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Rohinton Mistry's: A postcolonial humanist text

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Abstract

Rohinton Mistry is widely acknowledged for his postcolonial approach to the marginalized. In his novels, he has not only highlighted the marginal position of the poor and the destitute in the Parsi community but also in the wider Indian society. In *Family Matters*, we find he locates the marginalized within the family set up also. The aged people are objects of neglect, more so in poor families where financing the upkeep of old people seems burdensome. As is his wont, Mistry shows the impact of dirty politics on ordinary, politically unattached lives. Politics is also responsible for the fall of the city of Bombay from a cosmopolitan to a ghettoized one. As an intellectual, Mistry cannot escape casting a glance at the declining numbers of the Parsi community and comes up with his views on the issue of ty and how the community can forge links with other communities. For his focus on the Parsi identity, political suppression, and the weak and the destitute in society, Mistry comes out as a great postcolonial humanist.

Keywords: postcolonial fiction, new humanism, Indian English fiction, Parsis of India, ageism, public-private interface

Introduction

In Mistry, an Indian Parsi writer who migrated from Bombay (now Mumbai) to Canada in 1975, is a product of post-colonial times. Beginning with his *Tales from Ferozsha Baag*, a collection of short stories published in 1987 ^[1], Mistry has written till date three major novels, viz., *Such a Long Journey* (1991) ^[2], *A Fine Balance* (1997) ^[3] and *Family Matters* (2002) ^[4] and a novella *The Scream* (2008) – a limited edition (only 150 copies) published as a fundraiser for a Canadian charity. In all these fictional works, the community of Indian Parsis (also written as Parsees) is mainly in focus. And yet it would be injustice to the writer in case he were only considered to be representative of his community, for his concerns transcend to acquire a humanistic outlook. This is postcolonialism at its best and most relevant in the contemporary world.

Postcolonialism, which started with the theorization of the struggles of the colonized people for freedom, has indeed come a long way. India was among those which fought this battle against the erstwhile British rulers. Mahatma Gandhi, not only led the struggle in the first-ever successful non-violent experiment, but also formulated ideas for a postcolonial society in India. His innate spirituality enabled him to see all as equal and therefore, the idea of subjugation whether by an alien power or by our own people of fellow subalterns was an anathema to him. He was equally emphatic about the native culture which was reflected in his espousal of village industry and the concept of *Ram Rajya*. It is a pity that he did not live long enough and those who claimed to be his heirs so smoothly sidestepped his philosophy and indulged in the same kind of politics which the British practised so that the plight of the subalterns in our society continues to be miserable.

Sometime later in Africa, Aimé Césaire and Léopold Senghor talked of the Black identity that had been suppressed by the colonizers. Franz Fanon theorized that constant negative portrayal of the native by the colonizer led the former to believe in the very lies that the latter propagated about them. The native even tries to mimic unsuccessfully western cultural practices and don a white mask but all the same, it points to the cultural domination. The Arab scholar, Edward Said, analyzed the skewed Orientalist approach of the colonizers. His distinction of self vs. other became seminal to postcolonial thought.

In the 1990's, the Indian academic Homi Bhabha, modified the concept of mimicry to incorporate hybridity in it. The hybridized native is situated between his adopted Englishness and original Indianness – a state of in-betweenness and the same holds true for the colonizer, the later part evoking disbelief in many quarters. It was left to Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak to raise the fundamental problem of inadequacy of representation of the subaltern because he was not heard, nor did he have the clout or power gained through English language.

All representation of the third world, at present, is a Western discourse (Malik 143-47) ^[5].

Clearly, the chief concern of postcolonial studies is the status of the 'other' as colonized or the oppressed, regardless of gender, class, race, creed, etc. This stress on the value of justice is a humanistic concern which further leads to the issue of identity of the subjugated and the subaltern which is sought to be effaced or mutilated by the colonizer or an authoritarian set-up. Born of the struggle for independence, Postcolonial theory has a definitive political edge and it favors opposition to any regime that aims to suppress people a la colonizer.

