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Today's condition of old age people in Indian setup

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Abstract---Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters* is a novel which centers the family and the emotions of everyone in the family in a good and bad way. This novel shows well the bondage between father and a daughter, step father and a step daughter, grand - father and grand - sons and husband and wife. It is moving account of every middle class family in an Indian set-up. The readers could experience the real feel of incidents happening at their own families. *Family Matters* is an exposure of defenselessness, sadness, pain, and travails of parents in old age and cold-bloodedness and heartlessness of children. The problems of old parents are elaborated through the protagonist Professor Nariman Vakeel. Through one family, the novel reveals not only predicament among India's Parsis, Persian-descended Zoroastrians, but wider corruption and communalism. It hints at the

ripple effects of public policies on private lives. This paper exhibits the real life style and the status of old people in Indian middle class families.

Keywords---family, plan, helplessness, old age, bond.

Introduction

In India, health care and state support for the old people is mandatory for every individual family setup. This is well shown in the novel *Family Matters*. Most Parsis do not show interest for marriage because of late marriage and their dislike for adjustments within the marital life. Even if they marry they opt not to have children or being forced into a childless state by infertility. Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters* is an exposure of the defenselessness, sadness, pain, and travails of parents in old age and mercilessness and insensitivity of children. The problems of parents in old age is elaborated through the protagonist Professor Nariman Vakeel. Despite suffering from Parkinson's disease and protestations of his step-children Nariman Vakeel insists on going for vesperal walk. The step-children admonish him that he would lose his balance and fall down due to his Parkinson disease.

The status of an old man through the novel *Family Matters*

In utter disregard of the injunctions laid on his movements, Nariman uncurls his ageing and frail limbs and leaves the apartment. When Coomy, a step-daughter asks him, "How many people with Parkinson's do what you do?", he shrugs off her fears by saying, "I'm not going trekking in Nepal. A little stroll down the lane, that's all" (FM 3). Nariman retorts that dangers lurk indoors as well as outdoors. While Jal and Coomy debate among themselves as to what really constitute a danger to Parsis in Bombay, Nariman Vakeel really slips out their building, ironically named Chateau Felicity and the "stale emptiness of the flat" into the bustling life of the city (FM 5). Nariman's longing for fresh air and life outside inspite of repeated warnings of his step-children, is symbolized by the picture of an old Parsi, in a trade-mark Sola Topee, standing with his back to the camera, gazing out at the sea. Nariman's bravado is a bit dented though when on the celebration of his seventy-ninth birthday, he returns house "with abrasions on his elbow and forearm, and a limp.

He had fallen while crossing the lane outside Chateau Felicity" (FM 6). This brings out angry accusations from Coomy who accuses Nariman of behaving irresponsibly. Irritated by Coomy's scolding, Nariman retorts: "In my youth, my parents controlled me and destroyed those years. Thanks to them, I married your mother and wrecked my middle years. Now you want to torment my old age. I won't allow it" (FM 7). From this conversation, it is understood that Nariman was fed up by being listening to others life-long. At this Coomy flares up and retaliates with, "You ruined Mama's life, and mine and Jal's. I will not tolerate a word against her" (ibid). While Coomy is presented as a termagant, her brother Jal is the compassionate voice of reason, and he always remain silent.

Mistry clearly underlines the fact that, parents are seen as burden in their old age for their children. Coomy's resentment is heightened by the fact that, it is the 'second class' children like her and Jal who have to bear this responsibility while the 'flesh and blood' daughter Roxana, has escaped hers by virtue of her married status. However, Mistry gives Coomy her due and tells us that she loves her 'little Roxana', at the time of her birth, who rescues them from their unhappy state and "unhappiness was thwarted for the time being." (FM 9). The family is gathering in Nariman's place to celebrate Nariman's seventy-ninth birthday. This party has a poignant appeal as it is the last birthday of Nariman when all his family is more or less happy.

