



Cultural Evils and Family Crisis: Testing Faith and Identity in Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters*

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Abstract: Rohinton Mistry's work always deals with the complex relationship between the family, religion, tradition and the identity of the individual. *Family Matters* (2002) is an Indian Diasporic novel that examines the suffering of an elderly Parsi man who led his life with economic, political and religious turmoil. This particular work of Rohinton, i.e. *Family Matters*, is a suitable example of Cultural turmoil or evils in which socially inherited practices, prejudices, customs, ideologies and behavioral patterns become destructive when they are treated with undeniable tradition. This paper stands as the central stigma, where he exposes how cultural beliefs play a pivotal role when the self is detached from compassion, logic and dignity. This study focuses mainly on the patriarchal society and ageing, racial and religious purity, gender restrictions and the economy. It also examines the Parsi community's disquiet, which mainly focuses on their demographic decline and the survival of their culture. This paper is widely interpreted from postcolonial and social perspectives. It simply brings out various observations such as tolerance, compassion, dignity and human responsibility. On the other hand, this paper deals with an identity crisis both in culture and individuality.

Keywords: Culture, Evil, Turmoil, Disquiet, Tradition, Identity, postcolonial, family, religion.

1. Introduction

Rohinton Mistry plays a part in Indian Writing in English today. His stories are always about Writing in English, and they usually deal with things like who we are, how people are not equal, problems in families, people moving to new places and the bad things that happen because of politics and how that affects people. Rohinton Mistry is very important to writing in English. As a writer from Canada with roots in Bombay, India and the Parsi community, he stays connected to his homeland. His stories are about the lives of ordinary people who are stuck in the chaos of their culture. At the time he writes about the real issues facing India. The homes he creates in his stories show sides of culture and politics.

The book *Family Matters*, which came out in 2002, looks at the contrast between family and public life, culture and tradition and turmoil and conflict. This story takes place in 1990. Is about the Vakeel. Chenoy family. The title *Family Matters* is about the problems and arguments that families have, which can be emotional and practical. The main idea of the story is about family and the struggles that come with it. It does not just focus on the writer's personal struggles. Instead, it looks at how religious beliefs and generational differences, social expectations and gender roles, economic hardship and cultural trauma can contribute to family conflicts.

The term Cultural Evils refers to the practices that come from societal norms and cultural beliefs that are outdated. Culture and customs are not bad traditions; they also give people a sense of belonging and identity. When these traditions become too rigid, they raise questions about identity, freedom, equality and what it means to be part of a culture. The writer Mistry always explores these ideas in his novel *Family Matters*.

The protagonist Nariman Vakeel suffers from severe Parkinson's disease, which makes him dependent on other people for basic needs. Taking care of an elderly person in a family is always a part of custom in an Indian family,



but many families face a lot of struggles in providing both physical and financial support. This paper traces the gap between cultural ideas and reality; it also deals with psychological suffering. Secondly, it represents the cultural problem in this patriarchal society. The female characters, such as Roxana and Coomy, play the characteristic of the binary role, imbued with responsibilities as a strong notion. This creates a substantial burden in the domestic era, whereas Coomy plays a pivotal role in taking care of her family from scratch.

Mistry's depiction of women moves beyond being victims as they face oppression that keeps the social system in place, which limits them. This shows that culture is important for identity. It can be harmful when it forces change. We can feel the denial of demographics and the survival of Parsi culture here. For the people of Parsi, there needs to be a change in the way they think, accepting that they come from the Pure Blood idea, where they cannot leave their culture to marry someone outside of it. The difficulty of accessing something creates a problem at the centre of this issue.

2. Objectives of the Study

The present paper focuses on the following objectives:

1. To examine the concept of Cultural Evils critically in Mistry's *Family Matters*.
2. To investigate the interplay between family structure, gender bias and social structure in the novel.
3. To exemplify the gender stereotype of the society, gender restrictions and unequal domestic rules and responsibilities.
4. To critically analyse the problem of binary in terms of oppression, suppression, dependency and negligence.
5. To critically examine the decay that prevails in the cultural turmoil and identity.
6. To technically attribute the conflict, between modernity and tradition which states that the graph travels from younger to generations.
7. To justify how the concept of individualism affects the society, which works out with wider social and cultural structures.
8. To evaluate the values that contribute to the destructive practices of culture.
9. To apply the critical approaches of Mistry's Cultural Evils to contemporary society.
10. To exhibit the economic insecurity among family relationships and moral ethics.

