

Tandoori Pizza: Fluid Culinary/Cultural Identities in Select Contemporary Indian Travelogues

INDRANI M DESAI

Visiting Lecturer of Communication Skills & Presentation Technique
Sardar Patel College of Engineering
Andheri (West), Mumbai
India

Abstract:

Travel writing, in recent times, has become an important area of interdisciplinary study. Apart from being rooted in issues of imperialism, diaspora, multiculturalism, nationalism, identity, gender, globalization, colonialism and postcolonialism, it brings into play the dynamics of transculturalism, the idea of the centre and the margin, border crossings, hybridity, location and displacement. Travel also entails a movement away from a familiar place and location to an unfamiliar one, a new place, one that is different from one's home. This difference may often pose a threat to one's identity as it brings into purview ideas of the self and the other. All these engagements have made travel and travel writing to raise a few important questions. In this paper, the contemporary discourses on identity, hybridity and ethnicity are analyzed through the lens of food which becomes a marker of many trajectories of identity. In a multi-cultural, traditionalist country like India, food is an important marker of ethnic identity. Food as a literary device is used for various purposes and the diversity can be illustrated and apprehended through the relation between food and cultural identity, food and ethnicity and other issues surrounding it, such as globalization, hybridization and transculturalism as well. The paper proposes to study how do Pankaj Mishra and Samanth Subramanian, as postcolonial travelers, construct themselves in the text, what is it that they are looking for in their travels, what role does reflection on their own roles as travelers play in this process? Are they, as travelers, looking for otherness, or for

confirmation? Do they, as 'observers', occupy a privileged space, or is it the 'observed' that occupy a desired privileged space? Through the metaphor of food, the collective, inherited past is remembered, recorded and passed on to posterity; and through recipes, new innovations are experimented and adapted, each adding to the composite story of the nation. Even though the main interest of this paper lies in considering the transcultural potential of food imagery, this usage of food in contemporary Indian travelogues is not the only one and should not be analyzed in isolation. As a part of transcultural approach, this paper crosses the boundaries of various cultures making up the Indian landscape, and to have a look at how food imagery is used to illustrate and comment on developments in issues of assimilation, identity and ethnicity.

Key words: Identity, ethnicity, transcultural, culinary culture, hybridity, Diaspora, multiculturalism

Introduction

In the last decade we saw a growing interest and passion in travel and travel writings in India. Not only does it offer a very popular travel channel with travelogues by Rocky Singh and Mayur Sharma (*Highway on My Plate*) but as people have become more and more global and adventurous, travel magazines and travel guides published by *Lonely Planet* and so on, showed a significant impact on Indian travel records. We have also seen an increase in the publication of travel narratives and concurrently with this, an increase in the theories of travel writing. When studying travel narratives, one of the first issues that come to mind is that of narrative authority. Is the narrator trustworthy or only cooking up a good story? Is the author aware of and playing with the traditions of the genre? Does the traveler move beyond the traditional binaries of superior/inferior culture so characteristic of colonial travel writing? As Wimal Dissanayake points out in an undated internet article titled "Exploring post-colonial travel writing",

the narrative voice in travel literature among other things raises issues related to “textuality, representation, sign, desire, power, cultural intervention and modes of sense-making”. (Dissanayake 2011). To these one can add issues of identity, raised in the narratives under discussion, in this case a global, fluid or an ethno-cultural identity?

Contemporary Indian travel landscape is composed of the multitude of voices speaking from the diverse ethno cultural spheres and from the spaces in-between cultures. These voices reflect changing attitudes to Indian identities—they speak against homogeneity, uniformity and exclusionary structures. They apprehend the fact that identities are fluid as a consequence of cross-cultural exchanges. In *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Travels in Small Town India*, Pankaj Mishra portrays the social and cultural changes in India in the above mentioned context of globalization, in the form of a travelogue. Mishra uses this form to make a sharp insight into the minds of the people all around India. With the aim of depicting India in transition, Mishra describes the lives of various everyday people all through a huge undercurrent of economic and social change which in turn is changing the quality of people’s values, customs, hopes and dreams. The experience of multiple cultural traditions and the sociopolitical discourse surrounding it has found its way into the Indian travelogues, and is often commented on through food imagery which also emerges as a transcultural metaphor.