The son-in-law, Yezad, grandsons, Murad and Jehangir's love for the old man is obvious and even Coomy yields to the general atmosphere of goodwill, as her brother Jal keeps fiddling with his recalcitrant hearing aid to catch all the family chatter. As Yezad and Roxana try to explain the problems that Nariman's parents faced with inter-religious marriages, Mistry introduces the dilemma that contemporary Parsis are facing about accepting inter-communal marriages. In a state of confusion, Jehangir inquires if there was a law against marrying someone who wasn't a Parsi. His father says yes, "the law of bigotry" (FM 42). There is considerable dramatic irony in Yezad's answer as towards the end of the novel, he turns into a bigot himself and opposes his elder son Murad's relationship with a non-Parsi girl. Mistry exhibits the mind of typical Parsi and also Indian culture through words of Yezad.

After Nariman discharged, after two days at the hospital, in an unbelieving manner, Jal and Coomy withhold the information of Nariman's accident and hospitalization from Roxana. The doctor had recommended a bedpan, but Coomy thinks that a commode will be more convenient. So she purchases one thus causing untold misery to herself and Jal on one hand and Nariman on the other. At last Coomy is forced to change the commode with a bedpan. Yet the exercise "remained as expelling as before", and Coomy just complains:

It was ridiculous.....that with so much technology, scientists and engineers still hadn't invented a less disgusting thing than a bedpan. 'Who needs mobile phones and Internet and all that rubbish? How about a high-tech gadget for doing number two in bed?' (FM 78)

Coomy curses the technological development because there is no such technological development invented for disposal of immobile patients' wastes without others help. In a clever move, Coomy and Jal unceremoniously, dump the old man at Roxana's house and leave him there till he is mobile enough to return to their flat. Nariman is supposedly consulted on this move but he knows that he had no right to refuse or even say: "This flat is my home, and I put it in your names because I did not differentiate between you and Roxana. Would you now throw me out in my helplessness? They would probably laugh that I was getting dramatic" (FM 87). It is obvious in Indian life system, in every family, this type of incidents happen. The children would be very sweet to the elders till they get asserts and financial benefits from them. After that the elders would be thrown out of their life. Here, it is clearly seen how an old man, who longs for true love at his old age. Nariman, thinking about his pathetic state, comments: "Lying in bed,

here or there, is all the same to me. But it will be difficult for them, in such a small flat" (ibid. Nariman reconciles himself to his helpless situation and says,

Poor children, thought Nariman, it was difficult for them to disguise their eagerness. And he did not blame them. The blame lay with the ones thirty six years ago, the marriage arrangers, the willful manufacturers of misery. He could still hear his parents' voices after the wedding benediction, Now you are settled life, and we can die in peace, which they had, a year later. They had survived long enough to perform their duty but not to witness the misfortune it would foster." (FM 88).

The Compounders were looking like "He wondered if he was seeing the familiar faces (the portraits of his ancestors, which line the walls of the flat) for the last time. He wanted to tell the ambulance men to make a tour of each room so he could examine everything, fix it in his mind before the door closed behind him." (FM 89). Therefore Nariman has no rights to express his the feeling because no one enquires about his willingness. Roxana's little world in 'Pleasant Villa' is hit by the catastrophe of Nariman's sudden arrival. When she receives her loving father, "She bent down to kiss him. His pungent odour repelled her, but she fought the impulse to move away. She wondered how well they had been looking after him" (FM 105-6). Here Mistry also shows Roxana's obsessive solitude for her sons' health. Jehangir, Roxana's younger son always keeps himself busy with jigsaw puzzles and reading of Enid Blyton books.

Thus, Nariman becomes a part of the cramped but happy small family of his daughter Roxana. Murad, elder boy, is shifted to the balcony covered by a plastic sheet the old man is settled on the couch in the sitting room which also serves as his bed. Jehangir, the younger boy, sleeps at night on the little pull-out bed that remains under the bed during the day. Roxana feels happy for her younger son, when he feeds his grandfather. Roxana captures this scene when she was drying clothes in the balcony and feels happy at seeing, "nine year old happily feeding seventy-nineshe felt she was witnessing something almost sacred, and her eyes refused to relinquish the precious moment, for she knew instinctively that it would become a memory to cherish to recall in difficult times when she needed strength" (FM 113). Jehangir's innocent love for his grandfather shows that in young age, everyone wants to be with old people, listening their stories and advices. However, after becoming adults, they change their mind and try to throw them out.

