

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

Romen Basu has published so far seven novels and two volumes of short stories. One may say that he has considerable fictional output to his credit; and yet, curiously enough, he has not attracted critics' attention so far. In fact, there is a paucity of critical material on his fiction.

I have tried in a modest way, to fill up this gap in this dissertation. Actually, lack of critical material on Romen Basu's novels is in a sense, advantageous; for in that case a new critic is free from any preconceived opinions about the novelist; and that he is able to study his fiction from an objective point of view.

Romen Basu belongs to the second generation of 'new' writers in Indo-Anglian literature. Writers like Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Chaman Nahal, Jai Nimbkar, Nayantara Sahgal belong to this category. Romen Basu has an additional advantage over other Indian writers in the sense that he has been an UN official for a number of years; and in that capacity he has had innumerable opportunities to observe the changing scenes in politics, society, religion in a number of countries. He has had opportunities to come into contact and clash with a number of multi-racial, multi-cultural societies. And hence,

the main focus of his fiction has been not only the exotic aspects of different worlds and societies, but their impact on the Indian sensibility and its repercussions. In the four novels I have selected here for my investigation; we come across a cross-section of the multi-cultural diversities which impinge upon the Indian hero or heroine, which incidentally provides the author an opportunity to study the different cultures in a comparative perspective with regard to religious tradition, social modes of behaviour etc. Romen Basu has fruitfully exploited this opportunity to emphasise, to some extent, the superiority of Indian cultural traditions.

Another writer who deals with the theme of East-West cultural encounter is Raja Rao. In his *The Serpant and the Rope*, he has depicted French cultural tradition in conflict with ancient, Vedantic, to be specific, Advantic philosophy of India. The novel has an epic dimension and it is full of philosophical, discursive passages. Often, the novel turns into a philosophical treatise to that extent, *The Serpant and the Rope* suffers adversely as a novel. As David McCutcheon says,

All the central concerns of the Western novel are absent. Social relations, psychological motivation, characterisation, judgement, a passion for the concrete..¹

And McCutcheon strikes at the very roots of the Indian novel

when he says,

Considering that the novel's chief concern is circumstantial reality - 'the very exists', according to the well-known quote from Hazlit ... and that the traditional view-point regards all this as tedious illusion, it may be questioned whether a truly Indian novel is at all possible.²

Romen Basu, however, is truly a story-teller; and he never loses sight of his worldly-minded characters who are materialistic and dwell on philosophical dimensions on a surface level and only as far as they affect their routine life.

In the first place, Romen Basu's novels are hero-centred. There are, of course, women characters, like Zarina in *Your Life to Live*, who tries to stand up to the hero's dominance; and yet she appears to be mere satellite of the hero. And yet the woman is forced to adjust and readjust herself according to the wishes of Ashoke, her husband.

Ashoke's character is typical of the Western-influenced Indian who has developed false ideas of freedom. As against this, Zarina presents the more human, sympathetic Indian womanhood. Ashoke after a long sojourn in New York in America returns to his native place in India, and feels the difference between the American and Indian cultures. His Western influence is

not necessarily modern. For instance, he is an agnostic but he would not like his children to be Muslim. Here we see the contradiction in the character of Ashoke, who as a Western-educated man, should be expected to be a secular-minded. Romen Basu seems to suggest that the Western values are all right in the West, but in the East they are not fully practicable. This contradiction of the character is fully exposed in his relationship with Zarina. Zarina brings with herself not only Islamic culture but a broad-mindedness which includes the best of both worlds. Thus, in *Your Life to Live*, a cultural clash with regard to Islam, Hinduism and the West becomes the focal point in this novel.

Candles and Roses deals with French culture and its impact on the Indian hero. Broadly speaking, Parisian culture is thought to be liberal, artistic and even promiscuous. The heroine, Monique represents this aspect of Parisian life only partially. The Indian hero Samir is smitten with Monique's beauty and her liberal way of life. And yet, he is a married person, his wife Pramila being a typical orthodox Hindu woman. Thus, in this novel also we find the hero is torn between the promiscuous life which he lives with Monique, on the one hand, and the material life with the tradition-bound Pramila, on the other. This novel also presents a multi-cultural conflict. The liberal French conflicting with orthodox Hindu and the

hero representing the clash between his so called modernism and orthodoxy.

Portrait on the Roof has an Italian heroine, Teresa who is Catholic. Catholicism, like Hinduism, is an orthodox and tradition-bound religion. It is, like Hinduism, full of different customs and rituals. But unlike Hinduism, it is monolithic. Now this very similarity between the two cultures separates them. Also the family traditions are supremely important in both the cultures. Thus, we find the family as the central theme which affects the changing modes of life in both the families. This is yet another novel where it seems that Romen Basu seems to be obsessed with the theme of multi-cultural conflict in his novels. *Sand of Time* may be said to be the culmination of this theme introduced on the larger scale of the world stage, that is, the United Nations. Himself being an official of the world organization, Romen Basu exploits this opportunity fully in order to portray characters and conflicts not only from the West but from the Middle East, Far East. Here the interns and the officials, the young and the old alike, present the problems and conflicts on a much larger and wider scale in the microscopic manner. The U.N. as it were a cultural cauldron.

So, in Indian fiction in English, Romen Basu has followed a lonely path to treat a subject which is a departure from the stereotypes of the East and the West. It is, perhaps,

fortuitous that Romen Basu has had the experience of globe-trotting which he exploits to deal with multi-cultural encounters in his novels. The settings of his novels that are discussed here in this dissertation are not only New York and London but France, Italy and specifically Bengal also. I consider that this is a unique contribution of Romen Basu to Indo-Anglian fiction. The multi-cultural encounter dealt with by Basu is not just to give only an exotic feeling about the characters and settings, but they also throw light on the cultural peculiarities worked out through families, religious authorities and the central characters, or protagonists. In a sense, they are parables of the modern situation in which the world has shrunk to give us a feeling of global village where such encounters are inevitable and their consequences unavoidable.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 McCutcheon, D. *Indian Writing in English*, Calcutta, p. 72.
- 2 Ibid., pp. 69-70.