ABSTRACT
TITLE OF RESEARCH WORK:

STUDY OF YOUNG SOCIETY REFLECTED IN SELECTED
NOVELS OF VIKRAM SETH, PANKAJ MISHRA AND UPAMANYU
CHATTERJEE

CHAPTERIZATION:
I. Introduction:
In this chapter, an attempt is sought to do a comprehensive survey of the life and works of Vikram Seth, Pankaj Mishra and Upamanyu Chatterjee.

a. Life and Works of Vikram Seth:
Vikram Seth was born on 20th June 1952 in Calcutta [now Kolkata], West Bengal, India. He is one of the most celebrated authors in Indian Writing in English today. With the complexity and depth of his work and his significant achievement in prose as well as verse, Seth has proved as a master of the English language. The novelist no doubt has succeeded to get under the skin of young characters from a different cultural background so every new book of Seth creates a fresh departure in form and themes.

Along with Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth is arguably one of the three celebrated Indian English authors today. Whether it is for his complex and breathtaking novel in verse The Golden Gate, the densely realist A Suitable Boy, the exuberant travel narrative of From Heaven Lake, the sheer joyous fables of Beastly Tales From Here and There, the sentimental An Equal Music or the touching exploration of Diaspora and miscegenation in the biographic memoir Two Lives, Seth has proved the master of English language.

Though several Indian writers and novelist locate the themes of their work in other geographical areas in addition to Indian, the shaping consciousness of their work is often Indian, which then leads to liminal and hybrid representations that have now become the concerns of academic world. Vikram Seth’s Changing locales-India, China, America and Europe - do not exhibit these preoccupations.

b. Life and Works of Pankaj Mishra:
Pankaj Mishra was born in 1969, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, India. He is an award-winning Indian essayist and novelist and a recipient of the 2014 Windham-Campbell Prize for non-fiction. He is one of the most promising talents of his generation.

His Literary Career starts with: *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Travels in Small Town India* [1995], *The Romantics* [2000], *An End to Suffering: The Buddha in the World* [2004], *Temptations of the West: How to be Modern in India, Pakistan and Beyond* [2006], *From the Ruins of Empire* [2012] for which, he won The Crossword Book Award [nonfiction] in 2013. By studying his work, we come to know about the social and cultural changes in India in the context of globalization.

c. Life and Works of Upamanyu Chatterjee:
Upamanyu Chatterjee was born in 1959 in Patna [Bihar], India. He joined the Indian Administrative Service in 1983 and at present works as a civil servant in Bombay. He is being awarded with *Officier des Arts et des Letters* [Officer of the order of Arts and Letters], by the French Government and with the Sahitya Academy Award in 2000 for *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*.

A bureaucrat by profession, Upamanyu Chatterjee penned two short stories and five novels. The short stories include *The Assassination of Indira Gandhi* and *Watching Them* and novels include *English, August: An Indian Story* [1988], *The Last Burden* [1993], *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* [2000], *Weight Loss* [2006] and *Way to Go* [2010].

Upamanyu Chatterjee based his novels on the Indian Administrative System, which he depicted with hilarious sarcasm. The humour, sometimes, placed the reader in a state of shock as the writer went to an extent that his Indian contemporaries did not dare to go to. Through his works, he dared to match the sensibility, which one uncovers only in modern European novels.

II. Historical Background of the Indian English Fiction [1980 – 2000]:
a. A Brief Survey of Indian English Fiction in the 1980’s:
There are many structural similarities between 1980s and 1990s novels. Best known among 1980s Indian English novelists are Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Deshpande, Upamanyu Chatterjee etc. The novels possess the same dexterous ‘de-doxified’ use of language, the irreverent tone, the defiant and vigorous challenge to the power of history and received traditions; novelists also focus the same attentions on women and religious and linguistic minorities. A majority of the novels, of the decade reflects an urgency to rewrite received Indian history and expose the untruths of political versions. The postmodern technique of double readings and writing against the grain gets a free play in the novels of the
1980s, particularly since it enables novelists to challenge and re-write received truths. We do not find exuberance of theme of young society reflected in the novels of this time except *English August: An Indian Story* [1988].

**b. Indian English Novel in the 1990s:**

The 1990s Indian English Fiction is a period of vibrant vitality and uninhibited creativity. Writers like Raj Kamal Jha, Pankaj Mishra, Githa Hariharan and Vikram Chandra are interested in the time present and not the time past, in multiculturalism and not cultural nationalism, in elitism and not populism. Not only in India, but all over the world, the novel is more read, more appreciated and even more marketed than poetry, ‘its traditional rival’.

This trend diasporic nature gets strengthened and confirmed in the nineties. Many novelists like Vikram Seth, Vikram Chandra, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Gita Mehta and Amit Chaudhari are exploring the life in this country from afar. Others who like Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan and Raj Kamal Jha are based in the metropolis, Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi and so on and grapple with its life in their works. Their metropolitanism as well as their diasporic nature relates them to global culture, the ideal held high today.

