

Psychological Impact of Domestic Environment: A Study of the Scream (1995) by Rohinton Mistry

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Abstract:

Rohinton Mistry's short story *The Scream* delves into the complex interplay of family dynamics and emotional turmoil within a domestic setting. The protagonist, Percy, navigates a turbulent environment characterized by his mother's dominance and criticism, his father's passivity, and the suffocating atmosphere created by constant tension and suppressed emotions. This paper analyzes how Mistry portrays Percy's emotional journey, culminating in a pivotal scream that symbolizes the release of pent-up frustrations and the profound impact of emotional repression on individual well-being. Through close examination of character interactions, thematic elements, and narrative techniques, this study explores the themes of familial discord, psychological distress, and the transformative power of emotional expression. By situating the analysis within the broader context of Mistry's literary oeuvre and relevant critical discourse, this paper offers insights into the complexities of familial relationships and the enduring resonance of Mistry's narrative exploration of human resilience and vulnerability.

Keywords: Family dynamics, Emotional turmoil, Psychological distress, Emotional repression, Domestic environment, Resilience etc.

Rohinton Mistry's short story *The Scream* is set primarily within Firozsha Baag, a Parsi-dominated apartment complex located in Bombay (now Mumbai), India. This setting is crucial to the story as it influences the characters and the events that unfold. Firozsha Baag is a close-knit community of Parsi families. The apartment complex itself acts almost like a central character in Mistry's collection, providing a backdrop for the various stories and lives interwoven within it. The architecture and layout of the complex likely feature typical Bombay apartment characteristics, with multiple flats in close proximity, sharing common areas like courtyards and balconies. The apartment where Percy, the young protagonist, lives is depicted as cramped and noisy, reflecting the middle-class lifestyle of the residents. This small space heightens the tension within the family, as there is little room for privacy or escape from conflict. The home is filled with the sounds of daily life—arguments between parents, household activities, and the general clamor of living in a densely populated area. This noisy environment is a significant source of stress for Percy.

Bombay, a bustling metropolis, adds to the story's setting with its vibrant, chaotic energy. The city's noise and pace of life infiltrate the personal spaces of the characters, influencing their interactions and emotional states. The setting provides a rich cultural context, with the Parsi community's traditions, social norms, and interactions playing a significant role in shaping the characters' lives. The confined space of the

apartment amplifies Percy's feelings of claustrophobia and helplessness, making his eventual scream a powerful release of pent-up emotions. Living in such close quarters means that the residents of Firozsha Baag are acutely aware of each other's lives. This intimacy can lead to both a sense of community support and intrusive scrutiny. The setting highlights the contrast between public appearances and private realities. Percy's family, like many others, may present a façade of normalcy while grappling with significant internal conflicts. The story is enriched by the specific cultural setting of a Parsi community in Bombay. This adds layers of meaning related to tradition, identity, and the social expectations faced by the characters. Overall, the setting of *The Scream* is intricately tied to the narrative, providing both a literal and metaphorical backdrop that shapes the characters' experiences and the story's emotional impact. Rohinton Mistry's *The Scream* is a compelling short story that showcases his adeptness at character development and detailed narrative. As a piece of short fiction, it efficiently captures the essence of a moment in a young boy's life, presenting a rich, layered experience within a limited word count. The brevity of the short story format requires Mistry to be precise and impactful with his prose. Every scene, dialogue, and character action is crafted to contribute to the overarching themes and emotional resonance of the story. The narrative focuses on a significant emotional climax--Percy's scream--which serves as a pivotal moment of release and revelation. Mistry's talent for characterization is evident in his portrayal of Percy and his family, as well as the broader community of Firozsha Baag. Despite the story's short length, the characters are fully realized and imbued with depth and complexity.

Percy is depicted as a quiet, sensitive, and observant boy. His internal struggles and emotions are subtly revealed through his reactions to his environment and the people around him. Mistry effectively uses Percy's perspective to highlight his vulnerability and the intense pressure he feels from the chaotic and often harsh world of his home. Percy's parents are characterized with distinct traits. His mother is a dominant, critical, and demanding presence in the household. Her frequent arguments with Percy's father create a tense and hostile atmosphere. Despite her often harsh demeanor, her character is multi-faceted, reflecting the stresses and challenges she faces. Percy's father, on the other hand, is portrayed as more passive and subdued compared to his wife. His character adds to the family dynamic, where his quieter disposition contrasts with his wife's intensity, contributing to the household's overall tension. Percy's younger sister, Roshan, adds another layer to the family dynamic. While not the primary focus, her presence helps to paint a fuller picture of the family structure and the differing ways children can respond to the same environment.