Food is an important social phenomenon, an integral part of culture and the means of creating, affecting and making statements about one’s identity. This paper proves that food imagery is an efficient medium of conveying contemporary discourse on global and ethno-cultural identities which are tending towards transcultural perspectives, and to highlight the potential of food to establish the awareness of affinity and diversity, challenge exclusionary attitudes and stimulate cross-cultural interaction. The observations and conclusions are

based on the analysis of *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Travels in Small Town India* by Pankaj Mishra and *Following Fish: Travels around the Indian Coast* by Samanth Subramanian. These two travelogues gazing at various geographical areas and social spaces can help in this study of culture and identity. In keeping with the lines of contemporary travel writing, these travelogues too create a distance from the ideology of empire and present the encounters with other peoples and cultures in terms of mutual understanding, recognition of difference, and hope in the emancipatory possibilities of a global community. One important technique used by Pankaj Mishra that we might relate is local colour. Indian food and other edibles are abundantly referred to all throughout the book mostly under their Indian names. Some examples are: *mathri*, *daalmoth* and *achar* (Mishra 2013, 3) *Prasad* (58); *halwai*, *imarti* and *rabdi* in page sixty four and *sambar vada* in page one hundred and forty three. He also inserts Hindi phrases and sentences in his *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana* to add to the taste and flavor of the scenes. Since there has been very little literary criticism in printed format on Pankaj Mishra and Samanth Subramanian and their travelogues, much of the information reproduced here is mostly found and documented through web-surfing.

Identity is one of the central topics in contemporary political, social, cultural and consequently literary discourses which take on a specific form in multicultural environments. The reason for the intense attention to the question of identity is the identity crisis which many people seem to be experiencing at the moment. Rapid social changes are the cause of disintegration of most of the homogenous and stable identity designs, and the result is the emergence of the concept of multiple identities created across cultural, ethnic and other borders. New identity and ethnicity formations have become an invariable part of lives in multicultural societies. Since multiculturalism as a policy appears to limit identities and expressions of ethnicity, transculturalism can become a suitable

approach because it has a capacity to promote interaction and (re)creation of identities which suit the rapidly changing contexts. The main factor leading to the identity crisis include the breaking up of most of the all encompassing identity schemes such as family or nation, great demographic shifts, or forces of globalization in tension with local pressures. New identities stemming from this situation are hybrid and fluid. Identity has become decentred, ambivalent and contextual. Mishra makes an association between economic globalization and ethical, social and cultural problems experienced by the people. This happens when he comes to know that some hotels at Kovalam Beach do not admit Indians. Here the writer makes direct remarks:

But India wasn't a tourist economy – at least, not yet. All the more disturbing, then, it was to know about places where the shoddy practice of poor parasitic nations had crept in. In India, they were an unpleasant reminder of old colonial hierarchies: whites at the top, Indians somewhere at the bottom, finding their own different levels of degradation. They spoke, at least in certain quarters, of the growing damage, after just forty-seven years of independence, to national self-esteem; and they were the unexplored darker side of globalization. (Mishra 2013, 167).

The age of transnational and postnational identity seems to have set in and every national identity seems to be in a process of assimilation and transformation. Forces of globalization, free economy and the onslaught of mass media have redefined relations between structures, between communities, between nations and between individuals. The comforting images of nation, national language, and coherent communities are no longer sufficient. The fluidity and hybridity of global communities demand new definitions, new vocabulary. In fact, to put it more accurately the much contested term hybridity is recently seen as a cultural effect of globalization. M. M. Kraidy presents hybridity as the “cultural logic” of globalization as it

“entails that traces of other cultures exist in every culture, thus offering foreign media and marketers transcultural wedges for forging affective links between their commodities and local communities. (Marwan M. Kraidy, 2005, 148). Also Nederveen Pieterse who labels hybridity as the *rhizome of culture*, argues that globalization as hybridization opposes views which see the process as homogenizing, modernizing, and westernizing, and that it broadens the empirical history of the concept. (Jan Nederveen Pieterse, 2004, 54). Hybridization takes many forms including cultural, political and linguistic discourses. This notion of hybridity is central to Bhabha’s work “in challenging notions of identity, culture, and nation as coherent and unified entities that exhibit a linear historical development. Hybridity expresses a state of “in-betweenness,” as in a person who stands between two cultures.” (M. A. R. Habib 2008, 166). Hybridity, Bhabha argues, subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures. In his article entitled, “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences”, Bhabha stresses the interdependence of colonizer and colonized. He argues that all cultural systems and statements are constructed in what he calls the “Third Space of Enunciation”. (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin 1996, 183). Bhabha urges us into this space in an effort to open up the notion of an international culture “not based on exoticism or multi-culturalism of the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity.”

