CHAPTER-5

_Lament on The Death of a Master of Arts_ (1939) is a very short but significant novel. Here, the rare talent of a brilliant story-teller is combined with that of a writer of deep insight and intense feeling. The novel marks a return to the primitive and universal aspect of human experience. It seeks to reject completely the use of ready-made myth or symbol as means to express the modern disillusionment, which is the basis of many modern novels.

Surprisingly enough, _A Master of Arts_¹ has not received considerable attention, though it offers a fruitful and eye-opening reading to both the readers and critics of Anand whose concentration has always been on _Untouchable_ (1935), _Coolie_ (1936) and _Two Leaves and A Bud_ (1937).

A detailed exegesis of the novel shows the heights and depths attained by the author who has freed himself, to a great extent, from his earlier strongly romantic and doctrinal notion. A close study of _A Master of Arts_ (1939), however, reveals Anand’s compassion for the underdog. The novel seeks to describe with great amount of precision and textural density, the gross limitations of human life, and in doing so it unfailingly touches on the philosophical implication of human suffering. Consequently, an exquisite aroma of reality incarnates itself in this novel, an aroma different from the heavy, earthly, and mundane realism of the novels of the early phase, not only in theme and characterization, but also in the use of language. Anand seems to show in this novel "how in the crisis of life, when existence is threatened, the soul attains great powers."²
As in *Untouchable* so in *Master of Arts*, the events are focused within the compass of a singly day- the early dawn to the afternoon, when the torrid glare of the sun shows the body of death, as it were. There is, however, no perceptible progression in action.

*A Master of Arts* is a candid biography of a highly educated but sadly unemployed modern young man who is crushed under the weight of his duties as a son, a husband and a father. The hero is confined to his sickbed all the time. The window opens and closes as he wishes: it is only opening for him to view the sky and teeming world of nature. The only human contact he has with his father, his grandmother, his friend Gama and mother-in-law, the doctor and of course the worried woman, ready to howl at the slightest tremor of his cough. Thus, on the surface, there is hardly any movement. Nur, the protagonist awakes in the morning in a broken, gasping state. He dies in the afternoon. But there is a rich synergetic movement in his mind, composed of memory and desire, which brings the action to its rounded completion. The stream of consciousness flows like a river and the author takes full responsibility for the direction and flow. The technique of *monologue intérieur* and memory digression is successfully used to enforce the plot-structure and to reveal the implication of the momentous theme.

The novel is at once a realistic account and an artistic exposition of the endless physical suffering and mental agony of the present unemployed and under employed youth of our country. Besides, it is a brilliant satire on the corrupt practices in the selection of the candidates for jobs, the school master thriving on private tuitions, the evil of dowry systems, the heartlessness and total callousness of the doctors who are
more interested in collecting their fees than in curing the patients, and
the purely mercenary attitude of the parents towards their own children.

As the novel opens, we find Nur lying on his cot in the prolonged
weariness of five bed-ridden months, being victim of hypocritical
society and parental high handedness. His position at the very outset is
hopeless and intractable:

The body of death lingered on sick bed,
wrapped in a white shroud...waiting in a hot
sweat from his half-sleep he could see it lying
there, on the giant bed in the narrow front
room of his father's congested two storied
house. It was his own body; it looked like a
corpse because he had gathered the sheet tight
around him at night, and because he was
dying, dying of consumption.... And it was
carried through a door to ultimate freedom
from the world.  

Poverty, frustration and the utter coldness of his father have
hardened him to life and have made him insensitive to the colours, the
shapes, the forms of things and the thoughts and feelings of people. The
body of Death seems to linger on his sick bed. He struggles for life
every moment and delays the end for a few months. One side of him
urges him on to death, while the other holds him back to survival. Life
however, is ebbing in him. It appears as if it were very near at hand.

As in his novels, especially in Untouchable, Anand borrows from
Joyce (1982-1941) "the modified stream of consciousness mode,
simplifying it a great deal, in order to realize his objective of presenting a vivid picture of both Nur's mind and milieu.” And within the limits of self-chosen structural modes, Anand can always tell an absorbing story. As in the case of Bach, he deliberately presents Nur’s day as a graph of spirits soaring and plummeting by turns thereby investing the narrative with necessary dramatic interest.

In a flash, Nur is able to see the sad story of his life re-enacted before his eyes in all its pungent true colours. The stream of Nur’s brooding over his unfortunate part is interrupted and broken now and then by no less unfortunate happenings of the present-the thundering voice of his father, full of apathy and disgust over his present condition, the recurring wails of his grandmother in her attempt to soothe and console him, the unexpected visit of his classmate Gama, to formally enquire about his health, and towards the close arrival of the doctor as though to see his end. The trenchantly told narrative thus swings from the present to past and from the past to the present in a variety of moods and tones. This tragic tempo is maintained throughout the novel.

Nur is the son of Chaudhuri, a confectioner in the bazaar. His father, like most modern fathers in our country, educated him with the sole purpose of “making him a deputy collector sahib.” No sooner had Nur passed out the M.A. than he was married off, in anticipation of his future position as a dignified member of the Government of India, to Iqbal, whom he could never love. Her father thought that Nur, with his first class M.A. degree, would get into Government service and Nur’s father thought that the daughter of a respectable veterinary surgeon would bring a good dowry. But “both the players were deceived in
deceiving each other.” However, despite his first class, Nur got no job although he put in a hundred applications and trudged a thousand weary miles to secure recommendations. The great obstacle to his selection for any job, Nur was pained to realize, was his origin, his being a Muslim and what is more the son of a confectioner. Above all, Nur discloses to Gama:

He didn’t know that jobs are given by the public service commission for smartness, general appearance, the possession of a good pedigree and according to the number of testimonials and recommendation from influential persons that man may have than for anything else.  

With his utter failure to secure any job, he became the victim of the sneers of his relatives and wide spread mockery of his neighbours: “There goes Nur, the son of a confectioner who is an M.A. pass, but who sits idle with one hand on the other and kills flies because he can’t get a job.”

Unable to bear these pinpricks, Nur, like Keats (1795-1821), wanted to escape into the great freedom of his divines fading into the unknown yet he had not the courage to take his life and end it all. So he bitterly cried. “Oh! Lord god, take my life.” But god had not appeared, Nur feels, in answer to his prayers. He wearily protests: “Oh God! Oh God! Why did you drag me into the dust by making me an M.A?”

Nur seems to readily join Hamlet who laments:

“O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world
Fie on it! Ah, fie 'tis unweaded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
possess it merely.10

Between periods of blank despair and bottomless misery, Nur wished, as the last remaining desire in his life, for job of a peon so that he could earn a little bread for himself, his wife and the little child. But even the last wish was not to be fulfilled easily because he had the fear of being laughed at by the world: “Ohe, look at that Nur, the son of the confectioner, he fancied himself as a Babu, and now he has come down to his real state, become a coolie.”11

At last, after the exertion of his father-in-law and abject crawling of his father with joined hands before the Inspector of post Offices, after all the recommendations, he got a clerkship in the post office. Nevertheless, Nur was not at all happy with his job. He wondered whether there was anything in all the flux of his life that could have relieved his doom. There was no beauty he said to himself no tenderness, no faith, nothing but “foiled desire.” He questioned god: “Is this plain speaking on the part of a mortal insulting to you? If it so, why do you not smite the profane person I am with your thunderbolt? Why, Lord?”12 And like the jesting pilate he did not wait for an answer. He felt his heart throbbing with a helpless pity for himself: “All his young life seemed a spider’s web of crimes, the skein composed of faithlessness, evil deeds, blunders, brutalities in word and deed. Both his own and those of others wrapped round him.”13
Thus, as he tortured himself by self-accusations, his physical strength failed. His nerves quivered as if his inside had become more acutely sensitive to the fear and sorrow that had crushed him. The bile of sickness was in his mouth. A twitching of the lung frightened him. Every sinew and fiber of his skin was snapping with the black cough, which tugged at his tissues and tore the protoplasm of his life. The convulsive spasms resulted in the gasps of hiccupping breaths.

