Thus, Romen Basu presents the philosophy that underlies and supports the Hindu view of life. Philosophy forms an integral and fascinating part of this 'bitter sweet romance.' He also gives us useful, quick insights into the thinking of, among others, Camus, Sartre, Levi Strauss and Malraux and some of the French painters of today and the past century.

Romen Basu's style, as in his previous novels, is lucid as he brings in various human emotions. "The conversation is mostly natural except when philosophy creeps into it to make it rigid." Certain expressions such as "You are very poetic with my life" (p. 186) stand out for their lyrical quality and brevity. His language takes wings as he describes Samir's 'passionate admiration' for Monique in their first meeting:

Coup de Foudre -- a stroke of lightning. She was like a Hindu goddess that had descended to earth, he thought, an inspiration both for the creative and the spiritual.(p. 5).

At times his use of language reflects the delicateness of his imagination. For instance, Samir compares woman to a flower.

A woman is like a flower, he thought. It is such a pleasure to look at it, to feel it gently, to smell its bouquet. But it is at its best held a little distance from the eye.(p. 20).

The use of myth is a part of the technique of the novel. Myth operates consciously in the novel. Pramila bears

resemblance to Sita in *The Ramayana* as she stands out for asceticism in the novel and she wins back Samir through sheer penance. A similar feature is noticed in some other novels of Indian writing in English.

Sita as the archetype of Indian womanhood in all her suffering and sacrifice appears in *Some Inner Fury*, *The Dark Dancer*, *A Time to be Happy* and *The Dark Room*, where suffering almost becomes a virtue.  

In *Candles and Roses*, besides Sita, there is reference to other 'goddesses' in Indian mythology like Sabitri and Damayanti who endured pain for the life and welfare of their husband. The resemblance between them and Pramila is far-fetched but still relevant. "By devoutly doing the duty of a wife, a *pativrata*, and through silent suffering she demonstrates that Eastern values are far more greater than those of the occident."  

A close reading of the novel reveals a conscious repetition of reference to candles and roses so much so that they become images. First they are used as decorative objects on a dining table. For instance, the waiter "led them down.... to a table for two set with candles and roses." (p. 25). A little later in the novel, Monique buys peonies instead of roses for table because "they are not so rare." Samir tells her: "We only

-----------------------------
admire what we do not take for granted, is that it?" (p. 72). One gets a feeling that Samir must have remembered Pramila and his negligence of her.

As the novel progresses, candles and roses stand for light and sweetness each enhancing the value of the other. They seem to be an ideal medium to get into meditation, peace, spirituality and enlightenment: "In the candlelight, the roses glowed a deep, mysterious red." Samir tells Monique:

Isn't it peaceful, Monique? I could sit for hours like this. I love to sit in front of a fire, or a candle and empty my mind. If I were to meditate, it would be in front of a candle or a fire, (p. 177).

Monique seems to get a similar experience:

Monique seemed almost in a trance, staring at the light of the candle. The scent of roses filled the room.... Monique still sat there, the light glowing softly on her face and hair, (p. 179).

Thus, the title of the novel suggests its philosophical significance. Through the triangular love story, Romen Basu gives an interesting glimpse of the values of the East and the West leading to the vindication of the former over the latter. The author also calls for inner search by each in his own way to get at truth as Samir, Pramila and Monique do in the novel.
CHAPTER VII

"BROADEN THE HORIZONS" : PORTRAIT ON THE ROOF

Romen Basu's sixth novel, Portrait on the Roof (1980), seeks to establish the triumph of the union of the East and the West through the love-story of Dilip of India and Teresa of Italy. To explore this theme, the author makes an innovation of juxtaposing two families with different socio-religious backgrounds, an Indian family in India, and an Italian family in Italy and presents 'the dramatic tension between the two traditions, families, religious and ethnic background.' This endows the novel with 'a wider sweep and a trans-cultural panorama.' Commenting on this aspect of the novel, a reviewer says that the novel "takes in its sweep two countries, two cultures, two civilizations and is a more abiding contribution to international understanding than most of the cultural exchange programmes of the United Nations."\(^1\)

