The problems of bonded class are one of the painful aspects of Indian society. It expresses the central conflict between tradition and modernity in a more localized sense. In the last couple of decades, new theoretical approaches have emerged to account for the provenance of the discourses of the bonded society and hitherto marginalized groups. Post colonial theorists hold that imperialism is immediate cause for the creation of bonded society. It is not only a territorial and economic expansionist enterprise but inevitably a subject-constituting project. To make the place of the bonded subject visible, therefore becomes an important critical practice in the post colonial situation.

Both *The Big Heart* and *Death of a Hero* have the same track and follow the same direction. They are works of exuberant imagination exemplifying the excellence of Humanism. The Hero of *The Big Heart*, Ananta, and the protagonist of *Death of a Hero*, Maqbool Sherwani are Christ-like figures who suffer greatly for their noble causes and ultimately sacrifice their lives in order to redeem their society from falling into the abyss of ignorance and social evils. Their struggle for the spread of humanism does not end with their death. In fact, they become more powerful in their mission after their death and so their message, after their death, spreads like a shaft of light across the land.
The Big Heart published in 1945, has been acclaimed as a great novel by Margaret Berry, K.N. Sinha and M.K. Naik in their respective books on Anand. It deals with a small community of coppersmiths of Amritsar, who suddenly come face to face with machine civilization. Seth Gokul Chand, the chandri of utensil sellers' community, belonging to Kasera brotherhood establishes a factory in partnership with Lala Murli Dhar, the headman of the "thathiar" coppersmith brotherhood. Lala Murli Dhar's ambition to elevate his family of the thathiair caste to the higher sub-caste of Kaseras, impels him to ignore the welfare of his own community. Consequently most of the thathiair youths are not absorbed by the new factory. As the factory begins to produce most of the essential items required by the villagers, the thathiars fail to get piece-work for making utensils. They are thrown out of their hereditary profession and are rendered jobless. Starvation stares them in the face. The machine deprives them of their daily bread. Into this community Ananta, the coppersmith, the man with the big heart like Ratan in Coolie, steps in.

He has been to Bombay and Ahmedabad and has participated in the Gandhian freedom struggle in those places before his return to his native place, the Billimaran Lane of Amritsar. He brings with him Janki, a young widow, whom he loves and who is now slowly dying of tuberculosis. He has little respect for tradition. He has lived with Janki in Bombay and she is here with him in spite of all the things that people say against them. In
Amritsar, Ananta resumes his hereditary trade, but like most people of his thathiar brotherhood, he has difficulty in making a living. He has had glimpses of labour movements and trade unionist activities in Bombay and Ahmedabad. As he too is refused a job in the factory of Gokul Chand, he readily identifies himself with his dispossessed brothers, and he makes it his sole aim in life to help them out of their predicament. Ananta knows that revolution will be a far cry unless coppersmiths learn to unite. So he pleads for organized action and tries to bring together all the jobless coppersmiths into a union, so that they can in a fruitful manner bargain for their rights from the profiteers. In this endeavour he wins the support of a poet and scholar named Puran Singh Bhagat. But his efforts are thrown into disarray by the opposition he faces from men like Professor Mejid, Satyapal, an angry young student leader who preaches violent methods for the emancipation of the coppersmiths, Mahasha Hans Raj, an anti-machine Arya Samajist and also from his own men who are emotionally and mentally gripped by the fear of opposing the Karma and also skeptical of his motives. Many of his own friends fail to accept his ideas as his living openly with the young widow, Janki, is not acceptable to them. His open liaison with her deprives him of the moral hold expected of a leader in a tradition-bound society.

Though Ananta faces many hardships due to the introduction of the machine, he does not become blind to facts. He recognizes the reined
horse-power of the machine as indispensable for modernization and progress. So he makes a lovely comparison between machines and dowry while talking to Janki:

Like the fashionable Vilayati bride we have accepted, we ought to accept the dowry of machines she has brought, and make use of them, provided we keep our hearts and become the masters… *(Big, 40)*

He also agrees with the poet Puran Singh Bhagat that if one has the "controlling switch" of the machine in one’s hand, one can make the machine a slave rather than one’s master.

