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Globalisation: Projection of a Nascent Sensibility in Pankaj Mishra's *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Travels in Small Town India*

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Abstract

Globalisation is a great melting pot of cultures, ideas, values, economies and even people. The impact of globalisation can be seen in India on a large scale, leading to an expansion of capitalism and commercialisation, loss of traditional Indian values and imposing upon Western values. The present study analyses this impact of Globalisation on Indian society and culture with reference to Pankaj Mishra's *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Travels in Small Town India*. This travelogue portrays a new India for the readers depicting social, cultural, and economic transformation of a nation during the epoch of modernity and globalisation. The paper sheds light on the social, cultural, and economic impact of globalisation on the people of India, particularly the small towns across the length and breadth of India. It also aims to observe the transformation of society under the myriad new influences affecting the country and to chronicle the signs of change in the self-conception and the aspirations of India's burgeoning middle-class.

Key words: impact of globalization, transformation, bourgeois

Post colonial theory is one of the most comprehensive ideologies to understand the world in transition. 'Post-colonialism' refers broadly to the ways in which race, ethnicity, culture and human identity itself are represented in the modem era, after many colonised countries gained their independence. It also refers to a set of critical attitudes taken towards colonialism. It is region-specific and employs Western as well as native modes of expression. Postcolonialism is an umbrella term which is inclusive of all discourses that challenge the dominance of all kinds of hegemony in all walks of human life. "Postcolonial scholars have pointed out that when two cultures sharing unequal power confront each other, the weaker culture seeks different alternatives to meet the situation. If imitation and internalisation of the values of the dominant culture is one of the responses, to struggle to retain its identity by turning to its roots is another". Postcolonial literatures have given rise to a range of theoretical ideas, concepts, problems and debates. It is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction.

As a critical approach, postcolonialism refers to "a collection of theoretical and critical strategies used to examine the culture (literature, politics, history, and so forth) of former colonies of the European empires, and their relation to the rest of the world." as defined in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*. Among the many challenges facing postcolonial writers are the attempts both to resurrect their culture and to combat preconceptions about their culture. Alterity, Diaspora, Hybridity, Eurocentrism, and Imperialism are some of the keywords of postcolonialism. From one standpoint "postcolonial theory has emerged from an interdisciplinary area of study which is concerned with the historical, political, philosophical, social, cultural and aesthetic structures of colonial domination and resistance; it refers to a way of reading, theorizing, interpreting and investigating colonial oppression and its legacy that is informed by an oppositional ethical agenda." As Simon Gikandi has asserted, in 1990s it was postcolonialism that brought a range of terms such as transculturation, 'Third space', and hybridity into the realm of cultural globalization. Accordingly, there are great evidences indicating that interdisciplinary keywords are the meeting points in the relationship between globalisation and postcolonialism. As the two fields show evidences of convergence in the line of consequent historical explanations and concurrent but different emphasis regarding the same concerns, we come to know some celebrated theorists. Having seen many different

turns and twists, a key moment in the development of postcolonial theory emerges with the publication of Edward Said's Orientalism (1978). When he established the notion of the "Occident" in opposition to the "Orient", Said was echoing Georg Hegel and Simon de Beauvoir and using these intellectual sources, Said re-positioned the West as the masculine One to the East's feminized Other. Among other prominent thinkers who have made immense contributions on the foundations of postcolonial theories are Frantz Fanon, Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak-Chakravorty. Frantz Fanon, the French Caribbean psychologist wrote widely about the damage French colonialism had inflicted upon millions of people who suffered its power.

