



A CRITICAL STUDY OF FAMILY RELATIONS IN ROHINTON MISTRY'S *FAMILY MATTERS*

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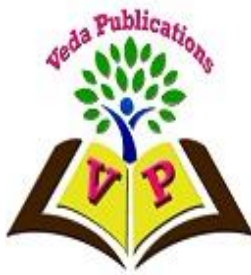
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ABSTRACT



It is a well known fact that the success of an individual depends on his family. From the bureaucrats to a layman the real secret behind contentment is family. The vital element for the growth of an economy is the individual's performance which comes from united family sectors. The favourite topic for movie directors and writers is family. Many movies and novels on this theme won awards and had a registered memorable experience imprinted in their minds. Gone were the days where children were brought up amidst joint families sharing the affection and care of the elders. The progression of modernization has transformed them into nuclear families where everything is unique. As change is inevitable, one should accept it. The present article is going to focus on the problems faced by a nuclear family in a metropolitan city. Rohinton Mistry, in his *Family Matters* (2002) delineates the characters and attitudes of middle class families suffering from domestic and emotional disturbances. The sensitive relations between the members of the family are finely tuned by the author

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**INTRODUCTION**

One point is crystal clear in life; life is not a bed of roses. The definition of life changes from individual to individual. The way one perceives life depends on his personal emotional strength. Rohinton Mistry, an Indo-Canadian writer born in Parsi family brings out his inherent feelings about his community and his birth place. *Family Matters* makes the reader to search himself in the characters as they are the part of every individual's self. The reader travels through the novel experiencing his internal turmoil. May be the reason behind the success of this novel is the simple, sensitive and real characterizations.

Family Matters deals with the life of simple civilians of the metropolitan city, Bombay. The patriarch Nariman Vakeel, in his seventies suffers from Parkinson's disease. It is quite natural for people of that age to expect love and care from the youngsters. Nariman's life in Chateau Felicity is not filled with sweet memories. Belonging to a traditional Parsi family, he was not allowed to marry his girl friend Lucy. Torn between love and tradition he suffers with his marriage to a widow, Yasmin added with her two children Coomy and Jal. Mistry portrays the real love between Lucy and Nariman. Lucy becomes an ayah to the Arjani's, who live in the same Chateau Felicity. Unable to forget Nariman she becomes crazy and sings songs standing on the edges of the terrace. Nariman rescues her falling from the terrace.

As every wife, Yasmin doesn't tolerate her husband meeting his ex girl friend. They even have Roxana added to Coomy and Jal. Caught between two extremes Nariman doesn't know how to deal with the two women. As usual when Lucy goes to the ledge, Yasmin decides to deal with the lunatic woman. Nariman rushes behind her but fails to control the two ladies and as a result he loses both of them. A pathetic situation, one way he loses his life and love at the same time and the other way he is left alone to take care of three motherless kids. The tragic effect makes one to be arrogant, other to be submissive and the third one to be docile.

Coomy and Jal are not married on the other hand Roxana marries Yezad and shifts to a small flat

in Pleasant Villa which is gifted to her by her father. She is blessed with two kids Murad and Jehangir. Despite their indifferences Coomy and Jal love their little sister and always welcome her to spend some time with them. On the eve of Nariman's birth day, the family has a get together. Coomy shows how she was suffering from her father's behaviour. Nariman argues to have dinner in the China set, whereas Coomy has her own problems with them. "He tried to leave the table amid general protest, while Coomy, close to tears, appealed to others. She said this kind of cranky behaviour was what she had to put with all the time" (*Family Matters*, 2002, 37).

May be it is true as said by Saki, Reginald; 'The young have aspirations that never come to pass, the old have reminiscences of what never happened'. Every individual grows from a child to old man. The cycle repeats. There are beautiful lines quoted by Shel Silverstein

"The Little Boy and the Old Man
Said the little boy, "Sometimes I drop my spoon."
Said the old man, "I do that too."
The little boy whispered, "I wet my pants."
I do that too," laughed the little old man.
Said the little boy, "I often cry."
The old man nodded, "So do I."
But worst of all," said the boy, "it seems
Grown-ups don't pay attention to me."
And he felt the warmth of a wrinkled old hand.
I know what you mean," said the little old man."

Though the younger generations love their parents and grandparents, unfortunately they are more entangled under time pressure. Much of the time is not devoted to grandparents. May be this could be one of the reasons for the mushrooming old age homes and old age communities.

Mistry clearly shows the anguish of the old people suffering from diseases and lack of attention. In spite of Jal and Coomy's care, Nariman fractures his leg and is advised for bed rest. For a few days Coomy manages but added to his broken ankle he develops Parkinson disease because of which she plans to send her father to her sister's house.



