

A Study On Gerontology And In Rohinton Mistry's "Family Matters"

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ABSTRACT

Rohinton Mistry's enthralling novel "*Family Matters*" is a traditionally set work which focuses on a major conception of the old age anxiety of meagerness. His novel urges on the idea of the sufferings of an old aged man Nariman Vakeel, aged 79 who is a retired English Professor. He suffers with the Parkinsons disease and also has some issues on family relationships. Nariman is affected psychologically all through his life. Mistry instigates to know about 'gerontology' which is rising to be a prominent one. The term "Gerontology" that focuses on the analysis and study of the old aged persons and also the issues related to old age. To be precise, the ailments faced by those in their lives. It has three major aspect of changes that happen in an old aged person that include, physical change, mental change, societal changes.

Keywords: old age, meagerness, gerontology, suffering, anxiety, psychological aspect.

INTRODUCTION:

A creative artist is not merely a member of the society as others are, but a representative of the society. He cannot shut his eyes to the happenings of the society, become numb to the sufferings of his fellow beings and be a passive listener or an indifferent observer of what is happening around him and become immune to the degradation of values in society. Rohinton Mistry, the foremost author to be considered in Indian heritage writing in English, the prolific Indo-Canadian writer was born in Bombay which is now Mumbai in 1952. His brother is another author Cyrus Mistry. He completed his degree in Mathematics in the University of Bombay in 1974, and in the same year he moved to Canada where he was settled in Toronto with his wife and was pursuing his degree in English and Philosophy as part-time at the University of Toronto and he successfully completed his second course in 1982, also where he won two literary prizes for publishing two stories in the Hart House Review.

He spontaneously began his career by writing his first short story, *One Sunday* (1983) and *Auspicious Occasion* won the same Canadian Hart House Literary Contest. Mistry's books have translated into many languages like Japanese, Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian. Mistry has received many prestigious awards for his works which includes the Annual Contributors' Award from the Canadian Fiction Magazine, Booker Prize for Fiction in 1992 and 1996. He also moved to an extent to quit his job to become a full fledged writer. His short story

collection *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987) was published in Canada and also in the UK in 1992. His recent book was *The Screem* (2008), which was illustrated by Tony Urquhart and is evocative work of Rohinton Mistry. In 2012 he won the Neustadt International Prize for Literature.

NARIMAN VAKEEL AND HIS PARSI COMMUNITY:

As Mistry is from the Parsi community, he does not fail to produce the feelings he has about his narrowing community. The Parsi people's ancient home land is Persian countries which is the southern Iran and now at present people live in Bombay and Pakistan. They follow the religion of the Zoroastrianism and worship the god named Zarathustra. They fled from their homeland and migrated to India during the eighth century because of the invading Islamians, they moved to preserve their community. The Parsi community has been narrowing with the moving period of time as there are increasing late marriages and low chances of having birth, inter caste and religion marriage which result in the loss of the identity as a Parsi.

In this regard, Dadabhai Nauroji, has given patriotism spirited words which describes the contribution Parsis have done to the country in all aspects like arts, culture, technology, science, etc. Nani A. Palkhiwala in his book entitled *We The Nation: The Last Decades* (1997) has given some exquisite words about Dadabhai Nauroji as: "Whether I am a Hindu, a Mohmadan, a Parsi, a Christian or any other creed. I am above all an Indian. Our country is India and our nationality is Indian." The novel *Family Matters* is set in Mumbai and thus highlights the story of a Parsi Community middle class old aged man called Nariman Vakeel. He is a seventy nine year old retired English Professor who is affected by Parkinson disease. He lives in a building called Chateau Felicity with his middle aged grand children Coomy who is domineering and harsh to others and Jal who is calm and kind hearted. The novel starts when Nariman breaks his ankle while going for a walk in the streets and his grand children feel hatred to take care of him and so they plan to move him to his daughter Roxana's home, who is married and has two children.

Another dominant character in this novel is Yezad, son-in-law of Nariman who is stricken with financial troubles and is working in Sports Goods Emporium. Two primary happenings in the novel sets as the turning point. Yezad, who wants money, thinks of cheating his employer and involves in ad deeds and so in that tension he gets angry on his father-in-law and later he realizes it. As redemption Yezad takes care of Nariman in return and his life changes from an atheist to a fanatic. Mistry therefore mainly feature the old age suffering of men in their lives.

