CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

The 1970's witnessed an efflorescence in Indian English fiction heralding a new era of change in its tone, tenor and content. Apart from Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and the novelists of the fifties and the sixties who continued to write novels in the seventies, a set of new writers appeared on the scene whose work was published first towards the close of the sixties and later. They include Romen Basu, Chaman Nahal, Arun Joshi, M.V. Rama Sarma, Michael Chacko Daniels, Nergis Dalal, Ruskin Bond, Raji Narasimhan, Sasthi Brata, Veena Paintal and Bharati Mukherjee who write with a purpose which they translate into a discourse, a design or a structure to accommodate new compulsions, new realities and deepened sensibilities. These novelists not only happily demonstrate a thematic and technical maturity but also effectively evince an intensely felt Indian sensibility and a new consciousness, offering remarkable interpretations of imperishable Indian values as well as highlighting our cultural heritage, sometimes in sharp contrast with western values. Each one of these novelists has added a new, significant dimension, a new, significant depth to Indian
English fiction. In fact, they all hold out plenty of promise and potentiality that we have got to reckon with in all critical fairness.¹

Particularly, Arun Joshi, Bharati Mukherjee, Chaman Nahal, Romen Basu and Sasthi Brata have made a significant contribution thereby elevating Indian English fiction to a much higher plane of a new seriousness in the context of world writing.

The novelists of the seventies have distinguished themselves with a variety of thematic concerns and technical virtuosities handling English language freely, creatively and unselfconsciously. Arun Joshi takes up in his novels certain existentialist problems and serious themes, revealing his awareness and craving for technical experimentation. M.V. Rama Sarma's novels chiefly dwell on the theme of quest while Michael Chacko Daniels chooses to write on the problems of minorities. Ruskin Bond's susceptibility to children's literature influences the content of his novels. Sasthi Brata's novels have an autobiographical element and show a zeal for breaking the old order in the Indian society, orthodoxy, intolerance and authoritarianism. Raji Narasimhan dwells upon the relatively new theme of the 'liberated' working woman and her plight in contemporary society. She presents women in quest of freedom and self-fulfilment. Veena Paintal comes close to Raji Narasimhan in trying to focus on the inferior status given to Indian women and the need for them to fight against the traditional expectations of

society to become independent. Unlike these writers, Nergis Dalal writes of 'a protected world of the individual comprising subtle and complex emotions and passions.' She also makes a comprehensive study of foreigners in their intimate relationships with Indians in India. The basic problem in Bharati Mukherjee's novels is articulation of emotions which are essentially incommunicable. In other words, her novels are explorations of the kind of sensibility which is inarticulate. Chaman Nahal's novels give ample evidence of variety, profundity and artistic integrity. Their thematic content is highly significant. His themes include wife-husband relationship, tradition versus westernization, partition of the country, internationalism or synthesis of the ethnic strains, East-West encounter, man-woman love transcending national barriers, satire on the contemporary anglicized upper class, terrorism versus Gandhian non-violence in the context of freedom struggle.

Romen Basu belongs chronologically to this group of writers as his first novel was published in 1968 followed by ten novels that were published in the seventies and the eighties in quick succession. His novels bear significant resemblances to those of Chaman Nahal among the novelists of the seventies in terms of choice of themes ranging from disintegration of joint family, wife-husband relationship, East-West encounter to internationalism. Indian to the core, his novels are significant for their sociological value which, however, does not detract from their merit as works of art.
Though a novelist of the seventies, Romen Basu, like Chaman Nahal, belongs to the tradition of social and political realism and humanism established by Mulk Raj Anand and fostered chiefly by Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandaya. The attempt to render contemporary Indian society realistically can be traced back to the novels in most Indian languages in the second half of the nineteenth century. As Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly observes:

Realism is not a value in literature, but one of the many modes that narrative fiction can adopt. When novel was emerging as a distinct genre in India, social realism had for some time been the dominant mode in the European model, and the early Indian novelists joined in 'that effort, that willed tendency of art to approximate reality.' This effort consisted, among other things, in the creation of characters in situations permitting individual choice as well as their mimetic representation in a manner which did not distort contemporary reality.²

