In his second novel, *Your Life to Live* (1972), Romen Basu attempts to show 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 every wife and husband, like Ashoke and Zarina in the novel, have to live their life and strive to achieve and establish reconciliation in their own way. The road to such achievement involves realizing and transcending of one's own limitations and learning to appreciate the other point of view. The author also touches upon East-West encounter and leaves a note of affirmation of life in the treatment of the theme. Like *A House Full of People*, *Your Life to Live* is also a testimony to the author's ability in delineating complexities, trials and tribulations in personal life.

The novel is partly set in Europe but a major part of it is set in America and later in India. Ashoke is an attractive and enterprising young man from Calcutta who has made a success in the competitive New York business world. Handsome, assured and westernized, he is on holiday in Vienna when the novel opens. At the airport in Vienna, he meets Zarina, a Muslim girl from India. She did her Master's in Art History at the School of Oriental Studies in London. She has come to Vienna to see the architecture
and sculpture in churches and art galleries. Ashoke is drawn to her by her 'rare beauty.' Together they visit museums and night clubs. They find themselves in love with each other. They come closer physically too. Zarina accepts his engagement present before leaving for India and Ashoke gets back to New York.

Back at home, Zarina reveals her love-affair and her decision to marry Ashoke. It invokes the wrath of her parents. Her father even beats her. Zarina leaves her parents and goes to New York on Ashoke's request. There she lives separately and finds a job in a library. It gives her an opportunity to know him better, particularly his weaknesses such as his possessive nature, jealousy, sentimentality, his western outlook, his bad friends and so on. But she is unmoved and optimistic. She writes to her parents confirming her marriage with Ashoke. Their civil marriage takes place.

After the marriage, differences of opinion and temperament crop up resulting in occasional friction between them. Zarina continues to write letters to her father. He informs her of her mother's failing health. Zarina thinks that she should get back to India with Ashoke to make their life more meaningful. She finds it difficult to reform him on the American soil. Ashoke insists on settling in Calcutta. He wants to test whether she can adjust to live with his conservative and orthodox parents. She does not bear Ashoke's total neglect of her. She goes to stay with her parents in Lucknow. They are chastened by six months of separation. They become aware of their shortcomings and
decide upon living a new life of understanding and shared values. Ashoke is welcomed by Zarina's parents and the reconciliation is complete.

The novel has a single plot tightly woven about two protagonists and the action of the novel is set both in America and in India. The first chapter is set in Europe. Chapters from third to eighth are devoted to America. The second chapter and chapters from ninth to twelfth are set in India. The two main characters -- Ashoke and Zarina -- are introduced in the first chapter. The author takes care to reveal differences in their tastes and temperament suggesting a possible clash of their personalities in the subsequent chapters. The plot is designed in such a way that the conflict between the husband and wife in the American setting is resolved in the Indian setting. In Chaman Nahal's *My True Faces*, similar differences of temperament surface in the married life of Malti and Kamal in Delhi. Malti leaves her husband, Kamal, and goes to her uncle's house in the same city without informing Kamal. Their separation leads to no reconciliation chiefly because Malti remains adamant. In *Your Life to Live*, the plot is contrived to achieve a happy ending. The six months of separation is made use of as a catalyst for their reconciliation.

As the novel discusses ideal relationship between husband and wife, Romen Basu highlights the two characters, namely, Ashoke and Zarina, in such a way that they can be studied in contrast simultaneously. A look at Ashoke's background before
he landed in America helps the reader know his mental make-up. He belonged to a traditional joint family in Calcutta. Ashoke was unorthodox even as a boy. He disliked the 'many idiosyncracies' in the family. His tendency to break away from tradition made him the black sheep in the family. Since his boyhood he has been self-interested. For instance, once he bought two tickets to watch a football match along with his friend. But he changed his mind later, sold a ticket in black market and lied to his friend that only one ticket was available. Then his friend said to him:

.... You do not have eyes to see anything beyond your own need. Just as you have your own need, so have the others. Unless you are able to see that, you will be without a real human relationship with anyone all your life. ¹

This comment on Ashoke, recollected later, was to bring transformation in his attitude towards his wife.

One of Ashoke's cousins planted in his mind the desire to go to Europe. He moved to Bombay and joined college. He worked hard to earn enough money and sailed for England where he found fortune, success and romance. This gave a boost to his self-confidencee. He asserts: "I can get anything in the world I want. There is nothing to stop me." (p. 37). From England Ashoke moved to America. He first joined as a book-keeper at the

¹ Romen Basu, Your Life to Live (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1972), p. 49. All further references are to this edition and the page numbers will be given parenthetically at the end of the quotations.
National City Bank and later joined a private company as an Account Executive. The American ethos is suited to his temperament. For a man of ambition like him, the free society offers opportunities to reach higher positions. He feels that he is a capitalist. He says: "I believe in free enterprise. I believe that a man's ambition should not have any limits. He can achieve anything he wishes if he tries hard at it." (p. 74). The free society of America has made him materialistic in attitude and philistine in temperament. "I like a carefree life with all the freedom," he declares. The selfishness in his nature has hardened into extreme possessiveness.

