Romen Basu's third novel, *A Gift of Love* (1976), seeks to present a kaleidoscopic view of love in man-woman relationship from sexual escapades in the beginning to physical expression of love without meeting of minds, from thereon to a mature form of love which involves spontaneity and selfless sacrifice, finally ending in a defiant wedlock cutting across the barriers of caste and community. It relates the haunted wanderings of an immature youth, Sukumal Ghosh, who lost his mother when he was born. The protagonist's yearning for love is fulfilled on the alien soil with an English girl overcoming hindrances of nationality, religion, colour and even of age as in Chaman Nahal's *Into Another Dawn*. In dealing with marriage outside one's caste and community, it has affinity with Roman Basu's second novel, *Your Life to Live*. The novel is rich in human emotions and the author displays "his ability to explore the desires and movements of the flesh and the yearnings of the spirit."  

The novel is presented in the nature of an autobiography, the locale being partly in India and partly in the

West. The protagonist recapitulates his past since he was twelve. Sukumal grows up amid opulent surroundings. His doting lawyer father, Gopal Babu, pampers and spoils him. Lack of motherly care and restraint casts shadow on the emotional side of his personality. Moving with street urchins develops in him love of low-class people. He envies his friends for the care and love they get from their mothers. He indulges in sexual escapades such as masturbation, reading pornographic books, watching people in sexual intercourse at home and sexually awakening a neighbouring girl, Karuna. He luckily escapes from the snare of a homosexual.

As an adolescent he wants to emulate his friend, Madan Kundu, by joining the Armed Force but fails in his attempt. Undeterred, he keeps thinking of other ways of leaving home because he "was tired of the monotony of school, the street corner, and the lonely house." Kanai Lal Banerjee, a stevedore, promises to get room for him in a freighter bound for England.

On board, Jock, a sailor, befriends him and invites him to live with his family at Liverpool. He is fascinated by Nell, Jock's sister. As she reveals her pregnancy, he runs away. At Kensington, he meets Shirley, a call-girl turned barmaid. The latter takes him under her wing and persuades him to study law. He comes into contact with his classmate, Moira, but he finds her repulsive.

2. Romen Basu, A Gift of Love, (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1976), p. 36. All further references are to this edition and the page numbers will be given parenthetically at the end of the quotations.
After Shirley's premature death, he returns to India. His attempts to make a prostitute, Indu, socially acceptable fail. He is an absolute misfit at home. In spite of protest from all the members of his family, he announces his impending marriage with their maid servant, Kajali.

The novel is woven round a single plot, namely, Sukumal's discovery of true love in man-woman relationship. The episodes of Nell, Shirley, Moira, Indu, and Kajali are fused with the central theme of the novel. The plot construction is taut and gives unity of impact to the novel.

Further, the scene of action in the novel opens in India, moves on to England and again comes back to India, thus making the circle complete. While action in India is limited to Calcutta in Part I and Part III, action in England in Part II shifts from one place to another—Liverpool, Southport, Kensington, Knightsbridge and Morocco. Thus, the novel is spatially stretched and also crowded with characters in Part II. This is also substantiated by the fact that Part I and Part III are divided into six chapters each whereas part II is divided into twelve chapters. It is interesting to note that "the chapters have suggestive and meaningful headings, like the key-words for examinees to forge compositions with." 3

One artistically dissatisfying aspect of the plot structure is that Sukumal's nostalgia for India after Shirley's death looks

too sudden to be credible. On the other hand, his ambition to set foot in England is given a convincing treatment in Part I of the novel. Sukumal's sudden nostalgia in Part III remembers one of similar nostalgia of Ravi Sharma in Chaman Nahal's Into Another Dawn after he discovers a deadly disease in his body. Second, the end of the novel is found 'repelling.' A reviewer says:

.... there is little excuse for the hero getting married so soon, after Shirley's death, to Kajali. The relationship with the reader, so fondly nurtured by the novelist all through, breaks off with a note of melodrama.  

The author employs both first-person and third-person points of view to suit the context. Yet, the predominant use of the first-person is in keeping with the thematic framework of the novel and the reminiscent mood of the protagonist. The events are narrated chronologically from the age of twelve till his manhood. The first-person narrative enables the reader to get only the protagonist's view of events and persons in the novel. It is notable that first-person point of view is used when Nell and Shirley narrate their past. On the other hand, third-person point of view is used to narrate the background of Moira, Indu, and Kajali who are minor characters.

