

This work is on a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0), <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>. Access to this work was provided by the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) ScholarWorks@UMBC digital repository on the Maryland Shared Open Access (MD-SOAR) platform.

Please provide feedback Please support the ScholarWorks@UMBC repository by emailing scholarworks-group@umbc.edu and telling us what having access to this work means to you and why it's important to you. Thank you.



Exploring Language, Literacy, and Cross-Cultural Representation: A Semiotic Analysis in Mistry's *Family Matters*

Harry Bhandari¹
University of Maryland Baltimore County, USA

Abstract: In this paper, I explore the local cultural space and community engagement, and the meaning making process of everyday lives of fictional characters through the signs, or the objects. Using a case of Rohinton Mistry's (2002) novel *Family Matters*, I look into the cultural representation and community engagement derived from cultural and material interpretation of various objects that highlight arbitrary nodes of signifier and signified-- the linguistic meaning making process. The family is a central semiotic construct of the novel; thus, all meaning derives from the patriarch of that family: Nariman, the main fictional character. This essay also analyzes the text through diachronic tour winding through how words, symbols, and contradictions open up new decoding of cultural variance. The phenomenon of collective strength, glorification of Persian culture, and decoders' longing to their roots are aligned with people's messages, context, code, and discourse. Amid the growing debate on media (film, television, still images, advertisement and other works of art), I intend to examine how the social production and structuration of meaning come into play in this novel.

Keywords: *interpretative symbiosis, Rohinton Mistry, fiction, Persian culture, education*

Semiotics and Cultural Representation

¹ Harry Bhandari is an educator of higher education. He is also member of House of Delegates in Maryland.

The semiotics, the science of signs, helps us to understand culture, politics, religion and other societal institutions. Linguistic theorists such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, and Saunders Peirce have developed semiotics as a method for analysis of the social production of meaning.

Saussure's linguistic model created an analytical method that described the overall organization of sign systems as "languages"; it establishes the foundation for the theory of structuralism. The French literary critic and semiotician Barthes' goal in semiotics was to reveal to society the popular culture's myths "a science of signs that not only possesses a notion of ideology against which the truth of science can be measured, but it promises a scientific way of understanding popular culture" (Strinati, 2004, p. 97). Similarly, Swiss linguist Saussure (1974) describes semiotics as "the study of the role of signs as part of social life" (p. 16). He created a systematic method that considers "sign" as a fundamental unit which has two elements: the "signifier" and the "signified." The signifiers are symbols, words, and images whereas the signified is a concept associated with the signifier. Saussure believes that languages are the most important system of signs responsible for human communication and are therefore the model for the study of other symbolic systems (da Costa Souza, et al., 2015, p. 24). Moreover, the American linguist Charles Sanders Peirce defines a sign as a "Stimulus pattern that has a meaning" (1992, p. 51) and also identified three signs: "symbols, icon and index that relates to something else for someone in some respect or capacity" (Cobley, 2009, p. 28). In a Saussurian spirit, he believes that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary. These semioticians recognized the importance of examining cultural representation that makes meaning.

In this light, this paper analyzes the sign, the object, and explores the meaning through semiotic analysis in Rohinton Mistry's novel *Family Matters*. The family is a central semiotics construct of the novel which has been central to the analysis of messages derived from cultural and material interpretation of various objects that highlight arbitrary nodes of signifier and signified that proves how the social production and structuration of meaning come into play in Mistry's *Family Matters*.

Anthropologists commonly use the term culture to denote a society or group of people who share commonalities and in particular, standard rules of behavior and a basic form of social organization that constitutes a community. In this sense, culture is the human symbolic activity. Thus, the terms culture and community are somewhat interchangeable. Culture is a human consciousness that is both developed and shaped by society, religion, history, and geography (Saraswathi, 1999, p. 223). Similarly, Fredric Jameson (1991) defines culture as a vehicle that expresses the relationship between groups, "No group has a culture all by itself. Culture is the nimbus perceived by one group when it comes into contact with and observes another one" (p. 271).

