CHAPTER - IV

NARIMAN’S LONG JOURNEY IN SEARCH OF SELFLESS AND CARING

SOUL IN MISTRY’S FAMILY MATTERS

I think emigration is an enormous mistake. The biggest any one can make in their life. The loss of home leaves a hole that never fills. (FM, 254)

Family Matters, the title is at once cleverly plain and gently wordplay. Mistry has viewed the life of a middle-class Parsi family in Bombay from his Canadian point of vantage. The novel focuses of the oppression and solace of individual and family relationships. It hints at the current and existing effects of public policies on private life. This Bombay epic is a three generational series piece and mourns for the negation of Parsi family.

In Family Matters, Rohinton Mistry has explored human frailty in old age that arises to question between emotional and economic and the moral and spiritual implications. Although, its’ specific geographical and cultural setting is in India. Family Matters illustrates universal issues of impartiality caretaking and family relationships. The plot of “Family Matters” is very simple and clear based on an ordinary man and his family.
Apparently, the story of the pressures faced by one Parsi family whose attempts to care for an aged and sick person Nariman Vakeel. Characters are caught in complex situations and their reactions of dealings with each other in the wider world they live. Family Matters as a novel that shares with the loss as well as the subsequent struggle for meaning of life. In Family Matters, the family members’ personal moralities are provoked through the injury Nariman Vakeel. It permits Mistry to examine matters of corruption and religious struggles that are part of his larger concerns about his home city of Bombay.

Rohinton Mistry’s works are preoccupied with problems of world in which meaning has become limited. Mistry novels reflect interest in the importance of personal and cultural identity. These issues take their parts in the family response to Nariman’s sudden need for care. Family Matters provides an intimate and compelling depiction of matters to families in the universal situation of parents’ need for home care.

Mistry’s thoughtful text also leads the reader to consider the various ways in which family does matter. He unfolds detailed story of religious, ethnic, and cultural. It comes across with all who have experienced the complexities of the haunting of the present by the past and the oppressions of selfishness and pride. Mistry invokes to the experiences of all of family matters tremendously in the life of individuals. There is a sudden shift in the dynamics of a family resulting from illness or disability in “Family Matters”.
In **Family Matters**, Nariman Vakeel is the protagonist of this novel. His old age is shadowed by Parkinson disease and the heritage of an unhappy marriage. Nariman Vakeel’s situation is common enough in some respects. He enjoys an independent life in his own apartment even with advancing Parkinson’s disease in which he shares his life with his two stepchildren until he falls and becomes bedridden. This crisis provokes a different behaviour among his stepchildren that is motivated by their own selfishness because of earlier family crisis.

**Family Matters** is almost completely set within four walls. More exactly, the novel has as its setting two flats, Yezad and Roxana as well as Coomy and Jal. In the novel, Mistry does not merely understand Parsi community’s fear as a form of degeneration both spiritually and culturally. **Family Matters** is a particular way of family matters. It is not only merely Parsi family but also the family of man. Such actions are investigated as part of the novel’s moral ambiguity and causality. That often centres on the distinction between duty and free will. Mistry explores the inevitable fragmentation of such ideals in practice and compulsions of duty to family, community and Zoroastrian faith.

Although, the novel sets in the mid-1990s, it again blends past and present of Nariman Vakeel by Parkinson disease. Then, the novel reflects on the incident that leads to the joint deaths of his wife and former lover and the family’s subsequent fractures. As a protagonist, Nariman is gradually reduced to silence and ultimately death. The voices and role of his stepson, Yezad, and nine year old grandson, Jehangir take over as the novel’s further progresses.
In a final Epilogue, ‘five years later’, Jehangir takes over completely. He is able to part of adult motivation and then his grandfather’s tangled love life has so painfully scrambled. The title suggests that family is important both as the site of primary loyalties and often unresolved issues. In the novel, family comes to have both positive and negative connotations. Nariman Vakeel, Yezad Chenoy and Contractor family unit is already fractured by their losses.

Coomy and Jal Contractor’s own father dies young and they are unwillingly forced into a new domestic arrangement. Their mother seeks the security of a marriage to Nariman Vakeel who carries them with him. Therefore, he is forced by family pressure to marry a Parsi widow with two children, Jal and Coomy. Under the family compulsion, Nariman sacrifices his love with a non-Parsi, Lucy Braganza and unwillingly yields to the marriage with Yasmin Contractor without interest. Nariman soon adds a daughter of his own, Roxana his newly acquired stepchildren.

