

A Study of Culinary Journey of Faizi: From Dreams to Ustad Hotel

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ABSTRACT

This study focusses into the culinary odyssey of Faizi, a character whose transformation from an ambitious chef with big dreams to a crucial figure at Ustad Hotel provides perceptions into Keralan culture, familial expectations, and individual goals. Against the desires of his father, Faizi sets out on his road to become a chef. He begins his adventure in Switzerland, where he trains covertly to become a chef, and ends with a momentous return to his family's restaurant in Kozhikode. The research compares and contrasts Faizi's humble upbringing with his eventual encounter with the luxurious world of fine dining, symbolised by the five-star Beach Bay hotel, which is located nearby. Based on Faizi's experiences, the research explores topics of transformational potential of culinary arts, resistance, and personal growth. It draws attention to how Faizi overcomes obstacles in his quest for mastery to revitalise the Ustad Hotel and demonstrates how his work engages with larger cultural and social contexts. In contrast to the status-driven excesses of high-end businesses, the narrative highlights the genuineness and simplicity of local culinary traditions.

Key Words: Culinary Arts, Personal Aspiration, Family Potentials, Cultural Subtleties, Food Tradition.

INTRODUCTION

The culinary arts are frequently linked to ingenuity, ardour, and an unwavering quest for perfection. It combines tradition and innovation, science and art, and for many, it is their ideal career. The culinary adventure of Faizi, a figure who epitomises the conflict between individual goals and societal standards, is the main subject of the paper. Through following Faizi's path from his aspirations to become a chef to his important position at Ustad Hotel, we are able to see the intricate relationship between social and cultural forces in Kerala, a southern Indian state renowned for its extensive culinary tradition. The lively backdrop of Faizi's story is created by Keralan cuisine, which is distinguished by its distinctive blend of spices, fresh ingredients, and ancient recipes. Faizi's culinary journey has been greatly influenced by the region's rich culinary traditions and diversified food culture, underscoring the need of comprehending local culture and legacy in the pursuit of culinary perfection.

Faizi is the main research subject; he is a young man who has a strong love for cooking. Faizi's journey is a tale of defiance, tenacity, and transformation in addition to being about learning the culinary skills. His goals are framed by cultural norms that constrain professional choices, familial pressures, and conventional expectations. Faizi is unwavering in his pursuit of a culinary career, even in the face of strong opposition from his father, who hopes to see him succeed as a businessman. Many obstacles face him on his path, such as a lack of finances and support, societal expectations, and the necessity to establish his value in a cutthroat sector. Faizi's story serves as a tribute to the strength of ambition and the value of pursuing one's passion in the face of many setbacks. In addition to developing his culinary abilities, Faizi experiences a deep personal metamorphosis at the Ustad Hotel, where he gains invaluable insights into fortitude, tenacity, and the fundamentals of cookery. His journey is a reflection of the larger cultural and societal changes occurring in Kerala, where a new generation of young people who are pursuing their passions and redefining success are challenging old roles and expectations.

Context

Kerala, often known as “God's Own Country” is well-known for its varied cultural heritage, beautiful scenery, and, most importantly, its food customs (Gupta 2019). The history, topography, and numerous cultural influences that the state has acquired over the ages are all reflected in its cuisine. Kerala is known as a gastronomic paradise due to its usage of spices, coconut, rice, and a wide range of seafood. However, a complex web of social and cultural forces that affect people's decisions and professional pathways is embedded within this rich culinary legacy (Thampi 2023).

Ustad Hotel was scripted by Anjali Menon, marking her first time writing a script for another director. The film originated from the friendship between Anjali Menon and Anwar Rasheed, which developed while working on the anthology film “Kerala Cafe,” where Anwar directed the segment ‘Bridge’ (Singh 2012). Anwar Rasheed explained that the concept for *Ustad Hotel* emerged during a phone conversation with Anjali. After ‘Bridge,’ they decided to collaborate on a full-length film. They discussed several ideas before settling on a food-related theme. Although the project was initially postponed, and despite the release of “Salt N' Pepper” around the same time, Anwar emphasized that *Ustad Hotel* is different from *Salt N' Pepper* except that both films focus on food (Nambidi 2012).

