CHAPTER IV

*Family Matters: Fusion of the Private and the Public*

Mistry's third novel *Family Matters* at one level, as the title suggests, is about behaviours and relationships of members of individual families. At the same time family matters are no longer in the purview of private domains but in the changing socio-political contexts one is a witness to how these so-called private family dealings spill onto the public domain affecting the larger communities in a society. In the novel, the reader is offered a peek into the strengths and weaknesses of the Indian family-value system; the willingness to help and to be together during times of need and the desire to keep distance when the situation demands. Actions by members of a family are sometimes guided by jealousy and anger and at other times directed by love and warmth. Compassion and loyalty find a strong place in the Indian familial landscape. In other words positive and negative emotions are intermingled and at times in confrontation with one another in *Family Matters* and in that sense it is truly a representation of the typical Indian family.

With clever use of the word "matters" in the title of the novel, Mistry has succeeded in bringing out the complexity of the theme of his novel: the word can be taken for a plural noun, signifying therefore the problems and concerns of a family or the word can be a verb implying the importance of the family as a unit of society and/or nation. Thus, the novel perceives the family to be the intersection of the private and the public.

Barucha's observation about the novel may also be useful here. She remarks that it may be termed as a "child is the father of Man" (169) text.
because it is through Jehangir the younger son of Yezad’s that the reader gets to know of the family’s journey and politics in its attempt to attain the ever elusive happiness. The children are a vital part in the family and it is through teaching them the right lessons at home they learn to care for and respect members of the family and outside of it. In turn it is through the expression of their selfless love that the adults also learn of their filial responsibilities. For example, when Yezad is angry over the need to look after Nariman in his tiny flat, Roxana his wife reminds him of Gandhi’s teachings that “there was nothing nobler than the services of the weak, the old, the unfortunate” (286). She goes on to list out the advantages of having the elderly at home. “... be glad our children can learn about old age, about caring – it will prepare them for life, make them better human beings” (286). That the novel is about love, care and concern for the old and aged and human relationships is brought out in yet another poignant moment when Jehangir feeds his grandfather. For Roxana that was a precious moment as she was witnessing something almost sacred.

Jehangir filled the spoon again and raised it to his grandfather’s lips. A grain of rice strayed, lingering at the corner of his mouth. Jehangir took the napkin to gently retrieve it before it fell.

And for a brief instant, Roxana felt she understood the meaning of it all, of birth and life and death. My son, she thought, my father, and the food I cooked... A lump came to her throat; she swallowed. (113)
But sadly as the novel progresses the reader is given to understand that the seemingly peaceful family of Nariman Vakeel's has fallen apart and divided into Jal and Coomy into one unit and Yezad and Roxana into another with Nariman belonging nowhere.

The novel at another level may be said to deal with the macrocosmic Parsi family; that is, the whole of the Parsi community may be regarded as one big family. As every family is bound to undergo trials and tribulations the Parsi community experiences as well its ups and downs. In the past its traditions and rituals were considered superior and pure but now those values apparently have eroded and the family itself is almost on the verge of extinction. From this point of view it could be said that through *Family Matters* Mistry is attempting at articulating the distinct Parsi identity and singularities within the dominant Indian cultural space. That also explains why Mistry has allotted a huge space in the novel to Parsi customs, issues, culture and history in the context of inter-ethnic understanding and tussle with the majority community.

The community consciousness of Parsi writers in general has been a common topic of discussion in the Indian literary arena. Avadesh Kumar Singh in an article says that the Parsi writers' "works exhibit consciousness of their community in such a way that the community emerges as a protagonist" (28). Confirming this perspective is Dharan's affirmation on the Post-Independence Parsi writing. He says "Post-Independence Parsi writing in English is ethnocentric, culture specific and community oriented" (7).
Both Singh and Dharan have quite clearly captured Mistry’s actions but perhaps not the intention behind the actions. Mistry’s actions as seen in all of his novels are loud and clear. Bombay is almost a central character in his novels and interestingly the images of Bombay are honest, accurate, graphic and authentic. The characters are invariably from the Parsi community. Could one presume therefore that the focus on ethnocentric social matrix is decided by his familiarity with the community? Perhaps, yes. While observing that Fiction is largely autobiographical Mistry says,

> Writers write best about what they know. In the broad sense, as a processing of everything one hears or witnesses, all fiction is autobiographical—imagination ground through the mill of memory. It is impossible to separate the two ingredients (Vinoda, 175).

Again Mistry has not clearly revealed here his intentions. But a serious reader would not fail to miss the political and cultural undercurrents operating within the novel. In the political backdrop the novel describes the Parsi predicament in the wake of Babri Masjid riots. As in all his novels Mistry places *Family Matters* in a specific historical context. A close reading of the novel brings to light the fact that the narration of this novel which is centered on Nariman and his family members covers three generations of Parsis in the fast-changing Indian socio-political context. However, ironically though, the predicament is the same all through the three generations. The political situation hasn’t changed much between Nariman’s time and that of Yezad’s or even that of Jehangir’s. The political conflicts that plagued the nation during
Nariman's time continue to wreak havoc on those of Yezad and Jehangir as well, and as a minority community their position in the majoritarian politics is uncertain. Hence from a political-cultural perspective, *Family Matters* may be seen as a work that deals with identarian politics as observed by Leela Gandhi (126); a work that tries to secure a distinct space for the Parsi community within the hegemonic culture.

Mistry's intentions through *Family Matters* as one reads it closely become quite clear. Mistry's objective seems to be the preservation of the entire, varied, and rich cultural heritage of the dying community for posterity. Many a time Mistry has expressed this in his interviews and there is ample evidence in all his novels to affirm his intension.

Nariman Vakeel in *Family Matters* may be said to symbolize the ageing Parsi community which is moribund. The metaphor is quite appropriate as he is 79 years old, afflicted with Parkinson's disease, immobile and slowly dying. "That's the problem with the Parkinson's," emphatically proclaims Dr. Fitter in the novel. "Never gets better" (412). Nariman in the novel may be allowed to die. But to allow a community and religion as old as 3500 years, which came into being even before the Christian or the Buddhist era to disappear from the face of this earth is definitely depressing. Mistry clearly reflects this view in his interview to Dirk Bennet. He says, "And it's a pity when anything disappears in this world, any species, man, animal or insect" (57).
It may be safely surmised that among the three novels of Mistry’s, that here in *Family Matters* he dwells on the future of his community at great length. While pointing out what the problem with his community is and where it is probably heading, Mistry’s own interest in tracing the reasons for the community’s moribund state is evident. Migration to foreign countries, low birth-rate and high average age of marriage in the community, men and women choosing to remain single may have contributed to this state. Jal, Coomy, Villie Cardmaster, Daisy Icchaporina in *Family Matters*, Kuptitia in *Such a Long Journey* are a few examples. Although Mistry seems to treat these matters in *Family Matters* lightheartedly, beneath the humour one cannot miss the sense of pain and guilt. Inspector Masalavala in *Family Matters* tells Dr. Fitter, “The experts in demographics are confident that fifty years hence, there will be no Parsis left”. To which Dr. Fitter replies bluntly and matter-of-factly. “Extinct, like dinosaurs. They’ll have to study our bones, that’s all” (412). Though the dinosaur imagery is extended further in their alcohol induced discourse naming each other Jalosaurs and Shapurjisauras, Mistry’s anguish about a race being wiped out manifests through Inspector Masalavala’s final cryptic remark. “Yes…it will be a loss to the whole world. When a culture vanishes, humanity is the loser” (415).

