

## **Tracing the Economy and Cultural Circuit through Food in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance***

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Consuming food is a common human activity. Food is necessary for living. It is directly related to socio economic status of the people. Food taken by people shows their family, class and also their ethnic identity. Food items have meanings and some cultural values attached to them. Regional food habits also exist in nations, but they change time to time. Religion, caste and economical condition such as cost, income, and food availability are some of the factors that influence food habits. Different religious ceremonies are being practiced by offering various food items in front of God's idol. The above factors show their culture and socialization. Middle class people maintain their dietary than the lower class people. Society is not formed by equal structure. It is constructed with different classes of people.

Rohinton Mistry is an Indian born Canadian writer. The different cultures followed by Indians and Indian politics are the major themes in his novels. Mistry's strength is to connect diverse background into a single straight line. In his second novel *A Fine Balance*, he exposes the changes in the Indian society through his protagonists, Ishvar and Omprakash from Chamaar caste, Dina Dalal from a traditional family and Maneck from a mountain town area.

In an interview, the author explains the way he chose the background of his characters:

After writing my first two books, I became aware that they were stories about a very particular and special kind of city and even then, I had focused only on a very small part of it the Parsi community. I made a conscious decision in this book to include more than this, mainly because in India seventy-five percent of Indians live in villages and I wanted to embrace more of the social reality of India. So, I made the tailors come from a small village and Maneck come from a hill station in the North. While the city is certainly important, I wanted to give a strong sense of the different locales and I wanted to root the reader those places so that he or she has a very clear sense of where these people are coming from and what their difficulties are now. (Nasta 204)

The situation becomes more complicated when the subject is not actual food but food within literary texts, and food, like literature, looks like an object but is actually a relationship. (Aoyama 2)

In this novel, Mistry said a little about Parsi's food culture in marriage ceremony. Three basic things are needed for each wedding celebrations, the couple, their loved ones and the food. Food is in the list because it is emotionally satisfying, it touches everyone's senses. Food served in the celebration shows their hospitality and is an expression of happiness. The author portrays Parsi marriage culture through the marriage of Dina and Rustom. They had simple preferences on marriage. They did not want a grand function. But Nusswan, brother of Dina arranged a grand dinner party and served the dishes with real care. He suggested everybody to take more food. He enquires each and everyone whether they had food or not.

“Nusswan examined the plate that passed before him. . . What's this, Mina, you must be joking. Even my pet sparrow would go hungry with this quantity.’ He spooned more briyani for Mina. ‘Wait, Hosa, wait, one more kebab, one more, come on, be a sport.’ (38)

Actually, Nusswan did not have any interest in this marriage. But in the case of the wedding dinner he whole heartedly spends the amount lavishly. And his warm words towards him guests are a showcase of his Parsi culture. Not only in Parsi culture, all caste in India have some traditional way of providing food in celebrations.

The Same day, after three years Dina and Rustom arrange a small house party for their wedding anniversary. Dina wore the previous year's wedding frock and she prepared food on her own and everybody enjoyed the meals. Rustom went to buy ice cream after the meals. Unfortunately, he met with an accident while returning from the shop. Dina and Nusswan searched Rustom. On the way to the shop they found Rustom's bicycle and heard about accident. Dina was totally heartbroken. At that time a street dog was licking the ice cream near to bicycle. Police inspector kicked the dog. But Dina screamed at him and asked him to allow the dog to eat.

Dina was first to spot the bicycle. ‘It's Rustom's,’ he said. Her voice had strange into a stranger's, sounding unfamiliar to her own ears. . . a stray dog lapped at the thick pink puddle near the bicycle. The policeman kicked the sand coloured mongrel. . . when he kicked it again, she screamed ‘stop that! What harm is it doing to you? Let it eat!’ (45)

From this incident economic level of Dina and Rustom is exhibited. They were not able to order food from outside. They did not have money to buy new dresses and did not have iceboxes to keep ice creams previously. Food served in the celebration clearly describes financial level and their life style. Her humaneness is exhibited when she raises her voice for the sake of the street dog.