In the afternoon of that single day in the life of Ananta described in the novel, Lala Murli Dhar’s grandson Nikha’s marriage takes place. The Lala’s desire to assimilate his family with the superior caste of kaseras urges him to insist that Gokul Chand and other prominent kaseras should visit his home and honour his grandson’s marriage. At the betrothal ceremony he offers his guests only soda water so that the kaseras may not be embarrassed in having to drink sherbat or whay made in the house of his thatiard brethren, whose lower caste status is looked down upon by the various exalted Hindu brotherhoods. Lata Mudi Dhar’s hope that soon his family will be taken into the kaser class, makes him proud and turns him arrogant towards his old community of coppersmiths and he invites only a few among them for the ceremony. So his community
boycotts this ceremony as a protest and at the critical moment, as a symbol of apology, the old man has to put his turban at the feet of the elders of the bride to save the ceremony.

In the evening, the hot blooded thathiar youth, Ralia, whose hatred for the machine has been mainly due to the fact that he does not get employment in the factory, after hearing the fiery speeches inciting people to violence, made by the student leader Satyapal and Professor Mejid in front of the factory gate, breaks open the factory and starts hammering and destroying the machines, shouting abuses at them, with uncontrollable madness and fury. The police Sub-Inspector comes upon the scene a bit too late. When all others are helplessly watching the wanton destruction Ralia is carrying on, Ananta takes courage and tries to appeal to his sense. In the struggle that follows, Ralia strikes Ananta's head against a broken machine and kills him. Thus, in the very process of helping his brethren, Ananta, the defender of machines, is crushed between the machine and the oppressed craftsman. The Poet, Puran Singh Bhagat, appears on the tragic scene and lectures to Janki on the death of the old order and the birth of the new for which Ananta has lived and died. The poet extracts a moral from the catastrophic end of Ananta:

All stories end in death, Janki, but, childing, even if one is given a short life it becomes shorter if it is guarded selfishly. On the other hand, think of the
beauty, the richness and the joy of living with others, of helping others...(Big, 229)

In a letter to Saros Cowasjee, dated Nov. 1971, Mulk Raj Anand stated the purpose of writing this novel:

I Wrote this novel at the end of World War II in London when the machines of Western Civilization had nearly destroyed the world. I was convinced that if India also went the same way, after freedom, without controlling the machine, but allowed it to become instrument of exploitation, then we would also produce the same horrors...! was thinking of Gandhi's natural rejection of machine. I wanted to show that though we can't reject the machine altogether, we have to control it, as a driver controls a railway engine...(121)

The letter clearly reflects Anand's attitude to the machine. He wants India to be industrialised but not at the expense of traditional pieties. The machine in Anand's fiction is a double-edged sword. Wide and rapid industrialization is one side of the sword that can affect society adversely and cut the throat of village artisans through unemployment and exploitation. At the same time total rejection of the machine is the other side of the sword that can jeopardise the growth and necessary modernisation of the nation.

Anand, according to the above mentioned letter, had seen in the English midlands the smoking towns when he had gone to Derbyshire to meet
D.H. Lawrence. He had experienced the misery, the tortures and the gray squalor of the lives of the coal miners in contrast to the vast estates of the Sitwells, when he was Osbert Sitwell's guest for a weekend. He recalled Rimbaud's disgust at the sordidness of the big heaps of towns built on machine shops. He had known the transformation of Amritsar, 'the ocean of nectar', the holy city of the Sikhs, into sweet shops in almost every lane. The emancipated hillmen coming from the beautiful Kangra valley and the widows earning a pittance on the drains of narrow alleys from little businessmen seemed to him to be pictures of despair. The further complication of capital investment churning their lives up portended a disaster worse than any invasion of the walled city by northern hordes.