The broader community of Firozsha Baag is depicted through brief interactions and background details. The residents' awareness of each other's lives, their gossip, and their varied reactions to Percy's scream create a vivid tapestry of communal life. Mistry captures the essence of a close-knit but sometimes intrusive community. The characters in *The Scream* are not just individuals but also representations of larger themes. Percy's emotional outburst symbolizes the breaking point of suppressed emotions and the impact of a toxic environment on a sensitive individual. The family dynamics illustrate the complexities of familial relationships and the often unseen struggles that take place within households. Mistry's attention to detail and his ability to create believable, multi-dimensional characters allow readers to deeply empathize with Percy's plight. The emotional climax, Percy's scream, is not just a literal act but a metaphorical release of accumulated tension and a cry for help, making the story both powerful and poignant. The story is a masterful example of short fiction that highlights Rohinton Mistry's skill in characterization. Through concise and evocative writing, Mistry brings his characters to life, making their

struggles and emotions profoundly relatable. The story's setting and character interactions contribute to its thematic depth, creating a rich, immersive narrative experience in a compact form.

The story centers around the experiences of a young Parsi boy named Percy, who lives in Firozsha Baag, an apartment complex. Percy is a quiet and sensitive child, often overwhelmed by the noise and chaos around him. His family consists of his parents and his younger sister, Roshan. The family dynamics are central to understanding the characters' behaviors, emotions, and the overall narrative arc. The family consists of Percy, his mother, his father, and his younger sister Roshan. Each member contributes to the complex and tense atmosphere within their household, reflecting broader themes of communication, emotional suppression, and the impact of domestic environments on individual well-being.

Percy's mother is a dominant and critical figure in the household. She often expresses her dissatisfaction and frustration through harsh words and demanding behavior. Her constant criticism and high expectations create a tense and oppressive environment for Percy and the rest of the family. Her interactions with her husband are marked by frequent arguments, which further contribute to the overall sense of discord within the home. In contrast to his wife, Percy's father is a more passive and subdued character. He often avoids confrontation and does not actively participate in the arguments that dominate the household. This passivity can be seen as a coping mechanism, allowing him to avoid the emotional toll of constant conflict. However, his lack of assertiveness also means that he fails to provide a buffer or support for Percy against the mother's harshness, leaving the child feeling isolated and unprotected. Percy, the story's protagonist, is a quiet and sensitive boy who is deeply affected by the ongoing turmoil in his home. He internalizes the stress and anxiety caused by his parents' frequent arguments and his mother's critical nature. Percy's emotional struggles are highlighted by his increasing sense of claustrophobia and helplessness within the family environment. The constant noise and tension push him to a breaking point, leading to his eventual uncontrollable scream. This scream serves as a powerful release of his pent-up emotions and a cry for help, symbolizing the impact of his toxic home life on his mental health. Roshan, Percy's younger sister, adds another layer to the family dynamic. Although she is not the primary focus of the story, her presence is significant. As the younger sibling, she might not fully understand the gravity of the family's situation, but she is still affected by it. Her reactions to the household's atmosphere and her interactions with Percy and their parents provide additional context for understanding the family's internal dynamics. The family's dynamic is characterized by a lack of effective communication and emotional support. The mother's dominance and criticism, combined with the father's passivity, create an environment where emotions are repressed rather than addressed. Percy's scream represents the culmination of this emotional suppression, highlighting the damaging effects of such an environment on a child's psyche.

The family's interactions also reflect broader societal and cultural expectations. The mother's behavior may be influenced by external pressures to maintain a certain standard of living or appearance, which she then projects onto her family. The father's inability to assert himself might stem from traditional gender roles or a desire to maintain peace, even at the cost of his own and his family's emotional well-being. Rohinton Mistry uses the family dynamics to explore themes of emotional repression, communication, and the impact of domestic environments on individual well-being. Each family member's behavior and interactions contribute to the tense and oppressive atmosphere, ultimately leading to Percy's emotional breakdown. Through detailed and nuanced characterization, Mistry provides a powerful commentary on the complexities of family life and the often unseen struggles within households. The family dynamics are central to understanding the characters' behaviors, emotions, and the overall narrative arc. The family consists of Percy, his mother, his father, and his younger sister Roshan. Each member contributes to the

complex and tense atmosphere within their household, reflecting broader themes of communication, emotional suppression, and the impact of domestic environments on individual well-being. Percy's mother is a dominant and critical figure in the household. She often expresses her dissatisfaction and frustration through harsh words and demanding behavior. Her constant criticism and high expectations create a tense and oppressive environment for Percy and the rest of the family. Her interactions with her husband are marked by frequent arguments, which further contribute to the overall sense of discord within the home. In contrast to his wife, Percy's father is a more passive and subdued character. He often avoids confrontation and does not actively participate in the arguments that dominate the household. This passivity can be seen as a coping mechanism, allowing him to avoid the emotional toll of constant conflict. However, his lack of assertiveness also means that he fails to provide a buffer or support for Percy against the mother's harshness, leaving the child feeling isolated and unprotected. Percy, the story's protagonist, is a quiet and sensitive boy who is deeply affected by the ongoing turmoil in his home. He internalizes the stress and anxiety caused by his parents' frequent arguments and his mother's critical nature. Percy's emotional struggles are highlighted by his increasing sense of claustrophobia and helplessness within the family environment. The constant noise and tension push him to a breaking point, leading to his eventual uncontrollable scream. This scream serves as a powerful release of his pent-up emotions and a cry for help, symbolizing the impact of his toxic home life on his mental health.