Thus, fictional realism marked the creative imagination in the second half of the nineteenth century India and "it subsequently came to form the mainstream along which the Indian novel developed in the twentieth century."³

3. Ibid, p. 16.
Ever since the 'novel' form came to stay in India, "the reciprocal influence between the novel in English and the novel in the regional languages has been rather more intimate and purposive than such influence in the fields of poetry and drama." For instance, the Bengali novelist, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (1876-1938) in his novels "identified himself with the down-and-outs, and boldly portrayed the tears and sweat of the lower middle and have-not classes. This realism, however, didn't dry up -- in this his work foreshadowed the best fiction of Mulk Raj Anand in English -- his abiding faith in the essential nobility of man."  

Between 1920 and 1940 the nationalist movement led by Gandhi with its revolutionary tendencies in society influenced the Indian writers of English fiction. This was reflected in the themes of patriotism, communal harmony and social reform chosen by them. There was a penchant for realism, to present India with a down-to-earth attitude. Thus, the novel of social realism emerged bringing with it a new inspiration, a new technique and a new vision.

Mulk Raj Anand, 'the father of the modern English novel in India,' blazed the new trail of social realism. Replete with 'passionate realism,' his novels attack social inequalities

5. Ibid. p. 318.
and make a powerful plea for social change with a Dickensian reformatory zeal. As H.M. Williams rightly points out, "Anand's novels constitute a considerable breakthrough in Indo-Anglian literature by indicating the wealth of material in the life of India's 'downtrodden masses' and in the drama of revolutionary nationalism available to novelists capable of combining social realism with fervent didacticism." It is believed that

The integrity and coherence that realism requires is present in the raw material as well as in the finished product, that is, in the persons and the world to which the realist directs his interest as well as in 'the characters' and 'the world' which he 'recreates' in the pages of his fiction.

This is the kind of realism we find in Anand's fiction. The protagonists of almost all his novels -- the sweeper, the coolie, the villager, the 'chamar', the peasant, the indentured labourer, the factory worker, the sepoy --- are drawn from the oppressed class of society. Instead of the recitalist, oriental manner of story-telling, he uses the Western dramatic technique of fiction. Thus, Anand succeeds in "interpreting the heart of India, the real India of the villages to the West in the form they could easily understand and appreciate."  

Humanism is the focal point of Anand's fiction. The chief characteristics of Anand's humanism are his "insistence on the dignity of man -- irrespective of caste, creed and wealth, his plea for the practice of compassion as a living value, his conception of whole man, the profound importance he attaches to art and poetry as instruments for developing whole man, his crusade against superstition, feudalism and imperialism."  

In the novels of Anand, the downtrodden characters are anguished but they are essentially human. His humanism pleads for compassion and sympathetic understanding for liberation of man from the enveloping gloom of violence, greed, jealousy and narrowness. Anand is essentially a 'humanist' because "he rightly thinks that, since most of our problems have been created by man, they can also be solved by man. Since man is the reason for the miseries of mankind, he should now become the powerhouse for processing his own salvation."  

Anand's humanistic perspective has given his fiction a depth of vision and a ring of sincerity. It has also endowed his fiction with a sense of immediacy of life, though his sense of commitment, at times, becomes so fervid that art degenerates into propaganda.


Like Anand, Raja Rao is also a product of the Gandhian Age. He reveals in his work his sensitive awareness of the forces let loose by the Gandhian Revolution. Yet, his fiction stands apart with its mythological, spiritual and religious overtones. While Anand sticks to social realism, excluding religion and Indian philosophy as irrelevant to the struggle for economic and political power by the underprivileged, Raja Rao constantly discusses the nationalist struggle and its revolutionary implications in terms of Hindu mythology, religion and culture. He makes an earnest attempt "to revive the ancient tradition of epics and Puranas in the comparatively new genre of fiction, as such he depends heavily on the metaphysical heritage of the motherland."¹¹

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is a realistic epic-novel of the freedom struggle. It is a tale of Gandhi's charismatic effect on the village, Kanthapura. It also seeks to explore the 'real' nature of India. It is modelled on the pattern of *The Ramayana*. "By equating the freedom movement with *The Ramayana* and with the gospel of Sri Krishna in *The Gita*, Raja Rao probes the deeper questions of good and evil, order and disorder that lie beneath the tangled web of the political struggle."¹²


In his next novel, *The Serpent and the Rope*, Raja Rao makes an attempt to explain and explore the unique vision embodied in Indian culture, Indian history, Indian religion and in Indian philosophy. In short, he seeks to expose 'the inwardness of the Indian self-hood.' What is more, he records a new development in the art of writing fiction. The influence of Proust, Henry James and James Joyce can be seen in his use of techniques such as interior monologue, extensive retrospective narrative and symbolism.

