
Pankaj Mishra is categorized among New Generation Indian English Novelists. Awareness of a New Generation, radically different in thought and attitudes from that of the preceding one, is the hallmark of the Indian English Novel that appeared at the turn of the century [1998-2000]. New generation Indian English Novelists are products of a sharply changing society that is undergoing marked transformation under the impact of Media, Cyber culture and raging Globalization. Their novels are featured by uninhibited narrative with no holds barred about sex, incest and registered strong antagonism to the socio-cultural mores and religious beliefs of the earlier generation. Excepting Manju Kapur, the novelists are in their twenties and project the dilemma and expectation of the Indian youth—the relationship with parents, job crisis, cultural alienation, representing a generation in flux and unattached.

However, *The Romantics* as an Indian version of Flaubert’s *Sentimental Journey* have much to recommend though it gives a selective picture of the youth of Modern Generation. *The Romantics* is Pankaj Mishra’s first novel, which establishes him as one of India’s literary leaders. Novel’s time is late 1980’s to 1990’s and the place is as vast as the subcontinent of India:

The novel captures the vastness of India. Whether he is describing the cool clarity of the Himalayas in the north, or the heat and light of the south at Pondicherry, or Benares with its funeral pyres along the Ganges, Mishra conveys the essence of each place—its similarities to all of India as well as its differences. [Kempf Andrea Rev.]

*The Romantics* is an ironic tale of people longing for fulfilment in cultures other than their own. The Romantics is an intriguing combination of casual grace and emotional intensity, peppered with discreet social comment on caste, class, sectarian strife, the state of the nation. It was published in eleven European languages and won the Los Angeles Times Art Seidenbaum award for First Fiction.
The novel is divided into Thirteen Chapters. He tells the whole story from first person point of view, and depends totally on his narrator. Samar is a protagonist, who can only reveal personal thoughts and feelings and what he sees or is told by other characters. He can’t tell us thoughts of other characters for he cannot read other characters’ minds, and he generally provides a source for any information he may convey about events he does not or could not witness. Writer’s language is direct, undemanding and lucid, due to uncomplicated diction he employs all through the book. His narration is smooth, coherent, thought through and yet absorbing.

Having in mind that, the whole story starts in a flashback mode to the year 1989, then technically the plot of the novel could be read on two bases: *proleptic* [looking forward] and sometimes *analeptic* [looking backward].

The Romantics is set in India, and it takes place over a period of seven years. The protagonist of work is a young man named Samar, is Indian, many of the other characters are Westerners and it is mainly against them that Samar measures himself. The setting of the novel is largely in places that foreigners congregate to, places of exile, retreat and death: Benares [Varanasi], Pondicherry and Auroville, and the Tibetan centre in exile of Dharamashala. There is an unreality to each of these places: deathly Benares, the Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, the misplaced Tibetan city of Dharamashala. The outsiders who populate these places in the novel emphasize the feeling further.

Samar is much like the author; both were born in 1969, studied at Allahabad University, travelled widely throughout India. The book begins with Samar reflecting on his time in Benares, starting in 1989. After graduating from Allahabad University, he moved to Benares to prepare for the Civil Service examination, the ‘Mains’ that are almost a rite of passage for every Indian university graduate. At nineteen, he is still too young to sit for the exam, and he spends the time in Benares
preparing, reading, and living a somewhat independent life. His mother is dead; his father has retired to the Aurobindo Ashram.

In the house where Samar rents a room there is also another boarder, the older Miss West is a romantic, an Englishwoman. For twenty years, she has been the mistress of a British Corporate Executive Mark, who will never divorce his wife, using as an excuse the possibility that he may go into politics. It was his idea that Miss West should live in Benares, where he feels there is less chance of their liaison...and in this way; she is involved in a hopeless romance with this married man. Miss West cannot see her own life for the waste that it is. Miss West is Samar's first close introduction to the West, and it is through her that Samar first experiences Western Thought and Culture outside the covers of a Philosophy Book. Eponymously personifying it as, she does. A long-time resident of India, she is an outsider relatively at ease.

However, Samar become involved in the world around him, where everyone is interesting and anything seems possible. Samar becomes obsessed with Miss West he cannot have, and later on Samar becomes close friends with Catherine-too close, eventually. However, Catherine returns to France with Anand, a clearly doomed affair. Samar holds out hope but-well, the centre cannot hold, things come apart. He also goes into exile. He becomes a teacher in Dharamashala, planning to stay only for a few months but then settling down there, settles for a diminished life. Samar comes to believe that life has no meaning and that people have no control over their destinies.

