CHAPTER-IV

STRESS OF SOCIAL CHANGE ON FAMILY
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The urban literature of the second half of the twentieth century in India has the credit of representing “a real slice of Indian life” (Mukherjee 35), and Rohinton Mistry is no exception to this general tendency among the urban writers to depict contemporary issues. Mistry appears natural, authentic and unselfconscious because he writes about things known to him. Like Boman Desai, Firdaus Kanga, Meher Pestonji, Dina Mehta, Bapsi Sidhwa, Mistry addresses some relevant issues confronting Indian urban society in modern times and the disintegration of family as an institution is one such issue to which Mistry’s imagination responds. How the new winds of change have affected the traditional family structure and how the stress of social change is felt more on sensitive individuals remains the persistent concern of Mistry in his fiction. He generally adds a ‘Parsi effect’ to his stories but the readers get the impression that the author is telling our own stories. As a socio-political novelist, while the author describes the experience of being a Parsi in India, on another level he gives thoughtful commentaries on imperative social issues of our times. The theme of change in the role and function of family is debated in detail by Mistry.

As mentioned earlier, independent India has started experiencing a new phase of civilization and our society is changing at a massive speed. The process of urbanization and modernization is said to have radically transformed the basis of traditional social structures of caste, family, kinship and marriage. It is often observed that the traditional institutional patterns are not just affected by change, sometimes their breakdown is also reported. As mentioned earlier, the post-independence period in the country is witnessing changes at all levels and in every section of the society, but the educated classes living in big cities are particularly affected
by this modernization of Indian tradition. Modernization implies some typical forms of changes in the social structure of societies and “modernization in traditional societies proceeds through a transitional stage in which traditional cultural forms have necessarily to undergo change” (Singh 122). It is seen that modernity has not completely supplanted tradition in India but many traditional institutions have indeed received a body blow with this march of modernization and family is one such institution that has been badly affected.

Since Mistry is always interested in the depiction of impact of social change on family as an institution, it is imperative to understand the definition and function of family before analyzing the stress of social change on family. George Peter Murdock defines a family as “a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction” (qtd. in Haralambos, 325). Charles MacIver and Page in Society: An Introductory Analysis, too, have studied the importance of family in the life of an individual and define that “the family is by far the most important primary group in society” (7). The sociologists establish that a man is always dependent on family for protection and comfort. It has been considered the basis of society and the ideal unit of human community. Family not only gives us warm natural feelings of love but also teaches us to be generous, sympathetic, kind and caring. A man gets emotional, psychological and financial support from the family.

If we talk about our own country, family is known to be a benign institution which protects even those who are weak. It always takes up the role of insurance for the individual as the family members help each other in times of crisis. In “Squatter”, Sarosh’s mother says, “It is better to live in want among your family and friends, who love you and care for you, than to be unhappy surrounded by vacuum cleaners and dishwashers and shiny motor cars” (187). Here Sarosh’s mother highlights the need of love and care in man’s life and the role of a family in fulfilling these needs. Here, the author’s views about importance of family are being
communicated through Sarosh’s mother. Nariman Hansotia and Sarosh’s mother in “Squatter”, Nariman Vakeel and Roxana in Family Matters convey the writer’s opinion about the value and need of having a family. Since Mistry is interested in the depiction of the shift from the traditional Indian family structure to the contemporary family system, an awareness of the Indian family system is necessary to evaluate Mistry’s works.

Our country had always been a supporter of joint family system with parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts and cousins living together and sharing happiness and grief together. Misfortune of an individual was considered the misfortune of the whole family. Because of the norm of caring and sharing, there was hardly any fear or depression from disease and sickness. Since the elders were given a place of pride and authority, complaints of their neglect or isolation were out of question. In the traditional family system, disrespect towards an elder member was not only unthinkable but also unpardonable so children always obeyed the wishes and commands of the elders. The spirit of collectivism was the hallmark of traditional family structure in India and the distribution of work and responsibility was on the basis of capacity and capability of the members. The old parents were always given a special place and privilege in such a family structure, old age was accepted as a fact of life and there was a kind of guarantee that senior citizens will be revered by all and their needs will be taken care of by the younger and abler members of the family.

Traditional Indian family structure was patriarchal in nature where all members were guided in their activity by an elderly family head and women had a relatively subordinate position, the inter-personal relations of all members were authoritarian and individualism and personal freedom were not promoted. Despite some drawbacks, “the unquestioning acceptance of the doctoring of the male dominance made for a more stable family in that earlier age” (MacIver and Page 269).
It is a reported fact that the role of family in our country, especially in urban areas has undergone substantial change with change in the technological and economic superstructure of society. Nuclear family has become a kind of norm where the individuals generally display a great sense of freedom. However, it will be relevant to mention that the process of change is quite complicated and it would be a gross oversimplification to infer that the Indian family system has totally changed due to shift from joint family system to the nuclear type. Indian society could be seen as a typical case whereby an ‘overlapping’ exists between modern and traditional institutions. It is seen that the urban households may be perfectly nuclear in composition but they follow some norms of a joint family system where the male head of the family remains in an authoritative position, females are expected to look after the household and children remain dependent on parents. It also needs to be noted that in the early stages nuclear families retained many of the features of the traditional joint family structure but with the passage of time, not many aspects of traditional family structure are retained in nuclear families and this marks a new stage of modernization. Mistry not only depicts the traditional structure of family in India but also the different stages of evolution of family as an institution.

The attitude of modern children is said to have substantially altered the concept of family in modern India and the reasons are not difficult to seek. It is a fact proved by various studies that socialization of children in urban nuclear families is quite different from the one in extended families. The children grow in a comparatively much smaller universe and the playmates and members of the child’s peer group generally belong outside the family. In such a situation the children become more independent and generally more innovative in orientation. As the children are influenced more by their friends and class-mates, the orders, commands and dictation of the parents become less important and peer pressure becomes the key factor in the growth of their personality. Since nuclear family is always conducive to the growth of a creative personality, a
fixed pattern of behaviour cannot be expected from the child who is a product of such family. In many cases, the parents just become the suppliers of the needs of their children. They are emotionally blackmailed, their suggestion and advice are not respected and they are generally made to accept the decisions made by their children. It is important to mention this point as the children in Mistry’s Parsi families are products of this nuclear family culture and stress in family matters is seen because of this new system.

Mistry has charted the shift from a joint to a nuclear family structure, the onset of a spirit of individualism, the growing estrangement in relationships among members in the family, the acquisitiveness and the consequent corrosion of human values in urban families. The writer takes the reader into a new world where individuals are not linked with each other in clearly defined bonds, where family does not matter but money does and the greed for money makes family members insensitive towards each other. Not only does Mistry project the supportive traditional family structure but also showcases the emergence of a new trend where family as a support system fails and becomes the cause of stress and distress. Mistry firmly believes that when a family disintegrates into nuclear fragments, the old and incapable members are bound to suffer. The trend of nuclear families in cities tends to take away the security and safety from the lives of senior citizens in our country. Mistry reveals that modern attitudes have cut the new generation off from the traditional ethos and there is always a nostalgic yearning for a more stable, traditional Indian family life in his works. The issue of old age finds sensitive handling in Mistry’s analysis of stress of social change on family as an institution.

Mistry’s first publication *Tales from Firozsha Baag* revolves around family matters. The stories are simple domestic tales of caring and sharing. A typical traditional Indian family structure is visible in these short stories. Caring mothers, docile wives, obedient children and close bonds among members of the family mark this world. Though there are direct and indirect
references about the stress caused by changing attitudes of children and the clash between members of the family becomes a bit serious in “Exercisers”, still, on the whole, all the stories end on a message of hope.

Mistry makes it clear that man does not live by bread alone. His emotional, physical, aesthetic and spiritual needs are equally important to him and family is the ideal and perfect living arrangement for human beings where many of his needs get fulfilled, hence, there can be no substitute for a family. It is also conveyed that the traditional family structure sometimes hinders the progress of children and their freedom of expression but that does not diminish its value and by and large it is a strong support system for all individuals. The family matters in Tales from Firozsha Baag are quite simple in nature and there is hardly any evidence of instability in the family as an institution.

