CHAPTER VI

MULK RAJ ANAND’S NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The emergence of Indian writing in English is punctuated by two major factors namely the impact of the British presence and the fact of anti-colonial resistance. Consequently, it concerned itself primarily with issues related to the liberation of the nation. In the early twentieth century of the colonial period, narration and related acts of cultural production were predicated upon a simple assumption: it was the duty of the Indian writer to contribute his mite to the forces of nationalist movement. Nation, national consciousness and narrative thus came to be closely intertwined with each other in the context of Indian writing in English. Frantz Fanan in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* speaking for all the colonized communities in general, argues that the legitimacy of the nation was in fact the enabling condition for a new post-colonial culture and that the strategies of narration, therefore, are geared towards the assertion of this legitimacy. He further adds that these narratives of liberation address the "truths of the nation" as opposed to the official and colonial versions of native history.

In India, these narratives of liberation appeared during the 1940-60 period, a decade before and a decade after India's independence in 1947. One can think of a number of texts such as Venkataramani's
Kandan the Patriot: A Novel of New India in the Making (1932).
Kamala Markandaya's Some Inner Fury (1955). R.K. Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma (1955), Ahmad Khwaja Abbas's Inquilab (1955), Raja Rao's Kanthapura, (1938), Nagarajan's Chronicles of Kedaram that directly addressed the processes of nation-making. Anand's Trilogy The Village, Across the Black Waters and The Sword and the Sickle) belongs to this phase in Indian writing and may conveniently be categorized under narratives of liberation. These writers are consciously engaged in the task of narrating the nation, and their discourses conceive nation as the highest symbol of the collective identity of the Indian people.

One cannot, however, discuss the formation of nation in the discursive formulations of Indian writing without invoking the Jameson-Ahmad controversy on the issue of "Third world national allegories." Jameson observes thus:

All Third-World texts are necessarily-allegorical, and in a very specific way they are to be read as what I will call national allegories…(4)

Aijaz Ahmad's timely rejoinder contradicts the totalizing attitude underlying this generalization. He opposes the three-world concept as well as the tendency to lump all Third World writing into unproblematized categories. Ahmad rightly points out that nation was only one among many categories deployed for projecting an explicit sense of sociality and
collectivity. Nation in Anand's work is a part of a larger social vision and does not suggest any unisonant ideology or homogenizing impulse. The word 'vision' is used not in any mystical sense, but in the sense of an apprehension of social reality. The researcher quotes Wole Soyinka's definition of the literature of social vision here since it best describes Anand's concern with the writing of the nation elaborated in this chapter. Soyinka states thus in his famous book, *Myth, Literature and the African World*:

> A creative concern which conceptualises or extends actuality beyond the purely narrative, making it reveal realities beyond the immediately attainable, a concern which upsets the orthodox acceptances in an effort to free society of historical or other superstitions, these are qualities possessed by literature of social vision…(66)

Anand's work is inspired by his commitment to freedom real and complete.

In the novels discussed in the previous chapters, Anand's multipronged attack on the social and political ills of his time has been closely analysed. The five novels discussed in this chapter, on the other hand address the political dimension, more directly. The theme of anti-colonialism becomes the central strand here and is given an extensive if not an exclusive treatment. The 'nation' becomes an important ideological problematic in
these texts and each of these texts addresses an important political issue directly connected with the process of India's struggle for self-rule. Anand does interweave a number of other issues such as the mercilessness of land-owners, the greed of the priestly class and the stranglehold of money-lenders upon the lives of the peasants into the fabric of the story, but his chief concern remains tracing the evolution of an independent India through a long-drawn painful process of collective resistance. In all this, the advantage Anand gains is the successful avoidance of a possible conflation of the issues of race and class.