Flaubert’s novel and Edmund Wilson’s criticism also have a profound influence on Samar’s university friend Rajesh, a strong personality who can’t quite establish himself in the Post-University world and winds up making an unusual career choice. He, too, admits that he can identify with Frederic; moreover, when he realizes how similar his own corrupt society is to that depicted by Flaubert, Rajesh loses hope and abandons his efforts at reform. At their first meeting,
Rajesh lectures Samar about a Brahmin’s duty; seven years later, Samar learns that the once idealistic Rajesh has become a contract killer.

Mishra limits himself to a single perspective, that of Samar, his first-person narrator. Moreover, the fact that Mishra’s title is plural indicates, an even more important dissimilarity. Though Samar is the central figure in the novel, he is not the only character who has what Mishra calls a romantic view of life, that is, who assumes that anything one dreams, hopes, or imagines can become a reality. By this definition, almost everyone Samar meets through his fellow lodger Diana West is a romantic. Catherine, a young, wealthy Frenchwoman, has drawn her naive Indian lover Anand into her dream. Her family and admission to the highest levels of French society convince them both that when she takes him to France, his skill, as a Sitar player will bring him fame and fortune, while his status as her husband will gain him acceptance. Among, the other romantics in Miss West’s circle are Sarah, a young German woman who, like many Westerners, believes that, she has found the truth in an Eastern religion, in her case Buddhism, and Mark’s current lover, Debbie [from United States], who likes to dabble in ideas but is not bright enough to form a coherent thought, much less a philosophy of life.

One of the most important tools available to the writer in a novel is its characters. It is the characters and their developments that show how creative a writer is. In this regard, Pankaj Mishra is successful in characterization; as an inspired writer he produces various touchable characters in the novel, whom we feel we have met before.

There are two highpoints in the novel; one it is an aesthetic picture of topography and the young generation’s life in Varanasi. Secondly, there is a more delicate interaction between the east and the west in the lives of the characters. In fact, when readers are drawn into the lives of Samar, Catherine, Miss West, Rajesh, and Anand they can understand them better and consequently make a fair judgment on the
thoughts, feelings, motivations and attitudes associated with these young characters.

Samar is much like the author; both were born in 1969, studied at Allahabad University, travelled widely throughout India. He is diligently studying Western literature and philosophy while his European acquaintances are immersing themselves in Indian Culture and Religion. After having graduation from Allahabad University, the young Brahmin Samar has come to the holy city of Benares to complete his education and take the civil service exam that will determine his future. We know that either the personality of such a first-person narrator protagonist like develops directly through his comments about himself [which are not too much] or indirectly in the way, he narrates events. At least, one good point in Samar’s characterization is the fact that though he is an intellectual of sorts, reading Turgenev and Schopenhauer. He is a round, open, dynamic character that has started a journey of progress and growth. A trace of Samar’s character is in the writer’s choice of setting and atmosphere:

At the beginning of a ‘new age’, Mishra’s novel travels back a century in morality as well as mood. The virtues of his hero are an endearing bibliophilia, a wide-eyed propensity for love and friendship, a touching shyness and a modest desire to learn. Moreover, all of Samar’s activities are cloaked in weltschmerz and ennui. ‘Weary’ is a keyword, and the fictional mode is prototypically confessional... [Nair Rukmini 5]

So stunningly defined above, we can infer that what Mishra has tried to present is done through his narrator’s pose as Samar is an elite choice that relates to how the story works formally, thematically and aesthetically.

Samar meets his neighbour, the middle-aged Englishwoman, Miss West, who arranges a party, which is the first such experience in the past nineteen years of age for Samar. She introduces him to a number of Westerners. He meets French woman Catherine and her
Indian boyfriend Anand. There he also meets Mark, Debbie, and Sarah.
The day after the party remains in Samar’s mind as he sees the other side of Miss West’s character who is sobbing in great distress. Later on, he recognizes the source of all those imbalances and anguish: Christopher, that tall man present in many pictures among “the collage of photographs Miss West had stuck on one damp-scarred wall of her room” [TR 35].

Through the character of Samar, the writer reminds some of the uncertainties usually experienced in daily life. As an example of this limitedness of the narrator, we might refer to the scenes after the party arranged by Miss West in the early stages of the novel. There, Samar is curious to find the source of “sniffling sound as though produced by suppressed sobs” [TR 33] when he finds Miss West in a miserable mood, murmuring, “It’s all a waste, isn’t it? Such fucking waste.”[TR 34]. It is after some interactions and obtaining knowledge that Samar comes to a better interpretation of the same accounts repeated by Miss West at the end of the novel. Samar is thinking to himself:

I used to think then that her solitude committed her to puzzling out the characters and lives of people she knew. It came to me now that her curiosity was dictated all along by her own complicated life, by the setbacks and disappointments she suffered in it. [TR 269-70]

Samar comes to believe that life has no meaning and that people have no control over their destinies. She is also suffering from frustration and loneliness throughout the years. Hopelessly she is engaged in the malformed relation.