Commenting on the tone of the novel, a reviewer has said that Romen Basu is a "master at reproducing a particular kind of conversational tone that I think of as very Indian; it is

sardonic, elliptically humorous, gently expostulatory and in a mood of rising emotion, fearsomely abrasive. Though the tone is chiefly conversational throughout, it varies as the situation demands. The tone is argumentative, for instance, when Sukumal talks to Shirley about their marriage:

"Shirley, do you still think of my happiness?"
"Of course."
"Enough to do something about it?"
"I know what you are leading up to and the answer is no."
"Will you give me one good reason. Please don't talk any nonsense. Today I am dead serious."
"For one thing, my past."
"I know that is an obsession with you, but I care nothing about it."
"Your naivete makes me laugh,"
"What else?"
"I am ten years older than you."
"You are not. Even if you were, it wouldn't matter." (Pp. 132-133).

This is how the argument continues. In moods of anger, the tone turns very harsh and rough. For instance, Sukumal's brother admonishes him for proposing to marry Kajali:

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You are a scoundrel of the worst type. You should be horsewhipped. You should be thrashed from head to toe. You are a disgrace to society, a disgrace to the human race. You were low to begin with and now you have brought with you from the West, their worst filth. (pp. 203-204).

The tone turns oratorical to reflect typical public speaking when Shirley and Sukumal go to Hyde Park to listen to speeches on various subjects. A plea to defeat the Atlee government runs like this:

These bloody trade unionists are the only cause of our economic problems. Today, they take away the railways: tomorrow, the coal mines. If you don't watch out, the next day they will ask for your mothers and daughters. (p. 124)

Another speaker bursts out:

Dynamite the Parliament. Either you listen to me or you will remain the same—bloody, hungry, and dirty the rest of your lives. (p. 124)

Further, the nostalgic vein of the tone is noticeable in Part III as Sukumal decides to get back to India:

After Shirley's death, I had thought with sudden longing of Ranchi and Deoghar where our family used to spend the puja holidays. To climb those familiar hills, to walk those rice fields, might make me whole again. (p. 162)

Romen Basu makes use of dramatic or 'showing' method for characterization. The characters are not described; they come
alive as the author builds up incident after incident. It has been pointed out that "the characters are not tame imitations but full-blooded and wholly genuine and each has a story to tell of absorbing interest." Further, Romen Basu displays "easy access to the recesses of human mind" with "the touch of Proustian humanism and Dostoevskian sympathy."  

The fictional consciousness throughout the novel is on Sukumal who emerges as an anti-hero. The two qualities that mark his character throughout the novel are — first, his thirst for motherly love and second, his love for the poor, the suppressed and the fallen. Sukumal is no conformist. He embarrasses his family again and again by his complete disregard for caste and accepted social customs. He develops a keen sensitivity to people especially those whom society would call 'outcastes.' As a child he keeps the company of loafers and goondas, though he is born in prosperity. He explains this obsession later:

"... Since childhood I had been drawn to street urchins. For some unknown reason, I was attracted to lower class people. That habit had not changed. (p. 187).

He is very sensitive to suffering. He says:

"It pained me to see their poverty-stricken life in the busti; they had none of the things we

relished to eat. Their sad lives drew me closer to them. (p. 13)

He had a similar obsession for motherly love. He admits later:

I envied Makhan his loving mother, someone who hugged him and kissed him. (p. 13).

Talking of his another friend, Madna, he says:

I wished I had his worries and involvements and a fraction of his mother's love. (p. 16).

This longing for love grows intensely as he grows up and as he misses it at home. In Nell he sees that kind of love. He comments:

I don't know at what age women develop motherly instincts, but Nell was as motherly to me as Mrs Kenmore was to Jock. (p. 66).

Besides this, he feels closer to Nell and later to Shirley, Indu and Kajali for the reason he was close to his boyhood friends. He is never attracted to riches. Hence, he has only "uncomfortable relationship" with Moira. Moira asks him:

"In your mind, it's all so simple. Poor is white. Rich is black, is n't that what you believe?"

"Not white and black--but two worlds quite different from each other. I want to live in the real world, not in a make-believe one." (p. 156).