The above mentioned developments have had considerable impact on the rethinking of ethnic identities as well. Ethnic identity can be described as “a way in which people, on account of their ethnic origin, locate themselves psychologically in relation to one or more social systems and in which they perceive others as placing them in relation to those systems” (Isajiw 2007). Even though some people still associate ethnic with foreign, marginal, immigrant, exotic, or, paradoxically, authentic, thus reducing ethnicities to mere

stereotypes, it is necessary to realize and acknowledge the fact that everybody is anchored in ethnic subjectivities and hybrid identities.

In the contemporary world, ethnic identification has plural forms and one can change from the range of ethnic manifestation according to the context: “We may be coloured in one context, Asian in another and Punjabi in a third, whilst ill at ease with the application of any category singly when applied in, for example, censuses and surveys” (Hall, 1997 252). Ethnic identities are created in everyday conduct. They do not vanish through the processes affecting them, but the diverse new forms are formed.

A connection can be drawn between new ethnicities, hybrid identities and the concept of transculturalism, since the transcultural act of crossing the boundaries involves dynamism and interaction, and eventuates in fluidity. Transcultural identity is fluid, multiple and subject to continuous change. Ethnicity through transcultural optics is not reduced to stereotypical and static manifestations, since transculturalism supports reinvention and recombination. Switching between such recreated identities is more often than not smooth and led by unconscious motivations, and it results from a desire to be at multiple places concurrently, to lead multiple lives (Ghosh and Wang, 277). Stuart Hall also provides a definition of what can be understood as transcultural identities. He claims that they “combine elements from a variety of cultural sources” and he adds that “they are particularly evident in a complex mixing of musical styles, literary genres and cinematic expressions”. However, “recombination, hybridization and cut-and-mix” (Hall 1997, 258) do not take place only in these areas, but also in everyday life through quite mundane activities—food and eating are their prime examples. The objective of transculturalism is to make identity free of the political dimension and strict labeling, and to create and support the existence of multiple hybrid identities without barriers. Hall

establishes argument that food in the contemporary context is a significant marker of culture and ethnicity.

Since ethnicity is understood as related to culture and not to biology as was believed in the past, and considering the fact that there is a clear relation between culture and food, it can be assumed there is, likewise, a certain link between food and establishing one's ethnic identity. Frantz Fanon had argued that the first step for 'colonialised' people in finding a voice and identity is to reclaim their own past. (Barry 1998, 186). Samanth Subramanian seems to be in line with this idea in his *Following Fish: Travels around the Indian Coast* "If Bengali cuisine were Wimbledon, the hilsa would always play on Centre Court" (Subramanian 2010, 2) or in 'But in the coastal area around Tuticorin, they still use salt ... before the Portugese arrived.' (Subramanian 2010, 56). The nuances of storytelling in the travelogues are demonstrated in Subramanian's humorous hilsa-fish details of Bengal, which has an 'abundance and variety of food', including 'fish of every species' (Acharya, 22). These hilsa-stories form 'narratives of localism' that perpetuate the 'quintessence of Bengaliness' (Ray 155-157). The Bengali hilsa-discourse is spiced up with the unresolved debate about supremacy of the Ganga's Ilish vs. the Padma's Ilish. 'It's in the touch, you won't understand it' (Subramanian 2010, 4). The concern over the vanishing of the hilsa is symptomatic of the anxiety about the loss of traditions, which 'will vanish if ... not repeatedly performed' (Ray, 157). 'The deterioration of the Hilsa was a lament I heard often' (Subramanian 2010, 13).