The disintegration in family relationships and the consequent stress gets reflected in Mistry’s very first novel Such a Long Journey. The book showcases that Gustad is a product of traditional joint family structure where the father always exercises his final authority, all the important decisions in the family are taken by him and the children are expected to obey the parents. As a son, Gustad had always been obedient towards his parents. His father’s wrong decisions had greatly affected the financial condition of the family and Gustad was compelled to discontinue his studies but he could not raise his voice against the decision of his father nor did he dare criticize him. But Gustad’s own son Sohrab doesn’t show any regard for our Indian family culture where elders are respected and obeyed. The theme of social change cannot be ignored as Sohrab’s behaviour pattern manifests a sharp contrast to his father’s attitude.

Sohrab’s declaration of his unwillingness to join IIT and his defiant attitude shake Gustad’s confidence and pride. He is upset not only because Sohrab is ‘spoiling’ his life but also because his son has forgotten all decency to behave. When Sohrab challenges his father’s
authority and becomes too assertive and disrespectful, Gustad feels deeply hurt and annoyed. Dilnavaz pleads him to be patient but Gustad still lays down his condition that Sohrab has to learn to behave. Unable to tolerate the defiance of his son, Gustad threatens to throw him out of his house for being indecent. In the heated discussion between the two, when the son blatantly defies the suggestion of his father and becomes excessively outspoken, Gustad takes out his belt and hits Sohrab. It is a typical reaction of a father, who is a product and supporter of a family structure where children are not expected to be defiant. However, despite serious disturbance in the family matters, the novel still ends on a note of hope as normalcy and peace are restored in the family, the matters are discussed, analyzed and resolved.

While *Such a Long Journey* depicts the tension between parents and children in contemporary family situations, *A Fine Balance* showcases the increasing animosity between brothers and sisters in urban families. Dina’s assertion and her spirit of independence are not acceptable to her brother Nusswan. Dina snaps all ties with him and makes a family with Rustom Dalal. Her yearning for a family makes her establish a family like bond with Omprakash, Ishwar and Maneck when Rustom dies. In her old age, in the absence of any support, Dina returns to Nusswan’s family. This re-arrival cannot be termed a reunion of family members, but highlights the need of having a family in a woman’s life. The requirement of family in a woman’s life also gets explained in *Such a Long Journey* through Nazamai’s case.

Dealing with family matters in a fast changing urban society, Mistry depicts the increasing conflict in parent-child relationship, sibling rivalry in urban homes, and lack of attachment in man-woman relationship. But more than anything else, it is the loss of reverence for the old parents in modern urban families that Mistry strives to portray. In *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, the traditional Indian family culture is projected where the family offers safety, security and respect to the old members. Nazamai in *Such A Long Journey* is a pitiable old
person without a semblance of security which one experiences in a family. Although the issue of place of the old people in modern Indian urban families is not discussed in detail in *A Fine Balance*, but Nusswan is shown to be totally unconcerned about his old mother who becomes quite baffled after the death of her husband. It is also seen in the course of the novel that Dina’s old grandpa, who lives with her uncle is a neglected old man in the family. When Dina goes to meet him, even as a teenager, she easily feels the smell of stale balm in the old man’s room. She also observes that her grandpa’s toe nails have increased too much. These details may appear petty in themselves, but they are quite significant as the reader is made to analyse that old people in urban homes have become a ghettoized lot.

When we enter the world of *Family Matters*, the usual concerns of Rohinton Mistry in his fiction i.e. social and political issues of the country, are not given much space. The writer is interested in the small world of Parsis living in Bombay, but “you don’t have to be a Parsi or Indian to identify with his characters and the dilemmas they face” (qtd. in Kumar, 29). This world undoubtedly represents the postcolonial conditions where many “traditional forms of family role expectation are changing” (Singh 183), and the ill-treatment meted out to old parents has reached its climax. The stress and tension of a father on account of the cold-hearted attitude of his children find detailed expression in the novel. We are directly taken into the bleak realities of our urban homes through the story of Nariman Vakeel who is the eldest member of Vakeel family living in Bombay with his two step-children. It is a picture of an imperfect present and a future indefinite for old parents. The novelist systematically studies the causes and consequences of neglect of needy parents in urban families.

*Family Matters* is not the story of a charming prince or a superhero in the lead but rather the narration of the stress of old age and the ominously increasing practice of exploitation of the old parents by their own family members. It is the story of old Nariman becoming bed-ridden
after an accident and the family’s reaction towards his pain and suffering. It is a book on family matters in which the members of the family don’t necessarily come across as very heroic and the family matters are not flatteringly portrayed. The novelist’s purpose is to make us realize that when someone is ill or something goes wrong at home, we all end up behaving a little bit badly. The novel’s theme of one family coping with tragedy is undoubtedly universal and the fact of Vakeels being Parsis doesn’t make the story very different. Mistry talks of how the Vakeels are a bit more in difficulty because they are not very rich, Nariman is quite old and Coomy and Jal are his step-children who are not very young and energetic.

The novel has a quiet opening and the age of the central protagonist is specifically mentioned. The long list of diseases from which he suffers is also supplied to the readers. Coomy and Jal ask their step-father not to go out for a walk since he suffers from Parkinson’s and the world has “become a dangerous place”. “Oh, it has,” Nariman said. “Especially indoors” (FM 4). Nariman’s statement and the brief debate between Nariman and his step-children states the basic theme of the novel – urban homes are becoming almost repressive to the old people. In the light of the situations described by the author in Chateau Felicity where the Vakeel family lives, it is evident that urban homes have become almost hellholes for the old parents.

*Family Matters* presents Coomy as a bitter and domineering character who always instructs Nariman to “follow the rules” (2) and keeps telling him the rules regarding his meals, his clothes, his dentures and his use of the radiogram. Nariman is also required to announce his intention to use the WC. In the morning he is not to get out of bed till she comes to get him. A bath is possible only twice a week. Nariman cannot afford to be inattentive as Coomy tells him to “stop dreaming” and to “pay attention” (3) to what they say. It becomes evident in the very opening chapter of the book that the relationships among members of the family are far from being healthy.
Through Coomy’s character, the novel studies how the parents can be ignored, sidelined and insulted by the children. Coomy has two primary weapons always ready for her defence. The first is her blunt speech laced with heavy doses of allegations. She always holds Nariman responsible for the lack of funds in the house and the charges of being partial towards “his own flesh and blood” (7), are always leveled against him. She is quick to echo a sentiment which others would be hesitant to speak freely about for fear of being criticized by others. The language is generally crude and offensive. The second weapon is her capacity to stoop down to any level of meanness.

We consider Mistry as a novelist worthy of our serious attention largely because we get convinced of his honesty and truthfulness as an observer of the contemporary scene. Mistry’s portrayal of the agony of the old age and the changing attitude of family towards parents is undoubtedly realistic. Nariman is troubled enough by his fading eyesight, tiresome dentures, trembling limbs, stooped posture and shuffling gait and the biting remarks of Coomy further add to his suffering. It seems that Nariman can cope with “trembling hands” and “shaking fingers” (FM 2) but the raucous remarks of Coomy harass him too much. The atmosphere in the house generally remains tensed and Nariman is kept confined to his room. He feels fed up sitting all alone in his “unhappy flat” (17) and longs for a whiff of fresh air. His evening walks are like “air for starving lungs” after the “stale emptiness of the flat” (5). But Coomy is strictly against his evening walks. The references like “unhappy flat” and “stale emptiness of the flat” leave the reader in no doubt that Nariman’s life is quite miserable in his own house.