3. Scope and Methodology

3.1 Scope of the Study

The paper acknowledges which is treated as an analytical concept that indicates the literary term and custom. It implies the harmful customs, practices, beliefs, and culture. It therefore exemplifies a judgmental to their caste, culture, religion and community. Here, the novel neither represents Parsi culture nor Indian culture; instead, rather than creating a fictional world.

3.2 Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative textual analysis which is firmly based on a close reading of the text *Family Matters*. A thematic study was done on the selected characters, situations and Parsi's culture. It also describes a descriptive and interpretative approach by analysing the primary data. Secondary materials such as books, articles and other related sources. It is therefore combined in the analysis of

- ♦ Cultural Studies and Feminist perspectives



- ◆ Sociological Approaches to family
- ◆ Postcolonial Literary Criticism
- ◆ Religious Identity and Communalism

The study further brings out a close textual reading rather than a statistical approach. The major purpose is to understand how he constructs meaning through his characterisation, narrative, dialogue, structure, setting and themes.

4. Review of Literature

Jagdish Batra's study of *Family Matters* discusses Mistry's humanistic concern for people who are neglected or pushed to the margins. Batra says that people are not treated fairly in the novel. This is not something that happens in the community. It also happens in the family. The old people are in a difficult situation. They are not as strong as they were before. They need help with money and other things. So they have to depend on others. Sometimes this makes the old people feel like they are a burden to the family they live with. This can be very sad for the people. The elderly people feel this way because they need help from their family. Batra wants us to think about how the elderly people are treated in the novel.

The family can make the elderly people feel like they are a problem. That is not a nice thing for the elderly people to feel. This point is important for the present study because it shows that oppression can take place even in everyday family life. It need not always come from political or social institutions. It can also develop through the way family members treat and understand one another.

Roger McNamara, in his study "Developing 'A Fine Balance': Secularism, Religion, and Minority Politics in Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters*," discusses the role of religion and religious extremism in the Parsi community. McNamara also says that we need to find a balance between what people believe in terms of religion and the rights of each individual. McNamara thinks that religious beliefs and individual rights are both important, and we have to balance them. This study is helpful for our research because it explains how strict religious beliefs can impact people in a community and become a source of pressure in their lives.

Kim Eun-young's 2020 study examines communalism and community relationships in *Family Matters*. It shows that communalism can create fear among minority communities. For the Parsis, the fear of losing their identity leads to a concern about preserving the community and maintaining pure blood. However, this concern can also create problems for individuals and families. The desire to protect the community may sometimes get in the way of choices and relationships. This is important for our study because it shows that preserving culture, although important for a minority community, can also be restrictive when it is based on ideas.

Studies about Mistry's writing that discuss people who live outside their home country have also explored what it means to be Parsi in his books *A Fine Balance* and *Family Matters*. These studies look at feelings of being lost and alone and not feeling like you fit in. They also discuss how Mistry portrays culture and how it relates to the experience of living outside your home country. This is useful for our research because the community's feelings of insecurity in their culture are closely tied to the problems that individual characters face in *Family Matters*. The fear of losing their traditions and sense of self in *Family Matters* often creates tension between what the community expects from people in *Family Matters* and what individuals in *Family Matters* really need for themselves.

These studies of *Family Matters* help us understand how the cultural practices and beliefs of the community in *Family Matters* can affect the relationships within families in *Family Matters* and the lives of individual Parsis, in *Family Matters*.



5. Tracing Culture and Identity

5.1 Bombay: A city of cultures

Mistry lived in Canada. Most of his writing is about the city of Bombay, where the stories take place. The city of Bombay means a lot of things to people. It is about money, culture and politics in a society that people do not always understand. The city of Bombay has two sides to it. One side of Bombay is very rich in culture and history. The other side of Bombay is like a village and can be very scary. The Parsi culture is a group in the city of Bombay. It is still a part of Bombay. This shows that people's private lives are separate from their culture. Life in the city of Bombay really shows the differences in how much money people have; the kind of house a person lives in, and the neighbourhood they live in can show how much money they have. Also, the city of Bombay and the physical space around people can affect how people feel about each other.

