



# The Grandeur of Humanism in Rohinton Mistry's Family Matters

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**Abstract:** This paper views from a humanistic perspective the materialistic attitude of the modern generation which lags behind in empathy and concern towards the elderly. It also renders a clear understanding of human psychology and temperament. It sheds light on the decrease in human values and spirituality due to the advent of globalization. An in-depth analysis of the novel, '*Family Matters*', brings out the reality of fickleness of human mind and behavior after becoming victims to physical and mental agony in family life. It exemplifies the fact that 'family' is not something but it is everything for a human being. Living as a family can be illuminating, complex, conflicting, rewarding and wonderful, and serves as a suitable theme for this paper.

"That's what people do who love you. They put their arms around you and love you when you're not so lovable." – Deb Caletti.

The whole institution of family is challenging. It is widely accepted that a healthy family is built on the support and affection and the unfaltering love that the members in a family share between one another. A sturdy bond could be built when there is untainted love and understanding between the family members showing up at times of need and spending quality time together. It is the belongingness and the feeling that someone is there for you brings the members in a family closer. Like every other relationship, family relationships demand continuous nurturing which is achieved only from being attentive at times of need.

The humanistic approach is a non-technical approach. Humanistic psychology aims at understanding human development. Man is a social animal and his life is influenced by various behaviors, thoughts and feelings. The humanistic approach is holistic as it recognizes the spiritual nature of human beings thereby enabling them to integrate their experiences related to their body, thoughts, feelings, spirit and soul. The world has become less livable due to the advent of modernization. This in turn has rendered the world to be more materialistic with its challenging professions prompting the greed for money and power.

In the modern world, the power of thinking of individuals is controlled by media which has become the channel of influencing knowledge and communication. Such kind of perversion has affected the ethical and moral life of human beings. Human values were regarded to be great virtues in ancient

civilizations. The relationship of man with his environment was valued and underlined in ancient traditions.

Modernization has led to man altering his environment with a failure to realize what havoc he has wreaked. The deadly grip of greed holds the world in its clutches. Modernization and the greed associated with it has influenced the society giving an altogether altered picture of how man views the world. Materialistic attitude dominates in the minds of the youth of today which has to lead to greediness and jealousy in the pursuit of wealth and happiness.

The Indian diaspora is compared to that of a banyan tree with many branches. Like that of a banyan tree, a man is seen to spread his roots at various soils gaining nourishment from one when the others dry up. Though he is displaced and homeless, he finds his home where he goes to and feels at home anywhere in the world. The outcome of globalization has led to intermingling of cultures and improvement of national economies. In the USA, Indians are the largest among the diaspora who constitute about 2.5 million of the diaspora population.

Diaspora in a nutshell comprises of multiculturalism. The Indian diaspora constitutes a diverse, heterogeneous community of people belonging to different languages, faiths, cultures and regions. They are bound together by a common thread which is the idea of India and its intrinsic values. They share a very healthy and a strong bond with the country of their origin. Their bonding with the country of their origin is reflected in their language, cultures and tradition which gets maintained for centuries continuing to be vibrant and unique. It is not based on the principle of harmony but on the basis of the principle of spontaneity these diaspora writings are created.

Various writers of Indian diaspora like V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Rohinton Mistry, M.G. VasANJI, Bapsi Sidwa, Kiran Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri have traversed across the path of diaspora by exploring issues like identity crisis, racial and cultural conflicts, nostalgia, sense of belongingness, displacement and loneliness and alienation among the immigrant community. From a psychological standpoint, it is the suffering of loneliness, displacement and alienation by leaving the beloved ones in their own country can make people realize the importance of human values like love, compassion, longing, care and respect for elders, kindheartedness etc. It is believed that when one suffers the lack of any of these virtues in life, the understanding of the value of these virtues gets better. Rohinton Mistry is one of the prolific writers who has emphasized on the importance of family bonding, respectable treatment of elders and living in harmony in one of his novels, *Family Matters*.

Mistry was born in Bombay in 1952 in a Parsi family. He immigrated to Canada in 1975. His readers could very well discern that he has given much importance to his home city, Bombay in most of his writings. Mistry has stated in the Literary Journal, '*Rungh*' (1993) that his immigration was partly due to the encouragement of his peers in India, mainly the ones before his generation.