Another thing that strikes the reader is the enigma of Sukumal's personality. Many characters complain to him about his enigmatic
nature. Nell and Shirley call him 'a mystery' and 'the most curious object on two feet' for running away from home. Indu also calls him 'the strangest man' because he argues that prostitution is just like any other profession. Sukumal's father wonders how he could stoop to move with Kajali:

Tell me, why is it so difficult for you to live a normal life? Where did you get these eccentricities? From the time you were seven, no one had a moment's peace with you. (p. 190)

Bulbul, Sukumal's sister-in-law, tries to probe this abnormality:

You are a misfit everywhere. Your impulses are abnormal. You have a special talent for annoying those who love you because you have never learned to see anything from the other person's point of view. (p. 192).

However, he explains himself to Indu:

People see mystery in silence. Some like to think and some like to act. I was the quiet, thinking type. My kind would never change the world. (p. 172).

A reviewer rightly comments on the implications of this non-conformity.

Through Sukumal's life in a chronological order, Basu tries to establish the reasons for the rebellions of the youth (especially from the well-to-do families) against the establishment of Indian culture. The reasons according to Basu:
There are too many injustices around them; the contrast is too sharp and too obvious for them to enjoy the luxuries.  

But, the core of Sukumal's personality lies in his "striving to reach out continually for a relationship that he feels would illuminate his whole life." It also forms the theme of the novel. It has been pointed out that "A Gift of Love is an exciting novel which describes the value of a genuine love between a man and a woman in the midst of conflicts between the values of the East and the West." Sukumal's goal of life seems to be loved. Shirley asks him:

"Don't you have any ambition?"
"Come to think of it, not really. I just want to be loved." (p. 123).

Sukumal's pursuit begins with his sexual escapades, that is, with the identification of the other sex in part I of the novel. From this budding stage, it takes on its full flowering in England in Part II of the novel. Part III constitutes the fulfilment of his pursuit. Nell, Shirley and Kajali are the three girls with whom Sukumal tries for a lasting and satisfactory relationship.

Through Sukumal's affair with Nell, the novelist seeks to establish the fact that meeting of minds or whole-hearted mutual acceptance is the pre-requisite for successful man-woman relationship.

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9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
relationship and not just meeting of bodies. But the affair with Nell prepares him well for a more satisfactory relationship with Shirley later. Sukumal owes much to Nell. First, she fills the emotional void in him and stands by him in his loneliness. She is interested in his studies and proves herself "a constant source of comfort" to him. Second, she encourages him for physical relationship with her in which he discovers his manhood for the first time. He says: "I felt ecstatic with joy and kept repeating to myself 'I am a man. I am a man.' The whole world seemed different." (p. 101). He recollects how much he got from her:

She brought comfort to my heart, satisfaction to my senses and her tenderness lightened my depression. I could not live without that physical relationship. (pp. 101-102).

But, Sukumal betrays his meanness when he disowns her for revealing her pregnancy. He feels he cannot marry her for his own reasons. He thinks that "from the very first day, there would be problems." (p. 104). Nell would dominate him. His children would become Christians. He would lose his identity and forget his own country. Better education and higher income would be impossible. "All I could see was endless emptiness, limitless darkness, gloom and despair" he says (p. 104). Though it is later found that the pregnancy is only a 'false alarm,' it has already had its hurt. Sukumal's annoyance with the pregnancy has slighted his image in her eyes. He senses her 'disenchantment' and 'disappointment' with him. In his parting letter he admits his smallness:
I ended saying that she deserved someone much better than me. She was entitled to a happy life, which I was not sure I could give her. (p. 106).

"The central theme of the novel is the story of the love of Sukumal and Shirley." Incidentally, Shirley enters Sukumal's life exactly at a time when Nell entered -- a time when he is totally frustrated and thoroughly disappointed with himself. With her pathetic story, which is more horrible than that of Nell, Shirley touches his emotional chord more intimately than Nell. His reaction to her story is heartfelt: "I have nothing to say except that I love you." (p. 132).

Suddenly Sukumal finds a new guiding force in Shirley, and in turn, Shirley spots a man who actually saw through her soft, tender and beautiful heart beneath all the so-called dirty and filthy expressions.

It is interesting to note that in his relationship with Shirley, Sukumal plays the role of Nell while Shirley plays the role of Sukumal. First, Sukumal is anxious to sleep with her just as Nell was anxious to sleep with him. Similarly, Shirley shows no interest in sex with him initially just as he was reluctant in the case of Nell. Second, Sukumal was afraid of marrying Nell for it would ruin his ambitions. When it comes to Shirley, he thinks differently: "If we married, we could never afford more than a

12. Ibid.
small house, but I felt that would be enough for me." (p. 150).
Similarly, just as he had so many reasons not to marry Nell, Shirley now has her own reasons to reject his proposal for marriage.