5.2 Cultural Survival and Minority Crisis

The Parsi culture, as a small minority that has strong roots in terms of culture and customs, takes a shift in this demographic decay. We can often find in Mistry's novel the desire to preserve his own Parsi Culture, which acts as a source of strength and anxiety. Marriage plays a vital role in this culture because Parsi people cannot marry a commoner. Thus, the community's concern with marriage and religious identity is understandable within the historical context. For Mistry, preservation of culture is more important than individual freedom. It otherwise causes tensions, as anxiety of disappearance can imbibe intolerance, and intolerance can destroy culture in human relationships. The ideology of purity is always a problematic statement when the cultural identity is defined with boundaries. He brings out that fear can distort cultural values.

6. The Role of Patriarchy as Cultural Evil

Patriarchy acts as a central stigma in the novels of Mistry, which inherits the cultural structure of the novel. In *Family Matters*, Mistry shows patriarchy through the ordinary experiences of family life. Men are generally given a stronger position in making important decisions, while women are expected to take care of the home and the needs of other family members.

Roxana's character is a good example of this situation. When Nariman becomes dependent on others, she takes on much of the responsibility for looking after him. At the time, she has to care for her children and support her husband. These responsibilities leave her with little time for herself and create both physical and emotional pressure. What makes Roxana's situation significant is that her efforts are treated as a natural part of being a wife and mother. Mistry uses her experience to show how easily women's sacrifices can be overlooked within a family.

Roxana is not shown as a woman. She has feelings and worries, like everyone. Roxana has her ways of dealing with tough moments. The author, Mistry, shows through Roxana that women should not take all the blame for holding a family. Roxana is a woman, and Mistry uses her character to challenge this idea about women and families.

7. Result and Discussion

The analysis of *Family Matters* shows that cultural evils are not caused by individuals alone but are often connected with family expectations, social values, religious beliefs, and economic conditions. Nariman's suffering, for instance, is linked to his ageing, disability, dependence, and the difficulties faced by his family. The book shows that the family, even though it is supposed to give care and safety, can also spread problems like patriarchy, ageism and unfair duties.



The research also discovers that wanting to keep identity can sometimes be limiting. The groups worry about staying alive as a culture makes sense, but ideas of being pure and keeping others out can put pressure on people. In the way Yezad's changing religious views show how faith can cause problems when it becomes strict and controlling. Money troubles add stress inside the family and affect the choices that family members make.

Roxana's story shows the weight of taking care of others that falls on women. The roles of a wife, a mother and a caregiver show that women are usually asked to deal with family problems without people understanding what women are going through.

The book *Family Matters*, written by Mistry, does not say that culture, religion or tradition are things. Mistry just questions things that're not fair that cause people to suffer or that take away their self-respect. Mistry believes that being kind and being tolerant are really important. Treating people with dignity and understanding each other are also very important to Mistry. He thinks that these things are more important than following rules. *Family Matters* says that cultural traditions are good only if they respect what people need and want. Cultural traditions should also give people the freedom to make their choices, according to *Family Matters*.

8. Major Findings

The important findings of this research paper include:

1. Mistry's *Family Matters* represents culture as a source of identity which enhances into political oppression.
2. It explicates the system of patriarchy that influences the family structure, its authority and the gender roles played within the family.
3. Economic, cultural, and Social insecurities bring out family conflicts and dilemmas.
4. Women carry an inappropriate burden of physical and emotional traumas.
5. The upcoming youth played the role of victim because of the generational conflicts played by the adults.
6. It challenges the ideologies of a traditional family pursuit.
7. Dependency acts as an act of taking care of the former generations, physically, financially and mentally.

9. Limitations of the Study

This research has certain limitations; the first limitation is that the study mainly focuses on Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters*. Although his other novels, such as *A Fine Balance* and *Such a Long Journey*, may offer important points of comparison, which goes on that they are not discussed in detail in this research.