The influx of cheap British and non-British machine-made goods into India and the transportational advancement which made it possible for these goods to reach the interior villages forced thousands of village artisans to unemployment. The newly started factories did not care to absorb the village artisans and so they found no source of survival. Anand, though wanted India to be industrialized, did not want modern industries to rob the meagre resources of village artisans like coppersmiths, blacksmiths, weavers and tanner. He wanted the modern industries to give alternative employment to the coppersmiths and other village artisans so that the introduction of the machine will not frighten them and drag them to poverty and misery. In short, The Big Heart is a
trumpet of a prophecy: if the industrial policy-makers of the nation introduce machine without sound considerations, the blessings of the machine will turn into curses, the cures expected from it will fail to cure and the future of the nation will then be dismal indeed.

The setting of the novel Billimaran or the Cat-Killer's Lane - exposes the conflict between the East and the West, tradition and modernity, industrialization and the conventional way of life:

It must be remembered, however that Billimaran is not a blind alley. Apart from the usual mouth, which even a 'cul-de-sac' keeps open, it has another which makes it really like a two-headed snake. With one head, it looks towards the ancient market, where the beautiful copper, brass, silver and bronze utensils made in the lane are sold by dealers called *Kaseras*, hence called the Bazar Kaserian. With the other it wriggles out towards the new Ironmongers' Bazar, where screws and bolts and nails and locks are sold and which merges into the Book-seller's mart, the cigarette shops and the Post Office replete with the spirit of modern times…(*Big*, 16-17)

The iron-mongers' Bazar represents the machine, and thus modernity, while the Bazar Kaserian typifies tradition. The items available in the Bazar Kaserian - copper, brass, silver and bronze utensils - are made by village artisans. They are mainly meant for use in kitchen and have a homely touch. But the items sold in Ironmongers' Bazar are full of sophistication. They - 'screws and bolts and nails and locks' (*Big*, 118)
evoke a frightening picture of mechanisation. They are tools symbols, of the capitalists' oppression, suppression, imprisonment and exploitation of the proletariat.

Anand, while appreciating the loveliness and simplicity of tradition, does not ignore the merit of modernity, its potentiality to provide adequate structures to society. Society should move the world and also should move with the world. To move the world, good aspects of tradition are important; to move with the world, acceptance of modernity is indispensable. Though the author and his spokesmen Ananta and the poet, Puran Singh Bhagat, know the debilitating aspects of industrialism and the advantages of the old way of life, they realise that the old order is obsolete in a country on the verge of a gigantic social, economic and political change. The machines, may oppress the workers, but it is necessary for the progress and prosperity of the nation. Perhaps, the solution to the exploitation of workers by the factory owners can be found in having well organized trade unions, which would fight for the welfare of the labour force. The workers should unite and form unions and with their collective strength, they must fight for their cause. As the hero of the novel, Ananta, tells his friends:

A living, heart-to-heart appropriation of "Vilayati fashions" is what is wanted. The coming of the machine in England, brothers, wrought as much havoc there, a hundred years ago, as it is doing in Hindustan. The bones of millions
were ground to dust by machines. Women and children were set to work for a few coppers, so Puran Singh Bhagat tells me - Angrezi woman and children, brothers. And there was such hunger as we see in our Hindustan today. The men of property were deaf to the cry of the victims of poverty.....But the working men of Vilayat themselves took their destiny in their own hands: and banded themselves into the new brotherhood of unions. At first they were persecuted and penalized by the employers, and the Sarkar, which was behind the employers. The men stuck together, and struggled and struggled, until today there are few working men and women in factories who are not members of the union. They bargain together for higher wages, shorter hours, against bad conditions, for holidays with pay, and defend their rights by strike action…

Just as Ananta wants the victims of industrialization in *The Big Heart*, Anand wants the Indian proletariat, to learn lessons from their counterpart in England, lessons which are sure to yield comfort and happiness.

