

PUNJABI CUISINE AS A CULINARY TOURISM PRODUCT: A STUDY THROUGH A RESEARCHER'S LENS

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Abstract: Culinary tourism, also referred to as gastronomic or wine and food tourism, is a niche area of tourism studies that has grown rapidly in recent years in terms of tourism research and education (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Hall et al., 2003; Hall & Mitchell, 2005a, 2005b). The focus has been more on regional cuisine. Punjab is no exception. Punjab's food is a signature of state and has made its mark on a global scale. This food if re-oriented towards tourism it could add flavours to tourism in Punjab. It could add a missing perspective to the quest for sustainable tourism (Scarpato 2002). Curries and spices have become synonymous with Punjab. Often tourists savour Punjab food and are unaware that the food they are savouring belongs to Punjab. The potential is there it needs only to be marketed and results will be there for the world to see.

Keywords: Culinary Tourism, Food Tourism, Punjabi Cuisine, Farm Restaurants, Dhabas.

1. INTRODUCTION

Food tourism represents a multifaceted research area rising prominence from the outer fringe of academic research to the forefront of geographical theory. Food has an important role for food tourism in strengthening a region's identity, sustaining cultural heritage. Oft late food tourism forms a part of 'special interest tourism' (Douglas et al. 2001). Its potential role has started attracting government policies, media focus, marketing strategies, even food festivals. There have been few empirical studies into food-related tourism, particularly from a socio-cultural perspective (Boniface, 2003; Hjalager & Richards, 2002). The definition that will guide the current study will be of Hall and Sharpley (2003) "'visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations ... it is the desire to experience a particular type of food or the produce of a specific region ...' The tourist feel that food is more than sustenance; it is a cultural artefact with a myriad of facets that can be enjoyed in many locations and through many activities some suggestive being food trails, events, festivals and visitor attractions.

2. IMPORTANCE OF FOOD

UNESCO has contributed to reinforce the gastronomy heritage promoting universal value of cultural landscapes, more of them foodscapes, inscribed in the World Heritage List; including culinary and traditional food manifestations and expressions in the Immaterial Heritage List; or promoting gastronomy as category at the network of Creative Cities. European Cultural Routes promoted by Council of Europe also included initiatives related to foodscapes as the Olive Oil Route or Iter Vitis – the Ways of the Wine and includes culinary heritage as a transversal item. (UNESCO 2014). With UNESCO supporting the cause the food has attained a new dimension.

3. IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL AND LOCAL FOOD

In the face of fears that the world is succumbing to McDonaldization and cultural homogenization, a new hope is emerging: culinary tourism. A tourist is by definition someone who travels for pleasure, and for most of these tourists part of this pleasure is had by experiencing and enjoying the host culture's food. While this has always been peripherally

accepted as a part of the larger tourism model, the world has identified the culinary tourist as an important demographic in their own right. Despite the success and proliferation of American fast-food chains worldwide, recent trends point to a newfound appreciation of, and a desire to experience, the culinary “Other.” This “otherness” can be the salability factor.

4. FOOD AN OPTION FOR AGRARIAN/RURAL PUNJAB TOO

The processes of transformation and redefinition of local identity, food’s heritage feature need to be considered – as an element of tourist development at local level. As identity marker of a region and/or as a means of promoting farm products, gastronomy meets the specific needs of consumers, local producers and other actors in rural tourism. There are numerous examples illustrating this phenomenon: the publication of books on regional cuisine is thriving, many farmers sell their produce directly and start up farm restaurants (dhabas adorn the rural landscape of Punjab).

The advantage that Punjab has despite being rural is its modern villages. The model of Punjab has proved that concepts such as ‘peri-urbanization,’ ‘rurbanization,’ ‘urban de-concentration’ and ‘urban exodus,’ clearly indicate that present-day rurality cannot be associated with the former ‘peasant’ society. The number of farmers has continued to shrink over the years while new categories of population have gradually appeared (employees, retired people, middle-class workers, etc.). The developments of communications, along with significant improvements in productivity and production systems, have contributed greatly to opening up rural areas to the outside world. Rural populations have extended their networks, widening their social space and economic scope.