Further, while Shirley suggests that he should study law and vows to meet all the expenditure herself, Sukumal wants to materialize her faith in him and the ideals and goals set for him. Thus, each of them gets out of his or her self to reach the other one. This is the secret of the triumph of their relationship. His yearning for true love is fulfilled though it is short-lived. In Chaman Nahal's *Into Another Dawn*, the protagonist, Ravi Sharma, finds a similar fulfilment of love with Irene. The sudden revelation of a deadly disease in Shirley in *A Gift of Love* and in Ravi Sharma in *Into Another Dawn* uproots the possibility of a lasting relationship with their partners. The comparison continues because like Ravi, Sukumal develops 'sudden longing' for his motherland and returns to Calcutta.

Sukumal's pursuit of love completes with the discovery of a woman 'who can love unselfishly' in Kajali. His attraction for low - class people finds a suitable partner in her. He wonders how he has developed interest in her:

Her slender figure, the dimple in the middle of her chin, absorbed all my attention when I looked at her. Was it her looks that attracted me? Or was it the kool in her -- her infinite
capacity for contentment — that drew me to her like a magnet? (p. 196)

His relationship with Kajali "fits in with the uninhibited and unorthodox nature of the hero, for whom love recognises no barrier, be it caste or racial." 13 To transform her into a polished diamond, he decides "to help get an education, widen her outlook, and make her interested in all the promising things of the world." (p. 192). When he asks her whether she is ready to walk out of the house and live a married life with him, she gives her consent:

"Yes, I am nervous for you and happy for myself." (p. 205).

Thus, by the end of the novel, Sukumal turns out to be matured and emotionally stable with a fruitful discovery of a lasting relationship. As a reviewer puts it,

"When unselfish kindness, and undemanding affection are allowed to enfold him in a variety of surprising (and engaging) love affairs, he gradually plumps out into the true shape of himself." 14

Apart from Sukumal, the other 'round' characters in the novel are Nell, Shirley and Kajali. It has rightly been said that "the portraits of the women are impressive and varied." 15

respects, Nell and Shirley look alike in their relationship with Sukumal. Initially, both of them realize that Sukumal suffers from emotional void in him. In his parting letter to Nell, Sukumal writes of her: "She knew me too well; in fact better than I knew myself." (p. 106). Unlike Sukumal, she is emotionally stable and so she accepts her pregnancy (though a false one) as something natural. She is perfectly conscious of the consequences when she wants physical relationship with him.

But Sukumal has a more satisfying relationship with Shirley because he 'loves women who love unselfishly.' He describes her as "someone I admire more than anyone else in the world." (p. 153). She knows what exactly he missed in his childhood. She wants him to study law to satisfy her and to live up to his father's expectations. She discusses it with Sukumal:

"I know what childhood must have been to you without a mother. You have brought back to me something I was not prepared to open my eyes to, ever. You may not realize it, but I am asking you to do this for selfish reasons."

"I have told you so many times that I want to marry you. I don't want your motherly love."

"Don't be so cruel. Don't ever say such things to me." (p. 135)

Shirley's past bears testimony to abject poverty, exploitation and sadism. Hence she finds fulfilment of her love in Sukumal's tender nature, his readiness to oblige to study law and in his service to her when she is hospitalized. No wonder then that his present--
a necklace of imitation jewellery—makes her 'happiest' after many years. It has been rightly said that

the most beautiful part of the book is the section describing Sukumal's life with Shirley.... Basu's description of the purity and sincerity of Shirley's passion for Sukumal belittles the sexual discoveries of the latter. 16

However, a reviewer says that "there has been no poetic justice to Shirley whose love seems to be mortgaged in death." 17 She appears to be sacrificed for the needs of the plot.

Kajali is totally different from Nell and Shirley. She is brought out of her shell by Sukumal into the wider world. As a result, she is transformed towards the end of the novel. She has achieved independence of mind and realizes what is good for her life. She comes out of the narrow world of her mother. In the elopement of Kajali and Sukumal, the author seems to suggest that the old should yield place to the new.