As Nur lay helpless and forlorn on his sickbed, Anand uses the technique of *interior monologue* as the memories of his past seemed to come back to him in their track as if they were ‘open sesame’ seemed to come back with the force and vivacity of rapiers thrust in the raw wounds of his heart. Nur recalls from the first cry at birth his life has been “pain marred.”\(^{14}\) Even the exuberance of the birth time and the sweet reminiscences of his mother’s caress fade into insignificance as he remembers his visit to the dark cemetery where his mother is buried and sense of fear grips him. Encircled by doom and obsessed by the thought of death, he makes a heroic effort to cling to life, “No, no, I don’t believe in attaining freedom from earthly bonds. I want to be free to live and suffer.”\(^{15}\) The prayer time of early childhood also comes to his mind, when he was made to read Koran and to pray by rote. He never had the faith in the rituals: “Call the faithful to prayer, dog! I have you all! To incur your wrath I spit on the face of your God.”\(^{16}\) During the spasm of uncontrollable cough, however, he wonders, “If the attacks of hemorrhage came because I don’t pray anymore.”\(^{17}\) Again during those fulfill coughs, he acquires a transparency which makes him conscious of his own faults:
He lent himself to the soothing warmth of the pillows beneath his head and accepted his helplessness for a while. And now he could see his own faults. His own self love, his ingratitude to grandma, his malice to step mother, his pride of his knowledge of books, all danced their ghostly dance before his weakened conscience.18

The agony of the moment places him on the wheel of fire and he voices his lyrical lament. Coming from the bottom of his heart, "Oh, Lord, take my life... you will not. Are you educating me like a school master with punishment......?"19 The cry from the heart with its fused syncopated feelings touches the high point of tragic emotion. This is not mere self-pity but the impassioned wailing of one at the death’s door. The crescendo of pain leads to self-knowledge and to serene acceptance of his lot:

He looked into his heart with the inner eye and asked whether there was nothing in all the flux of life that could have relieved his doom, no beauty, no tenderness, no faith nothing but failed desire.20

Self-introspection could hardly go any further in this case. The protagonist has different feelings for his family members and a deliberate attempt is being made to show Nur’s feelings about them. His father married another woman but Nur could not regard her as his mother, because she was only a little older than he, and even she quarreled with him over the toys when they played together and, “he
had been sad as he had never been sad before." No doubt, his grandmother loved him and doted upon him just like his own mother, but Nur only pitied and hated her. Probably the reason was that the pride of his love for his dead mother had never overcome the barrier of wrong she had done him in allowing his father to marry again. Although he let her, more than once, take the place of his mother, yet

the bitterness of her calm acceptance of his father's brutality persisted, the bitterness of those howls which he had uttered when his father beat him, and the tears he had shed, tears of shame and chagrin, where he had been made to accept the humiliation of orders from his stepmother of the sufferings they had all tried to extract from him. 

Then, his father had always been a source of dread to Nur except during his childhood days when he was loved by him. He was so afraid of his father that he remembers only a very few occasions when he had lifted his eyes to face him. He faltered, stumbled, stammered and even perspired whenever he had to say anything to his father.

At length Nur feels that he has become a nuisance and a great burden to his father in the course of his five bed-ridden months. That his impression is not unfounded is driven home to us when his father burst out red with rage:

You wasted hundreds of rupees of my hard-earned money, and couldn't even get a job to feed yourself and your wife and child. Why don't you die of shame and rid me of the responsibility you have imposed on me so
long?...you have disgraced me and given a bad
name to your family... go to hell and die and be
done with it, wretch.\textsuperscript{23}

Thus, alienated from his mother by her death, taunted by his
stepmother and appraised by his father, Nur, was condemned to be
alone, and he hugged his loneliness to himself. Furthermore, he is
tormented by his feelings of remorse for his innocent wife, Iqbal, whom
he married mechanically. He now feels that he had cruelly separated
himself from her for no fault of hers, because she was conventional and
not a fashionable woman who could put on a sari and walk over with
him so that he could proudly show her off to the world as his wife. He is
full of remorse for her because during the days of degradation and
suffering, she “had followed him about tenderly, pathetically,
fetching him cool drink, and fanning him pressing his head,
rubbing feet soothing him as he sought to forget the weariness of
his struggle for a job in an afternoon’s sleep.”\textsuperscript{24}

On the top of that he was pained to see now his own faults: “His
own self love, his ingratitude to grandma, his malice to stepmother,
the pride to his knowledge of books, all danced their ghostly dance
before his weakened conscience.”\textsuperscript{25}

As Nur is brooding over the predicament in which he is placed,
the doctor, Captain Pochkanwala, who does not know any medicine
other than quinine and tincture iodine, tests his temperature. Collecting
his fee, he coolly disappears whispering something to the Chaudhuri. He
(Caudhuri) rushes towards the Nur’s bed in a mad whirl like an angry
bull and wildly rages: “\textit{I have no more money for medicines or
Doctor's fees....You have made my life hell.}”\textsuperscript{26} But when the old
woman soothes him, he shouts, "what has he done for the money I spent on his education.....what has he done, except spoil my "Izzat!" Is this reward I get for bringing him into the world for looking after him, educating him."\textsuperscript{27}

Nur is deeply hurt at the absolute heartlessness and the purely mercenary attitude of his father. He moans as if to summon all the fragile cells of his body to come and look at the new wound that his father's cruelty had inflicted on him. He feels that his soul is rising in revolt and he rolls in frenzy:

\begin{quote}
I am a failure indeed......But why, oh why did he have to drag me into the dust by educating me? How could a parent expect to get a return for the money he had spent on his child? Why should he have expected anything? You produce me for your own pleasure......do you hear, and you didn't consult me before hand.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

Nur, thus moans and whimpers, working himself up into a fit of weeping. But none seems to hear his cries. The frenzied fire in his hand drums through his temples. Hot tears of remorse run from his eyes. His hard teeth grind a swooning sigh. His throat suddenly brings a profusion of saliva full of blood. He is now sure of his death. His brain is faint and the light of his eyes is dimming slowly. The woman shakes him with trembling fingers calling, "Nur, Nur, Nur, my son, awake."\textsuperscript{29} But the rose has withered even before it began to bloom.

In the novel, Anand is churning the soul of the protagonist using the technique of stream of consciousness. The successful characterization of Nur as a morbid, life negotiating, and death-obsessed
hero enforces Anand's claim to be one of the outstanding novelists of human condition. The disillusionment of the present-day urban civilization which results in the withering of lives, hopes and joys, finds one of the most powerful manifestations in the figure of Nur. He is not merely an individual caught in the labyrinth of modern life, but an archetype that is intellectually conscious and emotionally more that a match for the force of annihilation. He goes under but not before he has grasped part of the basic reality of existence. He has gained an insight into the nature of life, and that is a priceless acquisition.

Achieving a synthesis of techniques between the West and the inner consciousness as analyzed by Anand in *A Master of Arts* shows man in his confrontation with fate, as forsaken by the gods as well as by other men and women, broken, and decimated by the Machine-Money-War civilization and illumines his awareness against materiality “dead matterliness” and suppression by society.

*A Master of Arts* bears a close resemblance to what is designated as an existentialist art. It points out the limitation of human life without choice of action and touches on the philosophical implications of human misery and pain. The novel clearly demonstrates that human condition itself is perilous and erosion of contours is inherent in existence. The critical and genuine dilemmas of hero’s life are solved neither by intellectual exploration of the facts nor by operating the law thinking about them. There are no resolutions of the conflicts and turmoils, agonies and tumults raging in Nur’s soul. Anand is not an existentialist like Sartre (1905), kafka or Camus (1913-1960), but his deep reflection and the intellectual probing into the nature of suffering brings him closer to them. Above all, *A Master of Arts* remains a novel of profound insight and exploration.
Thus *A Master of Arts* is a powerful and lyrical novel that surpasses all the other novels of Anand in its deep and authentic search for illumination. The novelist’s control over experience is indeed superb in as much as everything else is relegated to the background. The medium yields to the pressure of feeling at every point of the narrative. At the same time, an intellectual effort of a high order has gone into novel’s artistry, the design, texture, character, and atmosphere taking on the resplendent quality of true and inimitable vision.