Roxana cares her father a lot. Though Yezad is not much supportive due to increasing financial burdens she dutifully nurses her father. Yezad worries about his financial status which further increases due to his father-in-law's medical bills. Like every middle class family living in metropolitan city, they count each penny before spending it. The internal clashes between the wife and husband naturally grow but are soon subsided as they are an understanding couple. When Nariman is taken to Pleasant Villa he understands how many sacrifices the family is making for his sake. He confesses it to Yezad, "That huge flat is empty as a Himalayan cave for me, this feels like a Palace. But it will be difficult for you" (122).

For old people old age becomes a curse. The present generations need to remember that they are the roots of our foundation. Nariman is happy in his daughter's house as he has a good time with his grand sons added to his lovely daughter's care. The things become too worse for Yezad. He loses his peace and finds ways to supplement his family income. A small employee from a Sports Emporium cannot do wonders to get rid of his financial crisis. He motivates his owner Mr Kapur to contest in the Municipal elections. Kapur, who is interested in politics drops the idea at the advice of his intelligent wife. Yezad hopes to get a promotion and in the absence of his owner he plans to take charge of the shop which remains a pipe dream.

The true attitude of a person comes on to the surface when reality is to be faced. Yezad hires two drama artists to threaten his owner to change the name of the shop from 'Bombay to Mumbai'. His intention is to make his owner move to politics. But Kapur prepares to give bribes to them instead of fighting with them. He hands over the amount to Yezad. Circumstances make Yezad to take the money home. But his true attitude which is a reflection of his brought up by his exemplary father makes him to return the money. He also tries to earn the money in illegal activity Matka but loses the entire amount which Roxana saves for the month's expenditure. Jehangir imbibed with the same principles is caught collecting money from the fellow students to help his parents. As a homework monitor he is very sincere,

but unable to see his mother's problems at home he thinks of helping her in the way he can.

A simple family living peacefully with less hopes and good aspirations changes its way as the economical crisis is bitter than anything else in life. On the other hand, Coomy

decides not to bring her father back. Though Jal warns her, she damages the ceiling and makes her father to stay back at her sister's house. Meanwhile, Yezad tired with the turmoil starts to visit the Fire-temple. He being an atheist, slowly transforms to a theist. As the troubles increase Roxana decides to send her father to the Chateau Felicity. She enquires Coomy and Jal about the repairs. She meets Edul in the lift, who though not a professional claims so and starts repairing the ceiling.

Destiny has its own role. None can imagine what happens the next minute. Two tragedies take place on the same day, the auspicious day of Christmas. Edul leaves the steel rod which he inserts in the ceiling and it kills Coomy and him. On the other hand, two real Shiv Sena people come to suggest changing the name of the shop. Vexed with the political interferences, Kapur uses harsh words and gets brutally killed by them. Yezad loses his job, applies for other Sports Emporium but doesn't get one. Despite losing his job, he stays at peace as he regularly visits the Fire-temple.

Jal comes with a proposal that the entire family would move to Chateau Felicity. Yezad though reluctant gets convinced as he has no other option. He gets convinced that it was God's wish they sold their flat in Pleasant Villa. One year after moving into his own house, Nariman loses his last breath. Yezad becomes more religious. Murad and Jehangir enter their teens. The financial problems reduce to a great extent. Was the family happy? No. It is crystal clear that a house is not made up of bricks and walls but with relations.

Mistry shows how relations make life happy. Roxana gets vexed with her husband's too much of religious activities and his constant fight with his elder son Murad. Yezad always fails to understand that one should change according to the



circumstances. He suffers and makes his family suffer. Roxana knows that she is very cautious about her father in her small flat, but once she comes to the big flat, she leaves her father in the care of the nurse, who doesn't take care of him. She recalls how her father was happy with Daisy's music and her family's caring. May be he could have lived for long if she could personally care for him. She advises her son, "Learn from this Jehangoo. Listen to the advice of elders. When we grow up, we think we know everything. We assume old people are not right in their heads. Too much pride we acquire with our years, And then it brings us down" (494).

CONCLUSION

Mistry wants the younger generations to learn from experience because experience is the best teacher. Be proud to have old generation people to teach, adore and make you a complete man. The novel is well planned. Each character has its own importance. To show the culture of Parsi people he shows how Dr Fitter and Inspector Masalavala helped Nariman's family. He never fails to show his love for his home town, Bombay. *Family Matters* gives a clear indication to the reader that family and life are both one and the same. Though the novel is mostly set in India, being an Indo-Canadian writer he focuses on the matters related to immigration. It is not family matters but what family matters. It is truly commented by *Independent on Sunday* 'It is rare to discover a novel in which the characters are so well drawn that you feel wrapped up in their problems, rather than just privy to them'.

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