Chapter-V
Novels of the Last phase
Anand launched upon a very ambitious project, indeed, when he took to writing the *Village* trilogy dealing with the turbulent career of a Punjabi peasant. Lal Singh, like most of Anand's heroes, is a rebel. He defies the rigid religion of his caste, stirs up the wrath of his orthodox brethren, and no longer able to live as one of them, flees from his village. Fiercely bent upon moulding his life independently, he enlists in the British Indian army. He hardens himself for the job of a soldier, goes through all the rigours of the regiment, and undergoes bewildering and excruciating experiences during World War I. He is utterly disillusioned when he is unceremoniously dismissed from the army for suspected seditious association with some Indian political agitators in Germany.

Back at his village, he finds that his family has broken up, and all his property gone. Then he elopes with Maya, his first love, and joins an eccentric landlord in U. P. There he is involved in the Indian freedom struggle. But his methods of working up a revolution among landless peasants and evicted tenants prove faulty and futile. Eventually, he courts arrest and ends up in jail, where he comes to realise the probable causes of his failure—his vanity, his lack of self-control, and his inability to
resolve the various conflicts rampant among the members of his own group and bring about harmony among them.

Thus, we find that the struggle that man puts up in his quest for the realisation of his destiny through all opposing death forces is, by and large, the central theme of the trilogy. The struggle might end up in failure, but what is really important is the struggle itself, since it indicates the possibilities of a happier and nobler life for man.

The Village is symbolic at once of the tragedy as well as the hope of India. The novel presents a clear picture of a typical Indian village in transition. The village described here is still in the grips of poverty and hunger, ignorance and superstition. But there is also a hint at Anand’s faith in the eventual awakening and emancipation of peasantry, easily discernible in the dashing, rebellious character of the hero who fights against all hypocrisy and tries to emerge into a richer and more honest world.

Lal Singh pities his father, Nihal Singh, who represents all the reactionary villagers too deeply orthodox and superstitious to escape the exploitative and victimising forces around them—the extortionate
government, unscrupulous landlords, greedy money-lenders, fleecing lawyers, and the age-old customs of the brotherhood which compel the poor peasants to waste money on meaningless rituals. With his indomitable love for life and freedom, Lal Singh rebels against orthodoxy and gets himself into hot waters, and eventually runs away from his beloved village to join the army.

Anand's condemnation of orthodox religion ossified through years to mere rituals, of poverty, cruelty and superstition, of belief in karma and God, and his emphasis on the need for love in human relations—all these are to be found implied in the *Village*.

Since Anand believes that religion is a matter which is better left to the private conscience of an individual, his humanism insists on tolerance. The elaborate description of the reaction of the fanatical Sikhs to Lalu's act of getting his hair cut exposes the fanaticism of men in whose hands religion has deteriorated into mere ritualism and an instrument of tyranny. This is how Anand describes the tense scene:

"There was a gasp of horror, followed by a moment of stunned silence ... Nihal Singh sprang forward and
dealt him (Lalu) a resounding slap on the face. With the fury of an old tiger, he fell, upon his son, digging his claws into the boy's neck, while Sharam Singh ground his teeth with an 'Oh! rape mother!' and struck him hard on his head, his neck and on his body...

'The son of a bitch' shouted Nihal Singh, pushing off Dayal Singh's restraining hands and, lifting the barber's silvermounted staff that, lay by he struck the boy hard on his neck, his back, his legs and his ribs!'

Aunt Ajit Kaur arrives on the scene only to be astounded at the impudent, irreligious act of the boy, and she delivers her verdict:

"It is the most shame fullest shame that could be for a Sikh to have a single hair of his body shorn. It is the most terrible insult to our religion of the five K's."

Anand suggests that it is the religious intolerance and reckless fanaticism of the men of his own community that is responsible for much of Lal Singh's disgust and discomfiture, and eventually for his flight from
the village despite his great love for it. But it is surprising—nay, shocking—that these very men of religion should be too blind to see through the greed and hypocrisy of an impostor like the Mahant, who actually pleads for social inequality in the name of religion, and God. This is how he puts forth his cunning argument:

"God has given a place to everyone in this world. You know well that a serf has not the dignity of a farmer like you (Nihal Singh). Keep your prestige therefore, but do not set yourself in the same place as other folk. For that would be a sin. This is the true religion, that you should not envy your superiors, for if you did so, there would be no order in the world."