A community indicates social groups and particular quality of a relationships that imbue a sense of shared identity and characteristics (Williams, 1983, p. 75). On the

logical ground, he clarifies the quality of holding something in common for a community of interest. Levi-Strauss (2001) provides a further persuading definition and scope of a community describing it as one of the domains of semiology, the study of signs that incorporates mythical language, marriage rules, customary laws, economic exchange to name few (p. 22). The term community, thus, embodies the multitude of concepts which forms alliances with the theoretical premise of the interdisciplinary approach. Overall, these researchers illuminate the meaning in differences, contrasts, and oppositions in examining ways of a compelling framework of knowledge, beliefs, social relationship, social identities, culture, and power.

When we interpret the meaning of the text regarding culture, it becomes cultural property resulting in the multiplicity of their meanings. While analyzing the univocal aspect of signs about any cultural and social specificity we should return to their authenticity, community, and intellectual domain. Risager (2006) believes that cultural representation is built up in discourses, and they convey images or narratives of culture and society in particular contexts (p. 167). She further notes that in understanding the concept of cultural representations 'culture' adopts a point of departure or perspective. One could refer to two kinds of look: a look at culture, and a look out from culture (Risager, 2006, p. 167). It has been in the form of practical and theoretical issues concerning the choice of themes and text that communicate relevant images of the target-language countries (Byram, 1997, p. 21). The latter way of understanding cultural representation is often seen in the materials that base themselves on the choice of literary text. For Barthes, one of the crucial tasks for semiotics is to identify the ideology underpinning the linguistics systems, the connotation chains, the unsaid that speaks us without us ever realizing (Lorusso, 2015, p. 41).

The Story

Nariman Vakeel, a 79-year-old Parsi widower, mentally struggles against his family values in the beginning of the novel. His past love of a Catholic Goan girl, Lucy Braganza, haunts him. The silhouettes of human dielectrics are formed, and the severe convolution of the empirical realities realized when he confesses his love as his weakness. His stepchildren, Jal and Coomy Contractor, share his Bombay apartment. However, they are irritated. Therefore, his married daughter, Roxana, her salesclerk husband, Yezad Chenoy, take care of him. His grandchildren, Murad and Jehangir, are increasingly aware of their family distress discovering their love for the household and their dying grandfather. The immanent, psychic, metaphoric or paradigmatic conceptualization of primary characters in *Family Matters* change. For example, Roxana watches the nine-years-old Jehangir raising a spoon to his grandfather's mouth (p. 9) In a similar way, Yezad, after months of resistance helping Nariman with his ablutions,

catches the sight of his wife. All forces come to bear on the apartment dwellers in ways that range from the merely sad, heartbreaking, and truly horrific in the beginning.

When the 78-year-old Nariman Vakeel's development of a strong bond with her children Murad and Jehangir. His stay with his daughter Roxana Chenoy reflects a constant negotiation between his faiths to his family. Similarly, Yezad, Roxana's husband is turned down by a Canadian-born Japanese immigration officer and Yezad destroys all immigration paperwork and decides not to emigrate to Canada. When he was tearing the papers, Roxana comes in and asks what he is doing. He replies 'Getting rid of the garbage' (p. 246). Similarly, Yezad's explanation about his old childhood home, the Jehangir 183 Mansion, symbolizes his yearning of belonging for the home. Moreover, the mistreatment of Coomy and Jal towards Nariman reflects the Parsi dilemma of assimilation. Jal and Coomy are half-brother and half-sister of Roxana who has been ill treated by them and consequently they are called "half-brother and half-sister" (p. 120). Mr. Kapur describes Bombay, as a home, as a survival for many homeless and exiled people. Thus the Bombay represents as his own belonging - a home to live in. While some critics interpret the novel as a criticism of religion and family integration, I make an opposing claim. I argue that the novel in the end recognizes the sense of patriotism and love of culture that is reflected in semiotics analysis of objects below resulting from a sense of belongings of family. Mistry's *Family Matters*, therefore, is an avowal of collective strength, which fortifies the society from possible disintegration.

