"SEARCHING FOR THE TRUTH" : CANDLES AND ROSES

Romen Basu's fifth novel, Candles and Roses, (1978), is distinct from his earlier novels in that it deals with the theme of East-West encounter in the realms of both human relationships and ideas in an amplified manner. For this, the author chooses the framework of 'the ancient triangle': two women and a man. Monique, a Parisian, represents the West while Pramila from Calcutta represents the East and Samir Sen, the central male figure, also an Indian, stands at the crossroads. He finally chooses to abide by the Eastern values of life and overcomes the attraction of the West. The novel is an affirmation of the Indian, Hindu view of life and succeeds in glorifying the essence of Indian womanhood.

The novel is essentially a double story of romance of the hero, Samir Sen. He is a civil servant in an international organisation in Paris. He is 'obsessed with beauty.' One day he goes for shopping where he meets Monique, who is a stunning beauty. He is drawn towards her. He goes to Galerie de Paris, where she is an employee, to see her again. He pursues her in spite of her repeated efforts to brush him off. In their subsequent meetings they reveal to each other their backgrounds. Monique tells of her love-affair with Marco, a Yugoslav peasant, and how it snapped later. Samir tells her about his marriage with Pramila and the role of dowry in it. Monique decides to avoid
Samir for fear of facing a second disappointment in life, but Samir persuades her to listen to the other part of his story after his marriage with Pramila. He had no sexual pleasure with her because "she was afraid. She thought it unnecessary and found it unclean."¹ Three months after their introduction to each other, Samir and Monique are physically united. She is also impressed by his knowledge of the Hindu philosophy. She leaves her parents and lives in a separate apartment. Meanwhile, Samir's family in Calcutta comes to know of his affair with Monique. It is decided to send Pramila to join her husband in Paris. Pramila sets out though she does not want to come in the way of Samir's enjoyment. Samir informs Monique of Pramila's arrival. Monique decides to do away with Samir. Again, it is Samir who struggles to get close to her. Monique advises him to understand Pramila. She refuses to have a platonic relationship with him. Pramila is very traditional and adheres to her convictions. She tries her best to keep herself away from him. Samir tries to reform her outlook. He asks her to learn music and French. He wants her to go out alone for shopping. Living together brings them closer together. Pramila is pregnant. She wants to return to India to attend her friend's wedding. Samir says he cannot accompany her because he has signed for another two years. Monique feels jealous of Samir and Pramila shopping together. She finds Pramila beautiful. She is

¹. Romen Basu, Candles and Roses (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1978), p. 37. All further references are to this edition and the page numbers will be given parenthetically at the end of the quotations.
disillusioned. She thinks Pramila is on a sacred pedestal. She wants to practise 'Yoga' to achieve detachment and find a balance between the material and the spiritual and to know the secret of Pramila's inner serenity. Pramila's convalescence after the miscarriage brings Samir closer to her. Monique interviews Pramila in the guise of a reporter. She feels she is clear as to where she should begin the search for happiness. She leaves Samir for good. Samir realizes from Pramila that "beauty of the soul surpasses all else." (p. 204).

The plot of the novel is constructed in such a way as to highlight 'the juxtaposition as well as the contraposition' of the values of East and West in social, romantic and philosophic aspects. Apart from the main plot consisting of the triangular love-story, there are three episodes in the novel, namely, Samir's dowry-marriage with Pramila, Monique's love-affair with Marco, and the events leading to Monique's abortion when she was fifteen. These episodes are brought in terms of recollections at appropriate contexts and not as a part of the action of the novel. Further, the scene of action in the novel is Paris except in Chapter 15 where the scene is shifted to Calcutta.

It may also be noted that, as a part of the theme, Romen Basu goes deeply into some of the elusive yet simple meanings of Hinduism. The discussions on art, philosophy and religion are used "never ponderously, always unobtrusively, heightening and not obstructing the flow of the story." But, in some places, they do

remain a patch work rather than an integral part of the plot. For instance, the discussion on liberation appears to be dragged on between Samir and Monique (pp. 79-81). Similarly, the discussion on karma (pp. 93) and the indestructibility of spirit (p. 94) appears to be out of context. At times, certain ideas are repeated or overlapped inadvertently. Samir tells Monique:

When a person dies after attaining self-knowledge, he does not have to go to another plane of existence. He is not born again (p. 17).