However, the difficult times do arrive as Nariman's presence begins to irritate his son-in-law Yezad who has to eat his breakfast in the midst of the smells and sounds of his father-in-law's morning evacuations. Mistry portrays the realistic and moving situation that may be experienced by many middle class families in India. As the Chenoy family faces difficult situations in taking care of Nariman and the monthly budget becomes a problematic for the family. They contribute to supplement the declining notes in the envelopes she has so thoroughly marked with different items of daily use and through which she manages very much to manage her monthly budget. Her elder son Murad in an honest, simple manner takes to walking home from school and puts the saved bus fare into his mother's envelopes. Yezad and Jehangir are more adventurous and go in for big money. Yezad with the help of Villie, the Matka Queen, places at first small and later big bets on the daily lottery. Jehangir as the Homework Monitor strikes deals with

rich and not so intelligent boys in his class, whose unsatisfactory or even non-existent homework he marks as satisfactory, in return for a monetary consideration. So Roxana's little envelopes mysteriously become fat again. In Indian families, the bondage among the family members makes the children in the family to understand the situation of their family and take up the responsibilities at their small age. According to Nariman, life is better than that it was in his spacious flat. Here, he has his grandson's company and when he talks in his sleep, Roxana and Yezad rush out of their bedroom to stand by and watch until he settles back into sleep.

Coomy's behaviour reveals that to what extent children can stoop to avoid the responsibility of parents. Coomy is busy in making a situation in which it would be unfeasible for Roxana and Yezad to insist that she should keep her side of the bargain and take her stepfather back after the stipulated three weeks. In a desperate move, she deliberately gets her brother to break open the plaster of the ceiling in Nariman's bedroom so that it would not look suspicious. They also damage other rooms in the flat and attribute the damage to water seepage from the overhead tanks on the terrace. In cunning move, Coomy engages her neighbour, Edul Munshi, a rather inapt artisan to repair the flat. She knows that Edul would take an inordinately long time to do the repairs and this would give Nariman's ankle time to be fully healed before he would return to them. At one level, it might seem implausible that Nariman's step-children were damaging their own property, but if viewed in the context of Coomy's earlier behaviour, it would only reveal the desperation with which she wanted to avoid becoming her stepfather's nurse again.

This brings into picture the cunning plan of Coomy. Therefore, Coomy refuses to take her father back until the flat is in perfect shape again. She also turns down Roxana's appeal to let her have a part of her father's savings to enable her to balance their monthly budget. The bitter quarrel with Roxana and Yezad over money finally strains Jal's patience and he accuses Coomy of not caring for the family. He says: "Family does not matter to you! You keep nursing your bitterness instead of nursing Pappa" (FM 193). Pointing to the mutilated ceiling, Jal says to Coomy, "Don't turn away! Feast your eyes! Happy? Ruined house and ruined relations with our one and only sister" (FM 193-4). Coomy weeps at this but does not change her stand.

At this point in the novel several hearts and relationships are on the verge of breaking. Physical and financial strain of keeping Nariman in their flat adversely affects the relationship of Yezad who cannot disguise his eagerness to get rid of his father-in-law. Yezad argues with Roxana: "If they play this game, so will we. They kick him into our house, we find a way to kick him back into theirs" Roxana protects, "Papa is not a footballif you force papa out, you mSay as well throw me out at the same time" (FM 195). Yezad asks, "So that's it? That is all I mean to you, your family means to you?" Roxana replies, "And what is Papa if not family?" (FM 196). Here Roxana proves that she is a good daughter and her true love and care for her father. Mistry clearly shows that in Indian family system, how women struggle to take care of their parents but for men, it is the duty of daughter in-laws to take care of their husband's parents. This should be eradicated and if the

women have rights in the society, their parents should be treated and taken care of them.