Anjali states;

“When we met and talked about his past films, Anwar Rasheed told me once, 'Anjali, I want to make a film in which I compromise the least.' That kind of stuck in my head. I wanted to write something in which he wouldn't have to compromise” (Singh 2012).

Anjali wrote the script for *Ustad Hotel* during a stay in Calicut. She explained;

“Soon after I discovered I was pregnant, I moved to Calicut to be with my mother. As she and the rest of the family showered me with affection as only Kozhikodans truly can... I began to think of the peculiarity of the local culture, especially with food and hospitality. I started to read up about the Arab past and ended up with Sufi philosophy. Many folks ask if I had researched the hotel industry, food preparation, etc., but the truth is that the core of my research was around Sufism, which celebrates food, music, dance, creativity, art, romance, and finds the divine in all such aspects of life. It seemed natural that the film, too, should be an exploration of a new generation person into such a mode of thought and life” (ibid).

Anjali wrote the film in English until the seventh draft, then rewrote it in Malayalam, saying, “I remember the opening line – 'The idea of Faizi began before him.' When I wrote in Malayalam it became, 'Faizi-nte katha oon janikinnel munpe todangi’” (Anima 2012). That is when it really hit Anwar (ibid).” The film was produced by Listin Stephen, with production starting on 21 November 2011 at Hotel Sarovaram in Kochi. It was planned for release in April 2012.

Ustad Hotel is a 2012 Indian Malayalam-language drama film directed by Anwar Rasheed, written by Anjali Menon, and produced by Listin Stephen. The film stars Thilakan, Dulquer Salmaan, and Nithya Menon, with supporting roles by Siddique, Mamukkoya, and Lena, and cameo appearances by Asif Ali and Jishnu. The music is composed by Gopi Sundar, with cinematography by Loganathan Srinivasan and editing by Praveen Prabhakar.

The story follows Faizal, or Faizi (Dulquer), who studies to be a chef in Switzerland against his father's (Razaq's) wishes. Abdul Razak and Fareeda, a Muslim couple from Kerala, eagerly await the birth of their first child. Razak desires a son whom he plans to name Faizal and call Faizi. However, they have a daughter instead. Following the birth of three more daughters, Abdul Razak becomes frustrated and moves to Dubai. Fareeda

eventually has a son, but her health deteriorates due to the strain of multiple pregnancies, leading to her death. Razak then relocates to Dubai with his five children, where Faizi is cared for by his four older sisters, whom he affectionately calls 'Ithathas & Company.'

As Faizi grows up, his sisters marry off and his father remarries. Faizi aspires to be a chef, conflicting with his father's ambitions. He studies hotel management in Switzerland at the University of Lausanne but secretly trains to become a chef. Upon his return, his choice disrupts Razak's plans to open a five-star hotel in Kozhikode and causes Faizi to lose a marriage proposal from a wealthy family. Razak had hoped Faizi would marry Shahana, the daughter of a business tycoon. Infuriated, Razak confiscates Faizi's passport and credit cards to prevent him from taking a job as a sous chef at The Ivy in London. In response, Faizi travels to Kozhikode to stay with his grandfather Kareem, known locally as 'Kareem Ikka,' who has run Ustad Hotel for 35 years. During his extended stay, Faizi becomes involved in the hotel's operations and befriends the band 'Kallumakkayees' discovering that the lead singer, Shahana, is secretly pursuing a singing career. After a successful performance, Shahana reluctantly accepts Faizi's offer for a ride home, revealing that she is about to get engaged and is experiencing her last day of freedom.

A five-star hotel called 'Beach Bay' adjacent to Ustad Hotel aims to acquire the land where Ustad Hotel is situated. Kareem, who has accumulated substantial debt, faces the risk of losing the restaurant as the bank conspires to transfer the property to Beach Bay. Faizi informs the Beach Bay owner that he will not permit the takeover. In response, the owner bribes the local health authorities to shut down Ustad Hotel by claiming it is unhygienic.