The ever increasing harsh treatment shown towards the old in urban families is repeatedly mentioned by the writer through different situations. In the episode where Nariman goes for an evening walk against Coomy’s wishes and falls in the street and gets mild scratches on his elbow, Coomy gets a chance to vent her anger: “A stubborn child, that’s what you are. Should be
punished like a child. No dinner for disobedience” (FM 4). An inexcusable, soulless attitude of children towards their parents gets easily manifested in such reactions of Coomy. Many charges are leveled against Nariman that he doesn’t act responsibly and that he has no appreciation for Jal and Coomy and for the things they do for him. Without bothering about Nariman’s distress, she passes strict orders that Nariman will not go out for any walk in future. One feels shocked to see the inhumanity of her behaviour. Thus, the author takes the readers into the world of old parents where their hurt, disappointment and anxiety gets unfolded on account of the stone-hearted attitude of their children.

The first few pages giving information about the treatment meted out to be the old man by his children and the title itself makes it clear that Family Matters is about family matters in modern times and it remains the central issue throughout the novel. Many scenes filled with emotions highlighting the suffering of the old man make the novel a unique critique of old age which is an unavoidable fact of human life. It is a book where the writer speaks across national, ethnic and gender boundaries, with a voice that compels attention.

Although apathy, selfishness, self-centeredness and indifference are some of the features always associated with urban living, but in the context of life within the four walls of the house, these make it shockingly disturbing for a sensitive individual. The readers are informed how Nariman has owned every responsibility of his step-children but Coomy always holds Nariman responsible for her mother’s distress and her death. Her deep seated hatred for Nariman makes her almost cruel towards him. She criticizes Nariman all the time, dictates and plagues him with rules to govern every aspect of his shrunken life. Nariman muses: “she should have been a headmistress, enacting rules for hapless schoolgirls, making them miserable” (FM 2).

It is necessary to give attention to these minute details because their function in the novel is to stress the social nature of Nariman’s destiny and its typicality. Coomy enters into all kinds
of deceitful dramas to force her sister, Roxana into taking care of the old Nariman when he falls down and breaks his ankle. Through these details, Mistry tries to clarify that the spirit of individualism and deceitfulness towards family members is a recent and quite an accelerated development since indecency towards parents was never a part of Indian culture and our value system has always recommended an attitude of reverence towards the elders.

It is made evident enough that Coomy, in many ways, is a creature of the times she has grown up in since “pauperization, both financial and emotional is a hard fact of life” (Batra 90) and lack of sensitivity has become the specific trait of young generation in our country. Coomy’s behaviour shows that modern children have forgotten the Indian values of respecting and looking after the parents in their old age. The responsibility of caring for the ageing and ill parents is the biggest burden for the children these days and this is the most common cause of conflicts and clashes between family members. Mistry has captured the mood of the Gen-next in the character of Coomy.

The reader may feel confused to see the apathetic attitude of most of the characters towards the parents who need supportive treatment by the family. It is strange that Jal, a humble and reasonable person who never approves of Coomy’s actions and plans, is always silenced by Coomy and he becomes a party to her decisions. An unapologetic defender of her own actions, she does not allow Jal to give his suggestions, as the balance of power in the house is always shifted in favour of an aggressive Coomy whose focus is primarily on the troubles and tensions involved in looking after the old father. As she does not let anyone speak, Roxana and her family generally cannot dare to say anything directly. Mere suggestions by any member of the family can raise Coomy’s anger. Jal is a mere puppet in her presence and Nariman has to accept her dictation and decision. She snubs everyone and never lets anyone win the argument. Without her blunt speech and sarcastic remarks, she would have been perhaps just another woman. Her
cleverly chosen allegations and a long list of inconveniences in looking after Pappa, make others speechless. Jal, Nariman, Roxana and her family generally avoid entering into debates with Coomy for fear of creating war-like situations in the house. Thus, the family matters in Family Matters are far from being pleasant and happy and the contemporary reality of unsupportive family ties is right in front of us.

The unscrupulous conduct of a daughter highlights the fact that modern children have marginalized the old parents. Nariman is the embodiment of all the virtues Mistry glorifies in old generation – self-sacrifice, compassion and sensitivity. The non-complaining nature of the protagonist sufficiently contributes to the appeal of the novel. Nariman is shown to be too simple and humble. It is through the plight of Nariman that Mistry intends to portray the helplessness of old people as well as the need of family support when one is old. The novel is melodramatic and sentimental at places, but not far removed from reality. It appears to be an emotionally charged domestic drama where an old man suffers endlessly and the family members fail to render the required help. All of them feel that looking after the bed-ridden old man is “a huge responsibility” (FM 84). Although sometimes Jal tries to make Coomy realize that it is unfair to treat the old man badly but she always silences him: “I don’t owe Pappa anything. He did not change my diapers or wash my bum and I don’t have to clean his shit either” (82).

Coomy’s words make it evident that the era of serving the parents in their hour of need is getting over as the educationally empowered and rational generation is quite aware of its rights but forgetful about its duties. It is a tough phase of civilization that we are passing through. Mistry aptly sums up the pragmatic approach of modern children through Coomy’s character. It is worthy of mention that Coomy is not an exceptional individual who is being so savage and unsympathetic towards her old father. The modern generation in general is unconcerned towards the need of old parents. The uncultured, unsympathetic, immoral, corrupt and pragmatic
approach towards life is responsible, to a great extent, in making the modern children careless towards their ailing parents. Mistry tells us the very facts of Indian urban families through the reactions and responses of Coomy, Jal and Yezad.

Nariman’s ill-treatment by his children raises many issues: Why do the family members enter into plots and strategies to throw the old man out of their houses? Isn’t it obligatory for the children to, at the very least, provide the required minimum assistance to their old father? Why do the family members shirk their responsibility of looking after the parents in old age? The answer is very simple: Modern generation has become so self-centered that looking after the old members in the family does not form part of their mandate. It is easier to blame when you have someone to blame than to accept that you are not in a mood to own your responsibility towards the old. What a fall of moral values! Nariman lives with disease and disability every single day, every moment and the children make his last days all the more miserable by their hatred and repulsion for him.

Mistry has an understanding that looking after the ailing person requires management of funds and also a lot of mental and physical strength. It is discussed how the bad smell of Nariman’s room annoys Coomy and how she remains under acute pressure all the time. Her stress gets manifested in her anger and irritation. She snubs old Nariman all the time and makes him all the more tensed. The author maintains that a sick man needs a lot of emotional and psychological support from his family members and in the absence of the required assistance, his anguish and agony, stress and distress gets doubled up.

How the values of a person are tested in tough times is the question the novelist raises repeatedly in *Family Matters*. When the doctor declares that Nariman’s ankle would take weeks to get right, Coomy gets upset because she is already fed up with looking after the old man, particularly handling his nature’s calls. A week after Nariman’s accident, he is shifted to
Roxana’s small flat without any prior information. The Chenoys are told that the ailing old man needs a change of place for a few days and Coomy makes a promise that Nariman will be taken back in three weeks’ time. But Coomy’s fertile brain hatches a plot to keep Nariman away from Chateau Felicity. Jal is compelled to hammer the roof of Nariman’s room and the excuse of a leaking roof is invented. In Coomy’s moves, strategies and plans is reflected the culturally corrupt attitude of modern generation towards their old parents. Starved of the tender care of family members, Nariman represents the generation of old parents, sidelined by their own people. Mistry details how the anger and spite, hatred and accusation of his family members make Nariman’s life miserable. The novel communicates that Nariman always speaks in soft, few, simple sentences, more matter of fact than melodramatic about the injustice and pain experienced by him. Still, Coomy never lets him rest in peace and always condemns him for being stubborn. The open display of unthinkable apathy towards a sick, old man is quite disturbing.

How the families have become uncultured, uncivilized, uncouth and inhuman has been realistically portrayed by Mistry in *Family Matters*. Mistry’s understanding of the pathetic predicament of old people in urban homes makes him project old Nariman a victim of domestic violence at Chateau Felicity and also at Pleasant Villa. It needs special mention that all the members of his family have accepted his property without blinking an eyelid but instead of feeling grateful, Coomy levels the charge of being wasteful against Nariman. Charges of favoritism are also levelled against him for doing nothing than purchasing a tiny 1 BHK flat as a marriage gift for Roxana. It needs special mention here that Nariman has put the seven room apartment in Coomy’s name in a city like Bombay, lest he should be considered partial towards his real daughter. Nothing can be more ironical that Coomy takes the palatial house and still
criticizes Nariman for treating them second rate. She throws tantrums and Nariman is at a loss to know what to do with his bad condition.

