

## An Examination of Family Bonds and Broken Relationships: A Study of Domestic Realism in Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters*

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**Abstract:** This research paper discusses the theme of family responsibilities and family cohesiveness destruction at the domestic level in the third novel of Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters*. The plot of the story is a touching domestic realism, set in Bombay in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It shows how the Chenoy and Vakeel families are cut off by the mundane problems that are also highly dramatic. In this paper, it shall be contended that Mistry has used the physical and mental decadence of Nariman Vakeel to bring out how anger, religious bigotry and financial hardship keeps the Parsi family of the modern generation united. This paper also discusses the ways in which Mistry proves that home is not just a place of security but also a home where people have to answer ethical questions and feel guilty. It also dwells on how outside social influences, like the growing influence of the Hindutva politics and diminishing Parsi numbers, have influenced the lives of the main characters and made them less to blame. Finally, this research paper indicates that the reality presented by Mistry is how fragile the human ties are, yet on the other side, it also shows how strong the human spirit is revealed by demonstrating the family unit as having a fine balance of empathy and endurance.

**Key Words:** Family bond, the Parsi Identity, modern generation, social influences, city decay, fine balance

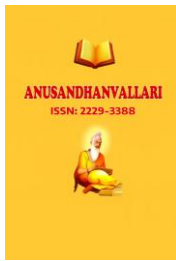
### Introduction:

Family is a home where individuals idealise and think that all individuals love each other despite the situation. Yet, in the *Family Matters* by Rohinton Mistry (2002), the family can be viewed as the space where the moral obligation and the inner struggle are involved in complicated relations. The setting of the story is in the crowded and decaying Bombay metropolis in the 1990s. It is about Nariman Vakeel, who is a 79-year-old Parsi patriarch with the Parkinson disease and is compelled to take his fractured family and face their repressed resentments. By the domestic realism employed by Mistry in analysing the life of the middle classes we discover that illness may lead to a moral crisis. The house itself not merely serves as a setting when the narrative breaks out of the chaotic apartment of the Chenoy's to the declining elegance of Chateau Felicity. It becomes a character that shows the weakness of human relationship.

Mistry is a very intelligent individual because he was able to see the deeper meaning of the objects of daily living. Peter Morey, the critic, says that the author writes of scrupulous realism upon the "struggles of marginalized individuals against the backdrop of larger social shifts" (122). The more significant transformation that was witnessed in this novel is the corruption of the Parsi society and the growing political unrest in India. However, the battle is fought on sickbed and dining room. So, this paper shall argue that Mistry employs these issues in the family to explore the fine balance of the desire to care about other people and self-protection. This paper further attempts to demonstrate why Mistry domestic realism is a miniature of the human condition by examining the fusion of tradition and modern survival.

### Goal of the Research

The primary purpose of the research is to investigate how Rohinton Mistry applies the style of domestic reality to demonstrate how complex the morals and feelings of the Parsi family are in *Family Matters*. The aim of the



research is to examine the fractures of the Vakeel and Chenoy family, particularly the effect of the physical strain of attending to an aged father to reveal all the long-repressed resentment and prejudices. The article also examines how the external socio-political changes in Bombay such as fundamentalism in religion and economic uncertainty impact the home and subject family relations to stress. This paper examines these internal and external forces to indicate that the concept of home of Mistry is not merely a place, but a microcosm of the broader struggle that people have to undergo in order to preserve their dignity, recall the past, and survive in a changing world.

### Research Methodology

A close reading of a novel titled *Family Matters* (2002) by Rohinton Mistry was used as the main source of the data in this study. The study was largely qualitative and analytical. The paper applies the theory of Domestic Realism to determine what the story is and how the slightest of events that occur in the daily Parsi life demonstrate larger philosophical and social ideas. The analysis is a comprehensive one formed through the hermeneutic approach, which interprets the text in the context of the particular socio-historical setting, which is the post-colonial landscape of the 1990s Bombay, and the dwindling Zoroastrian community. Also, the paper relies on the secondary sources to support its arguments regarding the movement of families and the entrance of politics in the house. These involve critical biographies, peer reviewed journals as well as literary theories by authors as Peter Morey and Nilufer Bharucha. This research aims at providing a more detailed picture of how dysfunctional family relations can be used to illustrate the issues prevailing in contemporary India by taking into account both textual sources and the contemporary critical discourse.