In this novel, Mistry shows the situation of lower caste people through their struggle for food. When Ishvar and his brother were kids, their mother Roopa steals milk from cows and filled her sack with oranges of upper caste orchard. This shows readiness of mother to take risks to gratify her children's hunger. “But for this child she did not hesitate to steal either. And there was not a mother she knew who would not have taken the risk for her own son” (97).

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**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 19:1 January 2019

**Editors: Dr. V. Sangeetha, Dr. B. J. Geetha, Dr. K. Sindhu, Dr. S. Boopathi and Ms. S. Sneha Sri**

**Food in Literature: Papers Presented in National Seminar on Food in Literature, 2019**

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After Narayan and Ishvar were well trained Narayan opened a tailoring shop in the village. Ishvar settle down with Asraf Chacha. Narayan developed his shop and got married. After a few years he wanted his son Omprakash to learn tailoring. He sent his son to Asraf Chacha at the age of eight. Omprakash was paid a lot attention by his mom and grandmother during his weekly visit. His sisters resented his visit because of special treats like cream, dry fruits and sweet meats offered to him. His sisters were not given much attention. They secretly sobbed at night. Here author manifest Indian culture of giving more authority to male child than female child while serving food.

When Ishvar and Omprakash were searching for tailoring work in Bombay, Ashraf Chacha arranged their stay with his friend Nawaz. He proved to be far from hospitality and friendly. Nawaz accepted to shelter them, but he was not happy with the situation, so he allowed them to sleep in a filthy shed and behaved strangely. He did not ask them to eat in his house. This incident shows the city culture. People who lived in cities like Bombay do not believe other people and not even take care of neighbours.

They could smell food cooking, but Nawaz did not invite them to eat. . . Light from the house spilled out through the kitchen window. They sat below it and finished the chapattis Mumtaz Chachi had packed, listening to noises from the buildings around them. . . There was no offer of morning tea from inside the house, which Omprakash found quite offensive. (154-55)

The character of Maneck was exposed in his first meeting with Ishvar and Omprakash. Maneck offered watermelon sherbet to them in the railway station. They refused his offer. Maneck deeply examined their appearance and understood that they actually wanted to drink but they refused. He told them that he had drunk as much as he could, and he did not want to waste the remaining. So, he offered the drink to Omprakash. Then Ishvar and Omprakash accept the sherbet. After finishing the drink, they thanked Maneck.

He drank and said, "I'm full. You want it?" they shook their heads. 'It will go to waste'. Okay, Yaar, in that case, 'said Omprakash and took the sherbet. . . How much gratitude for a little sherbet, thought Maneck, how starved they seemed for ordinary kindness (7-8).

Here, Mistry clearly shows the economic condition as well as the helping tendency of Maneck. Actually, he was not able to buy two more glasses, but he gave his drink to them. This attitude shows that he was born and brought up in a well cultured family.

Dina Dalal is the only female protagonist in this novel. She is from a traditional family. Ishvar and Omprakash worked under her. At first, she did not care about Ishvar and Omprakash per day per meal policy. After knowing their story, she felt ashamed of herself. She allowed them to sleep on her verandah and to use her bathroom, and she offered them tea, so, at the end of the second week the two tailors decided to share the daily cleaning, in return for her kindness.

Their work went well for a year. Unfortunately, the Prime minister declared a state of emergency. This made their life catastrophic. Dina has no other way, so she stayed with her brother. Ishvar and Omprakash became beggars. They met Dina during weekends. She gave them food and money when there was no one at her place.

The discrimination of upper caste and lower caste is revealed using the symbol of food. Migrant's suffering for food is clearly showcased. The author gives importance to the nature of food which is consumed by the people of various religions. Thus, Mistry deals with the economy and cultural circuit through food. Mistry is well known for his realistic frame work. He analyzes deep into the effects of emergency and how people suffered to get everyday meal. He portrayed the truth how voiceless are dominated by the supremacy.

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