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The Production Of Space In Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics*

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Abstract:

Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics* portrays the city of Banaras (Varanasi) ,not merely as a backdrop but as a dynamic socio-political and emotional protagonist in its own right. This paper explores the novel's spatial imagination, arguing that Banaras in *The Romantics* is a site of profound contradictions—sacred yet profane, traditional yet modern—shaping and reflecting the identities and desires of those who inhabit it. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's theory of socially produced space (his spatial triad of perceived, conceived, and lived space), Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia (spaces of otherness where contradictory facets coincide), Edward Soja's concept of thirdspace (the hybrid, conflictual space where physical and mental realms intersect), and Victor Turner's idea of liminality (the state of in-betweenness and threshold), the analysis demonstrates how Mishra's characters engage with Banaras in markedly different ways. Streets, ghats, rooftops, cafés, temples, colonial bungalows, and libraries become charged spaces that reveal collisions of caste and class, tradition and global modernity, memory and aspiration. Banaras emerges as an **active force** in the narrative—its perceived physical form, conceived mythos, and lived experiences profoundly influence characters like the young Brahmin narrator Samar, the Western seekers (Miss West, Catherine, Debbie, Mark), and locals like Rajesh and Anand. Ultimately, the city's heterotopic contradictions and liminal spaces generate in-between identities, exposing how spatial access and movement are linked to social inclusion or alienation. All the while, space in *The Romantics* is shown to shape and subvert notions of self, belonging, and cultural meaning.

Index terms: Third space, Liminality, Heterotopia, Perceived Space, conceived Space, Lived Space.

Introduction:

Banaras, one of the world's oldest cities and the holiest site in Hindu pilgrimage, occupies a central, paradoxical role in *The Romantics*. Mishra's novel, set in the 1990s, captures a city "caught between tradition and modernity, decay and aspiration, local life and global influence". Renowned as *Kashi* (the city of light and learning) and *Benares*, this urban space is at once a **sacred center** and a thriving, chaotic town in a rapidly changing India. Mishra introduces Banaras through Samar's eyes as a place transformed: "Cut-price 'guest houses' for Japanese tourists and German pastry shops now line the riverfront... The new middle-class prosperity of India has at last come to Banaras. This holiest of pilgrimage sites... has grown into a noisy little commercial town" (Mishra 3). In these opening lines, the novel juxtaposes **spiritual geography** with encroaching modern commerce, highlighting the city's internal **heterotopia** – a single space containing starkly contradictory elements (the sacred riverfront alongside tourist kitsch and capitalist enterprise). Michel Foucault's concept of *heterotopia* is apt here: Banaras functions as a space of otherness where "all the other real sites... are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 24). The city's sacred ghats and temples coexist with profane marketplaces and hotels, and ancient rituals are framed by the buzz of contemporary life. Banaras in *The Romantics* is thus not a static backdrop but a **living palimpsest** of meanings and power structures, where every alleyway or riverside vista carries layered significations.

Henri Lefebvre famously asserts that "urban space is political; it is a product of social actions and at the same time a means of control and domination" (Lefebvre 34). This theoretical lens is central to understanding *The Romantics*. Lefebvre's spatial triad—**perceived space** (physical, sensory space), **conceived space** (space as imagined or planned by social forces), and **lived space** (the space of everyday experience and emotion)—provides a vocabulary for Mishra's Banaras. The novel continually shifts between these registers. Banaras is presented as **perceived space** through rich descriptions of its ghats, labyrinthine lanes, and weathered architecture; it is also **conceived space**, shaped by ideologies (religious sanctity, nationalist histories, or global tourism); and crucially it is **lived space**, saturated with personal memories, yearnings, and conflicts of the characters. Robert T. Tally Jr. notes that "the urban landscape is always ideological, always already shaped by economic, political, and cultural forces that influence how space is organized and lived" (Tally 77). Mishra's Banaras exemplifies this: the city's layout and locales reflect stratifications of caste and class, while also serving as stages for resistance, *liminality*, and transformation. The novel's spatial imagination is therefore inherently socio-political. Banaras becomes a **spatial agent** that actively participates in the narrative, "shaping identity, memories and conflicts". Each character's journey through Banaras is simultaneously a journey through *social space*, where power relations and cultural practices determine who has access to certain areas and under what conditions. By analyzing the novel's key spatial moments—from the **ghats** and **temples** to the **streets, rooftops, cafés**, colonial-era **bungalows**, and academic **libraries**—we can see how *The Romantics* maps a city that produces and contests meaning at every turn. In what follows, spatial theory will be seamlessly embedded into a close reading of the novel, illuminating how Banaras' perceived-conceived-lived dimensions shape the emotional and political consciousness of Mishra's characters.