The second limitation is related to the methodologies used in the research. It does not use surveys, interviews or statistical data. The study follows a qualitative approach and is based mainly on the close reading and interpretation of the text alone. It does not use surveys, interviews or statistical data. So this study does not say that its way of understanding these practices is the only way to see them.

This study does not try to show the Parsi community; it only looks at the characters and situations in the novel *Family Matters*. The characters and events in the novel are not meant to be a picture of the real Parsi community. The study only looks at the practices and social attitudes shown in the novel. The study also focuses more on cultural issues than on the psychological development of each character.

While it does look at the emotions and personal struggles of the characters when they are relevant to the point, it does not try to do a complete psychological study of each character. Literary interpretation is not always straightforward; different readers and critics may understand the novel in different ways.



So the findings of this study should be seen as one way of understanding the novel *Family Matters*, not as the final word on the novel.

10. Research Gap

The book *Family Matters* has been studied in many ways, but there are still plenty of parts that deserve more attention. These areas need exploration. The book is about family, religion, getting old, disability and gender. There is still much to say about these topics. The book *Family Matters* is about family, religion, getting old, disability and gender. There is a lot more to understand about these parts of the book. It gives many different views on these topics. The concept of identity and social change is really important. Usually these issues are studied separately. If we bring them together, we can understand the problems in the novel better.

10.1 Cultural Evils as an Important Role

Studies focus on one issue at a time, like ageing or disability, diaspora or religious identity. It would be interesting to study how these issues are connected. A new study could look at all these issues together. See how different cultural practices and beliefs affect the characters' lives and create problems in the family.

10.2 Ageing: Fact of age

The relationship between gender and ageing is another area to look at. Nariman, Roxana and Coomy have family responsibilities because of their family structure. Their experiences show that ageing affects men and women differently. A new study could look at how gender influences how elderly people are treated and how family members share responsibilities to take care of them.

10.3 Disability and Cultural Attainment

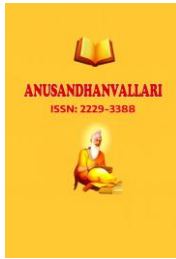
Disability is a part of Nariman's story. We can still learn more about how disability is understood in the family and society. More research could look at whether people with disabilities are treated according to their individual needs or if cultural attitudes make them more dependent on others. This research could also look at how disability is represented in other Indian English literature.

11. Conclusion

Mistry's *Family Matters* shows the life of a family in Bombay and talks about bigger issues like culture, religion, family relationships, ageing, gender, disability and social expectations. Through the characters' experiences, Mistry shows how cultural practices and beliefs can affect life. The idea of "evil" helps us understand these issues because the novel shows problems like patriarchy, neglect of the elderly, religious rigidity, communal prejudice, ideas of purity, economic difficulties and unequal family responsibilities. These problems are all connected to how people understand family, religion, tradition and social responsibility.

Nariman's illness and dependence show the difficulties faced by disabled people in the family. She takes care of Nariman while still being a wife and mother, which shows that women are expected to make sacrifices for the family. Yezad's changing religious attitude adds another layer to the novel. His growing rigidity shows how personal insecurity can influence thinking and how faith can become problematic when it is used to control others. At the time, the Parsi community's concern about preserving its identity raises questions about cultural survival, purity and individual freedom.

Mistry does not believe that the traditions and cultural values of people are bad and that they should be rejected. He knows that things, like family, religion and community, are what give people a sense of who they're where they belong and make them feel supported emotionally. What he points out is the things that make people feel pain or get treated badly or get ignored or have rules that don't make any sense. The book wants people to think about what happens when they believe in something of just believing in it because that is how it has always been



done. The younger generation is also very important because what they go through shows that what people have always believed can be questioned and understood in a way.

Through the family, Mistry shows how what happens to people is connected to issues that affect society. It is a story about how people and culture are connected. Its concerns remain relevant because questions of ageing, gender inequality, religious identity, communalism, and changing family relationships continue to exist in contemporary society. Ultimately, Mistry reminds us that culture should serve human beings, and not make human beings suffer in the name of culture.

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