II

*The Big Heart* (1945) is Anand's novel first to have a factory hand as its protagonist. It deals with the mechanization and nature of its impact on traditional Hindu society. Here in the novel the economic depravity dominates. One is conscious from the first page of the misery, hunger and starvation of Billimaran. The novel's basic aim is to protest against the industrialists who have, by establishing a factory, left the other thathiar brothers unemployed. With the demand of the factory utensils, the thathiar community is left without work. The unemployed thathiars insists on being employed in factory because it has cast them their means of livelihood. But the factory owner Murli Dhar himself a thathiar - refuses to employ them.

Ananta, the hero, is very much aware of the plight of the unemployed thathiars—the hunger that prevails in their houses, the children that cry out for a morsel of bread. He himself a thathiar, and a very efficient craftsman is not employed in factory for he is reputed to
be a rogue, drunkard and a whore monger. Ananta is agonisingly conscious of the squalid atmosphere of the lanes and the alleys. He is appalled by the swarm of beggars:

All the beggars, young and old were now scrambling over a stinking rubbish heap on which the four puris had fallen. 31

Ananta's protest is mainly directed against the political and economic condition. He knows it very well that he cannot vanquish this wide-spread destitution and

all he could do was to curse the country in which there was always an endless scarcity, punctuated every now and then by famine. 32

Ananta is an affectionate, strong and big-hearted man. As he says:

There is no talk of money, brothers, one must have a big heart, 33

He tries at every level to help men in need. He feeds the beggars stooping to the level of a beggar himself. What all he earns, he spends on feeding the hungry thathiars. Ananta is a realist, and is conscious of the fact that the only solution to the economic problem is to form a Trade Union and then protest in unity for refusal of their grievances. But to form a union and then demonstrate against the authority would indeed take a long time, and so thathiars like Ralia and Viroo get uneasy and want immediate action to obtain instant rewards. Satyapal,
the student rebel, is an extremist. He urges the men to destroy the
machine which has left them unemployed. Since he has a hold on the
more violent thathiars, Satyapal preaches protest against the capitalists
in the form of violence.

Ananta's method of remonstrance is quite different from that of
Satyapal. Ananta discerns the benefits of the factory and learns from the
poet, Puran Singh Bhagat that

If you have the controlling switch in your
hand, you can make the machine a slave rather
than your master. 34

Lalchand and Gokulchand belong to the Keseras caste, and when
Murli Dhar, a thathiar invites them to his grandson's betrothal
ceremony, they shrink from going to the house of a lower caste man or
eat anything in that house. In turn Murli Dhar invites the higher caste
people to show that his social status has improved. He does not call the
men of his own community because they are poor and have no status.
Thus caste plays a vital role in The Big Heart.

Ananta realizes that only in unity can protest have some effect,
but when the thathiars do not follow his advice, he is frustrated and
irritated. He cries out:

O for the life where a broken heart could seek
out other broken hearts and fight together with
them. 34
He is constantly aware of the fact that unity has strength. To Ralia, a man of strong passions and emotions, the voice of Ananta's reason is not comprehensible. To him the only weapon which matters is that of violence. He believes either in getting employed in factory or destroying it. His protest is based on violence and unreason. Towards the end of the book, he is led by Stayapal's rhetoric of violence. In passionate anger, he breaks the machinery in the factory. The real cause of his distress, anger and consequent destructiveness lays deeper— he cannot provide his wife and children with even one square meal.

When Ananta comes to know of this impending disaster, he runs towards the factory. He realises that they cannot defy the government in power:

Protest seemed futile against the shut mouth omnipotent, omnipresent will of the Sarkar, the fate against which he himself was wrestling.  

He is conscious that the will of the government dominates. It is not in their hands to change the way of life in Billimarn—and a total revolution seemed a far cry.

Ananta is killed by Ralia when he tries to stop him. Puran Singh Bhagat, the wise poet, says that perhaps with the death of Ananta, people will realize the futility of violence and the importance of mass revolution. Perhaps Byron's aphorism rings true on the politicians that a mob “can also defy you when neglect and calamity have driven them to despair....”

The mob can protest and destroy everything in a fit of rage. Saros Cowasjee comments:
The whole of man's nature is governed by economic condition and when Anand attacks individuals, he never lets us forget that these people themselves are victims of unjust institutions.³⁸

This is true about Ralia. Anand lays stress on the awakening of collective consciousness to protest and fight against unjust order. In *Untouchable* (1935), Bakha, and in *The Big Heart* (1945), Ananta realise the ineffectiveness of individual protests against a mighty adversary who can use religion, politics and the hierarchy of interests on his side to crush a rebel.

This is the story in a nutshell, but it can also faintly convey the magnitude of the tragedy and its rich political implication. Ananta emerges as a perfect hero who is also a perfect victim crushed at the hands of the destiny. His only fault is that he is big-hearted, humane, and brave. He must die so that others may live. He is an outstanding creation, of Anand. Unlike others however, he also understood that,

*It is no use blaming the tools...but it is question of who is master of machine.... Machines don't think or feel. It is men who do.*³⁹

Anand uses the method of psychoanalysis as Ananta saw beyond the immediate fact:

*The sudden cramp, which has got hold of the soul of men ever since the ragged rhythm of the
machines in the shed began to drown the hammer strokes with which the coppersmiths were used to smooth rough metal into shape and imprint the polish of gold on finished pots, ill for them as a caste. ⁴⁰

He had seen for himself that the world - the Indian world too - was changing and that there was no going back. The only answer which he had learned as an agitator in the Trade Union Movement, was the imperative need for the coppersmiths to bury their quarrels and jealousy and "to get together as men. It will make us brothers and make our voice irresistible." ⁴¹

Like Lal Singh in the Trilogy, Ananta, too is a complex character. But the radical disintegration of his being is reconciled in the white radiance of passion, his fidelity to Janaki, even when he is consumed by insidious tuberculosis, borders on the sublime. Love, among other things, demands courage, and Ananta has it in great abundance. His attachment is final and complete:

How he loved her, almost broken her and eaten her up, as if he were not content for her to remain separate. And he had to see her withering before him and with drawing, consumed by this dread fire of her own....for having eaten the full fruits of her love, he had plunged in to the work for "Revolution" and left
her bereft alone, helpless, consigned to the subtle despair of her inevitable doom. \(^{42}\)

He builds a sanctuary of love as he says to Janaki, "Oh, take me on your breast, and rock me in a peace."\(^{43}\) But at the same time, he is a daring sceptic, who questions every thing. Anand uses the stream of consciousness technique as Ananta broods ironically:

God works in a mysterious way. In such a heartless way that the ominous owl alone has so far taken pains to answer the peasants in the night.....God seems to have deserved the world-if ever, he were, there, helping it along.\(^{44}\)

*The Big Heart* lies in the fact that the people who are most in need of Ananta are precisely the ones who cut short his life, not so much out of calculated maliciousness as out of their having succumbed to their own worst impulses and fears. It is Ananta's death- the climax of the novel, that brings home dramatically what Anand had himself stated:

Fate! Fate! Fate! Doesn't decide anything. Oh! I beg you stop this kind of talk.\(^{45}\)

The themes of castes and class system have been dexterously fused in *The Big Heart*. Anand has adopted the technique of the stream of consciousness at many places in the novel in order to make it a realistic one. He defines casteism in all its complexity, for we see it not in its rigidity but in its insidiousness. The relations between Lala Murli Dhar and Kasera Gokul Chand, the managing partners, expected to be
harmonious on account of money considerations seem strained because of caste differences. We see here how the two evils co-exist and coalesce in the society. The novel also shows the pro and anti-machinery reactions and suggests that we should respond more favourably to the impersonal process of modern scientific and technological development. The machine may have demonic force but man should learn to master this labour-saving public benefactor which is vital for progress.

*The Big Heart* is a metaphor. Coherent revolution, organized mass protest finding its inspiration not only in books but also in popular yearning for human dignity, is what Anand appeals for here. That Ananta loses his life in the struggle for a Trade Union Movement is not entirely pointless. As the poet Puran Singh Bhagat tearfully explains to Janaki, his existence lives on in the consciousness of the coppersmiths who are increasingly realising Ananta's dictum that it is heart and not mind nor machines which matters.