It has been pointed out that "Mr. Basu has created an excellent character in Zarina and has drawn her portrait with astonishing roundness. She has honesty and courage and a very level-headed view of the role of the woman in family life." Unlike Ashoke, Zarina Ahamad hails from a rich Muslim family in Lucknow. Her perceptions of life offers a contrast to those of Ashoke except that both are unorthodox in temperament. While Ashoke was drawn towards money and success in life, Zarina was drawn towards scholarship and social and political reform. Though gentle and introverted, she was mature and rather emancipated in her outlook. She was influenced by her History professor's scholarship and Nihal Singh who was a fellow worker in Socialist party. The latter appealed to the reformer in her. He widened her awareness of the caste system, Hindu-Muslim strife and the

economic gap between the rich and the poor. Besides, she is rooted in the Indian cultural ethos.

The first phase of the relationship between Ashoke and Zarina which takes place in Vienna serves as a pointer to the principle of contrast between them. Initially, "the very opposite nature seems to attract the one to the other." The purposes of their visit to Vienna are different. While it is a pleasure trip for Ashoke, Zarina has arrived to see the exquisite churches and to visit the art galleries. In his initial acquaintance with her, Ashoke takes only physical interest in her. "The more details he observed, the more he became interested in her. It had been a long time since he'd met an Indian girl. They couldn't all be bores. Some had to be fun. The only trouble was their prudish notions about sex. They were too puritanical." (p. 2). Further, "he was happy not even to be an Indian as far as his relationship with her on this trip went." (p. 20). He is bored to go through the museums with Zarina. For him, "the cultural expedition was the biggest physical and mental strain" (p. 15) while "Zarina was so completely absorbed that she seemed detached from the immediate world." (pp. 15-16). As days pass on, they find their intimacy growing. He begins to call her 'darling' and 'sweet heart' and shows her off as his wife. "They were to change their pace from cultural absorption to fun and frolic." (p. 28). Even within the short span of their acquaintance, Zarina understands his possessive nature. She complains that he is self-centred because

he wants all her time and energy to be devoted to him. When she asks him whether he is always so possessive, he tells of himself: "...ever since I was a boy my mind was clear about one thing. The girl I love should all be mine." (p. 29). This sense of male dominance is rooted in his very conservative family where it was made sure that "the women play a subordinate role to the men." (p. 129). In Tunis they meet a young Arab lawyer, Mehebub. Ashoke does not like her spending time in conversation with him. Later he jealously remarks: "He was a big show-off. He had an eye on you. Desire, I might add." (p. 34). Yet, with all his shortcomings, Ashoke appears to her 'irresistibly sweet.'

The second phase of the relationship between Zarina and Ashoke which constitutes their living together in New York further heightens the contrast between them. Ashoke's personality is glaringly revealed to her in the American context. First, she finds him to be a man of double standards. While he expects her to be devoted to him, he is found to be a man of many women. In a party with his friends, Zarina sees the girls he flirted with previously. One such girl even asks her: "You don't mind if I borrow your man for a little while? after all, you have him for keeps." (p. 57). Second, she realizes that Ashoke, just like his friends, is obsessed with sex. She calls him 'an exhibitionist.' He tells her: "Darling, what else is there in life so important as sex? I am one hundred per cent Freudian." (p. 59). Matured in mind as she is, Zarina retorts: "Some day, perhaps, you will learn that there is more to life than just sex. But you will have to
wait a long time." (p. 59). Ashoke seems to mistake that the only way for a woman to show her love is through sexual act. Hence he entertains a wrong notion that Zarina's love for him is less than his love for her. Third, she finds him conservative. Ashoke himself declares: "I don't want my wife to work. I am very conservative." (p. 59). The reason for his refusal is his possessiveness and he wants her "undivided, undiluted, unashamed love and attention." (p. 59). Another reason is that it is difficult for a woman to keep up her sexual morality if she becomes an employee in the American society. Zarina rightly understands his possessive nature. She says: "You want to put me in a cage as your favourite 'myna'. Feed me and talk to me when you come home and when you ask me to whistle I must whistle." (p. 60). She further says: "I will not be proud to marry a man with a narrow outlook. You must learn to trust people you love." (p. 61). Zarina is not disheartened. She hopes to reform her husband. In another context she tells him: "I am going to bring you back to your Indian heritage." (p. 54). Ashoke is also willing to be changed. He says: "Change me, baby! Mould me, shape me with your two hands. That is what I have been waiting for." (p. 60). But she thinks it is "too soon to try to curb his restless energy." and she hopes that "after they got married and settled down everything would be different." (p. 63).