Along the line somewhere, the colonial narrative had an interface with the postmodern globalized world wherein movement across political boundaries and geographical continents is on the increase. The spaces wherein the immigrant comes into contact with the people in the host country and subsequently his culture interfaces with the native culture there is ever on the increase, calling for dealings on equal terms even if the past relationship had been along colonizer/colonized axis or the racial lines of white/black or brown. This, then was and is the current scenario facing postcolonial studies.

Further on, taking up the case of the subaltern and the weak within any free society, post-colonialists feel that they are pitted against an increasingly commercialized world with no scope for taking into account the adverse effect that the globalization brings to bear on them. It is in the fitness of things that from this point of departure, the postcolonial theory must evolve to become a more inclusivist and broader humanist approach in the global village if it has to stay relevant in postmodern times. In fact, even Frenz Fanon, who was a champion of violent overthrow of the colonizer, recognized the importance of building solidarity of colonized people on the basis of a shared history of suffering, regardless of their racial identities. This, according to a scholar, is —a form of humanism that Fanon seeks and in this —Fanon's humanism anticipates the work of several postcolonial theorists, notably that of Leela Gandhi (2006) and Ashis Nandy (1987 and 1998) (Nayar 29) ^[6]. So far as the current scenario is concerned, recent trends in postcolonial theory have come to embrace the language of cosmopolitanism and humanism as viable alternatives for a postcolonial future- the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 provides an alternative to postcolonial theory's revisionist humanism-the recognition of difference says Pavan Malreddy (1557) ^[7]

However, humanism is not the sole preserve of the updated postcolonial theory. It has always been valued in Parsi and Indian cultures which show a lot of similarity in many areas. These are among the oldest civilizations in the world. Parsis -- the people of ancient Iran -- belonged to the Indo-European branch of the Aryans and their history goes as far back as 2000 B.C., when Prophet Zarathushtra is believed to have been born. In his novel Family Matters, Mistry makes Nariman Vakeel tell his grandson about the glory of the ancient Iran. The migration of the Parsis from Persia (now Iran) to India started after the invasion of ancient Persia by the Arab Muslims. It continued from 785 to 1021 A.D. and they settled on the Gujarat coast under an agreement with the local ruler at the root of which lay the sentiment of humanism only. The Parsis have faithfully kept their word to live in harmony with other communities, and their

reputation as peaceful, industrious people contributing to the uplift of their adopted land is well established.

Plot of a novel

With these musings on the postcolonial theory as the setting, let us go over the story of the novel briefly. It revolves around a lower middle class Parsi family of Bombay (now Mumbai). The head of the family, Nariman Vakeel, is a retired professor of English literature. In his late seventies, he suffers from Parkinson's disease about which his step-daughter Coomy is more concerned than his step-son Jal. He lives with them in a building named Chateau Felicity. Both siblings, though well past their marriageable age, are still unmarried. They are the children of Palonji Contractor, the former husband of his wife Yasmeen, both of whom are deceased now. Nariman and Yasmeen's daughter Roxana is married to Yazed and has two young sons – Murad and Jehangir. This family lives in Pleasant Villa which was gifted to them by the professor.

The story opens with the concern shown about the professor who has had a fall while crossing the road and broken his ankle. He is taken to hospital and his leg is put in cast. After a two-day stay there, he is brought back home in an ambulance. Later, the doctor attending on him says the ankle would take some more weeks to get set. This news dampens Coomy's spirits as she is already fed up with looking after the old man, particularly at moments of nature's call. So, a week after the fall, the professor is shifted to his daughter Roxana's small flat and assured that it was for a few days only. Surprisingly, she had not been informed about the accident earlier.

