"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet": A Study of Cultural Dissension in Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics*

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Abstract: My paper will attempt to explore the negation of any possibility of East-West confluence in Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics*, its theme being in continuity with E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. While Forster underscored the fundamental failure of connection at the core of East-West relationships, Mishra's *The Romantics* provides poignant insights into the dissonance in value systems between the East and the West, highlighting the persistent cultural discord despite the professed cosmopolitanism of the contemporary era. Despite the acclaim surrounding Homi Bhabha's concept of "hybridity" and Mary Louise Pratt's idea of the "contact zone", even after the passage of seventy-five years since Forster's seminal work, Mishra's *The Romantics* reaffirms the enduring relevance of the "hundred voices" in Forster's narrative, echoing the resounding chorus of "No, not yet." It resounds with the echoes of the sky proclaiming, "No, not there" (Forster 1924). Mishra's novel reveals in a poignant way the continuing chasm between the East and the West even after the end of colonialism.

Keywords: Cosmopolitanism, East-West, confluence, culture, contact zone, hybridity

> Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
> Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgement Seat;
>
> -Kipling, "The Ballad of East and West"

Kipling's words may appear anomalous within the contemporary context of cosmopolitanism and globalism, where the delineations of national culture and psyche are gradually diminishing. Nonetheless, the enigma of interpersonal communion, or rather the persistent challenges in achieving effective communication, remains salient even in our current epoch, characterized by the concept of a "global village." The fluid exchange of commodities, technologies, and human mobility across international borders obscures the enduring disparities in values and mental frameworks between the Eastern and Western hemispheres of our planet. The Western world, often characterized as "materialist," has harbored an enduring fascination, since the days of colonialism with the "spiritual" East, particularly India. India became "a topic of learning, discovery and practice" (Said 1995, 73). Europeans came to India in

> search for childlike innocence, a vision of wholeness, a yearning for the recovery of what the poets and philosophers of the period felt the age has lot, namely a oneness with humankind and a oneness with nature, and for a reunification of religion, philosophy, and art which has been sundered in the modern Western world. (Clark 1997, 54-55)

The allure of the East was concomitant with its denigration, as Asia evolved into a symbol encapsulating the mysterious and remote, while also instilling fear and embodying the Western subconscious where all that is obscure, unspoken, feminine, sensual, suppressed, resided (Batchelor 1994, 234). The theme of cultural dissension between the Eastern and Western nations is a much older phenom-

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enon and can be traced back to the era of Herodotus and the epic clash between Greeks and Persians, which led to the legendary distinction between the "heroic, liberty-loving and dynamic West and the despotic, stagnant and passive East" (Clark 1997, 4). Despite concerted efforts to transcend the East-West schism in pursuit of fostering intercontinental dialogues, this enduring Occident-Orient dichotomy persists conspicuously in contemporary times, particularly within the realm of interpersonal relationships. My paper will attempt to explore the negation of any possibility of East-West confluence in Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics* (1999), its theme being in continuity with E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924). Mishra's *The Romantics* shows the impossibility of any form of relationship between Samar, the protagonist of the novel and Catherine, the girl he falls in love with, because of profound disparities in cultural values and incongruities in their philosophical outlooks on love and life. While Forster underscored the fundamental failure of connection which lies at the core of East-West relationships, Mishra's *The Romantics* provides poignant insights into the dissonance in value systems between the East and the West, highlighting the persistent cultural discord despite the professed cosmopolitanism of the contemporary era. Despite the acclaim surrounding Homi Bhabha's concept of "hybridity" (1994, 4) and Mary Louise Pratt's idea of the "contact zone" (1991), even after the passage of seventy-five years since Forster's seminal work, Mishra's *The Romantics* reaffirms the enduring relevance of the "hundred voices" in Forster's narrative, echoing the resounding chorus of "No, not yet." It resounds with the echoes of the sky proclaiming, "No, not there" (Forster 1924, 317).