Through Miss West Samar is introduced to other Westerners. He is particularly drawn to the Frenchwoman Catherine, who is involved with the Indian Musician Anand and preparing to take him back to France with her. However, besides being ‘a party-organizer’, Miss West acts in an important role; since she has noticed Samar’s
different reactions toward Catherine then she brings about a great dilemma in his mind:

Instead, she said, Poor girl. How badly she needs to be loved. She’s obsessed with Anand. She thinks of him as the next Ravi Shankar. But I wonder how long that will last. I don’t think he can give her the stability she needs. He’s too dependent on her. [TR 39]

Such hints together with more meetings with Catherine, and passive status of Anand cause Samar to be attracted more to Catherine:

I was always struck by her great alertness to the world around her, which made her discover style and beauty in the most unexpected places. It made me want to see the city through her eyes, and always pretending to more knowledge than I possessed, I often adopted her opinions about something I knew nothing of. [ibid. 77]

The plan for a trip to Mussoorie is proposed by Miss West in the beginning of the second section of the novel. Though she promises to join Samar and Catherine after some stopover in Delhi, this never happens and much stranger they head for their trip even without Anand:

I knew from Miss West that Catherine had asked her not to invite him [Anand] to Mussoorie. Catherine had wanted to do this trip without him; it was meant to be a change from her usual life in Benares, a life recently grown more tense with the growing anxieties about her and Anand’s future in Paris. [ibid. 104]

Therefore, they have a very good time after arriving at Mussoorie. There Catherine speaks of Anand and her dissatisfactions with him and accepts Samar’s advice to be more detached from Anand, in order to correct him. And Samar talks about activities in the University while Catherine unfolds some accounts of Miss West’s secret love affair with Christopher. Gradually, they feel closer and build up instances that are more intimate. Next, they go to Kalpi, stay
in a bungalow, and meet a Sadhu in a temple. It is after a long discussion about the Monk in that temple and human relations and the hot topic of love that he gets more emotionally involved with Catherine. Chapter three in section two of the novel starts with love-making scenes by Samar and Catherine:

It is hard for me to describe the physical aspect of what happened next. It was made memorable only by my incompetence in everything that followed upon Catherine’s first disencumbering kiss: the first nervous explorations, the fumbling with buttons and hooks, the awkward impasses and shameful lonely climaxes. [TR 135]

On the way back to home, feeling frail and feeble Catherine makes many moments of melancholy silences and cries. However, astonishingly upon their arrival at home and visiting Anand, Catherine shifts to her old role of a “strong-willed purposeful” [ibid. 147] person. Though Samar receives a letter from Pondicherry telling about his sick father, he is too much preoccupied with Catherine and their love affair; thus, he is not going to see his father. [At least one critic has related this reaction from Samar to a similar story about the death of Mahatma Gandhi’s father, when bringing about the idea of guilt]. [Kumar Amitav] However, going back to library again and spending hours by rummaging through memories from Kalpi, Samar loses concentration and can’t find a remedy even in his old habit of book-reading.

Another message about his father’s sickness is waiting for Samar at Benares when he comes back. Consequently and after inner conflicts, he decides to go and visit his father in Pondicherry. Catherine comes to railway station to say goodbye to him and they have a romantic farewell in an ambiance of sadness, separation and uncertainties about their future. “She asks Samar to promise: ‘You must promise me that you will never regret anything. No matter how painful it is for you...’” [ibid. 184] and he does so. Before departing, Catherine delivers a cream-coloured envelope to Samar. When Samar
arrives at Pondicherry he finds out that his father is quite well after a minor stroke and now lives with his “constant companion” Deepa in a more stable circumstance. In the letter given at the time of departure, Catherine tries to make great compliments about Samar and their new relationship, and promises to write very soon. Samar goes high on emotion whenever he reads the letter again. Life goes on but with no reply to his letter to Catherine for a long time and after all daydreaming about past moments gradually Samar becomes a bit restless and worried. Moreover, after having been next joined the Tibetan primary school in Dharamshala; the whole dreamy world for Samar collapses when he receives a letter from Catherine; she breaks up:

...What was the meaning of this affair in the total economy of our lives, apart from giving me a sense of mischievous adventure and providing instant gratification to both of us? It was a perversion of human emotions, of our humanity. I now see that perversion within myself and feel ashamed. [TR 210]

Reality does not accommodate such romantic dreams; it counters delusion with drudgery and disillusion. Samar finally lands up as a school teacher at Dharamshala. There is no escape from isolation and fallen dreams. At Dharamshala, Samar realizes:

I still sensed something raw and incoherent within my own personality, and I remained vulnerable to those large vague longings, the urge to throw oneself into a grand and noble venture, into whatever could give coherence and shape to my own life...I was more conscious than ever of how absurdly romantic and incongruous these longings were for me. [ibid. 229-230]

Samar become conscious whether he thinks that such a relation is hopeless and uncertain and he is wasting the most crucial time of his career. Moreover, due to lack of incompetence I put myself into the hand of another. That’s why I think he didn’t respond to Catharine’s letter. Trying to escape from all familiar scenes and themes in his surrounding, Samar starts a round-the-country trip to appease his
sorrows and ailments caused by their breakup. In this way, there is romantic disillusion into the life of Samar.