Gayatri Spivak-Chakravorty's chief contribution of post colonial theory is her terms - subaltern, essentialism, strategic essentialism, - which gained a specific reference in post colonial literary and critical studies in contemporary age. She is interested in seeing how truth is constructed rather than in exposing error. Fundamental to Spivak's theory is the concept of Subaltern. The 'Subaltern' is a military term which means 'of lower rank'. She borrowed this term from Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" shows how the earliest political historiography shifted the voice of the subaltern groups (women, tribal people, Third world, orient)

The next significant postcolonial theorist is Homi K. Bhabha and his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) has made prominent contributions in postcolonial criticism. His concept of Hybridity gained currency in defining the vision of postcolonial theory that all cultures are confluenced in each other and it cannot be separated. One of his central ideas is that of "hybridisation," which, taking up from Edward Said's work, describes the emergence of new cultural forms from multiculturalism. Instead of seeing colonialism as something locked in the past, Bhabha shows how its histories and cultures constantly intrude on the present, demanding that we transform our understanding of cross-cultural relations. His work transformed the study of colonialism by applying post-structuralist methodologies to colonial texts.

The term 'post-colonial literature', therefore, not only refers to a phase in the history of a country and the literature belonging to that phase but also to some distinct body of literature having shared feature even though it be from several decolonised countries. It is a term of collectivity

for the literatures emanating from the Third World countries which share certain formal and discursive features of their own specific to the social, cultural and historical conditions. They demonstrate 'resistance' and 'subversion' of the imperial 'centre' (the 'coloniser', the 'dominant' or the 'hegemonic' power). All the post-colonial literatures will have concerns with freedom struggles, rejection of imperial culture and so on. So, the literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries and Sri Lanka are all post-colonial literatures. They emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonisation and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial.

The most recent phenomenon has been the emergence of the powerful post-colonial discourse writing back to the entire and asserting its own identity and cultural and national individuality. Literature of Post- colonial times reflected the increased flow of people from one country to the other – mostly to the land of coloniser and dealt with consequent issues like migrancy, hybridity, loss of identity, multi culturalism and disappearance of rigid national identities. Globalisation hastened this process and resulted in the merging of cultural practices and increased marketing of cultures. In its literal sense, Globalisation can be viewed as the process of metamorphosis of local or regional phenomena into global ones. It is an ongoing process for the integrity of regional economies, societies and cultures through worldwide networks of exchange.

Postcolonialism looks at globalization for two major reasons, one comes from globalisation's demonstration of the structure of world power relations, which stands firm in the twentieth century as a legacy of Western imperialism. Second, the ways in which local communities engage the forces of globalization bear some resemblance to the ways in which colonized societies have historically engaged and appropriated the forces of imperial dominance. Critics such as Arif Dirlik, Arjun Appadurai, and Roland Robertson have exercised on this second aspect through their reviews. Indeed, they focus more on the link between the local and global and the agency of local subjects in appropriating, transforming and consuming global phenomena. Among other major critics who have made great critical contributions on the

relation between globalization and postcolonialism, we may refer to Simon Gikandi, who believes that "what makes current theories of globalisation different from earlier ones, let's say those associated with modernization in the 1950s and 1960s, is their strategic deployment of postcolonial theory." In his essay, Gikandi explores the problems that arise in connection with reading globalization through English literature, beginning with the overly optimistic assumption, bolstered by postcolonial theory, that globalization represents the end of the nation-state and the proliferation of cultural relationships characterized by difference and hybridity. He further asserts that diverse writers on globalization and postcolonialism have at least two things in common: "they are concerned with explaining forms of social and cultural organization whose ambition is to transcend the boundaries of the nation-state, and they seek to provide new vistas for understanding cultural flows that can no longer be explained by a homogenous Eurocentric narrative of development and social change.

Indian writing in English is an integral part of, and a significant contribution to post-colonial literature. Though it has its own distinctive stamp of Indianness, it displays some of the features of post-colonial literatures. It draws attention to issues of cultural difference in literary texts including issues of gender, class and of sexual orientation. It is ideally national literature. So, the writers are obliged to define new sets of literary conventions and new literary traditions. They have to draw on the rich cultural heritage of India and at the same time explore its contemporary relevance. Indian writers, like their post-colonial counterparts, 'adopted' the European model since they too assumed, at least initially that it had universal validity. They 'adapted' the form to suit Indian themes and perceptions. Then, the postcolonial writer came into his/her own and there was a declaration of cultural independence in unequivocal terms.