He speaks similarly in another context:

But once one has attained true liberation, has become one with the universe, we believe that person will never to reborn, that his search is over (p. 55).

Similarly, Samir asks Premila:

"When you pray, what do you ask from God?"
"Nothing."

A similar conversation between them can be noticed elsewhere in the novel.

"What has God done for you for all that praying?"
"I make no demands on Him." (p. 135)

Interestingly, there is a repetition of dialogue between Samir and Monique:

"I don't know how I will live without you," she cried.
"Who says you will?" (p. 123)
At the end of chapter twenty we see this:

"I don't know how I will live without you."
"Who says you will?" (p. 134).

Also, one agrees with the view that "if Sen had made philosophic interests a little deeper and the speeches of characters a little natural, the novel would have reached better heights." 3

_Candles and Roses_ is essentially a novel of character. In a novel of character, "the characters are not conceived as parts of the plot; on the contrary they exist independently, and the action is subservient to them." 4 The characters are not fitted into a story. Instead, a story is arranged so that the characters emerge. And the characters emerge from a chronological account of a group of events and the characters' reaction to those events. The fictional focus is on the three characters -- Samir, Pramila and Monique as they are entangled in a triangular relationship. A reviewer comments:

All three of these characters are immensely likeable; all, in Mr. Basu's skilful hands, come warmly to life; and we, the readers, become engrossed in the outcome of their situation. We are absorbed, not because we agonize for the triumph of one or the defeat of another, but because we understand and become very attached to all three, and tremble lest someone get hurt. 5


Romen Basu presents the character of Samir through the relationship with Monique on the one hand and with Pramila on the other. Besides being a well-paid official, Samir Sen is "quite a scholar of Hinduism" (p. 57). He is very much a product of his native land. He says: "I have tried to learn everything the West has to offer, but my comfort comes from my own inner faith that I learned as a child" (p. 16). His relationship with Monique may be observed in three phases. In the first phase, he is seen in 'passionate admiration' for Monique. "He seemed to read in her expression an inner strength and harmony that softened the sensual appeal of her beauty. It was a face every man dreams of worshipping." (p. 3). "He was sure he would find a loving and giving human being" in her (p. 20). He tries repeatedly to get in touch with her. His dowry marriage is a shocking news to her. "Everyone in his family urged him to marry -- to solve his problems with a rich father-in-law. The thought revolted him at first, then it became more and more attractive." (p. 33). He had to decide between marrying a pretty girl or one with a higher dowry. Finally he decided on the dowry. Monique expresses her aversion to his narration:

Monique felt sick inside. Nothing she had ever heard had disgusted her as much .... she wanted more than anything to end the conversation and never see Samir again. Samir could tell she despised him (p. 34).

Having been disappointed in her affair with Marco, Monique is "not in the mood for romance." (p. 21). She thinks of him only as her
Indian philosopher friend. But, she finally yields to his tenacity, sincerity and lust-free behaviour. In the second phase, they are physically united. Samir establishes a 'semi-domestic relationship' with her after she goes to live in a separate apartment. In other words, Samir's life with Monique symbolizes "indications of the soul caught in its rose-mesh ever pulled to the earth." 6

With the arrival of Pramila to Paris, Samir's relationship with Monique enters the third phase. It should be said to the credit of Monique that it is she who encourages Samir to make amends to Pramila. When, referring to Pramila, he says "I can't live like a stranger with someone all my life" (p. 112), Monique tells him:

Why should you be a stranger to your wife? Have you tried to understand her? Now that it's just the two of you away from that circus tent in Calcutta, why don't you try? (p. 112).

Monique also tells him that Pramila "could be appealing, once you overcome your obsession with beauty." (p. 147). While Samir begins to take more interest in Pramila, he intends to have 'platonic relationship' with Monique which she despises. At this stage, one finds in Samir an inner craving for liberation, in other words, a search for Truth through the experience of the sensual world. The following conversation between Pramila and Samir is a pointer to this. Pramila says:

"There are so many paths to the truth, isn't it?"
"Yes, but one can only find out the absolute proof that life is above thought through experience."

