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The Ties of Kinship in Rohinton Mistry's Novels

C. Bharathi, M.A., M.Phil.

An Insider

Rohinton Mistry was born in Bombay in 1952, immigrated to Canada in 1975 and was employed in a Toronto bank. He began writing stories in 1983. His *Tales from Firozsha Baag* describes the daily lives of the Bombay apartment complex. Hope prevails in these stories, as Mistry's careful and compassionately drawn characters survive and work through difficult circumstances toward a brighter future. His first short story fetched him a Hart House Prize for fiction.

Rohinton Mistry is an insider to *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, Bombay and his vignettes are naturally authentic. Ironically perhaps he is able to achieve this authenticity as he has distanced himself by emigrating to Canada so that he can produce the effect of an insider /outsider to a scene, every detail of which is fetched and engraved in his mind. Remembering, re-enacting, re-creating that place-time-people with accuracy, understanding, and insight is the vision of Rohinton Mistry. In a manner of speaking, this is a "comedy" of manners and *Firozsha Baag* is Mistry's "Malgudi".

An Unending Journey

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The Ties of Kinship in Rohinton Mistry's Novels

Mistry's first novel, *Such a Long Journey*, creates a vivid picture of Indian family life and culture. The novel is set in Bombay, During Indira Gandhi's period, when India went war over with Pakistan what was later to become Bangladesh. This is the political context for the unfortunate events that disrupt the personal lives of the kind hearted Parsi man, Gustad Noble, and his family and friends. Mistry skillfully parallels public events involving Indira Gandhi with the misfortune of the novel's principal characters.

Gustad, his wife Dilnavaz, their two sons Sohrab and Darius and daughter Roshan live in the Parsi residential colony of Khodadad Building in Bombay. Gustad is the grandson of a prosperous furniture dealer, a lover of books and tasteful living. Gustad nurtures a daydream of building a book case, in collaboration with his son Sohrab, to house his decimated collection of books. His father's goodness and compassion inform all of Gustad's actions and relationships which constitute the novel.

A Measured Balance?

Mistry's second novel is *A Fine Balance*, set in India in the mid-1990's at a time when the government has declared a state of internal emergency. The story focuses on the lives of four unlikely people who find themselves living in the same humble flat in the city: a widow (Dina) whose refusal to marry has left her struggling to earn a living as a seamstress; two tailors (Ishvar and Omprakash), who come to the city searching for employment and a student (Maneck) from a small hamlet in the Himalayan foothills, whose father has sent him to attend college. Mistry's descriptive, layered account of the personal lives of these characters, as they are influenced by the country's political turmoil, makes for an engrossing novel of epic stature.

Hope in the Midst of Sadness and Tragedy

While *Such a Long Journey* must be one of the saddest books written, it does contain the seeds of hope. Mistry's next novel, *A Fine Balance*, seems systematically to destroy every hopeful possibility, or rather to show how government, landlords and businessmen combine to destroy hope. The castration instigated, in the climactic scene of the novel, by the village landlord, now that he is a big man in Congress, does not only destroy the actual and political family of its victim, his present and his future, and reduces Ishvar to a beggar.

The novel is a bitter condemnation of Indira Gandhi and her allies, and of the destructive viciousness of Emergency. It is not, however, merely concerned with this episode of Indian history, but shows how it arose from the class and caste exploitation that condemns the greater part of the population to poverty and importance. It also acts as a metaphor of the relationship between the people of India and their rulers. As the epilogue to the novel shows, this condition is not significantly changed by the putative return to democracy.

Focus on Family

Mistry's latest novel, *Family Matters* is based in Bombay once more, set in the 1990's. At the centre of the book is an old man, a Parsi with Parkinson's disease. Professor Nariman Vakeel has the pivotal role in the novel. He is nearly seventy nine, a widower living with his unmarried, middle-aged stepchildren, Jal and bossy Coomy. Their room, a dilapidated flat, is in the misnamed Chateau Felicity.

Nariman's likeable own daughter Roxana has a two-roomed flat in Pleasant Villa, which Nariman could afford to give when she married. When Nariman breaks a leg, a sequence of tragic events engulf the family. It is a deeply pessimistic book but one of Mistry's greatest gifts is finding comedy in the midst of tragedy. The novel ends with an epilogue in Jehangir's voice, five years after the main events and four after Nariman's death. Jehangir, so appealing as a child, seems a touch naive as a narrator in his teens. With deceptive simplicity Mistry draws a fine balance between scepticism and affirmation, faith and bigotry, family nurture and control.