R.K. Narayan's Malgudi novels stand in contrast to those of Anand and Raja Rao. This is due to Narayan's different 'angle of vision.' Yet, Narayan's novels are a faithful reflection of an India as real as Anand's or Raja Rao's. While Anand is an angry protester, a satirist and a revolutionary, Narayan is essentially a humorous writer interested in the lower middle classes of South India. He is a comic ironist and "a master of comedy who is not unaware of the tragedy of human situation; he is neither an intolerant critic of Indian ways and modes nor their fanatic defender; he is, on the whole, content to snap Mulgudi life's little ironies, knots of satiric circumstance, and tragi-comedies of mischance and misdirection." Narayan's novels present a blend of comic vision, gentle irony and sympathy, quiet realism and fantasy.

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Narayan's realism is limited to the authenticity of his descriptions of the everyday scenes in the life of Malgudi. As K.R. Srinivasas Iyengar points out, "he would like to be a detached observer, to concentrate on a narrow scene, to sense the atmosphere of the place, to snap a small group of characters in their oddities and angularities: he would, if he could, explore the inner countries of the mind, heart and soul, catch the uniqueness in the ordinary, the tragic in the prosaic."  

Narayan's novels are singularly free from the nature of sociological thesis-novels. The themes of his novels include "the growth of a child into adolescence, love, marriage and the aftermath, the place of women in society, the generation-gap, choice of bride, siances with the 'dear departed,' extra-marital love, show-business and sainthood, the relation of part (life lived) with the whole (life hereafter), attachment and detachment, the caste-mark (as also the forces working against it), the money lending and borrowing rackets, love leading to the doorsteps of Gandhi, art, life, myth and reality, struggle of the lower middle for the upper middle class status, the breakdown of the joint family system." Summing up Narayan's achievement, H.M. Williams says:

His ability to seek the source of his art in the universal and to see classical Indian

preoccupations beneath the changes and challenges of the modern world, are the very things that provide the strength of his finest achievement as a novelist in the nineteen fifties and sixties.17

Thus, it becomes evident that the novelists of the thirties and the forties maintained, by and large, a sociological approach to literature concerning themselves with public preoccupations such as the freedom movement, the poverty and oppression of the underdog and social evils such as untouchability. And, as H.M. Williams rightly observes, "what unites such diverse writers as Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan is that they are all concerned with exposing the significance of India for mankind and for the problems that man faces in the twentieth century -- violence, freedom and authority, tradition and progress, individual family, preservation and annihilation."18

A close observation of Nahal's fiction reveals that he belongs to the humanistic tradition initiated by Anand in the thirties and carried on by Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandaya in the fifties and the sixties. Nahal's theory of fiction is analogous with that of Bhattacharya. Like him, Nahal believes in the social purpose of fiction. He is of the opinion that a creative writer, especially in modern times, cannot ignore

18. Ibid., p. 7.
the economic and social actualities of the day-to-day life. Hence, according to him, a novel must possess 'synchronic relevance' or 'specific humanism', that is, it must concern itself with "a specific community, a specific class, a specific society." 19

Chaman Nahal's first five novels can profitably be read in the light of his theory of novel. He seeks to present "not an India, window-dressed for foreign consumption, nor even an India seen from the outside, but the real middle-class India, an India Nahal understands and is thoroughly acquainted with and of which he is able to create the world of the novel." 20 He comes close to Bhabani Bhattacharya in giving fictional treatment to the traumatic events of the pre- and post-independence India and the tumultuous changes that have taken place in the Indian society after the nation's freedom. Moreover, like Bhattacharya, he is a positive affirmationist in his philosophy of life. He upholds values of life and shows life worth living with optimism and courage.