After finishing college in Bombay or elsewhere in India, one had to go abroad for his/her studies. If possible, one had to find a job after finishing a masters or Ph.D. in the states or in England, find a job and settle in the country. That is how Indians define success. Therefore, that is why I say that coming to Canada was in some

ways decided for me. (Quoted in Mchfil, November, 1996).

His collection of short stories, *Tales from Firozsha Baag* was published in 1997. He has given a clear description of the life of the residents of the Parsi residential complex called Firozsha Baag in these stories. In these stories, he has laid emphasis on the exclusivity of the cultural values, family relationships, adaptability and the uniqueness of his community. His first novel, *Such a Long Journey* was published in 1991. Following which, he published his second novel, *A Fine Balance* in 1995. His third novel, *Family Matters* was published in 2002.

The novel, *Family Matters* contemplates on the questions of religious intermarriage, problems arising in taking care of elders when there are two or three children in a family, lack of gratitude and respect for the elders, emotional conflicts between the members in a family due to materialistic attitude, despair and loneliness experienced by the ailing elderly gentleman etc.

### **The Plot of the Novel**

The story is centered on a 79-year-old Parsi gentleman, Nariman Vakeel. The protagonist, Nariman is a retired English Professor who suffers from Parkinson's disease and age-related osteoporosis. He lives with his two adult step-children, Jal and Coomy in his large family house called Chateau Felicity. When he was 35, he was in love with a Goan Christian woman called Lucy and wanted to marry her. Due to the Parsi culture and traditional values forced upon him by his parents and relatives, he had to succumb to take a Parsi widow called Yasmin with two stepchildren to be his wife. Even after he was married, Lucy never stopped loving him and loitered around the place where he and his wife stayed. This brewed hostility and strained the relationship between Nariman and Yasmin. Even after his marriage with Yasmin, Nariman loved Lucy. He often met her privately which displeased Yasmin. There were intermittent temper tantrums and wordy warfare between the couple witnessed by the stepchildren. Due to her unhappy marriage, Yasmin committed suicide by throwing herself from the roof of the house. Coomy, the eldest of the stepchildren begrudged her stepfather for the unhappy life of her mother and her untimely death. She carried the hostility and hatred for her stepfather till her death. Jal, her brother is portrayed as powerless and easily relenting to his sister's words.

Nariman had a routine of going for evening walks though it was against the will of Coomy. She feared that her father would trip and fall somewhere and turn a burden to her. Roxana, his own daughter often visited him with her husband, Yezad and her two sons, Jehangir and Murad. Their visits were joyous occasions for Nariman as he enjoyed the company of his two grandsons. Nariman was well cared for at the initial stages. He happened to be a victim of a tragic accident where he tripped and fell due to a pothole on the road during one of his evening walks. He became bedridden. It was then the temperament of Coomy becomes highlighted to the readers as she pretends that there was no money left to medically care for her father. She packs her father in an ambulance and sends him to the small apartment of Roxana (his own daughter) to be taken care of.

Roxana's family is portrayed to be very lively and lovely. Yezad often loved his visits to Chateau Felicity and enjoyed the company of his father-in-law there. In his own house, Yezad became a stranger to his father-in-law. He did not want his sons to touch any of his belongings for the fear of contacting infection. There was also diminishing finances in the family where Nariman's medical needs could not be met. Yezad turned to be angry, grumbling and unsatisfied due to the poor finances of his family. Due to the greed lurking in him, he tries to acquire the money what his boss gave him for safekeeping. Jehangir accepts a bribe from the boys of his school (as he was in-charge monitoring their homework) for cheating on their lessons in order to help with his grandfather's medical expenses. Murad falls in love with a non-Parsi girl just like his grandfather.

The author brings out the notion of good altered by evil in mankind in the form of greed, money, hatred, jealousy as a result of modernization. Coomy begrudges Nariman and behaves very badly with him. Yezad becomes tormented by his guilt for his covert activities and believes that religion could be his only solution to carry his multitude of sins.

## Conclusion

*Family Matters* is an exemplary work of Mistry. It is a novel which fully talks about Nariman and his family. The novel focuses on the decline of moral values due to modernization. The novel brings out the suffering and humiliation of the elderly which goes out of hand when they become bedridden or incapable. Through the novel, the novelist indirectly condemns that the younger generation of today has failed to realize the importance of elders in the family and failing to take care of them. The proposed epigraph of Mistry is, 'Each happy family is happy in its own way but all unhappy families resemble one another'

## Work cited

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