Focus on Impending Loss of Identity

Mistry's discourse revolves around the detailing of Parsi identity. It also reveals how Parsis have learnt to cope with the reality of post colonial living. Mistry's fiction is fashioned in the form of alternative narratives and employs anti-realist modes of narration. As a Parsi, he is on the periphery even in India, so his discourse also challenges and resists the totalization of the dominant culture within India itself, which is reflected in the depiction of relationships within the family and the discourse of the members with others in the society.

20th Century India – Rising Middle Class and All that It Entails

The Indian social set-up in twentieth century India comprises the middle class family and the pattern of the family is nuclear. It consists of parents and children. After marriage, the sons still live with parents, unless their jobs take them to other places. The daughters, however, leave the parental home and live with the husband and in-laws. Their relations with the parental unit of the family remain cordial. The relationship between the parents and the children is based, mostly, on conventional practices and ties. The twentieth century, however, has given rise to a greater number of nuclear families, mainly because of the nature of the jobs held, education of children, women's employment, etc.

In twentieth century India, sons are educated for life outside the household and fathers want their sons to join socially respectable profession like engineering, while the children wish to adopt vocations of their own choice. The fathers expect their children to fulfil their dreams and debts. Education affects the father-son relationship in one respect: the adult sons begin to challenge parental authority in regard to the choice of marriage partners and profession.

Gustad's dream comes true when Sohrab passes the IIT entrance. To celebrate this along with his daughter's ninth birthday, he invites only his bank colleague Dinshawji. The initial atmosphere of gaiety, humour, songs, jokes and fun contributed by Dinshawji is followed by a nice dinner. The vegetable stew and chicken curry end disastrously when Soharb turns violent, uttering volleys of freakish remarks to his father and announcing his decision not to join IIT and instead, pursue Arts Programme with his friends. Sohrab thwarts his father's plans that had completely taken hold of his imagination:

And the Indian Institute of Technology became the promised land. It was

EI Dorado and Shangri-La, it was Atlantis and Camelot, it was Xanadu
and Oz. It was the home of the Holy Grail. And all things would be
given and all things would be possible and all things would come to pass
for he who journeyed there and emerged with the sacred chalice. (66-67)

At the dinner party Sohrab bursts out: "It's not suddenly. I'm sick and tired of IIT, IIT, IIT all the time. I'm not interested in it, I'm not a jolly good fellow about it, and I'm not going there" (48). Gustad is sad and angered by his son's betrayal as he jumps back into the past in a bid to escape from being a co-traveller. He recollects with bitterness:

With holes in my shoes I went to work, so we could buy almonds to sharpen
his brain. At two hundred rupees a kilo. And all wasted. All gone in the
gutter-water [. . .] Remember, I kicked him once to save his life, and I can kick
him again. Out of my house, this time! Out of my life! (122).

Gustad's thoughts and vocabulary, however, in spite of his attempts, clearly establish an axis of tension, for he locks himself in the past refusing to be 'bound' by present developments. That Sohrab leaves the house of his own accord is only a natural outcome of this tension. Whenever Sohrab comes up with a suggestion or a comment, Gustad lets his aversion speak out. For instance, when Sohrab explains how democracy was mocked by chemical elections, Gustad cannot control himself and shouts that he is pretending to be an expert on law and politics and RAW. He lifts a finger and points out: "Better that the genius shuts his mouth before I shut it for him. Before he falls off that high roof he has climbed" (93).

Ways to Earn and Spend Money

Again, when Sohrab explains the anagram Mira Obili and Bilimoria and suggests ways of spending the money received from Jimmy, Gustad springs from his chair without warning and aims a powerful slap at his face – 'Shameless!' Sohrab manages to deflect the blow. "Talks like a crazy rabid dog! My own son!" (121). Gustad's integrity is such that he cannot even imagine spending any of the money. But he is also a hostage of his belief in authority – his faith in Indira

Gandhi and the institutions of power. These, reinforce his own authority as a father in the institution of the family.