But these are only a few concerns that *Family Matters* deals with. There is certainly the story of familial love and affection. And there is Mistry’s struggle at preserving a rich culture which is evident throughout. But more than these issues the novel is about identity politics, about personal and political corruption, about the necessity to learn to live harmoniously in a
multi-cultural environment and to accept diversities as a way of life. In order to secure a ‘safe’ place in the mainstream, the unique individuations of the ethnic minority have to be emphasized. In a multicultural setup where some cultures continue to exercise dominance this trait in the minorities becomes a necessity. As Edward Said rightly observes in *Orientalism*, the advanced cultures have rarely offered the individual anything but imperialism, racism and ethnocentrism for dealing with other cultures (204). It is quite clear that when the majority communities pursue ethno-religious politics, the minorities affirm their ethnic identities by retreating into their ethnocentric enclosures. The desire for homogeneity is on the rise while tolerance to diversity is on the decline. Graham Huggan’s idea of cultural decentralization suggesting a shift of emphasis from the desire for homogeneity towards an acceptance of diversity is certainly missing—perhaps not merely missed but sadly and ironically the reversal seems to be more pronounced.

In this chapter the focus therefore will be on three points. In the backdrop of *Family Matters* as a novel dealing with identity politics, first it will be explored how Mistry attempts to reclaim the lost community identity; second, it will be illustrated, from several examples found in the novel, how personal and political corruption have eroded values in society resulting in the postcolonial decadence; and third, the chapter will examine the ways in which the subaltern, minority discourses take place in spaces dominated by mainstream cultures, highlighting the centre/periphery dichotomy.

Also it will demonstrate the need for and the use of the two modes of revolt as tools of identity reclamation, reasons for the choice of these modes
and their outcome. Eventually all these are pointers to the crumbling edifice of the decadent postcolonial society.

Identity is a complex phenomenon. It is both exclusive and inclusive. It calls for the sharing of a common culture and yet at the same time harps on separateness from others. It is confusing and yet illuminating. On the one hand it looks at separation, isolation and division. On the other, it seeks to enhance similarity within the category and increase the distinctiveness or differences between categories. Wittgenstein said, “there is no finer example of a useless proposition than saying that something is identical to itself” (Shanker 402). Moving from this position, from the notion of ‘being identical to oneself’ to ‘sharing an identity with others’ compounds the issue further. On the one hand identity is important or even essential for one to live at peace with oneself. But paradoxically, it is the same ‘uniqueness’ of this identity that causes innumerable conflicts and enormous violence. In Family Matters there is ample evidence to the fact that the Parsis in general consider their culture and religion superior. Cultural exclusivity and racial purity are integral to the Parsi community. Nariman’s family troubles begin when he tries to defy this established notion of the racial exclusivity. His falling in love with Lucy a non-Parsi girl is the starting point of his downfall. As the elders in the community debate about Nariman’s ‘lufroo with that ferangi woman’ (14) referring to Lucy which in their view will disgrace the community, they are determined to make Nariman learn “to preserve that fine balance between tradition and modernness” (15). In their effort to preserve the rich culture of the community a widow with two children is thrust on Nariman. “Yes, the
widow is our number one choice. She will make you a good wife" (16).

Despite his worldly experience and academic erudition, Nariman is confused; torn between his passion for the one whom he loved and the need to adhere to the dictates of his community commitments, he relents.

Like an invalid steered by doctors and nurses, he drifted through the process, suppressing his doubts and misgivings, ready to believe that the traditional ways were the best. He became the husband of Yasmin Contractor, and formally adopted her children, Jal and Coomy. But they kept their father’s name. To change it to Vakeel would be like rewriting history, suggested his new wife. The simile appealed to his academic soul; he acquiesced." (16)

Although Nariman consents to marrying Yasmin, the fact that he continues to meet with Lucy even after marriage proves that he values his relationship with Lucy equally sacred, if not more. It is this conflict within himself that manifests in the turmoil that his family experiences, causing strain in relationships ultimately resulting in the death of both Yasmin and Lucy and at the end Nariman himself deserted by Jal and Coomy. Ironically this desire to preserve the racial exclusiveness is noticed in Yezad too, despite his awareness of Nariman’s past, he reprimands Murad, his elder son for courting a non-Parsi girl. Yezad warns Murad in no uncertain terms. “I’m warning you, in this there can be no compromise. The rules, the laws of our religion are absolute, this Maharashtrian cannot be your girlfriend” (482). When confronted by Murad, Yezad is quite direct in his answer. “Because we are a
pure Persian race, a unique contribution to this planet, and mixed marriages will destroy that . . . Purity is a virtue worth preserving” (482).

Does Mistry here affirm the notion of cultural superiority or is he questioning it? Perhaps neither. Arguably, Mistry is simply advocating adherence to one’s own culture. No culture is superior or inferior but all of them are different. Differences have to be recognized and accepted. In fact, quite interestingly, Mistry does not in any explicit terms resolve the differences relating to cultural politics between Yezad and Murad in *Family Matters*. While Murad is keen on continuing his relationship with Anjali, a non-Parsi girl, Yezad is very much opposed to it. Intentionally, it seems Mistry leaves the outcome open-ended unlike Firdaus Kanga, another Parsi writer of repute, who in *Trying to Grow* allows the mixed marriage to happen. Rhoda, Nari’s sister, supports her brother’s marriage and explains the new times to her parents:

And that isn’t your fault or Mama’s or anyone’s, it’s the fault of the times we are living in. Everything is changed. The age of miracles is gone. Almost all things have a scientific explanation now. There is no mystery left, no heaven and hell, not even your chin vad pul. Zoroastrianism is no longer a faith to be lived, it’s just a unique cultural heritage (194).

For the young, the community values and tradition don’t matter much. But, community is primary for Yezad and hence not much concession is given to Murad. He is allowed to invite his non-Parsi girlfriend Anjali to his birthday party but not of course without a condition. The condition is simple: Anjali
cannot go anywhere near the prayer cabinet. It is a compromise but one that works well for both. The father and the son have their own spaces and each space has to be respected. Harmony and peace can prevail when the individual space is respected. It's a moving scene that is presented through Jehangir at the end of the novel between the father and the son as they attempt to reconcile with each other.

Still keeping Murad's hand in his, Daddy finally looks into his face. For a few moments they hold each other's unwavering gaze. Now Daddy places his right hand on Murad's head, over the prayer cap, and I think he is saying a prayer. Murad waits without rolling his eyes or displaying any sign of impatience. Then Daddy relieves him of the flowers and betel leaves and nuts, returns them to the tray, and hugs him. Murad responds by putting his arms around Daddy (497).

Very often resolution for identity conflicts is not reached as mutual differences are not recognized and accepted. To resolve such issues in identity politics the commonly used solitarist approach which views human beings as members of exactly one group negating the importance and relevance of plural and multiple identities should be discarded. The notion that human beings are diversely different requires closer examination and perhaps the resolution for these conflicts lies in the understanding and acceptance of the plurality of human identity.

Many theories are employed while discussing identity politics. Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams and Tajfel are a few important names in the fields of
Culture and Identity. In his work *The Myths of Caribbean Identity*, Stuart Hall argues:

Far from the still small point of truth inside us, identities actually come from outside, they are the way in which we are recognized and then come to step into the place of recognitions which others give us. Without the others there is no self. There is no self-recognition (582-583).

Hall’s argument is only partly acceptable. While conceding the notion that identities ‘could’ be given by others one must also take note of the fact that social identities may be created by the groups themselves. Such identities need not necessarily come from the outside.

However, what is essential to all identities is the process of struggle for recognition from the other. The ‘other’ could be other individuals, communities or other social groups. Historically various groups have constructed certain kinds of identities because they have felt exploited, oppressed and dominated. The Parsi community in India, particularly in the Postcolonial situation has all along felt politically suppressed and culturally excluded. As a result the community tries to reclaim and re-describe and reaffirm its authenticity. Rather than accepting the negative scripts offered by a dominant culture about one’s own inferiority, one transforms one’s own sense of self and community, often through consciousness-raising. To attain this, the group engages in self-assertion. Sonia Krucks rightly observes:
What makes identity politics a significant departure from earlier, pre-identarian forms of the politics of recognition is its demand for recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied: it is qua women, qua blacks, qua lesbians that groups demand recognition. The demand is not for inclusion within the fold of "universal humankind" on the basis of shared human attributes; nor is it for respect "in spite of" one's differences. Rather, what is demanded is respect for oneself as different. (85)

Mistry through *Family Matters* is precisely engaged in this task of reclaiming the Parsi cultural identity—asserting the community's 'differences' and demanding respect on that basis.