Man-woman relationship is the unit of individual and social life. The changing facets of this relationship since independence are reflected in a number of novels. Divorce has become a reality with the advent of the Hindu Code Bill and with the influence of Westernization. Besides, owing to urbanization

and industrialization, the system of joint family has been yielding its place to that of nuclear family. With these social actualities as a backdrop, one could approach Nahal's first novel, *My True Faces* (1973). The novel is also important for its philosophical overtones and psychological realism. While the Bengal famine makes its sweeping presence in Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!*, the multi-headed hydra of partition looms large in Nahal's second novel, *Azadi*. The novel can be read along with Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* which deal with the theme of partition. Nahal presents partition from a humanistic angle, renders the holocaust objectively and shows the unbeaten human spirit despite the devastation. 'Synthesis, not merely of ethnic strains but also that of East and West' forms the thesis of Nahal's third novel, *Into Another Dawn*. In this novel, Nahal also presents the theme of international brotherhood. He attempts a social corrective in his fourth novel, *The English Queens*, with a blend of fantasy and reality. Laying bare as it does the foibles of the anglicized upper class of Indian society and the degradation of Indian life at political, social and cultural levels, the novel makes a plea for moderation, for avoiding artificiality in thinking and living and for improvement of the standards of public life.

A close study of Romen Basu's fiction in terms of his themes reveals that he too, like Chaman Nahal, belongs to the tradition of realism and humanism initiated by Anand in the
thirties and carried on chiefly by Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandaya in the fifties and the sixties. His theory of fiction bears similarities to that of Anand, Bhattacharya and Nahal. He says:

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. Expressing it is the power of art. 21

He admits that he is influenced 'a great deal' by Mulk Raj Anand. He says: "I admired his writing from Untouchable onwards. I share his views, respect his dedication and commitment.22 However, he denies writing novels with a social purpose like Anand and Bhattacharya. "That is why," he says, "I have not accepted having been described as a sociological novelist."23

Basu's novels bear immense sociological value and represent the Indian society from different viewpoints -- the rural and the urban, the impact of the West on the life and social institutions of Indians, social unrest and human relations with a cross-cultural background. Commenting on the basis of his choice of themes, Romen Basu says:

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

22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
develop as I get deeper on the subject. I deeply believe in family. Togetherness is my obsession. So I wrote *A House Full of People* describing the cause of disintegration of joint families. *A Gift of Love* is about a motherless child's search for love. *Outcast* is about evils of caste system --- not only brahmans discriminating against the 'sudras' but the lower castes against each other. So, in every one of my novels you will see the cause.

III

Again, though a novelist of the seventies chronologically, Romen Basu could be grouped with the novelists of the fifties and the sixties in terms of his own age and his choice of themes.

The close of the Second World War and the events of national importance -- national independence followed by partition — deeply stirred the consciousness of the Indian nation and influenced the literary scene in the fifties and the sixties. A harvest of new talent appeared on the scene. Some of the younger novelists creatively exploited the socio-political changes that came over India in the wake of national independence. Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, B. Rajan's *The Dark Dancer*, Manohar Malgonkar's

A Bend in the Ganges are a creative comment on the problems and the chaotic conditions that defaced India after partition. With the end of the British rule, the political commitments related to national independence that were so strong in Anand and Raja Rao became obsolete in the fifties and the sixties. In the independent India, the writers found themselves free to write and speak. They had a wider choice of subject and they were now heard and read with respect. The immediate result was "a turning to private life, to Indian individual consciousness and Indian family life." In this context, the tradition of social and political realism founded by Anand received a new impetus in the fiction of some writers of the fifties and the sixties. As H.M. Williams rightly points out, "the most promising development in Indo-Anglian fiction concerns the transmission of genuine Indian themes and the absorption of Indian literary conventions and forms within the novel as conceived and developed in the Western world."