Sense of Betrayal and Consequent Anger and Sadness

Gustad experiences the same sense of betrayal regarding his friend Major Bilimoria, his neighbour for many years in the Khodadad Building, when he left the house without a word of information to him. Gustad considered him a brother and referred to him as a possible model of excellence in physical and mental culture to his children. Major Bilimoria was very affectionate towards the children and they were all admiration for him, having listened to the stories of his valour on the war-front. The Major's abrupt departure wounds Gustad 'more than he allowed anyone to see' (14). These two events together have a disconcerting effect on him. He tells his wife: "I don't understand this world any more. First, your son destroys our hopes. Now this rascal. Like a brother I looked upon him. What a world of wickedness it has become" (142).

Father-Son Conflict/Controversy

The fifth section of the novel *A Fine Balance* deals with the story of Maneck's controversy with his father, like Sohrab's in *Such a Long Journey*. His story is the story of the ecological denudation of the Himalayas through the forces of 'development' and the death of indigenous enterprise through the entry of multinationals. Maneck's father's increasing sense of loss colours his relationship with his son, who becomes increasingly alienated from his father. The Kohlah family ruins its business because they do not envisage competition. Maneck's father refuses to compete with rivals regarding it as absolutely undignified like begging. Maneck refuses to involve himself in the family business and comes to the city to study his diploma course and stays as a paying guest at Dina Dalal's house. The incident of the son leaving the father's house is repeated in Maneck's case.

The Plight of the Lowliest of the Lowly – Fight Against Thousands of Years of Social Oppression

Ishvar and Narayan belong to the poverty stricken cobbler family. Their father Dukhi loves them. He feels bad when Ishvar and Narayan receive terrible beating from the teacher for defiling the tools of learning and knowledge. Dukhi's complaint to Pandit Lalluram, a Chitpavan Brahmin of the village, is futile. Dukhi's defiance of the caste system by sending his little sons to Ashraf chacha, a tailor is a welcome step in the right direction. The boys make progress as tailors.

Dukhi learned what it was to be an untouchable in the village society and never wanted the same for his progenitors. He had seen Bhola, Dosu, Gambhir, Dayaram, Sita, Dhiraj, Bhungi, and others suffering at the hands of zamindars. Ishvar and Narayan were overwhelmed to confront the sea change in their life style after joining Muzzafar Tailoring Company. They lived and

learned with Ashraff chacha for years. India wins freedom followed by nation-wide riots due to the partition. After the riots Ishvar and Narayan returned to their village to set up business.

Narayan got married and Om was born. Years later Narayan's attempt at voting to make his mark results in the ruin of his family. The family except Om and Ishvar are burnt alive by the goondas of Thakur Dharamsi.

Inter-Ethnic, Inter-Caste, and Inter-Religious Dreams of Marriage in Caste-bound India

Like Sohrab in *Such a Long Journey*, Nariman in his youth wishes to marry a non-Parsi woman Lucy, against his parents' wishes. One day Nariman had taken Lucy home when his parents were out and he had been observed by his neighbour. When they returned, seeing Lucy there, his father had been incensed: "This son of mine has turned my house into a raanwada, bringing his whore over here! It's the kind of immorality that's destroying the Parsi community!" (267), to which Nariman had retorted: "When you call the woman I love a whore, and our home a raanwada because I invite her here, you disgrace the role of father. And I despair for you" (268).

Unlike Nariman, Yezad's children are very responsible and ready to obey their parents. Jehangir and Murad are school going children of Roxana in *Family Matters*. They are very happy to receive stories and experiences from their father Yezad. Mr. Kapur's nostalgic praise of Bombay, is offset by Yezad's own memories, or rather his inherited ones, regarding the Bombay Docks explosion in 1944.

This particular story is re-told to his sons in the context of the clock at home. So Yezad becomes the story-teller and tells his sons how his father, who had been a cashier in a bank had safeguarded the bank's money in the midst of the chaos and destruction that had overtaken the city. This incidentally is a common memory shared by fathers and handed down to their sons, and the nostalgia created by this sharing bonds their relationship.

Gustad's second son, Darius in *Such a Long Journey* falls in love with the neighbour's daughter Jasmine. He is fully developed, an active young man, brimming with interest and aspiration. He is a teenager with love for animals, a bodybuilder developing character and personal pride. He has an ill-starred romance with "the dogwalla idiot's fatty!" (166). His physique identifies him as his father's son and his actions make Gustad angry and he warns him: "I warned you not to talk to the dogwalla idiot's daughter. What is that fat padayri up to, anyway, giving you newspapers from her house? If he comes here again to complain, even your mother won't be able to save you from the terrible punishment I will give" (123).

