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# The Predicament Of Geriatrics In The Scream By Rohinton Mistry

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### Abstract

Mistry's novels are showcases of relationships. Mistry reveals vulnerable relationships through his works. He suggests that relationships are very weak, and trust that solidifies relationships can be easily broken. Misunderstandings and delusions can lead to the collapse of relationships and even oppression. Age is one of the central themes of Mistry's fiction and the relationship between them. Generations are of great concern when Mistry talks about the private territory of the family and home. The private world is a place for families to get together. This paper aims at analysing the complexities faced by an old man out of too much pampering in *The Scream*.

**Keywords:** Geriatrics, aging, loneliness, reminiscences, fear.

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## 1. Introduction

Old age is an inseparable part of human life. It is an inevitable, unwanted, and problematic period of life. An old man is full of experience. While experience is a great help to the younger generation, he is perceived as an unwanted burden. He is obsessed with a terrible sense of redundancy. Old age is a vision of loneliness and negligence. The images get even better as health and illness diminish. Hopelessness covers all his joyful feelings.

As an old man, he needs someone to help him with all the work he does. He becomes dependent on others, mainly because of his physical weakness. He is full of emotional anxiety. He wants someone to take care of his needs and share his feelings. But in this materialistic society, everyone is short on time. No one has enough time for him. Even his children, to whom he devotes his life and income, do not have time for him. Weakness and poor health make things worse. The parts of the body that helped during his lifetime seem to be tired and weakened. He is very susceptible to illness-minor or major. Both minor and major illnesses always follow them, and their awakening time is occupied by symptoms and pills, diet and treatment. Regular medical care and care become routine at this stage of life. There is also a terrible need for social security and emotional support.

Loneliness is detrimental to their mental health, which is reflected in some physical problems. The problem of loneliness and isolation is a gift of modern society. Society makes old people live as if they

were on an island. He often faces the loss of his spouse and his old friends. Old age faces multifaceted problems.

*The Scream* by Rohinton Mistry deals with such a familial relationship. It talks about the nightmare and the problems of the Oldman. It is not given clearly whether the scream that he hears is a dream or reality. One in the family except he is disturbed by the scream. The narrator of the novella is angry, sad, frustrated, and helpless- all this because of the evening of life. The story begins with the sleepless night of the protagonist because of the horrible scream at midnight. He is very much disturbed by the groaning and shrill voice from the market. The voice was pleading, crying and calling out for help. Nobody either from his family or from outside seemed disturbed or went to help him. When he tried to close his eyes, the terrible voice scares him; not letting him sleep and suffocating.

The narrator thought that silence is golden with complete wisdom and associated with virtuous people. But the declining years proved it wrong. He understood the horrible nature of silence, especially every night. When the night declines everything goes down. The silence made him think and the scream returned. While the others in the family in the backroom are “snoring, wheezing, sighing, coughing, belching and farting” (4) at night, he becomes restless because of the utter horripilation on his floor mattress.

Life during the advancing years seems “Horripilating. Caliginous. Hypogean. Inspissated.”(6) for the narrator. He feels horripilating every night because of the nightmare; Caliginous, Hypogean and inspissated because of the loneliness and negligence of the family members. Others in the family didn’t let even the servant do the needful. Sometimes when he asks help from the servant, “If his masters are not watching, he comes at once. If they are, he ignores me, naturally not wanted to cross them” (8). The old man felt the humiliation. He is treated worse than the servant whereas the servant was given equal importance to sleep in the same room on the bed, a piano for the servant and eat with them at the table. He realises the forthcoming of Kaliyug.

The Years have passed by,  
In the blink of an eye,  
Moments of sadness,  
And joy have flown by.

People I loved,  
Have come and have gone,  
But the world never stopped,  
And we all carried on. (Pat Fleming)

Food is another major issue for the narrator. Though he likes to taste all varieties of food, one of the members of the family forbids all kinds of spices. They suggested that masala could cause a sore throat, tonsillitis and diarrhoea. So he was served some insipid food to eat with too much salt sometimes or no salt. “They won’t let me such the marrowbones” (30). It was snatched and preserved for Browne, the neighbour’s dog. Constipation and incontinence are both frequent as people age and can lower a person’s quality of life. These may be a result of earlier problems including not eating a well-balanced diet and having chronic health conditions, in addition to age-related changes.

To avoid stumbling at night he started using bottles for micturition. He labelled the bottles as “Nocturnal Micturition” (12) so that others may not use the bottles for other purposes. One from the back room complained that the spelling should be micturation and not micturition. He sensed the pang since he was the one who instilled the habit of using a dictionary. When he complained about the increase in the volume of urine at night, he was not considered. On other occasions, they forgot to give him the tablets. When it was enquired, they retorted that all were provided on time without fail.

From the back room, they switch off the light in the front room. They reasoned that his eyes took a week to read at night. They caressed him stating that he has to be hale and healthy to look his grandchildren grow. “We are here on earth to serve our elders”(10). This entire predicament made him use some long obscure words on them. He calls them “floccinaucinihilipilificatiors”(19). They even let the Brownie sniff over his crotch which is highly disgusting.

He is scared of three things; loneliness, mice and starvation. He started facing loneliness by staying alone in the front room. But he realised that staying alone is not as bad as he thought. Rather he feels good to be alone instead of being with others. “loneliness has arrived, it’s not bad”(7). Then starvation, he is not relishing his food or starving but just living with insipid food. When mice ran over the mattress or brushes his hands and legs, he felt the usual disgust and revulsion.

The man’s children assure him that it’s all in his head: “Every day they tell me I’ve lost my mind, my memory, and my sense of reality.” The elderly man misidentifies his grandchild as a servant and has an unreasonable fear of losing “a few fingers or toes” to the mice that prowl through his room at night, which is evidence in favour of this assertion.

We are never fully sure whether to believe the man’s account at face value or his entire narration is the consequence of his progressively advancing dementia, which is reminiscent of Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw* in Mistry’s narrative style. He ends the plot by stating that everything is not going to end since life is a cycle. Whatever he faces today will soon be faced by others in the family too.

## 2. Conclusion

The elders alone cannot be blamed for everything happening to them. The traditional practice of respect is eroding among the younger generation as a whole and they are showing less regard for the elderly. Nuclear households are more common; there is little intergenerational interaction, and older people are not socialised as much. The following important sectors may present challenges for older people: housing, transportation, employment, income, education and leisure, utilities and consumer protection, information access, and decision-making. Ageing can lead to a decline in mobility, a loss of vision, hearing, and muscle strength, as well as increased susceptibility to heat and cold. Minor issues might quickly turn into significant disabilities that are too much for elderly people to handle. They find it difficult to get assistance and are less able or willing to depart swiftly or defend themselves in dangerous circumstances. For instance, older people have more trouble transporting heavy items and gaining access to distribution sites, while losing their spectacles or walking sticks may make them dependent on others. We also can truly be concerned and loving.

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