"Maybe some day you will find out that enjoyment of food and wine and physical pleasures is not the road to your salvation."

"Realisation of the self is the ultimate preparedness," Samir said.

"Perhaps that is true for Samir, Pramila thought. Perhaps experience of the sensual world was a purifying fire for her husband. Had she not said herself: "There are so many paths to the truth."

(p. 137).

"There are two paths before him, the West and the East, symbolized by Monique and Pramila. He is wedded to the East but the West attracts him. He has to overcome this attraction. Only then will he find true liberation." 7

Living together with Pramila brings a change in Samir's attitude to her. He begins to see the positive side of her personality -- her beauty, orthodoxy, naivety, undesiring devotion to God and, above all, her non-interference in his private life. Thus, "the hero turns to a second line of romance -- less tempestuous, more understanding and less demanding, sublime even when sensuous." 8

He stays at home with her, cancelling his appointment with Monique


on the Janmastami festival day. Pramila's pregnancy is a positive sign of his reconciliation with her. The period of convalescence after her miscarriage brings them closer together. He chooses to stand by Pramila realizing his leanings following Monique's decision to part with him for good. Thus, Samir "proves to us the Hindu makings of his soul, by making the right choice between Shreyas (good) and the Preyas (pleasant). He attains the wisdom that "beauty of the soul surpasses all else." But, there appear to be some contradictions in the portrayal of Samir's character. First, his dowry marriage with Pramila is unconvincing. A reviewer comments: "how Samir with very modern ideas had agreed to marry one he had not seen before or who is not pretty beats the reader .... Romen Basu through his characterisation of Samir Sen reveals once again that the Indian male is surprisingly modern or conservative as per his convenience." Second, granting that Samir is the author's mouthpiece to expound the concepts of Hindu philosophy such as the Hindu attitude to suffering, liberation, meditation, karma, religion, God, and the Hindu pantheism, one feels that "the hero talks more than what he practises" since "Hinduism is more a matter of experience than exposition." For instance, while he is

sharing bed with Monique, he speaks of liberation: "If a man is ruled by his body he can never be free." (p. 93). Third, his proposal to Monique for a 'platonic relationship' goes against the kind of relationship he has had and promised so far. It smacks of opportunism and escapism. He thinks that Monique should realise that "he wanted more than a clandestine sexual relationship" (p. 122). He says that they "don't need a sexual relationship." They can "remain friends" (p. 123). But, it is not the kind of relationship Monique expects. She says:

I want to share a home with a man. I want to depend on him as much as he'd depend on me. I cannot live in a relationship like ours when I never know if you will have to cancel our arrangements." (p. 178).

She wants a 'lover' while he wants to be a friend. Hence, their relationship is bound to break up.

The characters of Pramila and Monique are best studied in contrast. Pramila's character is kept at a low-key and underplayed. Pramila is introduced to the readers through Samir's recollections of his marriage with her and its subsequent break-up. The first reference to her is when he tells Monique about her:

I am sworn to someone 'till death do us part! Yet there is nothing between us. She lives only for God. I have nothing to give, she has nothing to receive (p. 31).
Samir recalls that

She was so thin, she was really skinny. Her stringy hair seemed to be padded, her nose was a little crooked, when she smiled shyly, Samir saw her teeth were slightly crossed. (p. 34).

On the other hand, Monique's dazzling beauty appears to him like "a stroke of lightning" (p. 5). By this the author seems to suggest the inner beauty of the Eastern values as opposed to the outer glitter of the Western values.

In spite of his disappointment with her physical appearance, Samir admits to Monique that "Pramila had been brought up with all the virtues expected of a Bengali girl." (p. 37). She was of "incomparable modesty and devotion." (p. 37). Her innocence is transparent. She feels guilty about her parents' deceiving Samir by showing a touched-up photograph of her. For no fault of her, she becomes a victim of her husband's scorn.