It may be worthwhile to consider the views of Henri Tajfel, a British social psychologist best known for his pioneering work on the cognitive aspects of prejudice and social identity theory here. Tajfel has extensively written about personal identity and social identity. Although both are important, the social identity which is based on the general characteristics of a community, according to him, receives prominence as it has a value and provides advantage.

Social identity is a person's sense of who one is, based on their social membership(s). The groups they belong to, be it class, family, religion, culture, are an important source of pride and self-esteem. It is these groups which give a sense of belonging to the social world. In order to increase the group's self-image people in the group through conscious efforts enhance the
status of the group. Categorization is resorted to for instance dividing the world into ‘them’ and ‘us’. Between the in-group which is ‘us’ and the out-group which is ‘them’ there is a conflict and tension which is central to the social identity theory. There are three important aspects to be remembered in Social Identity theory: categorization, identification and comparison. The Parsi Community in the novel and Yezad in particular are engaged in all these processes. Yezad, for instance after having been categorized into the Parsi Community group which is defined by certain specific behaviours and practices adopts the identity of the group and finally compares favorably his group with other groups. In the process of enhancing the group’s self-esteem the people in the group sometimes create stereotypes and myths. In the case of the Parsis their utmost honesty is a virtue not to be found commonly among other peoples. This stereotype may also have been created by other groups outside of the Parsi community. But the in-group accepts it and even strengthens it by talking about it and taking pride in it. Yezad narrates the story of his father’s brave act of ensuring the safe delivery of a large consignment of money to the bank for which he worked, despite the chaos and panic caused by wartime explosions. As a mark of appreciation of bravery and honesty the bank presents him a clock that Yezad is extremely possessive about. He tells his son the story with enormous pride.

And in the bank, they realized how brave my father had been, how determined and, above all, honest. When the clock was presented at the bank’s annual function, the chairman made a speech praising my father’s courage. He said that just as the
clock would tell the time accurately, so would Mr. Chenoy's act tell accurately about honesty. (234)

And this notion about the Parsi honesty is further reiterated by Kapur, Yezad's boss. He tells Yezad during a conversation, "Oh, don't be modest, the Parsi reputation for honesty is well known. And even if it is a myth — there is no myth without truth, no smoke without fire" (156). Yezad's insistence on the Parsi identity to be accepted and followed by his children hence comes as no surprise at all.

To conclude it may be said that identities are robustly plural and importance assigned to one identity in a given context need not obliterate the importance of others. The importance of a particular identity is determined by the social context. And one must constantly make important choices about what relative importance to attach, in a given situation, to the divergent loyalties and priorities that may contend for precedence. The Parsi community members in the novel are doing exactly that trying to prioritize their sense of several identities and in the process reclaim their identity through acceptance of the uniqueness and assertion of the same.

Another issue of great importance in the novel is corruption. In all of his novels Mistry has elaborately dealt with this 'disease', which in his view has degenerated the entire social edifice of the Indian community. In Such a Long Journey he describes how people in power fall for the temptation of lucre and in A Fine Balance how such practices completely dehumanize ordinary citizens in rural and urban spaces. In Family Matters, too the focus is on corruption. The difference is perhaps in the treatment. In Family Matters
the political is at the background till the end while one is given to see the result, impact and repercussions of the political in the foreground. The interlink between the political and the personal is not to be missed. Mistry’s concern here, apparently is not to describe the Mumbai riots that followed the demolition of the Babri Masjid but to capture the physical hurt and the mental trauma in the victims that followed the riots. Hence Barucha’s argument that Mistry could have elaborated on the political, detailing more on the Mumbai blasts or the demolition of the masjid itself may not be credible. Bust as she rightly observes, through Family Matters “Mistry returns to Bombay and the Parsi world with a vengeance” (168). Leaving aside the rusty villages of A Fine Balance he revisits Bombay his comfort world to expose the unholy link between the colonial and the postcolonial worlds.

The opening scene of the novel very reminiscent of the Tales from Firoshabagh is quite enchanting.

A splash of light from the late-afternoon sun lingered at the foot of Nariman’s bed as he ended his nap and looked towards the clock. It was almost six. He glanced down where the warm patch had lured his toes. Knurled and twisted, rendered birdlike by age, they luxuriated in the sun’s comfort. His eyes fell shut again. (1)

But beneath these calm, serene and peaceful opening lines lies hidden a storm waiting to explode. The initial euphoric feeling of the readers is immediately shattered by Nariman’s feeling of a ‘vague pang of abandonment’ (1) foregrounding a sense of desertion and doom as well. In Family Matters
exposing corruption in three realms, namely the physical, the moral and the political. Mistry has quite fascinatingly linked the three to show how they are inextricably related.

The novel, it may be said, is filled with images of bodily corruption. Nariman, the central character of the novel, is suffering from Parkinson's disease and Osteoporosis. It may not be common to come across a protagonist who is rendered immobile and completely at the mercy of other characters throughout the novel. One may without serious objections assume that Nariman's physical deficiencies are the result of his moral inadequacies. A weakling in his youth, although filled to the brim with passion for the one whom he truly loved, he is forced to abandon his love for the sake of family and community. This flaw in him makes him responsible, although indirectly for the ruin and loss of two lives. Also it is this weakness in him that makes him morally weak, unable to take control of his life and letting others mock and ridicule him. Relations get impaired, resulting in the damage of familial obligations.

As the novel opens, Nariman is venturing to set out on his evening walk and his step children warning him against it. Coomy asks, "How many people with Parkinson's do what you do?", but Nariman dismisses her saying, "I'm not going trekking in Nepal. A little stroll down the lane, that's all" (3). This initial exchange between the father and the step-children is indicative of the already existing differences in the family. Coomy's 'concern' for her father is not born out of love but worry that her burden of taking care of her father will increase manifold if something were to happen to him. The tension
mounts as the argument continues between them. Screaming at Jal her brother for supporting Nariman’s line of thinking, Coomy wonders if he was saying the world has become a dangerous place to which Nariman answers curtly, “Oh, it has, Especially indoors” (5). The strained relationships in the family in the absence of love and awareness of familial responsibilities are further seen when Nariman openly accuses Coomy of harassment. “In my youth, my parents controlled me and destroyed those years. Thanks to them, I married your mother and wrecked my middle years. Now you want to torment my old age. I won’t allow it” (7).

Yet another character suffering from physical decay is Jal who is partially deaf. His deafness has made him inefficient, weak, and almost a puppet in Coomy’s oppressive hands. At Nariman’s birthday party Coomy snaps at Jal to switch off the hearing aid as the batteries would be exhausted.

“Let him listen!” said Roxana indignantly. “He wants to enjoy the conversation.”

“And who will pay for new batteries? Do you know how expensive they are, how quickly that little box eats them up?”

“But it’s a necessity, like medicine.”

“Calling it a necessity doesn’t magically produce money for it,” said Coomy, and recited the prices of items she thought were necessities: onions, potatoes, bread, butter, cooking gas.

(23)

Coomy does not allow Jal to have the minimum independence that any man of some self-esteem might wish for. Always dictated to by others, not mustering
enough courage even to express his liking for Daisy, Jal comes across as a comic weakling who is completely dependent on others for his survival.

