

Thought Questions for Distant View of a Minaret

Familial duty is central to many of the stories in the collection. Children have duties to their parents, and their siblings; parents have duties to their children. The questions below examine the ways in which these duties are expressed and enforced in three different stories.

For each of the stories below, keep in mind: 1. What are the consequences of failing to fulfill one's duties? and 2. What does Rifaat think about the duties of family members to one another? How is your answer supported in the text?

At the Time of Jasmine

1. What was Hassan's duty to his father? What is his duty to his daughter?
2. Do you think that Hassan has failed in his duty to his father? Does he think he has? Do the villagers think he has? Assuming that Hassan has in some way failed, why did he fail? What happened? How did Hassan's father react to Hassan's behavior? How was Hassan's father complicit in his failure?
3. How is duty gendered in this story? In this and other Rifaat stories, do sons and daughters have different duties to their parents? If so, what are these duties and how do they differ?

Me and My Sister

1. In this story, the desires of the sisters conflict with the desires of the mother. Mummy doesn't want her girls spending time with boys, forcing Dalal to be secretive about her behavior. As her duties to her parents and to her sisters are contradictory, how does the narrator fulfill them?
2. Why doesn't the narrator tell her mother about Mahmoud? How does she feel about him? What can she gain from her friendship with him and what is at stake?
3. Secrets are very powerful in Rifaat's work. What power does the narrator's secret give her? How does this power change her relationship with her sisters? How does it change her duties to them?

The Flat in Nakshabandi Street

1. Everyone in this story is bound to the flat on Nakshabandi Street. What keeps them there? What are Aziza's duties? Mahmoud's? Waheeba's?
2. Is it possible to separate Mahmoud's duty to his father from his duty to his Aunt Aziza? Why does he continue to obey his Aunt's words even when he is keeping secrets from her? What does he gain by taking care of her?

3. What power does Waheeba have? Where does this power come from? Does this power influence her sense of duty?

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21F.022J / WGS.141J International Women's Voices
Spring 2004

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.