And we know this is all calculated to serve his own ends. Anand seems to vent all his indignation against the fraudulent religious head through a description of Lalu’s reaction to him:

"Lalu felt a violent revulsion against Nandgir now ...

Why couldn’t the family learn better than to waste money on gifts for these charlatans? Why? The man
hadn't done anything for them for years, but came in at the end of every harvest for his share of the grain and the gift of clothes! The lecher! He ate sumptuous food, dressed in yellow silks, smoked charas and drank hemp, and, if reports were true, whored and fornicated. And he was kept as a holy man, the Guru of the community."

The concept of happy living being an integral part of Anand's humanism, it naturally abhors poverty which dehumanises man and condemns him to sub-human living. The village, Anand describes, is full of dirt and poverty, misery and squalor. Rubbish heaps, stinking sewers, crumbling madhouses, and narrow streets are a common sight here. Mr. Hercules Long, the Deputy Commissioner who visits the village for an inspection, is so much shocked at its dirt and poverty that he describes it as a place fit only for animal habitation. Apart from the men like Gughii and Jhandu who are the very pictures of poverty, Nihal Singh himself is becoming poorer and poorer, due to the falling prices and thuggery of the money-lenders, and also the government. The hero speaks for Anand when he
talks of replacing the dirty, foul-smelling village with its crumbling hovels by a well-built town.

Anand's humanism abhors cruelty and violence with equal emphasis, since they can result only in causing damage to society and crushing an individual's spirit. Lal Singh meets with cruelty all around him. It is manifested now in the form of the harassment of those that refuse to follow the traditional religion and all its injunctions, however meaningless they have now become, then in the form of money-lender's greed or landlord's eagerness to usurp any man's property. Greed and power not only corrupt the men who possess them but oppress the unfortunate poor and force them into miserable existence. If Harbans Singh, the landlord, and Seth Chaman Lal, the bania, are typical of the individuals who are afflicted with these dangerous maladies, the government is itself not free from these cancerous diseases; since all of them are greedy grabbers and tormentors of the poor village folk. Fanaticism has made them so hard-hearted that they cannot brook any violation of their religious principles, and they blacken Lalu's face for getting his ritualistic hair cut and shout him out of the village. He escapes from these nagging tongues, runs and runs and on reaching a field, he
realises how cruel his own men have been to him, so that it seems to be impossible for him to live any longer in this village:

"Oh! I wish I had never been born here if they had to treat me like that! .., the abuse ..., the shouts ..., the insults ... and ... oh, how .......... could they they put me ... All of them ... my ....., own people oh how could they ... my own father and mother ... Oh! disgraced for ever ... beaten and bruised......what can I do?"5

Suffering seems to be the lot of Lalu throughout his life. Now the village elders and then the parents, again men like Lance Naik Lok Nath in the army - all these try to pester him and crush his vivacious spirit. He is compelled to exclaim:

"It seems as if I was born to suffer and be sad."6

Naturally, we find Anand pleading for love, and more love, as an antidote for the intense cruelty and suffering that prevail in the world.

It is the tragedy of Lal Singh's life that he receives so little love from the world at large that he often feels that he has been continually
deprived of love with which he could not only have lessened his misery but also have changed his village. Not only the villagers, but his own parents make life miserable for him, and he bursts forth in chagrin and indignation:

"And if they will only love me more, and let me love them, I could soon work off their debts and relieve them of their troubles .." 7

Anand's disapproval of the theories of karma and God are to be seen in Village also. He points out that the gradual decay and general decrepitude of the village is mainly due to the fatalistic attitude the old villagers bear to the problems of life. At moments Lal Singh is seized with the fiery zeal to change the world of his village. But such thoughts are immediately followed by his realisation of the immensity of the problem. The villagers are all so cynical and fatalistic that it is almost impossible to change them. Lalu knows his own father and brother are no exceptions to the general apathy into which the villagers are sunk. Anand describes Lalu's feeling thus:
"The images of his father and Dayal Singh seated in the lotus seat, telling beads and mumbling prayers with their heads hung down, their lips trembling as if at the fear of death and abjectly craving a panacea for all the ills of mortality, flashed before him. They seemed base and contemptible, defeated. They did not want to think, to feel, to do anything, but relegated the responsibility for all their misfortunes, as well as their blessings, on karma and a God who didn’t exist apart from his apostles."