As the days drag on, Coomy's fertile brain hatches an ingenious plan to avoid receiving back the professor. Jal deliberately hammers the roof of Nariman's room so that the plaster falls down. Thereafter, both of them visit Roxana and deliver the disturbing news of a leaking roof making it impossible to host Nariman. As expected, Yezad and Roxana are a worried lot now. They want some financial support from Coomy which the latter refuses straightaway leading to exchange of some unsavory words between them. To save her face however, Coomy engages an amateur handyman Edul residing in the same building to repair the _leaking roof. The novice that he is, an iron beam while being hoisted up, falls down on Edul and Coomy, killing the two then and there.

Meanwhile, Yezad, under financial burden due to the upkeep of his father-in-law, tries gambling for some time. In a politically vitiated climate, Yezad reports to his boss the fictitious demand from Shiva Sena activists for money in lieu of permission to keep _Bombay instead of _Mumbai on the signboard of the sports emporium where he works. The owner of the emporium, Mr. Kapoor is in deep love with every old thing about Bombay. He won't hear of such a thing and instead would part with money. On the appointed day, however, real Shiv Sena men descend demanding change of name but before they speak, Mr. Kapoor castigates them for their supposed demand and throws the money which action offends them so much that they murder Kapoor. Yezad is shaken by this sudden turn of events and considers himself responsible for Kapoor's murder. The all-round downslide makes Yezad turn to prayers to find solace. Coomy's death brings about the badly needed turnaround in the lives of these people. As per Jal's plan, Yezad's flat is sold for forty lac rupees. Some of the amount is spent on the

its renovation and the rest is kept in bank deposits, the interest from which is sufficient to see all of them through life. All of them now shift to this spacious accommodation. After a year, Nariman passes away due to Parkinson's disease. The Epilogue, entirely Jehangir's point of view, shows Yezad passing his time in reading religious scriptures and praying. He is now a self-righteous Zoroastrian Parsi who frowns upon any sign of modernity. However, in Jehangir's eyes he is a bigot only. The narrative throws up a number of issues like the terror unleashed by the political outfit in the city, the gambling operations, economic hardships of the characters and impact on children, and finally the issue of guilt and redemption. As a postcolonial writer, Mistry's concern about the Parsi community and race are highlighted.

Parsi recognition

The postcolonial issue of identity is an important one that finds focus in this novel. Mistry is aware of the dwindling number of Parsis the world over. The total population of the Parsis in India has gone down from one lac in 1961 to 75000 in 1987 census (Haldar, 102) and is estimated to be around 60000 at present^[8]. The Government of India has declared the community as endangered and announced several incentives to check the extinction of this wonderful community. (Murphy)^[9]. In Family Matters, Dr. Fitter and Mr. Masalawala have a lively discussion on the issue of depleting numbers.

"The experts in demographics are confident that fifty years hence, there will be no Parsis left."

"Extinct, like dinosaurs, said Dr. Fitter. —They will have to study our bones, that's all."

Jal smiled. He liked the doctor despite the gruff personality and bluntness. His humour epitomized the Parsi spirit, he felt, the ability to laugh in the face of darkness.

"You will be named Jalosauras," said Dr. Fitter. "I will be Shapurjisauras. If they find my father's bones, we will have a Pestonjisauras with a pugree on his head. And our inspector here, who loves his Scotch, will be the powerful Whiskysauras, a magnum of Blue Label tucked under his arm. In the meantime, eat, drink, and be merry." (345).

As to why the community is facing this predicament, a look at their history will help. The Parsi community, we find that the period before the independence of the country was crucial to the development of the community and its outlook. It is common knowledge that the Parsis cooperated with the British and came to be seen as their cohorts. "The Parsees dressed like the Europeans, smoked, drank, played cricket and pursued English education but the inner Parsee life remained unchanged" (Kumar qtd. In Batra 15)^[10]. With the British they launched on business voyages like the opium trade to which renowned author Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis Trilogy* (2019) is devoted^[11]. This cooperation with the British, in turn, led to a certain high-brow attitude among them which alienated them from the bulk of the Indian populace. After the country gained independence, the Parsis, who were quite well-off economically, withdrew themselves into a cocoon, so to say, and devoted themselves mainly to economic activity. Those who found it difficult to adjust to the new reality crossed the shores of the country to settle abroad or nursed dreams of migrating to western countries. Parsi intellectual Nilufer Bharucha (2003) aptly remarks:

"In decolonized India, the exalted position enjoyed by the Parsis during the Raj has been eroded and increasing dominance by the majority Hindu community has marginalized them. Parsis today are trying to reorient themselves to this new much reduced role" (Bharucha 42)^[12].

