A Critical Study of Diasporic Dilemma in the Novels of
Romen Basu

Introduction:

This research is to focus on something which is a very common study these days called or named as ‘Diaspora’ but my topic is something in dilemma for I don’t know whether the writer can be labeled as a Diaspora writer in fact I am going to prove him as a diaspora writer therefore I have given the title as “A Study of selected novels of Romen Basu’s Diasporic Dilemma”. The word diaspora originates from the Greek word, Diaspora meaning, a dispersion (scattering). Diaspora may be defined as dispersion of people, language, or culture that was formerly concentrated in one place. When an individual or group of people start producing literary production about people or language they may have disinherit but writing in another language, they may be defined as diasporas literature. As a result, we hear about Indian Diasporas writings in UK, USA, and Canada, South Africa, Sri Lankan or Australia and so on.

The dispersal signifies the location of a fluid human autonomous space involving a complex set of negotiation and exchange between the nostalgia and desire for the Homeland and the making of a new home, adapting to the power, relationships between the minority and majority, being spoke-persons for minority rights and their people back home and significantly transacting with the new “Sense of Place”; a new unknown geographical space.

Diaspora is a phrase coined by literary scholar Veva Clark in her work "Developing Diaspora Literacy and Marasa Consciousness" (Spillers: 1991, 40-60). It is the ability to understand and/or interpret the multi-layered meanings of stories, words, and other folk sayings within any given community of the African diaspora. These meanings supersede those of "...Western or westernized signification", means that they go
beyond literal or typical literary interpretation into an area of folk understanding that could only be recognized by the eye skilled in such an understanding. Readers rely solely upon knowledge and lived experience of social, historical, and cultural climates of the various cultures of the African diaspora as a foundation for interpretation.

Diasporas literature could be examined using several key features. First, it is based on the idea of a homeland; a place from where the displacement occurs. Secondly, Diasporas literature provides narratives of harsh journeys undertaken for various reasons. Thirdly, Diaspora provides accounts of another “sense of place” away from home land. Fourthly, one could read how “homeland-made” protagonists behave in a far of land either adopting or rejecting new cultural codes of their new “sense of place”. Therefore, when reading diasporas literature, we can learn why and how some people choose to migrate to another country either voluntarily or due to other reasons, and how they get used to living perhaps, “peacefully” elsewhere, but losing home and homeland. Diaspora literature may also represent and delve with concepts such as nostalgia, memory and even lamentation of losing one’s native language, homeland and friends and so on.

The literature of the Indian Diaspora constitutes an important part of the burgeoning field of Anglophone postcolonial literature. Some of the better-known authors in this archive include V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Romen Basu, Bharati Mukherjee, Amitav Gosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai, M.G. Vassanji, Shyam Selvadurai, and Kiran Desai. The growing international visibility of these authors has gone hand in hand with the popularity of postcolonial criticism and theory in academe.

It was with the Diaspora writing it opened a new realm of understanding of human nature and behaviour. It helped us to observe an individual in terms of his responses and reactions towards fellow beings, the environment and with its own self. It was with this understanding the later Diaspora writers came up with a wide angle. They are the
articulations of a talented writer who tries to seek the true meaning of life on earth. Among them one is Romen Basu whom I am here to discuss, he was highly fertile and whose more than a dozen works , beginning with A house full of people  (1968), Your life to live (1972), A Gift of love (1976), Candles and Roses (1978), Portrait on the Roof (1980), Sands Of Time (1985), Outcast (1986), Hours before dawn (1988), Blackstone (1989) The Street Corner Boys(1992), My own witness (1993), Breach of faith (2003). Besides these he has also written some short stories and poems. In most of his novels he has presented the variegated picture of Indian life set in rural Bengal. Among these I have selected a few as stated below which I am to discuss here.

1. A House Full of People.(1968)
2. Your life to live. (1972)
3. A gift of love. (1976)
5. Hours before dawn. (1988)

I have selected these above mentioned 5 novels of Romen Basu out of his 16 novels. In which I would like to do a research and highlight the **Romen Basu as a writer of Diaspora Dilemma**, this idea struck to my mind while doing my M.Phil. As my study was based on his novel ‘Outcast’ (1986) which tells us about the downtrodden people and the prevailing conditions in those days in India. Romen Basu being an Indian but has passed his entire life in foreign country, working in the U.S but still he was very well aware about the social life prevailing in India and it also shows the dilemma in his writing as to how a poor man has to suffer in his own country. This was written by him, maybe he had that feeling in his mind while he was in the United States or he has seen the Indians experiencing such things even in foreign so as to create an awareness among the Indians he has portrayed such a picture.

Romen Basu can be labeled as diaspora writer who wrote with a purpose which was translated into a discourse, a design or a structure to accommodate, new compulsions, new realities and deeper sensibilities.
Besides he speaks through his protagonist with a dilemma throughout his five selected novels. This is with a purpose to shun out the prevailing vices and try to connect the people, with modern ways of life style. As most of his protagonist have left their homes in search of new ways of life or to achieve something and are in a dilemma whether to return home with new hope. He states this as if he himself has experienced it or undergone all this in his life, or may be one can say that he was abandoned with certain things in life or he really missed them.

My research is going to be based on the following novels which shows lot of similarities to his family as stated in G.R Malliga’s book ‘Quest for Harmony’ that he too belonged to a joint family. The first novel ‘House full of people’ portrays Bengali joint family in exactitude consisting of nearly 60 people, this novel mostly relates to his family back in India which he really missed it shows from the way he has portrayed it. This alone is enough to show the dilemma. Second novel ‘Your life to live’ tells us about a Hindu boy getting married to a Muslim girl they have settled in the West and the girl’s fear for her acceptance in Bengali family and the girl’s bonding for the family with a dilemma. Third novel ‘A Gift of Love’ here also we find the protagonist who had fled from home in search of freedom but soon returns home in search of shelter and family solace. Fourth novel ‘Candles and Roses’ which speaks about the evil customs of the society like dowry even at the end that is given more importance and the protagonist fight for it. The last novel ‘Hours before dawn’ speaks about the real feelings and the jealousy and the personal and cultural dilemmas there is abandonment as well as reunion.

There is a need for the above stated research as I need to show how and why was Romen Basu’s writing are mostly related with the familial setup and the ongoing situations prevailing during the period of 1960’s. He had thus concentrated on the joint family system and social problems. His style is simple while his statements are sharp and emphatic, with complex themes and the social problems constitute on caste, religion and class. As a person was borne and brought up in joint
family therefore he was very well aware about merits and demerits in the system of joint family, besides with the coming up of the independence he has tried to bring an awareness and expose the shortcomings of the joint family system like exploitation by the elders of the younger’s and lack of freedom for the younger’s. There is all time dilemma even unconscious support to maintain the values are seen in his novels.

As for the Indians there is a lot of craving for the Western culture as well as Western education, which he hasn’t opposed but tried to demotivate the Indians, by portraying its drawbacks and highlighting it as a failure for the Indian society and Indian culture in the long run. The study will take up a close analysis for the growth of the writer at various stages which has been reflected in his novels. The cause and means is also to be studied under the light of universal peace. I shall even focus with this on the prevailing culture of the Bengalis, which in spite of achieving Independence after 67 years hasn’t yet vanished from the society. Though the Bengalis stood at the forefront in Education as well as the societal development, but still there prevails certain drawbacks in the society.