Before getting admission for Ph.D., he thinks it is better for him to get some teaching experiences in the meantime. Soon Deepa [his mother] with the help of her friends, search a job at Tibetan primary school in Dharamshala. The whole idea is attractive for Samar because of the proximity to the Himalayas. However, before starting his new job in mid-July there are many days of bewilderment and waiting. Even companionship with Priya, who is his mother Deena’s niece, who is three years younger than Samar can’t distract him from his main preoccupation with Catherine.

Trying to escape from all familiar scenes and themes in his surrounding, Samar starts a round-the-country trip to appease his sorrows and ailments caused by Catherine’s rejection of him. So he travels “everywhere and nowhere” [TR 215] for several weeks with no purposeful mind. Moreover, as it might be guessed with his inexperience and lack of emotional strength, the pain is much aggravated and not relieved. However arriving at the Buddhist Himalayan town of Dharamshala, he retreats into the uneventful, secluded life of a primary school teacher. He works in this Town for seven years with no serious emotional or even social involvements. “Strangeness and dread” [TR 229] are his new feelings toward others. He even loses that great enthusiasm for reading literature and instead resorts to “books on wildlife and the environment,” [ibid. 224] or even to science and astronomy. Samar spends seven years at Dharamshala amusing himself with school job as a routine and his own solitude until one day that he bumps into Mark in a bookshop. Mark informs him about the latest news of Benares and the people Samar knows. It is some time after and upon receiving a letter from Miss West that Samar leaves for Benares during winter season. Though his return gives him the “sensation of re-entering a dream,” [ibid. 259]. There are certain realities of Mr Panditji and his wife’s death, and Arjun and his wife
Sita that now live in the same house. There is no trace of the all those pictures on the wall in Miss West's place. Before departing, Miss West tells Samar to come and visit her in England. Samar's return to Varanasi underlines the end of his romantic dreams.

Therefore, while doing the job of teacher at Dharmashala he is isolated from home and friends that, leads him the life of loneliness and frustration. Writer’s specific attitude about his narrator, Samar, convinces us to accept that his special passivity in the social network around him is the best reaction, no matter if this passivity overwhelms the whole idea of Samar's appeal for defeat, isolation, perception and his sense of abandonment.

There are Indian contrasts: Samar’s father, not quite as ready to absent himself from the world as he had initially anticipated, the family that owns the house where Miss West and Samar live [and their servant], and the lost soul Rajesh. Coming from humble origins Rajesh is a university friend of Samar, a strong personality who can't quite establish himself in the post-university world and winds up making an unusual career choice. [Though Mishra is at pains to stick to English novel-ideals the Bollywood movie influence seems here to have seeped through – it’s a tad too melodramatic, Rajesh’s fall. to put it mildly. Trying to balance it, Mishra has Rajesh heroically identify with Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education* and Edmund Wilson's interpretation of it ...]

His regular visits to Benares Hindu University and a feeling of strangeness bring Samar to meet Rajesh, who seems to be an ambitious political leader among Brahmin students in the campus. Rajesh keeps a pistol in his room at the hostel and reads “poems by Faiz, the Pakistani exile, the poet of heartbreak and loss” [*TR* 25]. He also gives prolonged contradictory speeches through which, he criticizes Indira and Rajiv Gandhi and Pandit Nehru. Whatever he is, his “Godfather-like status” [*ibid. 32*] gives Samar a sense of security. However, it is shortly after their first meeting that there happens a great student riot in the campus,
during which a cop gets shot and many students beaten. Some days later Samar meets Rajesh again in the library. He shows interest in Samar’s readings of Edmund Wilson and asks for “a summary of Trotsky’s ideas.” These demands confuse him more about Rajesh and his ideology. Just as Samar’s intellectual prospects widen with his visits to the Banaras Hindu University and his acquaintance with the works of great writers, his social circle also expands. However, unconfident and reclusive, he is not equipped with the resources to face the challenges that such new interaction brings. Here University life is reflected in negative sense.