Parental Dreams Rejected

Sohrab, Maneck and Nariman are not ready to fulfill their father's dreams while Narayan, Ishvar, Jehangir and Murad are ready to favour their fathers. Father-daughter relationships are more lovable while father-son relationships are filled with anger, quarrels, authoritarianism, rebellion, etc. Gustad likes his daughter Roshan more than his son. Roshan actively contributes a rupee to a raffle to help the refugee children within East Pakistan. She also wins the first prize in this raffle, a big doll. She is a direct contrast to her brothers. While Sohrab initiates a quarrel on her birthday party, she makes peace by asking to sing the "Donkey Serenade" (44). She is affected by diarrhoea and Gustad takes her to Dr. Paymaster. In quest of better health of Roshan and Dinshawji, Gustad prays in the holy shrine of Mount Mary.

Some One to Heal the Family Rancour

Like Roshan, Roxana, Nariman's daughter in *Family Matters*, is the one who heals rancours within the family. Nariman has presented her a flat called Pleasant Villa as a marriage gift. Yezad tells Nariman to consider it as his own house and visit any time, but Nariman refused saying, "Never say that, please. Notwithstanding my barging in today, this flat is yours and Roxana's. Your wedding gift. It ill behooves anyone to suggest, after fifteen years, that I am attempting to commandeer these premises" (121). Though Roxana was his daughter, marriage had made her another's possession and Nariman establishes the convention that the father cannot demand rights of a daughter.

During Nariman's seventy ninth birthday party Roxana presents him a walking stick. He likes the gift very much and enjoys the presence of Roxana and her sons. When Nariman Vakeel comes to Roxana's 1 BHK flat-one bedroom, hall, kitchen, she welcomes him as a dutiful daughter. While Roxana and Yezad occupy the sole bedroom, the hall serves as their boy's bedroom at night and as the family's sitting-cum-dining room in the day time. There is also a small balcony where Roxana dries her clothes. When Nariman is dumped on them without prior notice, she has to improvise even further to fit the immobile old man into their milieu. She has to clean the bedpan and urinal without anybody's help. Roxana feels depressed when her husband cheats Nariman non-sensically. She also refused to get money from Coomy and Jal in order to care for her father: "After the way they behaved, I don't want a thing from them. I don't want to see their faces for three weeks, till Pappa is on his feet" (130).

Husband-wife relationship

In the twentieth century family, husband-wife relationship is filled with both love and hatred. The women are educated and take care of the family. As a housewife, Gustad's wife Dilnavaz is a hardworking woman. She is a tireless nurse. When Gustad is away, she defends her family with the tenacity of a terrier. She takes a blow from Gustad's heavy belt intended for their rebellious son. Her first thoughts are about her family, but they are solely focused on the impact of the conflict on the men in her family.

Slow but Steady Loosening of Family Ties

As the novel moves forward, Gustad's traditional family ties begin to loosen. The reticent attitude of his wife is explicit when she re-assuring says to him, "We must be patient" (52). However, Gustad has borne this for too long and it seems that his patience has been tested to the last string: "What have we been all these years if not patient? Is this how it will end? Sorrow, nothing but sorrow" (52).

Gustad shares his problems with his wife; but in effect, this sharing amounts to little more than an extended internal debate, with Gustad voicing harsh, rational left lobe arguments and Dilnavaz taking an emotional, right lobe stance. Their debate about turning Bilimoria's hot cash over to the police illustrates this aspect. Gustad makes management decisions; Dilnavaz executes them. His battles become her battles. When she acts as his lieutenant on the home front in his absence, his world literally becomes her's.

Aggressiveness and Passivity: Gender Distinction?

Dilnavaz is the perfect foil to Gustad. She is soft and pretty, while he is big and muscular. As a couple they exhibit the typical features of male aggressiveness and female passivity. Dilnavaz is an adjunct of her husband. As a good wife, she makes him "whole". Her family is her life. As Kate Millet has noted: "If aggressiveness is the trait of the master class, docility must be the corresponding trait of a subject group" (qtd. in Bharucha 133).