Anand’s attitude to the machine is conveyed in the refrain of Ananta’s song:

This is the machine age, sons,
This is the machine age,
We are the men who will master it…(*Big*, 19)

Anand considers the machine as an indispensable vehicle for socio-economic transformation and is suspicious of people who oppose it
simply because it has come from the West. The wiser thing to do would be to accept it and master it and enjoy its benefits. Ananta, the hero of the novel is a crusador for the utilization of the machine for the general well-being of man. He is apprehensive about the capacity of his fellowmen in mastering the machine and thereby revolutionizing the social life. He says:

> When the *thathiars* begin to handle the machine, we shall...soon show them!....We need not to become slaves to the profiteers or the machine. We are men. We will make a Revolution…*(Big, 85)*

He repeats the idea more than once:

> I tell you the machine is in our midst already, there! And we have got to decide to go and work it rather than sulk…*(Big, 89)*

Ananta’s message to his brotherhood to have a right approach to the machine is not pleasing to the reactionaries. If one machine can do the work of fifty ordinary men, rejecting it is a sign of madness. If Japan and Germany were to have only people of the mental disposition of Ralia and the Arya Samajist Mahasha Hans Raj, could they become economic super-powers? The martyrdom of Ananta, the machineman, for the cause of the machine and modernization comes as an eye-opener to his community to realise the immense utility of the machine in ending their poverty.
Industrialization played almost a revolutionary role in the life of Indian people. It made the Indian economy more unified, cohesive and organic. It raised the tone of the economic life in India. Further, it gave birth to modern cities which became the centres of modern culture and increasing democratic social life and from which all progressive movements, social, political, and cultural, emanated. The establishment of modern industries, in addition, generated two important classes of the contemporary society, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. By the time Anand wrote *The Big Heart* there were more than 9,000 factories in India giving employment to about 17,00,000 workmen. No one can deny their role in national formation and their voice in the formulation of policies for the emerging nation of the Indian Republic.

The social critic in Mulk Raj Anand is seen in his spokesman Poet Puran Singh Bhagat, with something positive which can make country’s social life a source of happiness. The poet wants people to practise the true religion which would re-assert "man's dignity, reverence for his name and a pure love for man in all his strength and weakness, a limitless compassion for man, an unbounded love especially for the poor and the down trodden so that those who have been left to rot on the dusty roads can be raised from their dreaded position and given the 'izzat' which is theirs by the miracle of their birth in this world". (The Big, 149) He wants the Indian society to have confidence in the fact that by abandoning dead
habits and evil customs and shams, “there can emerge a new kind of brotherhood, a new sense of devotion like the BHAKTI which our saint, Kabir preached and practised”. (Big, 157) He insists on the need for drastic social change as he knows that “in this country only an overturning of the old social order will bring the healing balm of love among men, only a revolution will complete the reformation and the renaissance that is going on among us and produce the new community with a new morality in which, and through which, men can live creatively”. (Big, 158)

By living in accordance with the above quoted views of Poet Puran Singh Bhagat, every person can possess a big heart like the hero of the novel, Ananta, possessed. The greatness of poet Puran Singh Bhagat lies in the fact that his entire life is an unceasing plea for a big heart. Though the central theme of The Big Heart is the need for selective industrialization which will not prove disadvantageous to any section of society, the author also devotes some space in the novel to the evil of caste-system. The novelist efficiently knits together the theme of casteism with the main theme of the novel. The criticism of casteism in The Big Heart is mainly concerned with its evil effect on human relationship. While Untouchable and The Road, draw one’s attention on the relations between the untouchables and the high castes, The Big Heart points up the tensions within the high castes themselves whose sense of caste superiority spoils their interpersonal relations on the basis of equality. As the influence of
machine products has penetrated into Indian life, Lala Murli Dhar, the headman of the thathiar coppersmith brotherhood and kasera Gokul Chand, the chondri of utensil sellers' community of Amritsar undertake a joint venture.