Anand’s *The Village*, *Across the Black Waters* and *The Sword and the Sickle* form an ambitious trilogy narrating the chronicles of Indian peasant life, portrayed through the experiences of Lal Singh, a Punjabi youth. These three novels span six to seven years in the life of Lalu, during which he grows from adolescence to adulthood, innocence to awareness, and a restless rebel to a revolutionary hero. Lalu’s growth is symbolic of the growth of his own society from its initial apathetic acceptance of subjection as fate, to a state of self-assertion and eventual declaration of autonomy. *The Trilogy* covers varied aspects of contemporary life and a whole gamut of human experience. As Jack Lindsay aptly remarks, in the Trilogy, "Anand has discovered the Indian epical tale in terms of contemporary struggle." (*The Elephant*, 25)
All the three novels in this series have specific political issues at the centre of their fictional tropes. In *The Village*, Anand directly deals with the effects of the Permanent Settlement Act of Bengal on the communal life of Indian peasantry; in *Across the Black Waters* his sole preoccupation is with the devastating effect of war upon the individual and the specific context is the experience of Indian soldiers in World War I; in *The Sword and the Sickle*, Anand examines various types of revolutionary ideologies that spread in India in the post-war period. Anand's concern, however, is not so much with the political realities as with their repercussions on human life. In *The Village*, he lays bare the tragic disruption of the traditional rural societies consequent on the land reforms introduced by the colonial rulers; in *Across the Black Waters*, the focus is on the damage done to human psyche by the reign of terror unleashed by war; and in *The Sword and the Sickle*, Anand shows how war and political turmoil impinge on the peace of individual life.

The theme of freedom becomes the major thematic link holding together these three novels. In this structurally challenging project, Anand simultaneously organizes the story of a peasant boy's growth, a sort of *bildungsroman*, and that of community's struggle to break the shackles of colonial domination. Lalu's revolt against unjust restrictions and his struggle for a free existence are placed within the larger context of India's struggle for independence. The finely executed balance between Lalu's
personal history and the description of the life of the community around him augments the political thrust of the text.

The village of Nandpur described in the first of the trilogy, *The Village*, is symbolic of any Indian village in the early decades of the twentieth century. Anand depicts the typical rural life in the village and the changes that occur under pressure from rapid modernization. Anand makes the structure and development of life in Nandpur a metaphor for the transformation of life in Indian society under colonial rule. The initial resistance to the entry of an alien power has weakened into a passive acceptance of the presence of the British. The tremors of the new awakening of nationalism have not yet reached the village. The peasants submit themselves to all kinds of exploitation with a deterministic apathy – the tyranny of the landlords and the autocratic rule of the *Angrezi* Sarkar as well.

In this novel Anand effectively demonstrates how the native rural economy has begun to collapse with the introduction of British land reforms. The colonial rulers totally ignorant of the efficacy of existing social structures introduced changes that strengthened the position of feudal landlords. Consequent on the new reforms, the overlapping and complex gradations of rural society were compressed into crude bipolar categories of landlord tenant and labourer. In place of countless small farmers, a few rich landlords with large holdings emerged; and these
feudal lords became the local representatives of the colonial power. The British found it easy to lure a few power-hungry landlords to their side, and use them as their instruments for perpetration of colonial rule in the villages so that they could avoid direct contact and confrontation with the masses. Therefore, the British kept the landlords in good humour through offers of titles and land-prizes. In this power structure the peasant occupied a pitiful position.

Anand portrays the repercussions of these changes on the general tenor of village life. A peasant is caught in a vicious circle of his meagre returns he has to satiate the landlord through payment of rent, propitiate gods whose earthly representatives are priests through periodical offerings feed his family and maintain a false status in order to impress his caste-brotherhood. Invariably the peasant fails to meet all these requirements and raises debts at exhorbitant rate of interest from the money-lenders who eventually acquire the mortgage of his lands.

Among these village-folks Lalu stands out distinctly with his independent ideas rational thinking and radical views. Lalu is different from the earlier Anand’s protagonists like Bakha, Munoo and Gangu in the sense that he is literate, he went to school and studied upto eighth class. What he shares with them is a strong faith in progress; what he possesses in addition is the confidence to assert his views and act on his own. Lalu detests the superstitions of the orthodox elders meaningless rituals of
religion and holds a strong faith in the possibility of progress. Like his maker Lalu subscribes to the need for change and modernization. His values, therefore, are in contrast to the traditional values of the village.