The contrast in Mistry's portrayal of men and women is particularly compelling in the case of Dinshawji and his domestic vulture. She is introduced as a wife neglectful of her husband's sexual needs. Certainly at this point in the novel, predisposition to judge her harshly is tempered by the fact that thumbnail assessment has been rendered by Dinshawji, the "Casanova of Flora Fountain"(72), a classic Laughable Lecher. Resisting the romantic overtures of a man afflicted by chronic halitosis may be as indicative of a well defined sense of self-preservation as it is of the vindictiveness Dinshawji insinuates. The pair is established as a classic comedy couple: a distinctly Parsi version of the Shrew and her spouse the Laughable Lecher.

Dina and Rustom in *A Fine Balance* is a happy couple and loved each other. Dina is born and brought up in a doctor's family; she had developed a refined taste for life and a systematic pattern. Her parents died when she was still a school-going girl. Her elder brother Nusswan, miser by nature, instructed her to marry a boy of his friend. Dina was defiant and stubborn by nature and decided not to marry the man of his choice. She met Rustom Dalal and announced her marriage. Nusswan conceded permission. But still, happiness eluded her. Their married life is happy, devoid of any obstacle. However, Rustom met with a road accident on the day of their third wedding anniversary and died. Nusswan was shaken by this; he held Dina and stroked her

head: "My poor little sister. I wish I could bring him back for you. Cry now, it's all right, cry all you need to" (46). After Rustom's death Dina refused to re-marry and also stayed at her husband's house, wishing to live without getting any help from her brother.

Values from Yonder

Maneck comes from the Himalayan hills stays as a boarder at Dinabai's. The tailors Ishvar and Omprakash, seeking refuge from caste upheavals in their village come to the same house in search of employment. In this way, the lives of Maneck, a Parsi student from a middle-class business family, Dinabai, a Parsi widow struggling to make ends meet and preserve her independence from her dominating brother, and two lower caste tailors Ishvar and Omprakash, gets inter-connected. Thus these characters from different class backgrounds start inter-acting with each other and live as a family.

Lonely and Struggling for Identity

In a sense, all the four main characters are lonely and struggling for identity and survival. Social circumstances bring them together and in time they forge a bond of understanding, as they struggle to survive. "Sailing under one flag", each is influenced by the other, just as each learns something from the other, whereby, this new and moderately happy 'family' of a sort conforms to the idea and meaning of a family. This is easily evident in matters trivial and significant. For example, Dina and Ishvar, alter their brushing habits; Maneck passes on to Dina something of his love for stray cats and dogs. Likewise, Maneck and Om influence each other's habits:

Dina felt that granting consent for the verandah had legitimized a role for herself in Om's marriage, and given her certain rights. He had come along quite nicely in these past few months, she thought. The scalp itch was gone and his hair was healthy, no longer dripping with smelly coconut oil. For this last, the credit went to Maneck and his distaste of greasy stuff in the hair [. . .] And Maneck had learned from Om as well - instead of always wearing shoes and socks in the heat, which made his feet smell by the end of the day, he now wore chappals. (474)

When threatened by the landlord's goons, Dina and her 'family' come under the protection of Beggar master, a man known for his swift and cruel retribution against his enemies. Sergeant Kesar brought along by the landlord's goondas to see to Dina's eviction, is very courteous and apologetic towards her: "That's the crazy world we live in. If I did not have a family to feed, you think I would do this job [. . .] Since the Emergency began, my ulcers began" (568). The trials, the tribulations, the shared jokes, intimacies, eating the same food and sense of adventure enables them to realize that life is often "a fine balance" between happiness and despair.

Poverty and Helplessness

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Dukhi Mochi - Roopa pair in *A Fine Balance* is an example of husband's helplessness due to his poverty. Dukhi Mochi married Roopa at the age of eighteen. She gave birth to three daughters during their first six years together. None survived beyond a few months. Then Ishvar and Narayan were born. Dukhi Mochi was not able to provide enough food for them to eat. This led Roopa to steal milk, butter, mangoes, etc., from neighbouring farms. She was raped by the watchman of the orange grove. Dukhi pretended to be asleep as she entered the hut. He heard her muffled sobs several times during the night, and guessed what had happened to her.

Dukhi felt the urge to go to her, speak to her, comfort her. But he did not know what words to use, and he also felt afraid of learning too much. He wept silently, venting his shame, anger, humiliation in tears; he wished he would die that night and "In the morning Roopa behaved as if nothing had occurred. So Dukhi said nothing, and they ate the oranges" (99). The incident shows the husband understands and, how the family survives.

