Romen Basu started writing novels in English towards the close of the sixties. The ten novels that have been written since 1968 have earned for him an important place among the Indian novelists in English of the seventies. Though Romen Basu chronologically belongs to the third generation of Indian novelists in English -- Arun Joshi, Bharati Mukherjee, M.V. Rama Sæma, Michael Chacko Daniels, Nergis Dalal, Ruskin Bond, Chaman Nahal, Raji Narasimhan, Shasti Brata and Veena Paintal -- his novels are mainly in the humanistic tradition of Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandaya.

Anand's novels are marked by a commitment to social realism and to present India with a down-to-earth attitude. This is reflected in his choice of themes and characters from the oppressed classes of society. Anand's fiction is also tempered with humanism which upholds the dignity of man, pleads for tenderness and compassion in human relations, denounces capitalism and imperialism, disapproves of superstition, obsolete tradition, orthodoxy and religiosity, decries feudal values, fosters equality of man and woman and promotes international harmony and world peace. Though not committed writers like Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandaya imbue their fiction with the
spirit of humanism and social and political realism. Their works usher in a new social order in India based on social justice, equality, co-operation and synthesis of the old and the new.

Romen Basu has definite views about the nature and purpose of fiction. He declares:

Fiction is a human document. For me unless it has some bearing on real life, it cannot be taken seriously as a work of creation.¹

Commenting on the basis on which he has chosen the themes of his novels, he says:

I am first and foremost interested in the cause.
That is why I want to write novel.²

Basu is not a 'sociological novelist' in the sense that he does not write with an overt social purpose. Yet, his novels deal with the realities of the contemporary Indian society -- the crumbling of the joint family system; the need for total understanding and harmony between husband and wife; search for true love in man-woman relationship; an integrated vision of the Eastern and the Western values of life, religion and philosophy; realities of rural life and the attempts to reform the unjust aspects of social and economic order -- and realities of the world politics and the need

². Ibid.
for a strong United Nations Organization for a peaceful, stable world. Basu's fictional treatment of these themes is tempered with humanism, idealism, objectivity, integrity of outlook, acceptance of realities, non-violent reformist attitude to problems and a vision for a better future world.

Basu's novels can be grouped under three heads -- Domestic novels, Rural novels, and novels of East-West encounter and internationalism. Of his three Domestic novels, A House Full of People (1968) deals with the disintegration of joint family choosing Calcutta as the setting. He maintains objectivity and shows no signs of sentimentality in presenting the crumbling joint family. The characters belong to two generations and Basu presents the struggle between the forces of unity and the forces of disruption. The novel is so structured that the first part of it, till Sudhin's death, is dominated by the forces of unity and tradition while the second part of it, after Sudhin's death, is reigned by the forces of division. The plot construction can also be seen in terms of series of setbacks and crises leading to disunity and division. The joint family itself rises to the level of a character in the novel in representing tradition and the values of group living -- unity, security and the spirit of mutual support.

Basu's second Domestic novel, Your Life to Live (1972), deals with domestic disharmony between husband and wife finally leading to their reconciliation of values and attitudes. The delineation of the two characters gives scope to touch upon the
conflict of the Eastern and the Western values represented by them. The plot is designed in such a way that the conflict between the husband and the wife that developed in the American setting is resolved in the Indian setting. While the separation between husband and wife leads to further erosion of their relationship in Chaman Nahal's *My True Faces*, the separation is made use of as a catalyst to bring about reconciliation in Basu's *Your Life to Live*. They get chastened through self-education like the protagonists of Jane Austen's novels.

Basu's third Domestic novel, *Hours Before Dawn* (1988), resembles *Your Life to Live* in many respects. It also deals with marital discord, separation and reconciliation of an Indian expatriate couple. Both the novels have a single plot and the scene of action shifts to several cities and countries in both of them. The couple undergoes self-education in *Hours Before Dawn* too. The episodes of two Vietnamese women are designed in such a way that they help the protagonist to look at his problem of jealousy from a different perspective. Similarly, in *Your Life to Live*, a boyhood friend of the protagonist turns out to be his eye-opener and helps him to overcome his limitations.