As days roll by the cultural gap between Ashoke and Zarina widens. One year after marriage, Zarina finds discontent growing in her. First, her intellectual bent of mind is unable to
adjust with Ashoke's materialistic attitude. There is no meeting of minds between them. He does not discuss any of her hopes, dreams and wishes. "He was happy with his fast car, fancy food, latin rhythms and sex." (p. 75). Ashoke finds her bookish, unsuitable to live in the 'cold and hard' world. He thinks that "softies had no place in today's world." (p. 75). Second, ideological differences crop up between them. While Ashoke speaks in support of the competitive set-up of the American society, Zarina longs to see society which aims at social justice. The American society appears to her to be the logical result of the dictum of the survival of the fittest. She tells him: "When people compete with each other for everything, they end up neurotic and compulsive like you!" (p. 74). Third, she sees friction in religious convictions. Ashoke is an agnostic. Zarina also defies religious authority but, at the same time, recognizes the value of positive religious impact. She is afraid that Ashoke will not allow their children to be brought up as Muslims. When she expresses her view in this regard, Ashoke categorically says: "What! Are you mad, woman? What are you saying? My son will be a Hindu son. I shall have nothing to do with the Muslim religion." (p. 86). Fourth, Zarina finds that Ashoke has not shed his jealousy. Ashoke does not like John, a visitor to his house, for he "paid a lot of attention to Zarina, complimented her for

4. Hetty Kelen feels that "the difference in religion, however, proves to be no issue between them, it is only a device to isolate them from their families and homeland and hold them in suspension." rev. of Your Life to Live, News, United Nations Headquarters, New York, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2, 31 January 1973.
everything...." (p. 84). He flares up when John asks in what religion they are going to bring up their children. "That is no one's bloody business in what religion we bring up our children. I don't believe in religion and I don't give a God damn about it." (p. 84). Similarly, Ashoke cannot bear Zarina's admiration for Harold, a writer. He is shocked to see Zarina smoking a cigarette in Harold's company. He feels that she has neglected and even defied him. He thinks: "If she did not respect his wishes, how could they go on living together?" (p. 90). Ashoke also feels that Zarina always neglects his point of view. He does not like Zarina involving herself in a 'whirlwind of social life.' He thinks that her social work is affecting their marriage. He asks her: "Why can't we live like other normal healthy couples, stay home, make love and be by ourselves? Before we were married, even the first year of our marriage, I wanted to be out all the time, doing things, and you hated it. Now the position has reversed. When I want to stay home, you want to be popular." (p. 97). He thinks that "if she loved him she would do things he liked -- take up golf, swimming, dancing, pay more attention to him instead of spending all her time with middle-aged spinsters. How could a woman of her age and looks, spend her time listening to the problems of others." (p. 95). On top of that, their conceptions of love also disagree with each other. Ashoke believes that "if there is love everything falls into a pattern. Things sort themselves out." (p. 100). On the other hand, Zarina says: 'Love does not thrive on air. You have to experience it in a worldly way. No one can understand your definition of love ...
your theory is, do nothing except hold hands, hug, kiss, make love and say all the time 'I love you,' 'I love you.' That's a school kid's idea of love. You are still in that puppy-love stage and I wonder if you will ever grow out of it." (pp. 100-101). Ashoke remains adamant and assertive: "I am a good husband, but you want to change my whole way of life. You want to reform me. Make me a socialist, make me an intellectual, make me a humanist, and I don't want to be any of those things. I like being what I am." (p. 99).

Zarina comes to the conclusion that living in America is not helping their marriage. She analyzes that Ashoke is suffering from the insecure feeling of "not doing the same things as the people he knew did " (p. 99) and how to get him out of it is her main concern. She believes that any meaningful adjustment in their lives is possible only when they go back to India. In spite of his initial resistance Ashoke is ready to go back to India to please Zarina: "He was prepared to give up his dreams to be rich, famous and popular if he could reach Zarina's heart that way. If returning to India was going to help, it was not too high a price to pay. (p. 108). But, as the journey day approaches, his purpose is twisted. He thinks it would give him an opportunity to settle scores with her in India. "... he was certain that he would not like living in India, that it would cause endless friction between Zarina and him. In fact, it might lead to the end of their marriage. He was tortured how much to give in. He had to show his wife that in all matters it was his decision that must prevail." (p. 118).
Small wonder, therefore, if Ashoke reverses his decision to live separately from his kith and kin and intends living with them. It would be a test for her to adjust with his orthodox people. He thinks he is justified in putting the test to Zarina because "did she not realize the changes he had gone through? How he had tried to adapt himself to a life he did not care for?" (p. 137). If she passed the test "he would give up his ambitions, his own dreams for her happiness." (p. 138).

The third phase of their marital life deepens the contrast of the individual lives of Ashoke and Zarina. Irritated by the contradiction in Ashoke's beliefs and actions Zarina is at her wit's end. She knows that Ashoke does not like any orthodoxy. In spite of this, he wants her to conform to tradition and orthodoxy at his house in Calcutta. She also notices that Ashoke has been avoiding her. Unable to put up with this, she tells him: "You insisted on coming here because you wanted to assert yourself as a man ... you knew that this totally strange place would be hard on me and yet you did it deliberately to show that it is perfectly alright for a husband to behave any way he liked." (p. 136). She asserts that she has sacrificed everything for life with him. "I left my parents for you. I left behind the money that should have been mine, comforts and luxury that I could buy with it. I gave up my friends, my interests, changed my way of life." (p. 141). Ashoke blames her for the undesirable change in his life after marrying her. Finally, Zarina leaves for Lucknow to live with her parents.
Like Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Romen Basu's *Your Life to Live* is a study in self-education. Like the protagonists of Jane Austen's novels, Ashoke and Zarina get chastened through self-education. Their separation for several months proves to be a good teacher for them in self-education. It brings total change in their attitude to each other. Ashoke now realizes the values Zarina stood for. He tries to make his kith and kin shed their religious orthodoxy but meets with little success. He also tries to change some social customs at home but faces stiff resistance. So he sets out to reform himself as Zarina expected of him. He is "obsessed with trying to understand his wife by trying to follow the same route in search of the truth which Zarina had followed fifteen years ago." (p. 155). He meets political leaders of various parties to appreciate her political philosophy. He meets poor people to understand their basic need, their day-to-day life. He realizes that no couple can "develop any deep relationship without dependence on one another." (p. 156). This cuts across his erstwhile belief that every man's life is independent of another and which had been fostered by his American experience. He also realizes that one chief difference between him and Zarina is that while she was ready to share the burdens of others, he was not. He realizes the value of socializing himself.