Faizi then raises funds from the hotel staff and undertakes renovations. Shahana, disillusioned with her family's rigid views, returns to support Faizi. Together, they successfully reopen Ustad Hotel and manage to clear the outstanding debts. Faizi receives a job offer as an executive chef in Marseille, France. However, when he informs his grandfather Kareem, Kareem suffers a heart attack and is hospitalized. While in the hospital, Kareem urges Faizi to visit Narayanan Krishnan in Madurai, a friend whom Kareem has been supporting to feed the poor (Kumar 2012). Witnessing the struggles of the underprivileged, Faizi grasps Kareem's insight that "anyone can fill a stomach, but only a good cook can fill the heart as well." Upon returning, Faizi learns that Kareem intends to fulfill his lifelong dream of a pilgrimage to Sufi shrines in North India. Faizi decides to stay at Ustad Hotel, marries Shahana, who assists him in running the restaurant, and ultimately wins his father's support, making the restaurant profitable.

The tale of Faizi is more than simply a personal account; it also serves as a window into the shifting dynamics of a society that is clinging to its traditional origins while gradually embracing modernity. We intend to shed light on the struggles and victories faced by those who dare to follow their ambitions in the face of hardship, as well as the transformational power of passion and tenacity, through this study.

Dreams and Aspirations

Faizi's love of cooking stems from his early experiences and is the foundation of his culinary path. Given that food plays a major role in the family, Faizi has a natural affinity for the culinary arts (Sharika 2012). He commits himself to learning new dishes, experimenting with spices, and improving his culinary abilities. His desire to become a chef and make a name for himself in the culinary industry is what drives him to remain steadfastly committed. His desire to learn more about hotel administration is what motivates him to pursue formal schooling in Switzerland. But his dream is more than just academic success; it's his ambition to create and innovate in the food industry. Faizi envisions a career where he can not only showcase his cooking skills but also redefine culinary excellence on his terms.

Faizi's father, Abdul Razak, strongly opposes his goals despite their obvious clarity. In stark contrast, Razak envisions his son Faizi as the manager of a five-star Kozhikode hotel in the future, driven by his own aspirations for both social and financial achievement. Razak has high aspirations for Faizi because he thinks a job in hotel management will provide him with security, status, and stability. There is conflict between personal fulfilment and family expectations as a result of their different perspectives. For Faizi, becoming a chef is about more than just making money; it's also about questioning conventions and creating room for one's own creativity. The contradiction between Faizi's sincere goals and his father's realistic expectations exposes a larger story about the struggle to follow one's passion and conform to social and familial norms.

Challenges and Setbacks

Faizi's father, Abdul Razak, has strong objections to his son's desire to become a chef since he has quite different goals for him. Razak's dismay is evident when he learns that Faizi has covertly chosen to pursue a career in cooking rather than hotel management. In addition to upsetting Razak's objectives, this discovery also sets off a string of disciplinary measures. Razak essentially denies Faizi the chance to work as a sous chef in London by seizing his passport and credit cards. This reply demonstrates how deeply disapproved Razak is of Faizi's chosen course and how unwilling he is to support it.

Deprived of resources and financial assistance, Faizi is forced to look for another path. He makes the decision to go to Kozhikode to be with his grandfather Kareem Ikka, who runs the little Ustad Hotel. With this choice, Faizi's journey takes a dramatic turn, turning the Ustad Hotel from a haven into an important teaching tool. In spite of its modest exterior, the hotel presents Faizi with an exceptional chance to fully engage with the food industry and understand the underlying meaning of cuisine. At this point, he starts to recognise the social and emotional effects that food may have on people's lives in addition to the culinary arts technical aspects.

Faizi faces the obstacles of managing a tiny, failing company at the Ustad Hotel. He experiences directly the importance of tenacity, diligence, and painstaking attention to detail. Faizi learns about the difficulties faced by the food industry through his grandfather's continuous battles, which range from lack of funds to competition from more sophisticated restaurants. He perseveres in his dedication to his trade in spite of these challenges, eventually contributing significantly to the hotel's operations. Faizi's comprehension of his love and his place in the culinary industry are shaped during this time of hardship and learning, which ultimately strengthens his commitment to realising his dream of becoming a chef (Sharika 2012).