Culture and ethnicity have attained different meanings in multicultural societies of today, and therefore food as an attribute of culture and ethnicity, and as a factor influencing one's sense of identity, functions in a specific way in multicultural circumstances. As a result of migration, post-colonialism and rise of countercultures and ethnic identity movements together with many other forces, a multitude of

identities is constantly being constructed and reconstructed, and societies are being enriched by food cultures from all over the world. Mishra testifies this point: ‘They still, however, travelled in the old way, with jute baskets full of *mathri*, *daalmoth* and *achar*’ (Mishra 2006, 5) and again, “ Very rarely did one find a corpulent *halwai* seated in front of a huge round *kadhai* full of simmering hot milk’ (Mishra 2006, 64). Subramanian’s narrative, on the other hand, follows fish – or rather fishing – around the coasts of India. It starts with an interesting foray into the fish markets of Kolkata and the sibling rivalry between East and West Bengal over the celebrated hilsa fish. It moves on to the southern coast of Tamil Nadu, with its syncretic Catholicism, the big game fishing of Goa, khanawal cuisine in Mumbai and other such spaces where colour and spices blend well.

If sight-seeing and food are the two big attractions of India – wedding and medical tourism are more particular growth areas – then *Following Fish* has just the right measures of both, subtly blended into a dish that goes down smoothly and is very satisfying. This is not just a book of travel but also of fish recipes – or at least the ghost of recipes. Mostly, Subramanian follows fish along the coasts of India, with freshwater fish making only rare and fleeting appearances.

In the two travelogues chosen for this paper, the views on multiculturalism, transculturalism and ethno-cultural identities are expressed through food tropes. Since the paper focuses on travelogues, a brief introduction to travel writing seems necessary. Postcolonial studies see early travelogues as narratives of power and desire. They see a strong historical connection of exploration with exploitation and occupation. Travelogues present not only the cultural identity of the land but also the cultural identity of the traveler. Postcolonial critics identified a monolithic Eurocentricism in travelogues. But post-war travel writing has become more sensitized to ethnic stereotyping and cultural condescension. With globalization,

the concept and the experience of travel have transformed and along with it, travel writing as well. It is estimated that by 2020, there will be 1.6 billion arrivals at world airports. It is not just a flow of tourists from the West to the Exotic East; it is also a journey from East to West. Pankaj Mishra, in his travelogue, *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Travels in Small Town India* is surprised when travelers he met at Kanyakumari talk of their plans to go to England, for sightseeing. Mishra says, " ... it meant the overcoming of several psychological barriers; it denoted a cultural confidence one would not have expected to find in the narrow by lanes where they had their shops" (Mishra 2013, 178). Transnational practices, interethnic coalitions cross and transcend national borders. Thus there is a shifting of identities and a fluidity of spatial-temporal spaces. Movement across the globe is no more an impossibility. Large scale deterritorialisation has happened as a result of globalization. Our lives are penetrated by the connectivity of globalization. Global customs, experiences and contingencies have a space in our intimate lives. Pankaj Mishra articulates these ideas;

In the bazaars of Muzzafarnagar, I found several shops selling the kind of imitation Nike sneakers I had seen on the young shopkeepers at ISBT.... The bazaars offered almost every famous brand-name: Wrangler jeans, Jurassic Park T-shirts, Chanel and Dior perfumes, Casio watches. (Mishra 2013, xiii)

In the typical Indian household of Mr. Sharma, Pankaj Mishra sees the family absorbed in watching the soap opera *The Bold and the Beautiful* :

...there now appeared on the screen in swift succession shots of an overflowing décolletage adorned with a diamond necklace, bare thighs emerging out of a high-cut swimsuit, busy-looking executives set against skyscrapers, fashion models posing as extravagantly theatrical mummies (Mishra 2013, 43)

Acutely observed and rendered with insight and biting wit, *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Travels in Small Town India* is an insightful and delightful travelogue through freshly liberalized India capturing its slushy lanes and satellite dishes through the mid 1990s with ease. Pankaj Mishra travels through the small towns of India and finds they had shed their sleepy, half-apologetic air; brash and ostentatious, kitschy and clamorous, here was an India in transition. A convent-educated young woman from Jhansi aspiring to be a beauty queen; a rich young man in Gujarat speaking casually of murdering Muslims; Naxalites in Bihar trying to foment revolution; small shopkeepers planning a vacation in London – Mishra captures, with irony and humour, people rushing headlong to their tryst with modernity. *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana* is a marvelous travel book about small-town India, where the village and the city, the folk and the kitsch, and the comic and the violent threaten to converge. India known to be the land of spirituality is also well renowned as a land that can offer eternal bliss. Several places like Hrishikesh and Benaras are visited by tourists who try to explore their spiritual awareness and seek solace. But the picture one gets from the traveler seems to have very little elements of sanctity. The impact of a changing world order is seen in these descriptions. Pankaj Misra quotes a Westerner, Sarah; “I haven’t met a single young white woman in Benares who has not been molested” (Mishra 2013, 209). He quotes another westerner’s observation;