Literary Analysis and Theoretical Application:

Mishra's narrative presents Banaras as a city full of contradictions, using these contrasts to shape and challenge his characters. The city is described in vivid, sometimes harsh detail. Samar's first experience of Banaras is steeped in sorrow—he arrives as a teenager to perform his mother's last rites, seeing the city through the smoke of funeral pyres and the lens of ritual grief. The ghats (riverfront steps used for cremation and prayers) leave a deep emotional mark on him, their sights and smells entwining Banaras forever with loss in his mind. Years later, when Samar returns as a student, the city feels very different. More hotels and noisy traffic crowd the once quiet alleys; now modernized, Banaras makes him feel "alienated in the changing cityscape." The sacred places that once offered him solace now jar his senses. This dissonance fits Edward Soja's idea of thirdspace—a space where reality (first space) and imagination (second space) mix to form something new (Soja 2). For Samar, Banaras becomes a personal thirdspace where memory, nostalgia, and current reality all collide. His inner emotions (grief, longing, yearning for meaning) blend with the outer world of an ancient city lurching into modernity, creating a space charged with emotional tension. As the narrator notes, Samar's experience shows "a hybrid identity characterized by nostalgia, grief and identity crisis." He stands in a liminal space—caught between past and present, between the world of his orthodox Brahmin upbringing and the pull of a more cosmopolitan, modern India. Although he is a Hindu Brahmin deeply rooted in tradition, he is also an English-educated intellectual lost in the new India. This in-

betweenness reflects Victor Turner's concept of liminality, where a person in transition is "neither here nor there... betwixt and between" (Turner 95). Samar embodies this condition: in Banaras he is neither the dutiful traditional son he once was, nor the worldly urban sophisticate he sometimes longs to be. The city becomes the crucible for this uncertainty, a space where his former sense of self is challenged and reshaped at every turn.

The contrast between different visions of Banaras is clearest in scenes that show how people imagine the city in their own ways. From a rooftop overlooking the Ganges, Samar shares a panoramic view with Miss West, an English scholar living in Banaras. He sees "the brooding city towards the north, the looming cupolas and minarets, the decaying palaces and pillared pavilions" (Mishra 5). This poetic yet decaying vista shows Banaras as a **perceived space**—a city visibly crumbling, where weathered temples and colonial-era palaces reflect a fading grandeur. The melancholy in this view suggests that the city's physical decline symbolizes a loss of past glory and stability. In the same moment, however, Mishra also shows modern life encroaching: hotels, cafes, and even "German pastry shops" (Mishra 3) sprout near the old ghats, bringing tourist comforts into sacred zones. This juxtaposition of ages and influences is very much a heterotopia in Foucault's sense—a place where different layers of time and meaning coexist, like ancient palaces slowly disintegrating amid a living, modern city. Miss West's presence on that rooftop highlights the **conceived space** of Banaras—the city as imagined in her mind. As a foreigner drawn by Banaras's spiritual renown, she initially sees it as an eternal holy city filtered through guidebook clichés and romantic mysticism. She lives in a "tiny room on the roof" (Mishra 5) of an old house, both physically and socially perched on the margins. From this height she spends her days reading and listening to Western classical music, gazing out at the river. To Samar, Miss West at first appears cloaked in *serene melancholy*, as though Banaras were her chosen escape from some private sadness. Her view of the city is colored by a personal quest for peace: in her imagination Banaras is less a real, changing city than a timeless sanctuary for spiritual healing. But living in that small room gradually complicates her idealism. The longer she stays, the more the rooftop becomes a kind of third space where cultures meet and blur: an English woman seeking transcendence and an Indian student haunted by loss share an unlikely in-between world above the city. In their hesitant conversations and shared silences, they form a tentative bond. They don't fully understand each other, but Banaras brings them together in a way that feels both peculiar and meaningful. This intimate rooftop moment shows Mishra subtly deploying spatial theory in narrative. The scene represents Henri Lefebvre's triad of spatial practice: there is the seen city below (perceived space), Miss West's romantic image of it (conceived space), and the lived experience of two people from different cultures encountering each other in that specific place. The rooftop is at once outside everyday society and a part of it—a heterotopic perch removed from the bustle below. It is also a liminal zone of cultural meeting, not fully inside either character's native world. In effect, it resembles what Homi Bhabha describes as an "in-between space," a hybrid third space where new cultural meanings are negotiated.

