

Diasporic Consciousness in Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters*: A Study

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Immigration and diaspora are not new phenomena in India and the literature produced by diasporic Indian writers explores the multi-dimensional anxieties of émigré life. Recently, there have been more shifts in perceptions and perspectives of these writers' notions of individual and their national and cultural identities. Several kinds of identities jostle with each other and create a crisis of identity in the works of reputed writers like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and others. The interaction and commingling of various cultures certainly open new routes and modes of thinking about the individual and group identities of diasporas and help them to outgrow the stereotyped experiences of uprootedness, displacement and marginalization.

The Diaspora as well as immigrant features of rootlessness, dislocation and alienation are well represented in the novels of Rohinton Mistry. Rohinton Mistry was born and brought up in Mumbai in the mid fifty's, migrated to Canada at the age of 23. Mistry belongs to that class of the Indian authors who shifted their base from India to somewhere else but throughout their lives continue missing their mother land. The acute pain and feeling of not being with the people who are like him, who speaks his/her language can be better, felt and expressed by exiled or immigrant writers. Such people might be physically away from their own motherland but deep in their hearts always keep on missing their motherland.

As a Parsi and also an immigrant in Canada, Rohinton Mistry looks at him as a symbol of double displacement. He deals with severe identity crisis which is the outcome of loneliness and a sense of exile which is the root cause of diasporic existence. Nilufer Bharucha has explored the multiple aspects of Mistry's works: his search for identity, his need for roots, and the desire for location in history.

People today are migrating to different parts of the world for one reason or the other. Even from India, millions of people have migrated to various alien lands under "forced or self-imposed exiles". Some of the immigrants have made a mark in the field of writing. Their writings reflect their attachment to the homeland, feeling of alienation and rootlessness. They suffer from psychic trauma and haunting presence of their lost homeland – the land of their birth – and also suffer from the anguish of reinventing home in their land of their choice. As Ralph J. Crane and Radhika Mohanram remark, "migration is mostly lived as a process of loss and pain.

However, it can also be highly creative and motoric” (141). The migrants in the alien culture live in silken bond memory of motherland.

Parsis in India feel insecure, experience identity crisis and feel threatened by possible submersion into the Hindu culture. The Parsi people, a minority group, have found the economy and the living conditions in India are not favourable to them. So they migrate to other countries thinking that their new country would be more favourable to them. This sudden emigration to an alien land leads to identity crisis. Neither have they had their former identity, nor do they have a new one. Mistry himself had left for Canada seeking good fortune. Savita Goel comments on this

As a parsi and then as an immigrant in Canada, he (Mistry) sees himself as a symbol of double displacement and this sense of double displacement is a recurrent theme in his literary works. His historical situation involves construction of a new identity in the nation to which he has emigrated and a complex relationship with the political and cultural history of the nation he has left behind. (119)

Rohinton Mistry’s *Family Matters* revolves around the life of Nariman Vakeel, an aged Parsi, who is a retired Professor of English. He is living in an elegant apartment called Chateau Felicity with his two middle-aged step children Coomy and her brother Jal. When Nariman becomes bedridden, Coomy and Jal contrive a plan so as to send him to his daughter Roxana. She lives in Pleasant Villa with her husband Yezad Chenoy and their two children Murad and Jehangir. Already Yezad besieged by financial worries and he is being forced to take up the new responsibility of looking after his father-in-law. Rohinton Mistry lucidly depicts the sufferings of a man in his old age. For instance, Nariman is suffering from Parkinson and Osteoporosis. Even in Roxana’s home too, Nariman finds no peace. There also at times, he is insulted by Yezad.

It may not be far from the truth to say that Nariman is the embodiment of Parsi community. At the young age Nariman wanted to get married with a non- Parsi girl Lucy. According to Parsi culture a Parsi boy should marry only a Parsi girl. So the same was the tragedy with Nariman, and his parents did not allow him to marry her. So, under compulsion he had to marry Yasmin, a Parsi widow. “Congratulations, Marzi Said Mr.Kotwal to his father.” “After eleven years of battle you win!” ‘Better late than never’, said Mr. Burdy but fortune always favors the bold. Remember the fruits of patience are sweet and all’s well that ends well” (FM, 11). He could not forget Lucy even in his old age. He leads discontented life until his death.

In *Family Matters* migration is an important theme. Parsis in India emigrate to foreign countries in search of money. Narendra Kumar attributes:

The parsees prefer the best since it offers unlimited scope for growth and prosperity. Dislocation is part of the parsee psyche. Exiled twelve hundred years ago, they came to India. Now they are migrating to west in search of greener pastures. Thus there is “double migration” in the case of parsees (14)

Being an emigrant, Rohinton Mistry lucidly exposes Yezad’s dream of emigrating to Canada. Mistry gives autobiographical touches to his portrayal of Yezad. The striking similarity between himself and Yezad is clearly felt in the novel. In order to ensure materialistic security

Mistry was migrated to Canada in pursuit of a career. He wanted to earn money and led a affluent living. Since Yezad is an autobiographical character, Mistry too experiences the sense of alienation like Yezad. He seems to wish to comeback to India, his homeland, to rejoin his community.

Yezad is eager to migrate to Canada for he wants “clean cities, plenty of water, trains with seats for everyone” (131). To Nariman, “emigration is an enormous mistake. The biggest anyone can make in their life. The loss of home leaves a whole that never fills” (240). Finally Yezad realizes his blunder and decides not to emigrate to Canada. He is firm to destroy the letters, forms and photocopies related to his intended emigration. When he is tearing the papers, Roxana comes in and asks what he is doing. He answers, “getting rid of garbage” (246). Roxana first tries to save the documents but then she understands, “Yezad was right, it was not worth keeping” (246). Mistry here seems to authenticate the fact ‘East or West Home is Best’.

The Parsis always feel that their community is declining gradually. The Parsi writers express their fear through their writing so as to caution their community about their dwindling population. In *Family Matters* too Mistry expresses his concern about the downfall of the community. Inspector Masalavala Jal, and Dr. Fitters discuss the future of the parsi community. They agree that the factors contributing to the downfall are “dwindling birthrate, or men and women marrying non-parsis, and the heavy migration to the west” (400). Inspector Masalavala expresses his fear thus “the experts in demographics are confident that fifty years hence, there will be no parsi left” (400). He also offers suggestions as to how parsi population could be increased. He says that parsi panchayats must prohibit parsi youth from going beyond a bachelor’s degree. If they want to do post graduation, they have to sign a contract to have many children. He also finds fault with parsi boys and girls for the falling of birthrate.

Another instance of the Parsi hostility to alliance outside occurs when Yezad catches his son Murad kissing a non-parsi girl. He advises his son, “you can have any friends you like any race or religion, but for a serious relationship, for marriage the rules are different. Because we are a pure Persian race, a unique contribution to this planet and mixed marriage will destroy that” (469). Yezad is an ardent follower of parsi culture and rituals so that he didn’t want to migrate and didn’t allow his son to have a serious relationship with a non-parsi girl.

Family Matters is characterized by author’s hard-to-be suppressed yearning to return home and reintegrate into the Parsi community in India. His autobiographical feel is more in this novel. *Family Matters* clearly portrays the anxieties, alienation and feelings of insecurity of modern day Parsis and Mistry’s concern of the past and the present.

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