Yezad, the central character in this novel too nursed such a dream but he could not go to Canada and this botched plan left a scar on his psyche. Beset with economic hardships here, many Parsi young men and women keep on postponing marriage – till the time they get good employment or by the time they get accommodation in a costly city like Mumbai where a large number of Parsis live. Their number has also been dwindling over the past few decades due to the rat-race for success which marks the educated and prosperous members of the community. They feel threatened as a small island in the vast oceanic waters of a populous country.

Another significant factor relevant in this context is the obsession with purity in the Parsi community. Until 2017, they forbade strictly the entry of any non-Parsi into its fold through marriage. On the other hand, any Parsi girl marrying a non-Parsi was banished from the community. This led to fall in numbers of this community. Only in response to vehement protests by the young Parsis was this injunction removed. The treatment meted out by Nariman to his lady-love Lucy or later by Nariman's children to him have similar pattern. The plot is mum about Nariman's decision to marry Yasmin even when he loved Lucy. The only plausible reason is that he buckled down under parent's pressure who went by the societal code. At the cross-road in his life, Nariman repressed his desires which stage a comeback in his dreams.

The identity of Parsis, therefore, becomes an urgent focus of attention. There is a lot of space given to the identity markers like their lifestyle, history, myths, way of worship and the current problem of dwindling population. The westernized lifestyle of the Parsis is also reflected in his works by Mistry. Whether it is the surfeit of English rhymes and song-lines in *Such a Long Journey*, the birthday celebrations in pucca English style in *Family Matters*; the handling of lovesick Lucy by a married Professor or the way of addressing his father-in-law as *_chief* by Yezad in *Family Matters*, English culture seems to have permeated the Parsi lifestyle to a great extent.

While these conditions have left an imprint on the social psyche of this race, the Parsis do try their best to impart knowledge of their religion and value system to the young. These efforts do not necessarily succeed at all times. Yezad used to tell his sons the story of his father's valour in displaying loyalty to the bank in which he worked during fierce riots in the city. For this, he was rewarded with a clock that hung in their house and which Yezad zealously guarded as a valuable symbol of honesty and bravery of his late father. Whereas the mythical story of Faridoon and Zuhaak as told by Nariman to the grandchildren symbolises the eternal nature of the struggle between good and evil, the heroic deed of Yezad's father is brought in to convince the sons of the modern relevance and desire to live by that ideal. The children, however, were hooked to Enid Blyton books to adopt their role models and reference points from -- something over which Yezad frets and frowns again, fearing children would develop an unhealthy mindset. Roxana, on

the other hand, feels proud of her son feeding his grandfather (108).

Politics and Humanism

Postcolonialism is intimately tied to politics as it came into existence due to the political struggle of the colonized against the colonizers. As such, in Mistry's fiction, the political angle does creep in. In fact, it forms the main plank in the novel *Such a Long Journey* in which an army man and a bank clerk – both Parsis – suffer due to the machinations of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Thus, the public-private boundaries get blurred in his fiction. Similarly, in his novel *A Fine Balance*, characters – both poor Parsis and Hindus suffer during the infamous phase of Emergency promulgated in 1975 by the same Prime Minister. In this novel, Mistry remorselessly peels the veneer off the face of the political class. Similarly, in *Family Matters*, he comes down heavily on the Shiv Sena, a political party in India, for its parochial outlook. This party launched a campaign to change the name of the city from Bombay to Mumbai as the latter is the original name of the city – a postcolonial move indeed but then it comes into conflict with the spirit of cosmopolitanism. Mistry underlines this conflict beautifully in the novel.