Miss West is not the only foreigner drawn to Banaras's mystique. She introduces Samar to her eclectic circle of expatriates, each of whom carries their own conceived space of the city. Catherine, Samar's age, from Paris came to Banaras for authenticity and adventure. A rich daughter, she astonishingly embraces the city's "simplicity" by living in a tiny flat with her Indian partner, struggling sitar player Anand. Catherine rebels against her bourgeois upbringing in Banaras, a gorgeous backdrop for her self-styled relationship with Eastern spirituality and art. She wanders temple courtyards and bazaar lanes with enchanted freedom, seeing the city as an extension of her bohemian ideas. Expatriate acquaintance Debbie calls herself a Buddhist-in-training. She visits ashrams and meditation institutes in Banaras and its surroundings to pursue spiritual awakening. Her personal route to nirvana includes the city's ghats and nearby Buddhist locations like Sarnath. Sincere American Ayurvedic student Mark sees Banaras as a living reservoir of old wisdom. Sanskrit scriptures and local vaidyas (healers) are his daily sources, believing the city has holistic truths the West has forgotten. These outsiders—Catherine with her romantic orientalism, Debbie with her spiritual idealism, and Mark with his scholarly reverence—view Banaras as an idea, a spiritual environment that matches their wants. They focus on Ganges temples, sermons, and postcard sunsets rather than garbage, poverty, and electric lines. These immigrants provide Samar a surprising double view of his hometown by sharing their experiences. Samar is intrigued to their cosmopolitan vibe and how they make mundane scenes poetry or exotic. But he also realizes how different their Banaras experience is from his. They live in the same city but have separate mental worlds, unaware of local issues and social norms. Their rooftop parties and café chats create a third space—an international Bohemia in Banaras. East and West interact in this social **lived space** over spiced tea and classical music, fostering cultural intimacy and misunderstandings.

Samar can find the atmosphere enlightening and confusing. At Miss West's impromptu gatherings, he watches Europeans and Americans laugh and talk about karma and art from a corner, wondering how to join in. These scenes show Banaras' *heteroglossia*—many voices and worldviews. Samar's sadness and yearning clash with his foreign friends' idealistic notions of the city. Character emotions depend on their spatial experience. Each layer enhances Banaras's *thirdspace* character as a physical and imagined, local and global, ancient and ever-changing place.

From lofty rooftops to narrow streets, *The Romantics* does not hide the rough edges of Banaras. If the foreigners often drift above the city's harsher truths, Samar cannot avoid them. His daily walks as a poor student reveal how uneven and divided the city is, especially between rich and poor areas. On his long route to Banaras Hindu University (BHU), he navigates congested bazaars and neglected neighborhoods. In early mornings, the alleys are nearly empty and the houses "sunk in a blue haze," but the calm is deceptive. "Rubbish lay in uneven mounds... deposited by an overflowing open drain. After every twenty metres or so, a fresh stench hung in the air" (Mishra 20). This raw, visceral picture is Banaras as **perceived space** in the most literal sense: the sight and smell of poverty confronting Samar at every step. It is a far cry from the romantic postcard image of a holy city that Catherine or Debbie might cherish. Just beyond these slums, however, lies the sprawling campus of BHU, with its groomed lawns and grand facades. The university's architecture is described as a "mishmash of neo-Victorian and Hindu-Islamic styles: cupolas, arcades, colonnaded balconies... castellated towers" (Mishra 76). This planned, hybrid design represents a **conceived space** of its own—an ideal of national pride and learning envisioned by figures like Madan Mohan Malaviya, who helped found the university. Inside the campus gates, Banaras suddenly looks orderly, academic, even genteel. For Samar, stepping into BHU's grounds feels almost like entering a separate pocket of the city, one shaped by high-minded ideology and resources. The neat paths and libraries of the university stand in sharp contrast to the chaotic, dirty streets just outside. Lefebvre's theory helps explain this divide: the university, a symbol of state power and elite culture, asserts a kind of spatial dominance, insulating itself from the surrounding disorder. Banaras thus appears as a divided city, its spaces stratified by class and caste. The wealthy and educated can remain in enclaves of relative comfort—whether the colonial-era halls of a university or the upscale cafes cropping up for tourists—while the poor dwell in crumbling neighborhoods that the city's development has passed by. Even the simple matter of transportation reveals these inequalities. Samar cannot afford a bus or rickshaw, so he must walk for miles (Mishra 20), exposing himself to every uneven cobblestone and foul odor along the way. In contrast, his expatriate friends or wealthier classmates, with money in their pockets, can easily bypass much of this discomfort—they hire cycle-rickshaws or catch rides, skimming over the city's surface without having to wade through its muck. Space in Banaras is shown to be not just a physical backdrop but a social product, charged with politics and privilege. The layout of the city reflects who holds power and who is excluded: clean parks and broad avenues in some quarters, open sewers and piled trash in others. The novel makes it clear that these geographies of inequality are not accidental. They have been **socially produced and politically charged**, proving Lefebvre's point that urban space always encodes relations of power. Samar experiences this truth on an everyday level—he literally feels it under his worn shoes—while his Western companions remain only dimly aware of the reality he lives in.