The relations between these managing partners, expected to be cordial on account of pecuniary considerations, is strained because of caste feeling. Kaseras and thathiars are sub-castes of the Kshatriya community - the second highest in the hierarchy of castes. The orthodox Kaseras classified by megalomania look down upon the "lower orders" by the belief: "To Ram was given an arrow, to Sita a bow, and from them the truly noble order of Kshatriya Kaseras is descended - a belief which makes them think that their 'purity' would be defied by coming into contact with the sub-castes. To assert their superiority they refer to the thathiars with the epithet 'low'. The spiritual philistinism and insularity of caste-consciousness is reflected in every contact the Kaseras have, under unavoidable circumstances, with the thathiars. Soon the headman of the Kaseras, Gokul Chand, realises the risk of losing his own caste in opening "a new account book in partnership with people whom he considered to belong to a lower caste" (135), which in this case happens to be that of the thathiars:

He had been forced by the circumstances of the market, where there was little or no money in household utensils, to open a factory and take on
Government contracts. In order to assure the employment of skilled workers he had to choose and select, first, the boys from Murli’s family, who were highly skilled silversmiths, and then such other thathiar boys as had been to a technical school or were young enough to go to one and learn to handle machinery. Old Murli was the headman of the thathiar brotherhood. For this reason, he had given him shares in the factory on the same footing as to some of his own Kasera brethren. But he had never intended the partnership to involve eating and drinking with the low thathiars, or to be on intimate social terms with any member of this community. For though both the Kaseras and thathiars were Hindus of the Kshatriya, the second highest caste, they had kept distinct because the craftsmen, doing dirty, grimy, ill-paid work with their hands, had come to acquire a low professional status in Hindu society. Now he was on the horns of a dilemma, for his solidarity with his fellow partner in the factory, Murli was in conflict with his affiliations with the Kasera brotherhood. And all these and other fears and doubts tangled up inside him to make his face a knot of worry. (Big, 134)

Thus, The Big Heart deals with one aspect of casteism that has not received a significant consideration in either of the two novels, Untouchable and The Road, that is snobbishness. The caste snobbery among the upper-castes makes their social life filled with unnecessary hardships. The 'superior' sub-castes within a caste treat the 'lower' sub-
castes as untouchables. To dispel this ‘untouchability’ from the public eye, the lower sub-castes do anything on earth to cultivate friendship with the superior sub-castes. Lala Murli Dhar’s ridiculous insistence that Gokul Chand should attend the marriage of his grandson is only due to his desire to assimilate his family with the ‘superior’ caste of Kaseras through friendship and social intermingling. His proud feeling that his family has attained a ‘superior caste status’ makes him turn his back on his community of coppersmiths without actually establishing deep and intimate connections with the ‘superior’ Kaseras’ community. He insists on the presence of Gokul Chand at any cost at Nikha’s marriage with Kausalya, but he does not care to invite the members of his own brotherhood for the ceremony.

When the young men of the thathiar community come to know of this, they, under the leadership of Ananta, prevent the few rich thathiars that are invited for the marriage from attending it. The bride and her relatives now understand the attitude of Murli Dhar and his family to their community. The bride’s father, Lala Ram Saran and his brother Binde Saran protest. Their protests and in reaction to those protests the statements made by Lala Gokul Chand and the High Priest of the Arya Samaj are worth quoting:

‘If we had known this, Lala Murli Dhar’, said Lala Ram Saran, shocked, 'we wouldn't have stayed.
After all, if our thathiar brothers are not coming, how can we celebrate the ceremony?

'We will be turned out of the brotherhood if we don't honour our kith and kin with invitations on this sacred occasion', said Lala Binde Saran, echoing his brother's concern.

'I think', said Lala Gokul Chand, 'these folk from Jandiala are right. If you don't have the men of your own brotherhood, who will you have? The Kaseras are not coming. And if possible our visit here to-day must be regarded as secret.' 'We Arya Samajis have no such scruples, brother Gokul Chand', said the high priest in orange robes. 'We do not agree with the Orthodox Sanantani Hindus in keeping the old caste and sub-caste divisions. We have come here openly and I wish more of us had been informed.