Thus, the novelists of the fifties and the sixties started presenting the real face of India with its economic and social realities. Commenting on their choice of themes, K.C. Bhatnagar says:

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26. Ibid., p. 95.
They are sensitive to the emergence of new socio-economic and moral values in the context of age-old traditions: the slow loosening of the joint family and community bonds both in the rural and urban areas, the upsurge of heroic patriotism under the monolithic Gandhian influence, the growth of heavy industry at the cost of cottage industries, the egalitarian protest, the problem of the isolation of the individual from society, North VS South, East VS West problems, the emerging trends in Indian politics -- these are some of the challenging themes that have been taken up by the young Indo-English novelists.\(^{27}\)

Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandaya are the foremost among such writers.

Though Bhabani Bhattacharya is not a committed writer like Anand, he has evinced keen interest in the social, economic and political problems of India. As Stephen Hemenway points out, "Bhattacharya inherits Forster's sharp eye for East-West dichotomies, Anand's concern with social, economic and political problems and Narayan's playfulness and exaggeration."\(^{28}\)

Bhattacharya believes that "a novel must have a social purpose" and that "it must place before the reader something from


the society's point of view." His novels purport "to usher in a new social order in India, based on justice, equality, co-operation and the judicious synthesis of the old and the modern." Thus, while Anand is a revolutionary social realist, Bhattacharya is a reformist social realist. In *So Many Hungers!* he presents in realistic terms the savage effect of the Bengal famine resulting in mass starvation. He brilliantly traces poverty and hunger leading to social evils like exploitation and prostitution and, at the same time, juxtaposes this with heights of human sacrifice and nobility. The twin hunger for food and freedom is the central theme of the novel. It lays emphasis on the lot of the many rather than on any individual's lot. Bhattacharya is not only a realist but also a visionary "for he has portrayed not only the darker side of life -- its poverty, corruption and suffering but also the golden edges of hope around it." In *So Many Hungers!* he not only presents men and women emaciated by hunger, but also provides us with glimpses into characters who display abundant love, purity, strength and hope.

In *Music for Mohini*, Bhattacharya deals with another contemporary problem in India -- the reconciliation of old and new values in Indian life. Unlike the earlier novel, *Music for Mohini*


is not born of any specific inspiration. Yet, the author succeeds in suggesting the direction to the countrymen to reap the benefits of political freedom. The novel ends on a hopeful note, suggesting the need of social reforms through the reformist group.

He Who Rides a Tiger is "a novel of protest not only against a political and economic system which degrades the human being but also against an established social order which labels men as superior and inferior by virtue of the accident of their birth." Thematically, the novel is related to So Many Hungers!.

While the hunger for freedom and hunger for food find expression in So Many Hungers!, the third type of hunger — 'the hunger of the well-fed and prosperous men of the city for the emaciated women destitutes' — is exhibited in He Who Rides a Tiger.

In A Goddess Named Gold, Bhattacharya shows his concern for the right use of the political freedom the country has achieved. Freedom should not be misused to amass property. It should spur men to do deeds that benefit all. It should enable men to reach targets further away. The theme enables the author to express the dangers facing the country and to stress the duties of citizenship. The novel strikes a note of optimism about the liquidation of all exploiters by the people.

Thus, a study of his novels reveals that Bhattacharya is not only a realist but also a visionary. He depicts poverty, corruption, superstition, exploitation and dumb suffering as he has seen them with his observant eyes. But he also presents in his novels a social order which gives equality to man and a mental outlook which promotes harmony through tolerance and reconciliation.

Kamala Markandaya is the only novelist in the fifties and the sixties who comes close to the tradition of Anand and Bhattacharya. She presents the grim and harrowing side of life in India. She sees "the essential tragedy of India as the loss of the truly human, the truly personal, beneath the welter of impersonal or social forces, whether of blind nature or of man himself in all his folly and wickedness and blindness." The contemporary India racked by confusion, violence, convulsive social and political changes is presented in her novels. Naturally, she deals with "themes of tragic waste, the despair of unfulfilled or ruined love, the agony of artistic ambition, the quest for self-realisation and truth by the young..."  

34. Ibid., p. 84.
Nature. They are even deprived of their drought-affected land. The author shows these dark clouds along with the silver lining -- the indomitable human dignity. Yet another endearing feature of the novel is the presentation of the peasants with all their follies and virtues.