Basu's Rural novels are aimed at presenting the social and economic problems of rural Bengal with a view to forging social reform and a just and equitable social order. Among them, *The Tamarind Tree* (1975) is the most satisfying in terms of the theme and its execution besides characterization. Basu makes
the village Balavpur a microcosm of the village life in India in presenting its problems. A wide range of the troubles of the village are woven into the narrative of the novel. The protagonist, Mohamaya, brings about peace, unity, and communal harmony in the village in a non-violent way. The main plot consisting of Mahamoya's role in the village affairs and the subplot consisting of Anukul's property affair are fused and Balavpur remains the scene of action for both the main plot and the subplot. As Mohamaya goes to live in Calcutta after her marriage, the author presents a contrast between the rural life and the urban life. Because of her aversion to city life, Mohamaya faces troubles of adjustment.

In his second Rural novel, Outcast (1986), Basu takes up another Bangali village, Basuli, as an objective correlative to focus on the problem of untouchability, casteism and the forces that scuttle the unity of low-caste people and untouchables prevalent in almost all parts of the country. While the non-violent crusade for social reform becomes successful in The Tamarind Tree, the lonely fight of the untouchable protagonist against the unjust and oppressive society and his attempts to forge unity among the untouchables themselves fail miserably in Outcast. Thus, while The Tamarind Tree ends on a note of hope, Outcast ends in gloom and despair. Outcast has a taut plot-construction. The incidents leading to conflict between the upper castes and the untouchables are carefully arranged. The episodes of cruel treatment meted out to the untouchables and low-
caste people by the upper castes are tucked into the main plot to highlight the rigid and oppressive caste system. The author carefully traces the protagonist's evolution as an uncompromising revolutionary in three stages finally leading to his estrangement from all the individuals and groups that supported him.

From *The Tamarind Tree* to the third Rural novel, *Blackstone* (1989), Basu presents a steady progression from non-violence as the means of social reform to full-scale violence as the means of establishing a just social and economic order. In *Blackstone*, the author draws the reader's attention forcefully to 'the angry conscience' of the oppressed landless peasants giving rise to the armed peasant uprising in West Bengal under the Naxalite leadership to decimate the landlords and seize the lands initially and to rise against the State which gives protection to such landlords with a view to usurping political power in the long run. As in *Outcast*, the episodes of humiliation and suppression of the tribals are strung together to justify the revenge motive of the protagonist leading to his joining the Naxalites. The novel also traces the dramatic rise and fall of the Naxalite movement, its strength and weaknesses. There is also a low-key argument both for and against the Naxalite movement.

Basu's third category of novels revolves round the theme of East-West encounter and internationalism in human, social, religious, cultural and political spheres. The first novel among them is *A Gift of Love* (1976) which seeks to present the
protagonist's haunted wanderings in search of true love in man-woman relationship. The discovery falls into a pattern of four stages -- from sexual escapades in the beginning leading to physical love without meetings of minds, from thereon to a mature form of love which involves spontaneity and selfless sacrifice, finally ending in a defiant wedlock braving barriers of caste and community. The protagonist finds true love in his relationship with a prostitute in England. Through the protagonist's stay in England and his affairs with two English women, the author presents the East-West contact in the sphere of human relationships. The episodes of the women characters who the protagonist comes into contact with are fused with the main plot, that is, his wanderings in search of true love in man-woman relationship. Thus, the plot construction gives unity of impact to the novel. The narrative is conveniently divided into three parts where the scene of action moves from India to England then, again, back to India.

The second novel in this group, *Candles and Roses* (1978), shows the East-West encounter in the realms of both human relationships and ideas in a more elaborate form. The protagonist, Samir, who is married to an Indian, is drawn to a very beautiful French woman. He is neither able to do away with his Indian wife, nor can he enter into an emotional, lasting relationship with the French woman. As he stands at the crossroads, his Indian wife wins him back by her virtuous conduct. Thus, from an admirer of 'beauty,' the protagonist becomes an
admiring of 'beauty of the soul' and this constitutes his search for truth. The triangular love-affair gives scope for a juxtaposition of Eastern and Western values in terms of human relationships, religion and philosophy. The three episodes in the novel are brought in the form of recollections of Monique and Samir at appropriate contexts and not as a part of the action of the novel.

The next novel, Portrait on the Roof (1980), is a triumph of the East meeting the West. In the previous novels, the superiority of Indian values over those of the West is suggested and the West is shown to be the loser. But in Portrait on the Roof, the conflict between the East and the West is resolved and they are shown to be complementary to each other. The meeting of the East and the West is worked out in the novel through the love story of an Indian and an Italian girl leading to their marriage proving that true love overcomes all impediments.