The dichotomy between Catherine's ostensibly "progressive" mindset and Samar's wistful nostalgia for bygone eras and adherence to tradition forms a central thematic contrast within the narrative. Samar's yearning for times past extends beyond a mere fondness for the historical context of Benares, the city where he once luxuriated in the "pure time of desires and dreams" upon his initial arrival in a decrepit riverside abode (276). Concurrently, Samar's nostalgia is deeply rooted in his personal history, particularly his intimate familial connection and a lamentation for the evaporation of the coherence and wholeness that once characterized his parents' lives. Samar's educational trajectory, which meandered through various unremarkable small-town schools across India (8), eventually led him to follow in the academic footsteps of three successive generations of his maternal lineage by enrolling at Allahabad University. Samar's mother, in her twilight years, made a deliberate choice to relocate to a spiritual enclave in Benares, an act aligned with an age-old Hindu belief system positing that death in Benares signifies liberation from the cycle of rebirth—an irrefutable and sacred tenet (69). In parallel, following the demise of Samar's mother, his father, with an aura of inscrutability, embarked on a comparable journey of withdrawal from the world by seeking solace within the tranquil confines of Auroville in Pondicherry. This esoteric choice required no elucidation, as it adhered to a venerable rite of passage: the retreat into the self during the twilight of one's years. In the face of these choices, Samar and his contemporaries rarely questioned or demanded explanations; such decisions mirrored an unwavering adherence to time-honored traditions and held an aura of unquestionable sanctity. While V.S. Naipaul, in his second installment of the Indian Trilogy, *The Wounded Civilization* (2010[1977]), had previously adopted a disparaging stance toward these concepts of renunciation and the retreat to the self, Pankaj Mishra's protagonist, Samar, nostalgically reflects upon this bygone era. Estranged from his family, and their coherent past, Samar leads a "restless and lonely" existence in Banaras, in a rented house, spending "the longest time at the university library" (75). Gradually, he forms tenuous bonds with fellow tenants, prominently among them European tourists such as Miss West, Mark, Catherine, and her Indian paramour Anand.

Samar's profound discontentment and burgeoning sense of inferiority spring from his gradual pursuit of contentment through his newfound acquaintances. The chasm between the cultural milieu he had known, shared by most Hindus in India, and the European tourist culture becomes conspicuously apparent during an encounter with Miss West. At the mere mention of a "party," Samar's initial mental tableau conjures images of "noisy, half-naked revellers... empty frivolity and moral laxity of which I had been brought up to disapprove" (9). However, the actual event transpires

as a musical gathering, wherein Samar keenly observes the dynamics of casual discourse, mirthful camaraderie, epicurean feasting, and libations. It is here that he becomes "increasingly aware of the strangeness the occasion held for me" (9). Samar grapples with the dissonance between this newfound revelry and the serene milieu of his upbringing, characterized by the tranquil customs of traditional Brahmin culture. He wistfully recollects Sunday mornings when his father, after a refreshing bath, would sit bare-chested on a tiger skin rug before a fragrant sandalwood fire, reciting Vedic hymns—a modest homage to the grand ceremonies of their forebearers spanning generations. These venerable traditions use to instill in Samar profound reverence and admiration. Samar's moral compass and worldview were fundamentally shaped by this distinct upbringing, diverging sharply from the European milieu in which he sought fulfillment. His profound familial ties, especially with his mother, stand in stark contrast to the more individualistic disposition exemplified by Catherine. Samar fondly recollects the affectionate receptions and poignant farewells he shared with his mother during school holidays, poignant moments laden with restrained tears under the disapproving gaze of his father (69). In contrast, Catherine, a globetrotter with a penchant for autonomy, shares with Miss West her audacious resolve at the tender age of sixteen to relocate to Germany, undeterred by her father's objections. Her father's conservative inclinations, particularly regarding premarital intimacy, evoke her frustration. Catherine's capacity for independent voyaging across the world further underscores the divergence from Samar's tightly-knit Indian familial framework, characterized by a robust religious presence at home, an enduring connection to ancestral roots, and profound grief following his mother's demise. Chadda and Deb (2013) aptly observe the cultural distinction, delineating that "unlike Western society, which prioritizes 'individualism,' Indian society espouses 'collectivism,' emphasizing interdependence and cooperation, with the family as its focal nucleus". These dissimilar upbringings and cultural frameworks of Catherine and Samar, underscored by their contrasting emotional bonds with family members, ultimately precipitate disparate attitudes toward love and relationships. This incongruity not only affects Samar but also embroils Anand, Catherine's current paramour, in a web of discontented circumstances. The thematic juxtaposition between Catherine's ostensibly forward-looking perspective and Samar's yearning for traditions and historical continuity serves as a fulcrum for the narrative's exploration of cultural disparities which will lead to Samar's unhappiness and frustration.