In *Family Matters*, Husain is Yezad's colleague working in the same emporium. He lost members of his family in the post-Babri riots that rocked Bombay for a long time. Mr. Kapoor, himself a victim of the 1947 riots that accompanied the vivisection of India, tries not to remind Husain of the riots. Husain hardly retains the bitterness of the past, which could have been a normal phenomenon in any ordinary mortal. Another humane character is Vilas, who works in the adjoining book shop and as a side-job, writes letters for the illiterate migrant labourers who come to Bombay from far-off places to earn a livelihood. Thus, the total influence of the individuals working with Yezad should be positive.

As a postcolonial humanist text, the novel oozes with a humanistic spirit. It goes to the credit of Rohinton Mistry that the ambit of his sympathy is wide enough to include those who have not attracted much the attention of ordinary writers. In his novel *Family Matters*, therefore, Mistry takes up the status of the aged besides focusing on the subaltern within the Parsi community and the marginalized in other communities. In his novel *A Fine Balance*, a major portion has been devoted to the rural poor of India who belong to the Hindu community.

Yezad is the one who has to support his family with a limited income to which the care of his father-in-law has been added. Yezad's wife keeps monthly income apportioned in different envelopes so that she does not exceed the monthly budget allocation for different expenditures. His son considers it his duty to support his father and starts accepting petty bribe from class-mates in return for okaying their homework as monitor of the class. His other son Murad walks home from school to save the bus money. If a made-up leaking roof was a problem in Jal's house, it is the real prospect of rain upsetting arrangement of an extra bed in the balcony so that Nariman can be accommodated safely in the bedroom. The way Murad tries to create a make-shift room in the balcony is indeed heart wrenching:

“Daddy and I will dress the balcony in a raincoat and gumboots and cap.” Rummaging among the shelves outside

the kitchen, they found two small plastic sheets, enough to cover the spaces in the wrought-iron railings but nothing large enough to make a roof. “Ask Villie,” suggested Yezad to Roxana. “She might lend us a tarpaulin or something.” (109)

This picture of a lower middle class Parsi family is hard to believe since they are mostly known for their fortunes and a few of them actually occupy Fortune and Forbes lists of wealthy persons in the world – Tata, Wadia, Godrej, Poonawala, *et al.* But Mistry is truly a postcolonial humanist. Therefore, his attention turns towards the lower rung of Parsi community. But then, essentializing and homogenizing has always been suspected in the eyes of the postcolonial writers and thinkers. The western colonialists resorted to stereotyping to easily comprehend the native people. So, Mistry's Parsi characters Jal, Coomy, Yezad – all occupy liminal space which is more realistic portrayal.

Of all the characters in *Family Matters*, Yezad's professional life has been depicted in detail. He is fortunate to have got a humane employer in Mr. Kapoor whom he also respects for his intellectual leanings, something rare for a businessman. Kapoor is inseparably and emotionally linked to Bombay and the name of his shop, viz., Bombay Sports Goods Emporium does not seem to have been selected casually. He cherishes the memory of old Bombay through paintings and pictures preserved over a long period by him and laments the depredation brought about by the changing times. Being aware of similarity of Yezad's interests, Mr. Kapoor presents him some valuable pictures from his personal collection and Yezad is appreciative of the spirit of sacrifice behind this gesture.