Transformation and Growth

Faizi endures an extensive metamorphosis and develops personally throughout his stay at the Ustad Hotel. Under the guidance of his grandfather, Kareem Ikka, Faizi honed his cooking skills and gained priceless life lessons. Experienced chef Kareem goes above and beyond as a recipe book instructor, turning into a mentor who shares insights about resiliency, community, and the deeper meaning of food. This advice covers more ground than just culinary techniques; it also takes into account the idea that food can serve as a vehicle for spiritual and emotional sustenance. Faizi is greatly influenced by Kareem's teachings about the ability of food to create connections and touch people's hearts, which has shaped his view of cooking as an art form that transcends simple dietary needs.

Faizi gains an appreciation for the traditional and cultural elements of his background as he becomes fully involved in the Ustad Hotel's daily activities. His membership in the neighbourhood band 'Kallumakkayees' exposes him to a network of acquaintances and shared experiences. Faizi's life is enhanced by this newfound sense of belonging and community, which gives him a stronger bond with his ancestry. These exchanges emphasise the worth of customs and the necessity of preserving cultural links, which are fundamental to Faizi's

identity and philosophy of cooking and living. His connections within the community serve to further solidify his sense of dedication and purpose, bridging his personal and professional development.

Faizi's progress spans tremendous personal improvement in addition to his culinary expertise. He gains the resilience and humility necessary to deal with the intricacies of family dynamics and cultural influences. His growth process increasingly depends on him striking a balance between his aspirations and his family's expectations. Faizi has more confidence and a stronger feeling of responsibility as a result of this time of reflection and adjustment (Nair 2012). Not only does he become a better chef as a result of this life-changing event, but he also becomes a more confident and level-headed guy who is prepared to face the problems of his professional and personal lives with fresh eyes.

Cultural and Social Dynamics

The story of Faizi is told via the elaborate cultural and social fabric of Kerala, a state renowned for its long-standing caste system and deeply ingrained customs. Kerala's social standards are deeply ingrained in customs and roles that have long shaped its citizens' social and career paths. In this regard, Faizi's desire to work as a chef deviates significantly from accepted norms. Faizi's pursuit of a culinary career contradicts long-standing traditions and indicates a greater cultural shift in a country where traditional roles are rigorously preserved, particularly within a Muslim family. In spite of his father's opposition, his choice to pursue his love of cooking is indicative of Kerala's changing social environment, as younger people choose to prioritise their own happiness above conforming to socially acceptable positions (Palicha 2012). This shift is emblematic of a larger societal trend across India, where modern values and individual aspirations often clash with traditional expectations.

The generational divide that exists between Abdul Razak, Faizi's father, and himself is a microcosm of the larger struggle between modernity and tradition. Razak's ambitions for Faizi to become a prosperous businessman running a five-star hotel highlight a desire for economic and social mobility based on realistic and forward-thinking ideas. Razak's unwillingness to help Faizi fulfil her culinary ambitions, however, highlights the enduring nature of traditional beliefs and the difficulties in balancing them with modern goals. This dynamic highlights the challenge of bridging generational divides, as traditional expectations frequently fail to meet the evolving goals of the younger generation. Faizi's path also highlights the value of community support and mentoring in overcoming such challenges. Faizi's grandfather, Kareem Ikka, serves as a crucial mentor, imparting knowledge in cooking as well as valuable life skills that influence Faizi's outlook on his work and personal development. Faizi's achievement and resilience are further enhanced by the friendships he makes and the support of the local community. Within the context of cultural and social dynamics, this collective support network emphasises the value of community and mentoring in helping people endure obstacles and realise their aspirations.

The film *Ustad Hotel* effectively showcases the culinary traditions of Malabar. Written by Anjali Menon, it stands out as one of the finest food-themed films in Indian cinema. Menon, a self-proclaimed food enthusiast, explains that the essence of the story lies in fully appreciating the flavors of what we consume. She likens this to how the distinct flavors in a Suleimani tea blend to create a stimulating experience, much like romance. The movie features many mouthwatering scenes and underscores how Faizi's grandfather, Kareem Bhai, emphasizes that true satisfaction comes from watching others enjoy a meal rather than eating alone. On one hand, the film portrays Ustad Hotel, where the simple yet beloved biryani is sold for 35 rupees per plate, reflecting the modest means of its patrons. On the other hand, it contrasts this with the opulent Hotel Bay, where the same biryani is priced at 350 rupees. This contrast highlights the themes of excess versus scarcity and the disparities within the culinary world.