Yezad, too becoming increasingly choleric develops angina and his younger son Jehangir has a delicate digestive system upset by ill-prepared food and of course the pangs of conscience of his dishonesty at school. Even the mechanical cricket-bat wielding Santa which Yezad’s boss Kapur has put up in his shop to celebrate Christmas groans rheumatically, according to Yezad and shudders in its down-swing as if it too has Parkinson’s.

Through the afternoon, he watched the spasmodic Santa struggling with arthritic shoulders. Every once in a while the little motor malfunctioned; then the bulb blinked rapidly and the bat made little tremulous up-and-down movements. Like Santa has Parkinson’s, he thought. (296)

The next form of corruption that is manifest in the novel is moral corruption. Mistry employs the imagery of mobility versus immobility, decay and mortality, disease and pain to explore various forms of corruption throughout the novel and very subtly establishes the link between different forms of corruption. Bodily affliction and political corruption result in moral corruption. What is perceptible outside is the reflection of the vices within.

Coomy and Jal, despite being the beneficiaries of Nariman’s home and pension, shrink back from taking care of him. Yezad, Nariman’s son-in-law, is not very different from the others. All of them baulk at the unpleasant realities of caring for a powerless, paralyzed father (in-law). Coomy is disgusted by his bodily effluvia and does not hide her resentment. “I don’t owe
Pappa anything. He didn’t change my diaper or wash my bum, and I don’t have to clean his shit either” (85). And her wily designs to keep her father with the Chenoys reek of selfishness. Yezad also refuses to go anywhere near the bedpan and even decrees a ban on his children to that effect. At one point when Jehangir rushes to get the bottle to help his grandfather relieve himself Yezad stands in the way with his angry looks and voice.

Another aspect of moral corruption is linked to Yezad’s taking to Matka with a view to augmenting the family income. He succumbs to the temptation of making quick money through unfair means because managing the house has become increasingly difficult with Nariman and his illness now thrust on him. He removes (steal, to be blunt) money from envelopes meant for groceries and other utilities to place bets on Matka, a popular form of gambling in Bombay. At another point he takes the money, though temporarily, meant for the Shiv Sena in return for favours from them to keep the name Bombay Sports Emporium. Ironically, the scrupulous Parsi honesty is put to test many a time and sadly violated, too often. Although Yezad is proud of this myth and wants his children to emulate his grandfather who lived honestly even when death stared at him in the face neither Yezad nor Jehangir is able to live up to it. The myth at one level is an inspiration but at another level becomes a burden as Vilas Rane in the novel observes that myths can become outdated and “make misfits of men” (212). The manner in which the young Jehangir gives into corrupt ways is pitiable. At school Jehangir, a little unwillingly though utilizes the opportunity presented to him by his friends to make money. By allowing his friend to copy he betrays the trust his teacher
had placed in him as homework monitor. Miss Alvarez’s words of regret to Yezad are significant here.

... and I wanted to lay a firm foundation for my boys, make honesty a permanent part of their character. So they would be able, as adults, to resist the corruption in our society. Especially those who might enter politics or the IAS. Instead, that very evil has already infected my classroom. How will things ever get better for our country? (282)

Explaining to Roxana at home what Jehangir had done at school Yezad connects the wrong with the family’s moral corruption.

But it is ugly. And there’s only one way to explain it. The same corruption that pollutes this country is right here, in your own family, in Jal and Coomy’s shameless trickery and betrayal.

Think of the example they have set. Is it any wonder Jehangir took the bribe? (283)

Through all this Mistry presents how even small misdeeds can contribute to erosion of values at the national level. On the one hand there is Miss Alvarez trying to infuse honesty into young minds. Roxana on the other hand trivializes the incident as an insignificant one. Jehangir, in the mother’s view hasn’t done anything wrong for he cannot be bad but other boys in his class are. To Yezad quite forcefully she says, “Don’t exaggerate. Some bad boys offered Jehangoo money and he accepted it to help his family, end of story. No need to twist it and turn it and make it into something ugly” (283).
To the teacher what Jehangir has done is offensive but to Roxana it is a noble act. Mistry is presenting divergent views on an issue that is plaguing India. The way corruptions of all forms are fed at different levels which are devouring the individual, family and the national values are brought to the fore. Yezad is not in approval of Jehangir’s behaviour but at the same time he cannot be morally judgmental as he himself is guilty of the same crime. As Peter Morey observes correctly Jehangir’s classroom here takes on a metonymic relationship to society and nation (64).

The ambiguities and complexities of moral corruption are quite apparent in the novel. All that Coomy, Jal, Yezad, Jehangir and Roxana say and do are indicative of this. Nariman’s inability to give up his relationship with Lucy Braganza, even after his marriage to Yasmin, which in a way triggers this tragic sequence of events, is another pointer to this fact. His failure to choose his spouse and his perpetual obsession with Lucy even after his marriage to Yasmin cause incalculable loss, misery and disharmony in the family. Coomy’s unhealthy resentment towards Nariman may be, in this sense, legitimate as she bears in her subconscious the wish to avenge her dead mother. Yezad too spends much of his later years tortured by guilt over his covert activities ultimately becoming a religious recluse.

The third form of corruption which is of relevance is political corruption. Novy Kapadia in her article remarks about the nexus between crime and politics in Bombay that what one sees is “criminalization of politics and the politicization of crime, so rampant in India in the last decade of the twentieth century” (132). The transformation of the Shiv Sena from obscurity
to the centre stage and how the limelight is achieved can be seen through the communalist methods they adopt in the novel. Mistry openly accuses them of having links with gangsters for the implementation of cultural censorship agendas with a view to promoting a culturally homogeneous and ‘pure’ nation Shiv Sena envisaged. They are opposed to Valentine’s Day celebrations because it is not Indian. Men’s magazines are not allowed as they are corrupting and women cannot work in bars as it is alien to Indian culture. The notion of India as one unified space with a monolithic culture being followed cannot be but one’s willful imagination. Also it stems out of the assumption that culture refers to cultural artefacts. There cannot be a more complex word which is so often loosely used in English than the word culture. The Shiv Sena which embarked on this platform as custodians of Indian culture continues to indulge in communalist politics even today in the name of moral policing in the pretext of protecting Indian culture. One of the best examples in the novel that drives this point home is the way the Sena activists force the change of name from Bombay to Mumbai. Kapur is killed for defying the Sena dictates. Even when Hussain, himself a victim of communalist politics who lost his family during the riots that followed the demolition of the Babri Masjid, insists on revealing the identity of his master’s killers for he was the sole eyewitness to the crime the police advise him to stop making wild accusations. The peon tells Yezad how the police responded to his pleas.

They said it was not right to connect Shiv Sena, there was no evidence. One policeman laughed in a very bad way. He said, ‘You Muslims, always trying to blame the Shiv Sena.’ He
frightened me. ‘I’m very sorry, police sahib,’ I said with my hands joined. ‘That’s not my wish. Please punish the killers, whoever they are, I mention it only because you asked for everything (405).

Mistry’s ‘bête-noir’ the Shiv Sena is depicted in a very poor light by him in *Family Matters* and all his other novels as well. One cannot completely find fault with Mistry as the recent happenings in Mumbai lead by the Thackerays in an attempt to cleanse the city of outside elements, particularly the north Indians only vindicate his stand. Resorting to violence seems to top their agenda in their effort to achieve their ends. Anyone who does not subscribe to their views is appropriately dealt with. Gautam, a radical journalist who exposes the Sena link with the *matka* lottery with his in-depth analysis about the politician-criminal-police nexus saying Matka is Bombay and Bombay is Matka is given a sound drubbing.

“They blackened my face,” said Gautam matter-of-factly, biting into one of the mutton patties.

“What did they do, abuse or threaten?” asked Vilas.

“I was not speaking in metaphor.”

“You mean they actually...?”