The novel begins with an account of Late Sir Dwarakanath's joint family in Calcutta. He was a doctor. He married into a Zamindari family. He was made a Knight Commander of the Indian Empire in his forties. He had five daughters and four sons. After his death, his eldest son, Bholanath, took over the reigns of the family. Also a doctor, Bholanath bore the strain to keep peace

\(^1\) D.S. Rao, rev. of Portrait on the Roof, Indian Literature, p. 162.
among the brothers and help the sisters' families. The novel opens with an intimate and realistic description of the gathering of the whole Mitra clan, numbering 102, meeting to take a group photograph with Dwarakanath's wife, Biroja, to bid farewell to her. It is Arabindo who now maintains the family affairs after the retirement of his father, Bholanath. Arabindo is wedded to tradition and is deeply committed to the values and principles of joint family. One of his nephews, Dilip, has returned from England. His love-affair with an Italian girl figures in the discussion. Arabindo disapproves of any such marriage outside the family tradition while Dilip asserts individual will in matters of marriage. As a young man, Arabindo himself had fallen in love with an English girl in England but later bowed down to tradition and to the will of his elders. Thus, "the family union reflects love-hate relationships, inner tensions and pressures of a widening generation gap and notes of dissidence and revolt against the traditional idea of home and family."  

Dilip had met Teresa in London where he had been studying automobile engineering for three years. She is a teacher in a school in Milan, Italy. She had gone to London as a tourist. Her father is the manager of a textile mill and owns a very big farm. She is fifth among eight brothers and sisters. "In a moment of spontaneity" she opens a conversation with Dilip at Trafalgar Square. Over scenes they get to know each other. She

tells him her family history. Dilip's landlady, Madame Podopinski, encourages him to have love-affair with Teresa. Dilip expresses his desire to visit Italy and takes her address. On his way back to India, he goes to Milan. Teresa receives him. They reside in a pension. Together they visit cathedrals, museums and galleries which happen to be their common places of interest. From Milan Dilip returns to India. Before they depart, they promise to write to each other.

There is a brief separation between them. Meanwhile, Teresa's sister, Lucia's marriage takes place at the village of Feranto in South Italy. Their brother, Marcello, comes to know of Teresa's love-affair. He insults and rebukes her for having dishonoured her family. He pleads to his father to dissuade her from the affair. Teresa promises her father that she would marry only a man who would respond to her feeling for her family. She finds Dilip a job at Turin. Dilip sets out for Italy after allaying the fears of his kith and kin of losing him for good. Dilip and Teresa meet at Bologna. They visit the Vatican and Sistine Chapel. They realize that their opinions on religion differ. Teresa takes him for a non-believer. She recommends Father Contini to Dilip to clear his doubts about Christianity. Their visit to Venice and Rome gives them an opportunity to understand each other better. They realize that their love transcends the barriers of nation, religion and race.

Thus, the love-affair of Dilip and Teresa forms the main plot of the novel and the division of chapters in the novel is made
so as to highlight it. "The love story is developed on an even keel, no contrived situations." There are no climaxes, either of plot or of the other kind. The reference to Dilip's love-affair is made in the second chapter and the conflict between the points of view of Arabindo and Dilip is also indicated in the same chapter.

The third chapter presents the first meeting of Dilip and Teresa in London in recapitulation. The affair takes its roots as the scene of action shifts to Milan in the fourth chapter. The fifth and sixth chapters constitute an interregnum. As Dilip moves to Bologna in the seventh chapter, the scene of action shifts to Italy once for all. The seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth chapters take place in Bologna, Vatican, Turin and Venice respectively. The last chapter which takes place in Rome achieves the meeting of the East and the West in terms of their total understanding of each other despite their divergent views on religious matters.

Both Dilip and Teresa are committed to their individual families and religions yet they value and respect each other's. This aspect leads to an interesting juxtaposition between the joint family in Calcutta and Teresa's family in Italy and also a comparative study of Hinduism and Christianity, especially the Catholic Church. In the novel, chapters 1, 2, and 6 give us a picture of the joint family in Calcutta while chapter 5 presents a picture of the joint family in Italy. The differences in perceptions of Hinduism and Christianity recur in all chapters where the lovers meet.