Not just pictures, Mr. Kapoor also loves the people of Bombay for their cosmopolitan spirit. A Hindu himself, he has least qualms in celebrating Christmas or other festivals belonging to different communities. This approach is diametrically opposite to Yezad's when, egged on by his orthodox Parsi circle, he arranges for the immersion of non-Zarthustri images in sea waters. Kapoor also tries his hand at being one of the myriad Bombayites, commuting daily by local trains. A novice in this art, he suffers but does not complain. It is a philosophical decision, as he explains to Yezad, “I want to embrace everything my city has to offer. I want to mingle with her people, be part of that crush of bodies in the streets and trains and buses. Become one with the organic whole that is Bombay. That's where my redemption lies” (346). What is a philosophical decision for Kapoor is fantastic rhetoric for Yezad. The motivation for this experiment came from a common platform scene in which the daily passengers helped a latecomer chasing the train to board it. But when Kapoor tries to savour the same spirit, the daily commuters just laugh at him and do not extend the helping hand. The reason, as he analyses it, is the fine clothes and shoes that he puts on. So, he would now get ill-fitting cheap clothes from the pavement vendors (348). His search for the human values of fellowship and comradeship comes to an end when Yezad treacherously hatches a heinous plot to extract money from him taking advantage of the fear psychosis created by the Shiv Sena. But Kapoor never compromises on values dear to him. He has the guts to throw money in the face of the ‘extortionists’ rather than talk peace with the people who want to change the cosmopolitan character of his dear Bombay city. He becomes a martyr to a cause.

As in the other novels of Mistry, people belonging to the lower middle class have a formidable existence. Their life is beset with a thousand and one problems: their clocks stop, the taps run dry at six in the morning, their grocers cheat them regularly and getting adequate accommodation is well-nigh impossible. In this crowded city, even kholis in a modest chawl are rented out in shifts of 8 to 12 hours (138). The train travel for the daily commuters involves no less than Tarzan's antics (137). In an interview, he said, "Strange as it may seem, the individuals who make up the Parsi community are human beings, of flesh and blood, heirs to all joys and sorrows of mortals, capable of behaving as nobly and as despicably as any other, as they go about the business of living life that is inevitably filled with laughter and tears and meanness and kindness. And that is why their stories are universal" (Arzan) [13]. For Mistry, the commonality of lived experience is important even as the induction of an uncommon event upsetting fine arrangements is the necessity of a piece of fiction.

Sinners prayer

Mistry's humanism comes in conflict with faith. The particular situation in the novel has been twisted and turned to expose various dimensions of the conflict. Mistry's skepticism with regard to faith shines through this web. He is firmly on the side of humanism. What we see towards the close of the novel is a Yezad who is full of remorse for having forsaken the lofty human values and fallen prey to greed. The spiritual values provide sustenance to man in troubled times, but selfishness presents a stumbling block here. This is seen in Coomy's character, who, faced with the unwelcome prospect of hosting her ailing father, invents the excuse of a leaking roof: "An act of God is no one's fault". Jal is prevailed upon to cooperate but is reportedly "uncomfortable with casting God in a supportive role in their deceitful drama" (184). In a masterstroke of poetic justice, she pays with her life for having driven "Pappa" out of her home. God does play a sporty role, however, as the 'Bombay Sporting Gods Emporium signboard would indicate after the 'o' in 'Goods' has been blown away by storm. (370). And then, Yezad's proposed plan is disposed of queerly by God as a real Shiv Sena man turns up in place of the fictitious one leading to the murder of an innocent Kapoor.

Yezad is flabbergasted and his guilt cries for similar reward but then it seems God's justice is tempered with mercy; mercy because Yezad has repented. During the period of financial crunch caused by the additional burden of hospital bills of his father-in-law, Yezad starts visiting the fire temple. The latter phase involving Mr. Kapoor's murder, for which he thinks himself responsible, makes this practice of visiting the agiary (fire temple) and praying there a compulsion for him. His wife Roxana feels pleased with his new-found "faith in prayer that had descended like a blessing upon him and their house" (445). To Roxana "belief is not essential. The prayer sound itself will bring him peace and tranquility" (445).

