Rao's expounding these views for the first time in a paper

he read at the ACLALS conference in 1995. Selvadurai's novelistic skills in *Funny Boy* are such that he is able to blur the "male fanatical self" and the "other." Such compartmentalization is problematic in *Cinnamon Gardens*, too. But there is a definite sense in which class (as opposed to race), sexuality, and gender are major themes in *Cinnamon Gardens* with received notions of heterosexual, patriarchal, and upper-class living being contrasted and compared with the views and actions of gays, those from the lower classes, and women with progressive views. Selvadurai does show that the origins of the current animosity between sections of the Sinhalese and Tamil communities could be traced to this period, witness the Mudaliyar's decision to identify himself with the Ceylon Tamil Association to oppose self government because

[...] the arrival of this Donoughmore Constitutional Commission in two weeks makes it necessary that we Tamils unite together. It is rumoured the Commission will be granting greater self-government in the new constitution. This must be stopped. The governor must retain all the power he possesses. Otherwise, we will replace a British Raj with a Sinhala Raj, and then we Tamils will be doomed. (29-30)

Sinhalese members of the group are also suspicious of the Tamils' continuing demand for Communal Representation. Such feelings are articulated by F.C. Wijewardene and others at various times: "Slowly, slowly moving in that direction [towards the position held by the Ceylon Tamil Association]. Between you lot and the damn Kandyans wanting their separate state, you will split this country into a thousand pieces" (69), F.C. says to Balendran at one point. In dramatizing these conflicts, Selvadurai is here affirming the findings of those like Nihal Perera who contend that

[t]he consciousness of Ceylon becoming a single state precipitated the reconstruction of cultural differences and identities within the society. This was manifest in the increased intra-group competition among the elite. For example, in 1931, the Tamil elite had shifted its policy of 1910, of having reasonable representation for Tamils in the Legislative Council, to wanting equal weight for Tamils and Sinhalese. (102)

While the "competition" was sometimes carried out for self-centred reasons, both communities had reason to view the future with some trepidation. The work of historians, like Jane Russell, suggests that the Commissioners, though well-intentioned, were misguided in acting as they did:

The commissioners, on the other hand, optimistically believed that given a push in the right direction, the political divisions of the West based on economic class would prove axiomatic in Ceylon as well. The Commission's optimism on this point was proved by later events to be premature if not wholly mistaken. (18)

Although religion, caste, and class have influenced elections over the years, it is race that has been the bane of the island's politics and history ever since the Donoughmore reforms were implemented. But communal differences do not have the same impact in this novel because Selvadurai is more interested in showing how the upper crust of both communities was united in ensuring that others were not given access to the powers and privileges they enjoyed. As the Mudaliyar says, in defusing a potentially heated debate about communal representation between a Sinhalese and a Tamil, "Gentlemen, whatever our differences, we are agreed on one thing. Universal franchise would be the ruin of our nation" (70).

Although they enjoyed many privileges, women who belonged to the elite were marginalized in several ways. Women from other classes obviously fared much worse. Rao, in his essay on *Funny Boy*, makes the extraordinary argument that "[t]here is even a veiled implication that women, like the Tamil minorities on the island, need a militant movement to liberate them" (120). What becomes apparent in *Cinnamon Gardens* set in the pre-independence period (as opposed to Selvadurai's previous novel), is that women from *all* classes are capable of defending themselves without employing such drastic measures. True enough, *Cinnamon Gardens* pays considerable attention to women who are victimized. Nalamma has no voice in her own home and she is forced to suffer in silence the Mudaliyar's sexual escapades first with Pakkiam's mother, and subsequently with Miss Adamson. As for Pakkiam, who is brought to Brighton to take her mother's place when she is old enough to gratify his sexual desires, she would have suffered the same fate if Arul, the Mudaliyar's son, had not married her and left for India. Then again, Murugasu, though estranged from his wife and living in Singapore, pressurizes Louisa into making their daughter marry his nephew, Muttiah. His plans fail only because Annalukshmi runs away from home to avoid the marriage and her sister Kumudini chooses the intended groom as *her* partner. Such episodes, though overdone on occasion, effectively highlight the pressures and strains experienced by women in Sri Lanka. In addition to such victimization, Selvadurai also describes embarrassing incidents relating to proposals (especially those that fail)¹ and the plight of women who opt to remain single or are unable to find partners.