Pramila is orthodox in her outlook while Monique is modern. Monique asserts her individuality in leaving her parents to live separately. Pramila is orthodox to the point of bringing water from the Ganges to Paris. At the airport she takes her luggage only after sprinkling the Ganges water on it. Pramila's traditional background has influenced her views on sex. Sex is a 'taboo' for her. This attitude to sex has failed in establishing a meaningful relationship with Samir. On the other hand, she is staunchly religious and that is the source of her inner strength.
Samir tells Monique: "She asked only one thing for herself -- that she be allowed to pray one hour each morning and two hours every evening." (p. 37). She "had insisted on only one thing and that was a corner for her puja room, and on this one thing, she had been very determined." (p. 114). She prays to God with no desires in her heart. She tells Samir:

Nowhere in our religion does it say if you ask, God will give. It says pray. Offer your love to Him and you will find peace. Love is unselfish. Mine and His (p. 115).

This attitude has made Pramila ascetic and stoic. Monique thinks that, perhaps, Pramila "wants to be liberated through asceticism (pp. 79-80) in contrast to Samir's path of experience of the sensual world. Like an ascetic, she practises self-denial and keeps her mind free from desires. On the other hand, Monique lost faith in God and religion first when Marco left her and later when her sister died. She tells Samir: "When God refused my prayers, I called him selfish and mean and I have never been able to believe in Him since." (p. 29). What endear Monique to the readers are her qualities such as rationality, sensitivity, thoughtfulness and intuition. Her mother rightly comments: "you are strong-headed, but your heart is all-giving." (p. 62). She is essentially an extrovert while Pramila is an introvert.

The attitudes of Pramila and Monique towards Samir also reveal their characters. Pramila's attitude to Samir is marked by detachment and non-interference while Monique's attitude is one of
attachment and possessiveness. Pramila is reluctant to go to Paris to be with Samir. She doesn't feel sorry even when she knows that he is flirting with a girl in Paris. She thinks: "If Samir preferred some other woman, he was entitled to it. Why should she be sent to come in his way?" (p. 99). Even after reaching Paris, she decides to live separately and makes no attempt to draw him closer.

On the other hand, Monique is rational and cautious in her attitude to Samir following her failure with Marco. She looks for a sincere lover in him. She does not hesitate to 'cut Samir out of her life, no matter how much it hurt' when she comes to know of his married status. She continues her friendship with him only after getting an assurance that Pramila will 'never' join him and that they 'do not even write to each other.' But Pramila's arrival in Paris disappoints her. She suspects Samir's sincerity. She "could clearly see that the future held nothing but grief for her. He would never get a divorce. He did not even think it mattered" (p. 104). She realizes that Samir has never expressed his love for her:

She told herself that Samir did not really care for her. As a decorative dinner companion, someone to talk to, someone to flatter and drink with, to make love to, yes. But when had he ever told her that he really loved her? Never. He had only talked about her hair, her eyes, liking to be with her. (p. 106).

This is corroborated by Samir as "he tried to convince himself that he only wanted her friendship." (p. 106). When she learns that
Samir and Pramila have become intimate and that Pramila has become pregnant, she decides to do away with him. For Pramila, "love could grow under any circumstances" (p. 162); for Monique, love could grow only when there is reciprocity. She realizes that "she could never love unselfishly, as long as her mind had no control over her emotions." (p. 171).

While both Pramila and Monique have undergone suffering, Monique's life is steeped in misfortune. Her affair with Marco and later with Samir have not fulfilled her aspirations. Samir thinks of her:

Was Monique one of those people born to suffer? In spite of her beauty and charm, forever destined to be disappointed in life? (p. 176).

Pramila too has suffered. But, like a true Indian, she "acquires inner strength to overcome suffering." She "endures afflictions without complaining." (p. 133). She looks at her misfortunes from a larger perspective. Indians "feel the creator made the world with good and evil purposely. ... Without evil there could be no more turning on the wheel of life." (p. 92).