As, we have seen Samar who, is from very small town and his desire to escape from traditional Brahmanic path and the desire to learn, that has brought him to Varanasi but at the very early stage of his age, he is not so experienced, his hesitation, indecisiveness and incompetence needed to be more improved. In addition, his journey of self-discovery starts with coming into contact of the friends both Eastern as well as Western. Pankaj Mishra himself explains the origination of such a robust narrator quite explicitly through an interview:

I can't write anything until an idea possesses me completely. In the case of The Romantics, defining the narrator’s identity and his tone set me off. The plan-a small-scale intense drama featuring a cosmopolitan cast of characters-was with me in a different form. […] But The Romantics is truer to my experience: the narrator with small-town background and bookish knowledge who approaches the world very tentatively, through hesitations, indecisions, blind alleys and re-evaluations. [Mishra 2000]

In a long and demanding course of change and growth, Samar tries to confront temptations and make choices; so he never goes back to the life his father always tries to sketch for him, or he doesn’t fall in love at once any more [even if it is a nice girl like Priya!]. Instead, he shows signs of maturity. He had while in Benares, this time he behaves
differently with much prestige and esteem. But Samar only receives the finishing news about all those wandering people in a calm relaxed mood to illustrate in the most effective manner the accomplishments of his life journey from innocence to experience.

In this way, we experience the striving spirits of a protagonist like Samar in a life-like setting where everyday people and genuine concrete subjects and themes are dealt with. Though Samar feels “sad and full of mourning for the past, for that pure time of desires and dreams” [TR 276], he experiences for the first time in his life by coming to Benares, as the last lines of the novel proffer. Seemingly, and on the surface, we do not come to a highly splendid distinct scene at the end, but indeed the metaphorical rainy scene amidst the chaos in the hotel show how Samar feels purified and free from any guilt or burden: “Water ran down my back; my socks were wet; my feet cold. But I was feeling quite calm.” [TR 277] This ending line suggests the striving spirit of the protagonist to recover soon from illusionary love and build up for an unwavering future. In this way, the last words become a revelation of character. The narrator, for example, grows up in Allahabad, spends time in Benares and then retires in Dharamashala. This first person point of view of Samar give us a better stance in tracing a character’s growth. This process should definitely lead to what Mishra mainly concentrates on his hero’s identity.

Most literally named character, Miss Diana West, the middle-aged English woman “who is living in India in order to see her married lover without causing him scandal” [Kempf Andrea Review], plays an important role in the action of the story. This open, round, dynamic character has a structural significance in the future of our Brahmin Protagonist. Samar is attracted to her “odd manners and discomfiting vacillation from English primness to Bohemian excess” [Marie Arana Review]; thus, he shows eagerness and is drawn into her exotic circle of expatriates: Mark, Sarah, Debbie, Anand, and of course Catherine. In fact, it is after attending Musical Soirées arranged by Miss West
that, Samar gets closer to the peculiarities around himself. As a young bookish Brahmin, Samar had been taught to evade “romantic love” or any other “sensual derangements” so he had never experienced being in a party or even having a girlfriend. Miss West’s arrangements push him to cross these barriers; friendship with this lady initiates a performance of discovery and change for Samar. Moreover, readers would not overlook her deft arrangement of a trip to Mussorie, where she is supposed to join Samar and Catherine but never does so. In fact, we may be a bit suspicious about the lines that claim it is Catherine, who, asks Miss West not to invite Anand for this trip. From the first moment of Samar’s acquaintance with Catherine in the party to every other meeting, Miss West catches him in his special attention given to Catherine among others; thus, it is not so strange if she sees Samar as a better alternative for Catherine and plans to join these two. This specific position for Miss West is more justified when, we remember that as, a European woman she sees Catherine-Anand relationship as futile and knows about the ideals of Catherine, besides she is more experienced in love cycles!

Miss West’s relationship with Catherine [and Anand in the next place] is distinct in one word, that is, ‘protégés’. Samar recounts this very early in page sixteen of the novel when he wants to describe Miss West’s viewpoints about different people in Benares. This standpoint is further asserted by Samar himself: “After this, her [Catherine’s] soft French accent was all the more unexpected; it made her seem oddly childlike, more human, and more manageable.” [TR 17]

Miss West is a middle-aged British Woman, who is living in India in order to see her married lover without causing him scandal. Perhaps, it is only natural to be a romantic when, one is young, but it is unusual to find a middle-aged person who has not come to terms with reality. It is even more surprising when that individual is someone such as Miss West, who is clear-sighted enough to assess Debbie accurately
and to predict the problems. Catherine, Anand, and Samar do indeed encounter when they refuse to face the truth.

Miss West shows the attribute of change and growth in the novel so to speak. For Miss West all we understand from what Mark says is the point that her relationship with Christopher does not “work out” so at the end, she says goodbye to Samar and India as well to go back to England. Of course, this doesn’t mean to be her moment of awakening since she finally repeats the same familiar phrase, “it’s all such a waste. Such a bloody waste” [TR 269], which was once uttered by her early in the story and the day after the party; just to signify to the reader that as an veteran lover she knows the end from the beginning.