Nariman’s two stepchildren, Coomy Contractor and Jal Contractor have grown up with awful memories. Coomy is stubborn selfishness and Jal is the other victim to an equally dangerous passivity. An accident, Nariman becomes bedridden and helpless at the mercy of his children by the cause of old age. They react to their father’s changed position from benevolent to unwanted burden in different ways. Coomy forces Nariman to move into Roxana’s overcrowded house because of her inconvenient position. There, Roxana lives with her husband Yezad, and their two boys, Murad and Jehangir in small flat of Pleasant Villa.
Yezad and Roxana, a young couple and their two sons Murad and Jehangir live together in a small flat. The usual of family life is totally changed by the arrival of Roxana’s father Nariman Vakeel. Nariman’s step-children Coomy and Jal try to dispose of once his health deteriorates. But, as a real daughter of Nariman, Roxana makes a decision to nurse her father.

In the present disaster, Nariman generously forgives their behaviour, as they prepare to send him to his daughter’s small flat:

Poor children, thought Nariman, it was difficult for them to disguise their eagerness. And he couldn’t blame them. The blame lay with the ones thirty-six years ago, the marriage arrangers, the wilful manufacturers of misery. (FM, 88)

However, it is important to realize that Nariman’s character is not only his tolerance but also the contrast favourably with his parents. During old age, he needs the help from others that provokes the memories his of past and long lost life. The past has even more secrets in which Nariman’s first love with Lucy was withdrawn by his parents’ compulsion. Ultimately, Lucy had provoked jealousy to his wife Yasmin that led to both their deaths in a fall from the roof. This religious and ethnic strain of tragic end has produced an irrational sense of blame in Jal and Coomy, and decaying guilt in Nariman.

Selfish Coomy and Jal live in the larger of the two apartments that Nariman owned, while Roxana lives with her husband Yezad Chenoy and their two children in a very small apartment. It reflects the other part of Nariman’s survival to the two sides of
his family. So the story is set for some ironic and emotionally wrenching events. The novel portrays Bombay’s corrupt world that is a significant part of the text’s meaning.

However, Mistry’s fictions resonate well beyond their local settings and politics. Coomy’s moral view originates in the bitterness that she carries through the years. Early in the novel, she tells Nariman bitingly,

If you don’t like what we’re saying, ask your daughter’s opinion when she comes tomorrow... Your own flesh and blood, not like Jal and me, second class. (FM, 7)

As she declares her bitterness over caring for Nariman.

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. (FM, 85)

In a mediator tone Coomy adds, “I just don’t think I should be the one having to do all this for him” (FM, 85). Coomy thinks that Nariman’s own flesh and blood daughter should care for him. Her tensions between bitterness and caretaking are intertwined with tensions of moral and economic responsibilities. Coomy and Jal have no dependents and also control Nariman’s properties. In particular, Coomy opposes any role in care for Nariman and then plans to move him to Roxana’s small apartment. Then, she remarks bitterly that Nariman plans to give an apartment for struggling Roxana, so Coomy behaves and plans like that.
In *Family Matters*, ethical ambiguities develop in virtually every relationship and situation that springs from a range of concerns. Indeed, Roxana family has to face the everyday additional expenses for the old man.

When the medication ran out and Roxana went to purchase the next lot, she discovered that what Coomy had given her as her father’s pension did not cover even the cost of the pills. (FM, 187)

Perhaps, Coomy uses Nariman’s illness as a way to exact revenge on him for his treatment of her mother. Coomy holds a portion of the pension for caring of Nariman and for loose of her past. Then, the corruption has a vital place even into the family of the Yezad Chenoy.

These corrupt entanglements demonstrate to which members of Roxana’s family go to contend with the financial pressures in their caregiving family. But, Roxana differs from others and then she displays the patience and commitment to accept what fate has delivered and to manage the family with strength and love. Her husband reacts angrily to Jal and Coomy’s plan,

If they play this game, so will we. They kick him into our house, we find a way to kick him back into theirs. (FM, 195)

Roxana responds, “Pappa is not a football. I won’t behave like them” (FM, 195). Ultimately, the costs of this situation are deadly for her half-sister Coomy whose
attempts to stop her stepfather’s return. Coomy has an idea to damage the plaster ceiling of her apartment purposefully it results in an outburst from her brother:

Family does not matter to you! You keep nursing your bitterness instead of nursing Pappa. I’ve begged you for thirty years to let it go, to forgive, to look for peace. (FM, 193)

The portrayal of Roxana’s care of her father provides a vivid illustration of the costs of care. Roxana’s selfless to care for her father under strained conditions and Coomy’s self preserving avoidance of caregiving even with living in more comfortable surroundings have received the greater part of the care recipient’s assets. Further, challenges and conflicts frequently accompany with an old person’s loss of independence. Nariman reflects on caring: “Either it resides in the heart or nowhere” (FM, 121). Later, Yezad realises the importance of the old and he acknowledges,

helping your elder through it - that was the only way to learn about it. And the trick was to remember it when your own time came... (FM, 358)

Nariman’s presence helps the members of Yezad’s family that comes to understand themselves. At end, Nariman comes back to the more spacious apartment at Chateau Felicity where he has his own room again. Roxana’s family even moved with him from in the crowded conditions of Pleasant Villa.