Another interesting aspect of Pramila's character is that she practises what Samir preaches about Hinduism. His knowledge of Hinduism is only theoretical while Pramila's knowledge of Hinduism is a part of her being. Samir's awareness of the Eastern spiritual values is clouded by his temptation for the glamour of the physical and the sensual. If Samir is a 'guru' for Monique in
spiritual matters, Pramila, in turn, is a 'guru' for Samir. He asks her:

"Do you want to be my guru?"
"I am not that learned."
"You have something else to which knowledge can only take second place." (p. 186)

He tells her: "I with I was wise like you." (p. 203). His concluding remark in the novel -- "Beauty of the soul surpasses all else" (p. 204) -- sums up the wisdom he got from her. This remark stands in contrast with his earlier remark -- "In praise of beauty" (p. 6) -- written on a piece of card which he presents to Monique along with a bunch of flowers at the end of the first chapter. From an admirer of 'beauty' he becomes an admirer of 'beauty of the soul' and this constitutes his search for truth.

Pramila turns out to be a model to Monique also. Monique's disillusionment with Samir urges her to "build up inner strength to avoid future heartbreak." (p. 178). She tells Samir that she is to begin her 'inner search' for "finding out who I am." (p. 178). She admits to him:

All my values are changed. I find myself respecting someone I used to pity before. (p. 179).

She wants to begin her inner search through meditation or 'yoga' "to set her mind free, to learn detachment and to find out how Pramila has attained inner serenity and sacredness" (p. 171-172). She interviews Pramila in the guise of a reporter with the name,
Mademoiselle Fulon. Pramila recognizes her but answers her questions. Monique also knows that she is recognized. She realizes that religion is the source of inner strength of the Indian woman. She also comes to know that the stability of Indian marriages is based on the adherence of wife and husband to their dharma. Pramila's explanation of the tenets of Hinduism and dharma bears torch for Monique. She tells Pramila:

You have taken a millstone from around my neck. No one could have made it so clear where I should begin the search for happiness (p. 202).

Thus, Pramila stands out as an eye-opener to both Samir and Monique.

Among the minor characters in the novel, Monique's mother, Madame Beauchardeau, deserves mention. She loves Monique very much and is devoted to her happiness. She is not happy with Monique's connection with Samir: "With a mother's sixth sense, she was sure that intimacy with Samir would end in disaster... In spite of all his talk of Hinduism and self-denial, there was something about him that she did not trust." (p.64). She is also sure "that Hindu woman will never let Monseur Sen go." (p. 150). At the same time, she feels it shameful that her daughter be "responsible for breaking up someone's home." (p. 150). She tells Monique that she is "the last person to ask that he leave his wife, but if he does make up his mind to leave her, I am sure our church will accept him with proper purification." (p. 151). It
appears that Madame Beauchardeau is a personification of Monique's inward hopes and fears.

As in his earlier novels, Romen Basu does not rely entirely on third-person point of view in his narrative technique. While making generous use of the omniscient point of view, he makes use of flashback technique in the shape of reminiscences or memories. "Memory is no longer regarded as device for looking back on what has been left behind, but as an integral part of consciousness and personality." David Daiches further defends this technique:

... the relation of consciousness to time is not the simple one of events to time, but is independent of chronological sequence in a way that events are not. Further, the quality of my experience of any new phenomenon (and hence my reaction to any new circumstance) is conditioned by a group of similar experiences scattered up and down through past time, the association of which with the present experience is what makes the present experience what it is. A novelist might try to indicate this by such digressions as, 'that reminded him of ....', or "There flashed through his brain a memory of .... " or similar formulas, but modern writers have come to feel that this is a clumsy and artificial way of expressing the mind's independence of chronological sequence. Some more fluid technique must be devised which will enable the author to utilize constantly those ever present contacts with
Romen Basu makes use of recollections of characters to narrate past events. For instance, in chapter 4, Monique tells Samir about her love-affair with Marco "almost as if she were talking to herself."

In the succeeding chapter, Samir's account of marriage with Pramila is narrated in a similar way. As Samir narrates his marriage, Monique "remembered her mother's story about a friend's daughter and an Indian scientist." The bridegroom married an Indian girl accepting a huge dowry and deserted his French sweetheart. Monique's recollections are perhaps intended to present Samir's dowry marriage not as an anomaly in the Indian society. In another context, in chapter 17, the author makes use of Pramila's recollections to elaborate on how brides are selected in arranged marriages in India. Similarly, as Samir listens to Pramila singing, "he remembered now the record of Pramila singing bhajans and kirtans that his aunts had made him listen to. He had thought then that anyone with a voice like that would not be impossible to live with." (p. 118). Later, the author reveals the conservative upbringing of Pramila through her recollections.

