
Women in Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters*

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ABSTRACT

Rohinton Mistry is an award winning fiction writer living in Canada. All his works have received unanimous praise. Though he is a diasporic writer, he concentrates much on the problems of Bombay Persians. He has given much importance to family relationships. Woman plays the major role in a family. Father is the source of income whereas mother plans to spend it carefully. The happiness of the family is partly in the hands of father and partly on mother. Mistry has highlighted how the family grows and destroys by women, through his fiction Family Matters. I am going to concentrate on different types of women handled by the novelist in Family Matters, in and around the family and their roles in the society.

In today's world women contribution to overall social and economic development of societies is similar to that of men. The status of women versus men is a universal phenomenon. Even the government has increased the ratio of opportunities for women. Women are given special preferences in all places. Though women enjoy liberty, they face certain problems too. Either working women or housewives they have their own problems accordingly but the problems of working women are different from housewives. More than any other issue domestic women should be very careful in maintaining the economy of the family.

Housewifery is a most important calling requiring upteen talents. Without housewifery there is no home, without home no family. And without family, nothing else matters, everything from top to bottom falls apart or decends into chaos. (*FamilyMatters* 182)

Woman is a symbol of love – this is the universal thought: that's why everything is named after women: the rivers of our country, mother tongue, mother land etc... woman means dedication, sincere, caring and loving. Charity begins at home. But my question is, are all the women in this world loving or caring or dedicated?

Rohinton Mistry in his novel *Family Matters* has given the answer for this question. All the fingers in the hand are not same likewise all the women in this world cannot be same. Educated or uneducated, their behavior range according to their environment. Mistry dealt with Bombay Persians in his novel. Persian men and women are well educated and well mannered. Among these educated and mannered women, Mistry has portrayed different types of women such as nurturer, bully, spiteful, timid and independent. Coomy, Roxana, Jeroo, Yasmin, Lucy, Phoola, Villi, the Card Master, Mrs. Kapur and Daisy are some of the women characters in this novel who are different from each other.

Nurturer is a person who nurtures. Nurturing is being very caring and loving someone. Commonly mothers are referred as nurturers. Nurturing is the act of encouraging, nourishing and caring for someone. Roxana and Jeroo come under this category. They both love their family and

are very careful in the unity of the family members. The whole story of *Family Matters* is centered on Nariman Vakeel. Jeroo is Nariman's mother and Roxana is Nariman's biological father. When Nariman falls in love with the non-Parsi girl, Jeroo tries her best to divert Nariman. She arranged a get together, so that all her family members and relatives may give suggestion about the importance of marrying a girl from their own community. Finally she succeeded by arranging marriage for Nariman to a Parsi girl, Yasmin, the contractor.

Roxana is a selfless woman who lives in a small flat with her husband and two children. Her world is nothing but her family. Roxana is very careful in maintaining the economy of the family. Though her husband earns low, she manages to run her family happily. She also wants to know very often whether her family members are happy and satisfied.

She often asked daddy, Are you happy Yezdaa, is everything okay? This question Mummy asked Murad and him too, she wanted happiness for all of them, needed to check it constantly. (92)

She has brought up her family members in well-mannered and disciplined way. Her kids are also very adjustable and they always answered 'yes' even though they are not happy. When Nariman falls sick, she readily accepts to take care of her father though there is no enough space in her house or money. She shares the responsibility of her half-sister Coomy.

Some women feel shy and timid when they move with other people. There are strengths and weaknesses in being shy. They will be cautious thinkers. They will think a lot before doing anything. Also they are easily approachable. They appear to be innocent and good to others and believable. At the same time they will be very stubborn and strong in their decision. Lucy, Nariman's girlfriend, a non-Parsi girl appears to be a shy and stubborn girl. Nariman loves Lucy but was forced to marry Yasmin. But Lucy follows Nariman even after his marriage. She discontinues her studies and decides to work as a helper in the same apartment where Nariman lives. "*she had abandoned her M.A., she did not have a job, and was still living at the YWCA*". (65) Nariman requested her to return to her native place and not to come to visit him. But Lucy rejects his plea and comes every day. She is mentally disturbed because of her love and finally meets death. Being shy she does not know any other way to express her love, at the same time she is not able to leave Nariman. But her decision not to leave him at any instance clearly shows how stern she was in her decision. She has been insulted by Nariman's wife and others for this act. Even then Lucy is very stern in her decision.

