While reading the book, as a reader, one should certainly think about the nature of the struggles faced by the major characters.

* How many of the struggles are because of their own bad choices?
* What percentage of their struggles and trails are because of the unjust economic system?
* Could Dina have done better if she had some legal or state protections?
* Could Dina have done better if she had been a part of a larger workers collective instead of being an individual petty producer within the neoliberal market?
* And, in the end, they fail because of their own flaws or because of the flawed system of neoliberal economics within which they struggle?

Question 1: What kind of path to freedom does Dalal Pursue?

Dina Dalal’s state of mind is described at the end of the Prologue:

*‘When Maneck left her flat, she began pacing the room, suddenly restless, as though about to embark on a long voyage. No Need now to visit her brother and beg for next month’s rent. She took a deep breath. Once again, her fragile independence was preserved.*’ (11, emphasis mine)

It is obvious from the above passage that Dina Dalal is working toward reducing or eliminating her dependency on her brother, or patriarchy, and in this sense her attempt to follow her own path is laudable and fits perfectly in our own romantic imagination about women’s struggle and resistance. We all have been trained to imagine freedom in “economic” terms, for if we are economically independent, we will, we all believe imperceptibly, be able to live a free and independent lives. This economism is do deeply embedded in our consciousness that even at a larger scale our collective investments are absolutely always connected to what is termed providing “economic opportunities.” In fact, the framing of freedom depends mostly on an economic frame: upward mobility, self-reliance, financial freedom are the metaphors that we employ in describing this will or struggle to freedom. And. in a romantic sense, we always see these struggles as individual struggles, so if someone succeeds, the success can be attributed to their resilience and diligence, but, conversely, when someone fails, we can very easily blame them for their own failure as well.

Within the novel, though, the situation is not so simple, and maybe, in this way, the novel may teach us to see our actions not necessarily as our individual actions but rather actions either prompted by the world around us or by the limitations of an economistic imagination. So, the novel starts with Md. Dalal attempting to free herself through the means of neoliberal economics: she wants to tap into the burgeoning market of labour-intensive jobs that have been moved to places like India and Bangladesh and hopes that this entry into the market will enable her to earn enough money to be free of patriarchy in her own life and from dependency on her family. There is, thus, an attempt to freedom through free enterprise.

Question 2: What do we Learn about the Rural/ Urban Divide in the Neoliberal Economy?

‘A Fine Balance’ broaches the subject of Rural/ Urban divide of India. The two tailors are both from the rural part of India who have moved to the city to make a new life for themselves. Thus, in this case also, this is a move by two skilled workers to escape the very givens of their life through a movement into the Indian, and global, economy. But this move also, like the peasants of the early stage so capital, makes them the ideal subjects of exploitation and their lives in the city are doubly precarious: they depend on the work and the rates offered by Ms. Dalal and, having left their village under duress, they cannot even escape back to their rural roots. Here, in the context of the novel, it is important to keep in mind the power of more than one impediment to one’s life in neoliberal capital and one could also read the actions and experiences of the tailors as an example of the precarious lives of rural workers as internal migrants or workers who immigrate to the developed nations and work under similar precarious conditions. And, of course, this question should also make us think of our own lives and trace the persistence of precarity in our own lives.

If we look at the Kohlah family, we see that Farokh loses his family fortune but still choses to continue his life in the mountains with his wife and son due to his immense love for the hillside. They meet their livelihood with a small general shop and a soft drink namely Kaycey formulated by Farokh’s father. The drink has more demands in the village. In-spite of many requests of his wife and her family, Farokh never decides to migrate to the city. Both the father and the son (Maneck) share invaluable love and respect for nature. Farokh has lost one of his eyes and covers it all the time except he visits the hillside forests in the evening. He removes his eye path and shows his true self to the nature. The identity of the people of the hillside is connected to the nature but it disturbed by the Government’s plan. The Government plans to connect the hillside to the cities. Farokh and his friend Major Grewal organize meetings to condemn the plan but none of their attempts were given importance and the hills met a destruction. Just like every other citizen, Farokh was thrown way from his motherland.

Hence, the lives of people of the rural areas and their demands are not deal for the system. From these stories; the tailors and Farokh Kohlah’s, we realized that in front of the growth of the neo-capitalist economy the voices from the rural place have very little importance. Their marginal position creates a great division in the large scenario of the overall population of the country. Mistry intended to portray the reality of the nation and he very successfully nature of the neo-liberal economy which is thriving to grow no matter how much it has to ignore the wellbeing of the citizen.

Question 3: What Happens When the state can no longer protect its workers and citizens?