“Yes.” Gautam described how a dozen of them had accosted him, screaming that journalists who maligned the Shiv Sena and blackened its good name by printing lies would receive the same treatment. The men twisted his arms behind him and grabbed his hair to keep him still. They had a tin of
Cherry Blossom black shoe polish, and applied it to his face, ears and neck...” (207)

In yet another incident that exposes the Sena brutalities the victims are Roxana and her family. The Chinoy family is hassled at the bus stop by rowdies, very similar to what happens to Rustomji in “Auspicious Occasion” in Firoshabagh Tale. Returning to the bus stop after celebrating Nariman’s seventy ninth birthday they find themselves bullied by drunkards singing lewd songs. When Yezad threatens them with dire consequences they simply say, “Don’t tingle-tangle with us, bhavaji! We are Shiv Sena people, we are invincible” (44) which makes Yezad conclude that Bombay has become an uncivilized jungle now (45). It is quite evident that through Family Matters Mistry castigates the ruling powers and the dominant community for perpetration of atrocities against the minorities. Husain a peon at the Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium, for example a victim of the Bombay riots becomes an authentic voice of not only the muslim minority community but also of other communities that experience discrimination. Describing his horrendous experience during the riots Husain tells Kapur:

In Muslim mohallas they (police) were shooting their guns at innocent people. Houses were burning, neighbours came out to throw water. And the police? Firing bullets like target practice. These guardians of law were murdering everybody! And my poor wife and children...I couldn’t even recognize them...

(155)
The palpable face of political corruption ruining the nation is discussed in Nariman’s birthday party as well. Yezad tells Nariman:

“Corruption is in the air we breathe. This nation specializes in turning honest people into crooks. Right, chief?”

“The answer, unfortunately, is yes.”

“The country has gone to the dogs. And not well-bred dogs either, but pariahs.”

“May be the BJP and Shiv Sena coalition will improve things,” said Jal. “We should give them a chance.”

Yezad laughed. “If a poisonous snake was in front of you, would you give it a chance? Those two parties encouraged the Hindutva extremists to destroy the Babri Mosque” (31-32).

Quite adroitly Mistry connects the three forms of corruption, namely the physical, the moral and the political to expose the characters and institutions that perpetrate deceits and engage in subterfuge for their own ulterior ends. Mistry is perhaps suggesting that the postcolonial Indian society is in no way rid of its colonial corrupt hangovers but being fed by it is only becoming stronger by the day.

The third important focus that this chapter will deal with is the manner in which minority discourses are narrated in *Family Matters*. Several writers have looked at the novel from the point of view of a national allegory. Allegories are always conscious and overt. As Christina Rebecca says in *Family Matters* the recurring “thematic and tropological deployment of space and body could indeed be seen as elements of national allegory” (30). It is a
valid argument as the novel interlinks the individual and collective
subjectivities through time, body and space images. In fact, Boehmer’s
analysis that “when national histories are revealed as stochastic, divided and
painful, the body is too exposed as fissured and reduced (33) is quite true. The
impact of the Bombay riots on its citizens particularly on Husain is a case in
point. He is a living example of how the remnants of the riots can ravage the
people both physically and emotionally. Fredric Jameson’s argument that in
“Third world, the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory
of the embattled situation of the public third world culture and society” (69)
only strengthens this point further.

In the postcolonial world of today can the marginalized really speak
for themselves? What narratives do their discourses take? Can these discourses
be loud, strong and more importantly are they being heard? Again can we
assume that the voice of the marginalized is expressed uniformly? Is there a
singular voice of protest or are there multiple voices? Quite often, the voices
of the marginalized are the voices of displacement. And through protest and
resistance, the subalterns attempt to reclaim the lost identity. But the attempt,
more often than not, is wrought with dangers, sometimes even fatal. Using
Mistry’s *Family Matters* as the basis answers to these questions will be found.
In the process some light will also be thrown on the culture politics as seen in
the dominant and minority cultures of the seemingly cosmopolitan Bombay.

In Postmodern discourse displacement is an integral component
although the forces that necessitate it may be varied. Among many others, the
common forces of such compulsions are religious persecution, linguistic
conflicts, political pressures and economic mobility. Globalization, on its part has further compounded this problem by compelling migration of all sorts. So much so there is a marked contrast in the perceptions of the impact of globalization between those in the business field and those who are not. Nandan Nilekani who shot to fame in the Indian Information technology boom in an interview to the *San Francisco Chronicle* (July 4, 2004) observes that “Globalization is the best way to lift millions of people out of poverty because it increases trade; it increases job creation. It’s a positive force.” From a man who immensely benefitted with borders opening up and the humongous profits made through outsourcing the comment is not anything surprising. But is the picture as rosy as Nilekani has painted? For example, socially and environmentally aware public would view these developments as negative and extremely detrimental. “Globalization creates growth by destruction of the environment and local livelihoods,” says Vandana Shiva, scientist and environmentalist in *Resurgence* (June 1997). She goes on: “It therefore creates poverty instead of removing it. The new globalization policies have accelerated and expanded environmental destruction and displaced millions of people from their homes and their sustenance base.” For one it creates poverty and to another it is supposed to eradicate the same. Better sense may prevail if one asks pertinent questions as which section(s) of society has/have benefitted from globalization and if the chasm between the rich and the poor has been even marginally bridged after globalization.

With many reasons contributing to migration in the present day postmodern / postcolonial situation a critical perspective of the globalized
world is bound to reveal that displacement is a human condition. None can escape it given the fact that one is born, educated, works and settles down in different places either within a country or outside of it. Even the language one speaks and identifies with unlike in the past is not one but many. In the current circumstances displacement is identical to marginalization as both the act and the result of it bring to the fore the politics of the centre against the periphery. The displaced are always 'othered' in terms of fundamental rights and privileges, too. They face continued marginalization with doors for the possibility of entering the center permanently shut on them. Paradoxically, the minority discourse is characterized by an urge to adopt, adapt and assimilate on one hand and by a culture of protest and resistance on the other.

In terms of marginalization and displacement there are three important characters that one must take note of. Yezad, a Parsi is the foremost of them in the context of the novel. Second in order is Kapur, a Punjabi Hindu earning his livelihood in Bombay after the family was forced to flee from Punjab. Though a minor one, the third character Husain, a muslim living amidst the Hindu majority in Bombay is a stark example of the communal trauma that many of his community members experienced during the riots. All three of them from within the novel and Mistry from outside are raising fundamental questions about the way secularism is practiced in democratic India.

Very often intellectuals and politicians brand India as a 'secular' country. But rarely has anyone defined what that really means. In India the word has assumed a binary relationship: the Hindus as against the non-Hindus. As a result resolution to communal conflicts becomes difficult to achieve. For
example Asish Nandy, looking at secularism from political perspective, while commenting on the Gujarat Riots of 2002 says that religion and ethnic strife cannot be fought with the ideology of secularism and goes on to compare the riots of 2002 in Gujarat to the violent days of 1946-48 when the first genocidal riots based on the Hindu-Muslim divide took place in South Asia. Partha Chatterjee, too has described in detail communal conflicts occurring in several parts of South Asia in his works but always with a monistic view vis-a-vis the political perspective. Such an approach cannot be encouraged as resolving such sensitive issues requires multiple approaches and perspectives.