Samar's yearning for fulfillment within a foreign cultural milieu becomes manifest at the inception of the narrative, as he relocates to Benares with the singular aim of preparing for the Civil Service Examination. However, this ostensibly pragmatic motive swiftly metamorphoses into an intellectual entanglement with European literary works. Samar becomes deeply ensconced in the philosophical treatise *The World as Will and Idea* by Schopenhauer, the writings of Edmund Wilson, and Turgenev's *Torrents of Spring*. Having an autodidactic disposition, Samar, who had ventured to Benares with the explicit intention "to read, and do as little as possible besides that" (6), actively seeks intellectual gratification within the pages of Western thinkers' works, thereby further alienating himself from the immediate cultural milieu that surrounds him. However, this phenomenon of alienation from his own cultural milieu concomitantly engenders difficulties in the seamless integration into the intricate fabric of the European societal milieu. His academic voyage is profoundly imbued with a pervasive sense of self-disparagement as he grappled with his limited understanding of the texts he pursued:

> I read slowly but understood little of *The World as Will and Idea*. Nevertheless, I soldiered on … I would look up and let my eyes wander over the thick multicoloured spines and grow impatient at the slow progress I was making, at the long interval that separated me from those other books. (6)

Miss West endeavored to acquaint Samar with Western classical music, and though he did not consistently find himself enraptured by it, he discovered a genuine enthusiasm for the opportunity to engage with the luminaries he had hitherto encountered solely through the written word (55). As time elapsed, Samar's fascination and proclivity increasingly gravitated towards the "expatriate

corner of Benares – among foreigners" rather than the "uninteresting and petty" university atmosphere (57–58). Mishra adroitly employs metaphorical exposition to expound the manner in which European philosophical and rational traditions, exemplified by the books that Samar fervently devours, supplanted the traditional fabric of Indian religiosity and spirituality. This paradigmatic shift is underscored when Samar articulates how the "big books" assumed dominance within the "small octagonal niches in the whitewashed walls of my rooms where, when I first arrived vermilion-spattered clay dolls of Krishna and Vishnu had stood..." (6). The yearning to embrace foreign culture emanates from an inherent sense of inferiority, a prevalent trait among individuals hailing from formerly colonized nations. Samar's infatuation extends beyond Catherine herself to encompass the entirety of her cultural milieu. In comparison, all else appears lackluster, with Samar likening Anand to the labyrinthine and dormant alleyways of Varanasi. Catharine herself seemed to inhabit a different world, one that was prosperous and more content than the one she currently resided in (19). Not only Catherine, but Miss West too, represented, for Samar, "the world" that "held" Samar "more than the University" (33). Catherine embodies, in Samar's eyes, the allure of prosperous Western nations, while the aged Benares, Benares Hindu University, and the dilapidated quarters Catherine has rented, collectively symbolize India. He could feel "a sense of wrongness," a profound "incongruity of Catherine's presence in that small room, the French coffee and Gallimard paperbacks surrounded by the teeming obtrusive life of old Benares; there was the incongruity of her relationship with Anand" (48–49). It's interesting that Samar could sense the strangeness of the intermingling of the East and West, India and Europe and the incongruity that resulted therefrom but could not stop himself from desiring to be a part of Catherine's world. His station at the "remotest fringes" of the vast and diverse world, coupled with his dearth of economic means and prospects, only intensified his yearning for Catherine's milieu (65). Realizing his inability to join the conversation of Catherine and her friends, he increasingly "felt the fragility of… [his] own personality… lack of opinions and taste" (89). He harbored anxieties regarding whether he had managed to "impress them [Catherine's French friends]" (91). Following his encounter with Catherine's acquaintances, Samar descended into a melancholic state, yearning for the more abundant and fulfilling life that Catherine had perpetually enjoyed and would soon return to after this transient interlude in Benares (93).