Joyless Marriages even Amidst Plenty

Nariman-Yasmin's married life in *Family Matters* is not a happy one. As a young man, Nariman challenged the conventional Parsi faith he was born into by falling in love with a Goan Christian, Lucy. But due to his own weak will and lack of courage, he bowed to the relentless pressure of the marriage arrangers, the willful manufactures of misery, and married Yasmin, a widowed Parsi woman who had two children. "And that's the best you can expect, mister, with your history" (15). Although he had adopted them, it was decided they would keep their biological father's surname, as otherwise, Yasmin felt it would "be like rewriting history [. . .] The simile appealed to his academic soul; he acquiesced" (16).

Brewing Animosity between Husband and Wife

It was a joyless marriage, the only joy in their marriage being Roxana. Lucy, however, never stopped loving Nariman, often coming by his house, staring up at his window longingly and eventually demeaning her by taking up an ayah's job at the house of Nariman's hostile neighbour, Arjani. Nariman felt compelled to go and meet her. Nariman's conscience was once again aroused as he watched Lucy bent under the burden of school bags taking the Arjani grandchildren to school. He began helping her carry these bags. This naturally upset Yasmin and led to a significant amount of animosity between husband and wife and children.

Yasmin used to hide his clothes so that he would not go down to meet Lucy who had taken to standing on the pavement and staring up at Nariman's window. Nariman would try to ignore her until his remorse would drive him down to see her, and this in turn, would upset Yasmin and the children, especially Coomy. Nariman had countered Yasmin's ploy of hiding all his clothes, while he was taking his bath, by going down to meet Lucy wrapped just in a bath towel. This

episode had driven a further wedge between Nariman and his wife Yasmin and also alienated him from Coomy.

End of the Scandalous Relationship

The end of this scandalous relationship was very tragic –both Yasmin and Lucy fell from the terrace to death. “Mistry’s touch here is very delicate and reserved and the melodramatic core of the story is revealed almost as an aside, in the epilogue” (85), says Jha. Nariman’s biological daughter Roxana and her husband Yezad are happily married and they take care of each other. She is very much interested in her husband’s health:

On the balcony, Roxana thought again of Yezad. She had waved to him from up here when he left for work - their goodbyes always consisted of a kiss at the door plus a wave from the balcony – and her little outburst was quite forgotten. But it still worried her, his refusal to get his cholesterol checked, or to cut down on eggs. (98)

Roxana and Yezad are buffeted by the events in their family circle. Roxana dutifully welcomes her bedridden father and Yezad slowly grows to resent a man he once admired. He shrinks from his father-in-law’s presence, cruelly turning a deaf ear to his cries for help with his bedpan. He feels jealous of the old man’s claims on Roxana and says: “How can I not? Have you looked at yourself in the mirror? [. . .] You should take a moment, see what the strain has done to your face” (147).

Deceptions

Yezad works for Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium and has, in the past, eloquently written for permission to emigrate his family to Canada. The effect of the new responsibility on Yezad, who is already besieged by financial worries, pushes him into a scheme of deception involving Vikram Kapur. He pressures his boss to seek political office, thereby clearing the way for his own lucrative promotion. He arranges for actors, posing as sinister Shiv Sena agents, to extort money from his employer. He intends only to infuriate and goad his boss into reforming his politics. He lies that Shiv Sena is demanding money from Mr. Kapur and then planning to use it for his own cash-strapped family. The real Shiv Sena goons do finally turn up and Mr. Kapur thinks they are there to demand money again-flares up in a fit of anger and dies.

Religion – No Solace

After Kapur’s death, his pragmatic widow shuts the shop and dispenses with the service of Yezad. He suddenly become unemployed, religion becomes a full-time solace and he retreats into it to lick his wounds. However, instead of turning him into a stronger and better person, this

agony turns him into a bigot, the sort of man he used to despise. This sets in motion a series of events, a great unravelling and a revelation of the family's love torn, especially between Yezad and Roxana. Frustrated by his new family circumstances, his thankless job as a sporting goods salesman, his thwarted hopes of emigrating to Canada, Yezad terrorizes his family with violent outbursts.