She remembered how when she was young, her mother had taught her never to show her ankles, from the time a sari was first wrapped around her.... She had known so little when she married. She had never allowed to go to romantic movies or listen to romantic love songs even. Sex was dirty (p. 120).

Another aspect of the author's narrative technique is to get into the minds of characters and give a glimpse of their thoughts by digressing for a while. The author takes on the role of a 'privileged observer' and holds an 'internal view.'

The internal view opens to us characters' state of mind, reactions and motives, either by narrative report, by the telling of what in real life would be hidden from an observer, or by one of the more dramatized, soliloquy-like, 'stream of consciousness' or 'interior monologue' techniques. Instances of such an 'internal view' of the characters occur frequently in the novel and become part of the author's mode of characterization. In chapter 2, the author presents Samir's hesitation to go to Monique.

Coming closer and closer to his destination, he felt more and more self-conscious. It was a silly idea from the beginning. A man of his age behaving like a love-sick adolescent. What if she thought he was a dirty-minded Indian who only wanted to seduce her? Then his confidence returned as he remembered harmless romantic adventures in London and Rome. Surely there was no harm in wanting to see her once more, he told himself (p. 7).

Monique's hopes and doubts about Samir's trial for divorce from Pramila are captured by employing both 'internal view' and 'external view':

She felt sure in her heart that Samir would divorce his wife. True, they had not spoken ever about his obtaining a divorce, but Monique relied on her own woman's instinct. How could he stay married just for form's sake? He was too westernized for that. If she had somewhere they could meet alone, she was sure it would all work out (p. 64).

Later, Samir's soliloquy about as to how to convince Monique to have a platonic relationship with each other is thus presented:

Perhaps he should not see Monique for a while, Samir thought. He had to give her more time to think it through. Sooner or later she would realise that he wanted more than a clandestine sexual relationship. How was it possible that such a sensitive person as Monique would scoff at a platonic relationship? Did she not find an empty heart was a neglected soul? Were they so far apart in their thinking that what seemed human to him was incomprehensible to her? (pp. 121-122).

Monique's thoughts leading to her decision to begin her 'inner search' are similarly perceived by the author:

To understand him, she would meditate as he had taught her. She would practise Yoga and set her mind free. She would not see Samir again until she had attained her inner strength .... Monique could see Pramila's face clearly in her mind's eye. How did she attain that inner serenity that shone forth for all to see? Somehow, she would find out. (pp. 171-172).
Romen Basu shows concern for realism in creating characters and situations. In fact, "realism implies truth of detail, the truthful production of typical characters under typical circumstances."  

The author gives a graphic description of the urban scenes and captures the Paris city. He seems to have "magical ability to make his locales come vividly alive." For instance, Romen Basu depicts Notre Dame in a few words but with a keen eye for fresh and telling detail:

Samir parked the car under Pont St. Michel, then they walked to the Isle St. Louis along the tow path past the great bulk of Notre Dame (p. 83).

In another context, the St. Lazare station seems to have been caught in action:

The St. Lazare station looked as if refugees were trying to escape before the invasion of Paris. Taxis and private cars blocked each other's way, the drivers screaming at each other, waving clenched fists out their opened windows in true French fashion. Giant buses that could not get near the front entrance disgorged a seemingly endless stream of passengers carrying bedrolls and hand luggage. Inside the station, there was a jam at all the entrances to the trains (p. 180).


The author is equally adept at giving pen-pictures of landscapes with photographic vividness:

The gardens were crowded with Parisians laughing and talking as they searched for a touch of green on the bare branches of trees. A crowd had gathered around an old couple feeding the pigeons stale bread, amused as the birds hopped and fluttered to steal the crumbs from one another. People sunned themselves, sitting on the edge of the empty fountains, turning up their faces, eyes shut, to the sun. Samir chose an empty bench and sat and watched a squirrel's busy movements as it darted in and out to get some of the pigeon's bread. (p. 2).