We must form a new community based not on caste prejudice but the revival of the true ancient vedic religion…(Big, 161-162)

Lala Gokul Chand's fear of being expelled from his Kaseras community for attending the marriage of a thathiar and Lala Murli Dhar's ambition to attain the caste of Kaseras and the problems that accompany it are basically due to the perpetuation of the caste system and they could be avoided only if society is willing to abandon the old caste and sub-caste
divisions. What the High Priest of the *Arya Samaj* tells Gokul Chand is what the social critic in Mulk Raj Anand has to say to the caste fanatics.

The central split in *The Big Heart* is between those who believe in Fate and those who show defiance to such a concept. The fatalists like Bhago and Ananta's step-mother Karmo, resuscitating their belief in karma would humbly say: "We belong to suffering, sister. We belong to suffering! This life is not worth living! All we can do is to do some good deeds and prepare for the next…" (*Big*, 101) For Ananta and his friends, the doctrine of Fate is nonsensical:

>'Fate! Fate! Fate doesn't dictate anything. I beg you to stop this kind of talk, ohe brothers, all of you, students, Maulvis and Pandits!' shrieked Ananta, desperate with anger and futility. 'Ohe, come to your senses and let us call all our brotherhood together and resolve upon some course for our betterment. Men make of their own deeds, they make of their own character, good or bad; and they shape of their own Destiny! So come and make your own fate…' (*Big*, 205)

Ananta considers fatalism as a self-destructive, fiendish belief and a serious obstacle to human progress.

*The Big Heart* has many similarities with *Untouchable*. Anand's touching treatment of the complex Indian problem in just over two hundred pages is magnificent and a further marvel is that the action is limited to the
happenings of a single day as in *Untouchable*. Many writers who restrict the action to a short unit of time, deceive the readers by embracing the technique of flashbacks to surmount the limitations they have imposed on themselves. But Anand does not do so. As in *Untouchable*, so in this novel poet’s long utterance is boring, but significant in the articulation of Anand’s ambivalence towards the machine. *Untouchable* deals primarily with caste-problem. Though *The Big Heart* primarily does not deal with the caste problem, it devotes quite a few pages to the evils of the old caste and sub-caste divisions. The hero of *Untouchable*, Bakha and the hero of *The Big Heart*, Ananta are closely modelled after people Anand had known in his childhood. Anand writes to Sahos coharjee thus:

I remembered the innocence of the original of Ananta”, “when he would borrow money to buy me sweets as he took me to bathe in the tank of the Golden Temple. I recalled the way he cooked meat on the monthly holiday of 'Akashti' and fed all his friends. I even admired the way he would buy liquor from his hard labour as a coppersmith and defy the elders by distributing drunkenness all around. He was among the few semi-literates who thought that God was dead, but himself seemed to have become a kind of God…(*Big*, 122)

The Poet, Puran Singh Bhagat says of him: "I wish I had his courage, his love of action—even a little of his roguery". (*Big*, 22) Ananta’s compassion
for the poor and the helpless, well illustrated in the novel, and his natural
goodness easily observable in it, confirm the sincerity of his often
repeated words: "There is no talk of money, brothers; one must have a
big heart." (Big, 19) In fact, as Alastair Niven wrote, "The Big Heart is
saved from being an economic tract only by the vitality of its central
character Ananta, and the dramatic energy of its machine-wrecking
climax." (The Yoke of Pity, 81) Ananta is one of Anand's best realized
characters. According to Elizabeth Bowen, "Ananta is an outstanding
creation." (55) Anand portrays him thus:

For the rogue and scoundrel that he was to the elders of the
thathiar community, he was the idol of the youth of the
craft. Partly it was the contagious warmth exuded by his
well-knit body, the rounded proportions of a frame which
seemed to combine a tiger's fury with the casual dignity of
an animal who did not need to throw his weight about. Also,
there was the air of the rebel about him, the man who
worshipped no god and feared no mortal and had travelled
farther by train than anyone else in the neighbourhood. And
there was his large, expansive, generous manner, the open,
frank, hearty speech which endeared him to those whose
impulses were yet free from all restraint…. (Big, 53)