As in other novels of this group, the scene of action shifts from country to country, that is, from India to England and then to Italy. The author also gives perceptive insights into the joint families in India and in Italy which bear many similarities.

Although the fourth novel of this group, Sands of Time (1985), also portrays love between Tamara, a Jew and Bill Roper, an American, the emphasis is on internationalism as symbolized by the U.N.O. The novel makes an in-depth study of the various aspects of the U.N.O. and makes a passionate plea to strengthen it as, according to the author's belief, it is the only hope for the survival and peaceful co-existence of mankind in the present-day
strife-torn world. Much of the novel is devoted to discussions among the members of the Secretariat staff on the internal and external issues of the U.N.O.; on assessing the tenures of the Secretaries-General; and on the steps to be taken to make the U.N.O. shape the destiny of mankind.

Thus, a close observation of Basu's novels reveals that each one of them has a 'cause' to speak about. He is interested in presenting a specific cause in each of his novels. He says how the characters "were chosen to speak against injustice, human sufferings and the pain that comes to us from life and living." He clarifies his point:

I create the characters that will suit best to support my cause .... My source is always real life people. They are everywhere. Characters are carved out of them. They come out of experience of real people whether it is about rural Bengal, London, Paris, Rome or Rio de Janeiro.

The protagonists of Basu's novels can be studied in the light of this statement. The author believes in 'family and togetherness.' Sudhin in A House Full of people represents obsession with the saving of the joint family from disintegration. The protagonists of the other Domestic novels -- Your Life to Live and Hours Before Dawn -- reveal the ideal of harmony between husband and wife and the need to look at things from the point of view of the other person. Among the Rural novels, The Tamarind Tree speaks of the author's belief in Gandhi's call to go back to

Mohamaya eloquently lives up to the ideal. In the other Rural novels - Outcast and Blackstone -- the uneducated protagonists, Sambal and Kalapathor respectively, undergo suffering and pain to rise against social discrimination and economic injustice. In A Gift of Love, Sukumal Ghosh searches for true love in man-woman relationship till he finds it in selfless sacrifice. The author's firm belief in the Indian value of not deserting the wife at any cost is vindicated by Samir Sen in Candles and Roses. By uniting two cultures in Portrait on the Roof through Dilip and Teresa, the author seeks to convey the message that we would have to get adjusted to in the changing world. The characters in Sands of Time are based on the experiences of the members of the Secretariat staff of the U.N.O. and uphold the author's belief in the efficacy of the Organization.

Romen Basu's merit as a novelist lies in his close observation and convincing delineation of all sorts of characters at every social level. Sometimes, some similarities can be perceived in some pairs of characters. For instance, Sudhin and Arabindo are protectors of joint family system and tradition in A House Full of people and Portrait on the Roof respectively. Unlike them, Ranjit and Dilip, in the same novels, honour the values of joint family but are not sentimentally attached to them. Second, Ashoke in Your Life to Live and Mrinal in Hours Before Dawn are initially westernized, possessive, jealous towards their wives, uncompromising, and temperamental till they turn wise by their
experiences. Third, Kalapathor in _Blackstone_ and sambal in _Outcast_ are devoted to the cause of the uplift of their people. They sacrifice their personal happiness and even refuse to get married. Moreover, Kalapathor emerges as an improved version of the emotional Sambal. He appears to be a matured revolutionary.

Fourth, Zarina in _Your Life to Live_, Kabita in _Hours Before Dawn_ and Pramila in _Candles and Roses_ look alike in being emotionally more matured than their husbands, in being free from jealousy and in being wedded to Indian values of life.

Another interesting feature of Basu's characterization is his special care in delineating the women characters. He declares:

> I make the woman character stronger in contrast. They are the underprivileged. They are my cause. I do not believe in the superiority of men or women. My women characters try to highlight they ought not to be neglected.\(^4\)

His prominent women characters -- Zarina, Shirley, Mohamaya, Teresa, Pramila and Kabita -- are known for their patience, forbearance, temperance, fortitude and sacrifice. When compared to them, the corresponding men characters -- Ashoke (Zarina), Sukumal Ghosh (Shirley), Biren (Mohamaya), Dilip (Teresa), Samir (Pramila), Mrinal (Kabita) -- are weak-minded, wavering and lack sound judgement. Even among the women characters,

Mohamaya may be considered Basu's most thoughtful creation and Teresa is one of the liveliest heroines of Indian fiction in English.