5. THE PUNJAB FOOD

Punjabi cuisine is associated with food from the Punjab region of India and Pakistan. It shares several characteristics with the cuisine of Kashmir and other adjacent states. Punjabi cuisine is diverse, and varies regionally. The local cuisine is influenced by the agriculture and farming lifestyle that has been prevalent throughout Punjab for centuries, and supported by locally grown staple foods. Many of the most popular elements of Indian cuisine as it is marketed to non-Indian customers (such as tandoor, naan, pakora, and vegetable dishes with paneer) are derived from Punjab. Food cooked in the villages Punjab are often cooked in animal fats. While many Punjabi dishes are common in other regions of India and Pakistan, some dishes are exclusive to Punjab, including sarson da saag, tandoori chicken, shami kebab, and makki di roti. Staple food are rice, wheat and dairy product. Clarified butter, sunflower oil, paneer and butter are used.

6. PUNJABI FOOD IN SOCIAL- ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Food is part of a physiological, psycho-sensorial, social and symbolic environment. It has, in addition to hygienic and nutritional values, psycho-sensorial and symbolic characteristics. This food symbolism appears in various guises:

Food as a symbol: some foodstuffs are the basis of fantasy and concentrate symbolic virtues (bread, wine, cereals, the dark blood in game for hunters) (Fischler 1993, Poulain 1985 and Herpin 1988).

Food as a sign of communion: food shared and eaten with others is a fundamental social link (for example, business meals, family celebrations, daily meals). “Food sums up and transmits a situation, it is information and meaning. A true sign, that is the functional unit of a communication structure” (Barthes, cited in Poulain 1985). The *langars* (community meals) at the gurdwaras are a regular, ongoing and continuous process and celebrates the spirit of Sikhism; the faith that most Punjabis follow.

Food as a class marker: champagne, caviar, whisky, wine for everyday consumption, or tripes, are markers, distinctive signs, allowing the various social actors to identify one another and mark their lifestyles (Bourdieu 1979). Different strata of houses with rising affluences and modernity sweeping in have developed different taste. Less religious and more rich have a more inclination towards the non-vegetarian Punjabi cuisine. Yet the positive sign is that dairy products, curries and breads are a common feature which joins the dining spread of various classes in the Punjabi society.

Food as an emblem: this is the case with culinary heritage of a given geographical area or community; a kind of a banner beneath which the inhabitants of a given area recognize themselves. The more modern cities like Chandigarh may boast of a modern more cosmopolitan food culture but geographically and demographically majority of Punjab have a food identity or emblem, dominated by parathas and lassi.

7. STRATEGIES FOR PUNJABI FOOD WITHIN AND OUTSIDE PUNJAB

The local food needs to be first strengthened within the fold of the geographic area to which it belongs to. The food may help in many ways. The food as a product will not be able to gain grounds unless the locals feel proud and associated with. This also helps in other ways too:

The propagation of local food will also help in reduction of leakages. With Punjab making a mark on MICE map of India many hotels and international properties have made their way in the market. These could be made to recycle financial by recycle of financial resources within the system by buying local goods and services, e.g. hoteliers and restaurants need to purchase and promote local foods, produce and beverages, use local banks and credit unions. The Punjabi population is settled overseas Europe, Canada, Australia, etc. in large numbers because of which a lot of export take place too.

Add value to local produce before it is exported; eg bottle and package food locally, consider using distinctive local packaging in order to reinforce local brand identity, use local food as an attraction to tourists thereby increasing the circulation of tourist expenditure through the local economy. The culture department needs to wake up from its slumber. Connect up with local stakeholders, people and institutions to create trust, new linkages and more efficient exchanges; e.g. local farmers and producers' cooperatives, develop local marketing networks, a 'buy local' campaign. For achieving this external resource have to be pooled in, especially finance, skills and technology where appropriate, e.g. use the internet to connect to customers outside of the region. Emphasis has to be on the local identity and authenticity in branding and promotional strategies, e.g. list the place of origin on the label and encourage consistent use of place of origin by producers.