In India, of late religion and politics are increasingly seen together making it a lethal combination. Naturally therefore debates on nationalism, secularism and fundamentalism are on the rise with varied views put forward by several scholars owing their allegiance to sundry political and religious affiliations. However, unfortunately such studies have been detached or removed from particularities of the historical contexts from which they actually emerged. Scholars unfortunately have been rather busy with categorizing and name calling. Those accused of bringing religion into politics are communalists, those seen as pandering to religious minorities are branded pseudo-secularists, and those wanting to introduce western modes of governance and ethics are pilloried as Macaulayists. Rarely do we find objective analyses of issues as these narratives are largely dependent on the individual’s affiliations to politics, religion and language. Scholars belong to either the right wing or the left wing with no one opting for a neutral position which enormously prevents an objective examination of issues. Even terms used to refer to activists reflect
prejudice. If they belong to Islam the phrase invariably used is fundamental while those belonging to others are branded nationalists. This results in the religion itself being made fundamentalist as many mistake some fundamentalists to be the representation of the religion. As Madhav Govinda Vaidya, spokesperson for Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) observes, "All muslims may not be terrorists but most terrorists are muslims" (Anandabajar Patrika, Calcutta, March 28, 2002). On the contrary in the case of Hinduism many mistake the religion to be the representation for the people, even for those who may be involved in such acts. Interestingly, the Hindu 'nationalists' feel that secularism as practised in India is anti-Hindu.

In short scholars have become more and more skeptical of the relevance of secularism and at times have completely dismissed it as having no meaning for today's governance calling it 'dead' and advocating the doctrine of 'giving it up'. Nandy feels that secularism in India has had a reasonably good life and has done some good to the society but now, having exhausted all possibilities, should be discarded. Removing corrupt forces may help the cause to some extent but that's not easy and a change from within from these agencies is unlikely and hence Nandy is skeptical of its relevance.

Partha Chatterjee in a scholarly discourse of the three principles that are inherent in the concept of secularism in his Secularism and Tolerance engages in analyzing their problems as well. He begins his essay asking an important question: Is secularism an adequate or even appropriate ground on which to meet the political challenge of Hindu majoritarianism? From here he goes on describe the anomalies of the secular state establishing in due course that the
three important principles – liberty, equality and neutrality- have been invoked in the law although their application has always been contradictory. For example, in the case of liberty which permits the practice of any religion, one recognizes that it is also limited by other basic human rights. Chatterjee observes, “Thus, for instance, it would be perfectly justified for the state to deny that, let us say, human sacrifice or causing injury to human beings, or as we have already noted in the case of devadasis, enforced servitude to a deity or temple, constitutes permissible religious practice” (359). The question of the equality principle being uniformly applied to all religious groups is also found to be wanting as the state at times blatantly shows its partisan approach as demonstrated by Chatterjee in the essay or as we have seen in the Rushdie and Shah Bano cases. Lastly, the third principle – that of the separation of state and religion- is also not practised as it should be done. The law, for example says that there shall be no official religion, no religious instruction in state schools. But this is far from the truth. In many state buildings pictures of deities adorn walls and prayers and poojas are performed openly to the gods. The attempt to indoctrinate children into a particular faith is clearly noticed in the educational policies and programmes of the governments. An interesting example of this is the attempt that the BJP government made during its term at the Centre with MuraliManohar Joshi as the Education Minister. A school text book read, “Kabir is a nice boy even though he is a muslim” (quoted by Nussbaum, 6). As Chatterjee observes this entanglement has only increased since Independence. So, according to him the notion of secularism as
understood and practised in India has problems and in its present form it may not be of help at all.

It is clear therefore in a multi-religious country like India, the idea of secularism is bound to be extremely problematic because of its plural understandings. It is linked more and more to the idea of the recognition and acceptance of difference. For some it is the western notion of saying no to religion in public which defines Secularism. For some, it is religious pluralism and tolerance between diverse religious and cultural communities and for some others it is a free and open acceptance of various religious positions. For Mistry and his three important characters in *Family Matters* the latter position is preferred.

The rationale for opting for that position is comprehensible considering the marginalization the religious subalterns faced in the country. Yezad, Kapur and Husain are only representatives of several minority communities that suffered at the hands of majoritarian politics. A detailed study of the dynamics of culture politics and minority discourse that emerges out of it is interesting as well as intriguing. A notable outcome of being a minor is displacement. Hence it is imperative that the minority discourse consistently rests on modes of resistance and protest. At this point it may be worthwhile to fall back on the observation made by Jan Mohammed and David Llyod in their *Introduction: Toward a theory of Minority Discourse*. They discern that “in the relations with the dominant culture, the syncretic movement is always asymmetrical” (9). This characteristic may be noticed in *Family Matters*. Yezad, a Parsi Bombayite and Kapur, a Punjabi Bombayite are expected to assimilate and
integrate into the dominant hegemonic culture of Bombay whereas members of the majority culture rarely feel obliged to incorporate various ethnic cultures. Moreover, it must also be remembered that the assimilation expected of the minors is only superficial for no amount of struggle can help them merge with the center or be an integral part of it. Both Yezad and Kapur in *Family Matters* claim love and loyalty to the city they are in. In fact Kapur’s expression his love for Bombay is poetic. He tells Yezad:

> What I feel for Bombay you will never know. It’s like the pure love for a beautiful woman, gratitude for her existence, and devotion to her living presence. If Bombay were a creature of flesh and blood, with my blood type, Rh negative- and very often I think she is – then I would give her a transfusion down to my last drop, to save her life (152).

Kapur’s feeling of oneness with the city is the outcome of Bombay’s hospitable culture that warmly welcomed even outsiders and gave them a home. After office hours in a personal converstaion with Yezad he says:

> You see how we two are sitting here, sharing? That’s how people have lived in Bombay. That’s why Bombay has survived floods, disease, plague, water shortage, bursting drains and sewers, all the population pressures. In her heart there is room for everyone who wants to make a home here” (158-159).

To many Parsis Bombay is their homeland. The close affinity they shared with the place is clearly seen almost in all the writings of Parsi writers. In *Such A Long Journey* Dinshawji is very critical of the political leaders who through
name changes tried to reconstruct Bombay. Their love for the Bombay they lived in is unexplainable. In *Trying to Grow* there is Brit talking to Cyrus about Bombay:

> What sensible man would leave Bombay? You know what NewDelhi’s like? It’s monstrous. If you aren’t a minister, a diplomat or a judge you’re a ghost. Hell! You can be anyone in Bombay; as long as you’ve got brains and bluster, you’ve got it made. And then New Delhi’s got the muddy Jamuna.

> Bombay’s got the sea” (110).

It is this charismatic pull that Bombay had on the Parsis that is expressed through Kapur in *Family Matters*. In yet another emotional moment, talking about his forced migration from Punjab he says: “we had to run. And we came here. But Bombay treated us well. My father started over, with zero and became prosperous. Only city in the world where this is possible” (151).

Kapur’s reverence for the city is enhanced by the show of pluralism and multiculturalism that ordinary situations exemplify. Describing a common (place) sight in the eternally crowded Bombay railway platforms he comes emotional. As he watches hands held out to help a commuter board a moving train Kapur wonders: “Whose hands were they? And whose hands were they grasping? Hindu, Muslim, Dalit, Parsi, Christian? No one knew and no one cared…my eyes filled with tears of joy, because what I saw told me there was still hope for this great city” (160). But this euphoria is cut short by the cruel hand of reality. Kapur soon realizes that the fact he is a minor will never allow him to be part of the city his best efforts notwithstanding. His adventure into
boarding the train in a similar fashion wishing to ‘become one with the
organic whole that is Bombay’ proves futile. The attempt is spurned by the
insiders and Kapur becomes a comic figure. He tells Yezad sadly:

They didn’t help me, Yezad. No man held out his hand to grasp
mine. They looked at me as if I was some stranger. Yes, okay, I
am a stranger. But I’m also their Bombay brother, am I not?
And they just stared through me. Others seemed to find me
amusing, turning to one another to laugh” (347).