*Some Inner Fury* is a tale of personal love that transcends race, placed against the backdrop of national Independence movement. This love between an Indian girl and an English government official is smothered by the political animosities. The novel is 'an eloquent cry of despair.' *A Silence of Desire* not only offers a subtle psychological study of wife-husband relationship but also explores the spiritual dilemma of doubt and faith. Her next novel, *Possession*, deals with the East-West theme. It seeks to explore how India is deprived of its heritage by the possessiveness of the British and the way out is in snapping its ties with the British. *A Handful of Rice* comes close to Anand's fiction in presenting the problems of the suffering poor.

An important preoccupation of the Indian novelists in English is to dwell upon the encounter between the East and the West not only at the level of people but also at the level of ideas. The impact of the West has created certain cultural problems and crises in values in all parts of India. Naturally, it is a theme of all-India significance. Moreover, some of the contemporary Indian novelists in English, including Romen Basu,
have stayed long abroad. Because of their intimate experience of a culture other than their own, they are made aware of their Indianness as well as of the difference in the two systems of value. A majority of Indian novelists in English have found a creative challenge in the tension between the two civilizations. They have explored the metaphysical, spiritual, and romantic aspects of the confrontation each in his or her own way.

In the fifties and the sixties, novelists such as Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, B. Rajan and Santha Rama Rau attempted to give a fresh treatment to the theme of East-West encounter, following a reassessment of the relationship between India and England after independence. They refused to submit to the cliches embedded in the Forsterian theme and presented the East-West clash as much more complex and ironical than might appear on the surface. Commenting on the difference between the approach of Forster and that of the Indian novelists in English to the East-West theme, Meenakshi Mukherjee says:

Personal relationship - communication between, and understanding of, men who happen to belong to two races - is part of Forster's theme in _A Passage to India_ while the Indo-Anglian novelist more often than not is trying to reconcile within himself two conflicting systems of value. In this tension between the two views of life any easy solution is bound to be an inadequate one. 

Santha Rama Rau's *Remember the House* (1956), Nayantara Sahgal's *A Time to be Happy* (1957), B. Rajan's *The Dark-Dancer* (1959) and *Too Long in the West* (1961), Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) and Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) reveal the change of perspective of these authors towards the East-West encounter. In these novels, the personal crisis in the life of each Western educated hero or heroine becomes inter-cultural in nature. The connotation of 'East' and 'West' varies in these novels as do the levels of their artistic achievement.

Thus, all the important writers of the second generation in the fifties and the sixties share certain major concerns — "specific humanism instead of liberal humanism; individual happiness rather than muddled collectively signified by the joint family; morality freed of the shackles of metaphysics; ethical commitments even more valuable than morality; synthesis not merely of ethnic strains but also that of East and West; a freer and more confident handling of the English language; and bilingualism and biculturalism seem as an asset rather than a handicap."  

These thematic concerns are common to almost all the novels of Romer Basu. His themes include disintegration of joint family, tradition versus westernization, cultural conflicts in wife-husband relationship, search for true love in man-woman relationship, rural reform, divergence and convergence of the

values of the East and the West, internationalism at the level of United Nations, untouchability and Naxalite movement. Based on this analysis, his ten novels may be grouped under three heads -- Domestic novels comprising *A House Full of People*, *Your Life to Live* and *Hours Before Dawn*, Rural novels consisting of *The Tamarind Tree*, *Outcast* and *Blackstone*, novels of East-West encounter and Internationalism which include *A Gift of Love*, *Candles and Roses*, *Portrait on the Roof* and *Sands of Time*. The time of action in these novels varies from pre-independence to the nineteen sixties.

Like Santha Rama Rau and Attia Hosain of the fifties and the sixties, Romen Basu makes use of the institution of joint family for his fictional purposes with a view to highlighting the struggle between self and society. The collapse of the traditional economic foundations in the British rule brought about drastic changes in the structure of family also. The joint family system was directly hit by the Western notions of individualistic family life, and growing urbanization. The joint family is "a formidable force .... and in Indo-Anglian fiction it has served a number of functions at the same time. It represents the voice of authority and tradition and serves as a microcosm of the hierarchical society which the individual has to rebel against in order to attain his personal identity." 37 The joint family may be a static

force to rebel against but, at the same time, it also stands for security, relaxed comfort and a kind of sharing of joys and sorrows.