It is not, then, a question of whether to have machines or not. Anand is no Gandhi, in this respect. It is rather a question of how mechanization and industrialization may be used to make human life go further. Anand has talked about *The Big Heart* as a

Fable to show how in the whole world you can only conquer the machine now in terms of a new brotherhood....I say that all these things-machines, politics, parliaments, everything...is to be judged in terms of how it affects the man in the train, the man in the telephone booth...if
big dams are made but people can't get water,
dams have no meaning.\textsuperscript{46}

Undoubtedly the novel is a very forceful statement of the great novelist which makes us both think and feel.

\textbf{III}

\textit{The Old Woman and The Cow} (1960) is the only novel of Anand with a woman protagonist Gauri. It is perhaps the only one to deal with marital problems. To the old woman, Laxmi the material comforts were of greater importance than the life of her daughter who was sold in order to save Chandri the cow - the means of her livelihood. The whole meaning of the novel revolves around mother and daughter relationship. The focal point of interest and importance is the heroine Gauri whose life with her mother as well as with her husband is insufferable misery. Alastair Niven aptly commends Anand's

\textit{understanding of his first female protagonist
and his ability to place a story of domestic insignificance into a national and mythic context.} \textsuperscript{47}

It is the only novel of Anand where the protagonist succeeds in the mission to overthrow the oppressor and lead a life of independence and dignity. Poverty as usual has a major part in the novel leading to the harrowing experience of the village community and to the growing rift between wife and husband, mother and daughter.
The novel deals with the anguish of a woman who is ill-treated by her husband. The woman, Gauri, is a docile being, believing her husband to be God. She serves and satisfies him and even accepts his beatings with patience and forbearance.

Later during the time of famine Gauri unfolds the goodness of her being pregnant to Panchi but to her surprise she is beaten and thrown out of the house because soon there would be another mouth to feed. Gauri does not writhe or wince in agony at the inhuman treatment but accepts it with meek submissiveness. She returns to her mother's house. Her mother sells Gauri to a banker in order to save her cow. Gauri for the first time in the novel protests at being sold to Seth Jwala Prasad. But the strong arms of Amru are more powerful than her verbal remonstrance and she is thrown into the carriage of the Seth.

In Seth's house Gauri falls ill with mental and physical exhaustion. Lying on the bed she curses her fate at being treated as a commodity in a cheap shop-

She allowed a naive, half-suppressed protest to rise to her lips, 'May the Gods die if they favour these dogs !" but instantly "She withdrew her protest against the Gods...lest they should wreak vengeance against her for the blasphemy, she had uttered. 48

Being a woman meant she dared not resist or expostulate. Gauri is saved from the clutches of the Seth by a local progressive Doctor Mahindra. She works in his hospital.
Later Panchi gets reconciled with his wife, but has not changed much. He resents her newly acquired city habits - the scented soap, the white Sari, uncovered face and her talkativeness - although she is attentive, gentle and amiable as before. Gauri this time is wiser and more courageous to understand the values of living with dignity. When her mother- in-law comes abusing and taunting her, she rebels and turns out the old lady from her doorstep.

When Gauri asserts that she would have her child in Dr. Mahindra's hospital rather in the village, she provokes the anger of the mid-wife who was a gossip monger. She does not lose time in blaming Gauri for her unchastity. The malicious rumour of the villagers turn the head of Panchi. He beats his wife mercilessly and asks her to prove her chastity. The humiliation is unbearable to Gauri. Instead of meekly surrendering to further disgrace as she had always done, Gauri rebels against her tyrant husband. She leaves the house to lead a life of freedom and self-respect. "A Girl who had turned out to be comely and innocent" earlier in the novel matures into a fearless and self-dependent woman. Anand does not extol the traditional virtues of 'endurance and submission' but makes his heroine revolt against the injustice and cruelty of her husband. Gauri discovers her identity as woman, not a mere appendage in the role of a daughter or wife.

**The Old Woman And The Cow** (1960) is the only novel by Anand, where opposition of society is offered not by one, but two individuals-husband and wife. Basically the problem is the same because the young man Panchi is a typical representative of society, while his wife Gauri is meek, docile, gentle like a cow who wants to live as a devout Hindu woman. Therefore, her development has much
common in Gangu's *Two Leaves and A Bud* (1937). Like him she struggles for her liberty and existence. She is also introduced in the character of Janki in *The Big Heart* (1945).

After her marriage Gauri becomes a perfect and devout Hindu's wife. Unfortunatly, she suffers due to cruel and unbalanced behaviour of her husband. Anand highlights some of the problems and limitations of the traditional Indian rustic society between two villages-Chhotapipllan and Piplankalan. While the first three novels *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and A Bud* (1937) and *The Village* (1939) discuss the major problems of peasants, labourers and poverty before Independence, *The Old Woman and The Cow* (1960) depicts the same picture of post- Independence. However, the position of woman in this society remains the same. But through Panchi and Gauri, Anand hits at the physical violence, fatalism and innocence. As we see, the earlier part of the novel shows the tedium and misery of Gauri's life and her superficial relation with her husband, But Panchi's harassed existence, the continuous drought, the hopeless waiting for rains, the insinuations of Kesro, the idea of her bad stars all make him not only miserable but also homicidal. Gauri’s meekness makes her vulnerable to abuses and beating at the hand of her husband. Even her chastity is doubted by her husband:

*In spite of her devotion and love, Panchi's weakness and immaturity make her life more and more miserable.*

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The first tragic thing happens in her life when her husband comes to know about her inauspiciousness and evil spirit. He curses her saying:

She has ruined me. Ohe Sone! Ohe Chandi! She has destroyed our homes this Gauri...! To be sure, Gauri the incarnation of the Goddess Kali. My aunt Kesro is right when she says that this bride is the incarnation of Kali.⁵⁰

Like Panchi, Kesro always curses Gauri for spoiling her house. She believes that from the day this witch from Big Piplankalan sets foot in her house, the inauspicious things start: the bullocks have fever, the crops have burnt up and there is no sign of rain. Indeed she is projected as a docile cow throughout the novel. During her marriage ceremony, her parents are fond of repeating:

Gauri is like a cow, very gentle and very good.⁵¹

Panchi naturally feels himself like a bull going to marry with little cow Gauri. When Kesro, Panchi’s evil aunt, builds up hate against her, young husband’s defence is

Chachi, Gauri had the reputation of being as gentle as a cow in her village.⁵²

Perhaps, fatalism and innocence are the chief features of the novel which shower troubles and sufferings upon Gauri and her husband’s life. Panchi’s aunt Kesro believes that all inauspicious things are brought by this girl. She says to Panchi:

And it said in his horoscope......our house would break up with the coming of an
inauspicious girl......an it has happened as the horoscope said. 53

After hearing her fabulous words, Gauri snarls at her,

Get out of my house, witch! Get out! You oppressed me enough when I first came as a bride. Untill you and your husband turned us out. Now donot come interfering in our lives. 54

This shows her revolutionary attitude against her injustice and inhumanity. About her changing behaviour M. K. Naik says,

A change from bondage to freedom, from meekness to self-assertion, from weakness to strength--it is the transformation of a cow into a tigress. 55

Thus she changes, as Anand would desire every Indian woman to change. Despite Gauri’s appreciable traits, Panchi is confused. He still believes that the circumastances are the same which indicate her being inauspicious. The events such as the droughts becoming regular, the failing rains and more birds dying with the heat in the field also contribute to his superstitious belief. In spite of his cursing and abusing, she does not show any sign of rebellion. As a devout Hindu wife, she believes in the worship of her lord krishna and her husband. She wants to remain submissive to her husband Panchi. She remembers the songs of saint Mira from her girlhood. Through the song of Saint Mira, she wants to melt the heart of her husband. As she says:
If Mira could melt the heart of God with her devotions, then surely she could get to Panchi.\textsuperscript{56}

The action reaches its climax in the middle of the novel when Gauri announces that she has conceived. Her announcement brings the biggest confusion in Panchi's mind. Then he suspects her purity. Kicking her viciously he roars-