Semiotics Analysis of Objects

The main emotion towards home, a staying force in the novel, serves as historical and ideological assumptions and anxieties of diasporic authors, "the loss of home leaves a hole that never fills" (p. 246). Similar to many diasporic writers, the double displacement (first from Iran and then from India) directs the course in Mistry's *Family Matters*. It creates double consciousness hindering Nariman to have one unified identity. Mistry finds himself at the margins of mainstream Hindu-glorifying culture in India. The feeling of alienation from the cultural mainstream is uniquely reflected in the way Mistry's characters are displaced and attempt to search for a new identity through emigration or reinvention of themselves through cultural representation.

The various material, cultural, religious objects, and places -- Bhagwat Gita , Bombay Sporting Goods, hearing aid, new brass plate, frying pan, cupboard and cupboard key, umbrella, Chateau Felicity, jigsaw puzzle, and college gate -- that the author employs share a great deal about peoples' pre-modern 'faith' which was intertwined with all aspects of life—from the religion, through economic, to culture. When *Family Matters* progresses, Parsi honestly gets fragile and the family's middle-

class lifestyle gets threatened. The semantic observation of these objects reveals the shift in power of family that swings in search of an alternative social structure and return to the family for personal solace and social integration.

Nariman's family ordered an elegant new brass plate, large enough to accommodate the front door when Nariman family returns to the old house. It symbolizes the return to Parsi roots and customs. While leaving for her parent's home, Roxana said to her sons that from then on life would be wonderful in their big new house. At once her son Murad disputes and says, "Not new for you, Mummy. You are going back to your old house" (p. 445). His mother reacted: "But I have my whole family with me this time. That makes it new. And this time it will be a happy place" (p. 445). Jal suggested the names should be engraved in alphabetical order:

Mr and Mrs.Yezad Chenoy
 Mr. Jal Contractor
 Mr. Nariman Vakeel. (p. 441)

A nameplate is used for a personal and commercial purpose which is mounted at a prominent place. The brass plate is used for making ornaments and quality musical instruments. In this respect, it merits special attention and typifies power. Further, this cultural practice is an expression in ornamentation that invokes the publicity, the circulation of their family name, and material culture of urban space. More particularly, it probes the claims to power and social status that are bound up with a skillfully executed name carved on an expensive brass plate that hangs on the door. Most importantly, both the written and visual source of the image on the elegant new brass plate help us piece together the confirmatory evidence that the Nariman family belongs to the upper class. Correspondingly, the simultaneous use of local high class Hindi words in the text helps the readers observe how the family undergirds social stratification. The author uses this comparison to enkindle Nariman struggle to balance a mystic past with the modern present.

The author writes, "Darvaja Kholo! Jaldi Kholo Koi gharmay haikya?" "What are you writing for?" said Jal, frantic. "Cholo, bring him in! Nahin, don't put him on the floor! Sofo ki ooper rakho! Wait may be inside on the plunge is better." He led them to Nariman's room. "Theek hai, gently, that's good" (pp. 46-47). The use of Hindi dialects -- "Darvaja (door) and Jaldi (fast)-- inevitably sheds lights on author's attachment to his native language. It reflects how a language becomes a marker of a social identity and reveals semiotic representation of family values in the midst of conflicts within the Chenoy-Vakeel extended family. In this vein, Huntington (2010) asserts, "The people came to the cultural lines to define and create themselves" (p. 21). Every social class has a distinct variety of language use. The language becomes a demarcation line that locates individuals in a class schema. On the contrary to untouchable (Dalit) caste,

Nariman's family language--"Jaldi Kholo Koi Gharmay Haikya" "Theek hai, gently, that's good"—appeals to ethos and logos exhibiting high culture. It further yields some important insight into a language-related social division that reflects economic disparity. It further yields some important insight into a language-related social division that reflects economic disparity. A considerable number of researches proved that this economic disparity does not only divide the society, but also it brings degradation affecting life chances of oppressed

A considerable number of researches proved that this caste based stratification does not only divide the society, but also it brings degradation affecting life chances of oppressed people. Moreover, a sense of highness and lowness provoke the inferior and superior feeling that result in a gradation of society based on the economic status.