Romen Basu also presents two episodes in the novel — the Antonia episode in chapter 4 and the episode of Lucia's marriage in chapter 5. The Antonia episode helps throw light on some aspects of the characterization of Dilip and Teresa. The episode of Lucia's marriage reveals the marriage customs of South Italy and also presents a contrast between Lucia's traditional marriage and Teresa's love-affair which is outside the family tradition. Thus, the episodes help highlight the main plot of the novel.

The fictional focus of the novel is on the two characters — Dilip and Teresa. Dilip comes from a joint family. He honours its values but he is not sentimentally attached to it like Arabindo. Perhaps this is due to his education abroad, as Aunt Kalyani feels: "We all know your commitment to family, yet you have been more influenced by the West than the others — in a non-sentimental way." Arabindo feels that one should sacrifice one's pleasures to maintain joint family. Dilip feels the other way. To him, commitment to joint family is mental and not necessarily physical. Allaying the fears of Aunt Kalyani that his joining job in Italy would disassociate him from the joint family, Dilip thinks:

No one in the family believed that without sacrifice for the family one could remain attached. Oh, their sentimental joy of martyrdom, he thought. How could he make them see that every cousin, every maid-servant,

4. Romen Basu, Portrait on the Roof (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1980), p. 96. All further references are to this edition and the page numbers will be given parenthetically at the end of the quotations.
every uncle and aunt wore a part of him. Going away could not destroy his roots. Togetherness was not just seeing each other daily. His childhood memories would keep him loyal, no matter where he was, no distance would be too far to come home if he were needed. (pp. 95-96)

Teresa is also committed to her family to the extent that she promises her father: "Papa, I want you to know that I will marry a man only if he responds to my feelings for my family." (p. 87). Further, she forgives her brothers, particularly Marcello, even after she is abused for her affair with Dilip. She tells her father: "I know that my brothers are protective, even though they do not understand me .... Sometimes we act selfishly, but nothing can come between us ultimately." (p. 86).

Besides this, the two characters bear some other similar characteristics too. First, both Dilip and Teresa are stamped as rebels in their families. He tells her that "from the time Dilip was grown-up, his behaviour had been criticized. He had done too many things of which the family did not approve." (p. 99). For instance, as Aunt Kalyani tells him, he has always avoided religion and the latest being his love with a foreign girl. "Teresa is a rebel," Uncle Umberto tells her father Signor Luciano because she "is the only one in your family with any interest in education." (p. 78). In Italy, it is considered a taboo for a Southerner to marry a person from North Italy. No wonder then, her love-affair with an Indian faces stiff opposition and
disapproval. Second, both Dilip and Teresa are committed to sexual morality. Madame Podopinski tells Dilip: "You have lived in this country (England) for three years and I have not seen you once with a young lady." (p. 32). His idea of woman is drawn from Indian philosophy: "A woman is first a goddess, then a mother, then a sister. She plays her role as a wife only to give birth to their children. Passionate sex even with one's wife was sinful, Dilip had learned this as truth spoken from the time of Sankara to Vivekananda." (p. 145). He never thought of 'making a pass' at any girl and he confesses to Teresa that "sex-minded women were frightened by me." (p. 145). Teresa considers pre-marital sex 'sinful.' She had to do away with the first man in her life because, as she tells Dilip, "he wanted me to make love to him to prove my love. I refused." (p. 137). At one instance, she pleads with Dilip to respect her honour: "I grew up knowing it was a sin to masturbate. I would not expect you to violate me, not even as the last thing." (p. 141). In this respect, Dilip and Teresa are quite different from Ashoke and Zarina in Your Life to Live. During their sojourn in Vienna, Zarina yields to Ashoke's desire for sex within a few days of acquaintance with him. Third, both Dilip and Teresa are deeply interested in art, architecture and religion in spite of the difference in their perceptions of religion and Christianity in particular.