¹ See the encounter between Louisa and Mrs Nesiah in pages 149-52. The theme of proposed marriages with its many references to dowries is also found in other novels

What makes *Cinnamon Gardens* different from many others by Sri Lankan writers is that here women do not always submit to patriarchal dictates but covertly and sometimes overtly resist the pressures that threaten to smother them. Unfortunately, the author has presented a whole cavalcade of characters for this purpose, a form of underscoring that is detrimental to the novel. Although Nalamma suffers the humiliation of her husband keeping a mistress in her own home, she is sufficiently "wise to the ways of the world" (314) to use this relationship to advance the cause of her children. It is her idea that Balendran should ask Miss Adamson to intercede on behalf of Arul. Louisa had married a Hindu despite parental objections. Sonia, Annalukshmi's English aunt, encourages her niece to think for herself; furthermore, she eschews her own privileged schooling where she was "trained to be a perfect society lady" (73) to involve herself in a programme to train women from depressed castes and classes to help themselves. Miss Lawton, the Missionary School principal, for her own part, shows what single women can achieve. Then again, Nancy, a girl whom Miss Lawton had adopted and educated to a level of sophistication that would never have been possible otherwise, marries Mr. Jayawera, a clerk, against the wishes of her guardian, a major statement against received notions of upbringing. The most important woman character in this novel is Annalukshmi who will be examined later in another context. Suffice to say for the moment that she invites the censure of a very conservative society by riding a bicycle to work, in electing to further her career as a teacher, and in attending meetings of a society that is intent on securing franchise for women. Indeed, the women in this novel are victimized only for a brief period of time; they are so vocal that one of them can even denounce Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan who is regarded as a National Hero by Sri Lankans of all communities.² Annalukshmi, in arguing with Philomena Barnett on the need for women to be given the vote, makes this comment:

dealing with early twentieth century Ceylon, like those of Lucian de Zilwa, (1917), (1919), and Ja[me]s de S. Wijeyeratne [n.d.].

²

Jane Russell states that "[t]he ageing Ramanathan, resembling the aged Gladstone whom he had so admired, took refuge more and more in oracular dogmatism delivered with such a patriarchal air that he became more like an Old Testament prophet than a politician" (19). While these and other pronouncements recorded in Russell's book seem to support Selvadurai's portrayal, the denunciation of Ramanathan as rendered in the novel gives the impression that Ramanathan and his peers were just hidebound, self-seeking individuals who had made no contribution whatsoever to the island's gradual emancipation from British rule.

Mrs. George E. De [sic] Silva, who was one of the speakers, said that men like Sir Ponnambalam are narrow-minded and selfish, [. . .] She said that such men are swine and that women were the pearls and that good pearls cannot be crushed that easily. Even by men. (118)

Fortunately the novel does not provide too many instances of such facile iconoclasm. What is debilitating, however, is its inability to capture the inner struggles and the procrastinations experienced by women in taking such stances. Since these are not women on the verge of the 21st century but those inhabiting a 1930s Ceylon, the decision to challenge the establishment could not have been easy. Except for Annalukshmi's curiosity at the thought of entertaining a proposal, her reluctantly agreeing to dress up for the visit of the intended, and her anger and embarrassment when it is reported that the boy had eloped with an older woman, the author presents few instances in which she is less than correct in her actions, *vis-a-vis* challenging the dictates of a patriarchal society. Many of the other right-thinking women are equally strong with the possible exception of Miss Lawton who despite her pronounced views on the subject reacts negatively to Annalukshmi's proposal that the school should admit bright non-christians (129-30) and to the prospect of her protégé, Nancy, marrying Jayaweera. To keep a sense of balance, Selvadurai fashions an idiotic, near-Dickensian character named Philomena Barnett as the major representative of conservative, Sri Lankan womanhood. Although she occasionally provides humour to a work that is generally devoid of the same, she is too obviously a foil to the others to be a credible figure.