The 'hearing aid' imagery used in the setting of the novel appears to confirm that Nariman has decreased quality of life and lack of communication due to his hearing impairment. 'Please don't go, Pappa, we beseech you,' said Jal through the door, then grimaced and adjusted his hearing aid, for the words had echoed deafeningly in his own ear... 'Please stay home, for your own good'" (p. 1). The phrase "don't go" is a general disagreement from Yezad's caring and positive attitude to his father and the 'home' connotes to affection. Interestingly, the hearing aid is made up of a metal case: "a metal case the size of a matchbox was clipped to his shirt pocket and wired to the earpiece" (p. 1). The setting does not explain explicitly about the quality, design, and technology on amplification or any unique feature of the hearing aid. However, it is a clear signifier that indicates the better off economic situation of Nariman's family in comparison to many Indians. "In India, the median household income is US \$616 a year. If someone in India saves all year without spending a penny, they still cannot afford a hearing aid that costs an average of US 1,500." (*The Times of India*). In this sense, the object--hearing aid-- provides the confirmatory evidence that Nariman family's strong economy since the object is a luxury to many people in India.

Family matters in a particular way in Family Matters. It is not merely a Parsi family that Mistry is ultimately interested in but the family of man. By way of intertextual reference to Shakespeare's King Lear, the cast-out Nariman becomes a test case for the charity and solidarity of others. The plot of the novel can be understood as detailing the ramifications of Yezad's family's 189 attempt to accommodate the "unaccommodated man" (King Lear), exiled by his unappreciative children. It is a test that every member of Yezad's family passes through except the head of the family himself. Yezad's religious keenness is revealed to be a compensation for his uncertain belief in consideration, solidarity and sharing. This is a shortcoming that the author of Family Matters takes issue with. Yezad is criticized for losing his faith in humanism and for replacing it by a dependence on essential difference as a doubtful approach at making meaning. While Vikram Kapur emphasizes the ideal of "the community rediscovering human bonds" (p. 222) Yezad's development from secular to sternly

religious is not simply a psycho hygienic strategy; his radical Zoroastrian belief is also a psychotic overreaction informed by communal intolerance and problematic in its treatment of others.

Drawing the comparison of Indian hierarchical society, the author uses the powerful object, “frying pan” that implores a sense of pain and suffering. He poses the question: why migrate from the frying pan into the fire? (p. 132). Comparing societal tension between Toronto and Bombay, the author asserts, “Not much difference between there and here and we have beggars in Bombay, they have people freezing to death on Toronto Street, instead of high high- and low-caste” (p. 132). The object “frying pan” further helps us to understand serious social issues emerged through the centuries of caste system. The author’s reference to “Bride-burning and Dowry Deaths” (p. 321) contradicts with the Zoroastrian ideology of intercultural tolerance “in this shop we will celebrate all festivals: Diwali, Christmas, Id, your Pasi Navroze, Baisakhi Buddha Jayanti, Ganesh Chaturthi, everything” (p. 153). Against this backdrop of cross-cultural similarities between Canada(West) and India(East), the use of elite class Hindi words and frying pan (cultural object) attempt to crystallize cultural signifiers which influence caste-based discrimination that pushed oppressed community at the competitive disadvantages in social and economic ⁰⁰status.

When we examine a dowry system, a common culture in the most part of India where a parental property is transferred at a daughter’s marriage, Mistry has used other important objects such as the “cupboard” and “cupboard key.” When people plan to marry, the offered dowry includes a private car, motorcycle, as well as daily articles like a TV, table, cabinet, and cupboard. Nariman wanders, “from cupboard to cupboard” looking for something to wear” (p. 62) and expresses himself “come now, Lucy, let’s not be naïve again. We were naïve once before. Thinking we could change our parents, change the ways of the world” (p. 64). All things considered, her wife handed over the cupboard key to Nariman only when his relationship with Lucy was over. This cupboard, which was transferred at her marriage, further symbolizes the cultural malady stemmed from the social practice of the dowry system. Unlike that in developed countries, many incidences of domestic abuse in India are tied to dowry demands made by the husband and his family. Very often this leads to a conflict between husbands and wives. In extreme cases, this results in a murder of the wife (uxoricide) (Das, 2015, p. 78).