Any attempt to engage with the contemporary cultural milieu in India must necessarily analyse the role played both by the processes of cultural globalisation underway and by the continuing influence of India's colonial history. The junction of the past and the present and the local and the global, probing the issue of identity around which these multiple influences converge. Identity, conceived as a meeting point of influences and ascriptions and as an ongoing process of "identification" (Hall 1996) with those forces allows one to engage with issues of power and

history that continue to inflect the ongoing global flow of culture. Facets of a globalising India where the influences of history are inescapable – sometimes by design and often without any conscious effort opens up crucial avenues for theories of cultural globalisation that seek to understand the changes being wrought in the world due to rapid advances in media and communication technologies.

Thus, using the post colonial lens this paper endeavours to explore the pre, post and globalised world on history-embedded Indian cities as reflected in the travelogue *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Travels in Small Town India*. Pankaj Mishra's journeying around nineteen Indian cities is an exploration into past to understand the contemporary reality.

This travelogue is a potential site of exploration from multi theoretical perspectives such as the dimensions of post colonial as well as strong globalisation undercurrents. Hence I have endeavored to apply this multi theoretical approach.

Writer, novelist, essayist, lecturer, literary critic, journalist, and reporter Pankaj Mishra was born in 1969 in North India. Raised in a small town named Jhansi, his childhood and adolescence were spent in the Northern Indian province of Uttar Pradesh. As a child, he felt distaste for formal schooling because it kept him away from what he loved most: reading. Later he graduated with a bachelor degree in commerce from Allahabad University before earning his Master of Arts degree in English literature at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi.

His first book was *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Travels in Small Town India* (1995), a travelogue that describes the gradual yet profound social and cultural changes taking place in rural Indian towns in the new context of globalisation. Hailed as India's travel writing sensation, this book vividly brings to life nineteen small towns of India, describing them not in exotic or quaint terms, but rather in the frightening new context of modernisation and globalisation. Mishra upon receiving an offer from Penguin India to write a travel book, formulated a project and itinerary around the kind of Indian milieu with which he was best acquainted and his reading of writers like Thorstein Veblen, set out to across India for a period of six months to chronicle the signs of

what he thought was "a nascent sensibility", a change in the self-conception and the aspirations of India's burgeoning middle-class.

In an interview dated back to 2000, the writer himself straightforwardly distinguished this book from his next works; telling the readers how they find a very different tone here:

I was writing in that clever, metropolitan voice that's become the trademark of Indian writing in English – the Butter Chicken in Ludhiana voice.

And quite adequately this different voice is marvelously domineering throughout the travelogue via a defensive tone of irony and humour which sometimes culminates in mere pessimistic creed over fact-files of middle class life in India or then immediately balances to equilibrium:

[...] –the world which was the other side of places like Muzaffarnagar, and which at times made one wonder if much of urban India wasn't simply a horrible mistake. The squalor, however, was part of the new prosperity; the two things went together in India.

It is then through the nineteen well elaborated chapters, that Mishra depicts the profound changes taking place in rural Indian towns during 1990s. Throughout these chapters the readers become acquainted with different characters and settings via narrator's keen observation. The presence of this first person narrator is easily felt from the second paragraph in the introductory prologue, where one might face with the first traces of stylish satirical standpoints by the writer from the very beginning of the book.

As it is mentioned in the subtitle of the book, *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Travels in Small Town India* can be categorised as a travelogue. According to encyclopedic definition which says travel literature is —

Travel writing considered to have value as literature. Travel literature typically records the people, events, sights and feelings of an author who is touring a foreign place [or different regions within the same country] for the pleasure of travel. An individual work is sometimes called a travelogue or itinerary.