The love-affair of Dilip and Teresa symbolizes the East meeting the West. Dilip's education abroad has liberalized his outlook. He has found 'many values common to the East and the West'.
He felt, himself, that the greatest change was in how he felt about other races and peoples. They were not so different, after all, from his own family. He had found that other Indians who went overseas either changed identify or condemned everything they found different. For him, the differences were so few and the similarities so many that he could not accept that understanding could not be reached.

(p. 52)

A reviewer says that Dilip's view "sums up the novel and marks it off from a large number of novels in English written by Indians, dealing with the trendy East-West encounter." Reacting to Dilip's love-affair with a foreigner, Arabindo holds the view that the values of joint family forbid him to marry an Italian girl. Taking his own case as an example, Arabindo says that the East cannot meet the West. Dilip tells him:

"There are many values common to the East and the West."

"Not that many."

"Dada, neither you nor I have any control over the change of times. We would be creating our own circle of isolation if we are unprepared to accept changes. Values are being reappraised in this shrinking world." (pp. 22-23).

Dilip feels that one should not be so bound by tradition.' (p.138). He firmly believes that the tradition and customs of joint family should not come in the way of his individuality in selecting his life-partner. "For him marriage was an individual

choice in which no one had the right to interfere. He didn't care what Bengali families and society expected." (p. 24). Teresa voices the same feelings: "I believe, more than ever, that two people's need for one another is enough reason to stay close." (p. 87). Dilip later tells Teresa that he does not approve of Kipling's dictum:

"East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." How could Kipling predict for all future generations? Time would prove Kipling wrong, he had been convinced from an early age. (p. 138).

Herein lies the difference between The Serpent and the Rope and The Portrait on the Roof. As a reviewer says, "When Raja Rao makes the marriage of the Western Madeleine and Eastern Ramaswamy a failure he is agreeing grudgingly with Kipling. But when Romen Basu makes Teresa and Dilip marry with their eyes fully open, he is emphasizing the affinity, and he does so with a rare understanding and skill that at the end of the novel, the reader wouldn't accept any other ending. The world has travelled a long way from Kipling to Basu."  

As has been said earlier, the common interest of Dilip and Teresa in art, architecture and religion brings them closer and offers an excellent means of communication between them. In Milan he tells her that "for him each painting and sculpture was a 

revelation, a civilization unfolding, a culture to recognize. With Teresa to correct his interpretations, he saw a new dimension to Western values." (p. 53). His friendship with Teresa has led to a new vistas and outlook. "Dilip told Teresa that for the first time he was not homesick. It was as if life had begun for him. Teresa couldn't help being flattered. (p. 51).

In spite of their intense love for each other, they are aware of the differences in their perceptions of religion. Teresa's religion is of the heart, she has a child's faith, Dilip's is of the mind. He has the intellectual's questioning spirit. Dilip is a Hindu and has sound knowledge of Hinduism. He is also fairly conversant with Christianity as he happened to study in a missionary school. He "could not accept anything irrational." (p. 125). He says,"I will accept another person's knowledge, but not in blind obedience." (p. 129). On the other hand, he finds Teresa religious and an uncompromising Catholic. He asks her:

"Are you very religious?"
"Yes. I answered that once before."
"And you?" She asked.
"I don't think about God and religion as much as most people do, I suppose." (p. 45).

Initially, when she realizes that she loves him, she wishes "if only he were a Catholic" indicating that difference in religion remains to be a psychological impediment in her love for him.

Dilip directs his criticism chiefly on rituals, the need of church or a place of prayer, the false priests and on things like
These elements are present not only in Christianity but in other religions too. First, Dilip believes that a study of religious books like the Bible, the Koran or the Bhagavad Gita should lead to development of knowledge and 'inner discipline' which we need 'to reach our conscience.' But, unfortunately, "most people prayed or read holy books not for knowledge, but to satisfy rituals." (p. 50). He feels that meditation and personal reflection should replace going to church or temple. He takes the Indian example where holy people achieve enormous spiritual power "from years and years of meditation, trying to understand the Self. This inner knowledge and strength has to be sought quietly and with little help from others." (p. 51). He further asks: "Could there not be an hour set aside for personal reflections, instead of rushing to the church, temple or mosque?" (p. 51).