Similarly, Yezad reacts to Murad who wants to adopt a Maharashtrian girl: “I’m warning you, in this, there can be no compromise. The value, the laws of our religion are absolute; this Maharashtrian cannot be your girlfriend” (p. 469). To this Dr. Fitter adds: “For grandfather, he had a very unfortunate life. I still remember the day he came downstairs to speak to his girlfriend the day he was wearing only a towel around his waist” (p. 476). In this context, it is worthwhile to consider Nariman’s altered mindset of his love that contradicts with his Parsi culture. As a result, he struggles because of the social codes of cultural values. In addition to calling the reader’s attention, these italics

pages make reading reflect Nariman's indifference towards his past relationship with Goan Christian. To that end, he handed over the cupboard key. The author asserts, "Nariman extricated his hand: Bye, Lucy. And good luck. When he was back upstairs, Yasmin, his wife, threw the cupboard key at him. I am sorry. I had no choice. But it is over now" (p. 67). Another key fact to remember here is that marrying a non-Parsi girl, according to Indian Parsi religions, is not an advantageous practice since it has a detrimental effect on the already dwindling Parsi population.

Moreover, another cultural object "umbrella" is depicted on a seemingly simple cover of the book against a vivid ocean and earth- color backdrop in which a red text reads "Family Matters". Nariman's outfit including black shoes, camel wool felt wide brim fedora hat, and expensive causal straight pant material object allude to his higher class. Yet objects such as those examined here can be symptomatic. The common need of an umbrella is merely to shield ourselves from rain or the sunshine. In Indian culture, the umbrella symbolizes earth, the center of the universe, and spiritual support. Interestingly, people respect it so much that many religious groups in India worship the umbrella as a symbol of heaven, shelter, and an emblem of the power of dignity. In a modern sense, it also serves like a sunscreen lotion that protects skin from getting darkened due to the exposure to the sun. Moreover, many people in India, particularly women, carry umbrellas all the time as a fashion accessory similar to a luxury handbag or diamond ring. Nariman's umbrella is not a Chinese cheap, filthy, and small umbrella sold at a price less than a price of a cup of coffee at China market. Therefore, his big branded umbrella from big umbrella brand: Kerala, Popy or John. The umbrella serves as a marker of his social status which he uses a walking stick due to his old age. His hat might be handcrafted with the woolen material that matches the luxury branding of his wood handle umbrella. Moreover, it symbolizes prosperity as only rich people can afford an expensive umbrella that Nariman carries. Unfortunately, many people create turtle-like covers of a woven straw 'umbrella hat' known as "*Sekhu*" to protect them from the monsoon while they work in the field and walk around their communities.



Workers in north east India shelter from the rain under the turtle shell-like covers.

The research of McKinsey Global Institute (2014) concludes that from 45% of the Indian population in 1994 to 22% in 2012 can spend Rs.22.42 (\$0.35) per day. In the lack of effective poverty reduction program, the living standards of urban and rural area are fast deteriorating. Over the past few decades, India's modernization process has led to rapid expansion of urban centers and remarkable rise in urban population. What has been of particular concern is that rapid urbanization has been accompanied with a steady growth in the number of urban poor and the "urbanization of poverty" (Piel, 1997, p. 21). The numbers of urban poor have risen by 34.4 percent, from 60 million persons in 1973–74 to 80.8 million persons in 2004–05 (Gol, 2009, p. 26).