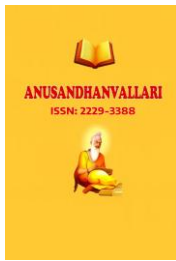
### Main Discussion:

The house in *Family Matters* is not merely a background but it is a living organism that indicates the healthy state of the family. Domestic Realism is a style that examines the uncouth and unseemly aspects of the family life. Rohinton Mistry uses it to demonstrate that the family relationship is not always a question of spiritual power.

The body of Nariman Vakeel disintegrates at the beginning of the novel. His Parkinson disease and the accident that followed the disease is the inciting incident that makes the family confront their hidden fractures. Mistry is so realistic in his writing because of the “cloying smells of liniment, the indignity of the bedpan, and the agonizingly slow pace of a geriatric life” (Morey, 2004). In the case of Jal and Coomy, the body of Nariman is a liability that they wish to get rid of. Although it is Chateau Felicity, they have a sad history of their house. Mistry relates their degrading morals to the ceiling of the flat, which is deteriorating. Since Coomy describes the flat as being unsafe to Nariman, she intentionally causes a hole in the ceiling to be formed. Through this, she violates the home sanctuary to escape her employment. As critic Nilufer Bharucha, points out, “Mistry’s characters are often defined by the rooms they inhabit; when the room decays, the ethics of the inhabitant often decay with it” (p. 57).

The real study of fractured relationships occurs when the Nariman is assigned to live in the house of Chenoy family in their small room in Pleasant Villa. And this is where the reality begins to choke. Roxana and Yezad are already having trouble with money and the fact that their father-in-law was getting ill, made matters worse. This has been termed as a spatial crisis. Here, Mistry discusses the transformation of the living room into the sickroom: “The settee-bed was no longer a place for guests; it was a station of sorrow, marked by the medicinal smells that now defined their air” (Mistry, 142). This physical crowding leads to certain feelings of crowding. Roxana and Yezad had been intimate previously because they could help one another, but regular work and the financial strain which the specialty doctors were causing were tearing the two apart. This is nothing more than a mere demonstration of realism: love is not cheap and poor people struggle to be patient.

*Family Matters* presents a psychological breakup that is full of memories, guilt and that of the ghost of Lucy who remains in the mind of Nariman and continues to influence the way Nariman behaves even today. In order to see why the relationships in the novel are so strained, one should consider such ghosts of the past which plague the



characters and make them unable to care about and connect with each other. Much of Mistry domestic realism in this story can be what one would refer to as a 'realism of the past' where memories are not passive reminders, they are active forces that can creep into the present story by flashback, by nightmarish raving and affect decisions, cause tensions to escalate, and establish patterns of anger and sacrifice in the Vakeel family. By doing so Mistry demonstrates that trauma and regrets of the past do influence even the day-to-day interactions in the family, therefore, the appearance of conflicts in the family is actually the manifestation of the unresolved problems of the past.

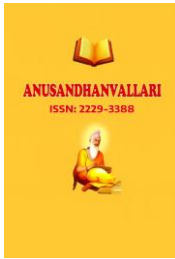
The illegal affair Nariman had with Lucy, a non-Parsi woman was developed 30 years before the main action of the book. He had married Coomy and the widow of Jal a Parsi, on a sacrifice to tradition, which failed. Mistry relies on Nariman memory sequences to suggest that a family built on deception cannot stick together. Nariman considers, "We think we are caring for the living, but we are always at the mercy of the dead" (Mistry, 2002, p. 210). This fractured beginning is the cause of the anger of his stepchildren. It is not only cruel that Coomy is cold, "realistic outcome of a childhood spent watching a father long for another woman" (Morey, 45).