Lal Singh does not believe in God, and sees no reason to do so. In fact, in a fit of rage, he even invites God to come and strike him dead if He can punish people for being irreverent to Him and infringing rules of religion. But, of course, Lalu is not struck dead. It is clear from this that Anand believes that belief in fatalism and God is positively detrimental to community’s progress since it breeds apathy and inertia.

Superstition, it appears, is still an integral part of the average Indian’s mental make-up. Anand, being acutely aware of the dangers of
superstition, shows in this novel how superstitious beliefs persist among rustics. It is not only an old woman like Gujri who is naive enough to believe that it is auspicious to meet a sweeper or a black dog before one sets out on one's journey, but the entire village community is in the grips of incurable superstitious beliefs. For instance, his own father does not mind being reduced to bankruptcy in the process of endless borrowing of money just to observe some meaningless ceremonies connected with marriages and funerals.

Rightly Called 'an Indian pastoral, unique in character,' by the reviewer of *Southport Guardian*, the *Village* has generally been hailed as a charming novel giving an engaging and imaginatively vivid picture of Indian rural life in pre-war days. What the same reviewer says further about the novel seems to be equally apt:

"No one has described the beauty and squalor of an Indian farmer's existence, the pageantry and pettiness of life in a small Indian hamlet, with the knowledge and understanding that Mr. Anand, himself an Indian, is able to command. The most successful interpreters
of Indian life, Kipling, E.M. Forster, Edward Thompson have inevitably presented a European interpretation. In THE VILLAGE, a gifted writer writes about his own people."

No one can ever denounce Village as a propagandist novel.

Anand writes here on a theme which is quite familiar as well as dear to him, Indian rural populace-their passions and superstitions, their religiosity and fanaticism, their orthodoxy and intolerance. Nor has he any axe to grind, since he gives in it, with great skill and sincerity, a realistic picture of an Indian village and subtly hints at the changes it undergoes under the impact of changing times. The entire novel bears the stamp of naturalness and authenticity, and Anand hints at the changes he wants in rural society by giving a convincing picture of the intelligent hero’s reactions to the status quo, and not by directly sermonising about them. Thus, the novel escapes from being stigmatised as a work of art marred by obtrusive propaganda.

Set in the battle-fields of France, the second volume of the trilogy, Across the Black Waters, runs like a sort of an elaborate running
commentary of the four years' war. The Indian army joins the French and English armies at Marseilles and from then on the three fight against the enemy together. The troops march from one place to another-Marseilles, Orleans, Calais, Festubert, and so on. Lal Singh also moves on, and though he is only one among thousands of men involved in war, he remains the central figure of the saga. Right on the battle-field he trains himself as a soldier, fights the enemy, but ends up as a prisoner of war in German hands.

Not only was his father a regular soldier, but Anand also is by no means a stranger to wars, since he has had close glimpses of the two giant wars fought in his generation. Naturally, the descriptions of the various phases of war and the hazardous life of the soldiers ring perfectly true. In this novel Anand has re-created all the horrors and brutality of war.

The most important tenet of Anand's humanism that finds an elaborate amplification in Across the Black Waters is his ruthless denunciation of war which is only a dignified name for cruelty and cold-blooded violence. The saddest part of the tragedy of Indian soldiers during the Great War is that their movements are kept a secret; they are
not all owed a knowledge of the exact location of the battle-field; and they do not even know why they are fighting, or grips of the feeling against whom they are fighting. Thus, they are forever in the cruel of uncertainty and the dread of the unknown. They are even denied a knowledge of their destination. All they can do is to hang on to a guess or a rumour. Naturally, as Anand writes during the course of the novel, they are forced to assume a resigned attitude towards the entire affair:

"... no one asked where the war was or why it was being fought and how it happened that they were going there. For there had been no answer to such queries in the past and now they took it for granted."

