

Humanistic Approach in Rohinton Mistry's Family Matters

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Abstract: This paper presents a humanistic approach in human psychology to understand human development. It makes us realize the human values that are becoming increasingly globalized and the spiritual nature of the human being. A thorough analysis of the novel, 'Family Matters', has been done to bring out the reality of human nature and behaviour during physical and mental suffering in family life. It clearly illustrates that "family" is not necessarily a happy affair but it can be enlightening, complex, rewarding and surprisingly rich, and a suitable theme for this paper.



In his private heart no man much respects himself. In addition, how could he? From the time he is chewing on his pabulum he is told he is weak, low, sinning, dirty, offending, downright stinky, told that this life is a mere dress rehearsal for something better, and in need of some kind of miraculous salvation. This is the way to engender excellence in humanity", says Mark Twain.

A humanistic approach is a non- technical approach. It favours the artistic, physical and cultural aspect of matters. It considers the need for self-reflectiveness and self-actualization among the younger generation. It is a concern to growth. Humanistic psychology is the way we understand human development. It is concerned with the realization of individual and community potential. Basically, human beings are well and the process of living is fundamentally creative. The socially nourishing life that we live is masked by behaviors, thoughts and feelings. It has consciously developed as a response to painful experiences. The humanistic approach paves the way for people to step into their own potential, through active engagement with their own journey of growth. Humanistic approach is holistic. It recognizes the spiritual nature of human beings, and works to help people integrate all levels of their experience: body, thoughts feelings, spirit, and soul.

In many ways, we live in a dystopian world. Wise heads have speculated that modernity and technological progress has come at the cost of a less livable world. Professions have become more complex, challenging, that essentially trap men in that single identity. Greed pervades society and power is concentrated in

the hands of avaricious individuals who crave for more power or money. Many channels of communication and knowledge, are controlled by self-serving media houses. Society has come to adopt modes of living, which are at odds with basic human values. In the midst of such perversion of life, what role is left for ethics and morals?

Ancient civilizations had certain things in common in their classic texts; they endeavored to understand the nature of mass and values that made man unique in the living world. Human values were accorded the highest respect and virtue was the most respected accomplishment. The relationship of man with his environment is underlined in each of these traditions. Nature was worshiped as a provider of life. But modern civilization has allowed man to alter his environment so dramatically and abruptly that perhaps man does not realize what he has wreaked. The destructive arms of Greed have clasped much of the world in its deadly grip. The impact of all this on society has been to create a pervading sense of reality and conceit that has transformed how a human being views himself in the world. Since society respects only material achievement, impressionable youth turn greedy and jealous in their pursuit of wealth and material happiness.

The Diasporic Indian is like the banyan tree- the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life, he spreads out his roots in several soils, drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up. Far from homeless, he has several homes, and that is the only way he has increasingly come to feel at home in the world. With

globalization of national economies, the mixing of cultures and Bollywood increasing cultural appeal and reach, Indians has become one of the forces to flatten the world. Indians in the USA are one of the largest among the groups of Indian Diasporas, about 2.5 million.

Gandhiji rightly says in Young India:

“I don't want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about me as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.” (Gandhi, 1921)

Diaspora is all about the creation of new identities, spaces for growth, resolution of conflicts and a new culture, either composite or plural. Diaspora writings are not constructed on the principle of harmony but on the principle of simultaneity. The principle of simultaneity displays 'the core' human predicament in the countries of the West and the East. The overseas Indian community constitutes a diverse, heterogeneous, and electric global community representing different regions, languages, cultures and faiths. The common threat that binds them together is the idea of India and its intrinsic values. Overseas Indians share strong bonds with the country of their origin. This is reflected in their language, cultures and tradition that have been maintained often over centuries and continue to be vibrant and unique.

They are well represented in all walks of life particularly in academia, IT and medicine. The writers of the Indian Diaspora like V. S Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, M.G. VasANJI, Bapsi Sidhwa, Kiran Desai, and Jhumpa Lahiri have explored the identity crisis, racial and cultural conflicts, ethnicity, and sense of belongingness, loneliness and alienation among the immigrants. In order for human values to become relevant age such a struggle needs to occur within each individual who has been corrupted in some way. The need for human values to be championed is immediate. Everyone who wishes to see a better world has a responsibility to bring about changes. One among them is the reputed writer, Rohinton Mistry. He has given a clear presentation of human values in his novel 'Family Matters'.