Rajesh, an older student and previous activist, illuminates Banaras' political and intellectual shadows. Rajesh symbolizes "Banaras' waning political history," the narrator says. Though no longer in student unions, Rajesh evokes a bygone protest era. A dusty revolver found in a drawer in his cramped campus room suggests a young fascination with dramatic change. The peeling posters on the wall, the Urdu poetry books on his shelf, and the air seem to pulse with stories of hope and disillusionment in his humble room as a **lived space**. Rajesh in the novel reminds us that Banaras has been a spiritual center and a hub of political thinking and protest. He could captivate younger students with old protest and principle stories at quiet tea stalls and under Banyan trees at twilight. The story indicates that opposition and debate can thrive in unlikely places, reflecting Michel Foucault's heterotopias, where alternative social regimes survive amid the prevailing one's fractures. Rajesh's small space echoes radical conversations and optimistic ambitions. He is no longer a leader of guys or just another student on campus. Younger pupils revere him; "they feel safe around him" (Mishra n.pag.), gathering in his room for guidance and continuity with a period they never knew. History continues in space through Rajesh. As a living city, Banaras' streets and buildings retain layers of character. Banaras has temples and religious rites, but also turbulence and intellectual ferment. The city is a site of prayer, protest, faith, and ideas. Rajesh links these strata by humming a revolutionary Hindi song while hearing morning ghat chants. Rajesh, like Banaras, is torn between his fiery past and his resignation. His

experience softly shows that identity in Banaras is constantly negotiated and remade via geography and journey. Each character's interaction with Banaras shows this transformation. In the same city, Samar's sad ghats and intellectual isolation, Miss West's rooftop reveries, Catherine's romantic getaway, and Rajesh's remembered battlegrounds coexist. Mishra depicts Banaras as a patchwork of thirdspaces that tries and transforms its inhabitants. Space and self are intertwined in *The Romantics*, as each character discovers who they are (and are not) in the hallowed, untamed maze of Banaras.

Character-Based Spatial Readings:

Each major character in *The Romantics* interacts with Banaras in their own unique way, showing how space and identity shape each other. For Samar, the narrator, Banaras becomes both a safe place and a testing ground. He comes to the city hoping to continue the “idle, bookish life” he lived in Allahabad (Mishra 75), but instead finds “a different world” that brings out “new emotions” and makes him face “old inadequacies” (Mishra 75). His idea of Banaras as a peaceful place for study soon breaks down when real life interrupts. University life pulls him into politics and complex relationships, far beyond the quiet academic life he imagined. He sees violent protests and police crackdowns on campus, which destroy his view of the university—and Banaras itself—as calm and intellectual (Mishra 149). These events turn the university into a space full of conflict, reflecting larger tensions in India. Even casual places like tea stalls are filled with political talk: “More violence had followed while I was away... the talk at chai shops was of more possibility of violence” (Mishra 149). Samar even avoids going back to the university, showing how space can make someone feel pushed out or unwelcome. Banaras no longer feels like a peaceful or spiritual place; instead, it becomes a kind of **thirdspace**—a place of both real conflict and deep emotional unrest, as Edward Soja might describe it. Samar, who is aware of politics but doesn't take part, is forced to confront his own passivity. He is “politically conscious but uninvolved, intellectually active but emotionally abstract”—someone caught between action and escape. Banaras becomes what Homi Bhabha would call an “in-between” space, where Samar feels like he belongs nowhere. He drifts between the world of Hindu traditions (like the ghats), the modern academic world, and his foreign friends' circle—without fitting into any of them. This feeling of being in-between becomes the emotional heart of the novel.