Go to your mother's home you, with your evil stars. If the rains come then I shall not believe my aunt Kesro.\textsuperscript{57}

Like a humble and gentle cow, she realizes her helplessness and tolerates his anger. She hopes that it would pass and she would request him not to be cruel and doubt her chastity. This shows a cowardly and cruel behaviour of Panchi which forces her departure from his house. After that she raises her head deliberately and wipes her silent tears. Then she gets up to protect her womb against any further violence from him and begins to pack her bundle of clothes for departure. Dr. P.K. Rajan rightly remarks about her condition:

Gauri no doubt, emerges as a symbol of the new woman of Anand's humanist conception and the novel is a powerful indictment of the brutal rigidity and authority of the Hindu social ethos that reduces women into helpless victims.\textsuperscript{58}

On coming back to her mother's house, she gets a strange welcome. Her uncle Amru sells her to Seth Jay Ram Das, a widower brother of Seth Jawala Prasad, a banker of Hoshiarpur. Previously her
mother Laxmi does not want to sell her to Seth Jawala Prasad, she requests Amru,

\[
\text{Do not force my girl if she does not want to go.}
\]
\[
\text{Oh! Don't be harsh with her. Kill me if you like but spare her.}^{59}
\]

Immediately she agrees to the decision of Amru because she fears that the cow Chandari which is already mortgaged to will be taken away from her if she does not pay the interest to Seth by this method. The influence of drought and the fear of bread not only affect Panchi but also her mother Laxmi. Moreover, Dr. Anand shows the poor and miserable condition of women in India. The selling and buying women is one of the tragic dramas of Indian peasant women. When Gauri comes to know about their intrigue that she has been sold to Seth Jay Ram Das, she prays to God to help her escape from the uncongenial surroundings of her mother’s house. In the following lines Anand shows her miserable condition:

\[
\text{She huddled back limply like a wounded bird who had no wings in spite of her prayer to the Goddess to grant her the wings.}^{60}
\]

Her mother assures her that she is not murdering her. She has decided to send her away for the sake of her pleasure. But she rejects their decision and wants to live in her present condition. About her mother’s behaviour she shrieks,

\[
\text{What are you doing if you are not murdering me! Almost tearing her throat so that the whole world may hear and her face glistened as she}
\]

269
uplifted in to deliver her challenge, her eyes
shining like diamonds.\textsuperscript{61}

This shows her struggle against injustice and cruel behaviour of her mother as well as her uncle Amru’s. In Dr. Mahindra's hospital of Hosiarpur, when she comes to know that she has been sold to Seth Jay Ram Das, she protests against their action and expresses surprise on her mother's decision. She interrupts:

\textbf{Why did not she choke me at birth, if she had}
to murder me now when I was grown up. \textsuperscript{62}

Her uncle Amru is a very greedy and ambitious man. He tells Gauri when sold to Seth Jay Ram Das that due to poverty he cannot pay the interest to Seth and that is the only way in which he can keep the land and her mother's cow Chandari. But in her heart there flashes a feeling of release and she wants to return to her husband's house. Although after marriage she remains a perfect Hindu wife, yet the weaknesses of her husband makes her life more and more miserable. Like a devout Hindu wife she always pays a respect to her husband. Therefore, her desire to return to husband's house remains with her. In Dr. Mahindra's hospital when she is molested by Dr. Batra, a junior doctor of the hospital then Doctor Mahindra asks her, What her really wish is to do in her heart, her answer is firm and straight:

\textbf{I want my husband and I am with my child by my husband, and I want to go back to him.... I want to go back home.} \textsuperscript{63}
This shows the greatness of Gauri's Character. In spite of
Panchi's cruel behaviour, Gauri does not show any hateful feelings for
her husband. Due to her being a devout Hindu woman, she believes that
her goddess will protect her in all situations. When Seth Jay Ram Das
makes his lustful desire for her she warns him saying:

I am guarded by the Godless! So do not come
near me, or you will burn.\textsuperscript{64}

Her such a stand shows her being heroic like a traditional Hindu
woman who protects her chastity with courage and fortitude. Besides
her being a gentle and devout wife, she is a spirited woman. It is quite
clear when she boldly turns out Kesro who misguides her husband. Of
course she fights against Panchi's fatalistic outlook as well as the
society, which has a claim on her.

After escaping from the grips of Seth Jai Ram Das, Gauri starts
her new life as a nurse in colonel Mahindra's hospital. It is doctor
Mahindra, who teaches her the lesson of modernity, broad mindedness
and independence. Through her contact with Dr. Mahindra she gathers
courage and boldness to face problems. It is a spirit of Gauri's character
that sometimes she appears more docile like a cow, but another time she
becomes very bold to solve her problems.

Her contact with the urban world gives her wings and now she
become a bold and self-reliant young-woman. It is Dr. Mahindra who
shows utmost sympathy towards her sufferings. As a social scientist and
revolutionary apostle, he opens her eyes so that she could see her life in
a new light. What he has taught her, he tells Laxmi and Adam Singh at
the end of the novel.
In spite of his cowardice nature, Panchi does not want to leave Gauri. When he comes to know that Laxami and Amru have sold his wife to Seth Jay Ram Das, he roars:

*I will go and bring the neck of the old witch.*
*And I shall teach Amru the lesson of his life!*
*The shamelessness ones! Liars! I shall defame them all over the world.* ⁶⁵

This shows his generosity and good will towards his wife. He likes her very much but due to circumstances he dislikes her. As he tells Laxami:

*I only beat her because my aunt Kesro said she was 'Unlucky' But I asked her to go back to you till better times......now, where is she?* ⁶⁶

He believes that his aunt is responsible for her sufferings. Perhaps he curses and beats her because he is misguided by her aunt Kesro. Infact it is the weakness of his character that he easily believes the words of his aunt. Poverty, drought, famine are also the cause of her suffering. Her mother Laxmi sells her to Seth Jai Ram Das because she wants to get her land as well as cow Chandari from Seth Jay Ram Das. On account of his cowardice and innocent nature Panchi loses the sympathy of the readers, but it is his weakness which arouses our pity.

By this time his mother Laxmi and Adam Singh and other sincere villagers of Chhota Piplan come to take Gauri back. Now she is completely changed from the docile, simple peasant girl who had come as a bride to her husband's house. In colonel Mahindra's hospital, she
becomes more advanced and able to solve her problems. Saros Cowasjee observes that her re-generation may:

mean less to us than the Gauri of the early chapter who spoke through her silence.⁶⁷

After returning Chota Piplan, she forgets all the traditional views and shows modern views which she learned in Hoshiyarpur. She tells Panchi to abandon fatalism and to act according to his own will power. Previously Anand deals with her position as a typical hopelessly, low status woman in the traditional Hindu society. Infact, through the presentation of her character Anand represents some of the finest elements of Indian womanhood. Through the description of her character Anand deals with her finest collection of traditionalism and modernism. M.K. Naik says about her changing attitudes,

Her contact with the Urban world has given her wings, and she is now a bold and self reliant young woman, who has learnt to think about the problems of rustic life and has also come to develop ideas regarding religion, education and other matters.⁶⁸

However, the activities of the novel are arranged between the village and the town to give full expression of traditional and modern dilemma. For instance, it is a journey from her village to Hoshiyarpur town which seems to be a journey from tradition to modernity. Dr. P.K. Rajan says:

In The Old Woman and The Cow, modernity is projected as the ideal that Gauri achieves of
her old way of life at the end of the novel. At the same time, however, the novel shows that Gauri is able to emerge as a new woman only because she is basically rooted in the traditional values of Indian womanhood.\textsuperscript{69}

At the end of the novel a great tragic incident happens in the life of Gauri when Panchi doubts the purity of her character. From Damodar, he comes to know the opinion of people about her character. For instance, Damodar ridicules her character as:

\begin{quote}
Oh! Ja and look after her! She has come back after her exile, like Sita who had stayed with Rawan. \textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

Henceforth these words of Damodar pour a poison in his ears of her purity. Having been suspected of her chastity, he curses and abuses her chastity and compels her to leave his house. Like a devout Hindu wife, she tells him,

\begin{quote}
He turned me out and I have come back to him
-as pure as I went away. \textsuperscript{71}
\end{quote}

Like his previously shown incredible nature, he does not believe her words. Hating her he shouts that she has cut his nose in Pipan. Again he curses himself that he had married to a daughter of whore. Now despite all her devotion, all her love, all her dignity and purity, she cannot tolerate but reply:

\begin{quote}
Acha! If I am a curse upon you, I will go away.
She exclaims rising from the floor suddenly I shall go and work in Doctor Mahindra's
\end{quote}
hospital and have my child there.... And I will not come back again. She was defiant and her face was kind together with a terrible strength, even though the tears were in her eyes, And if you strike me again, I will hit you back.  