The soldiers are assailed by all kinds of doubts, since war itself is not clearly defined by any, but merely vaguely described as 'the final reality' or 'destination.' Most of the soldiers are not properly trained, and they find themselves quite strangers to words like 'traveres' and 'sap.' And most of them, like the hero, start practising marksmanship right on the warfield and habituate themselves to all the brutality that is required of a soldier.
Uncle Kirpu, an old, kind-hearted soldier, seems to summa rise Anand’s utter contempt for war when he tacitly says,

"... I wonder why they are killing each other and making a graveyard of this land."^10

And, to Lai Singh, war comes to mean nothing but a holocaust of men, beasts and houses, and he often wonders why this war is being fought at all:

"... he (Lal Singh) could not believe that ordinary men and women of good sense, and the Government of France, England and Germany, which were saner and wiser than the ordinary people over whom they ruled, could be engaged in a war in which men were being wounded and houses shattered."^11

But all that he can do is to obey orders, for he is no longer the arbiter of his destiny. Arjuna, the hero of the Mahabharata War, had at least God Krishna to advise him whether to fight or not. But Lal Singh, in the twentieth century when gods are not so easily accessible, has none to fall back upon for advice, though he is in the same predicament as Arjuna
was centuries ago. The fact is, he is a mere pawn on the chess board of war, all the movements of which are controlled and directed by British imperialists.

Rightly described by Captain Owen Sahib as the ‘Victims of civilisation,’ the soldiers lead a horrible life on the battle-field. Their job is to wait for orders, and obey them forthwith. These orders, more often than not, mean death. But they dare not disobey, lest they should meet with less desirable deaths such as the one Sepoy Hanuman meets with—he is shot down at close range for refusing to march into the jaws of death. Nor do the officers ever bother to explain the orders they give. As Uncle Kirpu puts it:

"The Sarka I’ is like a bitch, son. It barks its orders and does not explain."

Most of the Indian soldiers are either poor peasants or uncouth hillmen who do not seem to have any emotional involvement in the war. It is neither a religious war nor do the individuals bear any enmity to the men they are asked to fight. They fight at all because they are paid for it, and they are ready to fell anybody since the only alternative left for them is to
be felled down. Anand gives a detailed description of the resigned attitude of the Indian soldiers thus:

"A passionate people, prone to sudden exaltations and depressions, more faithful than any other if they believed, they were neutral in this war', because this was not a war for any of the religions of their inheritance, nor for any ideal which could fire their blood and make their hair stand on end. Ordered about by the Sarkar', they were as ready to thrust their bayonets into the bellies of the Germans as they had been to disembowel the frontier tribesmen, or their own countrymen, for the pound a month which the sahibs paid them. But they were like conscripts, brutalized and willing to fight like trained bulls, but without a will of their own, soulless automatons in the execution of the army code ..."14

The foregoing quotation goes to show how simple and ignorant men are forcibly drawn into the vortex of war and made its sure victims.
Anand's denunciation of cruelty is to be found clearly detailed in this novel. War means violence and cruelty, and the soldiers are compelled to practise them, and the result is utter savagery. In fact, Lance Naik Lok Nath gives the Indians their first lesson in fighting thus:

"Now you show them some of your savagery ... you must charge the enemy without fear with your bayonets, wherever you find him, and hit him in a vital spot. Aim at the heart, remember, the belly or the testicles of the enemy. If he has the advantage ill attack, swiftly fell him with a blow from the butt end of your rifle and trample upon him and drive the bayonet deep into the body and draw it out so that he bleeds and dies."\(^{15}\)

Though none might suspect or question the correctness of this lesson, it is impossible for any not to see through the brutality implied in it.

And no wonder even a tender and sensitive soul like Lal Singh finds himself gradually maturing into a sheer brute, capable of ferocious
cruelty. When he comes to kill the first enemy, a German soldier, he has no compunction left in his heart:

"With instantaneous resolution, the boy stooped low like a lion on the prowl and charged him with his bayonet, fixing him with such force that the butt of his rifle resounded back on his chest. The man gnashed his teeth and groaned as he fell. Lalu groped for his victim, to finish him, murmuring: 'Weep and wail... rape-mother.'"¹⁶

Not Lal Singh alone, but all soldiers are living examples of the brutalising effects of war.