Curious, he thought, how, if you knew a person long enough, he could elicit every kind of emotion from you, every possible reaction, envy, admiration, pity, irritation, fury, fondness, jealousy, love, disgust. But in the end all human beings became candidates for compassion, all of us, without exception... and if we could recognize this from the beginning, what a saving in pain and grief and misery (Rohinton Mistry, *Fmaily Matters*, 12).

The second chapter deals with the theme Rohinton Mistry has dealt with major concern that the old age people's sufferings has to be taken care of, and the portrayal of Nariman Vakeel is in such a way that the character faces struggles in his life through out from his youth till his end of life. His marriage life is affected with the decision of his parents and also his later life also is affected by mental stress who now becomes helpless because of the disease he is

stricken. The professor who is now a burden for his two step children suffers a lot of mental agony and so he finds it difficult to come out of the stress he has to handle. The two step children are selfish that they want to enjoy and live in the seven bedrooms apartment which is the property of Nariman but they deny taking care of him with whole heartedness. This stress along with the disease he is affected makes his life much miserable that passing a single day with making his step children lament of him was such a miracle. Mistry has very clearly given away the psychological facts that an old person will undergo in his mind and also the small happiness he finds for himself by taking a small walk in the streets and spending value time with his grand children who are the two sons of Roxana from the Chenoy family.

Another major theme Rohinton Mistry has dealt with is the suffering a middle class family has to endure when there is scarcity in all the things they use for their living. This anxiety of meagerness is portrayed through the character of Yezad Chenoy, the son-in-law of Nariman Vakeel who works as a clerk in Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium shop. He has a dream of migrating to Canada and living with his family there, but the immigration officer who treated him in a bad way, has retained him and this made Yezad give up his dream on going to Canada. The character of Yezad, is on some point an autobiographical character of Mistry as Mistry had also dreamt of going to Canada and building a happy living there. But Rohinton Mistry also expresses his view that moving to other country is fine, but moving away completely from our home land is not a good idea. One should never lose their home land and one should to seek to develop their home land rather moving to an unknown country and trying to develop the other country is not appreciated.

Then Yezad said if ten years ago he could have looked into the future, he would have given up on his Canadian dream. He would have tried again and again, that racist immigration officer could not have blocked his way forever. And they would all be living happily right now in Toronto, breathing the pure Rocky Mountain air instead of the noxious fumes of this dying city, rotting with pollution and garbage and corruption(283).

Thus immigration to other country is good but only for some period of time. One should return to their own home land and that is expressed by Rohinton Mistry in his beautiful words through *Family Matters*. Yezad not only feels for his lost dream but also suffers with the addition of another member in the family who is his father-in-law Mr. Nariman Vakeel, the retired professor. He is left with the responsibility of his lovable daughter Roxana Chenoy who has no other way but to take care of his deteriorating father. Yezad also accepts at first for his temporary stay in the Pleasant Villa but later resents him for prolonging the duration of his stay in the small flat which is already congested.

The two characters in Mistry's novel thus portray the sufferings of human life but in different perspectives which concerns the age. The young aged person faces sufferings related to his mind which are mental stress caused because for the poverty that lies in his life. The struggle he has to undergo in order to bring up his family to a good position. He on the other hand finds solace in his two sons who are there to cheer him up by showing ultimate affection on him. His wife Roxana also consoles him in all possible ways but the poverty which revolves in their family has made him commit a sin by going in a wrong way that had made him behave in an awkward manner to his family with agitation which mainly affects Nariman who feels dejected in all aspects of his life. Though he done many wrong doings in his life, once he had

realized his mistake he has become from an atheist to a fanatic and also respecting elders has become his major concern.

Thus Nariman in his last days of his life lives happily and Yezad also has the satisfaction that he had regretted everything he had done to his father-in-law. Rohinton Mistry thus has given the thought that sufferings will endure each and every person's life but one must have the confidence to face it and both the characters given by the author gives the readers a clear picture of what life will look like when we totally think for our parents goodness and the sacrifices one needs to undertake for the welfare of the family. The penultimate work of the author Rohinton Mistry unfolds the familial relationships of three generation that formidably involves a person from the Parsi Community who is struck in between many clutches of physical and mental stress that makes him feel insecure, a burden to his family and so he terribly feels loneliness and depressed on the thought of aging as he needs to depend on others for his living. Mistry here mainly focuses on the conception of the multidimensional process of the changes that happen while aging in accordance with physical, psychological and also some social changes in an old person and special problems of the old age people.

