

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE
FOR READERS AND LEADERS

DISCUSSES ROHINTON MISTRY'S NOVEL

A FINE BALANCE

1-866-578-5571

BOOKCLUBINABOX.COM

INFO@BOOKCLUBINABOX.COM

**THIS PDF GUIDE IS NOT FOR
DISTRIBUTION OR RESALE.**

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the discussion companion for Rohinton Mistry's novel A Fine Balance

Published by McClelland & Stewart Inc, Toronto, 1995.
ISBN: 0-7710-6052-1

Quotations used in this guide have been taken from the text of the paperback edition of **A Fine Balance**. All information taken from other sources is acknowledged.

This discussion companion for **A Fine Balance** has been prepared and written by Marilyn Herbert, originator of Bookclub-in-a-Box. Marilyn Herbert, B.Ed., is a teacher, librarian, speaker and writer. Bookclub-in-a-Box is a unique guide to current fiction and classic literature intended for book club discussions, educational study seminars, and personal pleasure. For more information about the Bookclub-in-a-Box team, visit our website.

Bookclub-in-a-Box discussion companion for A Fine Balance

ISBN 10: 1-897082-09-6
ISBN 13: 9781897082096

This guide reflects the perspective of the Bookclub-in-a-Box team and is the sole property of Bookclub-in-a-Box.

©2005 BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX
©2007 2ND EDITION

Unauthorized reproduction of this book or its contents for republication in whole or in part is strictly prohibited.

CONTACT INFORMATION: SEE BACK COVER.

BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Rohinton Mistry's A Fine Balance

READERS AND LEADERS GUIDE 2

INTRODUCTION

Suggested Beginnings	7
Novel Quickline	9
Keys to the Novel	10
Author Information	11
Historical Information	14

CHARACTERIZATION

Dina Dalal	22
Maneck	23
Ishvar, Om	24
Others	26

FOCUS POINTS AND THEMES

Caste system, Boundaries	33
Role of Women	35
Balance	36
Recycling	41

WRITING STYLE AND STRUCTURE

Language	45
Narration	46
Tone, Mood	47
Foreshadowing	49
Writing Structure	50

SYMBOLS

Balance	53
Sewing	54
Train Transport	54
Chess	55

LAST THOUGHTS59

FROM THE NOVEL (QUOTES) . . 63

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS69

BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Readers and Leaders Guide

Each Bookclub-in-a-Box guide is clearly and effectively organized to give you information and ideas for a lively discussion, as well as to present the major highlights of the novel. The format, with a Table of Contents, allows you to pick and choose the specific points you wish to talk about. It does not have to be used in any prescribed order. In fact, it is meant to support, not determine, your discussion.

You Choose What to Use.

You may find that some information is repeated in more than one section and may be cross-referenced so as to provide insight on the same idea from different angles.

The guide is formatted to give you extra space to make your own notes.

How to Begin

Relax and look forward to enjoying your bookclub.

With Bookclub-in-a-Box as your behind the scenes support, there is little for you to do in the way of preparation.

Some readers like to review the guide after reading the novel; some before. Either way, the guide is all you will need as a companion for your discussion. You may find that the guide's interpretation, information, and background have sparked other ideas not included.

Having read the novel and armed with Bookclub-in-a-Box, you will be well prepared to lead or guide or listen to the discussion at hand.

Lastly, if you need some more 'hands-on' support, feel free to contact us. (See Contact Information)

What to Look For

Each Bookclub-in-a-Box guide is divided into easy-to-use sections, which include points on characters, themes, writing style and structure, literary or historical background, author information, and other pertinent features unique to the novel being discussed. These may vary slightly from guide to guide.

INTERPRETATION OF EACH NOVEL REFLECTS THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX TEAM.

Do We Need to Agree?

THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION IS NO.

If we have sparked a discussion or a debate on certain points, then we are happy. We invite you to share your group's alternative findings and experiences with us. You can respond on-line at our website or contact us through our Contact Information. We would love to hear from you.