This shows that now she is completely changed and fully prepared to show courage against wrongs. Meanwhile Hoor Bano, wife of Patter Raffiq Chacha shouts at him about his misbehaviour of Gauri. After hearing the words of Hoor Bano, she utters the truth of his character.

Nahin, Chachi, Gauri protested weeping and sobbing. He is not foolish. He is a weak, spoilt creature, spoilt by Kesro. He pretended to be lion among the men of the village, but really he is a coward.

She was earlier a very weak, docile character and suffered like a gentle cow. After returning from Hoshiyarpur, she has confidence to solve the problems. Then she exclaims about the purity of her character:

I am not Sita that the earth will open up and swallow me. I shall just go and be forgotten of him.

There is a fine presentation of Sita in a reference of her sufferings. In this connection Meenakshi Mukharji observes that in

The Old Woman and The Cow, for the first time Anand uses myth as part of his technique.
Gauri, the meek heroine of the novel offers a parallel to Sita in her suffering.\textsuperscript{75}

Infact, Anand shows the parallelism of Gauri and Sita right from the beginning. For instance, Gauri struggles hard through the novel as Sita does in Vanvas. After being thrashed by her husband she stays at Hoshiarpur in the house of Seth Jay Ram Das as Sita's life in exile in Valmiki's Hermitage. Like Sita when Gauri returns from Hoshiarpur, everyday doubts her chastity because she has been away in the city with unknown people. Like Ram, Panchi does not accept her in his house. But unlike Sita the mother-earth cannot swallow her so she determines to save her. Dr. P.K. Rajan rightly remarks,

\begin{quote}
She is indeed going to the urban hospital where she will give birth to Panchi's child, just as Sita gave birth to Ram's children in exile.\textsuperscript{76}
\end{quote}

Finally, Gauri leaves Panchi's house for seeking a good fortune, not as a gentle cow but as a woman of high spirits. She hopes that her child would not be cowardly or weak as Panchi. Infact, she proceeds to Hoshiarpur for seeking a good fortune as Bhikhu of The Road (1961) leaves the village for Delhi, Capital of India, in search of freedom. From the beginning to the end of the novel, she is tortured and cursed by Panchi and his aunt Kesro. Really she is not responsible for the draught and famine of Panchi. About her condition K.N. Sinha says:

\begin{quote}
Gauri born under the shadow of violence, shame and defeat represents truth. She is the
\end{quote}
incarnation of Sita, as it were in an infirm, evil
and degenerate world.77

Therefore, Panchi should not have believed the words of his aunt. Like a devout Hindu Husband he must have shown a human behaviour towards his wife. Infact, it is a curse of our society that like Gauri, many women are tortured by their husbands everyday. Like her every woman should be conscious of solving her problems.

At the time when Anand wrote this novel the condition of women in our society was miserable. Perhaps the upper crusts of Indian womanhood are relatively liberated but the inner-core the peasant women are still bound in the chains of slavery to the males. The day when these women get liberated from the outdated traditions of orthodox and meaningless conventions, the wheels of the chariot of progress will proceed rapidly towards the race of world civilization.

In the beginning Gauri no doubt appears very meek and gentle like a cow, but at the end of the novel she comes to have enough intelligence to solve any of her problems. As D.Riemenschneider remarks:

Her struggle is much more fundamental: She is
fighting to be accepted as an individual and not
for the equal rights of man and woman.78

In spite of her sufferings she does not lose her patience but faces the problems like a bold woman. Through her intelligence, she gets freedom at the end of novel.

During the thirties and forties India lay under the spell of political and social reformers like Mahatma Gandhi and Raja Ram Mohan Ray.
New religious movements like the Arya Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj sprang up. For a while all discrimination based on sex disappeared from view in Indian life and literature. During the post-Independence Era, after 1947, the issue crops up again, this time with renewed vigour in a changed political and social milieu. It is Anand who takes up the cudgel on behalf of the Indian women whom he labels ‘the poorest of the poor’. Though written later in a novelistic career that spans 45 years, *The Old Woman and The Cow* has an interesting female protagonist. Gauri is *the modern Mother India*. '

Gauri breaks away from the established pattern of saved males and doomed females. At novel's end she had been rejected by Panchi her husband on the standard Hindu charges of inauspiciousness and impropriety. She acquires enough self assertion to take the road to the town towards the hospital now stands doomed in the slough of rejection and existential loneliness.

Mulk Raj Anand shows us how Gauri, the simple unlettered girl learns to be a competent nurse and mid-wife under the guidance of kindly Dr. Mahendra who shelters her. She is thus able to stand on her own feet and defy domestic injustice and tyrannical custom. Mulk Raj Anand has often been criticised for taking a too polemical stand on issues. The plot has been found fault with being too simplistic, the style as being too pamphleteering and cliche ridden. Nevertheless the novel is important from the point of view of authorial shift in sensibility towards women in Indian fiction. The ideal man-woman relationship as the dominant male and submissive female union has been imprinted so deep into the Indian psyche that Anand's questioning of the concept is a fresh breath of air.
The quality of Gauri's courage, her fortitude, the folk ethos, the
indestructible Hindu order which venerates the cow and ill treats the
gentle cow like Gauri, the mythic analogues to the sacred cow and to
Sita, in the *Ramayan*, are unforgettable. Meenakshi Mukherji rightly
maintains:

> The novel is unique among Indian novels in
> rejecting rather than extolling the
time
> honoured womanly virtues of patience and
> submission.  

Gauri like Sita of the *Ramayan* has to bring forth her husband's
child in exile. The modern day Sita, however, does not go wild. She
marches off towards a future, however hazardous with a quiet
confidence determined to provide a better future for the child she
carries in her womb.

IV

*Death of A Hero* (1964) is the story of Maqbool Sherwani, the
hero who was captured and executed during the first invasion of
Kashmir by Pakistani raiders in 1947. It describes the real life story of
Maqbool Sherwani and presents him as a patron- saint of secularism.

Maqbool, the hero of this novel, is a young poet of the National
Conference. In the last October of 1947, when the raiders from Pakistan
have advanced to Baramula, he flees to Srinagar to consult the leaders
of National Conference Volunteer Crops. They advise him to go back to
Baramula in order to rally the people to fight against the invaders. As
he gets near Baramula, he becomes tired. So he spends the night in a field making a cave out of some hay. His sound sleep is suddenly disturbed by a lengthy exchange of distant rifle and machine gun fire. The distant rat-tat-tat of the machine gun increases. He feels that he must go and reconnoiter the position in Baramula. The cover, which the darkness affords, will help him. So he crawls out of the haystack. A shiver goes down his spine as he realizes that he may walk straight into the arms of Pakistanis entry. As he walks towards Baramula, he sees the presentation convent, a little away from the town, smoking. He wonders how the Pakistani Officers, who know of the help given to them by the white Generals, have allowed the burning of a missionary centre. Soon he comes to know that Baramula is completely in the grip of the Pakistanis and that they are filling their trucks with loot. He does not know where to go. After a pause he feels that entering the house of the businessman, Muratib Ali, is the safest thing. From Muratib Ali’s workers of carpet factory, Maqbool comes to know that the factory is looted by the Pakistanis and later it is set on fire. He meets Muratib Ali in his sitting room. Muratib Ali asks Maqbool to flee from the town if he values his life. In response Maqbool tells Muratib Ali:

I am under orders.... Besides, I feel that, on principle, we must struggle...If we believe in freedom from these ‘Muslim Brethren’ as we believed in freedom from the British and their friends ....80