At the same time the struggle by the minors to merge with the center cannot be
with total allegiance for that will mean giving up their own community
uniqueness. Yezad’s taking recourse to the comforts of the fire temple is a
case in point. Hence minors are and will always remain minors. Clearly
therefore, Caren Kaplan’s argument in the above mentioned work that “the
status of the minor is not a matter of essence or ethnicity but one of political
condition” (8) assumes importance here. It is for this reason many critics have
argued for an intrinsic articulation of minority texts. Barabara Christian, Jan
Mohammed, Arun Mukherjee and their like have always insisted on not
succumbing to the ‘glamour of high theory’ (7). Mukherjee’s compelling
argument in “Whose Postmodernism and Whose Postcolonialism?” that
simply negates ‘high theory’ and pleads for an articulation of implicit theories
contained in the literary texts of the minority culture is of great significance
here. The “marginalized discourse can be deciphered despite distortion”, she
says and argues for how “minorities can develop cultural strategies for
survival and subversions” (9).
Social, Cultural and Political exclusions of the minorities constitute a vital position in minority discourses. In all the novels of Mistry’s there are sufficient examples to prove this element of discrimination. In *Such a Long Journey* Dinshaw laments the nationalization of banks in India in 1969 which brought the curtains down on the Parsi domination in the sector. At the political front, too, the threat to the ‘outsiders’ appear visible with the rise of sub-nationalist elements like the Sena and the Marathi Manoos of Bombay precipitating further the identity crises the minorities have been experiencing in the big city. The Parsis, it must be noted here, even in the pre-independence era were made to feel like ‘natural outsiders’. Yezad, in *Family Matters* despite staking claims to belong to Bombay is often made to feel intimidated and threatened by his minor status. He knows he cannot use anything more than empty rhetoric to threaten the rowdy elements claiming to be the Sena who harassed him and his family at the bus stop. His contempt for the Sena, uncoated by any niceties finds its way out in these lines: “...the crackpot accuses people left and right of being anti-this or anti-that. South Indians are anti-Bombay, Valentine’s Day is anti-Hindustan, film stars born before 1947 in the Pakistani part of Punjab are traitors to the country” (32). To which Nariman adds, “I suppose, if the Senapati gets gas after eating karela the gourd will be declared an anti-Indian vegetable” (32).

The decadent postcolonial situation is further highlighted through developments occurring in Mumbai even today. Through the Sena mouthpiece *Saamana* (4 November 2011, Deccan Herald) the outfit strongly has condemned the presence of the north Indians in Mumbai: “The North Indians
were not invited to Mumbai. They came here to earn livelihood, and settle down. If people from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar ply autos, sell milk and vegetables, they are also involved in other illegal activities” (8). Two important points are made through the statement. Firstly, the north Indians don’t belong to Mumbai, they came on their own, voluntarily and uninvited and secondly, very subtly though, the increase in crime rate in the city of Bombay is an outcome of their migration. The editorial goes on to suggest that Mumbai is self reliant and can thrive without support from ‘outsiders’: “Other hard working people will take their place. Mumbai is a city that is always on the move. If the North Indians stop supplying milk, Mumbaikars will not start having black tea” (8). Finally, like the last nail in the coffin, it asserts the Marathi identity while shifting the responsibility of maintaining communal harmony onto the ‘guests’ by assimilation into the local culture and not vice versa: “Mumbai is the capital of Maharashtra and only Marathi people have the first right on the city. Others can live in peace here. It is their wish if they do not want peace and happiness” (8). The ‘first’ right is with the locals and the others are second class citizens. By also emphasizing the fact that Mumbai is the capital of Maharashtra the insidious claim is to suggest exclusiveness from the Indian framework bringing to the fore the nation-state politics. At this juncture, it may be useful to recollect the controversy that surrounded popular Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar for having said that he is an Indian first and then a Maharashtrian and also the violence that was perpetrated later on on the north Indians in the city of Mumbai.
Fear psychosis and the anxiety syndrome that the minorities in Bombay had to grapple with are succinctly brought out by Mistry through Coomy’s frightened feelings when there’s a disturbance outside her home.

There was no knocking, no doorbell, only a muffled thud, making the hairs on Coomy’s neck stand on end. She kept her head inside her newspaper, but racing through her mind were recent reports of daylight robbery, thieves forcing their way into homes, killing occupants, looting flats (48).

Nariman, too right in the beginning of the novel, while responding to Coomy’s pleas asking him not to go out tells her that dangers lurk indoors as well as outdoors. The reference as the readers are aware is to the Babri Masjid riots. The complete makeover of a city from a peace-loving pluralistic society to one packed with narrow parochialism is loathed by the minorities of Bombay. Through Kapur’s poetic eloquence Mistry captures the city that he loved for all its benevolence:

This beautiful city of seven islands, this jewel by the Arabian Sea, this reclaimed land, this ocean gift transformed into ground beneath our feet, this enigma of cosmopolitanism where races and religions live side by side and cheek by jowl in peace and harmony, this diamond of diversity, this generous goddess who embraces the poor and the hungry and the huddled masses, the Urbs Prima in Indis, this dear, dear city now languishes . . . (160).
Such a beautiful city is now sick and diseased that it requires, according to Kapur intensive care to heal the wounds inflicted by “small, selfish men who would destroy it because their coarseness cannot bear something so grand, so fine” (160).

Mistry’s anger is directed at times in the novel at armchair intellectualism which, unfamiliar with the realities of Bombay and the Indian Emergency, tried to trivialize Mistry’s genuine concern to expose the corrupt. Strangely enough any time someone attempts to question or break established systems it is always met with criticism or cynicism. In *Family Matters* through Vilas Mistry ridicules theorists, especially Greer, an Australian who refused to believe the horrors of the Emergency terming them fabricated and exaggerated.

What to do? People are afraid to accept the truth. As T.S Eliot wrote, Human kind cannot bear very much reality...They become blind to real life with their intellectualizing. Stanislavsky-this and Strasberg-that, and Brechtian alienation is all they talk about (210-211).

But a migrant writer like Mistry representing the minorities must continue to write, tell their stories no matter whether they are perceived credible or incredulous. As Rushdie claims in *Imaginary Homelands* any writer writing about his homeland from the outside must “deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragment have been irretrievably lost” (11). All the same, this fragmentary nature of these memories, the incomplete truths they contain, the fractional elucidation they present are the
distinctive elements that characterize the 'transplanted' writer. As Rushdie observes further, these "shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were remains; fragmentation made trivial things seen like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities" (Rushdie 12). Yezad in Family Matters recognizes this condition, very similar to that of the Jews:

... they had to keep telling their story, just like Jews had to theirs, about the Holocaust, writing and remembering and having nightmares about the concentration camps and the gas chambers and ovens, about the evil committed by ordinary people, by friends and neighbours, the evil that, decades later was still incomprehensible. What choice was there, except to speak about it, again and again, and yet again? (151)

It may be useful here to note that Mistry through Yezad is perfectly conforming to Stella Sanlahl’s views on the role of an immigrant writer. According to her, the role of an immigrant writer is that of "the one who can conveys experiences from different worlds being himself part of different worlds. Complexity does not mean schizophrenia. We can and should contribute to the common culture and still remain ourselves" (Vasanji 36).

Mistry’s concern with personal and community identity can be discerned from his first work Tales from Firozsha Baag. The narratives seek to articulate reconstruction of identities displaced by historical and personal relocations. Craig Tapping’s comment on the Tales is important. He says:
Mistry foregrounds and articulates his personal, familial identity and sociopolitical context, explaining how and why he comes to be where he is and why he writes as he does. The manner in which he, and other writers in diverse manners, attempts to define self and community is therefore a dialogic engagement with history, making apparent the political and economic forces that have operated to create nations, literatures and identities (39).

