

CHAPTER ONE
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The struggle for Independence in India was not merely a political struggle, but an all pervasive experience that became a part of the life of almost all the sensitive and enlightened Indians. It is this coincidence which is responsible for a flowering maturity of the Indo-English fiction in the 'thirties during which period the freedom movement percolated to the very grass-roots of Indian society. Parallel to this struggle for political freedom was another one on the social plane. It was a fight against superstition, caste system, poverty, illiteracy and many other social ills. The socio-political movement, which had caught the imagination of the entire nation, also inspired the Indo-English writers. They had the added advantage of Western liberal education. With the intensification of the struggle for national independence, the Indo-English writers rightly realized that literature, too, had a vital role to play in it. Of the three great names that have left an overwhelming impact on the 20th century writers - Gandhi, Marx and Freud.

The decade of the 'thirties was indeed a blooming period for the Indo-English fiction. It saw the appearance



of the first novels by big three: Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), Narayan's *Swami and Friends* (1935), and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938). In them can be discerned a marked improvement on their predecessors in technique, form and style. Anand modelled his novels on the contemporary European and American novelists borrowing the stream of consciousness technique from James Joyce. Narayan sought to deal almost exclusively with the lower middle-class families of Southern India with gentle, sympathetic irony in a tragic-comic mode, whereas Raja Rao dwelt on the puranic Harikatha tradition of story telling and made an old village granny unfold the narrative in autobiographical form.

With the appearance of the first novels of these three eminent writers in the 'thirties, the Indo-English novel may be said to have ripened into maturity. These writers brought in new themes, new technique, new style and new approach to the novel. On the measure of achievement of the Indo-English novelists, we may well cite here the opinion of W. Walsh:

It was in the 1930s that the Indians began what has now turned out to be their very substantial contribution to the novel in English and one peculiarly suited to their talents.¹

After the World War II and the achievement of Independence, a complex spectrum of political and social change emerges in the country. The angry protest or the sentimental idealism gives way to a realistic appraisal and analysis of the surrounding world; and the novelists in English became more conscious of their art. In other words, the novelists strive to produce what may be described as the 'well-made-novel'. The novel, which is constructed neatly. In this category, one may consider Manohar Malgaonkar as a master-craftsman whose achievement as a historical-political novelist is significant. These novels are as much entertaining as they are commentaries on the contemporary history. Thus *Distant Drum*, *The Princess* and *A Bend in the Ganges* recreate the period of the partition, and explore the genesis and the nature of the upheavals in political situations and social transformations. Malgaonkar achieves his effects with a shrewd mixture of romance and reality in order to bring home his philosophy the bygone values of aristocracy.

India was in need of modernisation, and even spiritual experience was in need of renewal. We still need the West and shall continue to do so mainly for a deep knowledge of the spiritual basis of modernism is not all matter. There is nothing inherently Western about modernism because it does not derive from space but time. We should consider it on merits.

The modern man may be an agnostic or an atheist, but he is not necessarily an unspiritual materialist. What motivates him is the spiritual conviction that man must know the truth, nothing short of it.

One of the dominant themes of the Indo-Anglian novel has been the East-West cultural encounter. This is a very important theme because it reflects the conflict between traditional modernity in the context of a variety of social, moral and cultural situations.

Kamala Markandaya is one of the "insider-outsider" who deals with this theme. In Kamala Markandaya's estimate, there has not been much understanding between East and West inspite of the long association Between them. In the words of the novelists -

Undilute East had always been too much for the West; and soulful East always came lapdog fashion to the West, mutely asking to be not too little and not too much but just right.²

Raja Rao, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala are other novelists who have shown greater depth in this East-West encounter theme with a great sense of commitment and understanding.

Apparently, the critics have made too much of the

East-West or, to be more precise, Indo-British encounter. Actually, these other offshoots of the Western civilization and culture with whom Indians have come into contact. In a sense, the East-West theme is a colonial hangover. And yet we find a novelist like Romen Basu is not very conscious of this Indo-British colonial, cultural hang-up. Romen is a novelist who seems to be concerned with with multi-cultural encounters in his novels. Romen Basu holds a keypost in the UNO. As a UNO functionary, he has come into contact with a number of ethnic and racial groups. Naturally, he has hold on advantageous position, a vantage position to view the entire spectrum of human civilization and culture.

Romen Basu takes his readers on holiday trip, on a number of world capitals and creates situations where his Indian hero and heroine clash with, not only British and American, but French, Italian, Israeli, Turkish, Polish characters. The multi-cultural context sharply undercovers Romen Basu's novels from the other novelists who deal with East-West or merely Indo-British or Indo-American world.

In this dissertation I intend to analyse four novels of Romen Basu - 1) *Your Life to Live* (1935), 2) *Candles and Roses*, (1978), 3) *Portrait On the Roof*, (1980), and 4) *Sands of Time*, (1985) in order to evaluate his contribution to Indo-Anglian

novel. At the same time, I intend to illustrate that Romen Basu belongs to the second category of the novelists who wrote "well-made-novels".

The first novel I have discussed in Chapter-I is *Your Life to Live* (1972). The heroine of the novel is Zarina who marries a Hindu - Ashoke. This novel deals with the conflict between the values of the West and those of the East. Both Ashoke and Zarina are Western-educated, sophisticated and both came from cultured families. And yet the two - husband and wife - present contrasting values of the West and the East. Ashoke's Westernization has made him hedonistic and promiscuous. While Zarina represents the true union of loving souls. This conflict is interesting in the sense that both Ashoke and Zarina represent not only the conflict between the two cultures but of the East itself. The Hindu-Muslim conflict on the level of marriage between two highly educated individuals has this other ethnic and conflicting cultural dimension. Thus, the novel does not represent merely conventional East-West values, but also multi-cultural dimension as well.

Romen Basu's next novel that I have discussed is *Candles and Roses* (1978). Here the setting is Paris, and the heroine Monique and her family represent French culture. With all the hedonism of Paris life, along with its galleries and

restaurants, Monique's family can be as orthodox as any other. The family women, however, represent the French culture, Pramila the other Indian heroine, is the quintessence of Indian womanhood. This novel is a departure from the stereotype Indo-British or the East-West values.

Chapter-IV discusses Romen Basu's next novel *Portrait On the Roof* (1980). In this novel, the Indian hero falls in love with an Italian (and a Catholic at that) young woman. Even among the Westerners, the Italians are orthodox; and the Catholic orthodoxy and Indian orthodoxy are in juxtaposition in this novel. This novel gives yet another and different cultural aspect which is perhaps unique in Indo-Anglian fiction.

The last novel I have discussed in Chapter-V is *Sands of Time* (1985). This novel is altogether different in the sense that its setting, the UNO, represents a conglomeration or a cauldrom of a number of cultures in the world. It provides a vantage point from whose multi-cultural scenario can be naturally and effortlessly presented. The last chapter gives conclusions and general comments on the multi-cultural themes.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Walsh, William. *Commonwealth Literature*, 1978 London.
- 2 Naik, M.K., Desai, S.K., and Amur, G.S., eds., *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English*, 1968, Dharwar, Karnatak University, p. 328.