Mistry’s the ideal family is not only a matter of birth but also caring, harmony and kindness. Nariman could not able to do his needs, so he wants emotional and
sometimes physical supports from others. By this way, a touching relationship develops between Jehangir and his incapacitated grandfather. Therefore, Jehangir is most able to provide the sustenance Nariman requires. He consoles his troubled grandfather at night when unbidden memories plague him and even helps him.

Nariman’s Parkinson disease is linked to Osteoporosis. He breaks his leg when out for a walk that leads him to bed rest in Chateau Felicity building, under the production of Coomy. Eventually, the plaster on Nariman’s leg gives the idea to Coomy to shift and keep him at the Chenoy’s flat for recovering. Family Matters’ Characters are again furnished with a full complement of ailments. Coomy’s brother, Jal is partially deaf and struggles with a faulty hearing aid. The subjects of mobility versus immobility, decay and mortality are explored through Nariman’s way of life.

Nariman comes to exist only in the life of the mind that the theme of imprisonment. He struggles to perform the simplest tasks of his needs. Roxana and Yezad struggle every day to maintain their family from the financial risks. Coomy fights vainly with bitterness that she blames the old man for her mother’s untimely death. Coomy and Jal hesitate the unpleasant physical caring for the old man. Coomy and Yezad refuse to touch Nariman’s the bedpan cause of horrible smell.

Their repulsion is a part with their compulsive desire to exercise control over their environments. For example, this urge is harmful for two figures Lucy and Yasmin whose battle for control of Nariman sends them over the edge. They plunge to their
deaths from the roof of Chateau Felicity. Thus, the breakdown of family life is linked to physical and psychological sufferings.

Physical corruptions and the inevitable changes are linked with social corruption characteristic of modern Bombay. The moral corruption of characters is often for commendable reasons and engages in subterfuge. For example, Yezad Chenoy uses his family’s budget money to gamble on the illegal lottery ‘Matka’ that makes losses him. Yet, he does it with hope to face the increased expenses for the arrival of his Parkinson father-in-law. Similarly, His son, Jehangir is tempted to betray his role as a school homework monitor, who obtains money for his class-mates’ mistakes for his family needs.

The commonplace of corruptions takes charge on Yezad’s world. This harmful situation spreads through the city by Shiv Sena who fights for the changing the name of Bombay into Mumbai. This is also a continuation of Mistry’s exploration of the city who left so many years ago. Mr Kapur is owner of Bombay Sporting Goods and also the bass of Yezad. He refuses to change the name of his shop from Bombay to Mumbai Sporting Goods that attracts the attention of the murderous Shiv Sena goondas.

In Mistry’s novel, they are also shown to have a finger in the Matka pie. The underground lottery helps to fund the Shiv Sena machinery. It also finances the organised crime that has spoiled the city and its institutions, Vilas Rane observes: “Matka is Bombay and Bombay is Matka” (FM, 207). They also beat up the radical journalist and actor Gautam for writing an article on the “politician-criminal-police
nexus” (FM, 206). The moral corrupt affects all over the Bombay life also increasingly it makes its presence in the life of Nariman’s family. This example is obviously Coomy’s complicated plan to shift her stepfather in to Chenoy’s family to keep him there.

Yet, this clear example of dishonesty also symbolizes characters’ dealings with each other and sometimes with themselves. Jahangir’s classmates request him to hide their home work mistakes and they offer some money to him for their mistakes. So Jahangir is forced to obtain extra rupees for the family’s needs. He betrays himself and his teacher, Miss Alvarez who has unshakable faith on him but situation makes him to do the corruption. Although, Jehangir wants to help Miss Alvarez to fight against the corruption but he is eventually compromised and becomes part of it.

Likewise, Yezad is also the victim of corruption that he is tempted to take money from envelopes to place bets on the Matka. Later, he temporarily removes the envelope of money intended as payment to the Shiv Sena goondas. Although, he reconsiders and returns it before its absence is noticed. In different ways, Yezad and Jehangir violate their community’s careful honesty. Ironically, Yezad warns his sons in which the myth of Parsi honesty and integrity is an ambiguous one, both inspiration and burden. As Vilas Rane comments, “some myths can make misfits of men” (FM, 212-13). Indeed, Yezad and his son have a best reason to secure extra funds to cover Nariman’s expensive medicines.
Therefore, moral ambiguity in motivation is at the heart of the novel. *Family Matters* repeatedly returns to question the negative outcome of the well intended behave. A number of situations have themselves a kind of double construction to lead the novel to end. Roxana innocently suggests the unskilled handyman Edul Munshi to Coomy to fix ceiling but it results both deaths. Most intractable of all, the sequence of events appears to initiate all the Chenoy family’s subsequent troubles. That is Nariman’s inability to give up his relationship with Lucy Braganza, even after his marriage to Yasmin.