Second, the proceedings in the Vatican church in which the Pope participates make Dilip more dissatisfied with the rituals while Teresa is intensely satisfied. "Prayers gave her strength. Each one came to this world at God's will for a purpose, and it was not for anyone to question His design. To ask Him to change His Order was selfish, to defy was sinful. Sins deteriorated the body and soul." (p. 107). No wonder then it appears to be 'atheistic nonsense' when Dilip says that "the Vatican was another big bureaucracy and that nothing in it resembled the Kingdom of Heaven" and when he asks: "why was it more important to meet the Pope than to hear privately the words that comforted the soul from those who had the superior wisdom?" (p. 109). He lashes out at
the priests. He "argued that her spiritual world was governed by priests, who were just as self-seeking in striving to protect their own interests. They used God's name freely, but objected to others doing so." (p. 109). He urges her to 'speak to God directly.' Teresa tells him that "Christ believed in God and His thoughts His apostles had handed down as the teachings throughout the church." (p. 111).

Third, Dilip also questions the efficacy of confessions. It "only added to the burden of guilt, it did not provide anything except temporary relief." (p. 111). Teresa, on the other hand, argues that faith is 'a gift of heaven' and that 'Faith heals.' Fourth, Dilip and Teresa also differ in their concept of Heaven. According to her "being in the Kingdom of Heaven means to satisfy God by conducting oneself according to the directions of the Church." (p. 117). Dilip believes that Man's soul is his God and that it is wiser and much simpler to judge where we have gone wrong by our daily conduct instead of depending on the 'dishonest' or 'ignorant' priests. Teresa tells him that only an egotist refuses the help and guidance the Church offers. Finally, Dilip values love higher than religion when he says: "Every religion speaks of saving the soul. Is there a better way to bring supreme comfort to the soul than love?" (p. 116).

Dilip finds some more similarities and differences between the Eastern Hinduism and the Roman Catholic Church. For instance, both the Catholics and the Hindus cherish purity and morals. But Hinduism does not believe in conversion and claims no
superiority. "But when it comes to marriage, the Roman Catholic church excommunicates and Hindu society makes outcasts." (p. 108). Further, the Eastern religions only show how a person can be liberated from worldly bondage. They do not say 'do this and do that' while Roman Catholicism tries to explain too much. While Hinduism says "to be born is not a joyful thing," Roman Catholicism "takes full advantage of births and converts." (pp.118-119).

The differences in their perceptions do not diminish their love for each other. As Dilip does not accept anything irrational, she asks him to meet Monsignor Contini, a priest. The priest enjoins mutual respect as the only escape from their impasse. He tells Dilip: "I believe in Christ, the Son of God. I love by my beliefs, but I respect those of others.... A true Catholic must respect 'the other person." (p. 130). Dilip displays similar spirit when he tells Teresa that "he had come to respect her views, her convictions." (p. 120). Also, "he preferred a relationship where honest differences became strengths, not threats." (p. 120). He finds the right life-partner in her and admires her will-power. He expects "a woman to share my responsibility with her wisdom." (p. 120). Teresa wants to baptize her children, but he convinces her that it is better to "bring them up with the freedom of knowledge" and that children born out of love will find their God." (p. 142). Teresa expresses her readiness to live with his family in Calcutta and she also wants "to start a school in the bustis of Calcutta." (p. 144).
Thus mutual understanding leads to love and meaningful relationship between them. When Teresa proclaims her love for him, Dilip shouts in ecstasy: "I can hear it, my family can hear it, your family can hear it, the whole world can hear it." (p. 150) and this evidences the triumph of the meeting of the East and the West.