Basu seems to be good at the art of caricaturing. Anukul and Harihar in *The Tamarind Tree*, the typical rival landlords in a village context, are caricatured. Similarly, Paramesh Ganguli in *Outcast* and Gour Halder in *Blackstone* are presented as caricatures of landlords who unleash monstrous exploitation and act as bullies in their social spheres. Though they are types, with Basu's sure strokes, they appear as individuals.

Another notable feature is that in *Portrait on the Roof*, Italy itself rises to the level of a character in shaping the social mores and attitudes. The geographical differences between North and South Italy nurture mental reservations in the people. Besides this, Italy also gives an aesthetic dimension to the novel by its beauty and splendour of art and architecture.

For the purpose of characterization and narration, Romen Basu depends chiefly on the omniscient point of view. This can be seen particularly in *A House Full of people* where he probes the minds of all the important characters thoroughly presenting their entire personalities leaving nothing to the imagination of the reader. But he also makes a sporadic use of limited point of view confining himself to what is experienced, thought and felt by a single character or a limited number of characters within the
story. He traces the thoughts of characters particularly when they are caught in a mental conflict, hesitation, dilemma, inability to communicate with other characters or introspection. In many such instances, as in Your Life to Live, Basu's method is not dramatic because we are conscious of the author standing beside his characters and our attention is divided between them and him. The devices of recollections, flashback and memory digression are used not only to give a glimpse of past events but also to connect the past with the present. Further, it is only in A Gift of Love that the protagonist narrates his own story using the first-person point of view. But, in the same novel, the author also makes use of first-person point of view when the important women characters -- Nell and Shirley -- narrate their past to Sukumal Ghosh. At times, Basu makes use of letters as a part of his narrative technique. They are used either to bring out reconciliation between characters as in Your Life to Live and Hours Before Dawn or to run the story by a quick narration of events as in Sands of Time.

Romen Basu's strength as a novelist resides in his ability to make his characters, settings and atmosphere look real by his ingenious description of objects, sounds, colours, manners, details of speech, dress and behaviour. Thus, he fuses the documentary approach with that of the story-teller. This is the essence of his realism. This calls for an unusual sense of observation and eye for detail. Though his characters come from different backgrounds -- westernized like Ashoke, well-mannered
U.N. official like Bill Roper, typical landlords like Paramesh Ganguli, a village girl like Mohamaya, an outcaste like sambal and a tribal like Kalapathor -- he is able to present them convincingly, being alive to their different demeanour and characteristic traits.

Similarly, Basu gives a realistic description of a sprawling joint family in *A House Full of People*, *Your Life to Live*, *A Gift of Love* and *Portrait on the Roof* and a meticulous narration of the customs and orthodox habits followed in a joint family. A typical arranged marriage with dowry is described in detail in *A House Full of People* and in *Candles and Roses*.

Basu's art of characterization reveals his remarkable insight into both rural life and urban life. In his rural novels, he depicts rural sights, smells, sounds, its wondrous variety of inhabitants, its conflicts and sorrows. For instance, in *The Tamarind Tree*, he presents the rural simplicity, the bitter quarrels, adherence to caste system, poverty of farmers, absence of machines, and how the village turns out to be a breeding ground of so many evils as Hindu-Muslim riots, blackmarketeering, sale of liquor, smuggling and pimping. In *Outcast*, he presents the ingrained customs and beliefs of the people in the village, Besuli, such as pre-destiny, belief in palmistry, considering widows as a liability to community and describes in vivid detail their 'Kali Puja' and 'Bhim Puja'.
Urban life comes out with equal vividness and verisimilitude in Basu's novels. For example, he gives a realistic description of England after World War II in *A Gift of Love*. The poverty and squalor in Liverpool and Kensington is the same as in Calcutta. The free love-making in Hyde Park, racial feelings and political conditions in England are described in detail. In *Portrait on the Roof*, the author gives a realistic, picturesque description of all notable places of art, architecture and religion besides places of public entertainment and restaurants.