While Samar exhibited a genuine enthusiasm for Western culture, it became apparent that Westerners, in turn, did not always exhibit the same degree of respect for Indian culture. Catherine's mother, when she came to India "would not stop moaning about the dirty cloth the waiter was using to wipe the plates dry" (47) and Catherine, though seems to have an interest in India reveals only a paternalistic attitude when she pacifies her mother saying "…this is the way people live in India, and you have to do the same when you are here" (47). Furthermore, the Director of the French Information Centre issued a caution to Catherine's mother, warning against her daughter forming "sordid liaisons" with Indian men, whom he depicted as employing French women as mere conduits to access Europe (47). Catherine's friends had only a "gentle condescension" (91) and their conversation "floundered in prejudice and artifice." Their perception of India was encapsulated by a lens that cast it as an exotic realm characterized by illiteracy, poverty, and religious fervor. They enthusiastically recounted their experiences in Benares, regaling tales of ascetic sadhus sustaining themselves on a single leg for a decade, limbless beggar children, and the ubiquitous presence of large rats scuttling through alleyways (91). Jacques, another resident in Panditji's abode, initially harbored a desire to witness the "real India." His prior bookish knowledge had led him to the erroneous belief that every Indian inherently adhered to Gandhian principles, and that the nation at large existed as an idyllic setting of self-sufficient villages populated by non-violent cotton-spinning denizens. However, his perspective underwent a stark transformation merely two weeks later, as the harsh realities of semi-urban and urban India left him afflicted with food poisoning and dysentery. Within the first week, he abandoned his ascetic aspirations and sought solace in the very five-star hotels he had once criticized (91). Catharine's friends who had come to India have come with "trained" (76) eyes- with

knowledge gathered from books. It is ironical that Catharine's French friends were so "concerned about the Third World" that they behaved with Anand in the manner of an "uninterested and kindly patron." (89) They have come to India driven by "abstract political passion" (90). Samar also confesses that his knowledge of European social and intellectual backgrounds was primarily derived from books authored by utopian philosophers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as recommended by Edmund Wilson. This dated and mostly irrelevant knowledge only served to further confuse him, as it led him to search for meaning and subtlety where none existed:

> I… gobbled down books without any sense of the larger civilization that lay behind them, the hectic world of big cities and writers and publishers, of urgent social concerns and existential anxieties. (49)