Rohinton Mistry was born in Bombay in 1952, of Parsi origin. He emigrated to Canada in 1975. To him, his home city Bombay was all that looked tall, in all his writings. Mistry confesses, in the literary journal 'Rungh' (1993) stating that his departure from India was partly encouraged by the expectations of his peers especially those of his generations:

“After finishing college in Bombay or elsewhere in India, one had to go abroad for his/her studies. If possible, one had to find job after finishing a masters or a Ph.D in the states or in England, find a job and settle in the country. That is how Indians define success. Therefore, that is why I say that coming to Canada was in some ways decided for me.” (Quoted in Mchfil, November 1996)

In 1997, Mistry's collection of stories 'Tales from Firozsha Baag' was published. In this he describes the daily life of the Parsi residents in a Bombay apartment block. What Mistry explores in his stories are the relationships at the heart of this community, their cultural identity and the uniqueness of their community affection. In 1991, he published his first novel 'Such a Long Journey'. Following this in 1995, he published his second novel 'A Fine Balance' and then in 2002, he published his third novel 'Family Matters'.

The novel "Family Matters" deals with questions of religious intermarriage, problems arising in a "blended" family between parent(Yasmin), stepparent(Nariman), children(Roxana) and step children(Coomy and Jal) and the difficulties of caring for aged and ailing parents.

The Plot of the Novel

Nariman Vakeel is the 79-year-old professor of English. He is suffering from Parkinson and Osteoporosis. He is living with his two adult unmarried stepchildren Jal and Coomy in their large family house. When he was about 35 years old, he wanted to get married Lucy, a Goan Christian. Reluctantly, and with tragic consequences, Nariman succumbs to family pressure and took instead a Parsi widow (with two children) to wife. However, Lucy never stopped loving him and became half-crazy with his decision to conform to family wishes. This made Nariman feel more.

Lucy hounded him taking up premises close to where Nariman has started living with his new wife Yasmin and their children. Even though he has started his life with another woman, he does not stop loving Lucy. His private meeting with Lucy displeases his wife, Yasmin. The two step- children are marvels of characterization. Coomy, the righteous spinster secretly blames Nariman for having killed her mother, with his unruly love of Lucy. One could say that she is her deceased mother's avenger. Her life is full of hatred. Jal, her soft willed brother, represents as opportunistic powerless, because even though he is friendly, he cannot resist his sister's fury and rage, and objectively sides with her.

Nariman is, at first, taken care of well, but being bedridden, he is now an invalid. Coomy pretends that they have no money any more to look after him. She and Jal bundle him in to an ambulance and deliver him to his own daughter Roxana. Yesad, the son-in-law of Nariman leads a life of happiness, laughing with his boys (Murad and Jehangir), enjoying his wife's love- liness when he came back from work. When he visits his father in law, he respects him and enjoys his time there. But things start changing when Nariman is obliged to stay with Roxana. He is called a 'genial father' when he initially visits his daughter, son in law and grand children. Later he becomes a rigid purist, as he is bed ridden. Then, Yesad will not allow "his" sons to touch Nariman's instruments, and lets the old man starve in agony if Roxana is away. In addition, this unbalancing of an ordinary vir- tuous life (virtuous because it was balanced- virtue is often that, a precarious balancing of humanity and bestiality) reverberates on the innocence of his boys. Joy and happiness are no longer the rule at home, because a poison of greed and hatred has been in- oculated somewhere up the line. Jehangir gets himself trapped in a bribe-taking scheme at school (he helps classmates to cheat on their lessons), so he can bring money to pay for grandpa's medi- cines. Yesad's son Murad, is in love with a non- Parsi, as his grandfather does with Lucy.

In the world inhabited by Yesad and his family, the no- tion of good is adulterated and evil is immanent in humankind. Good and bad permeate one another, partly through those ageless

human proclivities, vengeance, pride and intolerance. Hence, characters' motives are often grey. Coomy behaves badly towards Nariman. It is perhaps a subconscious act of revenge for the way he treats her mother for which she has a legitimate grievance. Yesad is tortured by guilt over his covert activities until he finds that religion can conveniently be made to bear the burden of a multitude of sins.

Conclusion

The "Family Matters" is an exemplary work. It complete- ly talks about Nariman and his family. It reflects family and socie- ty in large. Since it is a family novel it asserts small walled events and supports family in length. The proposed epigraph of Mistry is,

'Each happy family is happy in its own way but all un- happy families resemble one another'

Work cited

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