

Chapter 2

The Novels

Murugan—The Tiller appeared in 1927 with an introduction titled “A Novel of Indian Rural life,” and *Kandan, The Patriot* appeared in 1932 with a prelude titled “A Novel of New India in the Making.”

Venkataramani the writer excels and reaches his peak in these two novels. Both the novels capture and reflect the “impassioned and lofty spirit of the 1920’s” (Ramaswami 48). Venkataramani says:

I was perpetually testing the ways and means by which the Indian Village could be remodeled in the most scientific way to suit modern conditions of life without in any way impairing its fundamental ideals or economics. The main ideals and purposes must be the same as of old though its efficient functioning may be readapted to modern methods and needs. (*My Ashram Plan for Rural Uplift 2*)

Postcolonial readers identify postcolonial germinations in his novels. In both the novels city life is contrasted with village life. Ramaswami says, “Venkataramani’s main point is that, while city life is destructive and deceitful, village life is integral with our Indian traditions and culture and fundamentally healthful and good” (49).

In *Murugan—The Tiller*, the city is a metaphor for the colonizer's world while the village is a metaphor for the colonized world in its

pristine status prior to colonization and in its endangered status during the colonization period. In *Murugan—The Tiller*, Venkataramani wants to revive the Indian Village and shows how superior and peaceful village life is. He exemplifies it through the characters of Ramu and Murugan.

The city life, by metaphor the colonizer's life, is full of ambitions that lead to suffering, both physical and mental. The city dwellers suffer a psychological trauma due to the very nature of their life in the city. The city-bred people believe that they are superior to the country-bred. As a result, they disturb the peaceful life of the village and drive the villagers to follow the city dwellers' traditions and customs, which ultimately ruin both. At the end of the novel, Venkataramani shows all the characters in the novel acknowledging the superiority of the native culture and vowing to follow the simple life. Symbolically he shows the excellence of the culture, the tradition and the people of the colonized world.

In *Kandan, the Patriot* Venkataramani deals with the theme of rural uplift through the character of Mudaliar and his pannaials. He also pinpoints clearly the drawbacks of the educational system introduced in India by the British. The abolition of the toddy shop, one of the evils of the colonizer's society, is advocated. Whether it is an I.C.S. officer like Rangan or a Railway Station Master like Sundaram, according to Venkataramani, they will do no good to the

colonized people by working for the British Government. The government servants should resign their jobs and engage in the real work, that is, work for their own people's uplift.

In both his famous novels *Murugan—The Tiller* and *Kandan, The Patriot*, Venkataramani sets the rural-urban or colonized-colonizer divide as the main theme. In *Murugan—The Tiller*, the story opens with the name of the life-giving river Cauvery. Ramachandran (Ramu) appears grieving over his mother's death and unhappy because he has also failed in the B.A. examination. Murugan sees Ramu sobbing. Murugan, though uneducated, advises him: "Give up the Madras education, which has drained our little wealth, and settle down at the village and look after the lands as your forefathers did" (*Murugan* 5). Kedari, Ramu's friend, writes him a letter and counsels him not to waste his education by remaining in the village. Ramu decides to leave for Madras and complete his B.A. programme. Ramu, realizing how much he has to pay for his education, tells Murugan, "even knowledge Muruga, carries its own *kist* and cost of civilization . I am paying for civilization which keeps my stomach empty" (*Murugan* 13).

Kedari, an ambitious lawyer in Madras, is fastidious in the matter of dressing, because "he had already begun to perceive that fine dress had a fine effect upon the mind of the wearer and induced a distinct respect in the mind of the spectator" (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 15).

Not only is Ramu's village of Alavanti contrasted with Madras, but also the main characters of the respective places are. Ramu from Alavanti represents the simple village life whereas Kedari of Madras represents the sophisticated life style of the city and the city-dwellers, ambitious to become rich quickly. Kedari criticizes Ramu thus:

'Idealists like you and ignorant men like the masses, keep the rich always rich for ever. The realists get the cream of things while idealists do the preaching by day and night for simplicity and humility and don't get even water to wet the parched tongue or throat. ' (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 24)

Though Ramu and Kedari are good friends in the beginning Ramu's failure in the B.A. examination propels them in different directions. Ramu goes to Madras as invited to by Kedari. But, when they meet, they begin to realize that they can no longer live in the same room as their views of and approaches to life are diametrically opposite. Though Kedari does not accept Ramu's philosophy of life, he sincerely says: "But I am sure the gods have meant you—deep, silent and intensely moral—for something great. If excellence like yours—nobility, gentility and a gracious knowledge of life—does not meet with success as we know it, then successes are not the true rewards of real merit" (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 29).

Kedari arranges Ramu's marriage with Janaki. Both are happy at the arrangement. But Ramu later realizes that, without money, he cannot support his family. However, he is sure that, till he earns, Murugan can support his family by duly sending the profits of the land. Ramu finishes his examination. After a quarrel with his mother-in-law, taking his wife Janaki along with him, he goes to Alavanti. They lead a happy life. Janaki launches a social movement in the village and befriends Sita. But Ramu again fails in the B.A. examination while Kedari gets the first mark in the F.L. examination. Ramu, with his mere seven acres and one thousand rupees of debt, invites his mother-in-law to live with him as he considers it his duty to provide for her (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 61-64).

But nature frustrates all his plans. The monsoon is heavy and there is a flood in Alavanti, which destroys all his dreams. Meenakshi, his mother-in-law, uses this natural catastrophe and persuades Ramu to apply for a government job. Ramu yields to fate and he gets the post of a camp clerk at a salary of Rs.25 a month in the arid Cudappah District. He leases his fields and *tope* (horticultural garden) together to Murugan for a mere Rs.250 a year. He settles everything and promises everyone that he will return after three years to the village (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 67-73).