The number of implications faced by an old man in his life is all around including physical, social, moral and economical ones. Rohinton Mistry through his text makes the reader understand the complexity of an old aged person's life, and the strangles he is caught under in order to lead a peaceful life. As the title suggests the author cleverly takes over the concept and shows the read how the family does matter to the people in it and the family is the place where each and every one will be comfortable with and the importance to safeguard the family is clearly depicted in the novel *Family Matters*.

The life cycle of human beings starts from birth, adolescence, youth and old age till death. The old age is the final stage of the life span and indicates the closing period, where the old aged persons tend to behave in the same manner as they were in their childhood which means that they utterly need some caring and help from the family members to live a peaceful life. The life course gets completed and the people keep on thinking of their own past accomplishments. The week people who are aged and now depend upon others for their living have to adapt themselves to the changing habits and so they will begin to feel for their disability as they were cherishing and enthusiastic in their younger days and now they will have to be just laying in their bed and keep their minds relaxed because they will create depression that will lead to mental health issues.

Depression is the symptom that make old aged people think and worry about their years while they were younger and can do all their works of their own. This is the most formidable condition among the old and week citizens. Many experts have proven that the depressive disorders that are created in the intellect of old people may lead to the increased risk rate of mortality. The novel prominently deals about the psychological and social impacts on Nariman Vakeel. He is a geriatric Parsi who journeys through various types of sufferings mentally and also physically till his death and acts as a standing example for the conception of the old age suffering and the hankering for the care from his children who does the deed whole heartedly. Although it is specific in the cultural and background setting to be in India, the author does not fail to convey the universal issue of impartiality caretaking and the social issue of the slowly degrading Parsi community and the loss of its identity in the social world. The opening

lines are finely crafted by Mistry in his magnificent words describing the calm place where Nariman lives which is the Chateau Felicity.

A splash of light from the late-afternoon sun lingered at the foot of Nariman's bed as he ended his nap and looked towards the clock. It was almost six. He glanced down where the warm patch had lured his toes. Knurled and twisted, rendered birdlike by age, they luxuriated in the sun's comfort. His eyes fell shut again. (1)

At the initial stage of the novel the author decrepit the physical state of the feeble professor and shows his difficult situation who cannot afford to do even his own activities and depends on others for his living. At the start of the story Nariman Vakeel celebrates his seventy ninth birthday. The disease he has, will give worst side effects like shivering of hands, slow movement, etc. Coomy is so much dominant but at the same time has much affection on Nariman. Most of the times Coomy's words create a sense of depression in Nariman's mind that made him feel much lonely and also that the step children took care of him with the thought of obligation rather than with affection. He is haunted by the memories of his rejected loved one Lucy whom he still loves and thinks of her often and also by his angry wife Yasmin till his death.

She hires him knowing that he will do all the work in a careless manner and so makes the ceiling fall in all the rooms of the flat and shows to the Chenoy family that there is a water leakage in the flat which makes it hard for the old aged step father to make his living so uncomfortable and also he can be without depression only when he spends his time with Yezad who is good at joking and his caretaking daughter Roxana and his two grand children Jehangir and Murad ready to show Nariman full care and happiness. So the two middle aged Jal and Coomy are bad at joking so they could not make the professor live with joy rather they feel oppressed by the burden of work they have while caretaking Nariman and they show their inconvenience in their actions. In considering all these aspects the brother and sister plan to send Nariman to Pleasant Villa for three weeks and to make them relaxed for a few days.

All the sorrow in his heart has made him weak and so he is in the situation of utmost loneliness and depression and this is because of the old age of Nariman Vakeel who is now seventy nine years old. He loses his comfortable zone with the dominance of his step children. He is having his hearing aid and as he went for a walk in the street without listening to his step children words, he broke his ankle and now his situation is still worse than before.