Through the characters of Sukumal's father, Gopal Babu, and brother, the novelist "clearly pointed out the depth of traditionalism that exists in Indian society." 18 They seriously object to Sukumal's intention to marry Kajali. Gopal Babu admonishes Sukumal:

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Does the name of this family mean nothing to you?  
...I have no objection to your choosing your own life, but for God's sake do not disgrace us this way. (p. 203).

Sukumal's brother joins his father in insulting Sukumal:

You are a disgrace to the human race. You were low to begin with and now you have brought with you from the West, their worst filth.

(pp. 203-204)

Sukumal's sister-in-law, Bulbul, is a contrast to her husband in that she is unorthodox. Unlike her husband, she does not maintain master-servant relationship with Kajali so scrupulously. This is seen in giving her own clothes to Kajali. She encourages her to become educated and does not object to her moving with Sukumal. She says she envies Kajali. At heart, she has no objection for their marriage.

Though the author shows 'commendable maturity' in characterization in this novel, the realism of the novel has more fascination for the reader. A reviewer says:

Basu conveys reality—the fact plus his feeling -- through excellent design, and that too in a way that his scheme is never explicit; his framework never shows. The result has been a perfect assimilation of meaning into form. 19

The novel is claimed as 'a real book in every sense of the term.' The author gives a realistic picture of the domestic and social scene in India and in England and touches upon the political scene too. First, the depiction of joint family is of particular interest. Gopal Babu's residence is an imposing "twenty-room house with eight servants and a chauffeur" (p. 96) remembering one of the joint family mansion in *A House Full of People*. Sukumal's three uncles and three aunts live in the same house. Ironically, Sukumal sees it only as 'a lonely house' because he is motherless. Thematically, the joint family rises to the level of a character in that it drives Sukumal to make friends with street urchins and to find in them what he has been deprived of in his house. The emotional void in him grows as he grows up. Through this, Romen Basu seeks to suggest that a joint family does not necessarily provide with what the younger generation needs.

Second, the joint family is a symbol of tradition. Any act of defying the tradition is not accepted by the members of the joint family. For instance, Sukumal's attempt to bring Indu, a prostitute, home is not accepted by anybody including the servants and Indu herself:

Even the servants did not think this was a noble act. Like their masters, they thought that family prestige was vital. There was no point pretending that by one marriage, society was going to wipe out the caste system. (p. 204)
Third, a close study of *A Gift of Love* reveals that the author is more at home in giving a realistic picture of the social life in England. Liverpool appears to Sukumal much the same as Calcutta with its poverty. He feels disenchanted:

My vision of England, with polished cars, clean streets, and freshly painted houses with gardens was dulled by the sights and sounds of Liverpool .... The working class people in England seemed to me dirtier than the people I had known in those Calcutta busties where my friends grew up. (p. 101)

The Tower of London near which Sukumal lives after going to Kensington is far worse than Liverpool. Basu describes the scene in vivid realism:

The Tower of London ... was one of the few places where men urinated freely in dark corners. Drunks too weak to get home, slept on the floors. Men without enough cash for the next pint stretched out their arms to the passers-by .... Men in rags, with cigarettes hanging from the corner of their mouths, coarse and unwashed hands tucked in their pockets, gave me an uneasy feeling that sooner or later my slim wallet would be stolen. Hardly any of the dirty, grey houses on the main road or on the side street had all their doors, windows, glasses, or shutters intact. (p. 110).

Here, one is reminded of George Orwell's account of the down-and-outs of Paris and London. The description of the pub in that area is even more nauseating:
Most pubs, in fact, did not take care to keep food since their customers did not come there to eat, they drank as long as their money lasted ... I had to get used to the barmaids taking someone's beer mug shoving it in the bucket of dirty water, and, with the soap film still on, serving me in the same mug. The man standing at my side feverishly spitting in the floor made one sick. (p. 111).