In the opulent hotel where Faizi works as a chef, a fusion festival features a scene where an entire layered cake is exploded, and guests playfully smear cream on each other's faces. This moment highlights contemporary

trends where food is often wasted and mishandled without regard. It also critiques the way some young people celebrate by wastefully engaging with food. The festival showcases a variety of foods, but humorously, many of these items are traditionally associated with the poor and have gained prominence over time. For instance, kappa, or tapioca, once considered a staple for the working class, is now enjoyed by foreigners in the film. Similarly, oysters, which were once plentiful and a cheap food for laborers in Britain, France, and the U.S., are now a luxury item with high prices due to increased demand. Charles Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers* highlights oysters' association with poverty. The film also features parotta, a favorite among Malayalis, depicted prominently both in Ustad Hotel and the five-star venue. Faizi is shown perfecting the art of making Kerala parotta, which is usually inexpensive, and later transforming it into a gourmet dish for the festival. This contrast emphasizes how simple foods can be elevated and appreciated in upscale settings. Additionally, biryani, a dish believed to have originated as a practical meal for soldiers and tracing its roots to Persia, is now a symbol of culinary diversity in India. The film demonstrates how biryani has evolved into various regional varieties, unifying Indian cuisine with its rich history and adaptability.

The five-star hotel in the film highlights how food becomes a marker of class and status. For the patrons of the upscale hotel, food represents a symbol of social standing and lifestyle, while for the staff at Ustad Hotel, food is essential for daily life. The film frequently features suleimani tea, which serves as a central element in Karim Bhai's and his employees' lives. Karim Bhai, when asked about the secret to suleimani, reveals with a modest smile that it is 'Mohobat' or love (Smith 2019). This contrast illustrates that one side offers food driven by love and satisfaction, while the other caters to the privileged for mere pleasure. The clientele also differs: Ustad Hotel serves a diverse array of ordinary people for whom a biryani is a rare treat, while the five-star establishment caters to well-to-do individuals indifferent to waste.

Food has become a modern status symbol, replacing previous markers like designer clothing and luxury accessories. Today, social media trends, like sharing images of gourmet meals and stylishly presented desserts, reflect this shift. The hashtag #foodporn has turned personal dining experiences into public displays. The film underscores how food has come to define personal status, from a simple bucket of popcorn and soda at the movies to extravagant cakes for birthdays and coffee meetings. Ultimately, *Ustad Hotel* conveys that true satisfaction and connection come from the genuine desire to nourish others, rather than from the pursuit of superficial impressiveness.

CONCLUSION

The study analyzed Faizi's culinary trajectory, showing how he went from being an ambitious chef with lofty goals to becoming a key player at the Ustad Hotel. Faizi's journey starts with a profound love of cooking, fostered in a family with a strong connection to food. Faizi decides to follow his culinary goals in Switzerland, against his father Abdul Razak's wishes for him to succeed in hotel management, only to return to his family's little restaurant in Kozhikode. This story juxtaposes the luxury of exquisite dining—represented by the neighbouring five-star Beach Bay hotel—with Faizi's modest origins. The study looks at how Faizi's experiences illustrate ideas about resilience, human development, and the transformational potential of the culinary arts. Faizi revitalises Ustad Hotel by overcoming multiple obstacles, showcasing how his work interacts with larger cultural and social contexts. Kerala's rich culinary culture is emphasised by the contrast between the Beach Bay hotel's opulent, status-driven grandeur and the Ustad Hotel's genuine, down-to-earth rendition of regional cuisine. The story highlights the significant effects of following one's passion against social norms and represents a broader cultural shift as younger generations redefine success and personal fulfilment. Faizi's narrative presents a dramatic look at the murky relationship between one's personal goals and societal and familial obligations. His turbulent and successful path through the culinary world provides insights into the larger issues surrounding modernity versus tradition. Faizi embodies the evolving ideals in Kerala, where new aspirations are challenging conventional positions, as he develops Ustad Hotel and reconnects with his cultural

roots. In addition to demonstrating the value of community support and mentorship in achieving personal objectives, this story demonstrates the larger cultural changes that are transforming both personal and professional identities in modern society.

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