David Hemenway declares that in Naipaul's fiction "sexual confusion is intended to reflect political confusion" (200). One could perhaps say that Selvadurai in this novel shows that sexual roles imposed on its members by a traditionalist society lead to sexual confusion. This process is in turn a metaphor for the confusion and misery experienced by the lower classes when their lives are planned for them or controlled by the elite. Although other Sri Lankan writers had touched on the topic previously, it was Selvadurai's honest, comprehensive analysis of what it was to be gay in Sri Lanka that made *Funny Boy* a seminal work. He adopts a different strategy in *Cinnamon Gardens*. In the previous novel, this author describes a teenager's growing awareness of his desire for those of his own gender; *Cinnamon Gardens*, on the other hand, portrays homosexuality in the adult world. The most fulfilling period in Balendran's life was spent in England where he had a homosexual relationship with Richard Howland. Although the author gives only occasional glimpses of their life together, it is apparent that they had pledged to remain partners for life. Such a future is not possible, however, because orthodoxy and paternalism totally disrupt their relationship. The Mudaliyar who had been informed about what was happening by F.C. Wijewardena, Balendran's best friend, travels to England, and

confronts Richard and Balendran in their apartment. Balendran runs away from the flat to escape parental wrath, and Richard recounts what had taken place in his absence to Mr. Alliston, thus:

The moment the old man started in on us, Bala fled the apartment, without even a coat, in the middle of winter. When we were left alone, his father told me I was vile, that I had ruined his son. At first I tried to assert myself, to order him out of the flat. Then he threatened to have the police charge me with sodomy. [. . .] I was terrified. After all, it hadn't been that long since the Wilde trial. [. . .] Our lives are so fragile. One word to the law can shatter our lives into a thousand pieces. The old man saw his advantage and he broke me down. [. . .] Soon I was on my knees pleading with him not to go to the police. He even slapped me and I did not defend myself. [. . .] He ordered me to leave the flat. He was going to move in, take charge of his son. I obeyed his command. I left, went to my parents' home in Bournemouth. (141)

Selvadurai's use of words like "threatened" "take charge," "broke me down," and "slapped" to describe Navaratnam's actions and "terrified," "fragile," and "obeyed" to convey Richard's reactions not only shows that the "old man" was in command of the situation but also demonstrates the extent to which the patriarchal, heterosexual world that Navaratnam inhabits could dictate terms at the time. It is significant that the "law" appears to be on Navaratnam's side in this encounter and that Richard leaves for his "parent's" home, while the Mudaliyar remains to "take charge of his son."

One way that Balendran could be "redeemed" is by getting him married. Although the novel suggests that Sonia had actually fallen in love with Balendran, there is little to contradict the idea that Balendran, the ever-dutiful son, had married because it was expected of him. The early sequences that dwell on Balendran's life with Sonia in their house, "Sevana,"³ promise much but do not fulfill that promise. The "anguish" he feels for the life he could have had with Richard, and the sense of "suffocation, lying next to his wife" (38) on a bed that he likens to "a funeral bier"

³ "Sevana" means both shade and shadow. While the "shade" that the home provides is a given (as opposed to the oppressiveness of Brighton), Balendran's past, and his sexual proclivities, cast an unmistakable "shadow" on this home.

(78) bring him little sexual satisfaction. The "formality [. . .] in their love making" (80) can only be relieved for him by surreptitious visits to the sea beach where a penniless young man provides him with sexual release. Selvadurai, unfortunately, has chosen to explore so many themes in this novel that some--for instance, the sexual/emotional frustrations that are experienced by Sonia and Balendran--are treated somewhat superficially. The passage of time, the arrival of a son, and the discovery that Sonia and he share many "liberal" views, allow Balendran to achieve some kind of equilibrium. Selvadurai takes considerable care to suggest a parallel between Richard's and Balendran's affair which was destroyed by Navaratnam through the connivance of F.C., and the role played by the British and the Ceylon Congress in victimizing the masses. Although the following analogy pronounced by Balendran to F.C. after he discovers that the latter had betrayed him is glib at best, and simplifies both the colonial experience in Ceylon and the role of the Congress in providing political leadership to the nation, it does demonstrate a parallel with the situation that Balendran finds himself in as an individual:

Your Congress is ultimately no different from the British. You want power to do exactly what the British have done. Come in your high horse, think you know exactly what needs doing, meddle in other people's lives, makes decisions for them, because, after all, aren't you superior to them, don't you know what's best? I have nothing but contempt for people who are like that. (166)