Nariman still immobile is shifted to the 'Chateau Felicity' in an ambulance. This makes the readers's to witness the happiness of the Chenoy's family bask in the comfort of large flat and sufficient money. Mistry, through Yezad's change in behaviour shows that guilt and failure become Yezad's constant companions and prompt his fanatical return to religion and so history repeats itself. Mistry, is in many ways bearing witness to the last grand of the Parsi Zoroastrians in India. He had noted their rites and rituals and their eccentricities in his earlier texts. In *Family Matters* he extends this to writing about the old myths and legends of ancient Iran using the device of oral narrative, Nariman Vakeel becomes the storyteller in this book and the audience who listens to his tales about ancient Iran is his young grandsons.

Nariman's discomfoting memories make strong comebacks when his son-in-law is increasingly drawn to religion as a mode of comfort from the hopelessness of his domestic and professional situation. Further when Yezad takes to slipping into the neighbouring aviary, the fire temple, on his way home from work; Mistry seizes the chance then to expound once again on the structure of an agiary-once more acting as a 'witness'. The troubles in Roxana's house are paralleled in the city of Bombay, ruled by the gangsters like Shiv Sena, who oppress Muslims as they preserve India from western festivities and morals. A substantial portion of the story unfolds at the Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium, where Yezad's boss Mr. Kapur decides to run in the next Municipal election to save his beloved, adopted city; There is also an echo of sectarian intolerance through inter-marriage or migration.

There is a subdued note of optimism at the end of the novel. "Aren't you happy?" Roxana asks her youngest son. 'Yes,' he answers, 'I'm happy' (FM 487). Mistry in his interview with Veena Gokhale opines: "*Family Matters* can be difficult, and Mistry doesn't shy away from showing, in all their roughness, the real truths about them" (Gokhale 'How Memory Lives and Dies,' *The Sunday Review*, *The Times of India*, October 27, 1996.). The novel does have some overtones of a morality tale. Once, a question was raised to Mistry about the role of destiny in the novel and Mistry rightly says: "There is enough in the book to support the notion of destiny and enough to show that everything happens as a result of what the characters choose to do. If Yezad had not undertaken the scheme with the actors, everything would have been different, Mr. Kapur would not have been killed. If Coomy had listened to her brother and said, right, 30 years have gone by, it is time to forgive and forget, things could have gone differently. It is the choice of each character that leads to the denouement". (Hancock, Geoff. "An Interview with Rohinton Mistry." *Canadian Fiction Magazine*. 143-150. *Family Matter* has "all the richness, the compassion, the gentle humour, and the narrative sweep that have earned Rohinton Mistry the highest of accolades and prizes around the world" (ibid). Mistry has "once again given us something absolutely painfully pleasurable, a bitter sweet rendition of life in its most ordinary intimate setting." (NZ Herald, May 25, 2002)

Parents-children relationship starts even before the birth of children and continues even after the death of parents. Parents start thinking and dreaming of their child much before its birth and continue to influence its life even after their death. In a simple but lucid and moving manner Mistry shows the different perspectives and attitudes of parents and children. A mother keeps her unborn child in her womb for nine months. After the birth of the child, Parents bear all the hardships of bringing it up with pleasure. A mother would gladly lie in a wet bed so that the child can sleep comfortably. But the world undergoes a sea change when the children have to look after their aged parents. M. L. Carg has rightly points out thus:

In *Family Matters* Mistry focuses attention on family relationships particularly parents-children relationship and the problem of looking after aged parents. Mistry, however, does not suggest any remedy, but through the protagonist emphasizes the inadequacy of any legal measure, "How can you force people? Can caring and concern be made compulsory? Either it resides in the heart, or nowhere" (M. L. Carg 55).

Once again, Mistry has proven that he is a master of fiction writing. From page one, the reader is immersed into a fully formed landscape populated by complex characters who tug at our heartstrings while simultaneously tempting us to give them a whack. The forces of political corruption, religious intolerance, poverty, and family obligations warp and weft through every character. The bleak theme is counterbalanced by Mistry's steady injection of droll humor. Beaten down but never quite defeated, the characters keep going because, for better or worse, they are a family that sticks together. Thus, Mistry tries to create impulse among the youth that everyone will turn up to the situation, describing here in the novel. Therefore, it is understandable that the younger generation should take care of the older generation and keep them loving, affectionately because they would have the expectations and longings. No one is exception from getting old age. Thinking of that the old age people should be taken care and treated properly.

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