The way Yezad has changed is one of the most radical of the splits. As the head of the house, he does indeed feel like he ought to provide. His nonreligious efforts fail miserably like when he tried to deceive his boss Mr. Kapur in an effort to acquire increased security and he collapses. He returns to Zoroastrian chauvinism. This is what many of the stories by Mistry speak of: the present is so painful that the characters hide in the habit of the past. Yezad starts enforcing purity regulations in the small apartment by telling his children how to pray and not to pollute things. It is because of this that he and Roxana are spiritually fractured. According to Mistry, "He was seeking a fine balance between his misery and his God, but in the process, he was losing his children" (385).

In *Three. The Porous Border: How Bombay Politics Got In*, Mistry does not present the family life in a vacuum. Rather he demonstrates how the failure of the house is related to larger societal and political issues beyond. His everyday characters are influenced by the emergence of the Hindutva philosophy in Bombay in the 1990s and the emergence of sectarian politics in Bombay overall. Mr. Kapur, the boss of Yezad who is optimistic and wishes to join the city council to restore the civic spirit of the city was killed by political thugs, who demonstrate the power of corruption and violence over moral conviction. The tragedy affects the domestic life of Yezad so much; as he is jobless and hopeless, which expresses the moral decay of the city. Minorities such as Parsis do not feel secure and this puts much pressure on family bonds. According to Mistry, "The walls of the flat were thin; they could not keep out the chants of the mobs or the smell of burning tires" (312). The family has got a fracture and this demonstrates that the nation has a fracture. As scholar Peter Morey suggests, "Mistry uses the Parsi family as a microcosm for India; their internal bickering reflects the communal riots of the streets" (168).

The most heartbreaking separation is in the presence of the kids. Murad and Jehangir must witness how desperate their parents are. Jehangir, the sensitive observer, begins stealing his friend's money in order to provide his mother money to purchase chicken to his grandfather. It is very true that poor children have the option of losing their morals to provide for the family. According to the author, Jehangir was grieving like "heavy stone in his pocket that he could never throw away" (275). The religious fervour of Yezad do not allow him to perceive the true suffering his children are experiencing, which negatively impacts their relationship with him as a father.

In the end of the story, told many years later, people can observe that the cracks have not disappeared, only healed. Nariman is already dead, Yezad turned into a strict and old-fashioned man. The relationship that existed in the family survived but at a high price: happiness was lost and the hearts were hardened. *Family Matters* by Rohinton Mistry demonstrates that there is a form of writing known as Domestic Realism which is most suitable to narrate a story of a region. He displays the macro facts of people in terms of the micro factors they engage in food, medicine and money. At the end of the novel, one can also learn that the fine balance is not a state of peace, but is always a state of compromising between love and anger



### Conclusion:

Rohinton Mistry has used the same arrangement of domestic realism in *Family Matters* to prove that the family is either a place of peace or a place of a fight. The paper discussed the role whereby Nariman Vakeel and his health problems acted as a centrifugal force that ignited the suppressed anger and financial fears of the Chenoy and Vakeel families. The lack of the myth of the home is condensed when Mistry focuses on the routine life that comes with the act of caring and the smell of disease, the inability to move around, and the ever-present number of grocery bills, which love and being are never in harmony with each other.

The study also found out that these lapses within the family are not independent but rather entwined tightly with the outside world. The house is open and the shadow of Bombay in the 1990s and the inflexibility of Parsi orthodoxy intrude into the personal lives of the characters. Yezad later becomes a secular provider but she becomes a furious traditionalist later. Peter Morey, one of the critics who adds that these wounds are not healed completely at the end of the story, but it is a straining balance. Mistry writes extensively of a fine balance in much of his work and this story illustrates the fine balance. The family is still relocating but the memories of having a home life have irreparable marks.

*Family Matters* is a great reminder that although history and politics make the country, it is the home where the actual matters of life are decided. Being able to perceive the universal in the ordinary, Mistry left a big impression on the post-colonial writing. The Parsi society is also losing people in the novel, although the Chenoy family is fragmented, they are still considered strong, demonstrating that the human spirit can discover a sense in situations when everything around is unravelling. Finally, Mistry adds that family relationships are not only gift or curse but permanent situation which makes people to be human.

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