How the very old and disabled members in contemporary urban homes have become most unwanted is also seen when Nariman is shifted to Roxana’s flat. Contrary to Coomy’s perceptions, Yezad was in a worst state of preparedness to accommodate the ailing Nariman. Yezad was the only earning member in his family. Besides he does not have the advantage of having a palatial house like Coomy. Nariman’s unannounced arrival in the tiny flat opens the door of family tensions. Unable to manage the financial burden due to the upkeep of old Nariman, Yezad first tries gambling and then tries to befool his boss in order to grind his own axe. The growing medical bills cripple the financial condition of Chenoys and Yezad becomes excessively irritable. When he feels that Coomy is not in a mood to take Nariman back to Chateau Felicity, he also tries to avoid the responsibility of looking after the sick man without any trace of shame.

While depicting the stress of social change on family in an urban society, Mistry corroborates that excessive money-mindedness, which is a recent phenomenon, is largely responsible for the weakening of ties among family members and making the youngsters develop an apathetic attitude towards parents. It is exemplified in Coomy’s behaviour pattern in Family Matters. She is all the time bothered about money and it is the only thing she can discuss about. Even in the 79th birthday party of Nariman, she doesn’t forget to recite the prices of necessary items like potatoes, bread, butter and cooking gas. When Yezad specifically mentions that Jal and Coomy have the privilege of having the palatial house, Coomy doesn’t acknowledge it. At times, Family Matters seems to be all about money matters.

How the mercenary outlook of the children in most urban homes makes them ignore their elders is also seen in an incident, when injured Nariman is brought home by the Ghatis. Instead
of being bothered about her father’s pain, Coomy is concerned about his stick. When Jal suggests giving something to the people who helped Nariman, she consults her father how far the Ghatis carried him. She wants to calculate the amount by applying the ration shop standard of payment: “They haven’t delivered a sack of wheat, it’s Pappa they rescued from a ditch” (FM 50). Quite bluntly she tells Jal that it doesn’t make a difference in terms of labour whether the laborers were lifting a person or a gunny of rice or furniture and she doesn’t hesitate to comment: “And just because Pappa is hurt doesn’t mean money grows on trees” (50). These words spoken by Coomy serve to highlight the theme of the novel that the preference of money over human emotions makes the modern children totally hard-hearted. Devoid of finer sensibilities such as pity, sympathy and humanity, Coomy can think about money only.

How money governs the behaviour pattern of a person and makes him oblivious of his duty towards the family is also seen in Coomy’s decision to consult Dr. Fitter. Although Jal tries to convince her that Dr. Fitter is an old man and has closed his practice, Coomy remains firm on her decision as she has to just save money. Persuaded by Coomy, when Jal goes to Dr. Fitter’s residence, the doctor instructs him to take Nariman to the hospital immediately. The doctor’s lack of cooperation outraged Coomy and she is not convinced by the sense of urgency shown by the doctor and postpones taking Nariman to the hospital as she is concerned about the fees of the doctor and hospital charges. As the incidents of exploitation of old parents in urban homes make headlines almost every other day, Nariman’s ill-treatment may not shock many readers. What happened to Nariman may not be unusual, but what is more worrying is the fact that the children don’t even realise that their attitude hurts their parents.

Family relations portrayed in *Family Matters* are far from being ideal but the portrayal is certainly realistic. In the contemporary urban Indian situation, it is not uncommon to come across inconsiderate and insensitive children. Coomy’s behaviour symbolizes the disrespectful attitude
of urban children towards the parents. It is specifically made clear by the novelist that having problems in looking after ailing parents is one thing but being inconsiderate is unpardonable. As an act, the neglect of parents has lowered the image and pride of our society. What Coomy says about her own difficulties may be true but her harsh comments are unjustified. Making Nariman realize his disabilities and calling him “a walking medical dictionary” (FM34), is certainly not in a good taste. Her continuous reminders of her difficulties in looking after Nariman make him feel totally unwanted in the family.

The portrayal of the stress of social change on family in contemporary times makes the author authenticate that the children these days have not only become apathetic but also vicious towards their elders which causes unbearable pressure on the minds of the aged parents. Despite Mistry’s acknowledgement that providing care to the old and ailing parents is not an easy task, the writer firmly asserts that old parents need better treatment. It is made known that the bad behaviour of children not only shocks the parents but also shames the country that prides itself on being a parent-worshipping society. A family value for which India is known in the world is the respect for the elderly. But Family Matters presents an analysis of a fluctuating commitment to these values in the face of difficulties.

Not only is the true character of Jal and Coomy seen during Nariman’s illness, but even Yezad proves no better. Roxana’s house is very small where the family members are expected to make adjustments regarding sleeping and dining. When Nariman is dumped on the Chenoys, they are compelled to make many more adjustments to accommodate the immobile old man in their tiny flat. The first few days of Nariman’s unannounced arrival demonstrates the value of having a family. All the members at Pleasant Villa struggle to care for Nariman, the financial difficulties are taken care of, adjustments regarding sleeping and eating space are also made. Roxana is a concerned daughter who is ready to do anything for her father, the two boys too
adjust well with old grandpa and Jehangir even insists on hand-feeding lunch to his grandfather. Each member, in his own way, attempts to supplement the family income.

How the family should get united in its efforts to support a needy member is seen in the efforts made by all members of Chenoy family. Murad saves bus fare by walking on foot rather than commuting by bus to the school. Innocent Jehangir accepts money from his rich class-mates whose homework he is entrusted to monitor on behalf of his teacher. The tender, personalized attention of Roxana makes Nariman comfortable. It is the concern of family members and the feeling of being wanted that makes life liveable for Nariman despite the old age and sickness. Despite some hardships in the tiny flat, Nariman finds his life much better in Pleasant Villa than it was in his spacious flat. He feels fortunate by becoming the part of the cramped but happy little family of his daughter “I’m truly blessed to have such a family. Makes up for all other deficiencies” (FM 122).

However, Family Matters also reveals how human values get tested when an old member needs the support of his family. Jagdish Batra makes an apt observation: “Behind the normal ebb and flow depicted in this novel lies the sorry state of society in which human values come under strain due to financial predicament” (99). Yezad is shown to lose his patience in tough times. Having two children with school expenses, prices rising month by month, no room in his tiny flat and no money for medicines plus bed pan stinking in the front room test his patience and mental strength. A Parsi who used to deliver moral science lectures to his sons is shaken by the addition of his father-in-law with medical bills.

It goes to Mistry’s credit that while highlighting the unsympathetic attitude of children towards their parents, he does not ignore to mention the genuine difficulties faced by them in looking after the sick old people. Family Matters gives a detailed description of how the task of looking after the old parents is an unpleasant and a ‘huge’ responsibility through the incident
where Nariman meets with an accident and becomes totally immovable. Jal and Coomy, who are unmarried and middle aged, find it too difficult to cope with the new responsibility of taking care of their sick father. Coomy finds it extremely repulsive and difficult when she is to make Nariman sit on the commode with intolerable pain in his ankle and when Nariman is unable to control the nature’s call. Coomy and Jal have to clear the mess, which, again, is not a cakewalk.

The middle aged Coomy is not prepared to own this kind of responsibility. The domestic help refuses to cope with the stink and smell in the house and leaves. Coomy, who, otherwise, is not a ‘crumbling type’ and always considered to be the ‘solid pillar’ by Jal, breaks down weeping saying it is too much for her and she does not know what to do, how to take care of the old man. In the absence of the domestic help, the burden of the house work is also on her head. She complains that looking after Pappa had been hard enough when he was not bed-ridden and now everything has become ‘depressing and difficult’. She regrets that with so much technology, scientists and engineers still have not invented a less disgusting thing than a bed pan. “Who needs mobile phones and Internet and all that rubbish? How about a high-tech gadget for doing No. 2 in bed?” (FM 78).