Ashoke meets his old friend, Mrinal. He learns some precepts of husband-wife relationship from Mrinal. Mrinal tells how his wife Mridula feels that both husband and wife should have "right to self-expression": "Husband and wife don't have to
agree on everything, but if emotions did not come between them, they could accept the other person's wishes without jealousy." (p. 161). Mrinal analyzes that both Ashoke and Zarina love each other but their relationship has not ripened yet. It will ripen the moment each of them sees from the point of view of the other. He further says that "the ultimate in love is understanding." (p. 163). Mrinal's counsel sets Ashoke in introspection. He recollects incidents when he was harsh to Zarina and misjudged her. For instance, they had once been to Cape Cod. Diane was their neighbouring girl. Zarina had to come back to New York in advance. So she asked Diane to take care of Ashoke in her absence. Instead of taking it for her faith in him, he mistook that she had no love for him. Ashoke now feels sorry for this. He had also accused her of not demanding him to reveal his expenditure and for not asking to buy things for her. He now clearly sees that he had misunderstood her considerateness. He also realizes that Zarina was right in objecting to his exhibitionism in love, his unreasonable demand for sex. "He felt deeply ashamed for holding this animalistic view and recognized that sex has no meaning in a disturbed mood. An unhappy woman could not enjoy sex. He put himself in Zarina's place and conceded that trying to win her with sex had failed for good reason." (p. 168). He also realizes that he no longer bothers whether their children would be brought up as either Hindus or Muslims: "He had come to realize that in love, if receiving was important as giving, then there would be no fulfilment. He was prepared to give everything Zarina wished without asking for
anything in return. He desperately wanted his fulfilment." (p. 169). He writes her a letter that he cannot live any longer without her.

Similarly, wisdom dawns on Zarina. Now she learns to look at the problem from Ashoke's point of view. "She thought of him as a sweet, lovable boy who was still in his adolescent stage." (p. 171). She now feels that Ashoke should not be particularly blamed for asserting himself in this male-dominated world. She now realizes the purity of his passion when she recollects his words: "I have no faith in religion. Everybody says that you must believe in something. I too believe in something, but that happens to be human being instead of someone's Siva or another person's Christ. I believe in you." (p. 171). She now feels that "love without passion was like lake without water." (p. 173). She realizes that she was wrong in criticizing that he was a highly emotional person. She now feels that "she was too set in her ways" and had unduly "intellectualized everything" (pp. 173-174). Ashoke's possessiveness was not to be mistaken because it only showed that 'his world revolved round her.' She finds fault with herself for her unconscious desire 'to make him go after her all the time.' This resulted in stinginess in showing her love. She also feels that it was not a great sacrifice for her to leave her parents and money for life with Ashoke. On the other hand, Ashoke had made a great sacrifice in leaving America for India. She feels sorry that she had not given Ashoke credit for anything. She is anxious to make amends for her faults. She
writes to Ashoke to come to her and take her with him. The reconciliation has become possible only because they have deep love for each other. Thus, as Mr. Basu states, the real issue is

the basic understanding between the hero and heroine. It is the question of their own value systems that need to be sorted out. Once this difference is understood and appreciated, they come to terms with their life.\(^5\)

Basu further says:

The book describes in great detail, I think, all the conflicts in day-to-day lives. Temperamental differences are very wide, but when there is genuine attraction and concern for each other, I suggest that love overcomes all other difficulties.\(^6\)

In this context, the epigraph acquires significance.

Love keeps no score of wrong; does not gloat over other men's sins, but delights in the truth. There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, and its endurance.

Thus, Romen Basu "has rendered the whole episode of romance, marriage, strife, and melting and fusing of personalities in genuine candour."\(^7\)

Besides Zarina and Ashoke, Romen Basu presents the parents of Zarina as round characters in the novel. Zarina's

\(^5\) "Basu's novel published."
\(^6\) Ibid.
parents are traditional and vehemently oppose her marriage with a Hindu. They are prepared to cut off relationship with her on this account. Zarina's father tells her when she is about to leave for America: "Zarina, I would request you that you do not see or write to any of our friends or relatives or people we both know. I propose to tell everybody that we do not know what has happened to you or why you went to America, and that we have no knowledge of your existence. As far as we are concerned, you are dead from today." (p. 51). He does not respond to her letter informing her marriage with Ashoke. It takes five years for him to break ice. He writes to her about the ill-health of her mother. Though he is softened in his attitude, his wife is not. When Zarina goes to live with her parents after leaving Ashoke, she finds her mother in a conciliatory mood. When finally Ashoke comes to take Zarina with him, her parents are totally changed. Her mother gives Ashoke an affectionate welcome. "As soon as Ashoke stepped out of the car, she pulled him close to her chest the way a mother would whose son returns from war when she has given up all hopes of seeing him again." (p. 178). Zarina's father admits to Ashoke that Zarina's selection of her husband is right. He says:

Parents refuse to learn from their children. This is another of our prejudices. Zarina tried to introduce so many new things to our home which we found difficult to accept. Now we know that she was almost always right. We have no doubt whatsoever that her wisest choice was to marry you. She knows quality." (p. 179).
The other characters in the novel are merely functional except Mrinal and the invisible Mridula. Mrinal is obviously Romen Basu's spokesman in the novel on the theme of ideal conjugal relationship. Though Mridula, his wife, comes up only as a reference, she is also a vehicle of the author's views.

Commenting on the characterization of Ashoke and Zarina, a reviewer writes:

Throughout, the characters reveal themselves, not through the fabric of the story, but in the long dull monologues that punctuate the book. And they do not mature credibly. There is much internal moralising (nothing is left to the imagination) and certain realisations come into their heads. But the author rarely shows these blossoming into any believable action.

While it is true that the author's use of long monologues and moralising rob the narration of its dramatic quality, it seems untenable to say that the two characters do not mature in a credible manner. A close study of the novel would prove that the author has succeeded in delineating the contradictory nature of the two characters convincingly. The character of Zarina, in particular, is delineated in 'astounding roundness.'

Romen Basu chiefly uses the omniscient point of view occasionally interspersing with first-person narrative. For instance, the narration switches over from the author to

Ashoke when he narrates his background. But Zarina's background is narrated in third-person point of view. Furthermore, while the author uses telling method in general, at times he opts for dramatic or showing method depending upon the situation. He makes use of the dramatic method in two ways—first, by showing the characters in recapitulation and second, by instant probing of their thoughts, that is, by the employment of the stream of consciousness technique. This helps the author bring the characters alive to the reader and also to make them more tangible and realistic.

As has been said above, Romen Basu makes use of telling method for narration and characterization. The omniscient narrator freely comments on the characters. For instance, he says about Zarina: "She had extraordinary control over herself and unusual maturity for her age. Her emotional experiences did not show themselves in frustration or cynicism." (p. 24). Similarly, the narrator comments that Ashoke walks like a "proud peacock" through the corridors, bowing and smiling at the staring chambermaids to catch their attention. The author makes an extensive use of the flashback technique. It is used to narrate the backgrounds of Ashoke and Zarina. There are passages of retrospect and reminiscence thrust into the midst of present experience. For instance, when Zarina's marriage is over in the City Hall in New York in a simple, matter-of-fact manner, she is recollected of the grand, colourful celebration of her uncle's marriage which she had attended as a little girl. She had asked
her mother whether her marriage would also be celebrated in an equally grand manner. Her mother had promised to celebrate in an unprecedented fashion.

The occasional friction between Ashoke and Zarina gives much scope for recapitulation. For instance, Ashoke becomes very angry with John for asking about the religion of Ashoke's children when they are born. Like a 'mad bull', Ashoke shouts that it is a private matter. Then Zarina recollects the argument that had taken place with Ashoke about the religion of their children. Ashoke had asserted that his son would be a Hindu.

Back in Calcutta, Ashoke goes to meet his old friend, Mrinal. He recollects the comment Mrinal made on him many years ago and feels that he has not yet got over the weakness of not looking beyond his own need and feels that it is one of the reasons for his rift with Zarina. Similarly, Ashoke recollects several instances in New York when he had misjudged and misunderstood Zarina. Similarly, Zarina remembers some incidents which reveal Ashoke's 'purity of heart' and passionate love. He had said that 'he would never go to sleep any day without kissing her one hundred times and telling her one hundred times that he would love her.' (p. 172). Once, while returning from Harvard to New York after meeting Zarina, he remembered that he had not kissed or said 'I love you' to Zarina fifty times before leaving and drove back all the two hundred and fifty miles to say so and returned to New York the same night.
Quite often Romen Basu probes the consciousness of the two characters to project their states of mind and for rendering the mental process. But Romen Basu's method is undramatic method, "since we are conscious of the author standing beside his characters on the stage, and our attention is divided between them and him." The reader is aware of the author behind his character, ready to explain the state of mind of his character. The author does not restrict the narration to the point of view of one character. The narrative is given in third-person. For instance, when Ashoke sees Zarina at the Vienna airport, he makes a right estimation of her: "...his eyes roved in her direction. Composed. Poised. Obviously, she came from a good family, not the type to be travelling on a Government scholarship or a foreign grant. Her father must be paying for a grand tour of Europe to widen her horizons after studies in London, Paris or Geneva." (p. 2). Later, the author captures Ashoke's ambivalence in advancing towards her: "Ashoke was pleased with himself. This would be his first adventure with an Indian girl and a Muslim at that. He wondered what kind of a girl she was. Certainly not afraid of men but not bold either, modest in fact. He was sure he could handle her, but to get results he would have to pay for her expenses in good style. But money was not going to spoil his fun." (p. 4). Ashoke's thoughts on seeing Zarina and Harold talking to each other are traced by the author: "Ashoke's mood completely changed from then on. He sulked and looked injured.