In this background, Romen Basu wrote the novel, *A House Full of People* (1968), which deals with the struggles of a traditional joint family to maintain its integrity in a changing milieu, finally leading to its disintegration. Through the breaking-up of the Roy family, Basu illustrates a great "impact of Western education on the culture and tradition of Bengal -- the disintegration of the collective joint family." The breaking-up of the joint family is not limited to Bengal. The whole of India had witnessed and is still witnessing the transformation from the collective to the individual. Romen Basu is a witness to this transformation and he depicts lucidly its effect on the life of the younger as well as the older generation.

Also, like Chaman Nahal, Basu is interested in the problem of conjugal relationship. The choice of this domestic theme vindicates the shift of emphasis from public to private issues of life seen in the post-independence Indian fiction in English. In his second novel, *Your Life to Live* (1972), Basu shows that the success of marital life depends upon understanding and reconciliation of values on the part of husband and wife. The title of the novel suggests that the husband and wife should

achieve harmony between them and that they should carve out a way of life suitable for them. The novel is also a reasoned tirade against the superficial glamour which young Indians like the protagonist in the novel imbibe in America. Basu shows that these apparently Westernized young men are not free from the influence of prejudices of tradition.

Individualism is the hallmark of social behaviour in modern times and it is upheld by Western culture in particular. Indians too have imbibed this trait because of the impact of the West. Romen Basu's third novel, A Gift of Love (1976), is a further step from the previous novel in the assertion of individualism. The assertion of individuality — the uncompromising pursuit of what is good to oneself — can be perceived in the protagonist's search for true love in man-woman relationship. What is more, the novel throws light on the negative side of a sprawling Indian joint family. It shows how an affluent joint family can negate the growth of a healthy personality in a motherless child. The joint family also exercises its force of tradition in negating the protagonist's desire to marry someone from the lower class. Besides, Basu shows, through the eyes of the protagonist, the moral and sexual degeneration which has always haunted collective living. Like Chaman Nahal's Into Another Dawn, A Gift of Love shows the fulfilment of love between an Indian and an English woman cutting across the barriers of nationality, religion, colour, and even of age. The novel also presents East-West encounter at the level of
human emotions. Basu maintains an admirable balance in depicting the protagonist's relationship with Indian and English girls.

Among Romen Basu's special fields of interest are the economic and social problems of Bengali villages. Rural life forms the leitmotif of three of his novels — The Tamarind Tree (1975), Outcast (1986), and Blackstone (1989). In the choice of the theme and in its treatment, Basu invariably reminds us of Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandaya. In The Tamarind Tree, the village, Balavpur, appears as a microcosm of the majority of Indian villages which are becoming 'breeding grounds for social, political, and caste rivalries.' The novel delineates the success of a village girl in bringing about peace, unity, and communal harmony in an unobtrusive, unassuming, selfless and non-violent way. It calls for a similar crusade and passion to cleanse the village life, for the roots of India are in its villages. The novel is an affirmation of Gandhian values such as Hindu-Muslim unity, prohibition, removal of untouchability and, above all, non-violent approach to social problems. Like Bhabani Bhattacharya's Music for Mohini, the novel presents the rural-urban conflict as well as the contrast between tradition and modernity. The author's devotion to women's causes provides another interesting sidelight in the novel. Yet another important issue in the novel is the rediscovery of one's own country and of one's own self presented through the man-protagonist of the novel who returns to India after a sojourn abroad and consequently decides to marry the
woman protagonist and settle in the village following a reappraisal of values of life. It may be interesting to note that home-coming after a sojourn abroad and consequent readjustment and revaluation of the terms in which to face life constitute a major issue in a number of contemporary Indian novels in English.

As a novelist of the second generation, Romen Basu is naturally interested in the ever-provoking theme of East-West encounter. As has been stated earlier, the fifties and the sixties witnessed a shift of interest from the public to the private sphere. One of the prominent issues was the quest for a satisfactory attitude towards the West, and for a realistic image of the East that would at the same time be emotionally valid. Writers like Kamala Markandaya, B. Rajan, Attia Hosain, Nayantara Sahgal have dwelt upon the theme of quest for the self touching upon the East-West conflict at different levels of meaning. In their novels, there are two groups of characters -- the representatives of the West and those (usually women) who embody the virtues of the East. The central character has to choose between the Indian woman and another person symbolising the West. In every one of these novels the East finally wins. Often, the women who embody the virtues of the East are found to re-enact the suffering, sacrificing role of Sita or Savitri. Suffering almost becomes a virtue.

