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ROHINTON MISTRY'S FAMILY MATTERS: A SAGA OF DISMANTLED LIVES AND FRACTURED IDENTITIES

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Abstract

Diasporic writers in their writings expose varied subtle and explicit ways in the narrative that explore methods to mirror their experiences and symbolize their dislocated dwelling spaces, dismantled lives and blurred, fractured identities. Rohinton Mistry's fiction has an in-depth description about his homeland and Parsi community with the background of the political problems that prevail in India. He is a writer with great honesty of imagination, who does not attempt to follow fads and fashions. His Family Matters suggests sensitivity to the beauty and the fragmentations, the victories and failings, loveliness and cruelties of the world. It represents the human lives bleached with mental, emotional and spatial up rootedness, their psychic pain of loneliness, despair, distinctive personality traits and their longing for earnest love and secured relationships. The paper attempts to traverse through their maze of fractured identity, vanished hopes and allayed fears of Nariman, Coomy, Jal, Roxena, Vikram Kapur and Yezad that structures them in claustrophobic conditions of bitterness and muteness and harsh realities of life.

Those whom we most love are often the most alien to us.

- Christopher Paolini

Rohinton Mistry, a well known Parsi writer has written three novels; Such a Long Journey (1990), A Fine Balance (1996), Family Matters (2002) and a short story collection Tales from Firozsha Baag (1987). Family Matters, a strong, realist drama of modern Bombay in 1990's narrates the story of three generations of a middle-class Parsi family through a domestic crisis. The story written from the point of view of an omniscient narrator imbues human lives and forged identities with metaphorical meanings. This paper captures through a miniscule eye human lives falling apart and identities blurring beyond boundaries.

The plot traverses through Chateau Felicity; a seven-room mansion inhabited by a seventy nine year old Parkinson stricken and osteoporosis affected Nariman Vakeel, a retired English Professor and his small discordant family. A decaying patriarch and widower, he sandwiches himself between his two unmarried step children, quiet and unassuming Jal and domineering, bossy, pushy, arrogant Coomy. Mistry puts the frustration of Nariman thus,

Like trapped animals struggling to break free. What a curse was sickness in old age. This damned Parkinson's, cruel as torture. (FM, 357)

Nariman seeks solace in his evening walks. The bustling life of the city pumps fresh air to his starving lungs in contrast to the stale emptiness of his sprawling palatial flat. The therapeutic walks enchants, reassures him 'a magic show', playing 'a floral melody'. Solitary walks comfort his mind stiffened by harsh instructions and venomous words of Coomy, "Your own flesh and blood, not like Jal and me, second class." (FM, 7)

Haunted by memories of the bitter, tragic past, Nariman looks back on the wasteland of their lives. He despairs remorsefully how he was so feeble-minded and spineless, allowing things to happen in its own way. Fate snaps Nariman's eleven year love life with Lucy Braganza, a Goan lady. Mr.Burdy, his father and his Parsi relatives and friends compel him to give her up and marry Yasmin, a widow with two children, Jal and Coomy. "No happiness is more lasting than the happiness that you get from fulfilling your parents' wishes," a family friend tells him and he allows himself to believe this lie.

His subsequent loveless marriage blights the family for decades, disintegrating two woman's lives (Lucy, Yasmin). Love and moments of happiness slips away from Yasmin as she mocks, 'Mr. Model husband', and her actions awaken Nariman to the ludicrousness of his predicament. With passing of time, Yasmin's fragile