Tension grows when Yezad learns that Vakeel's stay, expected to last only a few weeks, will be indefinite. Roxana and Yezad pressure Coomy to again take custody of the ailing man, frustrated by the lack of financial support from her. Everyone in Yezad's family is proud of their Persian heritage and their Persian reputation for honesty and loyalty. And yet nearly each person in the family is lured by temptation into something illegal to make an extra rupee or two for the family's monthly budget. Yezad attempts to supplement the dwindling pile of currency notes in the envelopes she has so painstakingly marked, butter, eggs, etc and through which she tries desperately to juggle her monthly budget. Roxana's husband is driven to trying his hand at running an illegal lottery aided by a flirtations woman in next to his door, and sometimes cursing his wife, even as he knows he loves her.

Lessons of Compassion

Fight for survival in Roxana and Yezad's household makes their children learn lessons of compassion and selflessness. In the fight Yezad finds himself torn between his duties to the family and the inability to raise the money which is badly needed. By living with his father-in-law in cramped quarters for several months, Yezad grows from a moody and resentfully, uninvolved husband to a sweet and caring son to Nariman. Roxana reminds him of Gandhi's teachings, "that there was nothing nobler than the service of the weak, the old, the unfortunate" (286).

The particular memorable event in Yezad-Roxana's married life is the change in Yezad, who descends from cheerful rationality into querulous, intolerant religiosity. The family watches his changes and Roxana dislikes his atheism. She is pleased when he begins to show interest in symbols and rituals of religion; religion is good, after all, and anyone who practices it is good. Her initial approval encourages Yezad. The chief cause of the change in Yezad is that Nariman's medication and food eat into the family budget. Thus the husband and wife relationship in Mistry's novels is a co-mixture of both hatred and love.

Mother-Son Relationship

Mother-son relationship plays a vital role in the family because, while the father pets the daughter, the son is a favourite of the mother. While Sohrab and Gustad are hostile to each other, Dilnavaz becomes a mediator between father and son. She accepts Miss Kutpitia's help to bring a reunion between her husband and her son, which involves at the beginning the rather innocuous

lime and chilies and then a more dangerous magic potion with lizard. She tries to make Sohrab come to terms with his father. It is ultimately her triumph that brings order in the midst of chaos. Gustad's epic struggle against a hostile and indifferent world would not have had a profound meaning without the final reconciliation. When Dilnavaz comes out with the benign qualities of a mother in these words: "He is your father. He will always love you and want the best for you" (321), the barrier between the father and the son gives way and dissolves.

Developing Modest Expectations

As the years roll by, Gustad Noble modifies his dreams and trims his expectations in life. Experience makes him into stronger, more enduring man. He comes to realise that the real reason for his struggle is not by either his own son or his friend Bilimoria but by the government. He firmly resolves to face life stoically and not to be crushed by the forces of destiny. This attitude is his greatest triumph in life. Things keep on taking their own course. Mrs. Dilnavaz informs him about the death of Dinshawji, and the tragic death of Major Bilimoria. She implores Sohrab to stay and talk to his father nicely, who would be coming in a short while from the funeral of Major Bilimoria. Life, as Gustad comes to realize slowly, has vital inter connections which mark the new matrices of relationships with a greater sense of indebtedness.

Sohrab foresees a fight between him and his father because he knows he is responsible for the latter's unhappiness. He reacts: "It's no use. I spoilt all his dreams, he is not interested in me anymore" (321). But the mother rules out any untoward happening: "So much has happened since you left. Daddy has changed. It will be different now" (321).

Tehmul Lungra, a mentally retarded person is injured during the heated debate which culminates in stone throwing. Gustad prays for him and cries for all, for Bilimoria, for Dinshawji, for his papa and mama, for grandpa and grandma, "all who had had to wait for so long" (337). It is at this moment that he accepts the return of his prodigal son, who comes to him. It is in complete surrender that the father and the son lose their personalities and excise their hatred of each other. They reach out to each other:

Gustad turned around. He saw his son standing in the doorway, and each held the others' eyes. Still he sat, gazing upon his son, and Sohrab waited motionless in the doorway, till at last Gustad got to his feet slowly. Then he went up and put his arms around him. 'Yes', said Gustad running his bloodstained fingers once through Sohrab's hair. 'Yes', he said 'yes', and hugged him tightly once more. (337)

Regarding mother-son relationship in *Family Matters*, Murad and Jehangir are introduced as school going children and makes Roxana happy by their naughtiness. Jehangir is a lazy boy and not willing to bathe regularly. Roxana had to run after him every day to get him ready to school.