Why she would invite a man like Harold? Was she becoming interested in other men? Was it the intellectual company she found more interesting? Harold was a writer and she admired his work .... The admiration must be mutual otherwise how could she invite him and not even mention it." (p. 89). The sight of Zarina smoking a cigarette in the company of Harold is too much for him to bear: "What was he going to do? How was he to cope with this situation? He felt the perspiration on his forehead. This was the end of their marriage but he did not care. How could this marriage last if his wife chose to defy him? If she did not respect his wishes, how could they go on living together?" (p. 90).

Similarly, Ashoke's thoughts on where to settle after going back to India are traced in detail. Settling in Lucknow would further estrange Zarina.

Zarina would be back with her parents and her Socialist friends who could help destroy his dreams. Certainly they would not go to live in Lucknow .... His family might not be rich like hers, still Calcutta was his home town. She had to fit into his environment. That would be a test, a real test for Zarina.... Ashoke worried a little about his family. How was he to expose Zarina to his deeply prejudiced relatives .... In Ashoke's house every other room had the image of a God or Goddess. ...What if Zarina was not welcome in these rooms. He knew Zarina's temperament. She would not take it for one minute .... Ashoke thought that living there would be worked out,
especially with his firm handling. But, what about the privacy that he worshipped so much? (pp. 108-110).

Once Zarina leaves him, Ashoke is given to introspection. So many questions rise in his mind about her:

Who was Zarina? What was she? What did she believe in? What is that she wanted out of life? Why was it so difficult to understand Zarina? Why did he fail to understand such an uncomplicated person, or was she uncomplicated? Doubts filled his mind every time he thought about it. He would never find peace until he found the answers to these questions. (p. 155).

Letters are a part of Romen Basu's narrative technique in the novel. He uses them to narrate events and make for reconciliation between Ashoke and Zarina. In this context, the letter Zarina receives from her father may also be mentioned. He writes about her mother's failing health and urges her to come back home though her mother is not in a mood to forgive her. Interestingly, the author reveals the contents of the letter by employing both third person and first person points of view.

As a major part of the novel takes place in America and the remaining part of it in India, the author takes every care to give a realistic picture of the American and the Indian societies. The author is at home while giving a glimpse of the American life by virtue of his personal experience. A reviewer says:

Readers who do not have a first-hand knowledge of the affluent life in New York and like places will
get a distinct picture of their crowded parties, swims in lonely beaches at the dead of night, shared weekends in cottages near the ocean. Those who have toured the continent will relive the moments among the tall pine tree of the Vienna woods, and the festive restaurants beside the Danube." 10

Zarina is touched by the friendly attitude of the Americans. She says: "Americans were outgoing people. They made friends easily. Their way of life included a friend as a confidant and a confessor. Friends substituted the emotional attachments for relatives." (p. 111). Zarina and Ashoke find that all the Americans had "the same aspirations, constantly striving for a bigger apartment or home, new model car and refrigerator; wanted their voices to be heard in Parent-Teachers Society meeting; try to forgot the depression years." (p. 116). Like Zarina, Ashoke also feels sorry to leave the land of his dreams. He particularly liked 'the freedom to do what he pleased.' He has moved with men of action, realized his ambition and enjoyed the comforts of the social life like the credit facilities. Further, the description of the procedure for conducting marriages in the City Hall in New York gives the reader an interesting insight. It has been commented that "the scene at the City Hall with the waiting brides and bridegrooms is tragic." 11

11. Ibid.
Romen Basu presents the other side of America too. The competitive nature of the American society has made people neurotics. One finds 'fast moving, money making, power grabbing environment' everywhere. A taxi-driver tells Zarina that people are very greedy particularly the politicians, judges and cops. The younger generation has no appreciation or gratitude for their parents who toil hard for educating them. Zarina's friend, Matilda, speaks frankly about her country steeped in materialism:

I think this is a terrible country. Do you know we are going back to the dark ages. We do not know what man is .... We are becoming such a mechanized society that everything we do is to kill each other faster. We make atom bombs to kill people. We make fast cars so that people can take the lives of the neighbours and friends on the roads much faster. Where is the Glory of God? The cosmic universe, the self, the alter ego? Where are they? Where are they? (p. 114).

She says that the West should now look to the East, that is, India.

That's where your country comes in. There has to be a balance between East and West. We have to learn from your country what they learned five thousand years ago. What Man is. (p. 114).

The glimpse of India as provided by Romen Basu is not so extensive as that of America. The time references in the novel indicate that the author presents India fresh after the partition which generated communal hatred. In this context, Zarina's father warns her of marrying a Hindu:
You must be quite out of your mind to think that you can marry a Hindu. Look at what they are doing to us. Since partition we have been living here in terror. Discrimination everywhere against Muslims, we dare not open our mouths. We dare not even pray peacefully in this country any more. They want either to destroy us or force us to leave this country. You want to be a traitor and disgrace our community. (p. 47).