Balendran's re-encounter with Richard is conveyed with even less conviction. Their trip to Galle, especially, reads like the sentimental twaddle that characterized S.J.K. Crowther's and Lucian de Zilwa's fiction produced in the early half of the twentieth century-- the only difference being that this is a homosexual relationship. Alli's resolution to visit India (obviously to provide time and space for Richard to sort out his feelings for Balendran) is contrived just as Sonia's sudden decision to leave for England soon after Balendran returns after his tryst with Richard is inexplicable. It seems glib to suggest that she shared Alli's motives. Balendran's decision to sever his relationship with Richard, coming as it does after a prolonged, passionate, and idyllic spell in an estate is even more implausible. The man who has begun to discover the background to his father's actions which had led to his severance with Richard many years ago, and is sufficiently emboldened to commence another chapter in his relationship with Richard, now responds sympathetically to his father's "begging for confirmation that his fears were unfounded" (204) when he returns from the "illicit" rendezvous. Soon after, his eyes focus on a photograph of Lukshman in which his son displays

[. . .] a contended smile on his face, the sun in his hair. As Balendran stared at the photograph, he had a sudden vision of that smile leaving

his son's face replaced by horror and repulsion at his father's crime. He thought of his wife. Sonia was so dependent for her happiness, her existence, on the life they had created together. Their house, Sevena, was all the world she had. How such a revelation would shatter her he could not even allow himself to imagine. (204)

It does not take a moment for Balendran to go to Richard's hotel room and break up with him for a second time just a day after they had completed their sexually and emotionally satisfying reencounter. The stormy scene that follows which includes an incident in which Richard "bent over and kissed him roughly, biting down hard on his lower lip" (206) concludes with Balendran saying "It's over, don't you see? It's all over" (207). Such a contrived, theatrical ending is surprising for a novelist of Selvadurai's talent. Balendran returns to his family, and Richard is apparently forgotten. At the end of the novel, however, Balendran, having pointed out some "home-truths" to his father, looked after Seelan's welfare, and seen his favourite niece growing up with an independent will, decides to write to Richard again and ask for his "friendship" (383).

The British play a curiously ambivalent role in this novel. In what George Goodin would have called a "victim-of-society" novel, the British (along with the local elite) would have been the antagonists or oppressors. That the local elite who belong to the Congress is given such a role is patent. Selvadurai chooses to ignore the elite's subordinate position *vis-a-vis* the British (including the notorious tactic of "divide and rule"), choosing instead to focus on their correspondences. Despite occasional negative references to British rule, however, the British are on the whole treated more sympathetically than the Congress which places his novel in the same category as those produced by Lucian de Zilwa, S.J.K Crowther, Leonard Woolf and others. It is interesting that a Tamil asserts, "[g]ive us a British Raj any day to a Sinhala Raj" (70); in fact, much of the criticism levelled at the British in the novel is articulated by the British themselves. Alliston says, in discussing the role of the Donoughmore Commission in Ceylon, "[t]hat's the British for you [. . .] Think they can barge in and tell everyone what to do. Then act put out when their brilliant solutions do not work" (108). He later adds, "[t]hey're trying to have their cake and eat it. Making it look they're being fair and treating the colonies well, while they rob them blind. Mark my words, this commission's recommendations will make sure the British continue to have their way" (108). Sonia who is British by birth concurs with much of what Alliston says. Other than these occasional criticisms, however, the novel presents few instances in which the colonizer's role is regarded with sustained criticism. Selected British characters who appear seem to be models or mentors for their Sinhalese and Tamil charges. Sonia

[v]olunteered a lot of her time and effort to the Girls' Friendly Society on Green Path. It had been set up for single working girls--secretaries, teachers, shop assistants--who had come to Colombo for employment. The society ran a boarding for some of them, but, more important, it provided a meeting place in the evenings and this kept many of the girls from the vices and the dangers of the city. Sonia had been one of those instrumental in setting it up. She helped in the administration and taught the girls English and other skills. (57)