Another feature of the author's realism of setting is providing the reader with a wealth of details and names of drinks, food, books, dress, cafes, shops, restaurants, museums, clubs and other public places besides a generous sprinkle of conversation in French.

Social realism is an important facet of the novel. Some of the relevant features of both Indian and French society are incorporated in the novel. To begin with, the author gives a detailed account of dowry marriages and the way the bride is selected in the traditional Hindu families. In chapter 17, Pramila recollects how she had suffered.

How she had suffered from not being beautiful. In spite of her father's considerable fortune, she had been rejected nine times. The marriage
brokers had sent a private recording of her voice, a sample of her needlework, a specimen of her handwriting. Always she had passed these tests with distinction. Then, ceremoniously, she was presented for inspection by an all-male jury. Her hair had to be loosened, her hands turned over, her sari lifted to show her ankle joints, then she had to walk around to show her posture. At the end, the answer, "we will let you know." (p. 116).

While caste system prevails in Indian society, the French have a 'class-ridden society.' "The French all want to rub shoulders with the class above them, instead of fighting for a one-class society." (p. 157). The French society is felt to have become decadent for its bourgeois culture. Francis points at what ails the French society.

We have some economic progress. But the bourgeois habits and attitudes are unchanged. What's happened is that more labouring people have moved up into the bourgeois. Now they follow the bourgeois example of two hours for lunch, too much wine with every meal. We flatter our women to make them think it's better to be feminine than professional. We'll never succeed in the modern world until we can get rid of our bourgeois heritage. Truly, Samir, the French are decadent. (pp. 85-86)

Unlike in India, it is common for the French to indulge in pre-marital sex. But this should not be misconstrued as 'free love.' "French girls don't go to bed with a man the first time they meet him -- or the second. They are very conscious of
their reputations and their family name. In France, the family is everything as in India." (p. 85).

The author's depiction of social realism logically leads to a discussion on the 'juxtaposition and contraposition' of the values of East and West in the novel. "Each book (of Basu) and especially Candles and Roses, has contained an increasing measure of penetrating analysis, of philosophic comparison, between the values of the East, particularly India ... and those of the West, particularly the United States, England, and now France."16 Commenting on this aspect in Indian writing in English, Meenakshi Mukherjee says:

The Indo-Anglians have explored the metaphysical, spiritual, and romantic aspects of the confrontation each in his or her own way. Even when the novel does not directly deal with the Forsterian theme, the personal crisis in the life of each Western-educated hero or heroine becomes intercultural in nature. The connotation of 'east' and 'west' varies in these novels as do the levels of their artistic achievement.17

In Candles and Roses, Samir, Pramila and Monique are caught in a triangular crisis. Pramila and Monique offer two alternatives and Samir chooses Pramila while Monique is willing to


withdraw herself. This is a stock situation of conflict in Indo-English fiction.

The Indian values were often embodied in one person (usually a woman) and the central character had to choose between her and another person symbolising the West. This was the most superficial statement of the drama. Often the resolution was not untinged with nostalgia or sentimentality for values from which the author in real life had become alienated.

Though Samir's choice of Pramila is natural and predetermined, Romen Basu makes the East-West encounter interesting by taking it to the level of ideas. First, the Hindu view of love and marriage is juxtaposed with the Western view. The interview between Pramila and Monique disguised as Mademoiselle Fulon is centred round this point.

In the West, women try to attract men, because they do not feel their marriage will be happy unless it is based on sexual attraction. They believe that where the sexual bond is weak, the marriage is threatened. The woman who does not like sex, leads a lonely life. (p. 197).

While the westerners do not make distinction between love and making love,' the Hindus feel that "physical relationship is not meant for enjoyment." One is not supposed to enjoy physical relationship because "it can lead to lust and that is against our dharma". (p. 202).

The Hindu view of marriage is entirely different as Pramila tells the disguised Monique.

Service to my husband will help me to reach the Almighty. A Hindu woman's main interest is her husband's welfare. When he is happy, all her wishes are answered. (p. 199).