A special mention may be made of *Hours Before Dawn* and *Sands of Time* in this connection. In *Hours Before Dawn*, one can see documentary and historical realism in the description of the Vietnam War. The places of war and the devastation are truthful. In *Sands of Time*, there are realities and not just realism. For instance, there are references to the world wars, the political and military conflicts among nations, apartheid, the tenures of Trygve Lie and Dag Hammarskjold as the General Secretaries and so on.

The fictional techniques that Romen Basu employs to present his themes and characters deserve keen critical attention. His use of devices like conflict, contrast, symbolism and imagery reinforces the thematic content of his novels. First, conflict operates at several levels — individuals, groups, ideas, ideologies and conflict within one's own self. For instance, at
the level of individuals, there is conflict between husband and wife in *Your Life to Live* and *Hours Before Dawn*. In *The Tamarind Tree* there is conflict between the two village landlords — Harihara and Anukul. At the level of groups, conflict is presented between high-castes and low-castes and among low-castes themselves in *Outcast*. In *Blackstone*, there is conflict between the landlords and the landless peasants. At the level of ideas, conflict is depicted between forces of unity and those of division in *A House Full of People*; between tradition and individual will in *A Gift of Love*; between Eastern values and Western values in *Candles and Roses*, between the ideals of the interns and the existing conditions in the U.N.O. in *Sands of Time*. At the level of ideologies, there is conflict between the two factions of Naxalites in *Blackstone*. Conflict within one's own self is presented in Ashoke, Zarina, Mrinal, Samir and Monique in their attempts at self-education and coming to terms with their life-partners. Similarly, conflict is internalized in Mohamaya's character as she is forced to live in Calcutta after her marriage though her heart is all the time concerned for the village, Balavpur.

Similarly, contrast is presented at several levels — between individuals, places and ideas. The best instance of contrast between individuals can be seen in Pramila and Monique as they represent two divergent cultures. Through them, the author brings out the contrast between the Hindu and the Western views of love and marriage, of husband-wife relationship and of the
relationship between man and Nature. Similarly, in Portrait on the Roof, Basu presents an interesting contrast between Hinduism and Christianity (as represented by the Roman Catholic Church) through Dilip and Teresa. Manmatha and Kesab offer a contrast as leaders of Sambal and Kalapathor in Outcast and Blackstone respectively. Sambal quickly goes out of Manmatha’s guidance as their perceptions towards the welfare of the outcastes differ. But Kalapathor remains Kesab’s lieutenant throughout the novel even when he grows critical of Kesab’s perceptions towards the Naxalite movement. Basu also provides contrast between places. For example, in The Tamarind Tree, he presents the contrast between Balavpur and Calcutta through the eyes of Mohamaya. Similarly, there is contrast between the affluent localites and messy, busy localities of Calcutta in A House Full of people.

Use of symbols and images, though very occasional, is a part of Basu’s technique. In A House Full of People, the old mansion itself is a symbol of the value of the traditional joint family and the cracks in the walls are symbolic of the dissident voices in the family. Further, in Outcast, temple-entry becomes a symbol of social equality among all castes and hence Sambal vows to achieve the right to enter into Kali-temple for the untouchables.

Basu also makes use of beast and bird imagery in his attempt to achieve artistic effect in his fiction. Certain animals and birds are attributed some qualities by human beings so that when people are called by the names of such animals and birds,
the people reveal their nature. This happens in two of Basu's novels. In *Your Life to Live*, Ashoke is called a proud peacock as he tries to woo Zarina. In another occasion, it is said that he wants to keep Zarine as a 'myna' in a cage to indicate his possessive nature. In *The Tamarind Tree*, Anukul calls himself a cobra and Gobindo is called a crocodile. Further, the image of a plant is used in *Sands of Time* to describe the U.N.O. as an organization to be nurtured and protected carefully to its full growth and development.