The statement of Coomy is to be given full weight as the function of such statements in the novel is to stress the social nature of Nariman’s situation. Such details may appear unnecessary to some readers but through the problems faced by Coomy and Jal and through the debates and discourse among the characters, the writer has drawn the conclusion that the aged in nuclear urban families constitute a major social problem, the seriousness of which is likely to increase in the times to come, as children are entering into that phase of development where family relations are bound to become more calculative and more commercial. Paucity of funds, dearth of time and scarcity of space and practical problems in looking after the old parents in the urban homes are the problems the solutions of which are not visible in the near future. Mistry is
aware that since ours is a culture where children are expected to look after the old parents, Government assistance for the senior citizens is almost non-existent and children don’t have sufficient time and funds for the aged parents, so they resent the presence of these elderly people in their homes.

Mistry’s fiction reveals that old people, who are dependent on others, not only face many problems on account of being seriously ill, but also create unmanageable problems for their family members. “I don’t want to be disgusted with pappa while he lies helpless in bed, but I can’t help hating him” (FM 82), confesses Coomy. Thus, the writer makes it known that the old people like Nariman who need special assistance are not able to get it from their family members since these family members are neither prepared nor trained nor willing to provide that help. Nariman is tormented by his family members and the members of his family are also under unutterable stress because of the new responsibility of looking after the bedridden old man. Coomy is all the time cribbing, criticizing and sometimes becomes too much irritable, loses her temper and uses bitter words. This is not to be taken just as part of her bad nature but is also a manifestation of her stress as she has to own the responsibility of ailing Nariman almost single handedly.

Mistry’s personal commitment to the cause of old parents is seen in every work written by him. The author tries to find out all the possible reasons behind the utter neglect of old parents by their family members and establishes convincingly that not only the moral degradation, insensitivity and the practical problems faced by the family members in looking after the old parents are responsible for the loss of their prestige in urban homes, but paucity of funds is also an important issue that makes the children face immense stress when they are required to keep the old parents with them. In Family Matters, Roxana, who always gets satisfaction from serving her aged parent, is greatly troubled by a lack of funds. She muses: “If at least the medicines were
covered by his pension, I could manage the rest. Government should be ashamed of itself, the amount it pays” (FM 191). Roxana’s state of mind and her anxiety is clearly visible here. Money is not a small issue that makes her lose her peace of mind.

Yezad is upset by Nariman’s presence in his small flat not only because of the morning stress, the overcrowding and the smelly front room but also because providing for one more person, when every rupee is budgeted, is a tough task. It is shown by the writer that the ordinary things like soap and washing and dhobi get affected. The Chemist’s bill is paid by making up the difference from housekeeping money. To compensate, Roxana purchases bread but not butter, and a small tin of cooking oil instead of the more economical large one. The quality and quantity of every household item gets affected by Nariman’s arrival in Roxana’s house. Murad grumbles there is no butter on his toast and Jehangir complains that his tea is bitter and Yezad does not like this daily fuss. There is an environment of quarrels and sarcastic comments all the times in the house. Gone completely is the tenderness of their relationship. Angry hisses and harsh mutterings of Yezad and Roxana make Jehangir cry in the dark. Thus, dearth of money is a serious issue confronted by the family which has to own the responsibility of keeping the old and ailing parent with them.

It is more than evident that apart from the physical difficulty of looking after the sick father, it is also the involvement of money in Nariman’s treatment and upkeep that makes Coomy forget all decorum. She does not want to bring Nariman back to her house, so she goes to Roxana’s flat with Jal and makes suggestions that Nariman should spend some more time at Roxana’s place. When Nariman insists going to his house, without bothering about the sentiments of the old man, Coomy says, “You can come back with us now pappa. But that means calling one ambulance to take you from here to Chateau Felicity, a second ambulance next week to take you to hospital for X-ray. Then a third one to take you home again” (FM 174). No doubt
Coomy’s words speak of her money-mindedness, but the issue of money is raised repeatedly by the writer to highlight that economic constraints make the family members adopt rude and unsympathetic attitude towards the sick people.

Apart from the difficulties in keeping the old people in small houses of the big cities, the issue of unsupportive attitude of the unsympathetic children towards senior people in the family occupies considerable space in *Family Matters* and it is the only issue raised in his last novel *The Scream*. The writer posits that the traditional Indian family structure where people of advanced age used to have an almost enviable place is on the verge of collapse. The writer has also pointed out that the loss of prestige of the old people in urban areas is not restricted to any particular caste or class of society, but is a social problem of modern-day India and he also records that the problem is increasing in its magnitude because India does not boast of having suitable plans and policies for the senior citizens like the western countries. Mistry shows that the senior persons are becoming the most miserable lot in contemporary urban homes. As a champion of the cause of senior citizens of the country, he always gets an elbow room to make his observation and suggestion about the issue. It is his unwavering concern for the neglect of the old people in the contemporary urban families that results in his making the old man the sole protagonist of his last novel and the depiction of the stress of old age its only theme. By refusing to assign any name to the protagonist or to the city, Mistry has inferred that the neglect of old people is today a pan-Indian concern.

Through the abandonment, desertion and utter neglect of the unnamed old man by his family members, Mistry is able to dismantle the established notion that India still has a rich culture of respecting the parents. The very perception of Indian family being a strong support system gets challenged in contemporary urban homes where the old people are victimized on a daily basis. Mistry takes up the cause of all parents who had remained bothered about the better
future of their children, but receive harsh treatment when they need the support of these very children. The loss of our value system leading to the ‘othering’ of parents is the significant theme of *Family Matters* and the loss of identity of old parents is the sole theme of his last novel, *The Scream*. This time the paucity of funds or scarcity of space is not discussed but the unconcerned and unsympathetic attitude of the family members towards the old man is detailed by the writer. The old man has not been assigned any name. Neither any name of the city nor the identity or profession of any member of the family is disclosed. The use of certain Hindi words makes it clear that the novel depicts the domestic drama of an urban home in modern India. The novelist has presented a situation in which children are simply not in a mood to look after the old and ailing member of the family. Mistry is not just being critical of the selfish attitude of modern generation, he gives us the very details which make it almost impossible for the old man to keep going.

It is mentioned that the family members dislike the very presence of the old man in the house as they want to keep a dog but they are unable to do so since one of the rooms is occupied by the old man. Thrown into an ignored corner of the house, the old man is leading a hopeless life. He lives in the front room while others share the back room. Mentally upset, physically distressed, the protagonist dreads darkness and loneliness which are his constant companions. Unable to dictate his terms, too dependent to tell his demands, rendered useless by senile decay, the old man suffers from delusions and hallucinations. Being a victim of domestic violence, the protagonist is a pitiable character who needs a lot of sympathy. Totally ignorant of their duties as children, ‘they’ don’t bother about the basic needs of old man. There is no toilet attached to his room and he is not allowed to use that facility in the back room during the night. He has become too suspicious and thinks that ‘they’ in the backroom want him to die.
It is through the thoughts of the old man that the novelist explores the ugly facts of modern families. Unlike the other novels of Rohinton Mistry, there are no debates and dialogues among characters on social issues. The tension and anxiety of old people is conveyed through suspicions and doubts of the old man whose “torn, stained and lumpy mattress”(TS10) is on the ‘floor’. The old man is a representative of thousands of millions of old people who are compelled to live a life of utter loneliness and total neglect. What one witnesses in *The Scream* is the very picture of most urban houses where the old parents are treated like beasts of burden. It is worthy of mention that children in *The Scream* are not very poor since they want to keep a dog and complain that the pet can’t be kept in the house because the space is being occupied by the old man. What is acutely missing is the feeling of respect, nay, any feeling at all for the old parent. Unlike other novels, the critics can’t trace any ‘Parsiness’ this time. Thus, the novel is not about Parsi concerns but about very human concerns. Mistry makes it known that the ill-treatment of the old is an issue which is generally not discussed in houses of the parliament, generally not reported at police stations, not dragged to the courts, but the seriousness of which is frightening. The novel is a quest for the bare minimum -- the right to live with dignity so long as one is alive. The novel records dearth of emotions for senior citizens in urban homes and it is the absence of humanity for the old man that supplies the material for this novel.