After his marriage, Lucy follows him and takes a job with a neighbour in order to be near him and repeatedly threatens suicide. Again, Nariman follows her up to the roof of Chateau Felicity to advice against her from jumping. Even though, he tries to calm his former lover and he worries for Lucy in her distressed obsession. At one point, he wonders himself that is about Lucy’s endless love.

Such moral complexity gives a new twist to Mistry’s repeated concern with the idea of goodness as understood in Zoroastrianism. Each of Mistry’s works contains a reference to the prime necessities of the Zoroastrian faith. *Family Matters*’ every move seems with danger either to oneself or to others. Coomy behaves badly towards Nariman because she fears the disturbance of her carefully ordered existence. She doubts her ability to manage and perhaps subconscious act of revenge for the way Nariman treated her mother.
Yezad is also tortured by guilty consciousness over his covert activities onto Nariman. Certainly, Coomy has chosen to interpret her mother’s unhappy marriage and death in a certain way. Her lonely life shattered by bitterness and clearly an unforgiving attitude towards Nariman. Thus, characters in Family Matters are seen largely to choose their own fates. Each is burdened by an acute sense of duty to family, to employer or to the city as a whole.

When hearing Mr Kapur’s intention about municipal election, Yezad expects the opportunity for an increment for his responsibilities. He invokes the Bhagavad-Gita in urging the greatest claims of duty. Ironically, Mr Kapur counters this and then recalls Kant in justifying the decision to set the family above civic duty.

Think about it - pure duty is unconcerned with outcome. Even if I become a municipal councillor, fight the good fight, what do I have at the end? The satisfaction of knowing I’ve done my duty. As far as Bombay is concerned, nothing changes. Nobody can turn back the clock. (FM, 302)

In respect, Yezad indirectly attempts to threat his boss Kapur through his friends act as fake Shiv Sena gangsters for money are all motivated by a notion of duty. As result of his plan, his friend and employer die by political brutality. Yezad is affected by the loss and death of his friends in the same way as Gustad who loses Jimmy and Dinshawji in Such a Long Journey, or the tailors who lose Ashraf in A Fine Balance.

However, there is a sense in which the various duties edge him onto Mr Kapur as his employ that comes into conflict with each other. Likewise, Coomy is forced to
choose between the duties to look after her incapacitated step-father and memory of her mother. Of course, she decides that her ceiling has collapsed in order to absolve herself of her duties to Nariman. However, Yezad or Coomy think that others would behave towards them with the same kind of deception.

Here, the point is not only to measure these characters’ good behaviour but also to show how they fail to meet the Zoroastrian faiths. In short, *Family Matters* is concerned with these causes and how one interprets for connections between past and present. Characteristically, the novel centres on the difficulties of making sense of narrative with controlling time and change.

Mr. Kapur gives some photos to Yezad that derives the illusion of continuity of subtle connection between the cheerful boy and the stressed middle-aged man. Dreams also show an option to Yezad in his increasingly desperate search for control over events. After winning with his very first bet in Matka, a stunned Yezad reflects on Villie’s accurate calculation:

Coincidence? Or had she predicted the future? And if dreams could do that… no more worry and anxiety. The worst news, foreknown, would lose its sting.

*(FM, 203-04)*

Then, Nariman recollects memories of Lucy with the dreams of semi-consciousness. In particular, the violinist Daisy Ichhaporia offers Nariman a little heaven on earth as she plays him popular songs from his youth. Formally, the concern for past-present connections is played out through repetitions. Family is the comfortable space to
all but it has over protectiveness to each persons of the family. Yet, parental control is not only against Nariman marrying for love but also Yezad dealing with his eldest son’s friendship with a girl.

However, For Yezad, family matters become a burden not only with respect to his father-in-law but also with respect to his son. Similarly, Yezad is not willing to modify his community policy that becomes manifest when his reaction towards Murad’s new girl friend. He comes to repeat Nariman’s father’s inflexible religious belief. Because, Murad’s girl friend is not a Parsi, so Yezad acts like Nariman’s parents did before him. Murad and his non-Parsi girlfriend dislike the repetition of the parental separation of the earlier generation. Murad may look like Nariman, but he has no longer feelings to obey his parents’ compulsion. In the novel, the disobedience of Murad, as an example of the young generation that represents a chance for the threatened Parsi community.

