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## **GASTRONOMIC IMAGES IN A TRANSCULTURE PARADIGM**

Multicultural competence in nutrition becomes a basic knowledge nowadays. The reason for getting acquainted with the cuisine of other cultural environments is tolerance, willingness to take risks, as well as openness to the world. Under such conditions, fiction significantly contributes to the acquisition of relevant experience.

Food is primarily a biological need in human daily life, but it also occupies an important place in culture as a criterion of identity. The writers use the names of dishes, food consumption to show not only characters' social status, expression of character traits, but also to determine cultural identity, because food has "its" symbolic meaning in all cultures.

Food as a cultural phenomenon is widely used in literary discourse. A great interest in this meaning represents Jhumpa Lahiri's writing, where the problem of cultural hybridity is greatly expanded, portrayed through the motif of national food as personification of "our".

Lahiri's "The Namesake" has a lot of culinary descriptions, recipes for particular dishes, the processes of their preparation and consumption. Gastronomic settings are thoroughly woven into the plot outline of the work and the concept of delicious and, no less important, "our" food is a constant aesthetic category.

The problem of cultural hybridity expands because of the national food motif as "our". Food choices have always been important for Indians (we can compare: Americans are simply starving, but for Indians eating is sacred). In this way I. Kosheleva notes about "three interconnected components: a process (cooking) – an object (food) – a man" [1, p. 78]. This is perfectly evident in Ashima's characterization, the protagonist's mother: Ashima (the person) spends most of the

day in the kitchen (process) and knows the taste properties of many spices (the object).

In this context “food is directly connected with gender issues. Eating habits and the way of cooking determine a woman’s identity as well as her difference. Food emphasizes woman’s cultural affiliation: in Lahiri’s writing it is shown that food serves as sacred ritual and art for Indians, in contrast to the American habit of hunger satisfying with semi-finished products” [5, p. 98]. The kitchen is a zone of her comfort for Ashima, a protective fortification that distracts from sadness and nostalgia for home. This place has a symbolic “healing effect”. Not surprisingly, the most of the day the heroine spends in the kitchen.

The writer shows American cultural differences in Gogol’s girlfriend house. Cooking gap is noticeable in dish size. Unlike the Bengalis, Americans are used to large portions, so they are very disappointed when they are served a small one (portion) on a skillfully decorated plate, as happened with Gogol’s wife Moushumi. In this context K. Rapai points out that “being one of the richest countries in the world actually Americans feel poor” [3, p. 117]. We mean symbolic culinary “poverty”, because unlike Indians who do not really have enough space in the kitchen, as well as being restricted in utensils, Americans are lazy about cooking, and that is why they feel conditional “poverty”. In this context length of food preparation is clearly seen.

D. Sivers notes that “making dinner is on Code for home in America. Food is secondary” [4]. That is why very little attention is paid to food quality in America; fast food costs twice as much as books, movies or music. The researcher continues, that “the average American spends six minutes eating dinner. The American Culture Code for food is FUEL” [4]. We notice the opposite with Gogol’s parents: for Ashima, as well as for the rest of the Hindus food is considered to be “a source of nourishment for all human life’s aspects.

The importance of “his” ritual in character’s life is often emphasized in transcultural writings. Lahiri’s works are particularly illustrative in this context. In almost every author’s work, an Indian ritual plays an important role. Food is

associated with the so-called “rice ceremony”, when the baby begins to eat solid food. “Instead, the first formal ceremony of their lives centers around the consumption of solid food” [2, p. 30].

Lahiri shows new gastronomic impressions of Indian immigrants: it is about pizza, turkey on Thanksgiving as an alienation symbol from the well-known “our” (rice, dal, stewed vegetables) and approaching the “other” (foreign) (French fries, chips, Coca-Cola, burgers). In this case, the characters’ fear of foreign dishes means the inability to be exposed to something, the fear of possible identity loss. The author keeps traditional Indian cult; it tells us how culture, ethnicity, even religious beliefs determine the choice of culinary preferences, as well as the appropriate consumption manner.

In the context of transcultural understanding, food and the process of its preparation are of particular importance: usual home-cooked dishes are synonymous of protection, security, peace, belonging to one's home; instead, the presence of “other” exotic dishes makes it possible to get acquainted with the culinary preferences of another culture, as well as to trace the basic similarities and differences.

In “The Namesake” we are convinced of the importance of Indian cuisine, because eating is equated with sacred ritual for the characters. The novel offers a wealth of visual material to observe the construction of “our”, and therefore near and owned, and at the same time “other” – odious and disgusting. We also notice, that different approaches to food consumption are shown in the novel: as a ceremony / ritual for Indians, and as a simple hunger satisfaction for Americans. Food is positioned from a cultural point, as it is directly related to ethnic identity. Food consumption appears as a daily sacred ritual followed by the characters, first and second generation immigrants. With the help of “their” food, they confirm their transcultural identity and keep in touch with their home. Indian culinary traditions define the characters’ values and stereotypes; the so-called taste from childhood “travels” with them.

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