From all that I’d read about it (Benaras), it seemed like the cultural capital of Northern India. ... But culture isn’t just about the past, about old temples and musical traditions and things like that. I think it also has something to do with the present moment, with how people treat each other in daily life, civic manners, a certain basic decency towards women, older people, and ... Benaras comes right at the bottom of all the Indian cities we visited. (Mishra 2013, 211)

The writer takes the opportunity to enlighten the readers on issues like apparent discrimination, racism and corruption in the Indian society and some minute observations done by foreigners. Here one may refer to the case of hotel Searock at Kovalam Beach in Kottayam as a good example. This hotel seems to be a suitable place but it doesn't let in Indians. Of course, this is not announced officially but done practically; as the writer was disappointed to get a room on a previous visit with a friend some time before and this time he tries again:

There was something else going on, and a British couple I met on a train had confirmed my suspicions. The Searock, they said, didn't admit Indians. They had come to know this from a French couple on the beach, who were also staying at the Searock and who fully approved of its policy of barring Indians. The British couple, to their credit, had been horrified by such blatant racism. They had left the Searock the same day and moved into another hotel. (Mishra 2013, 166).

Subramanian too observes the cosmopolitanism and diverse influences absorbed by India's coastal cities, the withdrawing of traditional fishermen from their craft, the corresponding growth of fishing as pure and voluminous commerce, and the degradation of waters and beaches from over-fishing. If someone wants to persuade us of the desirability of a seaside town, they will mention that it was or still is a fishing village. Yet what appeals in the Mediterranean seemed less obvious in India, until the journalist Samanth Subramanian arrives at the Lake Market, in Calcutta, to inspect the fish. The result, a book subtitled *Travels around the Indian Coast*, is much more than a narrative about coastal journeys. In a chapter about fishing for sailfish, the fastest in the ocean, there are stories about, or references to, the link between Hindu festivals and ocean currents, Marcel Proust, fishing during the Raj, and the annual Sailfish Cup challenge in Miami. In a khanewal — a workers' canteen — in Mumbai, he considers the culinary influences brought by migrants from southern India. Occasionally,

Subramanian seems diverted — he is clearly interested in the palm toddy, best drunk at about 11am, when at its freshest — but he is never less than fascinating, throwing light on an overlooked subject and announcing the arrival of a significant new talent.

There is much to admire in *Following Fish*, not least among them a particularly assured writing style. The narrator himself surfaces infrequently; as far as possible, the stories are about everyone other than himself, and its spare sentimentality is one of its greatest strengths. This is doubly commendable not only for having eluded the modern tropes of the confessional voice, but also because in spite of it being a work with an certain detachment, there is no sense anywhere that this is a dispassionate project. “I would still classify a lot of this work as journalism, or perhaps narrative journalism” says Subramanian. “And of course, the first rule of journalism is to put yourself outside the story. You have to go there knowing that you have zero knowledge and everybody else is relatively an expert.” Marketed as the first travelogue in the nonfiction narrative genre in India, *Following Fish* sets a high standard in its reportage and the perfectly balanced pitch of its reserved yet engaged voice.

Nowhere is this skill more evident than in two captures dealing directly with dying cultures. In what is arguably the book’s richest chapter, a community of Catholic fishing-peoples in the Tuticorin district are brought alive in an account that is at once part anthropology and part farewell tribute. Elsewhere, Subramanian lets down his characteristic objectivity in his documentation of the effect of tourism in Goa, where he says the loss of a fishing culture is particularly poignant, because “everybody fishes – not just commercially”. Modernization and its impact on fishing communities’ troubles him, but he labours under no delusions of activism: “The eternal plight of the journalist is, can he change things? A journalist can only write things. The next step depends on others. In every single state I

visited, I heard this complaint. It's probably the single uniting factor among the communities. The displacement is happening everywhere and in a lot of cases it's a particularly poor state of affairs”.

Among the many things that this book might be, it stays truest – and does proudest – the purpose the author has intended: a travelogue. “A travel book should not be a how-to-travel book,” he says later at the launch. ‘It should just be a log of what was experienced – that’s where the word travelogue comes from.”