Lalu expresses his sense of protest and his desire for self-assertion and individual emancipation early in life through violation of one of the most important injunctions of Sikhism by getting his hair shorn. Lalu's defiance is met with a response much more violent than he could have imagined from his family and class. His initial act of rebellion therefore results in a traumatic experience for him as the enraged Sikhs of the village tie him on to a donkey and take him in a procession on the streets. Lalu is filled with helpless wrath, humiliation and a sense of disillusionment. Yet he does not lose the courage of his conviction and decides to carry on his mission. However, Lalu realises that it is not an easy task to effect a change in his caste and class-ridden society. This is the moment of initiation for him: "He felt that this hour of anguish had made him grow older and wiser and larger with a largeness within him (Village, 21). He is, however, convinced that he is right and is filled with an optimistic confidence that he would one day be able to relieve his family and village of all their troubles.

Lalu is forced to flee the village when a trumped-up charge of theft is brought against him by the vindictive landlord Harban Singh. Lalu enlists himself in the military and this exposure to the outer world accelerates the
process of maturation of this village lad. Lalu's experience in the army is of mixed nature: while the intensive parades, bullying bosses and vulgarity of the general tenor of life in the barracks dampen his spirits, the good-natured camaraderie of a small group of friends he makes, and the spirit of adventure that informs the entire enterprise cheer him up. When he returns briefly to the village to see his ailing father, he finds the entire village disintegrating on account of unreasonable taxation, land mortgages and appropriation of the small-peasants' lands by the landlord and the money-lender. As his uncle Harnam Singh tells him: "I am not the only one, almost the whole village is ruined" (Village, 236).

Lalu's education outside the village alienates him from his familiar group of friends. "He could be no longer the simple crony of Gughí, Ghulam and Churanji." He feels "he was only a passer-by." (Village, 240). Lalu has obviously outgrown the companions of his youth through the wider range of his experience, and intensity of his awareness. Towards the end of the novel, Lalu is seen boarding the ship for Germany to fight for the British Sarkar. This moment of departure marks a significant change in Lalu's attitude to the village. The physical distance that separates him from his home offers him the right perspective and dissolves the psychological gap that has hitherto alienated him from the village. Lalu, after the punishment the Sikhs imposed on him for getting his hair cut, laments: "I wish I had been born somewhere else, in some city in some... in any place other
than this village..." (Village, 114). But as he is about to launch on a voyage away from home, he realizes that the village of Nandpur "with the broken walls of its decrepit houses" is the dearest place to him. He promises: "I will come back to you, but not yet, not for a while" (Village, 285). This registers a definite step forward in Lalu's growing political awareness, as he experiences a solidarity with the community that he leaves behind.

As the novel progresses, its statement about the nature of colonial power and its destructive effect on the village community is increasingly insistent. The British Sarkar is obliquely criticized for its indifference to the suffering of poor peasants and for contriving with scheming feudal lords. The elder generation of peasants like Nihal Singh and Harnam Singh consider the Angrezi Sarkar solely responsible for their suffering. Nihal Singh complains: "they [the British] destroyed the Sikhraj and favoured thieves like Harban Singh who betrayed our race and killed the righteous" (Village, 8). But surprisingly enough, Lalu for all his perceptiveness is enamoured of the ways of the Whitemen, their cleanliness, intelligence, technological advancement; and is unaware of the palpable designs of colonial power structures that empower the European minority and enslave the native population. This realization comes later when he gets over his glamour for the White man in the next volume of the Trilogy, Across the Black Waters.
Lalu's youthful exuberance, his zest for life, his fantasy-love for Maya the landlord's daughter, his unbounded energy and idealism mark him out as a sort of folk-hero. Anand himself has likened him to Raja Rasalu of the Punjabi folktales. Lalu is referred to as "hero" at several points in the narrative: in the Boy Scouts Rally he is singled out to be the patrol-leader of the troop by the British officer Mr. Long; Lalu imagines himself as 'Ranjah', the hero of poet Waris Shah's love-tale "Hir and Ranjah"; he is hailed as "brave lad, braver than all the heroes of Hindustani" (Village, 190) at the time of his recruitment to army; his ailing father greets him with verses from Japji: “...But the heroes... heroes...mighty and brave who are brimming with the spirit of God...” (Village, 226) When he leaves the village he is accorded a hero's farewell as the entire village walks in procession to see him off; the parting words of Uncle Jhandu reflect the village's hope in its young hero: 'Think of the time when you used to be the strongest and most courageous lad in the village. And feel happy that you are the only one of them who has gone out to the world. Think of the day when you will come back here like a hero" (Village, 254). Lalu thus comes to symbolise the power of the peasantry and their potential for leadership.