As already mentioned, Sonia acts as a confessor for Annalukshmi, her niece, encouraging her to get involved in women's affairs, and offers her sensible advise on handling matters like proposed marriages. What is more, she is the one who cajoles, argues and shames Balendran into giving up the exaggerated form of filial duty he showed his father. Sonia, finally, fiercely advocates that poor women need franchise more than others; consequently, she refuses to join the Women's Franchise Movement on principle because she feels that it will compromise on this issue (74). The reader's admiration for Miss Lawton is reduced towards the end of the novel when it becomes apparent that her belief that "the right of women to be free to pursue what ever they chose did not truly encompass women of the colonies" (287)--including Annaluckshmi--and in her sacking of Jayaweera (326); still, there is no denying the prominence she is given as an educator. During the first meeting of the Women's Franchise Union, an "heiress" insists on naming a school for girls in Miss Lawton's honour because her work in education had allowed women to become professionals. As Lady Dias-Rajapakse asserts, "because we have education, we have been able to be helpmates to our husbands rather than millstones around their neck" (75). One could conclude from such comments that missionary education, especially when carried out by informed individuals, like Miss Lawton, had made a positive contribution to the country.

Selvadurai is careful to select British characters who generally express "correct" ideas. Consider Balendran's view that the British who are part of the Donoughmore Commission are more sympathetic to the cause of the lower classes than the Congress. As already mentioned, Selvadurai's assessment of the situation simplifies some of the debates on the whole question of franchise, but Balendran's admiration for Dr. Drummond Shiels in the following comments is unmistakable:

What I thought marvellous was Dr. Drummond Shiels' comment on the Congress, when he asked how they could dare demand self-rule and at the same time not recommend universal franchise. (166)⁴

I mean, F.C., how pathetic that a British man is more concerned about the poor of this country than the Congress which purports to be the voice of the people. Listening to the Congress today, I think I would rather remain as we are, under the thumb of the British. (166)

What is curious, however, is that Alliston and Richard, who are emphatically politically correct, occasionally make references to Sri Lanka that are, to say the least, thought-provoking. Commenting on why he wishes to leave the island, Alli says, "This Ceylon is a bore, [. . .] There is nothing to see here. Centuries of imperialism have obliterated the culture" (142). Since Alli is searching for a reason to leave Ceylon to allow Richard to sort out his feelings for Balendran, such a comment cannot be taken too seriously. Consider, however, Richard's oblique condemnation of traditional Ceylonese culture.

Richard found himself thinking about this "wife" with a certain disdain, remembering the Ceylonese women on board the ship. There had been some modern women, but he thought of the traditional ones - the way they drew their saris or shawls over their head when they passed him, as if he might carry an infectious disease. He felt sure that she was a cloistered, traditional woman, naïve to the ways of the world and certainly to the ways of her husband. Probably some cousin from Jaffna, judging from what Bala had told him about Tamil marriage customs. (104)

Richard is wrong in his speculations on Balendran's wife. Sonia turns out to be more "modern" than most. His conclusions on the "traditional ones" are never challenged, however. That an intelligent, liberal-minded person who is always shown to be

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It is interesting that Kumari Jayawardena's account on which this incident is perhaps based merely says that Shiels "expressed his disappointment that Congress did not attach more importance to the franchise question" (265). Jayawardena's disclosure that "Goonesinha was on close terms of friendship with Labour M.P. Drummond Shiels, who advised him on tactics to be adopted in giving evidence before the Donougmore Commission" (271) is also significant. It suggests that Shiels was not an impartial Commissioner but an interested player in the proceedings. (265).

sensitive to the complexities of East/West relationships would make such conclusions is perplexing at best. Matters become more confusing when Richard's attitude is compared and contrasted with Balendran's "life-long dream [. . .] to write a book on Jaffna culture" (227), a point that will be explored later in this study.

Given that the novel is situated at a time noted for anti-British sentiment Selvadurai's decision to include the more enlightened breed of Englishman (despite occasional flaws) at the expense of others with more chauvinistic attitudes is pivotal. From principals of schools to housewives, homosexual partners to Labourite politicians, the British are presented with some admiration. Such characterization, especially when allied with Balendran's doubts that the Congress will be able to govern the country properly, means that the Mudaliyar's comment "Without the might of the British Empire behind us, we would be reduced to penury" (30) does not seem to be that fatuous after all.