It is interesting to note that the titles — *The Tamarind Tree*, *Candles and Roses*, *Hours Before Dawn* and *Blackstone* — acquire a symbolic force. The Tamarind Tree, like Toru Dutt's *Casuarina Tree*, is both tree and symbol and both time and eternity are amply implied in it. It recaptures the past and immortalizes the moments of time so recaptured. The title *Candles and Roses*, suggests the philosophical significance of the novel. Candles and roses stand for light and fragrance each enhancing the value of the other. They seem to be an ideal medium to get into meditation, peace, spirituality and enlightenment. The title *Hours Before Dawn* is symbolic of Kabita's affirmation of life and of her hope for harmony between her and Mrinal. The title, *Blackstone*, appears to be an English translation of the Bengali name of the protagonist in the novel, 'Kalapathor'. The title, perhaps, symbolizes the nature of the heart of an innocent tribal changed into a burnt mass of stone by the cruelty of man to man.
Romen Basu also makes use of myth as a part of his technique. A significant use of myth is seen in *Candles and Roses* where a resemblance is forged between Pramila and 'goddesses' in Indian mythology like Sita, Sabitri and Damayanti who endured pain for the life and welfare of their husbands. On the other hand, myth is made use of in a lighter vein in *The Tamarind Tree* where an unemployed vagabond, Annadasankar, is said to play the role of 'Narad', a puranic divine sage whose visits to Gods and kings often lead to quarrels.

Basu's use of language in his fiction has notable features. He says that he has chosen to write novels in English as he feels he cannot express himself adequately in Bengali. His prose has a transparent ease, directness and is free from ornamentation and circumlocution. He shares one important quality of some of his contemporary Indian novelists in English, namely, the use of Indian terms in English spelling and the use of swear words and idioms in English translation. At times, Basu makes his language lyrical and evocative as when he describes Sheila at the threshold of her motherhood in *A House Full of People* and when Samir passionately admires Monique's stunning beauty in *Candles and Roses* or when he describes a calm, starry night in *Outcast*. He employs certain Indian English expressions as referring to wife as 'Mrs.' In *Candles and Roses*, he makes use of French words in the conversation of French characters to give local colour to the novel.
Romen Basu has a message to convey through his novels. He says: "Each novel has a distinct message. Depending upon the cause which motivated me to write, the message comes through." Like the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya and Chaman Nahal, Basu's novels, by and large, convey an affirmation of life and acceptance of life in its entirety. In A House Full of People, Ranjit and Chitra learn to accept the harsh reality of the fall of joint family with no sentimentality. A Gift of Love, Your Life to Live and Hours Before Dawn call for positive values of life like love, harmony, understanding and hope. The Tamarind Tree upholds values of village life like unity, equality, non-violence and brotherhood. Candles and Roses underlines the importance of the Indian values of life and the need for inner search by each in his own way to get at truth. Portrait on the Roof vindicates the dictum: 'Beauty of soul surpasses all else.' Sands of Time reaffirms the author's hope for the peaceful survival of mankind under the assurance of an effective U.N.O. Through Outcast and Blackstone he warns of disastrous nature of caste system and exploitation as they create and foster hiatus between man and man.

Despite his solid contribution to Indian novel in English, Romen Basu is not free from certain limitations as a novelist. Some of the weaknesses of his fictional artistry come to surface in the handling of his themes. In Sands of Time, for

instance, the promise of the story seems to have been lost in
telling. In other words, the thematic excellence is not matched
by the requisite technical performance of the novel. Moreover,
the author makes only token efforts at characterization. The
characters, engaged in a series of discussions, appear as the
author's mouthpieces speaking in monotone. Thus, at times, the
novelist turns out to be an essayist. Similarly, Your Life to Live
suffers from inadequate conception of form. The plot looks
contrived. It can also be seen that in some places in the novel,
Candles and Roses, discussions on both art and religion remain a
patchwork rather than an integral part of the plot.

Also, some of Romen Basu's novels do not present
adequate resolution of the issues raised in them. For instance,
unlike Your Life to Live, Hours Before Dawn does not present a
restoration of understanding between the husband and the wife.
Similarly, Outcast and Blackstone do not show a convincing solution
to the problems raised in them as is done in The Tamarind Tree.
Also, one tends to feel that in Blackstone the Naxalite movement
could have been subjected to harder analysis or testing as the
novel is written twenty years after the uprising.

Furthermore, some of Romen Basu's characters seem to
betray their inconsistencies. For instance, in Candles and Roses,
Samir Sen is surprisingly modern or conservative as per his
convenience. The character loses credibility when he accepts a
dowry marriage with all his westernization and progressive
outlook. Second, he is more a theoretician than a follower of
the beliefs and values of Hinduism. A similar contradiction in characterization is present in Portrait on the Roof where the character, Eduardo, is referred to as the most sensible member of Signor Luciano's family. But, later on, Teresa says that his ways are disapproved by the family. This violates all probability, particularly when the speaker happens to be an honest, outspoken girl like Teresa. In Hours Before Dawn, Kabita insists on returning to India before and after her marriage with Mrinal. But, when Mrinal gets a lucrative post of assistant editor of the newspaper, Village Voice, she appears to be lured by it. From then onwards, she no more refers to her old demand of returning to India. This strikes an inconsistent note in her personality. Further, in the same novel, the author appears to introduce deliberately a coincidence that both Kabita and Mrinal come from 'brahmin' families with different 'gotras' to enable them to marry.