Sell direct to consumers via farm shops, direct mailing, farmers' and produce markets, local events and food and wine festivals; and Create a relationship between the consumer and the producer, e.g. using farm door sales, utilize newsletters, websites and the internet to create an ongoing relationship with consumers. Advantages of stronger food and tourism connections (including direct sales) at the level of the food operator are: Increased Consumer Exposure to product and increased opportunities to sample product. Building Brand Awareness and Loyalty through establishing links between producer and consumer, and purchase of company branded merchandise. Create Relationships with Customers provides the opportunity to meet staff and to see 'behind the scenes' can lead to positive relationships with consumers which may lead to both direct sales and indirect sales through positive 'word of mouth' advertising.

Increased Margins through direct sale to consumer, where the absence of distributor costs is not carried over entirely to the consumer. An additional Sales Outlet, or for smaller producers who cannot guarantee volume or constancy of supply, perhaps the only feasible sales outlet.

Marketing Intelligence on Products Producers can gain instant and valuable feedback on the consumer reaction to their existing products, and are able to trial new additions to their product range. Marketing Intelligence on Customers can include adding of visitors to a mailing list which can be developed as a customer database to both target and inform customers. Educational Opportunities can also be reaped. Visits can help create awareness and appreciation of specific types of foods and food as a whole, the knowledge and interest generated by this can be expected to result in increased consumption. Tourism and hospitality operators and the wider region can also benefit from stronger food and tourism connections through association with a quality product.

Local foods are not a standardized product. A Reinforcement of authentic' tourist experience allows visitors to see beyond the shop front and establish strong relationships with a destination. Food is an attraction. Existence of product, such as markets and wineries, provides a motivation for visitation to an area, stay in accommodation and eat at restaurants. Existence of food related products also helps extend length of stay because it gives visitors places to visit and activities to engage in.

8. THE PRECAUTIONS

Culinary tourism may therefore be a significant contributor to processes of localization as a response to increased global competition. For example, outsider interest in local produce may serve to stimulate local awareness and interest, and assist not only in diversification, and maintenance of genetic diversity and heirloom varieties, but may also encourage community pride and reinforcement of local identity and culture. In addition, the development and promotion of regional food products have also become part of a process of the protection of geographical places through intellectual property

law (Moran 1993). The commercial reification of place identity in international trade agreements for wine and food also helps reinforce the place branding and marketing processes that are integral to contemporary tourism.

The growth in culinary tourism clearly has the potential to contribute towards regional development. But the assessment of its benefits and costs are greatly determined by place and location and by the factors that are used to measure development success.

Culinary tourism also has positive economic impacts, especially for rural areas. As these tourists become more adventurous both in their palates and their interest areas, rural areas have an opportunity to capitalize. Promoting food tourism in rural areas helps local farmers, producers and small business owners, and helps these rural economies to diversify (Everett and Aitchison, 2008, p. 159).

9. CONCLUSION

Food tourism is an up-and-coming, blossoming niche both in the tourist market and for academic research. Clearly there is a newfound appreciation and demand for high quality food with a legacy, a history, and a story, and many are willing to travel far and wide to experience this. Punjab cuisine has already a base in the market but it has reaped enough on its own now it is time when a strategy has to be devised to make it as a product to the next level. The tourist market needs to be studied and accordingly product has to be aligned. It is their motivations that remain unclear: whether to assert the “self” in relation to, and consuming of, the “Other,” or perhaps just to satisfy a curiosity piqued by exposure to new cultures and foods through globalization of place and media, or even still – maybe because it just tastes good. Regardless, regional markets have potential to capitalize on this new fetish commodity, and through careful marketing and planning can bolster the economies of small farmers and other purveyors as well as areas with sagging economies. Punjab an agrarian society can encash and even promote its food through farm tourism.

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