Cinnamon Gardens is to some extent a resistance novel, like *When Memory Dies*. In addition to the women who were referred to early on, other characters, too, subvert the patriarchy represented by Navaratnam through open and subtle forms of resistance. Arul shows contempt for his lineage and sympathy for the marginalised by marrying a low caste servant, the daughter of his father's mistress, even though he loses his birthright as the eldest son in the process: Pillai, the devoted servant, conveys vital information about Mudaliyar Navaratnam's actions and thoughts to the ostracised son and to Nalamma. Despite the patently subaltern stance adopted by these characters, it is Balendran and Annalukshmi who need to be further examined in attempting a final assessment of this novel.

Unlike his niece whose "progress" was predictable from the novel's first pages, Balendran is pusillanimous to begin with. He is overshadowed by his father and his brother. This seemingly effete, self-effacing individual reduces his father to impotent fury by standing up to him at the end of the novel, however. There is growth of sorts, but how convincing is this growth? Balendran's subservience is a major factor in creating tension in their household. To Sonia,

The greatest dispute between her husband and herself was over his blind obedience to his father and her constant irritation and annoyance at it. It made little sense to Sonia, like a man of science believing in goblins. Balendran, she knew, was not an ineffectual man. After he had taken over running the family estate and temple, they had flourished in a way they had never done under his father. Intellectually, he was his father's superior and was thoroughly knowledgeable on all aspects of Tamil culture and religion. (54-55)

Sonia, of course, is unaware that Navaratnam had discovered Balendran's affair with Richard in England and that Balendran had convinced himself initially that his father had acted in everybody's best interests in breaking up the relationship. There are, however, many aspects of Selvadurai's portrayal of Balendran that are troubling. First, for such an intelligent man, Balendran is incapable of seeing through his father's hypocrisy until much later in the novel, while his mother, brother, and even the servants are quick to note the gulf between his precepts and the manner in which he carries them out. Second, Balendran is almost tediously correct in his political views, although his background is no different from that of others of his generation in the Cinnamon Gardens set. The author never gives any indication how Balendran and his wife came to be so enlightened. Third, his selfless concern in looking after the welfare of the oppressed, and his determination to "do the right thing" make him a mawkish individual. Consider, for instance, his insistence on providing for Seelan's welfare despite his knowing that this measure would lead to further acrimony with his father; his readiness to provide redress for his labourers, like Uma (189) even at the expense of delaying his other commitments; and his creating a "showpiece" estate which is made possible by substantial "labour reform" (227) that is engineered to make workers happy and yet increase productivity. Such actions are all set up to make Balendran into a person who is the personification of goodness. Equally debilitating is his confrontation with his father at the end which resembles the "settling of accounts" scene between Nora and Helmer in Ibsen's *The Doll's House*. What is amazing is that having devastated his father by confronting him with all the latter's wrong-doings and double standards, Balendran, Annalukshmi, Sonia and all the "politically correct" people gather round to participate in the opulent charade that is so much a part of the Mudaliyar's birthday.

Another disturbing aspect of this book is the author's inability to examine with conviction the counter-claims of homosexuality and Balendran's marriage to a woman he admires. Balendran's sexual orientation is indubitably gay. The reader is also made aware that he loves Sonia despite his "inversion." His life does not foreground the conflicting emotions undergone by people in such situations, however. When he is with Richard, he forgets his home, and when he has access to the joys of domesticity, especially in the middle of the novel, his passion for Richard is usually under control. Suspecting that his son had reestablished a relationship with Richard, the Mudaliyar orders Balendran to live in the ancestral home for a while, a place that was depicted in very negative terms in the first few chapters. Balendran's convalescence is best described in the author's own words:

In the days that followed, Balendran silently thanked his father for having asked him to stay at Brighton. In his childhood home, in the very room in which he had grown up, with its pictures on the walls,

the creaking of the old fan that lulled him to sleep at night, Balendran found a constant reminder of the life he had in Ceylon, the life that, he told himself, ultimately mattered.

[. . .] In the evenings, however, when he would sit on the front verandah of Brighton and read in the newspapers about the hearings of the commission in various cities, a searing ache would build in his chest. Still, even as he felt the pain of Richard, Balendran would look out at Sonia cutting flowers in the garden alongside his mother, their heads companionably side by side. The look of contentment and serenity on her face made more horrible the thought of discovery.

His revulsion was comforting to him. It questioned the depth of his love for Richard and made him aware that he did love his wife, that she was, in many ways, his dear friend. This understanding made him hopeful that somewhere in the future his love for Richard would diminish or become simply *a familiar impediment* (209; emphasis added).