The Big Heart is perhaps, the most argumentative of Anand's novels.
Large portions of it have the tone of debate as different spokesmen
among the coppersmith brotherhood suggest alternatives for modern
India. It is also not free from exaggeration. Anand's 'moving' exposition of
poor men's plight in this novel, to a great extent makes dismal reading. In a typical incident, Ananta is overcome with annoyance at the sight of a begging family and mutters to the elder child about its refusal to sit when it begs, only to realise that "starvation had bent their spines till they were doubled up like circus clowns, only without the gift that excites laughter". (Big, 65) He is horrified by an unsufferable sense of futility, the inadequacy of one man's sympathy to "spread the balm of pity over the rotting flesh of the whole of Hindustan". (Big, 67)

Throughout The Big Heart, Anand discourages the people who are over-enthusiastic to turn the emerging nation into an industrial super-power without giving due weightage to the multifarious problems rapid industrialization can bring. Though the novel has elements of propaganda and exaggeration, they are assimilated in the artistic whole. "In no other novel has Anand so attempted to organize a whole social, economic, and political picture", writes Margaret Berry (49). There is no character in the novel who is totally deprived of soul. The complication of its plot, the dynamism of action, the excellence of characterisation, the authenticity of its moral vision and above all its human centrality are redeeming features powerful enough to withstand the charge of propaganda against it and make it a singular triumph.

Death of a Hero published in 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 patronsaint of secularism.

Maqbool, the hero of this novelette is a young poet of the National
Conference. In the late October of 1947, when the raiders from Pakistan
have advanced to Baramula, he flees to Srinagar to consult the leaders of
National Conference Volunteer Corps. They advise him to go back to
Baramula in order to rally the people to fight against the invaders. As he
gets near to Baramula, he becomes tired. So he spends the night in a
field making a cave out of some hay. His sound sleep there, 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 reconnoitre the position in Baramula. The cover, which the darkness
affords, will help him. So he crawls out of the hay stack. A shiver goes
down his spine as he realises that he may walk straight into the arms of
Pakistani sentry. 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 friend... *(Death, 47)*

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 ProPakistanis under the influence of his father and landlord of Baramula. So, after leaving the residence of the generous and good natured Muratib Ali, Maqbool goes towards the mansion of Ghulam Jilani in order to strengthen him from faltering and falling towards the ProPakistanis. When Maqbool enters the big old Kashmir 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 outside to arrest him.

The old woman takes him to Begum Sahib as she 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 **burqa** of Begum 'Sahib. It is an old strategem 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 the 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 a lock-up. After some hours three warders drag him out of 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 shot 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, Noor. It is written with words that weep and tears that speak and they 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 conscience, howsoever dim, is a great force, and is the real source of poetry. (*Death*, 125)

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: "Epitaph 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-existant 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 a representative of all religious fanatics. It is his fanaticism that makes him think that murdering the 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. (The Koran, 256)

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 a good life as the only religion makes him laugh at the way murderers engage in prayer. When he has entered Baramula guarded by invaders he 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, to the cover of some fishermen's huts, that these brutal men could be devoutly praying, though only the previous night, perhaps they had been looting and murdering…(Death, 47)

The best religion is the most tolerant. It is nothing but love towards God and man. People, like the invaders referred to above, 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 Kashmiris for their territorial gain. The result is fantastic. The religious fanatics abandon their independent stand for Kashmir and in no time they turn to Pro-Pakistanis and welcome the invaders as liberators and call the barbarism let loose by them a holy war for the 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 Peshawar 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!…("Death, 37"

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 the South. And we can connect up with our brethren in the Middle East and revive the glory of ancient Islamic democracy in a world ridden with unbelief!…("Death, 72")
To Ahmed Shah, the Pakistani invasion is a war of liberation. He considers it a historic event, thereby 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...(Death, 75-76)