An Indian laborer sits with a child outside a makeshift shelter on a highway on the outskirts of Hyderabad on Nov. 14, 2013 Noah Seelam / AFP / Getty Images

On the other hand, "Chateau Felicity," a spacious flat in Bombay where Nariman lives implies his upper-class social status that contrasts with the poor housing situation of many poor Indians. In India, the housing problem is acute where many people live in the germ-infested house. Many houses do not have a water supply, sanitation, or a disposal system. The nature shortage of house is unprecedented. While about 9.3 million households in urban India do not have access to any housing, the rest of the shortage (17.2 million) arises from households living in inadequate housing conditions in slums, congested housing or obsolete housing, typically without sufficient access to necessary infrastructure (Tiwari & Hingorani, p. 228). Nariman's family could afford the Chateau Felicity while many low-income households Indians are deprived of housing and basic infrastructure.

Moreover, the wooden jigsaw puzzle pieces are used to examine how today's child should learn to bear the responsibility when they turn to father one day. Intriguingly, the 'jigsaw puzzle' serves as a metaphor through which the boy tries to solve the quarrels and power politics that stake his family" (p. 83). In addition to the jigsaw puzzle, the *Bhagawat Gita* and Bombay Sporting Good are equally significant object as well as a space that helps in cultural interpretation of the text. They serve as an irony to the religious fanaticism and chaotic political system. For example, when Jal inquires if

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a religious Hindu Party, and Shiva Sena coalition would improve things, Yezad laughingly replies: "If the poisonous snake were in front of you, would you give it a chance? These two parties encouraged the Hindustan extremists to destroy the Babri Mosque" (p. 30). Yezad satirically argues that welcoming Michael Jackson; Shiva Sena and South Indians are anti-Bombay, Valentine's Day is anti-Hindustan (p. 45). Moreover, Yezad makes efforts to change Mr. Kapur's mind about running for office so that he will be promoted (Senthilkumari & Prameela Priadershini, 2015, p. 77). Thus it is reasonable to say that if a country is not stable, people continue practicing their religious biases. However, it is equally logical to argue that the family stability will follow from economic prosperity.

Yezad, Roxana's husband who works at Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium wants to buy a shop. In this light, Mr. Kapur asserts, "You can take place. All the suppliers and major buyers know you" (p. 152). In this respect, the Bombay Sporting Goods represents economic freedom and reminder of Mr. Kapur's duty on his father's legacy, "Isn't it your duty to look after your father's legacy? Does not your Bhagawat-Gita tell you to let nothing interfere with your duty" (p.153). The Marxist interest in ideology is even more central to our perspective. Signs and messages (which we would refer to today regarding texts and discourses) are the results of material conditions and of social work, which constitutes their meaning (Lorusso, 2015 p. 41). Due to some political involvement, Kapur was murdered by Shiv Sena Party (Senthilkumari & Prameela Priadershini, 2015, p. 77).

Similarly, Robert L Ross (2016) reads the novel as: "The character represents past at odds with their religious belief and the large community and also employ the issue of a spiritual question, alienation, fear of death, family problems, and economic hardships" (p. 28). The conflict is apparent in both national as well as in family level. Murad responds to his father's command when prompted to read Parsi scriptures as: "Sorry, Daddy, I don't have the leisure to read all this interesting stuff. It's hard enough to finish my college work" (p. 451). On the whole, the dual causality of a mockery of religion represented through sacred object "Bhagwat Gita" and Shiva Sena Party's murdering of Vikaram Kapur, an ardent follower of Bhagawat Gita and owner of Bombay Sporting Goods projects the degradation in cultural values.

To Summarize, the narrative in the novel shifts from one character to the next in syntagmatic order. They are mostly from marginal groups who eventually become highly doubtful of the state that fails to prevent the rise of religious or ethnic-majoritarian rule where institutions act to spread social class status that damages people's self-esteem by consigning them to lower tier-groups. First, Nariman then Coomy takes center stage the meaning of the novel that transmits through the binary opposition of characters and their struggle in search of alternative social structures. The semiotic representations of characters are so fascinating that they inclined to see beyond the horizons of their own

lives and become open to self-criticism and eventually return to family values for personal solace and social harmony.