It is interesting to note that Teresa presents certain delightful and ironic inconsistencies. For instance, talking of Antonia's father, Teresa says: "I get so angry when someone speaks to me dogmatically." (p. 53). She is hardly aware that she herself is dogmatic in her declarations about Italians. She disapproves of a blonde woman flirting with three men at the bar in London "kissing each of the men in turn" and says to Dilip: "In Italy you will not see such things in public places." (p. 36). Hence, she is understandably upset when Dilip finds two young college students exchanging kisses with their girl-friends in the cafe at Víctor Emmanuel Arcade in Milan. In another instance, she takes a porter in the Grand Hotel to task for refusing her and Dilip the tiniest corner, even for ten minutes. Teresa does not spare the man for his meanness. But, a few hours later we find her speaking eloquently about the Venitians:

Venetians fought hard to protect their city. They were always proud and hospitable. They are known for their simplicity and honesty, unlike the pompous northerners and other pseudo-sophisticates. (p. 133).
She also makes similar sweeping statements about Italians:

"Italian brothers are worse than husbands" (p. 34).

"Italians will love you if you believe everything they say." (p. 42).

Italians also consider themselves God's chosen people and therefore feel that kindness to the non-Italians is incumbent upon them. (p. 34).

Thus, "Teresa becomes, in Romen Basu's hands, one of the liveliest heroines of Indian fiction in English." 7

Romen Basu is equally at home with Indian and Italian characters. One does not forget even the minor characters who appear and disappear. Bharati, Arabindo, Marcello, Signor Buchianti and Madame Podopinski are drawn vividly with a few bold strokes. At seventy, Bharati is "still as firm as that of a twenty-two-year-old virgin, her skin as smooth as a Chinese concubine's with the complexion of a Scots woman." (p. 9). Hers is a sad story--her extraordinary beauty brings her troubles, her third son running away at the age of sixteen, her fourth daughter taking an overdose of sleeping pills in the second week of her marriage. Arabindo holds dear the family interests. He celebrates Christmas because 'he will do anything that brings joy to the children,' but he cannot accept Dilip's marrying an Italian girl. Marcello comes late for his sister's marriage and begs his

father 'not to make a scene.' But he himself makes a scene, insisting on a family meeting where he wants to discuss his sister Teresa's 'disgraceful behaviour' of falling in love with Dilip. Signor Buchianti is boastful. He says he is "a self-made man who could have become a minister in one of the governments that came and went." He could have become even the Prime Minister, but "preferred to be the king maker." (p. 55). He displays his meanness when he wants his daughter, Antonia, to marry the physically repelling son of a wealthy industrialist because her prospective father-in-law has offered a handsome business proposition. Madame Podopinski, the polish baroness and Dilip's landlady in London, is the most unforgettable. She thinks that no English girl is good enough for Dilip. She notices Dilip's eyes 'dancing like marionettes' after meeting Teresa and intuitively forecasts that Teresa is his destiny. The characters of Arabindo and Aunt Kalyani are made use of to project tradition against Dilip's non-traditional approach and open-mindedness. On the other hand, Marcello and Uncle Umberto are projected as the forces of tradition trying to pull back Teresa from exercising her free will in choosing her life-partner in a non-traditional way.

Interestingly, Italy itself rises to the level of a character in the novel keeping in view its impact in shaping the social mores, attitudes and the geographical differences of North and South Italy nurturing mental reservations in the people. Further, it also helps provide an aesthetic angle to the novel by the beauty and splendour of its art and architecture and gives scope for a
lively discussion on several aspects of Hinduism and Roman Catholicism between Dilip and Teresa.

However, a close study of the novel reveals that there are some contradictions in characterization and, at times, what is said about the characters and what they are shown to do are at variance. For instance, talking about her brother, Teresa says that "the family did not approve of the way her brother Eduardo lived." (p. 35). But later, Eduardo is presented differently. It is said that "Eduardo was the eldest and most sensible member of Signor Luciano's family.... never missed Church on Sunday .... never caused problems for his father." (p. 69). Thus, to project a good person as a bad one through an honest character like Teresa violates all probability.