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 a being whose existence no one is sure of. Nations built on religious fundamentalism justified the butchering of millions of political enemies in the name of God. For Maqbool, who has no belief in the 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…(Death, 22)

Maqbool does not succeed in his plan of rallying people to fight for the freedom of Kashmir, as a good many of his 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 fatalists 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 fatalistic neutralism and inaction while the invaders are ruthlessly carrying on terrorist activities, disturbing and destroying the peace and tranquillity. 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…(Death, 80)
Maqbool, like Ananta in *The Big Heart* believes that man is the maker of his own destiny. Therefore he protests against Begum Jilani’s fatalistic view of life by saying, “when death is opposed to life, then life must oppose death”…(80) 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:

> What can we do against such odds, I ask you! The salvation of our souls lies in the hand of Allah and his prophets. If we pray, perhaps Allah will hear our prayers…(88)

To the rationalistic and atheistic Maqbool, the belief in fate is an absurdity. He is pained 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 and 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… (*Death*, 53)

Therefore he laughs at the 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!” (Death, 89) 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 religion of fate went by the road, and the soul became alive?...(Death, 100)

From the discussion made thus far, it is evident that the main social criticism in Death of a Hero is directed against religious fanaticism which invariably poisons the noble ideals of secularism and fatalism which freezes one’s enthusiasm to struggle in one’s life. Along with this main concern, the author also introduces a subsidiary theme: brutality and ill-treatment of prisoners. It is the age-old story of man’s inhumanity to men. 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 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…(Death, 101)

Not only the soldiers but also his old friend and lawyer Ahmed Shah is among the gang of tormentors kicking and abusing him. Dazed by the
assault, Maqbool just watches his ex-friend, "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". (Death, 110) Unable to suffer the torture any more Maqbool shouts: "You can kill me without all this Why do you want to prolong the farce?". (Death, 112)

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 realised that there must be other insects about in the cell, possibly scorpions and rats, and 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." (Death, 105) 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 prisoners 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 a nation treats its prisoners is a 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 of torture for confession practised in India and rightly reported in newspapers is a fatal blow to India’s 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 Napolean or Alexander the Great. His heroism is founded on moral courage and love of humanity practised by Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi and 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 empire upon love; and to this day millions would die for Him (Quotations 36)

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 tormentors' 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 realise 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 judgement 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 of its valleys there has risen for centuries the anguish of torture... And we were trying to emerge from the oppression to liberate our mother, because we know her each aching cares you have come and fouled her! How could any of us stand by and not protest...(Death,114-115)

It is easy to draw in Maqbool's life and death a parallel with the life and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Maqbool was an admirer of Jesus Christ. He
told Salaama: \textit{"Jessuh Messih} was a real person and suffered for mankind -- was crucified!" \textit{(Death}, 39) Both Jesus Christ and Maqbool Sherwani protested against the 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 of Maqbool Sherwani tied to a wooden pole. It reminded them of \textit{"Yessuh Messih} on the cross". \textit{(Death}, 124) On the lapel of Maqbool's shirt his tormentors wrote the word "Kafir" to show his crime. On the wooden pole on which Christ was crucified, according to the traditional belief, his enemies wrote the letter I.N.R.I., representing the words, \textit{Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaerorum}, 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 for 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", \textit{(Death}, 95) it is easy to discover at least a mild echo of the Biblical statement about Christ: "He learned obedience in the school of suffering". \textit{(The Bible}: Hebrews, 5.8)
Death of a Hero is Anand’s twelfth novel. It appeared one year after the publication of another short novel, The Road. In Death of a Hero, 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 elaboration, in terms of historical perspective, situation and character. Deprived of this elaboration the narrative was bound to appear sketchy and superficial, and covered in a miasma of vagueness… (Mulk Raj Anand, 106)

Death of a Hero, however, is an important question of Indian novel. It has not been dated. Its voice still makes reverberations!