The travelogues serve multiple purposes. They introduce the landscape to the readers in a new insight of the oppressed. As Carl Thompson says,

"It is most obviously, of course, a report on the wider world, an account of an unfamiliar people or place…it also reveals something of the culture from which that writer emerged" (Thompson 10)

Pankaj Mishra being an 'insider' and having an Indian perspective sets up his travels on small towns and not the usual popular tourist destinations. It is this choice of destinations which makes the key difference. Mishra has tried to show the effects of economic liberalisation and cultural social modernisation on the small towns of India. His journey starts from Simla at North, goes on to Jaipur at East, continues to Kanyakumari at far South and ends in Jehanabad at West. There are also some other towns in between.

As he sets for his journey from New Delhi Inter State Bus Terminal, the readers get to feel closely the woeful wretchedness, the blaring noise of cassette players, the smoke, the stench and the anxiety of a metropolitan city. The prologue sets the reader's expectations high and creates an anticipation of finding a way out of this maddening chaos of modern, globalised world of the national capital which later ironically turns into a disappointed narration of the towns which have lost their ubiquitous social, cultural and even architectural identity.

The first three chapters are about towns in the North: Simla, Mandi, and Ambala. Winter is arriving in the locale and the narrator stays one night at YMCA before starting for Mandi, five hours to the north of Simla. His journey to Simla reflects the global undercurrents of subjugation wherein Mishra brings in Latin American slum dweller like condition as reflected in the simla vicinity.

'From a distance, especially when approaching it from the plains, Simla has the appearance of a desperately poor Latin American slum: a ragged jumble of tin and timber on a steep hillside.'

The financial prosperity associated with globalisation is not evident in the small towns yet as his experience of staying at YMCA depicts Simla as a tourist destination chiefly for the foreigners.

When the two Italian girls declare that they hate India and the whole country is obsessed with sex, the narrator is forced to reconsider his own attitude of indifference. He couldn't help but think that travelers around the world may have similar experiences in any other part of the world and though we may boast about the world being the Global Village, the old barriers and xenophobia of racism and sexism between the globalised and the third world country still exist.

While waiting for the bus to Manali, his next destination, the narrator encounters the first glimpses of the impact of globalisation and the rise of the neo-rich. The perpetuation of colonial tendencies in Indianised version mainly with the attitude of well to do Indians with the poor Indian peasants is evident when the elderly passengers with their jute baskets full of Indian *namkeens*, thermoses and holdalls are juxtaposed with the 'tall, big-boned, quite beautiful woman' with her sleek VIP Skybags 'surveying with contempt those who weren't'.

A sense of stagnancy of the small towns in India is evoked through the description of Mandi with its rickety bridge, narrow cobbled lanes and the new houses with 'that incomplete, unfinished look to them'. The political rally and the young emerging politician Mr.Trehan, however indicate the corruption, cunningness and materialism proliferating in the rural interiors of India. His next destination, Ambala introduces him to the rich, upper caste Sharma family, conscious of its social and religious status. Kavita and Roli, the Sharma daughters are an embodiment of the modern, materialistic, snobbish convent educated girls in contrast to their naive, gawky and the small town cousin Dharam Kumar. The advent of satellite television corrupting the familial structure of the rural India is also evident in this chapter.

Following a short break in Delhi, the narrator traveler heads for Rajasthan after receiving an invitation from two friends to join them on a ten-day tour. Jaipur turns out to be full of disappointments for the writer who wants to rejoice with some past memories of his childhood visit in the town. It turns out to be 'only a larger version of the slummy little towns littered across the map of India.' The narrator is deeply annoyed and disappointed at the sight of a gigantic satellite dish-antenna in the middle of an exclusive courtyard of the City Palace. These symbols of India's shabby modernity juxtaposes against the exquisite beauty of the City Palace. Pushkar, as the next station, also has the least indication of a —colorful sweet-smelling squalor of a

pilgrim town of the past. Looking around the town, he takes a walk through bazaar and visits some multi-cuisine restaurants, some well-stocked second-hand bookstores, German bakery, and a hold-over sweetshop. The pilgrim town of the past has turned into an exotic tourist destination for the foreigners with travel agencies promoting camel and horse rides and 'pushback' deluxe coaches to Jodhpur and Udaipur.