The knowledge held by individuals on both sides of the cultural encounter was predominantly theoretical, grounded in scholarly pursuits rather than direct experience. Enlightenment philosophers in Europe gained their understanding of India primarily through the writings of Jesuit missionaries, and this marked the onset of a significant dissemination of information about Indian civilization in Europe during the seventeenth century. As the eighteenth century progressed, discussions and deliberations concerning India took root within intellectual circles in Europe (Clark 1997, 54). However, this academic knowledge about a deeply spiritual nation like India often led to perplexity rather than clarity. The European tourists in the novel often possessed a superficial grasp of India's predominant religions, lacking a profound comprehension of their underlying philosophies, whether it be Hinduism or Buddhism. An illustrative episode involves Debbie, who entertained the idea of converting to Buddhism during a conversation with Sarah. She was confronted by an Indian scholar named Prasad, who emphasized that "people in the West had misconstrued Buddhism" and underscored "how unequipped the Western mind is to receive a philosophy of negation" (14). The Indian scholar was perhaps right because Debbie could not understand the basic principle of negation, as Miss West (who was a little more sensible than the rest) informs Samar that Debbie "gets her parents to send her videos of David Letterman, she misses her dog, all she wants to do in Benares is sunbathe and get a great tan, and then she says she wants to convert to Buddhism. It doesn't make sense" (40). Debbie remains immersed in and addicted to the world while professing to convert to a religion which believes in "a philosophy of negation."

Another instance of limited comprehension of Indian religions, in this case, Hinduism, is exemplified by Catherine. During a visit to Mussoorie, Samar and Catherine encountered a young sadhu adorned in a white dhoti with bare feet and marks of sandalwood paste gracing his broad forehead (128). The sadhu shared his spiritual journey, detailing his sojourn to Gangotri, months of wandering, stays at various ashrams, and his eventual arrival in Kapli (129). When asked about his familial ties, he indicated their absence, elucidating that he had left behind those relationships on his path to spiritual awakening; they belonged to his past. Samar's father, too, had conveyed to him the idea of the "illusory nature of love and attachment" during his childhood by referring to the dialogue between the sage Yajnavalkya and his wife Matreyi in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishads* (71). Samar found the sadhu's life to be "interesting" (131). However, Catherine viewed concepts like detachment, negation, asceticism, renunciation, and celibacy as "weird" (131), as they seemed to lack what she perceived as a crucial element: "love": "It's a life without love. What's interesting about it? Nothing" (131) India's "metaphysical speculations and 'mystical' inclinations of Indian thought conflicted with Enlightenment taste (Clark 1997, 55) of reason and rationality. Catherine and Debbie is a part of that 'enlightened world'. Despite finding themselves in the distinctly Hindu city of Benares, they displayed minimal interest in comprehending the fundamental philosophical tenets of Hinduism. Practices like renunciation were believed to absolve the renouncer of sins, bestow heavenly rewards upon their relatives, and dissolve marital bonds (Olivelle 1992, 71), with celibacy constituting a pivotal element of renunciation (Olivelle 1992, 72). Olivelle (2008) observes:

> The primary condition for renouncing the world is the complete severing of all attachments, especially to sensual objects. That detachment or aversion to the world (*vairagya*) is the essential prerequisite for

> renunciation is emphasized in all ascetical treatises. The sexual impulse was viewed as the greatest source of attachment and the greatest impediment to progress on the spiritual path. The body itself is viewed as an impure and dangerous place from which the ascetic should seek to flee as from a burning house. (160)