A similar hatred of Muslims prevailed among Hindus. Ashoke remembers how his uncle Jour, at the time of a communal riot, warned the family to "be very careful as you walk the streets. Remember a Muslim never fights you face to face. He always stabs from the back. So, as you walk along, every footstep, turn around to see if a fellow in a lungi is following you." (p. 110).

Bombay and Calcutta were very close to Western cities even by the time of the story of the novel. Toying with the idea as to where to settle down after getting back to India, Ashoke thinks about Bombay first.

His personal preference was for Bombay. He liked a cosmopolitan life. He wanted to keep his worldly outlook. In Bombay people from all parts of India converged. Life was better there than anywhere else. Most important of all to him was the sea. He was very fond of the ocean. (p. 108).

Later he prefers Calcutta to other places. He imagines how he would live there:

He would join the Calcutta Club and the Three
Hundred Club. There was Firpos restaurant for lunches. The Grand Hotel, the Ambassador Room for dinner dancing ... In the summer they could go to Darjeeling which, for him, was the best hill station in India. In the winter there was good old Gopalpore. In all his travels he had not seen a nicer beach .... The glorious white marble Victoria Memorial Hall and the lovely green Maidan. He had also dreamed of Saturday afternoon visits to the Lido Bar... (p. 109).

Later in the novel, a visit to the slums shockingly disproves his knowledge of people in India:

He visited ghettos where eight or ten people lived in one room made of mud walls with a tin roof. Wives quarrelled with their husbands constantly, mostly about money .... Fathers beat their children, mostly out of frustration. Mothers cursed them to suppress their sorrows. Things they could not give their children. Things? yes, just food. (p. 155).

Joint family which looms large in Romen Basu's novel, A House Full of People, also finds a place in the novel, Your life to Live. Ashoke comes from a traditional and a very orthodox Bengali joint family. Romen Basu gives a verbal picture of the traditional atmosphere in the joint family. It gave high priority to religion. Religious celebrations were meticulously performed though they ruined the economic condition of the family. Ashoke's father, 'the worst conservative among the men in this family' arrives at the airport to welcome his son and daughter-in-law home. He sprinkles the Ganges water and puts sandalwood paste on their
foreheads before he takes them home. In this context, the reader remembers the similar, traditional way in which Chitra is welcomed home in *A House Full of People*. Zarina is shocked to see thirty-five people living under the same roof. Her mother-in-law gives her series of Hindu practices to be followed such as covering head before elders and saluting the elders according to ranks. She has to eat with ladies and abstain from talking to Ashoke in the presence of elders. Zarina notices that no one is particularly concerned about anybody or anything in the big family. They 'frown upon the modern way of life.' There is not one woman in the family who has passed her matriculation examination. Zarina's mother-in-law tells her:

> We believe in tradition, a way of life where women play a subordinate role to the men. A Bengali girl is taught by the time she is twelve years old that her real aim in life is to serve her husband and obey him for the good of the family. (p. 129).

She accuses modern people of having 'very low morals'

> Especially if they allow their women to study, go out with men, take jobs and work side by side with men .... Frankly, I think it is very bad for a woman to get too many ideas. Then they start to question everything. Why should they obey their husbands? ... They begin to neglect their children. Who else but a woman keeps home? (p.130)

Commenting on the aspect of realism in the novel, C. Hart Schaff writes:
On the quasi-documentary side, his descriptions of contemporary life-and values-in New York, Calcutta and Lucknow are informative and credible. He doesn't just weave fascinating tapestries: he makes them come to life. More than that, his quasi-documentary or sociological descriptions sometimes beguilingly confirm to us phenomena that are about as we thought they must be, sometimes shock us with aspects of a culture that many of us would have thought inconceivable, sometimes dramatically reveal the universality of particulars.” 12

The reviewer cites the grand wedding ceremony of Zarina's uncle as an example of Basu's 'quasi-documentary' description of contemporary life. He further cites the instance of Zarina's father throwing her to the floor, seizing her hair and slapping her for declaring that she will marry Ashoke as a shocking and 'inconceivable' aspect of a culture. As an example of 'universality of particulars,' the reviewer cites Zarina's father confessing to her that he was wrong in thinking that he could purchase happiness for his daughter with money. Another example he cites of 'universality of particulars' is when Zarina and Ashoke cling to their respective religions even though they are vehement in their denial of religious authority.

As in his previous novel, Romen Basu uses Hindi words at times to give native colour to the context. For instance, Farida asks Zarina, "Meri bachi, tell me, why are you still without a Kaka?" (p. 143). A taxi-driver in America, talking about the children in America, tells Zarina in American idiom that they are

"rotten to the bottom dollar." (p. 116). Romen Basu's language is simple, easy-flowing and free from circumlocution. The tone and language are hand in glove to suit the mood and context. For instance, Zarina's father shouts at her in a fit of rage:

I don't want to hear a bloody word from you, you bitch. I am sure you have already disgraced yourself. You have surrendered your virginity to that ugly Hindu. (p. 48).

Similarly, when tempers run high between Zarina and Ashoke, the language used is crisp and retorting. Ashoke taunts her saying that he 'would have been much better off marrying a French or an American girl.' To this Zarina retorts:

Don't fool yourself. What European or American woman would have put up with you the way I have. Ask your cousins or anyone you like. Not even an educated Bengali girl would stand your bullying. The only women who would be happy to be your slaves are from the village where your grandfather was born. (p. 141).