In this novel too Anand denounces the concepts of religion and God as they are blindly believed in by Indians. Most of the soldiers figuring in the novel are Indian peasants or hillmen who continue to nourish their faith in God as well as religion. Uncle Kirpu and Daddy Dhanoo are typical instances on whose lips multiply the various names of God, on every occasion. The soldiers are so naive as to think that the war they are asked to fight is only a God-sent punishment for the evil deeds of
the iron age. But Lalu remains an unbeliever, and the turn of the events in
the war further forces him to question the justice of God, if ever He exists
at all. He cannot understand why good men like Kirpu, Dhanoo, and
Lachman die untimely, tragic deaths. Why? He questions God, and
denounces Him as a fool.

*Across the Black Waters* is a significant novel in so far as it
acquaints us with the fierce atmosphere of the Great War, and with the
rigorous hardships of Indian soldiers. Lai Singh continues his love for
land, particularly because he has seen in France how farming can be
managed cleanly and profitably. Despite all odds, his love for life also
remains irrepressibly strong, and his will to struggle unabated. But, by
and large, his life in the army is essentially passive, since he lives it
resignedly.

Just as in *Village*, in *Across the Black Waters* too, there is hardly
any obtrusive propaganda. The most fundamental tenet of Anand's
humanism implied in the novel is his ruthless criticism of war, and this is
achieved not through any vehement, direct slogans against the evils of
war, but through a suggestive description of the miseries and sufferings
that the soldiers actually undergo on the battle-field, which is a veritable hell for rustics-turned-soldiers. They find it extremely difficult to adjust themselves to the sudden change from their rustic life to the new set up of war, indeed a strange enterprise for them. They are under the perpetual dread of their superiors. Some of them are relentlessly wicked. For instance, Lok Nath believes in instilling discipline among soldiers through slaps and kicks and vulgar abuse. While the days of these soldiers are made miserable by their constant 'wait' for inscrutable and incomprehensible orders of the Sarkar, their nights are spoiled by convulsing nightmares. The experiences of war prove so brutallising for these simple, uncouth hillmen that they become soulless automations with hardly any hope in their hearts. If the lives of the soldiers, on and off the war-field, are thus joyless enough, the deaths of some of them are positively frightening. For instance, Uncle Kirpu, an extremely kind, old man is so much defamed by Subah and Lok Nath that he is compelled to commit suicide. Another ignominous case is that of Hanumant who is shot dead at close range for disobedience. Also, Anand achieves this end-reproval of war as a brutalising and destructive force-by just hinting at all the dehumanising effects soldiery, and war have on man and society.
Across the Black Waters, in fact, occupies a unique place among Anand's novels, for it is the only novel he has hitherto written exclusively as a condemnation of war and its infernal effects. The characters of the novel are life-like, and its incidents have a ring of authenticity, and this is all due to the fact that they all spring from the author's experiences-in fact, most of the chapters were written actually in trenches, as Anand himself revealed in one of his conversations with the present writer. The novel goes to prove that a work of fiction may achieve much more than what even a powerful tract can achieve.

Sword and the Sickle, the concluding volume of the trilogy, is a continuation of Lal Singh's history. The hero returns to his Indian regiment after a period of five years of his stay in Germany as a war prisoner. He hopes to get some land, a medal, and also a handsome pension for his services in the war. But he receives only a rude shock, for he is demobilised with just a paltry pension. With utter disappointment smouldering in his heart, he returns to his village and finds that his family is all broken up and the property gone. The war has had its disastrous effects on the entire peasantry: the rustics have lost their lands and homes and migrated; to towns where they have become beggars. Now Lal Singh
stumbles into an association with a Count in U. P. and he takes an employment with this eccentric, de classed landlord, fervidly engaged in fighting the evil of landlordism. With his characteristic impetuosity and sincerity, Lalu throws himself into struggle, though he is continually worried by Maya whom he has brought here and married. Here-after he is no longer a hero with self-will, but a mere follower of Count Rampal Singh, who is himself an impulsive romanticist working on the spur of the moment rather than on any definite plan. The whole group has perhaps a sufficiently clear idea of the miserable plight of the peasants but they perpetually fail in their struggle for lack of leadership, unity and unanimity. Eventually, he courts arrest and is put behind bars. The novel ends with Lal Singh taking stock of the situation and reflecting on the causes of his failure, but still dreaming the glorious dream of the emancipation of the peasants.