Romen Basu employs chiefly the omniscient method of narration in this novel also. To narrate the events of past, he follows three methods. First, he uses the flashback method by keeping the character concerned in a reflective mood. For instance, in chapter 1, when the Mitra clan is assembled, Arabindo recollects to himself the days of his grandfather when the joint family was intact. Similarly, he remembers the birth of Mira, the daughter of Aunt Chaya. Second, the author narrates the events himself, that is, by employing the authorial technique. For example, in chapter 5, he narrates Teresa's love for Italo and how her sister, Lucia, attracted his attention later. Third, he makes the characters themselves speak of their past, as in chapter 3, where Teresa narrates her family history to Dilip.
At another level, the author probes the thoughts of the characters to reveal to the readers what is going on in the mind of the character at present. For instance, in chapter 8, as Dilip observes the painting of Lancraneo, he thinks of the similarities and differences between Hinduism and Roman Catholicism regarding the belief in purity of morals and the reaction of the two religions in cases of inter-religious marriages. Similarly, in chapter 7, when Teresa tells Dilip about Marcello's violent verbal reaction to her love-affair, Dilip imagines how he himself would similarly have reacted if his sister had an affair with an Italian: "Her account of her brother's treatment shocked him terribly, but then he thought to himself, suppose his sister was seen secretly meeting an Italian man, how would he have reacted? Perhaps there was something in common between Italian and Indian brothers." (p. 102). In another context, he begins to think about Teresa's long letter when Aunt Kalyani suggests that a long letter from a girl only indicates her love: "Aunt Kalyani could be right. Why should she write so much about her family. If he got a shade of encouragement from Teresa, he would make the move." (p. 92). Similarly, the author probes the thoughts of Luciano about his children and big family:

Signor Luciano had gone back to his study and lay on the couch in the darkened room. He had often felt responsible for his eldest son's lack of success, perhaps if he had been less domineering, Eduardo would be a better lawyer... It pained him to think that after his
death, not one of his children would live in his home. Was it better for him to settle his estate in a fashion which would force them to come together, but if he did, his soul would be tortured by their curses. (p. 85)

Romen Basu gives a realistic picture of the many-sided culture of Italy. With an eye for minute detail, the author provides a picturesque description of all notable places of art, architecture and religion besides places of public entertainment and restaurants visited by Dilip and Teresa. Filaret Tower, Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Millone Gallery, the Vatican city, St. Mark's church, Ponte del Greci, Church of St. Giorgio del Greci, the Church of St. Geronimo, the Rialto Bridge, places of Romanesque, Gothic and Baroque architecture are some of the places they visit together. The mention of these places together with a host of other details gives a realistic touch to the novel.

Another aspect of realism in the novel is the depiction of the Italian society. As a reviewer rightly points out, "the author gives a perceptive insight into this joint family in Italy, which has many parallels with the Mitra tribe in Calcutta, where relationships are marred by family quarrels, tensions and inbuilt jealousies."8 Teresa tells Dilip that there is distrust between the people of the North and the South in Italy. "Northernners think Southerners are dirty, immoral and lazy. They don't understand." (p. 43). She quotes her father's favourite warning: "If Italy was

divided in Firenze, the two sides would have remained strangers without even exchanging Ambassadors." (p. 43). Dilip tells her that 'it was the same in India.' Second, both in India and Italy there is social stratification. Teresa tells him: "your problem is the caste system and ours the class." (p. 43). Third, coming to family, it is strong both in Italy and India as Dilip and Teresa talk about it:

"For us the family is everything."
"Is it really?"
"And in India?"
"Everything." (p. 35)

Families are big in size in Italy. The Italians prefer to have many children. Teresa is one among the eight children in the family and she herself tells Dilip firmly: "I will never settle for less than six." (p. 139). Another area where the two countries bear a similarity is in the breaking up of joint family. The root of the problem, according to Uncle Umberto, is sex. He blames the present generation: "This generation has no time for the family because other things fascinate them more. Temptation for men and women to be free with each other makes them wish to break away from the obligations of the family." (p. 77). Moreover, the younger generation is 'getting out of hand' in Italy. Signor Buchianti says: "Confession is no longer a part of our life. What is this age coming to?" (p. 56). In Italy any attempt of a southerner to marry a northerner is considered a blow to the family. Teresa's father tells her: "Lucia had chosen to break away. If she had thought about the family she could not have married a Northerner." (p. 86).
Romen Basu gives some interesting features of the system of marriage in Italy in chapter 5 of the novel. Among them, one thing that bears similarity with Indian custom is advising the bride before sending to her in-laws' house. Signora Luciano gives a long list of dos and don'ts to Lucia:

Lucia was to understand that, money or not, her husband must be the most important person to her from that day on. "The wife makes or breaks the home. Even the meanest man can be brought back to the fold with the love and understanding of his wife." Lucia was to remember that as long as her husband's parents were alive, they should have the place of honour before her husband. Only duty to your mother-in-law and father-in-law will open the gates of heaven for you." (p. 79).

The contrast between the institutions of family and customs of India and those of Italy is part of the technique of the novelist. The attempts of Dilip and Teresa to exercise their free will in choosing a life-partner are not antagonistic to their families but are only meant for freeing their families from the shackles of tradition and for making them flexible and adapting. On the other hand, Dilip and Teresa hold conflicting views on organized religion but, 'in their quest for perfect harmony,' they sink their differences keeping love above religion. Thus, on both fronts of family and religion, there is an attempt to broaden the horizons and this constitutes the technique of the novelist.
The novel starts with 'a composite symbol,' the symbol of the portrait of 'one hundred and two' members of the family on the roof of an ageing mansion. Tutul, a three year old is about to fall down from the roof. He is saved by Kabita and Aunt Sabitri. "Kabita rushed to stop Tutul.... Aunt Sabitri took two leaps and stretched out her arms in front of the loose iron bars, then asked a nephew to run downstairs and fetch back the strongest rope in the house." (p. 1). The rope is symbolic of the protection offered by the institution of joint family. A similar instance is seen in chapter 2 where Arabindo recalls how he saved his cousin Pradip trapped under an almirah.

The symbol of the Mitra family portrait on the roof has another aspect too. At the end of the novel, Teresa joins the family which already contains 'one hundred and two' members. She is anxious to be a part of the Mitra family thereby expanding the canvas of the portrait. Furthermore, as in A House Full of People, the joint family contains not only women like Kartik's wife who want to live independently but also women like Sabitri, Kabita and Teresa who keep the family together.

Romen Basu's use of English language in the novel shows some signs of maturity. The language is used to suit the context. The lyrical description of the first meeting of Dilip with Teresa at Trafalgar Square in England may be cited as an example. As Dilip and Teresa move together, one can see "romantic vignettes of pigeon feeding, pub-crawling and visiting art-galleries in moods of:
infatuation." There are quite a number of purple passages. For instance, Basu gives an exotic and picturesque description of Italy.

Venice is mercifully intimate, religiously clean, blessedly decorated with flowers and shrubs, purifyingly woven with water and artistically uplifting. (p. 134)

Furthermore, the dialogues are convincing, making for pleasurable reading. However, on Basu's handling of English language, a reviewer says that "one gets the impression of a man playing the piano with a steel instrument instead of his fingers." But a close reading of the novel reveals Basu's competence to evoke delicate feelings with his language.

In presenting East-West encounter, Portrait on the Roof stands distinct from the previous novels of Romen Basu. In Your Life to Live, Ashoke and Zarina fail to come to terms with each other in America owing to the impact of American culture. They achieve perfect understanding only after coming back to India. Similarly, A Gift of Love shows that the protagonist of the novel, Sukumal Ghosh, fails to get fulfilment in England and returns to India. In Tamarind Tree, in spite of his exposure to the Western culture in England, Biren finds life meaningful in the values of his

own culture and in serving the rural people. In Candles and Roses, Samir finds the vindication of the superiority of Indian values over those of the West in his wife. Thus, in all these novels, the West is shown to be the loser. It is only in Portrait on the Roof that Romen Basu demonstrates the union of the East and the West. A reviewer rightly comments:

In the union of Dilip and Teresa, Basu has at last come to the realization that true love overcomes all impediments. It resolves the final sentence of Candles and Roses: 'Beauty of the Soul surpasses all else.'