What animates *Your Life to Live* is the dexterous use of conflict. Conflict can be observed at both external and internal levels. First, conflict between Ashoke's ideas and aspirations and the orthodox beliefs of his family can be noticed. He reminds the reader of Ravi Sharma in Chaman Nahal's novel *Into Another Dawn*, wherein he, the son of a priest, feels ill at ease to bear the deception involved in the activities of the priests in the name of absolving the sins of the visitors to the Ganges and in
performing religious rites. Later in the novel, Zarina too finds it hard to adjust with her in-laws because they are, besides orthodoxical, "narrow-minded, provincial, proud and lazy." (p.131)

Zarina is also seen in conflict with her parents in the choice of bridegroom. She fails to convince her parents for her marriage with a Hindu. But, the conflict between Zarina and Ashoke or, in other words, "the free spirit and the tranquil spirit," is significant in the novel. It includes "the clash of Eastern and Western culture, the clash of religious difference (he is a Hindu and she is a Muslim), and most of all, the clash between their own deeply desparate personalities." The author skilfully presents this conflict both on external and internal planes. Both Zarina and Ashoke indulge in heated exchange of views. At the same time, within each of them, there is mute battle of personalities. After their separation, the conflict in mind turns to introspection. Each of them is tortured by conscience and better sense prevails upon them. Each of them comes to peace with his or her self. They are cured of their excesses. Thus conflict leads to compromise and maturity of personality.

Besides conflict, Romen Basu employs the device of contrast for his thematic purpose. For instance, there is a contrast between Zarina and her friend, Anuradha. There are two ways of life for a woman after her marriage--one, adjusting to the nature of the husband and forgetting one's own personality and the other is not to hesitate to oppose and reform the unlikeable side

of the husband's personality and also reform one's own personality if necessary. Anuradha belongs to the first type while Zarina to the other. While Zarina is out to reform Ashoke even while trying to adjust herself with his ways, Anuradha has meekly submitted to her husband's will. She tells Zarina:

I wanted to marry a man who would go on being my teacher for the rest of my life. Instead I married a police officer. All he talks about is crime. .... I have the same problems as anyone else with the servants, high cost of living and my mother-in-law. (p. 149).

She found it easy to change to a life different from her dreams. She tells Zarina: "Life adjusts itself. When things happen against your will, you live with it." (p. 149).

This leads the reader to the more important contrast between the two pairs, namely, Mrinal and Mridula on the one hand and Ashoke and Zarina on the other. As has been said earlier, Mrinal and Mridula set the standards of ideal conjugal life. They stand for perfect understanding as expected of a husband and wife. Ashoke imbibes wisdom from Mridula's views as conveyed by Mrinal.

There is also a contrast between the parents of Zarina and those of Ashoke. Ashoke's parents are bound by orthodoxy. They remain impregnable to change even though Ashoke tries his best to reform their views on religion and society. On the other hand, Zarina's parents also oppose inter-religious marriage. But time brings change in their outlook. Her father is first to bow
down to the new waves of society. He and his wife warmly welcome their Hindu son-in-law to their hearts. Ashowe's parents are reconciled to their Muslim daughter-in-law only for fear of losing their son. Her father-in-law tells her plainly:

Except for Ashowe, no one ever challenged the system. I must ask him and you to try to fit into our ways. (p. 135).

Irony is another device used by Romen Basu. It is chiefly seen when Ashowe goes to his old friend, Mrinal. In spite of his wide worldly knowledge, Ashowe ironically finds much to learn from Mrinal in making marital life a success. It is also ironical that the very opposite nature of Ashowe and Zarina seems to attract the one to the other. Their meeting is like the meeting of two alien worlds. Their ways of loving are different. Ashowe is a rigid hero while Zarina is more thoughtful and self-aware with a tranquil spirit.

The author occasionally uses symbols and images to reinforce the contextual meaning. For instance, he describes Ashowe as 'a proud peacock' when he makes a show of himself to attract the attention not only of Zarina but also of others in Vienna. In another instance, commenting on Ashowe's possessiveness, Zarina says that he wants to put her in a cage as his favourite 'myna.' The image of 'myna' very well suits Ashowe's conception of wifehood. In another context, Ashowe remembers of having called Zarina 'an iceberg.' It aptly reveals the depth of her personality, steadiness of views and firmness of mind. An
iceberg symbolically reveals such qualities. Thus, Romen Basu's use of images works like a painter's brush in giving delicate strokes here and there in sketching the characters.

There is a perceptible element of satire in the novel. The novel is 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 traditional prejudices. But Basu's satire is underplayed in the novel.

To conclude, it may be said that the author upholds love and affirmation of life in Your Life to Live. The title of the novel also indicates this. Each should find his own way to the nebulous life and everybody has such a right. In other words, every wife and husband should achieve harmony between them and they should carve out a way of life suitable for them. Thus, the author stresses the positive values of life. Though the novel lacks any complexity of structure and technique, the author succeeds in driving home the theme of ideal marital relationship between husband and wife with ease and force.