Some women are rude and bully by nature. Bully refers to being forceful, dominate and aggressive to others. Bullying can be emotional, verbal, physical or cyber. Force by any of these four categories, affects others strongly. Coomy, the step-daughter of Nariman, Yasmin, the second wife of Nariman and Mrs. Kapur, the owner of Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium are portrayed as rude and bully characters in this novel. Nariman marries Yamin, who is a widow with two children, Jal and Coomy. So it is from the earlier time until the end Coomy behaves rude to her step-father. She always put forth too many rules and regulations to be followed. Being an old man, affected by Parkinson disease expects some sort of affection and love from his children but Nariman gets complete unbelongingness from Coomy. When Jal requests Coomy to be lovable to Nariman, Coomy frankly admits "*I was already eleven years old when he became our step father. It was not like a baby growing up with her real father*". (64) Coomy feels that

Nariman is responsible for her mother's death. So she is not able to stop her hate even at his olden days.

Nariman after marrying Yasmin, tries to be normal with his step children. Though he spends his time and money for them, he fails to earn their love. He compares Coomy with her mother Yasmin. "*Like mother, like daughter, he thought reminded of the time when Yasmin had deprived him of his pyjamas. His pyjamas and lot more*". (64) When Nariman broke his ankle Jal and Coomy finds more difficult to take care of him. Coomy is more frustrated and feels burden to nurse her father.. Even the servant maid Phoola refuses to clean the house because of the bad smell from Nariman's rooms. She informs Coomy that she won't be coming to clean the house from the very Next day and demands her salary. "*Just give me my salary, I will leave now. There is lots of work available in other houses without a smell that turns my nose into a sewer*". (76) Coomy is upset and much irritated. As the maid left, she has to do all the house hold works and also has to take care of her father too. For her, everyday ends with chaos.

When situation becomes worse Jal and Coomy want to take a decision. They sat couple of days to take some action but nothing works. They plan to appoint an ayah but their economic status does not leave them to have one.

There were back where they started, hurt and angry, their reasoning clouded by fatigue and frustration as they gazed over the balcony railing at the never-ending streams of traffic.... But I can't help hating him. (82)

It is Coomy, who forces in leaving Nariman in his daughter's house. Knowing very well that Roxana lives in a very small flat with little income heartlessly she leaves him there. Unaffectionately she talks about Roxana to Nariman she says, "*Your own flesh and blood, not like Jal and me, second class*". (7) Coomy has that much hate in her heart.

Mrs. Kapur is another female character who is very spiteful in this novel. Mrs. Kapur, wife of VikramKapur, owner of Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium enters into the novel after the death of Mr. Kapur. Yezad, husband of Roxana works in Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium for many years. Mr. Kapur is a nostalgic person who is stern in not changing his store's name as Mumbai from Bombay. Due to some political involvement he was murdered by ShivSena Party. So Yezad unfortunately lost his job. Yezad believes that he will be given the complete responsibility of the shop but he was disappointed by the rude behaviour of his wife. Mr. Kapur watches him carefully when Yezad takes his belongings before leaving the shop. From her behaviour Yezad understands that there was no much understanding between Mr and Mrs. Kapur. "*How little she knew her husband, he thought....*". (427)

Miss Alveerez, Daisy aunty and Villie, The Card Master come under independent women. These women are shown as single and independent in leading their life. Miss Alveerez is Jehanghir's school teacher. She is much worried about the studies of her students. When she comes to know about the mischief done by Jehanghir, she calls Yezad and informs him. She understands the mind set of Jehanghir and never behaved rude to him. She handles the issue very smoothly so that the students will not be affected in future. Her goal is to inculcate the qualities of trust, honesty and integrity in students she wants her students to be good citizens of India and this is the way to fight the "*backwardness and rot corruption in the country*" (217). Villie, the Jatka

woman lives in the same flat Pleasant Villa where Roxana lives. She seems to be a reserved person. Her childhood was the happiest with all her family members and relatives but now she leads a lonely life. She lives in nostalgia. When Yezad visits her house she explains her happy childhood life by showing him the family photo.

Daisy aunty is also a single woman who lives in Pleasant Villa. She has great passion towards violin. She always plays violin at home. Nariman is also a lover of violin. When Nariman hears the music, he insisted her to play violin for him whenever she finds time. Music takes away all the past memories and pain of Nariman. He rejoices and relaxes when he listens to the violin played by Daisy aunty. He asks her to promise that “when I’m dying, you’ll come to play for me” (241). Daisy aunty keeps up her promise. Though she forgets about the promise, when she meets Jehanghir on later days she reminds of her word. “*Daisy Aunty played for over an hour, till Dr. Tarapore arrived, as he had promised that morning. She ended with Grandpa’s favourite song, ‘One Day When We Were Young’*”. (474)

Family Matters weaves the lives and memories of a Parsi family. The novelist has succeeded in maintaining a fine balance between death and bigotry, family nurture and control. Mistry has explained different women characters in a single novel as caring, loving, rude, shy and independent. Though all the women characters are not highlighted in the novel, each character plays an important part for the main story. When we read and reread this novel, we can do deep analysis of different women characters.

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