On the very opening page, the age of the central character is repeatedly emphasized who is quite old, ill and medicines are his constant companions. The kind of food he is given and the warnings and directions issued to him by his family members speak of his bad condition. Sometimes he finds it difficult to rise from his chair and his eyes are also very weak. The family members suggest that he must not read past midnight, he must rest, he must not go blind. The old man around whom the story of *The Scream* revolves keeps on analysing his quandary:
All my life I have feared mice, starvation and loneliness. But now that loneliness has arrived, it’s not so bad. What could I do, the others no longer wanted me among them, in the back room. I suppose I was a nuisance. Hence my mattress on the floor, in the front room, wedged between the sofa and the baby grand. I am in a tight spot. One wrong turn and I could bruise a knee or crack my forehead. The others were only too glad to see me go. They began laying out the stained and lumpy mattress for me each night. (TS 6-7)

The novel reveals that the old man suffers from many physical, mental and psychological problems. He is not able to sleep properly because of his age and worries. He locates “signs of trouble” (4), everywhere. He hears screams outside his window and the screams are followed by shrieks. Since the scream disturbs none in the flat as no one opens a window and pokes out a curious head, it becomes clear that the scream is non-existent. It is obvious that the protagonist is too old and suffers from psychological disorders and can no longer separate the genuine from the spurious, the real from the acted. But it is beyond doubt that the old man is horribly lonely and he dreads being alone. His place in the front room instead of back room indicates that the old man is utterly neglected and cornered by the family. The very fact that he sleeps on the mattress on the floor and the adjectives like the “stained and lumpy mattress” confirm that the senior citizen is being isolated, ignored and inhumanly treated by the family, his physical and mental deterioration is nobody’s concern in the house and his emotional needs are not taken care of. ‘They’ don’t even think that he gets hurt by their treatment. He feels that other members of family eat together sitting on the dining table and they also sleep in the same room “and for me a mattress flung across the floor. What days have come. Kaliyug is indeed upon us. It’s a world gone arsy-versy” (TS 8).
The novelist does not expect the readers to believe everything the old man says and he has made efforts to make it known that the old man is mentally not sound. There is not an iota of doubt that the central character, whose pathetic tale is being narrated in *The Scream* is a bit psychic who hears screams but equally important is the fact that the family members are least concerned about the health and happiness of the old man. It is also possible that the ill-treatment of the family members is responsible for such a bad mental state of the old man. In fact, old age is a period when the limbs do not co-operate, the organs which have rendered life-long service seem to fail, minor ailments and major diseases create difficulties, memory begins to fail and medical bills increase and a person needs a lot of physical and emotional support but conditions of existence in modern metros, declining of human values and modernization of Indian tradition has led to the loss of respect for senior citizens in urban homes. Treated as mere burden by the family, rendered invalid by age, they suffer greater mental agony not only on account of their age but also because they fail to get the required physical and emotional support from the family.

G.C. Davidson and J.M Neele in *Abnormal Psychology* state: “Higher levels of social support reduce risk of illness, a close knit family would be regarded as providing structural social support” (Davidson 198). The psychologists regard family as an asset in the time of distress and it is the quality of a person’s relationship with his family members that becomes the pillar of strength for a person in distress. Michael W. Eysenck in *Fundamentals of Psychology* postulates “negative events or occurrences” are bound to “cause high levels of stress” (91) and “stress causes illness fairly directly by impairing the functioning of the immune system” (95). Thus, not only the importance of family is established by the studies, it has also been proved that excessive stress may cause abnormal symptoms like depression in a sensitive individual.

Nariman’s acute stress leading to fits of depression in *Family Matters* and mental imbalance of the unnamed old man in *The Scream* can be understood when we take into account
that both of them remain under acute emotional and psychological stress for being lonely and being neglected by their families. Both the novels aim to analyse the impact of seclusion, neglect and disrespect on the psyche of old parents. In *Family Matters*, it is through the predicament of old Nariman that Mistry raises the issue of quality of life available to senior citizens in urban homes and by situating *The Scream* in an unnamed city, he makes it evident that many of the old people in contemporary urban homes are under acute psychological stress and anxiety because of being neglected by the family.

The old man in *The Scream* always feels that he is no longer wanted in the house and ‘they’ want him to die. Unable to face seclusion and insult, the old man develops symptoms of mental illness. Nariman is gripped in the knowledge of his helplessness. The understanding that Jal and Coomy are fed up with the work, with him, with his being alive makes him sad and gloomy. When he needs some help, he does not dare call Jal and Coomy for help. They find him weeping, sometimes in the afternoon during his nap, though most often at night. When Dr. Tarapore is consulted about Nariman’s deteriorating condition, he comments: “Depression is no uncommon during illness, but in old people it can be severe” (FM 84). Dr. Tarapore’s statement needs to be given due importance here as it proves that in the absence of the required emotional support, the old people may develop symptoms of mental problems.

The writer regrets the collapse of the traditional Indian family system which used to revere the parents. No longer integrated and supportive, how the family becomes the source of acute mental and psychological stress for the sensitive old people is seen in *Family Matters* and *The Scream*. Starved of the tender care of family members, ignored by the society and Government, Nariman and the unnamed old man represent millions old parents who are compelled to lead miserable lives in urban homes. Mistry indicates that the neglect, disrespect and seclusion of the old parents is a recent urban phenomenon which needs immediate address. It
needs mention that Mistry does not depict the suppression and seclusion of old people in rural world. In one of his novels *A Fine Balance*, Mistry takes the reader to the village areas and establishes the belief that the village community, the rural children and the agrarian environment in general is not hostile towards the elders.

Apart from the utter insensitivity towards the sick and old people by the family members, Mistry’s fiction also reveals that the relationships among the family members in recent times are losing their sheen. A total lack of concern, attachment, aloofness and apathy marks the interpersonal relationships in the families which can be grasped from the conversation between family members. It is seen that people stay together not because they like to but because they are compelled by circumstances to do so. The inter-personal relationships between the members of the family in Mistry’s last two novels are far from being healthy. Coomy and Jal stay with Nariman because there is no other option available to them. There is hardly any communication between the father and the children in the house. Jal remains confined to his room and Nariman is a kind of prisoner in Chateau Felicity. In the name of conversation, it is only Coomy who speaks, dictates, criticizes and cribs. The only topics that the family members discuss are family matters which include only increasing prices of household articles to problems in keeping the old man with them and money involved in looking after the old man. General topics as subject matter of conversation end up becoming money matters in their house. If we take conversation among family members as the yardstick of their relationship with each other, Nariman is not having any pleasant relationship with his step-children and the old man in *The Scream* is in far worse state than Nariman since the family members have placed him in the front room and nobody ever talks to him.

It is also made clear by the author that the responsibility of looking after the old man alters the nature of affection and sentiments in the interpersonal relationship of family members.
Coomy remains jealous and annoyed with her sister Roxana since the latter has escaped the responsibility of looking after Nariman. Yezad stops being the loving and doting husband after Nariman’s arrival in his flat. Unreasonable and complaining all the time, he enters into unhappy clashes of opinions with his wife over the responsibility of keeping the old man in his flat. Whereas effective care and concern, proper food and diet for his own sons are above everything else for Yezad, he is totally unconcerned about his duty towards the old Nariman. As head of the family he is bothered about fish and butter for his sons, tries to find fair and foul means to increase family income but plans to ‘kick’ Nariman out of his flat. Yezad’s behaviour shocks the readers since he is presented as a devout Parsi who gives values to ethics. The gradual change in his attitude towards the old man shows that he cares about propriety only if it is to be maintained by others. One wonders if Yezad’s actions represent the noblest values of Zoroastrianism. Strangely enough, he does not consider Nariman to be a member of his family. Roxana asks a direct question and a pertinent one: “What is Pappa if not family?” (FM 196).