From the conversation that follows Maqbool comes to know that his trusted friend and lawyer Ahmed Shah whom he made the president of the National Conference Branch of Baramula has joined the Pro-
Pakistanis. Another friend of his, Ghulam Jilani who is a business partner of Muratib Ali, is gradually leaning towards the Pro-Pakistanis under the influence of his father and landlord of Baramula. So, after leaving residence of generous and good natured Muratib Ali, Maqbool goes toward s the mansion of Ghulam Jilani in order to strengthen him from faltering and falling towards the Pro-Pakistanis. When Maqbool enters the big old Kasmir style reception room of Ghulam Jilani, he sees Ghulam sitting with the lawyer Ahmed Shah and khurshid Anwar, an official of the invading army. Maqbool feels that he has walked straight into the lion’s mouth. Soon there erupts a heated argument. At the peak of it, Khurshid Anwar wants to arrest Maqbool. Ghulam Jilani protests against it by saying that Maqbool is his guest. As Maqbool descends the stairs, one of Ghulam’s woman servants, Ibil informs him that the Pakistanis are waiting out-side to arrest him. The old woman takes him to Begum Sahib who wants to meet him. Ibil then suggests a plan to save Maqbool from being arrested by the Pakistanis. Begum Sahib agrees with the plan. A tonga is arranged. Maqbool is asked to put on the burqah of Begam Sahib. It is an old stratagem of the feudal households. On their way, though the Pakistani sentries challenge the tonga, Ibil’s aggressive words prevent them from verifying the identity of the person in woman’s veil. The carriage advances slowly at a suitable place it halts. From there Ibil leads Maqbool to his house. There is real rejoicing in the family on his return. But it does not last long. There is a knock at the door. A whole group of Pathans is there to capture Maqbool. Aware of the impending danger, Maqbool rushes to roof-top. He then jumps from one roof-top to another. Bullets ring through behind him. In the chase that follows, the pursuers manage to capture him. His captors, after treating him brutally, drag him and
throw him into lock-up. After some hours three warders drag him out to the cell and thrust him forward before Khurshid Anwar’s improvised court. Ahmed Shah takes the role of a public prosecutor. After a summary trial, he is sentenced to death, in the middle of the night. Ahmed Shah then orders the sentries to tie the corpse to a pole and write the word ‘Kafir’ on his shirt with his own blood and place it for the people of Baramula to see.

The next day, when the conquering Indian troops enter Baramula, they find the body of Maqbool Sherwani tied to a wooden pole. They search the pocket and find a letter written by him from the prison cell for his sister Nur. It is written with words that reveal the real source of his poetry: “.... In our country, the most splendid deeds have been done by people, not because they were great in spirit, but because they could not suffer the tyrant’s yoke, and learnt to obey their consciences. And consciences, how so ever dim, is a great force, and is the real source of poetry.”81

As Death of A Hero was written in memory of Maqbool Sherwani who was a missionary of the religion of humanism who willingly accepted martyrdom for the propagation of that religion, Anand also gave another befitting name to the novel, Eptaph for Maqbool Sherwani. The author’s firm faith in the religion preached by Maqbool Sherwani probably encouraged him to write this historical novel.

Death of a hero is a beacon light beckoning people to the harbour of liberty and secularism. Those who come to this light can make no mistake in recognizing the evil of religious fanaticism and the new nationalism based on it.
Though Anand has, as a passing criticism, in all his novels allotted some pages to his disapproval of institutionalized religion, only in *Death of a Hero* does he present religious chauvinism as a dominant theme. The novel points out how zealotry can destroy human right, freedom, peace and happiness and turn society into a hell. Religious fanaticism blurs a person’s vision and provokes him to quarrel for the cause of unseen and non-existent forces. To a zealot anything other than his belief is blasphemy. The pro-Pakistani teacher Ishaq in the novel, who considers anyone of a faith other than his own as infidel, is representative of all religious fanatics. It is his fanaticism that makes him think that murdering persons who do not belong to Islamic faith is permitted by the Koran. Fanaticism, in fact, prevents him from knowing the message of the Koran. “Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clean from error.” or “Let not the hatred of others make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just that is next to Piety.” So he believes that the brutal Pakistani soldiers who are involved in random killing, looting and raping women are brothers engaged in a holy war.

Maqbool Sherwani’s belief in good life as the only religion makes him laugh at the way murderers engaged in prayer. When he has entered Baramula guarded by invaders sees

half a dozen men, raiders by the look of them. Kneeling in the attitude of Sajdah prayer, their eyes closed, their faces turned towards the west.

Would they break off from their prayers and challenge him? His heart beat fast. His face went pale. And his eyes were full of mist.
All the six men got up with hands folded before them and did not look this side or that, but persevered in their prayer.

He was safe.

It was a miracle that none of them had been walking about or sitting down, preparing for prayer. And the irony of it.

Struck him, as he reached past the tomb the cover of some fisherman's huts, that these brutal men could be devoutly praying, though only the previous night, perhaps they had been looting and murdering....

The best religion is be most tolerant. It is nothing but love towards God and man. People like the invaders referred to, who simply perform certain religious rituals, have in them only the cosmetics and not the substance of true religion.

Human history is full of religious persecution and religious wars. In the name of religion perhaps more blood has been shed than in any other name. Arousing religious fanaticism is sure to pay rich dividends to any invading nation. The Pakistanis' act on the religious sentiments of Kashmir is for their territorial gain. The result is fantastic. The religious fanatics abandon their independent stand for Kashmir and in no time they turn to be pro-Pakistanis and welcome the invaders as liberators and call the barbarism let loose by them a holy war for glory of Islamic democracy. Fanaticism darkens their mind so they cannot see the true motive of the invaders. The Pakistanis have come not to consolidate Islam but to expand their territory and, in compensation for
their trouble, to loot the people. This is evident from the words of one important Pakistani officer, Khurshid Anwar:

Let my boys secure the base in Baramula and compensate themselves for their trouble in coming all the way from Peshwar and Abbotabad—then we shall move forward. There are still riches hidden in the houses of kashmiri Pundits, even if they have taken the panditanis away !85

Unfortunately many educated and intelligent people too do not care to understand the Pakistani motive. Under the influence of fanaticism, they lose their dispassionate thinking. A typical example is Ahmed Shah, a lawyer and president of the National Conference Unit of Baramula. His view of the situation, as given below, shows how fanaticism has led him to wild and unreasonable position:

I believe in a Central Muslim State, which will be a counter to Communism in the North, and to the Bania Hindu Raj in south.... And we can connect up with brethren in the Middle East and revive the glory of ancient Islamic democracy in a world ridden with unbelief. 86

To Ahmed Shah, the Pakistani invasion is a war of liberation. He considers it a historic event, there by provoking protest from Maqbool:

I will certainly not be bullied by you’, interrupted Maqbool. 'I don't believe in this historic event ----we were living peacefully enough and struggling against wrongs...And
then these people came, with guns pointed at us, demanding accession by force.87

Maqbool and Ahmed Shah are both patriots but of different perspectives. Ahmed Shah’s nationalism is based on religious fanaticism. Anyone who does not believe in Islam is not a member of the nation Ahmed shah dreams to establish. In such a country laws are based not on reason but on the belief in being whose existence no one is sure about. We all know that the Holy Roman Empire was not very holy. Nations built on religious fundamentalism justified the butchering of millions of political enemies in the name of God. For Maqbool, who has belief in existence of God, the concept of Islamic democracy is an idiocy. His patriotism urges him to fight for what is good for Kashmir. He wants the people of Kashmir, in whatever God they believe, to live in peace and harmony, without breaking up into fragments by building parochial domestic walls. Knowing the advantages of secular democracy over all other forms of government, he struggles hard to establish in Kashmir a government of the people, by the people and for the people. He makes his position clear to the fanatic teacher Ishaq in this way:

I am for Kashmir. Not for its usurpation by force, but for its freedom to choose where it wants to go.88