Monique is perplexed to know this:

It only confused her, trying to imagine the relationship between them (i.e., Pramila and Samir). He claimed that Pramila found her contentment in God. But a husband was another object through which to serve God. How little he really understood women. (p. 162).

In the West, love leads to marriage but this runs opposite in India.

In India we first marry. Then we work always to be worthy of love .... Our religion speaks of the women as devi, a goddess. A man worships a woman also. (pp. 199-200).

This is why divorce is rare in India. Monique's mother tells Samir: "She (Monique) thinks Hindu people are very wise. One day she tells me that in your India divorce is rare because you think of love in another way." (p. 59).

The Hindu moral codes are very rigid, especially for woman. She is "taught from birth that he has only duties, no rights." (p. 198). Even if she knew her husband with another woman, she "would pretend not to know anything about it." (P. 198). Samir tells Monique:
It is a sin punishable by the Divine for the husband and wife not to love each other. You are ordered to love, even if you find flaws, by the elders. If a wife is miserable with her husband, that is her problem. Her father will not be concerned about her happiness, only about whether the world will think badly of them.

(p. 103)

The Hindu woman bears her pain in silence. She acquires such inner strength through her religion. This is quite untenable to a western woman. Monique tells Samir:

I think I am confused about you in every way. You try to teach me forbearance, to endure afflictions without complaining. Sorry. But I don't think I am ready for your Hindu way of life.(p. 133).

Indians believe that "marriage is not just for one life. It is for eternity." (p. 200). No doubt, the modern Indian woman finds this role of Indian wife difficult but "any Indian wife knows that her life is not without love. If there is no sharing, still the husband's love flows." (p. 200). Characters like Sita, Behula, Sabitri and Damayanti of Indian legends symbolise the essence of Indian womanhood.

In India, the husband-wife relationship is based on sound understanding and sharing of responsibilities. Women make men accept their responsibilities. Pramila says "that is the strength of our society" which is lacking in the Western society.
I think Europeans are very insecure. Perhaps it is because the women expect too much from the men. They do not take the responsibilities as we do. (pp. 165-166).

For instance, she tells that a lady wept just because her husband had forgotten her birthday.

Even on the relationship between man and nature, the Eastern and the Western perceptions do not concur. Samir tells Monique:

The Vedanta tells us that man suffers if he feels alienated from nature... Wouldn't you agree that people in western society, in spite of all its material achievements and scientific knowledge, have not found contentment! Do you know why? Because they have upset the natural order of life. (p. 16).

Incidentally, the contrast between the East and the West at times throws light on the inadequacies of the Indian and the French societies. For instance, Samir recalls that at a dinner party a French banker went on speaking about the poverty-stricken Indians in Calcutta who had to sleep in the streets. He wondered at "Indians who travelled to Europe each year, flashing their jewellery when their countrymen did not have enough to eat." (p. 147). While admitting the truth of the statement, Pramila retorted that in France she had been very surprised to find how rude and impolite people are .... A country so rich
that everyone goes to school, rides in private cars, is so successful in everything, how was it possible for such a people to act that way? In India, she knew, the more educated a person was, the less inclined he would be to expose another's ignorance. (p. 148).

Similarly, Monique teases Samir and says: "You are very good at feeling superior, you Indians. Even when you beg, you put your nose up in the air!" Samir says that there is difference between poverty and humility. She would give a Buddhist monk "a good kick and tells him to go and work for his food. In return he will bless you so you can understand the difference between poverty and humility." (p. 149).

Where social backgrounds are different, certain social problems are exclusive to them. For instance, while Samir has not heard of abortion, Monique has not heard of starvation deaths.

"You never heard of anyone having an abortion?"
"She asked him curiously.
"No."
"Then you have lived a very sheltered life."
"You have not heard of anyone dying of starvation, have you? I have seen a lot of that. That's the difference between our backgrounds."
"You would like me to believe that your culture is of a higher order. That you Indians are more intellectual and reflective. That in the West, our love has no depth, our material progress is at the cost of human degradation, that we lack mental security because we are selfish." (p. 176).