The author points to a sorry state of affairs where our old parents are no longer the part of our families. Mistry makes it evident that changes in the structure and functions of family is becoming the cause of unbearable stress for the parents. Now children want to live life according to their own plans and nobody wants to keep their old parents with them. It would be apt to view *Family Matters* as a social document highlighting the dilapidation of family in modern times. The writer shows that not only paucity of funds, scarcity of space and time compel children to adopt a pragmatic approach towards vital issues of life but lack of societal pressure also contributes to making children free from their duties towards old members in the family. Many sociological surveys and studies conducted on family structures in modern times find that parents and children are more likely to come in contact with new situations and new challenges these days. Since looking after the old people is a difficult job, the children tend to ignore this...
responsibility. Members of Nariman’s family in *Family Matters* and the family members of the old man in *The Scream* are representatives of this section of society. Coomy can afford to be free, unabashed, bitter and nagging all the time in the absence of any pressure and criticism from friends, neighbours, colleagues, and relatives. In the absence of any societal pressure, children often find it too boring to keep their parents with them. The spirit of individualism has become so deep-rooted that taking care of the old parents does not form the part of their curriculum.

Everyone aware of the traditional family structure would know that the open display of disrespect towards elders was rarely reported in earlier times. Pressure from the family, community and neighbours used to play a significant role in determining the behaviour pattern of a person. In recent decades, Indian society has witnessed drastic change in every sphere of life including the absence of any role of society in regulating the life of an individual. Mistry authenticates that gone is the era when neighbours used to interfere and the relatives used to intervene in family matters. What was once considered bad, unethical and unusual has become a norm. What used to startle has become acceptable. What was permissible in the context of few is being observed in all sections of society. What was shocking years back is not even discussed by people. Consequently family as an institution in India has degraded and degenerated.

The primary motive of Mistry’s creative endeavour is to find solution of the problems faced by the parents and very old individuals in modern families because “To rest content with portraying personal problems is not too satisfying a job for Mistry” (Batra 12). First of all, the writer recommends the need for moral education for the children. He strongly feels that the children should be taught the meaning of being educated which constitutes not merely in getting admission to good colleges but in being better human beings. While addressing the issue of ill-treatment of parents by their own children, Mistry holds the parents, to some extent, responsible for their problems. He evinces that these days the parents don’t seem to be concerned about the
character building of their children. Getting children admitted to good schools, supervising their curricular and extra-curricular activities and worrying about their career absorbs the energies of the parents. In the modern competitive world, parents only prepare their children to get success in life, to become doctors and engineers, to emigrate to foreign lands and don’t prepare them to become good citizens. The writer posits that becoming doctors and engineers may not make life worth living but being a good human being is essential.

Mistry puts forward the argument that the parents should awaken, ponder and stop not till they make their children realize that looking after the parents in their old age is their moral, social and legal responsibility. Home is an important ground for nurturing a child and the parents are the first teachers to instill this sense of responsibility in children. Parents’ lack of concern for moral guidance of their children has adversely affected the characters of their children. Mistry insists that it is high time we adopt measures to control the degradation of our culture. The parents should monitor and motivate the new generation towards a proper path. When parents fail to teach the value of good behaviour through their own example, family is bound to move towards its putrefaction. In Family Matters, Yezad, who fails to fulfill his duty towards the old father, cannot expect that his sons will retain their propriety. No doubt there is a lack of space in his house but throwing the old father out of the house is not the solution. It is against morality, ethics and culture that parents should be abandoned in the time of need.

M.N. Srinivas in his book Social Change in Modern India observes that “elite households have become articulators of the values of a highly competitive, educational and employment system” (Srinivas 139). The truth of this statement by Srinivas nowhere gets explained in a better way than in the house of Gustad in Such A Long Journey and in Pleasant Villa in Family Matters. Gustad is not much concerned about other things but remains bothered about the performance of his children in school, even their participation in extra-curricular activities is
quite important to him. When Sohrab performs well in any activity in the school, the father is beside himself with joy.

A devout Parsi who is very particular about his daily Kusti and who is very proud of his Parsi tradition and culture, Gustad does feel bad at the casual behaviour of his sons towards rites and rituals but is not very serious on this issue. His excessive concern and tension about the report cards and results of his children is always evident. He leaves no stone unturned to make his son perform well in exams. He even purchases costly almonds to make him ‘brainy’. When Sohrab gets admission in IIT, the thrilled father says, “I am telling you, our son will do wonderfully at IIT, he will be the best engineer ever to graduate from there” (SALJ 27). Yezad in *Family Matters* is also seen preparing his sons for material success only when he says: “Study useful things - computers, M.B.A., and they will welcome you. Not useless things like me, history and literature and philosophy” (FM 45). Mistry, thus, shows that the environment in homes in big cities reflects the values of a highly competitive society and the education system has been trivialised to work towards providing well-paying jobs. In the first place, young generation has no time to look after the old parents. Secondly, they have hardly any respect for our traditional culture. Further, the parents, too, have to own the moral responsibility of producing a generation that is conscious only about career and earning money.

It is a fact known to all that life in modern metros like Bombay is quite demanding and expensive. Adjustment, compromise and adaptability to modern forces is required for survival in such cities. Paucity of funds, lack of space and dearth of time are the hard realities of urban life to be adjusted with. But the writer firmly asserts that these factors cannot be made the excuses to neglect the old parents in the hour of need.

Let’s not assume that the writer does not understand the problems faced by the children in looking after the old parents when he recommends unconditional service to the parents.
Detailed description of the problems faced by the Chenoys and adjustments made by Roxana, Yezad and their sons is also given by the author in *Family Matters*. In fact, the efforts made by the family and Roxana’s non-complaining and adjusting attitude is the writer’s comment on the need to behave well with the parents. Not only does Roxana make every sacrifice for the ailing Nariman, she teaches the lesson of being respectful to her sons and she does not even hesitate to take Yezad to task when he behaves in an unethical manner with his old father-in-law. Roxana, who has always been quite humble and docile, challenges her husband and tells him that she is not going to tolerate any insult of her father. Not only does she enter into a heated discussion and fights with Yezad over the issue of respect of the old man in the family, she even threatens to leave the house if Yezad does not mend his ways.

Through Yezad’s behaviour pattern, Mistry makes us understand that the failure of parents to drill sense of morals in their children may be the major cause of stress and distress in modern urban families. Parenting is one of the most important duties of domestic life. How our children will behave, what kind of citizens will they become depends upon our parenting. Yezad tells the story of his father’s honesty to his sons, always tries to convince them about the relevance of living by that ideal, and frets and frowns when he finds his son reading Enid Blyton’s books. But Yezad’s level of faith in values is tested in the face of trying circumstances. His own faith in the value system proves superficial and shallow as he proves to be utterly inconsiderate and selfish when Nariman comes to stay with them. He even goes to the extent of chiding and scolding his son when the latter gives the urine bottle to his sick grandpa.

*Family Matters* is a study of fluctuating commitment to values in the face of problems of different kind. The novel posits that a person with superficial or shallow faith in the value system will change his behaviour pattern in the face of trying circumstances. This is aptly proved by change in Yezad’s behaviour after Nariman’s arrival in Pleasant Villa. The way personal,
familial and social values change under the pressure of various factors and how financial crunch deals a body blow to the value system cherished by the members in the family is shown in *Family Matters*.

A close reading of the novel may make us draw the inference that religion is the root of profound and permanent values of life which makes us follow and practice morality. Religious ideas of charity, love, piety, sympathy and mercy not only lay the foundation of a good home and a good society, religion also helps people check the tendency of becoming unjust, unsympathetic and tyrannical. Quite possible that modern generation is losing its faith in any religion and God and this loss has made them cold-hearted.