Therefore, the Friendship with this lady initiates a performance of discovery and change for Samar. Moreover, she shows the attribute of change and growth in the novel. However her relation with Christopher doesn’t work she flees to England. Moreover, she says: In an effort to change your life system don’t underestimate the power of fate! Or you can’t evade realities of your life forever! Or correlating the ideal and the real is more difficult than it seems! This is wonderfully illuminated in Miss West’s life as she has tried to build a different world based on her ideal love affair but at last comes to face the bitter reality and decides to go back to London. At all, she is very conscious of her class and country.

Catherine is the daughter of a banker in Paris and she comes to “Benares to get as far away as possible from her oppressively ‘bourgeois’ parents” [TR 17]. Feeling bored with something or somebody or feeling insecurity in some people or even some concepts and then trying to find stability, strength and safe haven in some other people or conceptions; this is a characteristic always with Catherine. Sometimes she points out some unique ideas such as rejecting a biased ranking of writers or referring to her own elite choices: “Personally, I like Kundera; He says serious things about contemporary life” [ibid.
57]. However, even these remain as stylish sophisticated gestures for readers: “Catherine is consistently unattractive for the reader. She remains a weak narcissist, weeping and sulking in corners in between spells of brittle gaiety” [Chaudhari Shoma Review].

In comparison with others, this flat closed character tries to be flamboyant, gorgeous and captivating but fails. She has few features with no psychological depth or detail and remains a flimsy Western dilettante who, lives like a “Bohemian but thinks like a bourgeois” [TR 45]. The only promising point about her is that she shows an inappreciable ray of change at the end: after breaking up with Anand and changing different boyfriends in Paris, she finally decides to be contented with one and plans to marry a stockbroker. Still, some idea that has no guarantee! Catherine is French woman and Anand is her Indian boyfriend, who plays sitar:

In Benares she had fallen in love with Anand, whom she had met at one of Miss West’s musical soirées. They lived together in a nearby riverside house. At the end of winter Catherine planned to take Anand back with her to Paris, where he would attempt to make a living out of performances and studio recordings while Catherine finished her philosophy degree. [TR 17]

Although she had promised Anand to marry with him, but finally she and her family could not agree to it and send him without job and married with an elite person. She were come India to enjoy and get psychic stability where as it is the romantic disillusion of Indian youth and his struggle for power and wealth. At all we are compelled to say [East is East and so on, and everyone winds up where they belong.]

The difference comes with quite a sharp contrast with Anand’s fate when failed in his career. As Miss West recounts it, Anand lives in a complete despair and depression after his failure in getting the previously imagined job and being, rejected by Catherine and returning to India from Paris. Even worse after four years he is still desperately
hopeful “still pinning for Catherine, hoping for some sort of miracle, writing long letters to her and getting shorter and shorter notes in return” [TR 273].

Anand couldn’t find a job in Paris and he returns back to India and continues a devastated life. Moreover, Catherine plans to marry a stockbroker after changing many boyfriends.

After coming from a trip to Mussorie, Samar accepts an invitation from Rajesh to visit his hometown just to avoid more “empty evenings on the Ghats” [TR 165]. They head for that village which is forty miles west of Benares. This trip gives Samar an opportunity to know Rajesh better, to feel the “cruelties of rural India” [ibid. 170] again:

It was unsettling: the half-naked screaming children outside and the bareness of the room. I hadn’t been prepared for this; the poverty these surroundings spoke of wasn’t immediately apparent in Rajesh’s life in Benares. I could have guessed previously that he wasn’t well off, but one could have said the same of almost all students at the university. [ibid. 169]

Rajesh has much influence on his mind of Flaubert and Wilson and whatever they wrote he says; that wasn’t very different from the one he inhabited in Benares. And their writing;

It’s the story of my life,…in Benares I had been among people who, like Fredric and his friends, had either disowned or, in many cases, moved away from their provincial origins in order to realize their dreams of success in the bourgeois world. [ibid. 250]

He also observes the that How Rajesh has changed from his traditional Brahmin path and become a contract killer;

Rajesh himself possessed some of that feeling, which in his case was also an awareness of not having lived up to old standards. ‘I am a Brahmin,’ I had heard him say,
'but I have done things no Brahmin would ever do.’ [ibid. 170]

Because his religious ethics didn’t provide him space for career opportunity because Brahmin is the elite caste and the young like him couldn’t bear the educational expenses because of their economic backwardness. Because, Samar come to know from Rajesh’s mother that his, “Childhood spent in maize fields and carpet factories” [TR 70]

Therefore, his past largely determines his present state of mind. Rajesh, a sometimes violent, sometimes mystical leader of student malcontents, presents a more jaundiced view. More than merely illustrating the clash of cultures, he becomes the contract killer.