Balendran's ruminations about his "depth of love for Richard" not only contradict earlier sequences which read differently, but the reference to homosexuality as an "impediment" is also a strange admission for a gay writer. In his previous novel, Argie and Shehan maintain their relationship despite opposition and ridicule from several spheres of influence. To Rajiva Wijesinha, "the importance of asserting individual feelings and relationships in defiance of the dictates of authority" is "almost a didactic theme" (82) in *Funny Boy*. Balendran, on the other hand, embraces heterosexual love, parental authority, and cozy domesticity when his "natural" preference is within reach.

Annalukshmi is indubitably a precursor of the modern, liberated woman. In addition to one of the opening sequences of the novel in which she enjoys a feeling of exhilaration, or freedom from restraint, when she rides a bicycle to school, she is also unafraid to frankly admire the physique of a young man she sees at a beach:

In that instance, Annalukshmi saw all that she needed to. His handsome face and nice teeth when he smiled, the straps of his suit slightly awry over his smooth chest, the shape of his crotch clearly outlined in the bathing suit. She felt the heat release itself from somewhere in her lower back and spread down her legs. She surreptitiously watched the young man. Before he could field another ball, however, a woman called out to him. He ran up the beach, flung himself on the sand next to her, took her hand, kissed it,

and then listened attentively to what she was saying, nodding his head. As Annalukshmi looked at the couple, she knew that this was what she would have to give up if she did not marry. (93-94)

Although Selvadurai demonstrates Annalukshmi's attraction to men, he thwarts the reader's expectation of seeing this attraction being fulfilled. Despite being interested in Chandran Mackintosh and Seelan at different times, Annalukshmi does not transform attraction into something more substantial. Perhaps this situation is brought about because her creator is intent on showing her as a woman who is determined to make choices on *her* terms rather than have "choices" imposed on her by others. Then again, Selvadurai is also keen on demonstrating Annalukshmi's identification with the "common man." Her conversations with Mr. Jayaweera, a union agitator, are schematic and contrived on occasion. Jayaweera's descriptions of the snake stone and the exorcism ceremony carried out to cure his sister who was possessed by a devil (126) add little to the plot and illustrate another instance in which a Sri Lankan expatriate writer has introduced a local custom or ceremony to give "colour" to a novel.⁵ Annalukshmi's association with Jayaweera allows her to become familiar with the orientation of people from the villages, however. Not only does she find Jayaweera's mentality a contrast to what she is accustomed in her upper middle class background, but she also discovers that Jayaweera and others who have emerged from indigent circumstances have much to offer her. At one point in the novel, she identifies her situation with that of the "common man" thus:

The colonial administrators of Ceylon often said that the common man--the farmers in the fields, the labourers, the fisherfolk--had no aspirations for freedom from political patronage. The British government agents in the provinces of Ceylon understood the problems of the common man and what solutions needed to be implemented. The Ceylonese élite who sought self-government had scanty knowledge of how the common man lived, had very little contact with him. They could thus hardly assert the right to represent him.

These claims were made with disregard for the crippling poverty and illiteracy, the terrible health and sanitary conditions that colonial rule had brought to the "common man." There was, however,

⁵ Another example is Triton's recounting of the Anguli-maala story in Romesh Gunsekera's *Reef* (175-78).

an element of truth to it. For the common man knew that self-government would not shatter any of the shackles that held him in his position of feudal subservience. He would simply exchange one set of masters for another.

Annalukshmi, in a curious way, shared the views of the "common man." The bid for self-rule did not promise to provide her with any greater freedom, any amelioration of her position as a woman, that had not been achieved under colonial rule. (114-15)

These facile, sentimental pronouncements are fraught because they attribute to the "common man," and indeed to the then not-so-politically-aware Annalukshmi, a greater knowledge of their position than was possible at the time. What is important to note, however, are her feelings for this class. This identification with the masses, her affiliations with Jayaweera, and her association with Nancy, Sonia, Balendran and Miss Lawton have taught her to abhor any kind of posturing: she experiences a moment of "epiphany," however, when she visits Mackintosh's exhibition. Here a description of the delicacies that are "artfully arranged on large platters in front of them," is followed by a characterization of the guests who had "disported themselves amongst the cushions" (375):