Novels also carry the label of post colonialism along with postmodernism the latest thing today. The deconstructionist narrative strategies of Rushdie and his followers have become the norm. Though some of the old novelists pursuing the old traditional path have also survived in this decade, they are; Raj Kamal Jha, Pankaj Mishra and Arundhati Roy. We also have women writers like Manju Kapur, Githa Hariharan and the center and decentered patriarchal authority. In spite of all the problematic, the nineteen nineties are an important decade in the history of the Indian novel written in English. It is marked by prolificacy, vitality and flexibility. Its achievement in creative writing especially in the novel has been able to compete with best in the West and bag prestigious international awards in spite of all its inadequacies. It has shown that the novel is still rated higher and betters than other genres and that it alone has the capability to survive in the new century of information technology and radical developments in science and industry.

**c. A brief Survey of New Generation Indian English Novel:**

New Generation Indian English novel is the hallmark of the Indian English Novel that appeared at the turn of the century [1998-2000], namely Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* [1998], R. K. Jha’s *The Blue Bedspread* [1999], Pankaj Mishra’s *The Romantics* [2000], and Sunny Singh’s *Nani’s Book of Suicide* [2000]. These novelties of the late nineties are different from those of the eighties like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Deshpande,
Upamanyu Chatterjee etc. in respect of their central concern, i.e. the problematic of the teenage youth, mainly the socio-cultural one.

New generation Indian English novelist are products of a sharply changing society that is undergoing marked transformation under the impact of media, cyber culture and ranging globalization, their novels characterized by uninhibited narrative with no holds barred about sex, incest and registered strong antagonism to the socio cultural mode and religious beliefs of the earlier generation.

The 1990s Novelists are in their twenties and projects the dilemma and expectations of Indian Youth - the relationship with parents, job crisis, cultural alienation representing a generation in flux and unattached.

III. Young Society in Vikram Seth’s Fiction:

a) *A Suitable Boy* [1993]:

*A Suitable Boy* depicts the middle class, Northern India milieu. Each of the characters seems too familiar to Indian traditional ways they are the representative of how religion, cast, class and secular values deals in the contemporary society.

Novel focus attention, on the issues of young society; of the value of work, the process of change, the injustice of poverty, and young society’s an active attempt to bring about changes in society, careless of caste of caste boundaries, and their attitudes is the result of generational shift.

It also reveals us that, In India, any lasting relationship cannot be predicated on a sexual or chemical affinity but must be based on respect, trust and understanding. Seth does offer a different perspective on tradition and the significance of religion in the private sphere. He also finds the same in the context of the institution of the family. In such a way, *A Suitable Boy* ostensibly belongs to the genre of realistic novel, which indicates that in addition to realistic representation of society, the individual consciousness of characters is realistically etched with some degree of complexity.

b) *The Golden Gate* [1986]:

*The Golden Gate* is a remarkable verse novel which is conceived in 594 stanzas. Seth takes up the verse form that Pushkin had used for his novel. *The Golden Gate* got published which created a literary storm and it won him literary acclaim in the form of Sahitya Academy Award in 1989.

It has studied the intimate Californian Lifestyle of American Young Society, their love, reconciliation and loss, their opposition to anti-social policies, superficial social life and
isolated from communal contact and their attitude towards marriage and homosexual issue. New information technologies encourage users to keep in touch with friends and family only in a shallow sense. Most characters experience loneliness in life and hence they search for meaning and an emotional fulfillment.

It also reveals that physical passion hardly leaves any breathing space between the lovers, which are essential for a successful and lasting relationship. And Seth also presents homosexual love underscores the barrenness of a society. He implies that when relationship will undergo deterioration due to loss of values, the result could be guilt-ridden people, indulging in malformed relationships.

c) *An Equal Music* [1999]:

It is a novel written by an Indian with nothing Indian in it, and set in England with English characters. Moreover, it deals with characters intense love and loss that causes loneliness and psychotic existence in their life.

Music, love and loss are thus major facets of the young generation depicted in the novel. It is appropriate because both love and music play on the emotions. By putting music back into the people who perform it, we know the young characters through their hopes, quarrels, ambitions, love, professional contacts they have to make with agents, critics, instrument makers and players. Characters reflect their flaws, restlessness and inertia. They see in themselves volatility, a sense of resistance, roughness, impulsiveness, even at times of dark panic, almost brainsickness. Feeling of betrayal, guilt, of despair and depression is also there and their inability to swallow their sense of self.

Young character’s Hypersensitivity is their reaction to the failed pursuit. Indeed, everything is mechanical in the present cosmopolitan life. Passion creates a sense of insecurity in character’s mind.

**IV. Fiction of Pankaj Mishra and Young Society:**

a) *The Romantics* [2000]:

*The Romantics* is an ironic tale of people longing for fulfilment in cultures other than their own. It was published in eleven European Languages, and won; The Los Angeles Times Art Seidenbaum Award, for the first fiction.