Yezad wrongly accuses Roxana that she neglects the rest of her family in favour of her father. Finally, they attempt to part together the chain of events and their family affairs have moved from initial domestic harmony to hostility. In Family Matters, events are interpreted variously as the product of coincidence, free will, destiny or God’s will.

Sometimes, coincidence makes a kind of bitterness in the way of unexpected moments. Yezad sets fake Shiv Sena goondas with the help of his friends to frighten Mr Kapur for requires. Coincidentally, Mr Kapur is visited by real Shiv Sena gangsters and then he is murdered by them. “That was the problem, everyone dismissing the possibility
of coincidence...” (FM, 405). Later, Yezad suggests that Nariman’s increasing bed infections as well as his new house servant arrival indicate as a coincidence. Roxana reminds him.

You say there’s no such thing as coincidence... You call it another word for the Hand of God. (FM, 495)

Roxana reflects on the tragedy of the shattered love-match of Edul Munshi and his wife by asking,

‘What is this absurd force called destiny?’ to which the increasingly devout Yezad replies, ‘Man proposes, God disposes’. (FM, 410).

Mr Kapur adores the challenging activities of Bombay life with passion. However, he justifies his decision that is not to run in the election. His dream of Bombay is simply that a dream just as Yezad’s glorification of Canada.

Hinduism has an all-accepting nature, agreed?... Even false gods are accommodated, and turned into true ones, adding a few more deities to its existing millions. ‘The same way, Bombay makes room for everybody. Migrants, businessmen, perverts, politicians, holy men, gamblers, beggars... So who am I to say these people belong here and those don’t? Janata Party okay, Shiv Sena not okay, secular good, communal bad, BJP unacceptable, Congress lesser of evils? (FM, 362)
In *Family Matters*, Yezad becomes a religious fundamentalist while at his wife encourages him to pray and participate in the Zoroastrian rituals. Due to the loss of meaning in his life, Yezad trusts on religion for the construction of an identity. Yezad’s religious passion is revealed to be a compensation for his stumbling belief in compassion and sharing. Yezad is criticized for losing his faith in humanism by a trust on essential difference as a doubtful approach at making meaning.

Particularly, Yezad contrasts unfavourably with his employer Kapur. Mr. Kapur offers Husain, the disturbed victim of violence with a job in his shop. He is suffered himself from Muslim violence in the course of the 1947 partition of India. It makes him to practice forgiveness and solidarity to his fellow human beings. By accepting Husain as an employee, he actively fights narrow-mindedness and becomes representative of a humanist utopia. Mistry emphasizes the importance of sharing.

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. (FM, 158-59)

The religious components of identity are particularly important for Parsi characters. However, the main concern for this vulnerable community in “Family Matters” centres the merits and notion’s ethnic purity. For Yezad, the issue is one of purity. As Luhrmann has noted,

The central cosmological struggle of good against evil is described as an effort to achieve purity—that which is evil is impure, that which is impure is evil.”
However, for the orthodox, a ‘transformation took place with the concept of purity... which was refigured from holiness into racial superiority. (Luhrmann, 101)

Burning fire at the temple offers subtle past and present connection of Parsis. In a way, the fire-temple replaces the family home as a place of safety from the outside world. Parsi community faces a real human tragedy and it is portrayed with great sensitivity in the novel.

Discussing the future of the community, Parsi Inspector Masalavala remarks, “The experts in demographics are confident that fifty years hence, there will be no Parsis left” (FM, 412). Dr. Fitter shares the grief and concern over the future responds, “Extinct, like dinosaurs,” “They’ll have to study our bones that are all” (FM, 412). Their grief brings to light that Parsis were the one who built the beautiful city of Bombay and made it prosper, but now, “it will be a loss to the whole world. When a culture vanishes, humanity is the loser” (FM, 415).

While talking about falling birth rate of Parsis, Dr. Fitter draws a comparison between Parsis and the other Indian communities to state that,

There are lots of wealthy couples living alone in new flats who produce just one child. Two, if we’re lucky. Parsis seem to be the only people in India who follow the family planning message. Rest of the country is breeding like rabbits. (FM, 413)
Further he says “your demographers will tell you, the more educated a community, the lower the birth rate” (FM, 414).