Hyde Park and dance halls reflect another facet of public life in England. Hyde Park is known for its free and easy lovemaking scenes. Sukumal recollects that "the whole idea of making love under the scrutinizing eyes of thousands of people was most disgusting...."(p. 113). The dance halls are places where one can go and dance with any girl he selects. Shirley's account of her past life reveals the horrid lives of prostitutes and how much of sadism they are subjected to. But, one saving grace is that prostitution is only treated as a profession in England. Once they cease to take it as a profession, they can lead normal life. Sukumal tells Indu:

In Europe and America, many women who take to prostitution out of necessity get married, have children and live a happy life afterwards. (p. 179)

Unfortunately, prostitutes in India are denied this opportunity. They can never come out of the social stigma attached to their profession. Indu, for this reason, clearly sees the impossibility of meeting Sukumal's family.
Romen Basu brings to the attention of the reader the racial feeling prevalent in the English society. In Liverpool, Sukumal goes to a shop to buy fish and chips. The salesgirl speaks to him rudely and she almost throws the package at him. He finds the smudge of the black newsprint on the eatables in the package. Smarting under the insult, he recollect how he used to wrap eatables in a newspaper and throw at a beggar from the balcony. In another instance, Jock and Nell are also insulted at a pub on account of Sukumal. Two girls refuse to give them an inch of space to get their drinks. Jock loses patience and shoves one girl aside. They are asked to leave the place by the barman. Sukumal reflects that "Jock was deeply upset at the way we had been treated on my account." (p. 86). In Kensington, Sukumal finds it very difficult to get a residence on account of his race.

Commenting on the aspect of domestic and social realism in the novel, a reviewer says:

Romen Basu's portrayal of the slums as well as of the so-called high society in the U.K. is vivid and realistic and so is his depiction of the trials, tribulations, meanness and the joys of a rapidly dissolving joint family in his Culcutta home dominated by a loving but extremely selfish father, mean to the core and an equally rapacious and greedy brother with a charming but frustrated young wife who is strangely drawn to him.20

A Gift of Love also reflects the political conditions in India and in England realistically. Mr. Kenmore, Nell's father, refers to Gandhi's leadership of the freedom struggle and the need for the rule of the British for a few more years. He tells Sukumal:

.... I don't object if a country wants to rule itself, but India is not ready for it .... you need our chaps for quite a while .... I mean we are helping your country build industries and giving your people education. (p. 65)

Much later, Mr. Robbins, Moira's father, expresses a different opinion:

He felt strongly it was right that India had been given her independence. Granting Jinnah's demand for a separate state had been a great error, he was against the British government's policy here. (p. 144).

It is evident that by the time Mr. Robbins speaks to Sukumal, India has already achieved independence. The time gap between these comments also points to the time of action of the novel. The reference to the Atlee government by a public speaker refers to its contemporaneity when India became independent. Thus it gives a touch of historical realism to the novel.

Though the author has not consciously developed East-West encounter as a theme, one can find a few features relating to it. A reviewer says that the novel "describes the value of a genuine love between a man and a woman in the midst
of conflicts between the values of the East and the West." 21 As has been said earlier, Sukumal and Shirley transcend their national, racial and religious barriers in their sincere love for each other. Besides this, the affection Sukumal gets at Jock's house is a proof of the meeting of the East and the West at the level of human emotions.

There are certain areas where the East and the West do meet, especially, social conditions. In the Indian society, there is discrimination in the shape of caste system. The counterpart of it is racial feeling in the British society. Further, in England too, as in India, wealth and poverty exist side by side as in Liverpool and Kensington. A reviewer says:

In a comparative treatment as this, a novelist has every chance of going out of proportion. But here the Eastern and Western values are admirably balanced, each given its share. This sense of proportion is nowhere lost in the volume --- not even in intimate details of the hero's life with Karuna, Nell and Shirley. 22

Romen Basu has succeeded in making use of language to explore convincingly 'the desires and movements of the flesh and the yearnings of the spirit.' The language is not verbose or embellished. It is transparent yet effective and at times probing. For instance,


when Sukumal analyzes his feelings and motives while leaving Nell, the language sounds adequate and touching.

Like Mulk Raj Anand and Chaman Nahal, Romen Basu makes a generous use of Bengali and Hindi words such as 'Chhoto pishima,' 'koel,' 'kajalir-ma,' 'pronam,' 'goonda,' 'tumi,' 'apni,' 'kulfi,' 'sansar,' 'bandi,' 'busti.' He uses certain typical Indian expressions. For instance, while swearing by Goddess Kali, Sukumal promises to offer "twenty one goat heads exactly on the same spot in Kalimandir, as before." (p. 50). Such expressions give Indian colour to the novel. At times, the author uses some queer expressions such as:

'The other cousins were like vegetables.' (p. 11)

or when Bulbul tells Sukumal:

".... from now on you can have me only in small doses." (p. 192)

Further, one is puzzled by the syntax in sentences such as the following one:

By the time I had spent six weeks unsuccessfully job hunting. (p. 111).