It is an aesthetic picture of topography and the young generation’s life in Varanasi. It is about the frustration of the new age global youth who get lost in the labyrinths of life owing to their romantic illusions. Everyone is looking for something. Mishra captures those seekers of the world whose own cultures have not given them sustenance and who look to the East, 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, love etc] and the Indians themselves. In brief, Indian youth are shown to be in quest of wealth and power, the Western Youth hunger for peace and psychic stability for which they come to India.

Overall, *The Romantics* is primarily about the inner turmoil of the youth forced to adjust in an ever-charging world. Moreover, it is a story of delusion, of the harsh facts of life faced by the young generation. The novelist also 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. Thus, *The Romantics* concentrates the problems of contemporary youth emotional, cultural, and familial.

V. Young Society Reflected in Upamanyu Chatterjee’s Fiction:

a) *English August: An Indian Story* [1992]:

Chatterjee’s *English August* is a thinly disguised autobiographical novel about a sensitive administrative officer in west Bengal. Actually, novel takes place in three places – Delhi Calcutta and Madras. It suits the hero’s mentality and mood, particularly when the hero is alienated from his land and people. It depicts the encounter of an urban youth with the provincial India and gives an account of a twenty four year old I.A.S. trainee posted in Madna. At the surface level, the novel is a satirical portraiture of Indian Administrative Service, but at the deep level, it is about self-discovery. Chatterjee attempts as it were, to bring everyday reality into the realms of fiction.

It realistically records the protagonist’s sense of isolation, rootlessness and cultural dislocation. It also depicts identity crisis, which is so common with the present day youth. The lack of identity leads them to various defects in building up personality and psychological balance. The novel shows disgust of the young society with the system and corrupted politicians.

b) *The Last Burden* [1993]:

Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *The Last Burden* [LB] is a novel about the burden of familial relationships, the growing strain between parents and grown up children, preference for nuclear family set-ups, etc. in the fast changing socio-economic scenario created in the modern day world. It is a strong comment on the changing values of the younger generation for whom parents have become a burden. With the growing individualism and self-centeredness, bonds are being broken and a feeling of loneliness remains at the end. Indian culture has undergone many changes with the fast changing value system.
VI. Conclusion:

In this way, Vikram Seth has been called as a citizen of the world and cultural traveller through more than one study, and every new book of his creates a fresh departure in form and themes. His work is housed in a variety of eclectic and traditional forms and location of his poetry and prose move across the world, making literary homes of distant land and cultures. While concluding Vikram Seth’s fiction, we can see that the central motif in both The Golden Gate and A Suitable Boy is the quest for a companionship in life.

Romantic passion, then, cannot sustain relationships since it is selfish and demanding. Since relationship have to be based on understanding, comprehension and compassion, respect, and duty that forms stronger and lasting bonds. Character’s denunciation of passion for family and social order is a thematic preoccupation, once again repeated from A Suitable Boy and The Golden Gate.

It is in The Golden Gate, the reason behind character’s sense of guilt is their failure at proving himself as a successful husband / wife. Seth also brings up the issues of divorce, separations that have the order of today’s fluid society. Character’s desire to escape their past is largely responsible for their present psychological state of mind. About homosexual concern, Seth implies that when relationship will undergo deterioration due to loss of values, the result could be guilt-ridden people, indulging in malformed relationships.

In An Equal Music, we learn that by putting music back into the people who perform it, the young characters show their hopes, quarrels, ambitions, love, professional contacts etc. This is what; they have to make with agents, critics, instrument makers and players. Hypersensitivity of characters is the reaction to the failed pursuit. Their past becomes largely responsible for their present state of mind.

Pankaj Mishra is one of the most promising talents of his generation. By studying his work, we come to know about the social and cultural changes in India in the context of globalization. In English August: An Indian Story, there is a more delicate interaction between the east and the west in the lives of the characters. It is an aesthetic picture of topography and life of the young generation in Varanasi. The frustration of the new age global youth is seen through the loss of the labyrinths of life owing to their romantic illusions. Thus, Mishra presents the universal truth that our desire for the other is our most painful joy. Thus, the novel concentrates on the emotional, cultural, and familial problems of the contemporary youth.

Upamanyu Chatterjee’s English August is a thinly disguised autobiographical novel that realistically records the protagonist’s sense of Isolation, Rootlessness and Cultural
dislocation and the Identity crisis, which is so common with the present day youth. The lack of identity leads them to various defects in building up personality and psychological balance.

In his second novel, *The Last Burden*, we learn about the family, which was the nucleus of the Indian society that is going to be end. Through the ages of the growing individualism and self-centeredness, human bonds are being broken and a feeling of loneliness remains at the end. Thus, the novel proves that Indian culture has undergone many changes with the fast-changing value system.