Ironically, Inspector Masalavala puts forward a suggestion that would increase the population of Parsis:

Then we need to fix that. I have two suggestions. First, our youth must be prohibited from going beyond a bachelor’s degree. Give them cash incentives to study less. And those who want to do post-graduate studies, tell them they will get no funding from Panchayat unless they sign a contract to have as many children as the number of people over age fifty in their family. Maximum of seven—we don’t want to spoil the health of our young women. (FM, 414)

This humorous statement not only focuses on the decline of Parsi race but also their cultural superiority. Aditi Kapoor observes:

Unless something is done to augment their fast depleting number and to revive their religion, Parsis after an illustrious past could well just fade out in oblivion. (N.P.Sharma, 32)

Exclusivity, racial purity and cultural superiority of Parsi community never like to have any sort of contact with the outsiders. This is seen in the narrative when the protagonist Nariman Vakeel recalls his love affair with Lucy Braganza, a Goan catholic girl.
For eleven years, he and Lucy struggle to create a world for themselves but finally Nariman surrenders to the will of his parents by agreeing to end his “ill considered liaison with that Goan women... and agreed to settle down,” (FM, 11). Nariman at the Breach Candy beach tells Lucy about ending their relationship “they had been ground down by their families” (FM, 13). Last Lucy’s parents too are seen against her marrying a non-catholic outside her religion.

Nariman finally accepts that “traditional ways were the best” (FM, 16) and his responsibilities to hold up the values and the purity of his community, he marries a forty years old Parsi widow with two children. This makes one of his close relatives Miss Katwal shout in delight that the “naughty boy at last becomes a good boy, it’s a double delight,” (FM, 13). In spite of being highly educated Nariman is seen surrendering his personal predilections to his community consciousness. Inter religious marriages which has been problem to different communities also seem to be problem to Parsi community. Being a Parsi, Nariman has no right to choose his life partner because his allegiance to his community is in his ‘flesh and blood’ that decides his life.

Nariman’s grandson Murad also develops intimacy with Anjali, a non-Parsi girl. Yezad, Murad’s father gets terribly upset when he finds Murad kissing Anjali in the stair well. At this sight, he shouts in anger,

I’m warning you, in this there can be no compromise. The ruler, the laws of our religion are absolute; this Maharashtrain cannot be your girl friend... He further
warns his son, “You can have any friends you like, any race different or religion, but for a serious relationship, for marriage the rules are. (FM, 482)

Yezad who strongly believes in maintaining the purity of his race says, “because we are a pure Persian race, a unique contribution to this planet and mixed marriages will destroy that,” (FM, 482). The dilemma facing in contemporary Parsis about inter-communal marriages is brought to light in confused Jahangir’s words with his parents Roxanna and Yezad.

He asked if there was a law against marrying someone who wasn’t a Parsi. His father said yes, the law of bigotry. (FM, 42)

Towards the end, Yezad feels seriously by unexpected events in which he falls back on his revived faith more and more. He constantly struggles to stop the non-Zoroastrian influence on two teenage sons. It seems that his attempts at religious ritual have not brought him peace. Mistry has remarked,

I’m not a practising Parsi but the ceremonies are quite beautiful. As a child I observed 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 characters have looked for happiness by following the dictates of duty as far as possible. But they often find that the duty comes into conflict with personal preference or immediate need. According to Kant,
there is no point in proclaiming happiness, in the sense of the fulfilment of one’s desires, as the ultimate goal in life, because it cannot be elevated to the level of that kind of universal law his maxims demand. In fact, to try to do so would be disastrous. (Kant, 11)

It is each person’s interests and happiness that would actually lead to conflict. This difference is almost without limit, because the specific happiness changes with the circumstances and histories of each individual. However, it is still, when his step-daughter Coomy asks,

How many people with Parkinson’s do what you do? I’m not going trekking in Nepal. A little stroll down the lane, that’s all. (FM, 3)

Nariman falls on the street lane and returns home on the evening of his seventy-ninth birthday,

with abrasions on his elbow and forearm, and a limp. He had fallen while crossing the lane outside Chateau Felicity. (FM, 6)

This fall results in an explosion from Coomy and also brings up bitterness and unhappy memories. This is the beginning of the unhappiness to Nariman and his Contractor families. In early, Nariman has ruined his life by marrying Yasmin Contractor, the mother of Jal and Coomy. Coomy irritates and scolds Nariman that she flares up, “you ruined Mamma’s life, and mine and Jal’s. I will not tolerate a word against her” (FM, 7). The quarrel now gathers pace and contemporary bitterness insults.
“will he go out and break his bones and put the burden of his fractures on my head?” (FM, 7).

Therefore, the novel has many flash backs and inner feelings of individuals. The first flashback provides the initial piece of the jigsaw puzzle that reveals the entire story of Nariman’s unhappiness at end.