Other characters, especially the Western ones, see Banaras very differently, showing how culture affects how people use and understand space. Miss West, an English scholar of Indian studies, sees Banaras as a place full of ancient wisdom and spiritual meaning. For her, the city is a kind of imagined safe space, where she can escape her personal struggles. But in reality, her life is limited to a simple guesthouse and her books. Through Samar's eyes, the novel shows that she is an outsider. She lives on a rooftop, both physically and socially removed, and her view of the city is shaped by her studies and her friendship with Samar. Her regular boat rides on the Ganges show her admiration for the city's beauty and sacred nature. Yet, even she can't escape Banaras's contradictions. During one boat ride, Miss West casually greets the boatman by name (Mishra 38). As a foreigner, she doesn't follow the same social rules that Samar does. For her, talking to a lower-caste man is easy. But for Samar, a Brahmin, caste and class make him uncomfortable. “The only common vocabulary... was of the service he offered” (Mishra 38). This moment highlights a major point: Miss West, because of her outsider status, can move through Banaras more freely than Samar. She experiences the city as a **lived space** without the same social restrictions. In contrast, Samar is shaped by the **conceived space** of caste norms that limit how he acts. On the boat, the **perceived space** is the peaceful river and ghats at sunset; the **conceived space** is the social rule about caste; the **lived space** is the tension between Samar's discomfort, Miss West's ease, and the subtle energy between all three people. This simple outing shows how deeply social background changes how people experience space.

Catherine, a young woman from France, brings a different outsider view. Unlike Miss West, who is serious and academic, Catherine is free-spirited and idealistic. She wants to live simply in Banaras with her Indian boyfriend, Anand, as a way of rejecting the materialism of the West. She says, “Really, I would like to live as simply as possible in India. We can sleep on the floor; we can do without a fridge, washing machine...” (Mishra 45). Catherine sees India as spiritually pure, free from the problems of Western life. Her desire to live simply shows a **conceived space**—a romantic idea of India. She hopes to create a **thirdspace identity**, blending her Western background with a spiritual Indian lifestyle. But the novel gently criticizes her. When her mother visits and is shocked by the poor living conditions, Catherine says, “this is the way people live in India, and you have to do the same when you are here” (Mishra 47). Her response shows both her commitment and her narrow view—that India must be lived in a certain way. Catherine chooses a hard life, but that choice itself comes from privilege. Eventually, outside pressures—family, discomfort—lead her to

leave. She cannot fully belong to Banaras. Her time there is real but short, showing that foreign experiences in the city, while powerful, are often temporary. Her story raises the question: is Banaras truly her home, or just a stage for her to act out a fantasy of spiritual simplicity? The novel leaves this open, but her departure suggests that Banaras quietly refuses full absorption into her ideal.

Debbie, another Western character, takes the opposite approach. She sees Banaras not as spiritual, but as a place for leisure. *“She wants to do nothing in Banaras but sunbathe and get a great tan, and then... convert to Buddhism. It doesn't make sense,”* Miss West says, frustrated (Mishra 40). Debbie uses the ghats not for rituals, but as a spot to relax—like a beach. For locals, these riverfront steps are sacred places for prayer, cremation, and community. For Debbie, they're just a fun background for a holiday. This shows how space means different things to different people. Debbie treats Banaras like a fantasy world that offers quick spiritual rewards without understanding its culture. Using Foucault's idea of **heterotopia**, Debbie turns Banaras into a place of illusion, projecting her own fantasies while ignoring the real life of the city. Her shallow view becomes almost a joke—she doesn't belong to Banaras or her home culture, creating an empty thirdspace of tourism. Through her, the novel criticizes how the West often turns Eastern places into tourist products. Debbie has the freedom to come and go, while locals live with Banaras every day. She physically occupies the ghats, but not culturally, showing how privilege allows some to take from a space without giving anything back.

Mark, an older foreigner, offers another viewpoint. He loves India for its spirituality and depth, things he believes the West lacks. For Mark, Banaras is *“unique and pure”*, a place of healing and peace. But he mostly watches, not participates. He avoids the problems of the city—caste, poverty, politics—and instead clings to an ideal version. He picks and chooses parts of Banaras that match his beliefs and ignores the rest. This places him in a **thirdspace**: he's left the West but doesn't really belong in India either. Mark lives in a large, comfortable home where other foreigners gather (Mishra 58). This home becomes a kind of **heterotopia**—a Western space inside Banaras, separate from Indian life. When Samar visits for a party, he feels the gap between this world and his own life as a student. He says, *“the great chasm between where I was... among foreigners who fascinated me endlessly – and the life I led at the University”* (Mishra 58). Mark's space feels colonial—like a leftover from British rule—and separate from daily Banaras. Samar sees that the worries of students and locals mean little inside Mark's world. It's a space where the West lives inside the East but on its own terms. This fits Bhabha's idea of **cultural hybridity**, but it's one-sided: the foreigners enjoy comfort and culture without dealing with the city's problems. Samar, who is both drawn to this world and uncomfortable in it, shows **liminality** in its most personal form. He's in between—East and West, belonging and not belonging.