Man’s innermost feelings and attitudes are in essence really personal and private! They may not be disclosed to dearest friends even over years. Rajesh and his mysterious career is a good example of this theme in the novel. Even at the end of the story and through his direct letter to Samar, some aspects of his real life remain under the clouds of vagueness and suspicion. Moreover, it is through the same letter that we find out even Rajesh cannot understand Samar’s true feelings and motivations for selecting a secluded life. This theme finds more remarkable interpretive grounds if we consider Rajesh as a character foil to Samar himself.

Among the other attractive characters, we can mention Rajesh, who is a stereotypical, allegorical, closed, flat, and static character, as he presents the familiar type of a disobedient student with charismatic personality and a “Godfather-like status” [TR 32], in the Campus with radical political ideas and a secret but predictable career of a “contract killer” [ibid. 244] in his future. Rajesh comes from humble origins and shows a strong personality through his intellectual speeches for other students in the campus or his interest in the poetry of Faiz and Iqbal or even conveys some sense of superiority to ordinary people by carrying and hiding that pistol in his hostel room. Though his poetic, rebellious,
and mysterious nature attracts attentions easily, Rajesh’s main function in the story remains somewhere else. As Rahul Gairola points out “Rajesh is a literary foil to Samar’s socially inept self” [ibid. 159]. Thus, as a secondary character who contrasts with Samar’s character; Rajesh’s behaviour and values are in disparity with those of Samar in order to highlight the distinctive temperament of the protagonist. Samar is naive and unfledged in his encounters with the world while Rajesh shows much more sophistication in this endeavour:

I [Samar] saw him [Rajesh] pointing to the empty expanses of sand and scrubland across the river. ‘That’, he was saying, bringing out each Sanskrit and Hindi syllable precisely, ‘is sunyata, the void. And this’—he pointed at the teeming conglomeration of temples and houses towards the north of the city—‘is maya, illusion. Do you know what our task is?’ The student shook his head. Rajesh continued, ‘Our task is to live somewhere in between.’ [TR 180]

This unique philosophy of life uttered by Rajesh is, once again stressed upon by Samar from a different angle when he wants to tell us about the degree of difficulty in dealing with the real world:

THE WORLD IS MAYA, illusion: it was one of the very first things my father told me. But it is a meaningless idea to a child, and the peculiar ordeals of adulthood take you even further away from true comprehension. New deprivations and desires continually open up within you, you keep learning new ways of experiencing pain and happiness, and the idea of illusion, never quite grasped, fades. [ibid. 215]

This observation focuses light on the psychological and social environment of illusion into the life of young characters.

While Europeans and Americans have had a long, noisy love affair with the mystery that is India, it is sometimes surprising to remember that many Indians have had a similar romance with the West.
Pankaj Mishra's evocative first novel is peopled with both varieties of romantics. Akash Kapur in his Review once writes, “In many ways this novel is as much about India’s encounter with itself as it is about the meeting of East and West” [Kapur]. Michiko Kakutani in his Review perceives this East-West encounter from a different perspective:

Like Flaubert, he [Mishra] seems to possess a simultaneous fascination with and wariness of romanticism, and he uses that ambivalence to explore the ways in which people from different backgrounds glamorize foreign cultures, be it Americans romanticizing the mysteries of India or Indians romanticizing the freedoms of the West. [Kakutani]

Thus, Mishra tries to strike a balance between East and West, contrasting the fates of the foreigners that come to India in search of something: [enlightenment, adventure, even love] and the Indians themselves. There is something to this, but Mishra tries too hard...the effort is sincere but ultimately unconvincing. With their self ethnic they all flees.

In the opening lines of Pankaj Mishra’s thoughtful debut novel, a young Brahmin intellectual named Samar reflects upon the inevitable changes that have altered the Indian city of Benares over the past decade. He observes that the ancient community has acquired the mirrored-glass sheen of the west, and it has surrendered a bit of the ancient charm that it held when it was his home in 1989, while he was a student attending university. However, Samar urges the reader not mourn for the atmosphere, Benares has lost, but to turn instead to the future.

This is as it should be; one can’t feel too sad about such changes. Benares-destroyed and rebuilt so many times during centuries of Muslim and British rule—is, the Hindus say, the abode of Shiva, the god of perpetual creation and destruction. The world constantly renews itself, and when you look at it that way, regret and nostalgia seem
equally futile. Although Samar came to Benares a young man seeking intellectual knowledge, Samar will leave Benares with an education of a much greater scope.

Initially, Samar fills his days by immersing himself in Western Literature. Searching beyond India for the answers to questions that he hasn’t yet become consciously able to ask, he leads a solitary existence. He soon meets a middle-aged British expatriate named Miss West, who takes him under her social tutelage and introduces him to Europeans and North Americans of his own age. As the Indian exploring European Culture interacts with Westerners seeking greater meaning in Eastern Cultures, Mishra creates scenes and images that illuminate the chasm between the two worlds, and question whether there is any possibility that the gulf between the cultures can ever be bridged.