Is Yezad's surrender total? It would require deep probing, for we are entering the domain of the subconscious and the mystical. It is hardly possible for one to know one's own self fully. When it is the question of one's relationship with the Absolute, the problem becomes doubly confounded, for the Absolute hardly speaks the way He used to, in Biblical times. Even then, Job had such a difficulty resolving his

doubts. It requires perhaps the sagacity of the sages of Brahadaranyak Upanishad to interpret the thunderous sounds to which T.S. Eliot refers in *The Waste Land*. When questioned by Jehangir about the prospect of getting a new job, an unemployed Yezad's reply is, "God is great. If He wants me to, I am sure I will" (433).

Yezad has his moments of revelation. The initial phase involving his visits to the fire temple seems to be having a salutary effect on him. The one, who hated attending to ailing Nariman for the foul smells, is now seen serving tea to him and giving him a shave. Analysing the self, he feels that the young would do well to remember death. "Carrying your death with you everyday would make it hard to waste time on unkindness and anger and bitterness, on anything petty." Also, he has the feeling that if you knew a person long enough, he could elicit every kind of emotion from you, every possible reaction, envy, admiration, pity, irritation, fury, fondness, jealousy, love, disgust. But in the end, all human beings became candidates for compassion (358).

Yezad's metaphysical discoveries, however, seem to distance him from the humanist ideal. He hardly fits in with the simple image of a loving father. Jehangir recalls the name-game that his innocent mind had invented as a child. The youngster's later point of view is authenticated through first person account in the 'Epilogue' section of the novel. Having found out the histories/meanings of the names of other members of the family, Jehangir thought that together they made a perfect family: "They were blessed, they possessed the whole world, they had their own guardian angel, and Mummy's dawn light shone upon all of them. Yet Mummy and Daddy were fighting and unhappy" (289). At that time, Yezad laughed and joked, whistled and played with the children. All that is passé. Now, "when he is home, he is either praying or reading, and says the music disturbs him" (465). Murad thinks his father has "gone over the edge...deep into the abyss of religion" (493). "You are becoming more and more fanatical," he is forced to say to his father. (486). Jehangir goes to the extent of observing that his real father "is gone, replaced by this non-stop-praying stranger" (500).

Even though he has not been able to act honestly in life, Yezad would very much like his sons to tread the righteous path. For this, he invokes the help of God: "O Dada Ormuzd, bless my sons, keep them healthy and honest, look after all our family according to Your will, help me do what is Your will..." (437). But his younger child Jehangir is a typical new generation brat who cannot accept things as they come to him. The child's internal conflict is manifest in his longing, which seems to be the writer's as well, —If only Dada Ormuzd could help me understand! Why must prayer and religion lead to so many fights between father and son? Is that His will? (466). Which, in effect, is the question that humanists ask of spiritualists.

Conclusion

The theme of the novel *Family Matters* reminds one of T.S. Eliot's play *The Family Reunion* (1939) [14]. Both have some similarity as far as the title and the theme go. Harry, the central character in Eliot's play is haunted by his guilty conscience (which even takes the shape of the classical Eumanides) for his desire to kill his wife, who falls overboard a ship and gets drowned in sea waters. He ends up atoning not for his sin but for that of his father who had

likewise desired to kill Harry's mother as he was infatuated by Amy's sister Agatha who restrained him in the name of the then-unborn child, viz., Harry. The Family Matters does not share Eliot's approach in looking at the events a la original sin committed by Adam for which posterity was held accountable. However, the culpability here appears more concrete even when the essential concern remains the same, i.e., the equalization of desire and deed at the site of sin.

Jehangir's is a choric comment on the futility of factitious and facile faith. He yearns for a genuinely humane order that touches the innermost depths of the self and is not confined to spaces marked by his father in the drawing room. Towards the end of the novel, he is told that post-death, all the requirements of food and clothing etc. of his grandfather would be met by Dada Ormuzd. As the first person account of Jehangir shows, he is immensely amused at the idea of this —clothing and catering service run by God. Nor does he understand the rationale of constant muttering the name of God while at the same time disregarding His creations; not attending to the cries of Nariman is a case in point.

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