Fascinated by the complexity of personal relationships, Mistry has debated the role of moral values in human relationships. Mistry highlights that a loss of faith has an adverse effect on our social behaviour. Having no faith in any value, modern children don’t feel any prick of conscience when they indulge in immoral behaviour towards their elders. This is exemplified in *Family Matters* where Nariman is shifted to Roxana’s flat by Coomy with a promise of bringing him back in three weeks’ time. In fact, it is only her deceitful plan to get rid of the responsibility of looking after the old man. She openly admits to Jal that she cannot bring Nariman back. Unable to overcome her revulsion for the smelly sick-room chores, she plans to hammer the roof of his room to avoid his re-arrival in his own house. The act is quite deceitful, destructive and extreme but Coomy always uses the past to justify her actions. She is quite cautious that her act should appear ‘genuine’ and everything should look ‘realistic’. She creates a mess of everything by creating holes and cracks in the ceiling, she makes the furniture and floor wet, so that it would look ‘more natural’. She is not ashamed of casting even God in a supportive role in her deceitful drama. Quite dramatic in her manner, she breaks the news to her step father in these words: “I must say, pappa, God is watching after you. If you were in your bed last night, a big chunk could
have cracked your head. May be your broken ankle and moving to pleasant villa, was God’s way of protecting you” (FM 183).

Coomy’s ‘crazy plan’ not only reflects the modern generation’s unwillingness to look after the old parents, it also shows the lack of ethics and morals in this generation. When Coomy adopts deceitful and destructive measures to keep Nariman away from Chateau Felicity, her brother Jal asks a question and a pertinent one:

“How will we live with this on our conscience?”

“We’ll get used to it. I am sure conscience is easier to look after than Pappa. To be honest, I cannot bear the thought of him back…” (FM 174).

This instant answer from Coomy reveals her character. Only an unscrupulous person who has no faith in any value system can show such hatred and contempt for elders. *Family Matters* depicts a sorry state of domestic life where human values suffer. There was a time when service to the parents was considered to be the moral duty of children and old parents were served, obeyed and looked after without any selfish motive. But now the time has changed and the very definition of duty has changed with the changing times. Coomy’s attitude reflects moral degradation of our culture.

How the urban homes can victimize the senior citizens has been vividly presented by the author. It is felt that urban homes are replete with instances of cruelty towards old parents and selfless service to parents in their old age is no longer a norm. Children have become practical-minded opportunists who want the property of parents but shirk their responsibilities. One feels aghast: What is going on in the country?

We cannot see the brazenness of Coomy and Yezad as unusual or temporary or exceptional. Since Mistry’s novels are deeply rooted in social realities, we should not treat his characters as mere fictional ones but a reflection of the real people of our society. Over the last
few decades, the ill-treatment of parents by their children has become mainstream news, at least in urban areas. The journey from *Tales from Firozsha Baag* to *The Scream* cannot make us hope that the things will change and the happy days will be here again. The story of young India, getting up in the sunlight for 21st Century is not without its stress for the elderly citizens. The stress of a generation abandoned by hope is reflected in the distress of Nariman. Alone in his lost hope, totally neglected by members of his family, if he weeps, it is his helplessness that gets reflected in his sobs and mutterings. Through the unnamed old man, *The Scream* narrates the same story of victimization of old parents by their family members.

After reading *Family Matters* and *The Scream*, the question that at once comes to mind is: Why the parents only think about the present and future of their children and don’t spare anything for their rainy day? When will they learn that the children can ditch them in their old age? Not only does Mistry lay bare the ugly facts that children can exploit their parents, the novelist also asserts that the children stand on their feet only because of sacrifice and support of their parents. If Coomy and Jal are residing in a seven room apartment in a metro like Bombay, it is because their father has put Chateau Felicity in their name. Yezad’s Pleasant Villa, too, is a gift from Nariman. It is unfortunate that neither Coomy nor Yezad is ready to own the responsibility of looking after an ailing and old Nariman. Being simple and trusting, Nariman puts his property in the name of his children and that becomes the cause of his problems. Mistry makes us feel how our value system has collapsed, how family as a support system is marching towards its ruin. He also voices the need for the parents to be alert.

The writer hints that it is time for the parents to wake up from their deep slumber and make plans and policies for their future since the responsibility for their future to be secure and safe, obviously, will have to be owned by the parents themselves. Mistry’s fiction documents that in their zeal to secure the present and future of their children, the parents tend to forget their
own life. *Family Matters* is a kind of warning to the parents that they should not distribute all their property among the children as money is the most important factor that makes the children downright selfish and the highly calculative modern generation does not want to spend on the needs of their parents. Had Nariman possessed money after his retirement, Coomy would not have thrown him out of his own house.

Nariman’s case should not be regarded a matter of injustice done to just an individual. Nor should we regard Nariman as a fictional character only whose story is to be read and forgotten. There are millions of Narimans who face exploitation at the hands of their own family members. The tragedy of Nariman and the unnamed old man is reflective of a trend that needs to be addressed on a war-footing. Our country has always enjoyed the reputation of being very cultured where the parents are revered unconditionally. It is strange that in a country where stone idols are worshipped and God is invoked as father, there is very little reverence left for the father who has made innumerable sacrifices for his children. One is shocked, saddened and angry at this moral degradation.

Mistry’s works suggest that it is not the time to talk about the fall of standards only but is certainly the moment to find solution of the problem that has become so grim and grave. A radical change in the domestic sphere, where initial socialization of the individual takes place, is the need of the hour. All parents should be cautious like Roxana who is very particular about the childhood training of her sons. She is of the view that Nariman’s presence in the house will make Murad and Jehangir sensitive towards old age. She tells Yezad: “Be glad our children can learn about old age, about caring -- it will prepare them for life, make them better human beings” (FM 286). But immediately comes the answer from Yezad: “First they should learn about fun and happiness, and enjoy their youth. Lots of time to learn about sickness and dying” (286).
Roxana, however, does not see eye to eye with her husband on the issue. It is undoubtedly the result of her timely training that her sons are so concerned about their grandpa, despite being discouraged to do so by Yezad. Through Yezad’s attitude towards Nariman, Mistry has made it clear that parents too, to some extent, are responsible for the absence of concern for old age in their children. In the absence of any practical training, the children don’t learn to accommodate the old people in their homes and parents like Yezad fail to teach moral lessons when the time is ripe. Children born and brought up in such a family environment become self-centered and tend to ignore their parents when the need arises. Mistry firmly establishes that the parents have a decisive role in the character building of their children.

Roxana’s caring and concerned behaviour towards the old father is part of her practical guidance to her sons. Despite exhaustion, she remains non-complaining and strains every nerve to make Nariman happy. Her moralizing, her lectures on ethics, her guidance about the role of a family are quite important for her growing sons. Example is always better than precept, the author seems to suggest. Mistry does not just record the loss and lapse, he tries to find out the causes of collapse of family as an institution in modern India that always stood by the weak. To an average reader, Mistry seems to be devoting much energy and effort in discussing the value of having a family. There are many characters and situations chosen by him that express his views about the role of parents in a family and many episodes and incidents are inserted into the plot of the novel that becomes the occasion to lecture and moralize. Sometimes he appears to be excessively critical of the philosophy of modern generation that neglects their old parents.

There can be no denying the fact that there is an overdose of discussions among characters in the novel and it also becomes melodramatic at places. This problem-solving approach of the author sometimes makes the reading of the novel tedious and boring, but the committed writer cannot escape the responsibility of sensitizing the public against social evils.
Despite certain flaws, the novel is quite significant as it has laid bare a current social problem and has also suggested some possible solutions. India will become a morally sterile and decadent society if the culture of treating the seniors with respect is forgotten by the juniors. It is the sense of sacrifice and close emotional bonds within families that make life worth living. Care and concern are always required in an individual’s life and only a family can provide them. Mistry gives a lot of importance to the family in a man’s life and the disintegration of traditional family system because of the changing attitudes of the family members is deeply mourned by the writer. Mistry gives a full and comprehensive picture of the stress of social change in family as an institution where he sheds light on the issue of sibling rivalry, parent-child relationship, man-woman relationship and the place of old members in the family.