Myth and Meaning in Contradiction

The signifiers have semantic features and their differences create the problem in interpreting the code structure in a text. While some may be simple one-to-one correspondences with their significance, there may be others whose referential correspondences are lost in the metonymic progression. In *Family Matters*, the synchronic analysis of a geographical location "College Gate" depicts a structure of tension in an evolution of his love outside his culture. The college gate served as a paradise for him forty years before when Nariman wanted to marry with Goan Christian, a western girl of Christian faith and the love of his life. Eventually, the same location serves as epiphany for a point of departure and changes the value of love, and he avoids the place completely, "From then on, if he saw her standing by the college gate, he would circle the building and take the back entrance (p. 35). The italicized paragraphs in the text call the attention of the reader highlighting Nariman's past relations with his ex-girlfriend, Goan Christian. His action accentuates to his ancestors' rejection of non-parsi girl in marriage. The love of Lucy, a non-Hindu woman, triggers the guilt and Nariman attempted to ignore her beyond imagination. It is much more interesting to explore how the interpretation of the story changes when we pay attention to a fundamental binary opposition of the cultural beliefs. For example, he responded to the woman he once loved so much, "Please. I have no energy to get through all that again. And please Lucy, for your sake and mine, stop following me" (p. 64). The complete structure of his mind consists of a large number of cultural language in psychic knots whose diachronic strands had become readily visible and reactivated in parole under the pressure of cultural pulls and pushes. In other words, Nariman's abnegation of Lucy is highly symbolic that underscores the immanent contradiction in the ongoing contradictory process of his mind that inflicts the structure of a family.

In European writing, the Eastern concept of life is largely distorted to some ideas such as irrationality and complexity. Lucy who represents western value says, "Oh, Nari, you're still not being honest with yourself" (p. 64). On the contrary, Westerners connote their ways of life with masculinity, rationality, and simplicity. The certain diachronic framework of history creates stereotypes in orientalism. In recent years, the academic field of what used to be called Orientalism has been renamed "Area Studies" or "Regional Studies". Edward Said (1993), a renowned Arab Christian scholar, agreed fully on the myth-making tradition of Western people about Eastern world (p. 35).

Many Western critics have read Mistry's *Family Matters* as such a novel full of disintegration in various levels: Political, Social, Religious and Economic. For example,

Goldberg (2002) comments that in Mistry's *Family Matters* "the tensions between family responsibilities and private passions, social expectations and individual dreams, have largely gone slack with the decay of strict traditions" (2002, p. 18). There is a family reunion and celebration at the end of the novel. For example, the author asserts:

Still keeping Murad's hand in his, Daddy finally looks into his face. For a few moments, they hold each other's unwavering gaze. ... Happy birthday, my son. Live a long, healthy, wealthy life, and lots of happiness. (p. 484)

In summary, the geographic location such as "College Gate" and "Orientalism" represent the contradictory meaning in the interplay of the signifiers into a new semantic combination to produce meaning in opposition. Anthropologist Levi-Strauss (1977) pairs oppositions often cohere into sets. In analyzing kinship systems, he found that the elementary unit of kinship was made up of a set of four oppositions: brother-versus- sister, husband-versus- wife, father- versus- son, and mother's brother –versus sisters' son.

Conclusion

In this fiction, Mistry constructs *Family Matters* as a synchronous state of Vakeel's family; there are always two opposing propensities: one that pushes toward elements of family value and the other pushing outside an integration. The result of this binary opposition makes a meaning of a family like a single structure in which every opposing view of character works as a whole and every whole function as a part. What did it mean that Nariman is a semiotic of his family? That he becomes unequivocally an ultimate source of progress, prosperity, and peace? For years, he has served as a crucial link across the boundaries in which his family was divided regarding ideologies of family value. The powerful message, of course, as depicted through various cultural objects remain—the outside encroachment cannot erase the family value and culture—and yet Nariman offers an opportunity for shared family values for those who stayed for too long apart, alienated, and opposed.