Though the author mixes points of view in the course of narration, there is an inadequate use of points of view other than the third-person point of view. The author does not make sufficient use of dramatic mode of narration. For instance, in A House Full of People, he does not bring out the impact of the first signs of cracks in the joint family through the interaction of characters. Further, he could have made Sudhin's death scene more effective if he had made it dramatic. The novel also contains forbiddingly lengthy dialogues. For example, Ranjit's reply to Chitra runs to twenty-nine lines. In Your Life to Live,
the explicit form of moralizing loses its effect. The characters reveal themselves, not through the fabric of the story, but in long, dull monologues.

Basu's use of English language is not free from certain linguistic infelicities. For instance, it looks odd when he makes a true translation of certain native expressions into English. At times, syntax becomes puzzling. The author also has not paid enough attention to diction. For instance, in *Blackstone*, the protagonist who is an uneducated tribal speaks polished language. Similarly, in *Outcast*, sometimes Basu's language looks artificial as it is entirely at odds with the rural setting of the novel. Moreover, humour appears rarely in Basu's novels.

With all such limitations and lapses, Romen Basu's novels deserve to be studied as works of art. What is more, they demand critical attention as human documents with a bearing on real life. They fall short of requirements of sophisticated forms of story-telling practised in modern British fiction. The reason can be seen in what Basu himself says:

I pay less attention to technique. I prefer substance to form. I do not follow the technique which comes out of courses in creative writing.6

Yet, his novels register remarkable progress in the growth and development of Indian Fiction in English. Each of his novels is

devoted to a 'cause' and has a positive approach to life. They represent the Indian ethos, explore the Indian psyche and provide a new consciousness of Indian values of life. They have predominantly Indian characters and atmosphere barring the examples of *Sands of Time* and *Hours Before Dawn*. The author's close and convincing observation is evident in the realistic delineation of characters and situations. Thus, his Domestic novels represent the changes taking place in traditional families. On the other hand, his Rural novels have explosive social and political content. His novels dealing with East-West encounter and internationalism testify to the fact that human contacts across cultures are one of his major concerns. Further, Romen Basu is devoted to the cause of women as seen in almost every one of his novels. His plots are devoid of complexity and the narration is free from circumlocution. Consequently, Romen Basu "has become one of India's most popular modern novelists" and his novels richly deserve critical attention.

While assessing Romen Basu as a novelist, it is profitable to compare his novels with those of Chaman Nahal who is claimed to be "the most outstanding of the novelists whose work appeared first in the seventies." As has been stated earlier, Romen Basu and Chaman Nahal share almost a similar theory of fiction. Both of them believe that fiction must have relevance to real life and that a creative writer cannot ignore the economic and social realities of the day-to-day life. Yet, Romen Basu does not want to be described as a 'sociological novelist'

7. C. Hart Schaff, rev. of *Candles and Roses*.
since he does not write with any overt social purpose like Anand and Bhattacharya.

Furthermore, both Chaman Nahal and Romen Basu project positive affirmation of life. For instance, Nahal's first novel, My True Faces, speaks out the need to accept the diversity of God's creation by acquiring a composite view of life. The diversity includes, in the context of the novel, the difference in the personalities of wife and husband too. Romen Basu's Domestic novels also make a plea that wife and husband should accept the individual personalities of each other. Such a view of conjugal life requires a superior or purged state of mind brought about by a temporary separation from each other. Further, Romen Basu's novels of East-West encounter seek to synthesize the values of the East and the West in order to have an integrated vision of life. Second, Nahal's Azadi projects a profound philosophy of life, namely, affirmation of life. Giving no place for anger, hatred or sentimentalism, the author establishes values such as forgiveness, love and a life of action. The author seeks to substantiate through the protagonist that suffering, pain and death are only a prelude to a new life, full of affirmation and hope. Romen Basu's Rural novels, like Azadi, present the sordid social realities and seem to suggest that non-violence is a more effective means of achieving social harmony. They stress the need to oppose the unjust aspects of society and to strive for a better social order. Thus, in presenting affirmation of life, both Chaman Nahal and Romen Basu get close to Bhabani Bhattacharya whose protagonists
display abundant love, purity, strength and hope in spite of facing the grim realities of life.