Across the Black Waters narrates Lalu's experiences in war. Anand offers a graphic account of war throwing light on a complex mosaic of themes of which the Indian sepoy's bewildered response to a war he does
not understand is the most dominant. In fact, the immediate reactions of Indian sepoys to this strange war beyond the black waters are recorded in the last pages of *The Village*. They try to comprehend this contemporary event in terms of mythological or historical wars that they have heard of. Some think it is another Mahabharata war because "Angrezi Badshah was a cousin of the Badshahs of Germany, just as the Pandus were cousins of Kurus" (*Village*, 267); some think that it could mean the end of *Kaliyug* through which the world had become less spiritual and more materialistic and others hold that "the German Badshah was really an incarnation of Changiz Khan, who, in alliance with the Sultan of Turkey, the incarnation of Tamerlane had come to spread the religion of Islam in this world" (*Village*, 268). There were some who felt that the German Badshah was a friend of Lalla Lajpat Roy of the Arya Samaj who had pledged to free India from slavery and spread the faith of the *Vedas*. Lalu who is considered "learned" among the soldiers as he has read upto the eighth class, too, does not understand the nature of this war. His analysis is based on simple common sense: “The whole thing is about who should have more money England or Germany” (*Village*, 269). In whichever way one looks at it, the factors that motivate a war are not too many. It is the same story of men clashing with each other for power – political or economic, whatever the case may be.
It is interesting to note in this context what Anand himself has said about his "new myths" while contrasting the old recital form and the new novel. While he argues that the narrative structure of newer forms of story-telling is different from those of the old bardic tales such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, he is convinced that the content of human experience never changes. He draws parallels between the *Mahabharata* story of Kurukshetra war and his own novel on World War I, *Across the Black Waters*. In both the cases, he says, the problem is “to fight or not to fight". But differences are obvious. One refers to the epic order where the protagonist is a princely member of the privileged class, while the other deals with the contemporary situation and the experiences of a mercenary soldier-a peasant turned sepoy a mere pawn in power politics. In registering the latter's experiences of war, Anand therefore looks for newer narrative forms. To a large extent, he lets Lalu speak for himself. Lalu remains the focus of events and experiences providing the readers with a participant vantage-point. The initial excitement, the early attempts at orientation and acclimatization; a brief delightful stay in the French Farm where he makes friends with Marie and her family; life in the trenches and clashing with the enemy groups, the loss of his friends one by one; general confusion pervading the battlefield, and his own capture by lion-moustached German - all these are recollected through Lalu's consciousness.
Anand makes only occasional appearances to make general statements on war and particular remarks on the meaninglessness of an imperial war to its colonized subjects. While war in itself is futile the war that Lalu and other soldiers fight in France is even more so, because they are offering their lives as sacrifice for a cause not known to them, and for an aspiration no nobler than the acquisition of a piece of land promised by the Sarkar as a token of appreciation for their participation in war. Anand hints at the central irony of the predicament in which the Indian troops are placed in the opening scene of the novel itself. Ships arrive at Marseilles carrying Indian troops "a cargo stranger than any they had carried before" (Across, 7). The House of Lords from the United Kingdom sends its special greetings to all brave ranks of the Indian army.

The King-emperor himself congratulates the Indian soldiers on their personal devotion to his throne and appreciates their "one-voiced demand to be foremost in the conflict" (Across, 7). Anand subtly exposes the hypocrisy of this high sounding imperial discourse and its calculated glorification of colonial subservience as a rare virtue.

When the Indian soldiers disembark briefly at Marseilles, they are immediately impressed by the wonderful sights of the Vilayat – large green fields, mansion-like buildings, friendly French girls, and above all sexual freedom available to them in the strange land of the Tommies.
Living so close to the Angrezi log is almost like stepping into a mysterious world kept closed to them so far:

The March through. Marseilles had been merely a fleeting expedition, and he (Lalu) was obsessed with something which struggled to burst through all the restraints and the embarrassment of the unfamiliar, to break through the fear of the exalted life that the Europeans lived, the rare high life of which he, like all the sepoys, had only had distant glimpses from the holes and the crevices in the thick hedges outside the Sahib's bungalows in India ({Across}, 35-36).