After Nariman Vakeel's arrival in Pleasant Villa, the children help her by their bedroom with their grandfather. When Roxana brings in the sun-dried clothes from her balcony; her little son hugs her and says: "You smell like the sun, Mummy" (98). Her elder son Murad is an honest boy, in a straight forward manner, takes walking home from school and slips the saved bus fare into his mother's envelopes during their days of hardship. Such little acts of caring express the strong familial affection that encircles the members.

Nine-year-old Jehangir, who is homework monitor at school, takes bribes to mark up his classmates' work. He covertly slips the rupees, a few at a time, into the envelopes in which his mother keeps her house keeping money. So that Roxana's envelopes mysteriously become plump again. The family set-up is not a bed of roses. Quarrels and hot tempers are part of everyday life.

Jehangir observes: "Daddy and Murad had another fight today. They quarrel almost every day now" (461). Jehangir, so appealing as a child, seems a touch naive as a narrator in his teens and pretends to be happy. 'Aren't you happy?' Roxana asks her youngest son, 'Yes', he answers, "Yes, I'm happy" (500). There are trying situations; there are trials and ordeals, but the ties of the family ultimately survive and proves, "*Family Matters* can be difficult, and Mistry doesn't shy away from showing, in all their roughness, the real truths about them" (qtd. in Jha 88).

The National Emergency and the Suffering of the Middle Class in India

At the end of the novel *A Fine Balance*, the four major characters Dina Dalal, Omprakash, Ishvar and Maneck are evidences of what happens to the middle class people during the emergency. Their lives are completely ruined. Dina who tried to preserve her tailoring business, with the help of Ishvar and Om is devastated. A widow with a brother who never cared for her, but only bullied and used her, Dina holds on for long to her fragile independence. At the end, she has no choice but to move in with her brother and his family, to work as an unpaid house keeper. Omprakash is castrated; a victim of sterilization targets and Ishvar is crippled for life both jobless and reduced to penury.

Maneck, the brooding Parsi young man, is upset at the alienation from his family. His sorrows increase, when he visits Mumbai and finds out about Dina, Omprakash and Ishvar. The culmination of the tragic series of staggering events is that it drives him to extreme despair and he commits suicide by throwing himself in front of a train. This extreme art has been criticised as making the novel very morbid. The novel ends with 'hope and despair', while *Such a Long Journey* ends with a note of hope, with Gustad tearing out the blackout papers and letting in light, allowing the moths of the past to fly out of his life.

What Does Rohinton Mistry Want to Communicate?

Rohinton Mistry highlights the shortcomings of the parents and the children. The relations between the parents and the son and daughter in the family constellation is naturally cordial and based on respect, mutual understanding, quarrel, anger, hatred, etc. The attitude of the parents is largely sympathetic and helpful.

Mistry attaches great importance to children's education in his novels. In this context, he makes no distinction between a son and a daughter. He is not interested in the intrinsic existence of small children. He does not delineate children as a novelist, but uses them to suggest illustratively that choice of higher education or upbringing adversely affects the parent-child relationship. The parental role is vital in making children complete human beings. The parents in Mistry's novels, Gustad-Dilnavaz, Dukhi-Roopa, Maneck Kohlah, Yezad-Roxana, Nariman's parents, earnestly work towards their children's well-being right from their early childhood.

Family ties are governed by the right conduct of the elders and their words in the matter of love and marriage. A sense of discipline is inculcated in them with a firm but affectionate hand.

Regarding husband-wife relationships in Mistry's novels women are neglected to a sub-ordinate status in the family and society. They are expected to be dutiful daughters, loving mothers and faithful wives. After marriage women become the property of their husbands and work only for the family as a housewife. Mistry himself reveals the importance of housewifely through the role of Roxana in *Family Matters*.

Mistry's novels revolve around the themes of family and friendship, which become metonymy of the society and the nation. The focus throughout is on the struggles of the family; their binding ties, and the trials they have to suffer. Mistry's humanism reveals itself in the depiction of a family who are closer and loving, in spite of all their differences. Thus the novels portray a vivid picture of how the middle class family suffers from all kinds of problems within the familial circumstances.

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