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The emotional struggles of the characters are intricately tied to the family dynamics and serve to underscore the broader themes of the narrative. These struggles are particularly pronounced in the story's protagonist, Percy, but they also affect other family members in different ways. Percy is a quiet and sensitive boy who internalizes the stress and anxiety stemming from his parents' frequent arguments and his mother's critical nature. The ongoing turmoil at home leaves him feeling trapped and helpless. His emotional struggles manifest as a sense of claustrophobia and isolation. Percy's inability to express his feelings openly leads to the accumulation of intense emotional pressure. The constant noise and tension in the household exacerbate his feelings of unease and distress. His eventual uncontrollable scream

represents a powerful release of his pent-up emotions, serving as both a cry for help and a manifestation of the impact of his toxic home environment on his mental health. Percy's mother, while dominant and critical, also faces her own emotional struggles. Her dissatisfaction and frustration are frequently expressed through harsh words and demanding behavior. This suggests an underlying unhappiness and possibly a sense of unfulfilled aspirations or unmet needs. Her constant criticism and high expectations might be a way to exert control in an environment where she feels powerless or constrained. The frequent arguments with her husband reflect deeper issues in their relationship, contributing to her overall sense of frustration and discontent. Percy's father exhibits passivity and a subdued demeanor, which can be interpreted as a coping mechanism to avoid the emotional toll of constant conflict. However, this passivity also indicates his own emotional struggles. By not actively participating in the household arguments, he may be attempting to maintain peace, but this comes at the cost of his emotional well-being and his ability to support Percy. His lack of assertiveness suggests feelings of inadequacy and an inability to confront the issues within the family, further contributing to the overall tension. Roshan, Percy's younger sister, although not the primary focus of the story, is also affected by the family dynamics. As a younger sibling, she might not fully grasp the gravity of the situation, but she is still impacted by the tense atmosphere and the lack of emotional support. Her reactions to the household's environment and her interactions with Percy and their parents provide additional insight into the pervasive emotional struggles within the family. The emotional struggles of each family member collectively create an environment characterized by a lack of effective communication and emotional support. The mother's dominance and criticism, combined with the father's passivity, result in a household where emotions are repressed rather than addressed. This repression leads to heightened stress and anxiety for all members, particularly for Percy, whose scream symbolizes the breaking point of emotional suppression. Throughout the narrative, Percy is depicted as a sensitive and quiet boy who grapples with the constant tension in his home. His mother, a dominant and critical figure, frequently expresses dissatisfaction and frustration through harsh words and demanding behavior. This creates an oppressive atmosphere where Percy feels trapped and isolated. His father, in contrast, adopts a passive role, avoiding confrontation and failing to provide emotional support. The buildup to Percy's scream unfolds through interactions and events that intensify his emotional turmoil. The relentless arguments between his parents, coupled with his mother's unrelenting expectations, exacerbate Percy's feelings of helplessness and anxiety. He internalizes these negative emotions, unable to find an outlet for his increasingly overwhelming feelings. When Percy finally screams, it is a visceral release of pent-up emotions—a culmination of his suppressed frustration, fear, and despair. The scream is not just an audible expression but a symbolic act of rebellion against the suffocating environment imposed upon him. It serves as a cathartic release, momentarily relieving Percy of the emotional burden he has carried.

Finally, *The Scream* serves as a poignant reminder of the profound effects of emotional neglect and repression within familial relationships. Through Percy's character, Mistry vividly portrays the consequences of a toxic home environment characterized by constant tension, criticism, and emotional isolation. Percy, a sensitive and introspective boy, becomes a symbolic figure of vulnerability in such environments. His scream, a culmination of suppressed emotions and despair, highlights the urgent need for open communication, empathy, and family support. This powerful narrative commentary underscores the damaging impact of unresolved conflicts and emotional neglect on individual well-being, while also illustrating broader societal and cultural expectations that shape family dynamics. In drawing a meaningful conclusion from Percy's scream, Mistry prompts readers to reflect on their own familial dynamics and the

importance of fostering environments where emotional expression is encouraged and supported. The incident challenges us to reconsider how we communicate and empathize with loved ones, especially children who may struggle silently with emotional burdens. It serves as a powerful narrative that urges readers to prioritize emotional well-being and cultivate relationships built on understanding and compassion. By addressing the underlying themes of emotional repression and neglect, Mistry invites us to recognize the transformative potential of acknowledging and addressing our deepest emotions within the context of familial love and support.

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