All this fascination is turned into fear as the troops are transported closer to the battlefield. A strange grimness of terror, uncertainty about the future and the dread of the unknown, charge the atmosphere. The meaninglessness of the whole enterprise of war in which they are acting out their parts like puppets whose strings are in the Sarkar's hands, dawns upon them. Havildar Lachman Singh's outburst: 'What has all about the guns got to do with men?. I hate to have to order you to your death. But what can I do? This is our Destiny, since we took the oath of service to the Sarkar.' ({Across}, 148) echoes the general feeling of helplessness. Anand successfully captures the erratic frenzy of the atmosphere charged with the grim confusion of war. Movement of troops, forward march, hours of waiting in the trenches, firing of guns aimlessly, withdrawal and reversal – things happen to the soldiers who are no better
than pawns in a game of chess. Kirpu, an old soldier rightly explains the situation when he says: "the master asks the dogs to go hunting when they are dying and they must go" (*Across*, 160-61). The power of regimented imperialism is for those within its control, complete and unquestionable.

It is a harrowing experience for Lalu to see all his friends and associates fall victims to the violence of war. Daddy Dhanoo, his godfather is drowned in the communication trenches, Havildar Lachman Singh, his guardian and well-wisher are shot dead. Uncle Kirpu, his closest confidant kills himself and the tall lemur-like Hanumanth Singh is shot dead for having refused to serve the "dirty" Sarkar. Lalu is completely demoralized. He finds no justice in the ways of the Sarkar or indifferent God. He wonders how the Sarkar supposed to be "saner and wiser than the ordinary people over whom they ruled could be engaged in a war in which men were being killed and wounded and houses shattered" (*Across*, 93). Lalu even reproaches himself for his predilection for the fashionable life. Lalu who has always believed in man's capacity to mould his destiny begins to resign himself to the power of fate. Totally bewildered by the chaotic situation in which no law either physical, moral or cosmic seems to function. He asks: 'Why is it that men like Kirpu. Dhanoo and Lachman who were so good should have suffered and died when I a wretch am alive?" (*Across*, 255). A sense of futility and
emptiness engulfs Lalu extinguishing his innate enthusiasm and optimism. Lalu who has always ridiculed the peasants' faith in fate. begins to wonder about his own kismet faced with an impending threat of death. Amidst all this, Lalu still retains his strong will to live. He hopes that "he might be saved and he wanted to believe that he would be..." (Across, 319). Towards the end of the novel, Lalu is shot and taken as a prisoner of war. "He resigns himself to the mercy of his captors..." (Across, 322).

In its historical portrayal of war, Anand's novel questions not only colonial involvement in an imperial war but also the power of the political and cultural "centre" which controls life at the "edge." In doing so, Across the Black Waters dispenses with the very idea of centrality which gives the imperial political structure its authority, and reveals a wider field of division and contestation within which the British power is neither unchallenged nor unlimited. The myth of the Whiteman's supremacy is exploded as soldiers meet and clash in the battlefield, totally oblivious of the fact of the colour of one's skin. Faced with Death the leveller, the barriers of colour and caste seem to collapse merging all humanity into one class of helpless victims, each fighting for one's own survival.

Anand invokes a number of myths-personal and national-associated with World War I which gained circulation in the colonies. There was, for instance, the national myth that this war would be the turning point in India's struggle for freedom. But the war, despite all its suggestions of
change and promises of liberalisation, does nothing to dissolve the political tension in colonies. At the personal level, the landless peasants are actually commissioned to the army, and despatched to the distant battlefields on the condition that they would receive cash awards and land prizes for their services. The Indian involvement in the imperial war of Britain was thus inspired by the possibility of change and promises of release, both at the national and personal levels. And breaking of these promises and ensuing disillusionment constitute the content of the third novel in this *Trilogy*.

*The Sword and the Sickle* is an overtly political novel dealing explicitly with the Indian resentment towards the British colonial rule. The sickle symbolizes the vast mass of India’s labour force—the peasants, the untouchables, the proletariat and the sword stands for the autocratic power of the authorities constantly trying to subjugate individual’s autonomy. The novel elaborates the conflict between the two, and highlights the role of the peasant-revolutionary in this movement for the liberation of the masses.