Discussion Starters

There are as many ways to begin a bookclub discussion as there are members in your group. If you are an experienced group, you will already have your favorite ways to begin. If you are a newly formed group or a group looking for new ideas, here are some suggestions.

Ask for people's impressions of the novel. (This will give you some idea about which parts of the unit to focus on.)

- Identify a favorite or major character.
- Identify a favorite or major idea.
- Begin with a powerful or pertinent quote. (not necessarily from the novel)
- Discuss the historical information of the novel. (not applicable to all novels)
- If this author is familiar to the group, discuss the range of his/her work and where this novel stands in that range.
- Use the discussion topics and questions in the Bookclub-in-a-Box guide.

If you have further suggestions for discussion starters, be sure to share them with us and we will share them with others.

Above All, Enjoy Yourself

INTRODUCTION

Suggested Beginnings

Novel Quickline

Keys to the Novel

Author Information

Historical Information

INTRODUCTION

Suggested Beginnings

1. Life is always a balancing act, whether it is in the extreme instances depicted by Mistry or in our own less urgent situations.

Discuss how each of the characters in this book finds balance. Why does Maneck fail at maintaining a balance of dignity, independence, and hope?

2. No one in the story remains whole; everyone is somehow maimed or dismembered. These horrors resonate on both the personal and national levels. Nearly thirty years after its partition and independence, India continued to suffer from regional, religious, and economic divisions.

What is Mistry suggesting about India's general welfare in 1975? Has the situation changed?

3. The title of Mistry's third novel, **Family Matters**, suggests one of his ongoing preoccupations, evident even in **A Fine Balance**. Dina, Maneck, Ishvar, and Om sew together a family from their disparate lives.

Compare the family unit in India in 1975 to the one in North America today.

4. The role of women is an important issue in the novel. Dina struggles to maintain her independence as a woman. Her adult life in the city is contrasted with her childhood under Nusswan's control and with the lives of many other women, some of whom are only casually mentioned in the novel.

Consider the position of strong independent women in a patriarchal society generally and in this novel specifically.

5. Everything and everyone in this novel gets recycled in some way. No scrap of tissue goes unused, whether it is salvaged for Dina's sanitary napkins, or for a quilt, or whether it is hair that is collected and resold. Body parts are commodified and recycled into the economic marketplace. People too are commodified: when they are maimed or damaged, Beggarmaster finds new uses for them as beggars.

How does the idea of recycling contribute to the setting and atmosphere in the novel? As citizens of a prosperous nation, we are used to a "disposable" culture. Discuss the cultural and value differences between our own and other societies.

More points to consider

1. Mistry uses his characters to discuss the caste system. Those higher in the caste seem removed from those beneath them and are unable to see the details and the pain of their lives.

Is this ignorance or prejudice or both?

2. Each character faces his or her destiny either by accepting it or succumbing to it.

What is Mistry saying about fate and destiny?

3. Mistry's vision of an ideally balanced family (nation) is to have power and rights shared equally by gender and caste. He uses the image of Dina, Maneck, and the tailors working in their tiny flat as a framework for this vision.

Is this vision possible in India, given the way that the social structure of the society has historically evolved?

4. Given Roopa's social status, should readers be shocked or surprised by Roopa's statement? *"My son does not sew for your kind."* (p.153)

Discuss this statement in relation to the possibility and reality of real future change.

Novel Quickline

Set in 1975 after Indira Gandhi has declared a state of emergency in India, **A Fine Balance** unites four characters, each of whom has suffered a loss. Dina Dalal's husband dies on their third wedding anniversary. In order to preserve her own independence, she takes a job as a supervisor for a clothing-export factory. The two tailors she hires, Ishvar and Omprakash, have come to the city in search of work after their homes have been destroyed. At the same time, Dina opens her home to a boarder, the young Maneck Kohlah, whose family still suffers the repercussions of having lost their lands in the 1947 partition. National politics intrude at every turn in these characters' lives, despite their own attempts to disengage themselves from all things political.



**Thanks for previewing this
Bookclub-in-a-Box discussion guide.**

**If you'd like to purchase the full guide in
print or PDF format, just visit:**

www.bookclubinabox.com/discussion-guides