Samar's journey in Banaras comes full circle as the novel ends. The city that once excited him now makes him feel empty. After Catherine leaves, Samar feels heartbroken and lost. Mishra uses the setting to show this emotion. *“I avoided the alleys, whose bright liveliness... depressed me”*, Samar says, noting the men chatting, playing games, and the music from windows (Mishra 152). These once-joyful scenes now feel painful. The alleys, once inviting, now seem to mock his sadness. This is another example of **thirdspace**—where physical space and emotional pain blend. The city reflects Samar's grief. In this way, Banaras becomes a **lived space** filled with memory, where feelings shape how space is seen. Samar prepares to leave the city to escape the *“futility and unhappiness”* he now feels (Mishra 179). He is torn—sad to leave Catherine, but also eager to move on (Mishra 179). In a powerful scene, he walks along the ghats at dawn and sees *“gossiping boatmen, children playing, old men gazing at the river...”*, but feels distant from it all: *“I was already remote from them”* (Mishra 179). This shows the **heterotopic** nature of Banaras: life and death, joy and grief, all exist side by side. But for Samar, it no longer feels real. The city that once changed him now feels like a dream. He's still there physically, but mentally already gone. He's in a **liminal space**—neither fully part of Banaras nor fully free from it. In the end, Samar, like many others in the novel, realizes that Banaras didn't give him peace or answers. It only held up a mirror, showing him his own hopes and flaws. And like the others, he cannot stay. Banaras, as the great **heterotopia**, offers no final belonging—only reflection.

Conclusion:

The Romantics portray Banaras as a multifaceted place. It is more than a backdrop—it defines the characters' identity and is often unsettling. Pankaj Mishra uses **Henri Lefebvre's** spatial triad to show Banaras in all its complexity: as a city vividly **perceived** through ghats and gullies; as a space **conceived** through invisible power systems—caste, class, and institutional design; and as a deeply lived space full of personal memories, longing, and disillusionment. Every aspect of Banaras has emotion, from balconies where characters ponder on their lives to alleys full of nostalgia or alienation. This view is enhanced by **Michel Foucault's** heterotopia. Banaras is sacred and profane, ancient and modern, a location of funeral rituals and spiritual longing, a tourist destination, and a worldwide capitalist hub. These **inconsistencies** give the city its weird, seductive power—a location that can be everything at once, making it the perfect theater for characters stuck between cultures, beliefs, and selves. Pankaj Mishra's Banaras embodies **Edward Soja's thirdspace**. In the novel, characters roam between **reality and imagination, familiar and exotic, who they are and who they want to be. For them**, Banaras is a **thirdspace** where identities change via interaction, emotion, and conflict. **Hybrid identities** are formed and broken here.

Banaras, like **Victor Turner's** liminality, is a threshold where characters search for purpose or selfhood yet find themselves in-between. All the characters, including Samar, the intellectual but emotionally detached narrator, and the **Western searchers** Miss West, Catherine, and Mark, are **in-between**. The city promises change but frequently brings confusion, heartache, or incompleteness. Most leave unanswered. Subtly, the story shows that space is never neutral—it is affected by how **people live**, fantasize, and move through it. *The Romantics'* Banaras is shaped by **caste, class, and privilege**. Who feels at home, speaks freely, and remains silent or unseen depends on social positioning as well as personal decision. Space and belonging become codes of **inclusion and exclusion**. By weaving all these **spatial realities** into a quiet tale that pulses with irony and depth, Mishra shines. The city becomes a **character**, luring individuals with spiritual or intellectual clarity but often breaking them. Banaras reflects and wounds Samar, revealing his deepest longings and shortcomings. The Romantics depict Banaras as a city of **contradiction and struggle, moving beyond idealized** depictions of the “eternal city” to a living, troubled, and thoroughly human realm. Characters seek meaning and lose themselves in this volatile, liminal setting. Thus, Mishra's work is a remarkable meditation on how complex space may form our **tales and selves**.

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