Two of Basu's novels - Candles and Roses (1978) and Portrait on the Roof (1980) - deal with the theme of East-West
encounter in all its variegated aspects. While the former shows the divergence of the Eastern and the Western values, the latter shows the convergence of these values. Candles and Roses is an affirmation of the Indian, Hindu view of life and succeeds in glorifying the essence of Indian womanhood. What is more, it offers an incisive philosophical comparison between the values of the East and the West. Portrait on the Roof goes a step further in the treatment of the East-West encounter. If, in Candles and Roses, the West is shown to be the loser, Portrait on the Roof 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. The novel reaffirms the synthesis of values of the East and the West. The protagonist finds many values common to the East and the West. Commenting on this Basu observes:

By writing the cultures I was sending a message that we would have to get adjusted to in the changing world.  

Being a former international civil servant, Basu is highly competent to give fictional treatment to the relatively less explored theme of internationalism. He gives an authentic presentation of the hopes, goals, achievements, frustrations and

40. "I am really an internationalist and can see a time when there will be world passports and world organisations." "Economist who is Romanaticist". 27 March 1976.
realities of the United Nations in his novel — *Sands of Time*. He stresses the need to strengthen the U.N. by its committed civil servants to enable the World Body to play a positive role in making the world a better place to live in. Thus, *Portrait on the Roof* reveals Romen Basu the idealist while *Sands of Time* Basu the visionary.

The impact of Anand's fiction is transparent in Basu's choice of the theme of untouchability for his following novel, *Outcast* (1986). It gives a realistic account of the harassment, misery and economic exploitation the low-caste people are subject to. The author also gives a new dimension to the theme of untouchability by showing how the various gradations among untouchables prevent them from coming together to fight against oppression.

The domestic disharmony between husband and wife which Basu has already treated in *Your Life to Live* recurs in *Hours Before Dawn* (1980). As in *Your Life to Live*, the clash between the husband and the wife is a result of differences in their temperaments, upbringing, interests and attitudes to life. The clash is followed by estrangement or separation giving scope for self-education, chiefly on the part of man-protagonist. The

41. In Secretariat News dated 31 May 1983, Isabelle Burns reveals that the novel was at first tentatively given the title 'Chandal' which means an untouchable.
weakness of jealousy in the protagonist of Your Life to Live is amplified in the protagonist of Hours Before Dawn. The separation is followed by reunion. The reunion is genuine in Your Life to Live while in Hours Before Dawn it appears to be only a semblance of reunion.

One of Romen Basu's favourite motifs is the past and the lessons it can impart to us. His tenth novel, Blackstone (1989), deals with protest against social and economic exploitation in the fashion of Outcast. It is a topical novel about the armed peasant uprising in rural Bengal under Naxalite or Maoist leadership twenty years ago. While the issue of caste forms the nucleus in Outcast, the issue of realizing the dream of the landless to own land by liquidating the cruel landlords by way of an armed revolution and planning for winning political power is crucial in Blackstone. The author seeks to go beyond the images of violence that dominated the news media of the period to the human hurt and the cause for it. The novel holds lessons for a just and equitable social order.

Thus, both in the choice of themes and their 'treatment', the novels of Romen Basu distinctly belong to the tradition of social realism and humanism which was established by Mulk Raj

42. Though it is a topical novel, Romen Basu feels that it has no risk of becoming dated. He says: "A real creation can never be dated. It becomes a historical document apart from remaining a work of art." Basu's letter dated 19 May 1992.
Anand in the thirties and enriched by Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandaya in the fifties and the sixties and carried on in the seventies and later chiefly by Chamal Nahal. As novels on India and Indians, presenting an Indian point of view, reflecting the matrix of Indian culture and way of life and bearing clear traces of national identity expressed through a language racy of the soil, with a ring of authenticity and integrity, they compel critical attention.