In a coastline as long and diverse as India's, fish inhabit the heart of many worlds—food of course, but also culture, commerce, sport, history and society. Journeying along the edge of the peninsula, Samanth Subramanian reports upon a kaleidoscope of extraordinary stories.

In nine essays, *Following Fish* conducts rich journalistic investigations: among others, of the famed fish treatment for asthmatics in Hyderabad; of the preparation and the process of eating West Bengal's prized hilsa; of the ancient art of building fishing boats in Gujarat; of the fiery cuisine and the singular spirit of Kerala's toddy shops; of the food and the lives of Mumbai's first peoples; of the history of an old Catholic fishing community in Tamil Nadu; of the hunt for the world's fastest fish near Goa. It also presents fascinating encounters, such as those with the Hyderabad family that has, for generations, offered a popular cure for asthma that involves swallowing a live murrel fish. Asked what the fish would be to him if it could be only one thing, Subramanian says, “a window”, then apologizes for the clumsy metaphor before continuing. “But it's multiple windows isn't it? Every place you open a window, you get a glimpse of another world.” (Subramanian) Clumsy or not, it's a neat capsule for the many narratives that emerge: food and culture, sport and commerce, history and change. *Following Fish* is at its best when it sticks close to its subject, offering wonderful descriptions of bangda curry in Mangalore,

or the huge wreck of the River Princess off the waters of Goa, sunk in "the far swampier waters of bureaucracy". It suffers on the rare occasions when Subramanian engages with such prosaic matters as the making of a fishing boat. Then his narrative veers towards bland reportage.

At a certain point in his piscine-inspired circumnavigation of India, Samanth Subramanian does the one thing that seals the deal as to his dedication to his research: he swallows. Although he contends, in conversation before the Chennai launch of his book, that he could have written the remarkable non-fiction debut that is *Following Fish* even if he were not a fish-eater, his swallowing of a live murrel fingerling (not to mention the utter relish with which he describes the seafood he consumes on his travels), suggests otherwise. For someone who spent a decade getting over the disgust of seeing a whole steamed fish as an adolescent, this book is a more than satisfying penance for the deficit.

But rarely is this exploration of fish purely epicurean, although some of the most evocative segments of this book are precisely about this aspect. In Kerala, for example, fish becomes quite literally a side dish in the pursuit of toddy. In Mangalore and Kolkata, searches ensue for different variants of the perfect fish curry. But there's much more. The live murrel fingerling is ritually swallowed whole in Hyderabad hardly as an adventurous challenge to the palate, but as a cure for asthma. Mumbai's fish curries are first marinated in the tensions of migration and the question of which a city could truly belong to. And these are only some of the kinds of fish he follows – even the fishes he encounters that are released back into the water upon capture, or never even seen but understood as the linchpin on which a story pivots, serve as introductions into ways of life and coexistence. In nine eloquent chapters, *Following Fish* casts lines all along India's peninsular coast, from Bengal to Gujarat (Orissa is given a miss as two strong leads presented themselves in Maharashtra), and at each place,

its author seems to reel in a completely different catch. Travel writing and reading are multicultural practices and Subramanian in his *Following Fish* realizes that fishing and cooking fish in India have been multicultural phenomena too. In a globalized scenario it is possible to visit places and taste different food. As a 12-year-old in Indonesia, he was haunted by the experience of a grey-as-death steamed fish at dinner and that made him stay away from finned creatures for more than a decade. Much later in life, Samanth returns to fish again. Born in a family of strict vegetarians, Samanth is determined to explore the idea of fish as food, not only through the country's diet but also its culture, livelihood and even religion. Thus by tracing his roots, the final message in his travelogue is all about openness to many cultures.

The linkage between food and identity is of great importance both to food studies and literary or non literary fiction. According to social theorists, identity is crucial to every human being as it gives sense to existence, formulates the relationship between oneself and the Other and creates values and norms. Identity affects the way people perceive and construct their society, and it determines they act, think, socialize, eat and work—in other words, it influences each aspect of their everyday lives. The question is how food is related to identities and processes of identification.

Food's essential role in identity formation is given by its equal biological and social significance. Food is necessary for survival, which is ensured by swallowing, and it is this incorporative character of food that makes it so important and open to symbolism. As Peter Scholliers says: "Food crosses the border between the outside and the inside and the principle of incorporation touches upon the very nature of a person" (Scholliers 2001, 8.). The fact that food becomes a part of us reinforces its link to identity. The social and cultural dimension of food is obvious when one considers the wide variety of food preferences across cultures regardless of the common need for

nutrition. Food is a cultural practice through which people participate in attitudes and rituals of a group and these participations can be socially controlled as well as more automatic (Scholliers 2001, 7).