Please don't go, Pappa, we beseech you" said Jal through the door, then grimaced and adjusted his hearing aid, for the words had echoed deafeningly in his own ear. The device was an early model; a metal case the size of a matchbox was clipped to his shirt pocket and wired to the earpiece (1).

While Coomy dominates Nariman and insists on using his room with all the locks opened as he will fall down and he will be unnoticed by everyone, in order to avoid that she scolds her stepfather that she will call the locksmith and make all the locks removed. Coomy behaves like a hysterical headmistress, spontaneously crafting rules to govern every phase of the elderly citizen Nariman's life. In the morning he was not to get out of bed till she came to get him. A bath was possible only twice a week when she undertook its choreography, with Jal enlisted as stage manager to stand by and ensure his safety. At the time Nariman feels that his privacy has been lost because of his age and the disease he has got, so he feels depressed by this

act of Coomy. Nariman is not only affected by the treatment of his step children but also he is much affected by his own thoughts about old age and the feeling of being lonely.

ILLTREATMENT IN SOCIETY AND HOME:

Nariman is avoided not only in his family side but also in the society within his friends. He used to go for morning and evening walk in the streets with his friends but now when he is stricken with his Parkinson disease, the problems that are caused due to this is slow movement while walking and also shivering of hands. So Nariman uses his old umbrella as his walking stick. As his friends can not join his slow walking style, he is being avoided among his friends and outside his home. This shows how he is affected even in the society because of his ageing process and the Parkinson's disease. The problem of the old age people who are being cornered in a single room without the care of their children and without any company creates depression in their minds. This problem is not only the fact of the Parsi Community people but it is a universal hitch that has to be focused by the people in the society. Another major problem the old man had was osteoporosis and so he always went to his subconscious state of mind and started dreaming about his past.

Yezad, the son-in-law of Nariman Vakeel was another major character who had hurt him so much psychologically which made him feel as though he was homeless and lost his identity and the dignity he had while he was an English Professor. The ill treating of the step children Jal and Coomy to their step father, made him shift his home from Chateau Felicity to Pleasant Villa. He had experienced good care while he was staying in his daughters home, but later on he was treated with due carelessness by his son-in-law who once made him laugh out loud and get rid of his depression by telling jokes and stories. He even watched television with Nariman and eagerly discussed the topics of the cricket game whether it was match fixing or played with true sportsmanship.

The first and foremost thing which made Yezad get angry on his father-in-law was he was much agitated when his lovable son was crying because of the silly stories told by his grandfather. The stories Yezad had told his son was full of laughter and joyful one rather the once recited by Nariman was somewhat superstitious and so they made Jehangir weep thinking of the story though he knew the characters in the story were not for real in the world. He gave a mock scolding to his father-in-law and wanted him to stress that his stories made his son look gloomy rather be cherished. Once Yezad who was happy to have him in his small flat even by adjusting on small things, now began to regret it because of the annoying smell he leave in the living room where he and his family members would have their breakfast while off to work and school.

Because of Nariman in their house, Yezad felt he was disturbing the harmony of his family. Roxana who was the only responsible for balancing both her family and also her helpless father, sometimes got tensed on her husband for pointing out all the flaws in her work. Nariman Vakeel is not only depressed by his family and society but sometimes he gets himself relaxed and happy in some of the happenings in the novel. There are some occasions where Nariman himself feels ease and comfortable by some of the characters in the novel described by Rohinton Mistry. The characters who make him feel happy in his living are Jehangir, who is the second son of Nariman's daughter Roxana and the assistant of Dr. Tarapore who is Mr.Rangarajan. These are the two main characters who involve in giving Nariman the old retired

professor an ease and relaxation of mind by taking care of Nariman and nursing in the way he likes it.

Not only the characters in the novel makes him feel good but also the surroundings and the Bombay City he lives in is admired by Nariman even though he has broken his ankle by walking the streets dominated by the political parties. In the beginning of the novel itself Professor goes on for his evening walk in the street even though he is beseeched by his step children Coomy and Jal. He uses his umbrella as his walking stick and starts his walk from the Chateau Felicity. Yezad faces struggle in his life all over his surroundings including his family, his work place and finds it much harder to live in the city with much less money to spend. He had faced all the hardship one has to face when he has the anxiety of meagerness like starving of good food till the satisfaction of living a peaceful life. It is clear through this character that one has to adjust in all walks of life and also learn to live with contentment even though they deprive of luxury in their lives. Yezad as a result of all the stress he has handled throughout his life in his family and also in his sports shop, he turns to be a fanatic and a committed Parsi, who now cries for the salvation from God.