To be exactly specific, the introduction of the Begger-master character is surprisingly bizarre and not very useful to the general plot of the story. It can also be sensed that, as if, Rohinton Mistry was simply trying to exoticize his narrative by introducing this remarkably predictable villain. But if we change our perspective of reading, we can find the Begger-master section central to the plot of the novel and find it extremely significance in understanding the author’s critique of neoliberal economics. In a way, one learns, that the entire balance in the story, especially toward the end, depends upon the benevolence of this private citizen with the power to protect or abandon Ms. Dalal’s venture. Thus, in the absence of state protection and at the mercy of the middlemen, who give her the piece work sent by the global corporation, Ms. Dalal survives only because the Begger-master becomes her protector and benefactor. This character has a lesson to teach us, that in order to succeed, one would need some kind of private protection, or the only way to protect your interests within the neoliberal post-colony is to build some sort of alliances with the urban underground? But indirectly this section also teaches us that violence and power, within the neoliberal regime, has been privatized and in most of the cases our success will also depend upon the possibility of building an alliance, economic or social, with the local private power-brokers.

Question 4: Describe the destructive legacy of the caste system mentioned in the novel, A Fine Balance.’

Rohinton’s Mistry’s novel ‘A Fine Bance’ is set in the year 1975 in an unknown city which can be easily identified as Bombay. 1975 is the exact same year when Mistry moved to Canada and in India the political scenario was at it’s worst. The political leadership of Prime minister Indira Gandhi announced the Emergency Period all over the country.

Rohinton Mistry as a chronicler has very cleverly interfaced history and fiction to bring out the socio-political events that took place during the specific period of Emergency. In that period, corruption. Tyranny, exploitation, oppression, violence was at its peak. This novel is not only embedded in the political background of the post-independent India, but also has highlighted the discriminatory social system at the heart of the country. Here, Mistry brings out the issue of caste oppression. One of the major characters, Ishvar and Omprakash Darji, the tailors whose family had been brutalized by the caste system.

Narayan, Dukhi, Ishvar, and Omprakash, they the Chamars (an extremely less-privileged and discriminated group of people of the society). They are the untouchables, and it is a saddening fact that even after twenty years of the independence, nothing has change. The fight against the discriminatory caste system and injustice still to be redeemed.

Dukhi, Ishvar’s father violated the caste restriction by encouraging his sons to be tailors instead of Chamars. because, the Chamars were not supposed to be tailors or anything else. Therefore, the Thakur decided a special punishment for Dukhi’s family, because they have disturbed the society’s timeless balance. Narayan questioned some of the lawless practices of the society such as- the Chamars cannot drink water from the village well, worship in the temples of the upper caste or walk where he likes. When he attempts to assert his right to vote, he is brutally tortured and hunged in the village square. Other untouchables were beaten up at random, their women were raped and their huts are burnt down. These practices had a very sharp depression in Omprakash’s mind. Again, Dukhi’s entire family Roopa, Radha and the daughters all were burnt alive with Narayan’s corpse. Omprakash thought of taking revenge, but Ishvar and Ashraf, the tailor, made him realize the futility of their dream and instead decides to move to Mumbai. However, this move didn’t bring him joy or peace at all. Rather it started a new tragic chapter of their life.

Mistry’s tone while narrating the city life of Ishvar and Om was slightly jocular. It is maybe because, Mistry wanted his readers to know the reality behind the glamourous City of Dreams, Mumbai, the city life did not open for them a new gate of good luck, but it made them realize a new form of oppression which is; class-consciousness. They were forced to stay in jhopadpattis that was mowed down. They were rounded up by the street beggars and was forced to work as unpaid labour. They attempted to live their lives with some semblances of dignity are frustrated at various points. Mistry also continued that, under the name of ‘beautification’ campaign, labourers like Ishvar and Omprakash where they lived, the slums were completely powdered. They were left homeless. Om and Ishvar felt that they don’t have any potential to exist in such a metropolitan city. And, they even felt more isolated when they realized that they were not allowed to stay at Ms. Dina’s place. To a greater extent during the Emergency. Om was sterilized forcibly and was made impotent by the officials. Ishvar who stand against this, looses his both legs and left as a beggar on the streets of Mumbai.

Ms. Dina was a nice lady, but initially she opposed Maneck’s friendliness with the two. As time passed, she and the other three of them built a strong bonding which continued even when Dina returned to live in her brother’s house. However, we can say that the novel ‘A Fine Balance’ very well attacks the dysfunctional oppressive caste system dominating our country for a long time.