Marxist- influenced semiotics scholar, Ferruccio Rossi- Landi (1983, p. 176) asserts that reality is the outcome of social praxis (the work carried out by people within a particular society), social reproduction (the means invented and built by human beings and history and the product of social praxis). The centripetal force of family affection to one another paves the way for the happiness of the whole family. McHoul, A. W. (1996) asserts, "What is taken to be outside the sign, as its point of contact with some meaning- for-now, is not an object of philosophical scrutiny. Rather, it is what a particular community is using, hear and now, as part of the practical management of

its everyday affairs. This is where efficient semiotics parts company with philosophy” (p. 52). Nariman, thus, is the central semiotic construct of *Family Matters*. He represents an indo-nostalgic discourse of extreme polarities in which the psychic combinations of the perturbed minds charge and lead one sequence to another, and make the logical consequences of the entire narrative to project the facets of Indian socio-economic life and Parsis’ Zoroastrian life, customs and religion through the representation of various objects-- hearing aid, new brass plate, frying pan, cupboard and cupboard key, umbrella, Chateau Felicity, jigsaw puzzle, *Bhagwat Gita* to name a few. □□□

References

- Barthes, R. (1994). *The semiotic challenge*. University of California Press.
- Beinhocker, E. D., Farrell, D., & Zainulbhai, A. S. (2007). Tracking the growth of India's middle class. *McKinsey Quarterly*, 3, 50-59.
- Broke, A. (2002). Loss and endurance: Rohinton Mistry's tragic and Triumphant Vision. *The Atlantic Magazine*, 305(4), 72-75.
- Byram, M., & Zarate, G. (1997). *The sociocultural and intercultural dimension of language learning and teaching* (Vol. 2). Council of Europe.
- Cobley, P. (Ed.). (2009). *The Routledge companion to semiotics*. Routledge.
- da Costa Souza, P. N., da Costa Maia, N., Guimarães, L. H. S., de Resende, M. L. V., & Cardoso, P. G. (2015). Optimization of culture conditions for tannase production by *Aspergillus* sp. gm4 in solid state fermentation. *Acta Scientiarum. Biological Sciences*, 37(1), 23-44.
- Das, S. (2015). The effect of the adoption of a pro-women domestic violence policy on De Saussure, F., Baskin, W., & Meisel, P. (2011). *Course in general linguistics*. Columbia University Press.
- Goldberg, M. (2002). Rev. of *Family Matters* by Rohinton Mistry. <http://www.buzzle.com/editorial/10-10-2002-27890.asp>
- Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical inquiry*, 8(4), 777-795.
- Harrison, L. E., & Huntington, S. P. (2000). *Culture matters: How values shape human progress*. Basic books.
- Jameson, F. (1991). *Postmodernism, or, the cultural logic of late capitalism*. Duke university Press.
- Johnson, A. G. (1997). *The forest and the trees: Sociology as life, practice, and promise*. Temple University Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (2001). *Myth and meaning*. Psychology Press.
- Lorusso, A. M. (2015). New York, NY: *Cultural Semiotics*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice*. Cambridge University Press.

- Mahr, K. (2014, Feb). McKinsey: 56% of Indians unable to afford a decent life. *TIME*, 183, 23-25.
- Mistry, R. (2003). *Family matters*. Faber and Faber.
- Piel, G. (1997). The urbanization of poverty worldwide. *Challenge* 10, 58– 68.
- Planning Commission. (2014). Report of the expert group to review the methodology for measurement of poverty. *Government of India, New Delhi*.
- Risager, K. (2006). *Language and culture: Global flows and local complexity*. Multilingual Matters.
- Said, E. W. (2003). *Introduction to " Orientalism"*, 1978. Pantheon Books.
- Saraswathi, V. (1999). 18 The culture-literature connection: Changing implications for curricular design. *Post-coloniality: Reading literature*, 221.
- Strinati, D. (2004). *An introduction to theories of popular culture*. Routledge.
- Tiwari, P., & Hingorani, P. (2014). An institutional analysis of housing and basic infrastructure services for all: the case of urban India. *International Development Planning Review*, 36(2), 227-256.
- Williams, R. (1983). *Culture and society, 1780-1950*. Columbia University Press.