Though there are certain similar themes in the novels of Romen Basu and Chaman Nahal such as internationalism, wife-husband relationship and joint family system, the latter seems to show more concern for the technical aspects of story-telling than Romen Basu. For instance, internationalism at the level of human emotions between lovers of different countries is common in Romen Basu's *Sands of Time* and Chaman Nahal's *Into Another Dawn*. In *Sands of Time*, internationalism is projected through the U.N., while it is presented through racial harmony in *Into Another Dawn*. But Nahal's novel excels in technique and has better readability than *Sands of Time* which, at times, turns out to be dull and drab.

Second, in his Domestic novels, Basu drives home the need for harmony and understanding between husband and wife for a successful conjugal life through temporary separation. In *My True Faces*, Nahal delves deeper into the same theme through a permanent break-up between husband and wife. What is more, in *My True faces*, the search for wife turns out to be a SEARCH for the meaning of life acquiring philosophic overtones. The thematic value of the novel is enhanced by an effective use of the techniques of interior monologue and stream of consciousness.

Third, it is interesting to note that Romen Basu excels in presenting the theme of the disintegration of joint family.
While *My True Faces* and *Into Another Dawn* deal with joint family or group-living at a superficial level taking a castigating stance, Basu's novels — *A House Full of People*, *Your Life to Live* and *A Gift of Love* excel in presenting an authentic portrayal of the beneficial and harmful aspects of joint family. What is more, these novels elevate joint family to stand out as an important theme and reveal the author's consciousness of the sociological importance of the decadence of joint family.

Fourth, while comparing Chaman Nahal and Romen Basu, it is significant to note that Basu's creativity is strangely unprovoked by the most dynamic aspect of modern Indian history, namely, the titanic struggle for India's independence. There are only passing references to the independente movement in his novels. On the other hand, Nahal excels in giving fictional treatment to several events of the independence movement and to the aftermath of the attainment of independence. But, it is equally significant to note that Basu responds more to the social and economic problems of the rural India as evidenced in his Rural novels, namely, *The Tamarind Tree*, *Outcast* and *Blackstone*. In particular, *Outcast* is a passionate outcry against untouchability, exploitation and caste discrimination like Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*. Similarly, *Blackstone* makes one remember of K.A. Abbas's novel, *The Naxalites* in giving a balanced treatment to the Naxalite uprising in West Bengal.

A striking feature of Romen Basu's novels is that their spatial canvas is big. They deal with a wide range of subjects
ranging from disintegration of joint family to internationalism. Though some of the themes like untouchability, East-West encounter and wife-husband relationship have already been touched upon by writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya and Chaman Nahal, Romen Basu delves deeper and makes a fresh approach to these themes with a view to forging new meanings and imparting values of life. Another equally striking feature of Basu’s novels is his "all-encompassing and zestful preoccupation with the human condition, in widely different geographical areas and even more widely different social strata." He is equally at home in presenting the poor, downtrodden untouchables and tribals in rural Bengal as well as in depicting the posh, sophisticated life of the affluent in Calcutta and in cities across the world. He uses the same 'penetrating insight' when he speaks of issues at the micro level of individual and family as when he presents issues at the macro level of the world at large. Furthermore, he smiles at human foibles. He is at his best in zestly depicting the 'human nest' of joint family. As a result, Basu's novels are always entertaining and hard to put down, and they have in several respects a kinship with the work of more widely known Indian writers in English: an opulent manner of using a language which has a common root with their own, a sympathy towards man, a tenderness to the young, and a skeptical quirk of thought as if

they had all subscribed to the New Yorker in their nurseries. 10

Above all, Romen Basu's novels bear immense relevance not only to India but also to the world at large. His implicit message of non-violence as the most effective means of solving social and economic problems of India hardly needs to be emphasized. Similarly, his faith in the U.N.O as 'the most realistic place on earth for man's survival, not only to prevent war, but to solve every kind of human suffering' is hoped to gain currency in the present world free from cold-war. Thus, Romen Basu's novels have a marked distinction of their own and make a valuable contribution to the Indian novel in English.