References to food are generally abundant in situations where transcultural acts are depicted and Mishra's *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana* deals with a variety of such references which in turn address current questions concerning culture, identity, and ethnicity and introduce the transcultural stance to these questions. And what's more, he effectively uses food imagery to handle them. 'There were multi-cuisine restaurants with menus displayed on small boards outside in German, Italian, French, but not English' (Mishra 2006, 58). 'The bakery lived up to its nameI've had elsewhere' (Mishra 2006, 60).

Multiculturalism has, off late, been a reality of Indian life and has therefore become an inseparable part of the Indian collective identity. Mishra states: "Bangalore, I soon became tired of being told, had the largest number of pubs in India; the only place to have draught beer, the best place to have Thai food." (Mishra 2006, 142).

Identity is constructed and affected by a multitude of significations surrounding food practices. Food is necessary for our continued physical existence. Even though it is a common human need, there exist a great variety of food preferences all over the world. Because of the closeness and interconnection of the physical and the social, food is an important factor partaking in creating and expressing identity, or rather the multiplicity of identities produced by the present era. The authors discussed in this paper are aware of the relationship between identity and food, and that is why they use food imagery to make statements about their global and ethno cultural identities. Mishra reveals such an awareness: 'Mornings began with what must be one of the best breakfasts in the world: sambar vada, coconut chutney, upma and freshly

roasted coffee.’ (Mishra 2006, 144). Mishra, makes a beautiful combination of global and local tastes when he comments:

This was what perhaps I had long wanted to do – discuss Thomas Mann on a rainy morning in Kerala over genuine South Indian coffee and I was happier than at any other time on my travels so far. (Mishra 2006, 155).

A close reading of *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana* and *Following Fish* proves the point that food plays a significant role in the biological, social, political, cultural as well as the very personal spheres of our everyday lives. It is a mundane object, but of great social importance. Food is an integral part of all cultures around the world, thus having a universal significance. However, food is associated with a variety of practices and endowed with diverse meanings across cultures, and therefore it has a potential to represent cultural specificities and differences.

In contemporary multicultural societies characterized by meeting and mingling of cultures, food can serve as the means of establishing the awareness of diversity and cross-cultural exchanges. All of these characteristics of food make food imagery an effective medium of addressing issues concerning cultures, ethnicities and fluid identities in literary and non literary works. In this paper, focus is on two travel writers speaking from various ethno cultural communities of contemporary India, or in other words, contemporary multicultural travel writers of India, and their treatment of these issues for three main reasons. First, the travel authors were chosen since food is one of the crucial factors shaping our identity. Second, the territory of India was chosen because of its specific socio-cultural milieu which has been affected by the implementation of Indian multicultural policy and by its subsequent criticism followed by searches for new concepts that would answer the needs of the pluralistic make-up of Indian society. And third, the choice of writers of diverse ethno cultural backgrounds was guided by a desire to illustrate, at

least partially, the variety of voices that shape Indian travel writings and to demonstrate the universality as well as diversity and specificity of food imagery.

The authors chosen for the literary analyses in this paper reflect on the current sociopolitical developments—in their writings they attempt to come to terms with multiple cultural traditions and so to deconstruct any uniform concepts of identity and speak against exclusionary structures of any kind. According to these writers, transculturalism seems to be the right solution to the cultural compartmentalization caused by the politically imposed pluralism, since transcultural approach implies cross-cultural communication free from harmful stereotypes, and unrestricted drawing on the multiple cultural competences. The result of such approach is the emergence of fluid identities resisting imposed labels. *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Travels in Small Town India* by Pankaj Mishra and *Following Fish: Travels around the Indian Coast* by Samanth Subramanian are outstanding examples of the application of food imagery to indicate transcultural perspective, as well as to address various other issues emerging in contemporary debates on cultures, ethnicities and identities. Through food, characters of these travel narratives learn the benefits of embracing more than one culture, and through interconnecting food with storytelling, or verbal communication in general, they learn about the necessity of multifaceted and attentive cross-cultural communication. Reflecting the essence of trans-cultural approach, which implies the act of crossing boundaries, blurring them and drawing on the multitude, An attempt has been made to look at food and food imagery not only across cultures of the Indian landscape, but also across the sociological, economic and political discourses in order to provide a multifaceted view of the theme, and to establish connections between the individual spheres.