In *Sword and the Sickle* we find Anand carrying on his ruthless crusade mainly against the evil of landlordism. The novel also reveals how Anand's humanism denounces the evils of war and cruelty, hunger and poverty, religion and superstition.
All through *Sword and the Sickle* we find Anand decrying the evil system of landlordism. While, on the one hand, it involves the princely life of ease and pleasure-loving landlords, it involves, on the other hand, cruel oppression of the tiller of the soil who is kept under constant threat of forced labour and eviction. It breeds misery and divides society into the two classes of the haves and the have-nots. Hence landlordism forms one of the chide targets of Anand's catching criticism in this novel. Poor peasants are subjected to limitless tyranny by these landlords. Most of their produce is usurped, either in the name of rent or debt, and are forced to live for ever in the fear of losing their lands, and even lives. The land-lords are like gods, leading luxurious and slothful lives, at the cost of the toiling and sweating tenants who are treated as worms, despite the legal as well as illegal taxes and 'nazaranas' extorted from them. Bhupendra, Gautam, Fazlu, Sukhua, and a host of other peasants testify to the cruelties that the landlords are capable of. Lal Singh himself finds that all his ancestral property has been usurped by Harbans Singh, the local landlord. Chandra, who is compelled to do forced labour and thus killed, is yet another instance of the brutality of landlords. The nawab of Nasirabad, the main villain of the piece, is a typical example of landlords
who are rich enough to buy the police and use this force to cow down and oust out the recalcitrant tenants. Given to all kinds of feudal vices, each of these thinks he is no less a person than Chenngis Khan himself, indulges in all varieties of luxury and barbarity. Anand tries to point out how the travails of the landless peasants and evicted tenants have gradually awakened them to acknowledge of their plight, and how they would put up an united fight against all oppressors, if only they could be properly led. But they fail, and their failure is to be attributed largely to improper leadership, for the Count, in spite of his unquestionable generosity and boundless sympathy for the peasant folk, is really an inefficient leader as evidenced by the consistent failures of his revolutionary activities.

In *Sword and the Sickle* Anand continues his criticism of war and cruelty. We see this in the descriptions of the post-war effects on villages and their inhabitants. The villages are struck with drought and famine. As a consequence, many villagers have lost their lands and migrated to towns and cities in search of jobs, the scarcity of which has rendered most of them street beggars. Disease and dirt, misery and poverty, are shown as the direct result of war. War is a curse on humanity, and it is not only the
soldiers that become its victims, but even the poor, innocent rustics are penalised. Harnam Singh, a typical victim of war, cries out in rage and agony:

“They (the Sarkar) look away crores of rupees as free gifts and loans from the country to support their war and food stuffs to stem the prilation of the menmies in Vilayat.” They took our grain, our timber, our tea, why, even the skins of our buffaloes and the oil from the poor man’s saucer lamp. And there are some people in the villages around here today who hide their nakedness in the clothes discarded by those who have died of plague, while their children go naked!”

The same peasant gives us a clearer idea of the extent of damage done to the country by the war, particularly through the British government, when he further exclaims:

“Oh, Hindustan! Hindustan! This country is like a lean bullock that has been reduced to the bone by the
Angrezi lion, son. Each day the lion awoke and gnawed a chunk of flesh off the bullock’s body and left it weaker but still standing. And then, the other beasts of the jungle came, and set to-the local jackals and The foxes took their Toll ! ... There have been bad times before in this country, but surely no time so bad as the present. It is one of those ages during which all joy and hope seems to have fled and in their place remains only a pain, a disease which you can’t even diagnose .. "18

All his life Lal Singh witnesses cruelty in the affairs of men and nations. Cruelty of his own men has compelled him to leave his village; he has found cruelty rampant on alien battle-grounds; and now in Rajgarh he finds cruelty again-particularly in the wanton activities of landlords like the Nawab of Nasirabad. Then he finds it in his own activities and in those of the confederates of the Count. The methods used by Lal Singh, the Count, and the entire entourage to rise the revolution are militant; and all of them fail. Much of this failure, no doubt, is to be ascribed to the essential fact that violence defeats itself. And, in the end Lal Singh
realises the truth of Gandhiji's belief in the futility of cruelty and violence. Thus, we find implied in the novel is Anand's condemnation of war and cruelty as well as violence.