The same is evident in *Family Matters*. Yezad, as a Bombayite by birth in his own ways contributes to the common culture and yet he does not want to let go of the distinct Parsi identity in the process. His taking recourse to the refuge of the fire temple may not be seen as surrender or his incapability to stand up to oppression but assertion of his identity through withdrawal into his own culture. Therefore Peter Morey’s indictment of Yezad in the Kantian ethical framework lacks credibility. He says, “in his reversion to a defensive, insular form of Zoroastrianism, Yezad succumbs to what Kant calls the fanaticism, indeed the impiety, of abandoning the guidance of a morally legislative reason in the right conduct of our lives, in order to derive guidance from the idea of the Supreme Being” (73). One cannot accuse Yezad of ‘abandoning the guidance’ as all along in the past he has lived by it. Having experienced life through that mode he is turning to the other mode that is available to him. The two modes in fact are not in opposition but are complementary. Ye^ad cannot be called a fanatic but someone who wants his family to be rooted in the Parsi culture and tradition. Fundamentalism in itself
is not negative but the expressions of it can become negative. John O Voll
describes fundamentalism as “the reaffirmation of foundational principles and
the effort to reshape society in terms of those reaffirmed fundamentals” (17).
Fundamentalism simply refers to attempts that try to “return to the scriptural
foundation of the community, excavating and reinterpreting these foundations
for application to the contemporary social and political world” (17).

Deeprootedness in one’s tradition cannot be said to constitute
fanaticism. Application of this yardstick would brand many world leaders
including Gandhi a fanatic. Mistry, through Yezad is perhaps suggesting a
way forward for the community, that he too is an integral part of - a way out
for its own survival. Mistry himself may not be a practising Parsi but that in no
way prevents him from suggesting others to be so or criticize anyone who
already is.

I’m not a practising Parsi but the ceremonies are quite
beautiful. As a child I observed (them) carefully in the same
way as I did my homework, but it had no profound meaning for
me. Zoroastrianism is about the opposition of good and evil.

For the triumph of good, we have to make a choice” (Lambert
7).

The minority discourse emerging out of the subaltern context therefore
is mired with complexities. Multiplicity in voices requires foremost
recognition. All three representatives of the marginalized in Family Matters,
Yezad, Kapur and Husain have different voices. At times these are loud and at
other times subdued. Kapur is seen as extremely emotional, passionate and
idealistic about his convictions. Yezad in contrast is practical and realistic.
Husain the weakest member in the marginalized category is utterly helpless.
Modes of resistance and protest are chosen by these individuals on the basis of
temperament, belief in and commitment to the cause in hand. Not all must
necessarily choose both the modes of revolt. For instance, in the case of Yezad
there is resistance but his growing concerns on the family front coupled with
his practical approach to life prevents him from going further than that. But
Kapur takes the dangerous step of protesting owing to his deep-felt
identification with Bombay. For Yezad the city is still an alien place that
constantly puts his Parsi identity into conflict with each other.

Between the two modes or tools of remonstration in the subaltern
discourse though resistance is vital it must still be placed at the lower rung as
it is mostly internal and need not be outwardly displayed if the resistor desires
so. Nevertheless as a basic characteristic of any upheaval or revolt its
importance is not to be undermined. Other modes of revolt are only an
extended expression of this basic ingredient. Resistance alone however will
not result in change. In most cases, as a matter of fact, faced with stiff
opposition resistors withdraw into their own shells after a while. Yezad’s
complete change at the end of Family Matters taking shelter under the spiritual
umbrella is a case in point. Mistry describes the change thus: “He had waited
enough...In the end, he could only depend on himself. And the fire-temple, his
sanctuary, in this meaningless world” (359). But Kapur, as mentioned earlier
goes beyond resistance and protests. Unlike resistance protest can be
dangerous, at times fatal. Consequently, Kapur is made to pay with his life for
not heeding Husain’s warning of past experience with the Shiv Sena ‘crooks’:
“You know when Babri Mosque was destroyed and all the riots were flaming, these bad people killed so many innocents, with my own eyes I saw it, sahib, they locked them in their houses and set fire to them, they attacked people with swords and axes...” (386).

Like Mistry Husain in the novel is retelling his tale, the tale of loss and suffering. Placed at the bottom of the subaltern class he cannot revolt openly nor can he protest. His is a silent resistance marked by an acute sense of helplessness. The unspeakable hurts and the incurable wounds of the victims of the riots are revealed through Husain in the novel. Mistry being a minority writer feels duty bound to expose the carnage of the riots even though he may be physically dislocated. In fact physical alienation cannot be an excuse to moral alienation. Rushdie’s observation on the role of immigrant writers is worth considering here:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties- that our physical alienation from India inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, indias of the mind (10).
Postcolonial India is not new to riots. Right from the Partition days the country has witnessed quite a few riots, the latest in 2002 in Gujarat. No riot of any great magnitude can be carried out unorchestrated by powerful individuals or political parties. But, ironically in India no one has ever been found guilty of a massacre. In an article *What will truth get us* in Sunday Herald of Deccan Herald (6 November 2011) Omair Ahmad states the plight of the poor victims:

In 1983 more than 2,000 people were butchered in the Nellie massacre in Assam in less than six hours. Unofficial estimates put the figure at close to 5,000. Many of the people killed were possibly illegal immigrants... An inquiry was held, a report was produced and nothing really happened. When the Asom Gana Parishad came to power in 1985, it dropped all the cases... thousands of people killed, and nobody guilty, nobody even accused (1).

In 1984, more than 3,000 Sikhs were killed in Delhi and till date no one of any consequence has been punished for it. The Bombay riots of 1992-93 saw several thousands slaughtered and no action was taken on the Srikrishna report submitted. The same is true of the Gujarat riots of 2002 wherein powerful people are allegedly involved but so far no one has been found guilty. Why do perpetrators of such crimes go unpunished and the victims are not granted justice? The answer, simplistic as it may seem, is pertinent. The doers of the crime are the influential and the powerful and the victims are always the poor and the marginalized. The politics of the divide between the centre and the margin is once again highlighted here. The marginalized are inconsequential
to the policy makers of the country and therefore they can be ignored. It is a pity that in the Postcolonial nation-state the marginalized have always been treated mercilessly, driving them at times to extreme conditions. The response of former Chief Justice of the Delhi High court, Justice A P Shah to the government’s decision to evict beggars from the streets of Delhi before the Commonwealth Games 2011 is relevant here. He observed that if the streets of Delhi had room for the mafia and villains of society then it had some room for the homeless too (Sondhi 1). The comment highlights two stark realities of the postcolonial India: the preferential treatment accorded to the anti-social elements in society and the ruthless apathy of the insensitive people in power towards the marginalized.

Despite the visible suppression of the marginalized by the privileged the subaltern positions have been questioned and criticized by academicians and scholars. It is disappointing to note that in its existence of over twenty years the subaltern study has not made a mark in India. Excessive reliance on theory has subverted the subaltern concerns and critics have lost grounding in realities that the chasm between theory and actual practice has unimaginably widened. Solutions offered to bridge the gap by scholars sometimes lack reason. Market participation, according to Tirthankar Roy is a key factor to enable the poor make their own history (2223). Market and resource conditions, he says could weaken or strengthen relationships of subordination. The fact that this option is merely idealistic and even unrealistic can be evinced from Kapur’s fate in Family Matters. Roy’s submission that ‘protest’ is not pivotal to the subaltern discourse is unreasonable as the central
relationship between the ‘center’ and the ‘periphery’ rests on hierarchy, authority and therefore power. His claim that the link between the colonial state and the colonized subject cannot be seen as fundamentally repressive is therefore untenable.

The narratives of displacement can better be understood without the intellectual trappings that one easily gets carried away by. Being raw and straight from the heart its inherent agony and brutality will be felt and understood only when they are not camouflaged in esoteric colouring. In *Family Matters* Mistry makes an honest attempt to do exactly that. The discourse of displacement cannot be but painful. Such discourses are continuous wherein quick-fixes and straight-forward solutions are hard to come by. All the same negotiations must constantly be employed. In short in *Family Matters* what is described is that negotiating skill of three minors who are relentlessly engaged in the process of discovering and articulating their marginalized identity in relation to the centre.