WORKS CITED

- Ashcroft, Bill, et al., London: *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*
New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Post-Colonial Studies* London: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- Barry, Peter, *The Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester/New York: Manchester United Press, 2010. Print.
- Bhabha, H. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Bhaskar, Sanjeev. *India: One Man's Journey Round the Subcontinent*. London: Harper Collins Publishers, Noida. 2007. Print.
- Ben-Amos, D. & L. Weissberg, ed. *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999. Print.
- Bruner, Edward M. *Cultures on Tour: Ethnographies of Travel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Print.
- Chakravarti, A.K. 'Regional Preferences for Food: Some Aspects of Food Habit Patterns in India' in *Cultural Geography: Form and Process*, ed. Neelam Grover and K.N. Singh. New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 2004. Print.
- Cuccioletta, Donald. 'Multiculturalism or Transculturalism. Towards a Cosmopolitan Citizenship.' *London Journal of Canadian Studies* Vol.17 (2001/2002). 15 Jan.2005. Print.
- Dissanayake, Wimal. s.a. Exploring postcolonial travel writing. <http://www.outboundholidays.com/uncategorized/6808/exploring-post-colonial-travel-writing/> Date of access: 10 June. 2014.
- Edwards, Justin D, Graulund, Rune. *Postcolonial Travel Writing: Critical Explorations Postcolonial Text*, Vol 6, No 2 (2011). New York. 2011. Print.

- Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth* Penguin, London. 1961. Print.
- Ghosh, Sujata and Wang, Lu. 'Transnationalism and Identity: a Tale of Two Faces and Multiple Lives' *The Canadian Geographer/Le Geographe canadien* 47 (3), 269–282. Blackwell Synergy. Masaryk U Lib., Brno, Czech Republic. 10 Jan. 2007 < <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/>>
- Habib, M.A.R. *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory: From Plato to the Present*. Malden, MA/Oxford: Blackwell, 2008: 737-759 ('Postcolonial Criticism'). New Jersey. Print.
- Hall, Stuart. 'New Ethnicities.' *'Race', Culture and Difference*. Ed. James Donald, and Ali Rattansi. London: SAGE Publications, 1997, 252-259. New York. Print.
- Hinnerova Katarina.' Food Imagery and Ethnocultural Identities in Contemporary Multicultural Women Writing in Canada' *Masaryk U Lib., Brno, Czech Republic*. 10 Jan. 2007. Print.
- Huggan, Graham. *Extreme Pursuits: Travel Writing in an Age of Globalization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009. Print.
- 'Identity.' *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity and Culture*. London: SAGE Publications, 2003. New York. Print.
- Isajiw, Wsevolod W. 'Definitions and Dimensions of Ethnicity.' *Multicultural Canada*. 3 March 2007 http://www.multiculturalcanada.ca/ecp/content/definitions_and_dimensions_of_ethnicity.html
- Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Melange, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.*, 2009. New York. Print.
- Kaur, Raminder and John, Hutnyk. Eds. *Travel Worlds: Journeys in Contemporary Cultural Politics*. London: Zed Books, 1999. Print.
- Kraidy, M. M, *Hybridity: The Cultural Logic of Globalization*. Temple University Press, Pennsylvania. 2005. Print.

- Kupiainen, Jari, Erkki, Sevanem, John A Stotesbury. Eds. *Cultural Identity in Transition: Contemporary Conditions, Practices and Politics of a Global Phenomenon*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2004. Print
- Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 1998. Print.
- Mishra, Pankaj. *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Travels in Small Town India*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1995. Print.
- Sarkar, Suchorita. 'Stories' Digest: Narrating Identities and Cultures through Food in Blogs, Cook-Books and Advertisements in India', Viewed 14 August 2014
- Subramanian, Samanth. *Following Fish: Travels Around the Indian Coast*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2010. Print.
- Scholliers. Peter. 'Meals, Food Narratives, and Sentiments of Belonging in Past and Present.' *Food, Drink and Identity. Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe Since the Middle Ages*. Ed. Scholliers, Peter. Oxford: Berg, 2001, 3-23. Print.