Maqbool does not succeed in his plan of rallying people to fight for the freedom as a good many supporters are engulfed in the sea of fanaticism and the remaining few sympathetic to him are resigned to their fate. Fatalism makes a person inactive. It unmans man and destroys his heroism. Maqbool knows that fatalist would never openly come out for the
cause of Kashmir. As it is a serious impediment to the self-determination of Kashmir, whenever Maqbool comes across fatalistic remarks he challenges it with the intention of removing its grip on the mind of the people. He becomes deeply annoyed with his own people who follow the path of the fatalistic neutralism and inaction while the invaders are ruthlessly carrying on terrorist activities, disturbing and destroying the peace and tranquility. When Maqbool visits the house of Ghulam Jilani, Begum Jilani tries to inspire him with the philosophy of humble acceptance in this way:

Life is cruel. As a woman I have known this truth. We have to accept, because, in the eyes of Allah, we deserve the punishment. The only way, son, in which this cruelty can be offset is by obedience to destiny. What is written in one’s fate will be.\textsuperscript{89}

Maqbool, like Ananta in \textit{The Big Heart} believes that man is the maker of his own destiny. Therefore he protests against Begum Jilani’s fatalistic view of life saying, \textit{“when death is opposed to life, then life must oppose death.”}\textsuperscript{90} When he returns home, he finds that his father’s reaction to what the Pakistanis have done to them is not different from the fatalistic belief expressed by Begum Jilani. The father tells the son pathetically:

\begin{quote}
What can we do against such odds, I ask you!
The salvation of our souls lies in the hand of Allah and his problems. If we pray, perhaps Allah will hear our prayers.\textsuperscript{91}
\end{quote}
To the rationalistic and atheistic Maqbool, the belief in fate is an absurdity. He is painted to see how his fellowmen become particularly vulnerable to Pakistani invaders by their religious fanaticism and fatalistic belief. He wants people to resist the invaders with all their strength instead of accepting invasion-its ugly concomitants as a scourge of Allah. As the novelist remarks, “he (Maqbool) knew that this sudden descent of murder on his land was not an act of God, but a planned brutality to cow people down to submit .and resistance to it was the only virtue,” 92 Therefore he laughs at fatalists with these words of caustic and bitter humour: “Allah has sent his apostles, the Pakistanis. Our 'Muslim brethren', to liberate us by depriving us of our breath!”93 “After he is captured by his enemies, he becomes more blunt in his attack on the religion of fate which is a serious hindrance to the salvation of Kashmir. So he speaks out most passionately:

Allah! Where was Allah? Why was he always against the innocents? ..... There would be no salvation unless the religions of fate went by the board, and the soul become alive? 94

From the discussion so far, it is evident that the main social criticisms in Death of A Hero are directed against religious fanaticism, which invariably poisons the noble ideals of secularism, and fatalism, which freezes all our enthusiasm to struggle in life. Along with these main concerns, the author also introduces a subsidiary theme-brutality and ill treatment of prisoners. It is the age-old story of man’s inhumanity to man. The ill treatment Maqbool receives from his enemies is tyrannical:
The advance guard of the pursuers was on him. Hitting him with the rifle ends, shouting abuse and filth in the their broken speech, slapping his face, and thrusting their fisticuffs into his sides, they pulled him from side to side, slapped him again and pushed him forward, till he fell. 95

Not only the soldiers but also his old friend lawyer Ahmed Shah is among the gang of tormentors kicking and abusing him. Dazed by the assault, Maqbool just watches his ex-friends, “still unable to believe that the thread of connection between the two Kashmiris should break so completely through the change in political allegiances. Somehow, he could not believe in the scene in which he was involved. He had the hallucination of being in hell.”96 Unable to suffer the torture any more Maqbool shouts: “you can kill me without all this ….why do you want to prolong the farce? 97

Anand, apart from protesting against the barbarism let loose on helpless prisoners like Maqbool, also condemns the unhygienic prison cells provided to them. The captors kick Maqbool from behind and push him to a prison cell. He sees in the cell “a cockroach steadily advancing between the planks and he realized that there must be other insects about in the cell, scorpions and rats even a snake. His eyes wandered across the dirty surface of the string bed and he was sure that there would be bugs in it.”98 Within a short time of stay in that cholera-causing prison cell without any proper place for excretion, he has to learn to do without self-respect.
In many of his novels, Anand has protested against the cruel treatment of prisoner in India. He wants reform in Indian prisons so that the unfortunate inmates will not suffer from the feeling that they are reduced to a subhuman status. The way nation treats its prisoners is reliable measuring yard of its level of civilization. Though for the past many years Amnesty International and other International human rights organizations could not come out with any major shocking revelations about India’s treatment of its prisoners, the frightening level torture for confession practiced in India and rightly reported by our newspapers is fatal blow to our age–old traditions of compassion and kindness.

As asserted by the title of the novel, Maqbool Sherwani is a hero. But his heroism is quite different from the heroism of arms and ammunition brought out by Emperor Napoleon or Alexander, the Great (1688-1744). His heroism is founded on moral courage and love of humanity practiced by Jesus Christ, Mahatma Ghandhi, Mohammed or Joan of Arc. The heroism born out of moral courage and love of humanity is infinitely superior to the heroism carried out by arms and ammunition. The great Napolean admitted this when he wrote about Jesus Christ: “Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and I myself have founded empires; but upon what do these creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded His empires upon love; and so this day millions would die for him.” Maqbool Sherwani, like Jesus Christ, valiantly faced his tormentors. He could escape persecution by “The recantation” his persecutors wanted him to make. But he never allowed the fear of death to grip his immortal soul. That makes him heroic. The heroism of Maqbool Sherwani is evident in the way he reacts to his tormentor’s vulgar talks.
Come to your senses! Raper of your sister,’ shouted Khurshid Anwar, ‘Do you not value your life?’
‘I value my sister’s honour more than my life!’
Maqbool answered. ‘So, please do not abuse me like that’.
‘Insolent swine! shouted Ahmed Shah.’you are persisting in your treachery and don’t realize that a word from Mr. Khurshid Anwar and Zaman Khan will finish you off!…
Recant your treacherous stand or I shall have no option but to ask the court to pronounce judgment on you!…..!
‘Truth has no voice’. He (Maqbool) began….I cannot move you… this land , which gave birth to me, this land which is like a poem to me – how shall I explain my love for it to you? From out its valleys there has risen for centuries the anguish of torture…And we were trying to emerge from the oppression to liberate or mother, because we know her each aching cares…..you have come and fouled her ! How could any of us stand by and not protest…. 100

It is easy to draw in Maqbool’s life and death parallel with the life and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Maqbool was an admirer of Jesus Christ. He told Salaama: “Jessuh Messiah was a real person and suffered for mankind-----was crucified!”101 “Both Jesus Christ and Maqbool Sherwani protested against evils which had been thrust upon their society. For this they both were tortured by their enemies and paraded on wooden poles in order to discourage the public from following their path. When the Indian soldiers entered Baramula, they found the body Maqbool Sherwani tied to a wooden pole. It reminded them of “Jessuh Messiah on the cross.” 102 On the lapel of Maqbool’s shirt his tormentors wrote the word “Kafir” to show his crime. On the wooden pole (cross) on which Christ was crucified according to the
traditional belief, his enemies wrote the letter J.N.R.I. representing the words, “Jesus Nazarenus Rex ludacorum” meaning “Jesus of Nazareth king of the Jews”, to mock at the plight of the man they had nailed to the cross. Both Maqbool Sherwani and Jesus Christ were aware that their life would end up in torture and death of protesting against their society, yet both faced death courageously. In Maqbool Sherwani’s words, “But we still have to struggle: we will have to suffer and ... But that is how we grow,”\(^{103}\) it is easy to discover at least a mild echo of the Biblical statement about Christ: “He learned obedience in the school of suffering.”\(^{104}\)

*Death of A Hero* is Anand’s twelfth novel where, as M. K. Naik observes, “The entire action is rooted in a set of real historical incidents which constitute its framework, and by its very nature, this framework needs a great deal of elaborations, in terms of historical perspective, situation and character. Deprived of his elaboration the narrative was bound to appear sketchy and superficial, and covered in a miasma of vagueness.”\(^{105}\)

*Death of A Hero* however, answers an important question of Indian novel. It is not dated and its voice still makes reverberations!

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