A lot of the women present were smoking, and Annalukshmi quickly noted that two of them were not wearing blouses under their saris. One of these women lay with her head in the lap of a woman she recognized as Srimani, Mr. Jayaweera's landlady. She was wearing a sarong and a shirt. The men were unusually dressed. Instead of suits and ties, most of the men wore sarongs or vertis, clothes that were usually worn at home. One of them had an elaborate shawl draped about his body. From the way he signalled the bearers, he was probably the host. (376)

It is this exhibition, the people she encounters, and the lesson she draws from the manner in which Mackintosh had altered one of the paintings she had previously seen that make her decide "to hold fast to her ideals, even when there was nothing to pin her dreams on" (377). If the "dignitaries" who attend the Mudaliyar's parties at his home with all its incongruous Western trappings are pretentious, the people described here are equally pretentious. The studied irreverence, the vulgar ostentation, and the exaggerated focus on indigenous culture are the traits of the "artsy" elite in the capital who love to present themselves as being avant garde. That the perceptive Annalukshmi with her feelings for the "common man" could countenance such posturing and describe these people to her uncle as "new people . . . interesting people" (383) is inexplicable.

Selvadurai's portrayal of the two major characters is flawed, but the novel displays other infelicities amongst which is his insistence on dealing with every conceivable issue that presents itself--a weakness also associated with Sivanandan's novel. In *When Memory Dies*, Sivanandan tries to encompass Sri Lanka's political and social changes through three generations of a human drama. This results in repetition and occasional diminution in intensity. Selvadurai takes on too many themes from too many angles. Not only do these themes impinge on each other, but they affect his artistic focus. In addition to the reaction of the elite to the prospect of Universal Adult Franchise he also examines concerns like homosexuality, women's rights, depressed classes, missionary education, trade union reform, proposed marriages, literature, and art-issues that Selvadurai is not always able to treat with thoroughness.

The message that emerges from what appears to be set up as a political novel is confusing at best. Balendran, Sonia, Annalukshmi and some others are individuals with vision who eschew the mores, conservatism, and chauvinism that plagued society at the time. Traditional Tamil culture and norms of behaviour are part of what they are reacting to. Having adopted such a position, however, Balendran for one makes these "discoveries" about Tamil culture:

He was soon absorbed in this task, and came to love the time he spent with the villagers of Jaffna, discussing their rituals, understanding, with surprise, the variance of custom and language from village to village; the radically different culture of the barren little islands that surrounded the Jaffna peninsula, the language of the inhabitants almost a medieval Tamil. (227-28)

What he sees in Jaffna culture is perhaps true; at the same time, however, the culture that he is fascinated with also involves divisions of caste and the kind of conservatism that Russell has so well documented in her study.⁶ They are precisely the practices that Richard and presumably Balendran himself find abhorrent. Balendran sees no inconsistency in his position, however. A similar contradiction is observed in one of the proposals that Balendran posits as a way of meeting both Tamil and Sinhalese demands. "Before foreign rule we had a constitution and system of government that was suited to our needs" (68), he says, and then proceeds to elaborate a system which is "more or less a federal state" (68). The conundrum that neither the author nor his persona (in this instance) can recognize, let alone reconcile, is that before foreign occupation the country was ruled by kings and the system of government feudal in the

⁶ See Russell 6-14.

extreme--hardly the kind of solution to be offered to a country on the verge of achieving self-government.

Selvadurai should be commended for locating his novel in a specific period in the island's history that was noted for political ferment, a strategy not employed in quite the same way by any previous author. The experiment is worthwhile, and *Cinnamon Gardens* does have its moments of artistic verve. Unlike *Funny Boy*, however, this work is not one that is ultimately successful. The attempts at rewriting the politics of the period are considerably fraught; some of the relationships that are presented poorly conceived; and the trajectory of the work impeded by what could only be described as the author's decision to chart too many courses. Even if all these blemishes are forgotten, one cannot ignore that Balendran's and Annalukshmi's beliefs and actions are to a large extent made possible by the positions of privilege, property, and influence they occupy, which they show no interest in relinquishing. Despite their philanthropic acts and ideological statements, then, they belong to and are very much part of the paternalistic discourses that they are critiquing.

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