Next morning in Ajmer and briefly visiting Chisti dargah, Mishra heads for Ghanerao, —an old frontier outpost of the kingdom of Mewar and now a village, no bigger than a medium-sized mohalla in a small town. Residing at a haveli-hotel exaggeratedly called 'Ghanerao Royal Castle', he visits Kumbhalgarh Fort at nearby Badal Mahal. The owner of 'Ghanerao Royal Castle' Mr. Tomar, a middle-aged man with many contradictions and challenges depict the perils of the lost aristocratic pride and a feeble attempt to cope up with the demanding needs of his own status. Mr. Tomar wants to explain repeatedly with the same diction and tone that how it is difficult to run a hotel like his with limited sources and how honored he is as many famous people have been to his place before; all those vain boastful descriptions ending in 'You see, for us, it's a small world.' As Pankaj Mishra perceives, in other instances he is —beyond simple contradiction, whether in speech or in action, since — 'feudal pride made him want to protect his haveli from being swamped by tourists; financial exigencies made him want to attract more tourists to his haveli. Both desires were equally legitimate.'

Ranakpur is the next stopover on their route, where they pay a visit to Adinatha temple; a pilgrim place most revered by Jains. While trying to relax some time, Mishra stays at Shikarbadi hotel, a few kilometers out of Udaipur; a city which turns out not to have an inner life of its own for him. Udaipur, in an attempt to lure foreign tourists 'had settled into a kind of touristy blandness which turned all observation into guidebook fodder.'

Then, he visits some tourist places there: the City Palace, Jagdish temple, Saheliyon-ki-bari, Lake Pichola, Lake Palace Hotel, and converses with Munna, a young man from Ghazipur while stopping at a nearby tea-shack. Munna's story 'quintessentilly of modern India', represent the problems of unemployment and migration to the globalised metropolitans.

On arriving Bundi, Mishra gets a firsthand experience of the corruption and the inheritance of the feudal-colonial India to the administrative services when he doesn't get a room in any of the facilities there. His next hault is at Hapur with a special purpose to meet an old friend. Rajendra, Mishra's friend from Allahabad university, is an example of a miserable failure of the modernisation in bringing about equality and acceptance of the 'Other'. Coming from an under privileged family, Rajendra has high aspirations to get into the Civic services but the complexity and confusion of the modern world baffles him and he ultimately settles in Hapur.

In the modernising Bangalore, Mishra visits some recently opened shopping malls. Though they are modeled upon the Western world, they are far from screening economic success yet as the globalisation boom has not completely caught on to the people . Many pubs, new restaurants, five-star hotels, health clubs, designer boutiques, and many other modern resorts have kept the metropolitan excitements alive. Trichur, as the next nearby town engraves fabulous designs in the writer's mind, while during his short stay he meets a medical representative and shares blissful moments with him discussing some literary figures in a tiny coffee-shack.

From chapter fourteen, the journey continues westward. the contrasting towns of Murshidabad and Malda

Mishra describes the people and his interaction with them well, an interesting cross-section of Indian society. From the family that sees him as prospective son-in-law (much to his surprise and chagrin) to students working towards taking (and failing) the Civil Service exam to passing encounters with Western tourists Mishra covers a lot of ground. Overall the book gives a good impression of a fast-changing society, offering many vantage points and vistas.

From the hundreds of impressions of Indian life logged in *Butter Chicken* — the appalling civic conditions of most small towns; the "aggressive individualism" and ostentation of the newly moneyed classes and their love of kitsch; the cultural impact of satellite television and the adoption of new styles of dress and speech; the hunger for and respect given to wealth, power and prestige regardless of the route taken to them; the nonchalant, unselfconscious, voicing of caste and religious prejudice; the widespread sexual harassment and the ubiquity of pornography

— there emerges a kind of double-sided critique of Indian society. On the one hand there is the old feudal, hierarchical India, in which discrimination and injustice are rampant, life is heavily circumscribed by one's caste or sex, and the free expression of personality is suppressed.

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