The religio-philosophical tenets of Hinduism, deeply ingrained in the spiritual fabric of India, failed to secure their place in the hearts of Europeans. Consequently, their comprehension of India was inherently flawed from the outset. India, as a profoundly spiritual nation, necessitates an understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of its religions for a comprehensive grasp of its essence. In India, religions, particularly Hinduism, encompass not merely creeds and dogmas but constitute a way of life. To truly fathom India, one must delve into the Indian way of life, characterized not only by the wiping of plates with "dirty cloth," of which Catherine's mother moans, but also by these deep concepts of inwardness, negation, renunciation and asceticism. What merits attention is that Samar's limited and incomplete knowledge of the Western world intensifies his yearning for comprehension and integration with this foreign milieu. Samar aspired to perceive Benares through the lens of Catherine's perspective. Conversely, Westerners' incomplete knowledge tended to breed denigration and essentialism. Samar's desire to imitate or mimic the West and his penchant for flaunting his knowledge of European texts represents the desire for, what I would call (improvising on Fanon's concept of denegrification (83)) de-Indianization. Samar's is not Bhabha's (1984) strategic and ambivalent "mimicry" for the purpose of resistance but an "unconscious wish" i.e. the "wish to be white" (Fanon 74). Dallmayr (1996) observes that "[s]ometimes (perhaps quite frequently), the hegemonic culture holds a powerful attraction for the subordinate groups eager to gain social acceptance or recognition…" (17). What becomes amply clear here is that even though colonialism has ended, decolonization is yet an "unfinished project." The East continues to experience an inferiority complex and the West continues to see itself as superior. Under such circumstances, when inequality looms large, an East-West encounter is bound to result in failure. According to Robert Park and Ernest Burgess, assimilation may be seen as "a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire memories, sentiments and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated by them in a common cultural life" (Dallmayr 1996, 14). In Mishra's *Romantics*, the relationship between India and the West betrays any form of "assimilation," "fusion," or "common cultural life" is never possible. Not only was Samar eager to be inducted into the Western world, but Anand too was eagerly waiting to move to Paris along with Catherine. Samar explains:

> …he [Anand] spoke of this [about his going to Paris] with the curious serenity that I had seen come over him, the serenity that came from his belief that with Catherine by his side, things could not but turn out well for him. Paris had become for him a locus of several desires. He spoke solemnly about the visit as expanding the narrow vision he had inherited from his rustic background; he spoke with childlike enthusiasm about the sold-out concerts he would give, the best-selling recordings he would make. (61)

Anand saw his entry into the Western world as a way of expanding the "narrow vision" which India has given him, which his "rustic background" has given him only to be frustrated at the end when neither the Western world accepts him nor his beloved, Catherine, who rejects him both due his lost prospect in life as well as her sexual wantonness. What is more interesting is that never in the novel is Catherine's promiscuity described as negative. Miss West at the end of the novel just casually mentions, "[h]er boyfriends kept changing," (272) as if it was a common culture of the Western world, whereas both Samar and Anand were "stuck" (273). Miss West says,

> His [Anand's] love for Catherine, his time in Paris: this was the greatest thing that could ever happen to him. He only had his past and was trapped by it. Catherine could move on but he was stuck. (273)

A profound divide exists between the Indian conception of love and sexuality and the Western understanding of these concepts. The palpable chasm in effective communication between Eastern and Western cultures originates from the fundamentally disparate philosophical foundations that

underpin their perceptions of love and life. Samar and Catherine, the principal characters in this narrative, epitomize the values of their respective societies but Samar departs from his own background and aspires to get integrated into the other culture. In Samar's case, the physical aspect of love is intimately connected to the emotional aspect of it. It is for this reason that after making love to Catherine, Samar repeatedly asks himself "Is this love" (136)? Whereas in the case of Catherine, the carnal and the affective dimensions of love are independent of each other. This allowed her to engage in physical intimacy with Samar, only to appear emotionally distant and distinct the following day, all the while openly professing her love for Anand without guilt (136).

> We must not let Anand know what happened last night. He will not be able to deal with it. It would crush him, and I can't let that happen. I feel responsible for him. I love him too, you know. (139)

Upon their return to Benares from Mussoorie, a profound sense of guilt overwhelmed Samar as he beheld Anand sleeping on the floor. In stark contrast, Catherine, having refreshed herself from the extended journey, displayed eager interest as she perused photographs of her friends captured during their time in Benares, which Anand presented during tea time. Catherine's apparent nonchalance regarding her own infidelity only served to exacerbate Samar's inner turmoil concerning their relationship. Upon their arrival in Benares, Catherine swiftly and seamlessly resumed her former role alongside Anand. This marked a conspicuous deviation from her conduct on the night at Kapli, an indelible memory that had left an enduring impact on Samar. Samar found himself grappling with the disconcerting notion that perhaps Catherine's relationship with him had been relegated to the realm of "inconsequential experiences" (151), a "minor distraction" akin to her dalliances with numerous other men. These liaisons, Samar reasoned, may have served as a means for Catherine to escape what she perceived as the emotional aridity that had characterized her upbringing. Whenever Catherine mentioned Anand, Samar harbored a profound sense of indignation. It gradually dawned on Samar that Catherine's life preceding her arrival in Benares held a more profound sway over her, and the persona marked by ostensibly ordinary concerns assumed greater authenticity and tangibility than the individual who had bestowed upon him the gifts of tenderness and happiness.