The first piece is about how one evening thirty-six years ago, Nariman had finally surrendered to his parents’ adamant compulsion. “end his liaison with that Goan woman... and agreed to settle down” (FM, 11). That evening at the Breach Candy beach, Nariman told Lucy Braganza that he was ending their long relationship and love affair. “they had been ground down by their families” (FM, 13).

Lucy’s family too was against her marrying a non-Catholic. This kind of calamity lays in Indian societies that being averse to inter-religious marriages and not just Parsis. This is not a protection of Parsi but merely an attempt to set the record of them. Therefore, Parsis are not willing their children marrying outside their community. Nariman is forced and compelled to marry the replacement of Lucy in the form of a widow, Yasmin Contractor, a widow with two children, his parents told him, “that’s the best you can expect, mister, with your history” (FM, 15).

Therefore, Nariman turns into himself the husband of Yasmin Contractor and the father of Jal and Coomy. Again, the novel moves into contemporary times as the family gets together to celebrate Nariman’s seventy-ninth birthday. The birthday party has an emotional level that Nariman and his family are more or less happy. The old man
Nariman has palpable love with his son-in-law Yezad and the grandsons Murad and Jehangir. Even Coomy and Jal ultimately afford to the general ambiance of good will to Nariman. Political gossip also forms part of this chatter and the family criticises severely against the corrupt politics of the Shiv Sena. In the party, politics interrupts into the family circle including the charges at Indo-Pakistan cricket matches and cricket players.

Coomy worries about a possible serious fall for Nariman if he continued ignoring her injunctions on going out. In a serious manner, she warns Roxana, if again that would happen, she should take care for him and this argument is countered by Yezad. So, the party ends but not without a reference of Lucy. But Nariman is irritated by asking her to bring the best one of dust-laden ceiling fan. The elders have immediately changed the subject, but the young boys have caught the reference at the bus stop on their way home. Therefore, Yezad and Roxana try to explain the problem of Nariman to their children.

Nariman’s parents had with inter-religious marriage. Here, Mistry brings out the plight of modern Parsis’ world and its inter-communal marriages. The explanation confuses young Jehangir to understand the nature of Parsi marriages,

He asked if there was a law against marrying someone who wasn’t a Parsi. His father said yes, the law of bigotry. (FM, 40)

There is considerable dramatic irony in Yezad’s response as towards the end of the novel. Yezad turns into a bigot himself and opposes his elder son Murad’s relationship with a non-Parsi girl.
Coomy already guessed clearly that her father would fall again. Like as Nariman does fall down again soon after his Birthday party. This second fall does more serious damage and he has to be carried home. Coomy sends Jal for Dr. Fitter who lives in near building to attend Nariman, but the doctor suggests taking him to hospital. The doctor’s reaction makes anger to Jal, who irritates the old doctor with worries,

Is it any wonder they predict nothing but doom and gloom for the community? Demographics show will be extinct in fifty years. Maybe it’s the best thing. What’s the use of having spineless weaklings walking around, Parsi in name only. (FM, 51)

Nariman is taken to Parsi General Hospital where Nariman is diagnosed by Dr. Tarapore, a fellow Parsi. Nariman suffers from a fracture of his left ankle that is complicated by Parkinson disease. So his left leg is x-rayed and plastered by Mr. Rangarajan, a non-Parsi technician.

Then, Rangarajan discusses with him about Shiv Sena and then wishes to immigrate abroad as he does not wish to work in India anymore. Thus, Mistry shows the middle-class educated Indian’s dream of immigration from corrupt India to a Western country, which is not restricted to Parsi community alone. Nariman’s hospital stay and his friend the non-Parsi Rangarajan allow Mistry to bring in the topic of unclean Indian hospitals where rats run wild. After a two-day stay at the hospital, Nariman is discharged and returns to his flat of Chateau Felicity.
But Coomy and Jal hide the news of Nariman’s fall and hospitalization from Roxana. They plan abruptly and without any warning to leave the old man at Roxana’s residence. Meanwhile, they do try to manage themselves for a little and give the old man a bed pan for commode to manage. His stepchildren struggle with the stinking commode and with their consciences. Nariman drifts in and out of painful hallucination and the text slips into the next flashback episode.

This is concerned with the time that Yasmin’s jealousy onto Lucy provokes her to hide his clothes. So, he would not go down to meet Lucy who has taken to standing on the pavement and staring up at Nariman’s window. Nariman has countered Yasmin’s plan of hiding all his clothes, while he is taking his bath by going down to meet Lucy. Nariman would try to ignore her until his regret would drive him down to see Lucy. This situation and reaction of Nariman upset Yasmin and the children, especially Coomy.