The plot of *The Sword and the Sickle* follows directly from *The Village and Across the Black Waters*. After five years of exile as a prisoner of war, Lalu returns to India with a hope of getting official recognition and the promised gift of land. The government dismisses him with a paltry pension and Lalu feels betrayed. He is dismissed summarily without
honour or recognition for the wasted years spent fighting for the indifferent Sarkar. Lalu's bitterness is further intensified when he returns to the village of Nandpur and finds his family shattered and dispossessed.

Lalu's village too bears unmistakably the marks of suffering it lived through during the long-drawn war. The war has had disastrous effects on the entire peasantry. The Sarkar "took away crores of rupees as free gifts and loans from the country to support their war" (*The Sword*, 63). As a consequence, the village economy is left in ruins. Several villagers are rendered landless and homeless. Some of them turned into refugees and migrated to towns while others lived in abject poverty.

Human suffering having reached unprecedented heights, the stage is all set for revolution. The peasants are no longer taking their suffering as their *kismet* but are getting ready to organize themselves into groups in order to oppose the unjust government. Lalu plunges into the people's politics. Revolution is inevitable – but what kind of revolution? This is the question that bothers Lalu.

The novel deals with Lalu's exposure to a welter of political ideologies and the consequent confusion in the hero's mind. The various revolutionaries Lalu meets are Prof. Verma, a thoroughly mixed-up intellectual preaching Marxism and practising elitism. Count Ramphal Singh who calls himself a socialist and incites peasants to revolt but fails to offer any clear-cut plan
of action Comrade Sarshar, the Communist, who urges organized violent
action and Mahatma Gandhi with his creed of non-violence. Lalu fails to
associate himself with any of these leaders. As a spirited Punjabi youth
he is drawn towards action and retaliation but in moments of reflection he
disapproves of violence. Lalu is constantly oscillating between the two
alternatives. The question of leaders and their relationship to masses
forms the substratum of the social formations depicted in this novel.

Lalu is however, taken up by the Count and initiated into the radical
movement of peasants, the latter organizes an agitation as a part of anti-
feudalist revolution. This movement has its historical counterpart in the
Kisan Sabha movement of the forties. The movement fails as none of the
revolutionaries has the vision or foresight required of a leader. The Count
and Lalu are arrested, and in the isolation of caged imprisonment Lalu
reviews his experiences in the village, during war and the subsequent
revolutionary activity, in an attempt to make sense of the chaos of
contemporary life. He asks himself thus:

> After seeking to grapple with my own destiny and
> that of others with a devotion even like that of the
> religious devotee Dayal Singh – why is it that I have
> ended up in this reeking hell, scratching my head
> tossing restlessly from side to side?... (The
> Sword, 381)
In a moment of introspection, he realizes the gap that existed between the leaders and their masses and sees for himself where things went wrong. He suddenly becomes aware of the disparity between the elite discourse of revolution that he espoused along with the Count and Prof. Verma so far, and the truly autonomous nature of the peasant insurgent consciousness. He realizes the importance of the notion of community which "gives to peasant insurgency its fundamental social character." Then he understands that revolution is "a need of togetherness." Lalu's hopeful assertion at the end:

Now is the time to learn the ways of struggle... Now is the time to live in and through the struggle... Now is the time to change the world, to fight for life and happiness... *(The Sword, 385)*

It further indicates that Lalu's present failure is only a step towards the eventual success of the peasantry.

In his personal life too, Lalu makes a definite progress: He marries Maya the landlord's daughter whom he loved and adored even as a village lad, whose memory stayed with him during the war and who in the intervening years has been widowed. Maya, whose name symbolizes illusion, has always eluded Lalu's imagination. In marrying Maya, Lalu bridges the gap that marked the class-divide, but the real reconciliation comes only with the arrival of their child in whom the twain—the rich and the poor—really
meet. Although the novel is structured around the failure of the popular revolutionary movement of the time, its emphasis is finally on the possibilities for transforming and remaking life in India.