The author uses British slang expressions of address such as 'bloke,' 'pet,' 'duchy,' 'young feller,' to give a native tang to the conversation of British characters.
Romen Basu employs devices like irony, symbol, conflict and contrast as a part of the technique. Irony, as it appears in the novel, is the kind of which arises out of the incongruity between expectation and fulfilment as in Jane Austen's novels. Sukumal's fond expectations of his marriage with Shirley are shattered by her fatal disease and death. His pursuit of a relationship for the illumination of his whole life is again belied after the first failure with Nell.

Conflict operates at more than one level in the novel. In Sukumal, conflict is seen at both external and internal levels. Externally, his conflict is with the alien surroundings in England to establish himself and find an identity of his own. He succeeds in this with the help of Jock and Nell at one stage and with the help of Shirley later. Internally, his conflict is with the enveloping emotional void in him. On the other hand, there is conflict between tradition and modernity. Tradition comes in the way of Sukumal in making Indu socially acceptable and in marrying Kajali. The conflict is decided in favour of modernity with Sukumal and Kajali deciding to leave the house in search of a new life.

The author also maintains contrast at several levels. First, there is an unobtrusive contrast between the rich and the poor. We have in the novel characters like Nell and Shirley who have undergone abject poverty and characters who roll in riches like Gopal Babu and Mr. Robbins. We also see the contrast between rags and riches in the description of the poverty and squalor in Liverpool and Kensington and in the description of the opulence in Mr. Robbins' house where Sukumal feels 'tongue-tied.'
Second, the author projects Sukumal and his brother as a contrast. His brother is tradition-bound like his father while Sukumal is the harbinger of healthy modernity. Further, Sukumal's brother is possessive about all his father's property whereas Sukumal does not want a bit of it. Moreover, he wants to divide it among his aunts from whom his father had managed to get it.

As a part of his technique, Romen Basu employs symbols and images. It may be noted that the repetitive use of the word 'love' in the chapter "Love" gives it a symbolic force. For Sukumal and Shirley it is as though the entire surroundings were permeated with love because their minds overflow with love for each other. For example, Sukumal views the expenditure for studying law as "an investment in love" (p. 138). He says he "loved the classwork, the tutorials, the discussions, chatting with my fellow students (p. 135) "Shirley loved to see me coming in with masses of books .... She loved to watch me do my homework." (p. 138). The repetition underlines the triumph of love relationship between Sukumal and Shirley.

Later, Romen Basu uses the symbol 'koel' for Kajali for "her infinite capacity for contentment." Like koel, "she spread her warmth and love as she hopped from place to place, person to person." (p. 194). The education and enlightenment she receives from Sukumal make her a 'koel' let out of its cage of tradition, social lowliness and ignorance. No wonder, she looks like a koel to him with the refinement she has acquired.
The very title of the novel - A Gift of Love - suggests the predominance of love in the novel. The concept of love is treated in its kaleidoscopic form existing among several persons in several forms. From the point of view of the protagonist, it could be seen in a pattern in three stages in association with three girls. While he denies for himself a lasting relationship with Nell, it is denied to him in the case of Shirley by her death and he finds it at last with Kajali. Further, Sukumal overcomes his adolescence and acquires manhood and emotional stability in his association with Nell and Shirley while now it is his turn to lift up Kajali and help her get over her adolescence into enlightenment. Thus, there is understanding, sacrifice and selfless love at all the three stages. The title of the novel could be interpreted in many ways. It is Nell's gift of love to him to bring cheer to his life and help him "think intelligently and act sensibly." (p. 106). Further, his barristership is Shirley's gift of love to Sukumal. It could also be said that achieving barristership is Sukumal's gift of love to her to live upto her expectations. They see "real relationship" in their mutual love. Coming to Kajali, it is Sukumal's gift of love to Kajali to give her education and enlightenment. Finally, it is Kajali's gift of love to Sukumal to promise to walk with him to a new life overcoming tradition and caste barriers. Thus the protagonist is not only a beneficiary of the love of others but also gives such a gift of love. Assessing the love, George Mathai says:

In my opinion, A Gift of Love is one of the best novels I have read. It is humorous, sardonic and
will keep you in a mood of rising emotion, until you finish reading it.  

A close study of the novel from the point of view of both its theme and technique only endorses what the critic has observed. A Gift of Love is, indeed, one of the best Indian novels in English.