Although Samar claims that he does not have a cultural context in which to frame such a romantic notion, he quickly develops a substantial crush on a French student named Catherine. It is in the passages describing Samar’s interactions with Catherine that Mishra delivers some of his most painful blows. Samar is incapable of understanding the context in which Catherine holds romantic love, and Catherine is either too naive herself, or perhaps too self-absorbed, to clearly see how their relationship is defined by Rajesh. As they converse in English, which is a native tongue to neither, it is also clear that in spite of their ability to use language to communicate, they have no true cultural understanding of one another.

Discussing another major theme, Kausalya Santhanam points out that

Transition is the essence of the novel. The transition of a youth from a sheltered life to a cosmopolitan experience, from innocence to awakening and knowledge, from emotional passivity to the pain of hurt and rejection. [Review]
Undoubtedly, this theme of change and transition has some close association with the type of story we are reading; as a coming-of-age story, Mishra’s young protagonist is initiated into adulthood through knowledge and experience, his understanding comes after the dropping of biases, a destruction of a phony sense of security, or in some way the loss of his innocence.

[The dominance of the controlling power of surrounding and heredity in characters fate] is also another recurring theme in the novel. As far as the surroundings and environment is concerned, this dominance is traceable when we see that many characters are bound to certain destinies only because they live in a shabby hostel, in a small town, in a big crowded city, in a historical place, in a secluded remote village or even in a modern city like Paris. [Even for Anand the ideas shaped around the locus of Paris makes the most part of his miseries apparent.] Heredity factor as a controller is mostly obvious in the life of Samar’s father, or in the way of Catherine’s retroaction when she finally forgets about all her bohemian thoughts and manages to marry a stockbroker and raise a family, as perhaps in total conformity with her parents’ wishes!

Rajesh and Samar’s inner turmoil to adjust in an ever changing world is best expressed through these lines;

But only a handful of these students [including Rajesh] were able to get anywhere near realizing their dreams of joining the Civil Service. Most of them saw their ambitions dwindle away over the years in successive disappointments, and they knew not only failure but also the degradation of living in a world where self-deception, falsehood, sycophancy and bribery were the rule. [TR 250]

So, this Young Generation holds responsible for their degradation of living largely to political concepts such as corruption, freedom or oppression. These are the half-formed ideas about Rajesh and the uncertain motives in Samar’s career that he has his own biases,
motivations and interests. Samar is unreliable for his inexperience, and a lack of self-knowledge, too. He tries to find answers for questions but in the juxtaposition of his book-based knowledge of the world and what in reality happens in his immediate surrounding that [India] and farther places [West], this proves to be a tough job.

Thus, his accounts are sometimes careful, generous, and motivated by psychological difficulties with other characters or events. As a nineteen-year-old boy, he writes:

But there were my own needs. I had no friends; growing up alone, I had developed no skills for intimacy, or even ordinary camaraderie; friendships seemed to require from me a degree of self-abnegation I could not achieve. However, a large part of the loneliness I had increasingly come to feel had been offset by my obsessive reading, the regard I had for the life of the mind. With each book, I entered into what I felt to be an exalted bond with its writer, to whom I gave all the care and attentiveness I could not bring to human relationships. [TR 63]

Samar, he is of high caste but is denied the opportunities his caste would have afforded him before Independence. The theme of the impoverished Brahmin is a sub-text of the novel. When the Indian constitution guaranteed a percentage of university and civil service positions to low-caste and minority citizens, the traditionally privileged Brahmins found themselves at a disadvantage. While their priestly benefits were unaffected, Brahmins were no longer first in line for education and job preferment. Samar's Brahmin friend Rajesh, a charismatic and possibly criminal figure on the university campus, exemplifies the issue as he wastes his prestige and intellectual capital for money and power in the Underworld. Even Samar's father has been forced to make difficult and unhappy choices because of the Brahmins' loss of automatic preferment.

In this way, the novelist masterfully exposes the almost absurd gap between the realities of India as Samar experiences it and the romantic notions that his foreign friends bring to it with their self-
consciously ethnic knickknacks and their fleeting enthusiasms. Mishra presents the universal truth that our desire for the other is our most painful joy. Therefore, Samar, Miss West and Anand are not exception to it.

Thus, the novel concentrates the problems of contemporary youth emotional, cultural, and familial. It focuses attention on inner turmoil of the youth forced to adjust in an ever-changing world. Young society’s interpersonal issues such as friendship, betrayal, and loyalty dealt with greater scale. Mere love does not bring security and peace! Or Instant joys won’t last long! Or society and environment make greatest modifications on your innermost feelings! All four characters Samar, Catherine, Anand and Miss West are the embodiments of such themes.