Anand continues to criticise the unwholesome effects of the evil of poverty in the present novel also. The poor villagers are reduced to miserable poverty as a result of war. They have lost their lands and homes, and become vagabonds endlessly dogged by hunger and disease. The post-war India depicted in the novel is a horrible world full of shrivelled bodies and broken souls of men who are left with only the freedom to beg or starve. When Lal Singh returns to India after the war his experiences show him that there are only two kinds of people in the world-the rich and the poor. What he feels about the situation is intensely reminiscent of Munoo's experiences in Collie:

"Everywhere it was the same. In fact, it seemed to him, there were no black or white people, no yellow or brown people, not even Francisis and Germans, and English and Hindustanis, and Chinis and Japanis, but there were only two races and two religions in the world, the rich and the poor."
Anand has his dig at God and religion in this novel too. Lal Singh, like his creator, is an unbeliever in God. He knows man has to depend on himself for his good, and not on God. This is clear from what he says about God in a conversation:

"If you leave men to the mercy of God first dig some graves." 20

But the superstitions of the peasants die hard, and they continue to believe in God. For instance, Raghu naively believes that the release of his friends from jail is due to his prayers to God.

Anand's condemnation of religion as it is practised in India is easily seen in Lal Singh's reaction to it: he cannot but laugh at it all because religion in India is confounded with tinkling bells and chanted hymns. That Anand loathes this variety of religion is again revealed in the Count's reference to it as a malady, "which is as widespread as small-pox in the lands watered by the Ganges." 21

The Sword and The Sickle serves as a glaring example of art spoiled by propaganda. It is out and out a political novel, and particularly towards the end it becomes a series of speeches and orations—now on the
evils of landlordism and British imperialism, then on communism and Gandhism, and so on and on. It is as though Anand forgets that it is a novel that he is writing, and in his eagerness to publicise his views on various important problems of the day he has produced a tract rather than a work of art. The novel form is perhaps elastic enough to admit of certain digressions, but Anand seems to transgress the limits when he goes on indulging in tedious descriptions of episodes like the one connected with Vasuki, Luxmi Devi, Shiv.

The theme of the novel appears to be more about local and national politics than Lal Singh because he can hardly comprehend all this. Circumstances have just pushed him into an unforeseen situation. He joins the Count by way of an escape from tormenting circumstances and he drifts on with the revolutionaries rather passively since he does not really know how to shape his own life, and much less the lives of the peasants. Perhaps, Anand wants us to believe that the part of Lal Singh's life described in this last volume of the trilogy is identical with the aspirations and lives of millions of his countrymen of the time struggling for freedom from Indian land-lords and alien rulers. But the hero as depicted here is deprived of his central position in the novel, and the
character of the Count played up. Inspite of the hugeness of the volume of
the novel, we find that there is a sudden check in the evolution of the
hero's character.

In parts the novel has become mawkishly sentimental, as in the
case of Anand's description of the funeral procession of Chandra's dead
body. Obviously, this appears to be a rather crude device manipulated to
exaggerate the cruelties of landlords.

In the light of the foregoing argument, the overall impression that
one gets of the novel is that it is sheer politics poured red-hot into the
mould of fiction. Thus, we find Anand failing in this novel to bring about
a fusion between his art as a novelist and his humanist ideas, however
admirable they may be.

The Village trilogy is one of Anand's most ambitious fictional
works, and it has achieved considerable success. In the ultimate analysis
the struggle of man for self-realisation and for the realisation of the
happiness of the common masses forms the central theme of this trilogy.
But for the last volume in which Anand has failed to control his
philosophy from becoming expressly obtrusive, the trilogy, on the whole,
is an impressive achievement. While the first two volumes show how an artist can gain from a philosophy of life, the last part gives the impression that it is just politics masquerading as fiction. Thus, the trilogy is a good example for showing both the advantages and disadvantages that fall to the lot of an artist when he is committed to some philosophy of life.
References

2. Ibid., pp. 92-93.
3. Ibid., p. 43.
4. Ibid., p. 45.
5. Ibid., p. 98.
6. Ibid., p. 163.
7. Ibid., p. 105.
8. Ibid., p. 146.
10. Ibid., p. 177.
11. Ibid., p. 83.
12. Ibid., p. 193.
13. Ibid., p. 92.
15. Ibid., p. 127.
16. Ibid., p. 162.
19. Ibid., p. 85.
20. Ibid., p. 281.
21. Ibid., p. 90.