Samar found in Faubert's book *Sentimental Education* something reflecting his own condition. His own thwarted love for Catherine is reflected in the novel's depiction of "ambitious provincial's tryst with metropolitan glamour and disillusion full of subtle satisfaction. He could sense his similarity with the novel's protagonist Frederic Moreau in his own "large, passionate, but imprecise longings, his indecisiveness, his aimlessness, his self-contempt," in his "love affair that go nowhere, of artistic and literary ambitions that dwindle and then fade altogether, of lives that have to reconcile themselves to a slow, steady shrinking of horizon… Something of Hindu fatalism seemed to come off its pages, a sense of life adrift and futility and illusion…" (155). Flaubert's novel indirectly comments on the "futility and illusion" of Samar's desire for Catherine and of the possibility of East-West dialogue. As he came to know of his father's illness through a letter from Pondicherry, he decided to leave Benares; though distressed at the thought of separating from Catherine, he thought that it would put "an end to a time of futility and unhappiness" (179). Yet, even during his sojourn in Pondicherry while awaiting Catherine's promised letter, Samar's thoughts remained consumed by her. When Catherine's missive finally arrived, its contents proved ironic, for it primarily recounted her frustration regarding her physical involvement with Samar. Paradoxically, she lamented their "mischievous adventure" as nothing more than an "instant gratification" (210). However, it is worth noting that Catherine herself later parted ways with Anand. She went on to engage in relationships with an Algerian film maker and, ultimately, a stockbroker, with whom she planned to wed. While Catherine's romantic partners came and went, both Anand and Samar remained ensconced within the confines of her memories. For Samar,

> the poisoned past that for many years never left my side, that first clung to me on those aimless travels across the country… the past that scratched old wounds on serene mornings in high mountain valleys

> and among the sullen ruins of remote monasteries, the past that long after I settled in Dharamshala and began to heal, pursued me into innumerable exhausting dreams (270-271)

In conclusion, Pankaj Mishra's novel *The Romantics* intricately weaves together the themes of cultural dissonance, unfulfilled desires, and the clash of Eastern and Western values. The world which "fascinated" him "endlessly," the world which appeared "richer and more fulfilled," the world which he tried to "impress," Catherine being the "central force which illuminate[d]" him, gradually turns into a world which is "exhausting" and "poisonous" generating "illusion," "futility," "unhappiness," and "self-contempt." Through the experiences of its characters, particularly Samar, Catherine, and Anand, the novel offers readers a nuanced exploration of the challenges inherent in navigating the complex terrain of cultural differences. The traditional, restrained, rooted and religious background of Samar's life is in no way compatible with the bohemian, global, non-religious and to some extent uncontrolled and wanton life of Catherine. Samar understood this later but his failure of relationship with Catherine left some indelible marks in his heart. Anand too was in the same situation. The unempathetic understanding of Indian notions of love, life, family and religion is bound to end up in frustration for both sides. Mishra's novel reveals in a poignant way the continuing chasm between the East and the West even after the end of colonialism. Ultimately, *The Romantics* is a nuanced portrayal of the limitations of cross-cultural understanding and the enduring relevance of cultural dissonance in an interconnected world. It prompts readers to contemplate the complexities of desire, identity, and the elusive quest for belonging in a world where East and West continue to intersect and collide.

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