CONCLUSION:

The protagonist of the novel Mr. Nariman Vakeel and his son-in-law Yezad are set the perfect examples for the theme of sufferings by Rohinton Mistry. The sufferings handled by the two citizens are much different in angle and so one has to view with different perspective during the analysis of the characters and the life they had lived in the city of Bombay is an irrevocable, hopeless, lost form of identity in the world they have been doomed to live. Not only Nariman Vakeel, but also Yezad feels struggle mentally by thinking of his covert behavior to his father-in-law. Once he had refused to give him the urinals when he needed it the most. According to him, only his wife and the lovable daughter Roxana should do these kinds of duties and no one other than her is allowed to do such chores in the house even their sons Jehangir and Murad are not allowed to do so.

It may be of helping but the most concerned thing than helping is the cleanliness and Yezad wanted his sons to maintain it in particular. But this made Nariman feel for his inability to do his basic chores like walking and other basic stuffs a human has to do. At that time, the professor felt that no one in this world would behave in such a manner than his son-in-law. Nariman even though feels tortured by all these deeds of Yezad, he finds solace for himself when he heard the songs played in violin by the neighbor Daisy Ichhaporia.

Thus Nariman recollects the memories in his semi consciousness. She gives him the immense pleasure of dreaming about his ex-girlfriend Lucy Braganza, and at the time when he heard the music he would go to a little heaven as the song was so much soothing that they were perfectly coinciding with the memories of his lady love. His family did not cooperate or help for his love rather they had opposed him in the name of community and culture and thus avoided a non-Parsi girl into their family. They considered that through his family the Parsi community would narrow and so the parental control affects in Nariman's family and also Yezad controlling his elder son Murad while kissing a non-Parsi girl goes to the argument between them and they end in fighting with each other.

Yezad though did not have the thought of dominating his son; he must follow the rule that was followed by Nariman's parents on the professor. Mistry has also dealt about the

future of the culture and also the Parsi community with the help of the characters of Parsi Inspector Masalavala. He remarks in the novel that, “The experts in demographics are confident that fifty years hence, there will be no Parsis left (412). Human beings from the stage of childhood, adolescence, youth and old age continuously face struggles and come over it after certain period of time. Characters in this novel also face problem from a small child till the character of the old man sufferings till their death. This is not the mistake of the man but this has to be faced obviously. Problems occur in different stages at different situations and one had to withstand boldly and face the problem rather than feeling sob on thinking of the problem will make the situation even worse.

In youth people face many mental problems which are formed because of their family as some individuals expect to live alone independently while their parents would force them to marry and lead a disciplined life. And once they are married their pressure will never reduce rather increase with the responsibility and the burden he is made to take care in the future. They have the responsibility of maintaining a good reputation among their family and friends. So in India people not only work for themselves but they reach out for dignity and good name in the society and so do their work and earn more to satisfy the needs of their family. The emigration has been a pounding feel in Mistry’s heart but he anyways confirms that home land is the best place to live and so he has given away the point that he himself loves to return to India from Canada though he lives in a foreign country his novels are full of Indian setting which is his home land. This portrays his love towards India and the Bombay city. Thus V.L.V.N. Narendra Kumar in one of his Parsi novel, entitled *Westernization and Expatriation* has quoted as;

The Parsees prefer the West because since it provides unlimited scope for growth and prosperity. Dislocation is a part of the Parsee Psyche. Exiled twelve hundred years ago, they came to India. Now they are migrating to west in search of greener pastures. Thus there is ‘double migration’ in the case of the Parsees (14).

Hence Rohinton Mistry has concluded his novel with the universal issues of suffering of old aged people for simple care from their family and another theme of poverty leading to sins by the middle class man Yezad. As the Parsi community is being narrowed day by day Mistry expresses his opinion for the welfare of his community and so poses these two major themes. As a conclusion one must take care of the elder citizens in the family with care and also should keep in mind that money should be earned with honesty and only then one can lead a happier life.

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