Later, Lucy gives up her studies and thanks for the relationship with him and then she is living at the YWCA hostel. Additionally, this episode has driven among Nariman, Yasmin and also detached him from Coomy. Back to contemporary times, the narrative moves into another gear as Coomy defeated by the physical labour of the old man. For domestic help and stinking smell in the flat, Nariman is driven away without any prior warning to Roxana’s flat.
There is no help and compassion at all for the care of the old. Nariman is nominally consulted on this move but he knows that he does not really have any rights to rejection. So, Nariman says,

this flat is my home, and I put in year names because I did not differentiate between you and Roxana. Would you now throw me out in my helplessness? They would probably laugh that I was getting dramatic. “Lying in bed, here or there, is all the same to me. But it will be difficult for them, in such a small flat. (FM, 87)

Extra people accommodation is not allowed in the majority of family unites in the crowded city of Bombay. It has ruined the happiness of families and their accommodation. So, the ambulance is once again called and the unlucky old man lifted onto a stretcher and as they take him out.

He wondered if he was seeing the familiar faces for the last time. Nariman wanted to tell the ambulance men to make a tour of each room so he could examine everything, fix it his mind before the door closed behind him. (FM, 89)

Thus, Nariman accepted his unsuspecting daughter Roxana’s little flat for the reason of his age and his fracture. Roxana’s world is Pleasant Villa also includes her neighbours, the violinist Daisy Ichimora and the Matka-playing Villie Cardmaster. These two women impose in a major way on Nariman’s life at Pleasant Villa. Daisy has soft behaviour through her performance for the old man. Villie has a role indirectly by
enabling Yezad to make a little extra money for the old man on the Matka game. Thus the old man becomes part of unhappy little family of his daughter.

Murad, the older boy, is shifted to the balcony under a plastic sheet provided by Card master and then Nariman is settled in the sitting room. The younger boy Jehangir sleeps at night on the little pullout bed. He cares his grandfather while his mother goes back to hanging up the clothes on the balcony. From that vantage point, Roxana is able to watch the scene,

nine year old happily feeding seventy-nine... She felt she was witnessing something almost sacred, and her eyes refused to relinquish the precious moment, for she knew instinctively that it would become a memory to cherish, to recall in difficult times when she needed strength. (FM, 113)

So, the family struggles to care for Nariman and as the monthly budget becomes more and more strained. In spite of this hardship of existence in the tiny flat, life is better than his spacious flat. There, Nariman had to compete with Coomy’s bitterness and Jal’s helplessness.

Here, he has his grandson’s company and then Roxana and Yezad watch him till he settled back into sleep. From this way, Nariman has experienced some sort of comfort in his old age. After one year of their stay there peacefully, at the end he died in Chateau Felicity.
All characters in the novel face identity crisis and they struggle individually. But Nariman suffers physically and mentally more than any other character. For example, Yezad’s life in Bombay reflects full of stress and strain of daily commute to work and insufficient salary working conditions. Yezad has eager to immigrate to Canada. Ironically, Yezad and Roxana had interviewed but at the end of the interview Yezad lost his faith with,

You sir, are a rude and ignorant mar, a disgrace to your office and country. You have sat here abusing us, abusing Indians, and India, one of the many countries your government drains of its brainpower, the brainpower that is responsible for your growth and prosperity. Instead of having the grace to thank us, you spew your prejudices and your bigoted ideas. You, whose people suffered racism and xenophobia in Canada where they were Canadian citizens, put in camps like prison is of war-you sir, might be expected, more than anyone else, to understand the more enlightened Canadian ideals of multiculturalism. But if you are anything to go by, then Canada is a gigantic hoax. (FM, 253)

This is Mistry’s the first instance of anti-Canadian discourse after the early critiquing of Canadian multiculturalism in “Lend Me Your Light” and “Swimming Lessons” in Tales from Firozsha Baag. Then, the Bombay riots are proclaimed by Yezad’s boss, Vikram Kapur points out,

Bombay endures because it gives and it receives. Within this warp and weft is woven the special texture of its social fabric the spirit of tolerance, acceptance
generosity. Anywhere else in the world, in those so-called civilized places like England and America, such terrible conditions would lead to revolution. (FM, 159)

Finally, this myth supports the basic Zoroastrian belief of the eternal battle between good and evil that rages within the soul of all men. Thus, it is important for human beings to remember their origins through such devices. Shattered dreams of immigration also trouble the pages of Family Matters.

The immigration story used to have two parts: dream and reality. But over the years the dream-of prosperity, house, car, CD player, computer, clean air, snow, lakes, mountains, abundance-had been renounced, since it was not going to come true (FM, 240).

Nariman is a man who leads the race of searching identity and individuality at one stage when he will get it he dies. So, the novel Family Matters progressively depicts Parsis’ plight of the earlier novels of Rohinton Mistry.