Of the many political negotiations performed in Anand's *Trilogy*, one approach stands out, partly because it attempts to constitute an autonomous type of popular discourse from peasant's viewpoint, and partly because it involves noticeably new political interpretations and tactics. This negotiation involves an interrogation of class and nationality through a double set of relationships namely between peasant uprisings and anticolonial agitation and between class-consciousness and the organization of a nation. Anand presents the empowerment of the peasants and the labour as the pre-condition for real anti-colonial action and as the pre-condition for the growth of the independent nation. Subaltern consciousness as emergent consciousness is one of the main themes of the *Trilogy*, and Anand presents the saga of India's struggle for independence not through the conventional nationalist bourgeois discourse, but through an alternative perspective foregrounding worker's struggle over and against the reformism and gradualism of Indian Anglophile political leaders. Anand's work reminds the readers of the many sacrifices made by workers and peasants of their strength and especially of their self-taught radicalism – a radicalism born and bred in the suffering of the people.
The Trilogy of Anand is a valuable locus for studying the interplay of village, ethnic unit, nation-state and language in the configuration of identity in India. It offers a macrocosmic view of Indian society and recreates Indian life in all its nuances. Jack Lindsay has made an interesting observation in this regard in his article, “Mulk Raj Anand”. He observes thus:

For the first time in his [Anand's] work India is defined on a grand scale. True Indian life and culture are so vast and various that no single writer could possibly deal with all these aspects and complexities. But Anand tackles fundamental aspects of the Indian situation, sets these on a broad canvas and builds up an epical picture of India in the throes of developing into the modern world…(2)

This work is an epic of human suffering and a tale of a nation’s rebirth. In portraying the growth of the peasant hero into a revolutionary leader, Anand suggests that the ultimate success of a nation's freedom struggle depends upon the realization of autonomy of all sections within its social mosaic.

In post-colonial writing, the novels of nation and nation-formation generally yield place to the novels of disillusionment as writers confront the failure of their newly independent states. The writers turn their invective against national governments which failed to fulfil the promise
they held out at the time of independence movement. George Lamming's *A Season of Adventure* (1960), Raja Rao's *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965), Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966), V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Man* (1967), Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1969), Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* (1977), exemplify this trend. Anand does not address specific political issues of post-independence India after *The Private Life*, but gets engaged in charting his own life in a massive fictional autobiography planned in seven volumes and begun in 1951 with *Seven Summers*. Haydn Moore Williams, commenting on this shift in Anand’s fictional oeuvre, observes that with the disappearance of the British ‘enemy' Anand appears to have been left without a subject. Cowasjee agrees with this view and adds thus:

> As a Marxist he [Anand] should have attacked the bourgeois Government that replaced the British as zealously and as incisively as he had attacked the British administration in India.” (153)

He further argues that Anand’s close association with Jawaharlal Nehru and the Congress party may have prevented him from undertaking a critique of the contemporary political situation. He holds that Anand turns to non-political themes such as exploitation of women in the Hindu society *Gauri* and the bravery of an individual in war as described in *Death of a Hero*. 


While it is disappointing that Anand did not choose to write about the Nehruvian era, or even something like the excesses of the Emergency in Mrs. Gandhi's period, but it is not fair to judge a writer by what he has not attempted to do. *Death of a Hero* is an overtly political novel dealing with an immediate political issue namely the Pakistani invasion of Kashmir. If this short novel lacks the complexity or richness of his earlier works it is not because it is in anyway less political but on account of its political immediacy. Whenever Anand dealt with contemporary political events, his focus was always on the larger political movements, accompanying social transitions, and their impact on human lives. But in *Death of a Hero* he is specifically referring to the 1965 situation in Indo-Pakistani relationships. While in the earlier works Anand was offering an alternative history, largely subaltern historiography and reiterated the official version of history with something like a polemic zeal. The document therefore becomes a propaganda piece and the text is technically too poorly crafted.

Nation as a unifying construct still occupies the centre of Anand's fictional universe. In *Death of a Hero* the geographical unity of the nation and the issue of national boundaries figure prominently. Nationality therefore becomes more important than narrow communal affiliations. It is important, however, to note that Anand's narratives of nation do not gloss over the internal contradictions that split the nation from within. 'Nation',
as it emerges in Anand's work is not a simple harmonious formation, but a complex political and cultural formulation wherein vast differences of gender, class, caste and community constantly frustrate the attempts of unification and homogenization. Anand thus writes the nation in all its ambivalence and complexity into his narratives articulating the essential heterogeneity that characterizes the process of nation-formation.