Now there is a great change in Ramu's life. In the village he was respected by everyone and, above all, he was a master. But the post of

camp clerk denies him his simple life and peace. Moreover he has to work with a difficult person like Cadell, the District Collector:

Mr. Cadell was a conscientious and hard-working Collector with a high sense of duty and a severe outlook on life which the study of classics had engendered in him, in addition to the traditions of the Indian Civil Service. He had the reputation of being a most difficult man to please and the camp clerkship fell vacant every quarter. (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 79)

Ramu's life is miserable. The Collector treats the camp clerk very harshly. He has to travel more than twenty-five days a month. He hardly spends time with his family. He has to swallow his pride and accept insults for the pleasure of receiving Rs.25 a month. In his close association with the Collector, he finds out how Indians are ill-treated. Ramu blames Cadell's "inhumanities on the traditions of the Service which started *viewing Indians as barbarians and as members of an inferior race waiting to be civilized*" [emphasis added] (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 80).

Ramu is contrasted with Murugan, who now represents village life. While Ramu is suffering and living alone and toiling for just Rs.25 a month in some distant district, Murugan is very peaceful, living happily with his family and also flourishing in terms of money earned. Here Venkataramani introduces one of the important themes of his

novel, namely, hired labour, which is very much a metaphor for the status of the colonized. Murugan tells his new friend Thoppai:

‘Look here, when I was a mere tiller of the soil like you, however kind the master be, and however hard-working I was, this field yielded but five *Kalams* of paddy. Last year it gave me ten and now it will yield twelve or thirteen. Nay I budget even for fifteen, to tell you frankly. *Nothing is so sinful as hired labour* [emphasis added]. It curses him that hires and him that is hired.’ (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 84-85)

Venkataramani, through Murugan, emphasizes how important it is for the tiller to possess the land he tills:

‘He who tills the soil has no interest in it. He is simply hired for the day and the job, though he is kept on for ever like this from one generation to another. . . . But he who owns it, cares not to till it himself for he owns more than he needs for his own wants. It is a pity and an evil thing.’ (*Murugan* 105)

Murugan writes to Ramu how his lands are flourishing. Tempted by Murugan’s words and tired of his wretched work, Ramu decides to leave for his village. But, as usual, his mother-in-law persuades him to change his mind. She advises him to sell his lands and continue in his job (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 99-1.03).

He sells his lands to Periyaswamy Iyar and the garden (*tope*) to Murugan. When Ramu leaves the village he feels a “strange liberation.” He can no longer live in the village. His connection with the village is totally cut off. He has to live for others. “A Sanyasin spirit seized him, a passionless ardour for work” (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 116).

Kedari in Madras City becomes an apprentice to B. Markandam Iyar, who had passed the B.L. examination only in third class. He also finds life difficult. He receives a very rough treatment from his senior. He receives his first brief from Periyaswamy Iyar, referred to him by Ramu. Kedari is very happy that he has received his first brief in the very first year of his apprenticeship. But he is hesitant to thank Ramu because of his ego (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 118-26). Cadell also suffers from ego. Even after his wife’s admonition, he hesitates to apologize to Ramu for having ill-treated him. Urban people always hesitate either to thank or to apologize to anyone who is below their rank (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 131). This ego or status syndrome is an apt metaphor for the attitude of the colonizer to the colonized.

In Ramu’s life there is a gradual progress. He is promoted to Deputy Tahsildar of Conjeevaram while Cadell becomes a Member of the Board of Revenue (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 137).

Murugan, until his association with the town-bred Thoppai, leads a simple life, satisfied with his work and finding happiness in

tilling the land. When he begins to earn more money, his character changes, largely because of associating with Thoppai's cousin, who owns a toddy shop. Influenced by Thoppai, Murugan accepts the idea of opening a toddy shop at Alavanti. Ponni, Murugan's wife, tries to bring him to his senses by listing the consequences, but it is in vain (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 138-40).

Kedari flourishes. His wife Kokilam points out the difference in the character of Kedari and Ramu thus: "You are always praising vice and wickedness, dear. It will lead us to trouble one day. You are just the reverse of your friend Ramu, whom you have so often described—(Venkataramani, *Murugan* 148). Kedari fails to recognize Ramu's help and has never expressed his gratitude to him for sending him his first brief.

Though Kedari refuses to admit the merit of Ramu, Ramu's higher official Cadell now recognizes his merit and recommends him to the Vice-Chancellor of Madras University, which has twice refused him a degree. Ramu deserves his promotion as Deputy Tahsildar because he has proposed a wonderful plan for rural reconstruction, which Cadell and the Governor accept. This is revealed in the conversation between Cadell and Ramu:

'I agree with your creed that in an agricultural country like India rural reconstruction is the primary thing—'

Which the British Government have neglected for over a century.'

'Yes, I know, but let me mend it under your inspiration. Let us make a beginning.' (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 155)

Ramu uses his authority for the common good and even persuades the higher officials to allow a grant of Rs.1 lakh for reconstructing the Dusi-Mamandur Lake. But Kedari uses his fame and money for acquiring a false prestige. Kokilam protests to Kedari: "But I quite distrust your life. It is false and uncertain"⁵ (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 166).

Kedari is ready to work for anyone for the sake of money whereas Ramu will work only for the common cause. He influences Cadell and H.E. the Governor and makes them accept his idea of renovating the Dusi-Mamandur Lake. It becomes the talk of the whole neighbourhood and Ramu's name becomes very famous:

Ramu worked still harder and consolidated his position both with the Government and with the people by his beneficent irrigation policy and whole-hearted devotion to rural reconstruction. He pressed into the labour of tank-renovation all classes of people including notorious hill gangs far and around who lived by plundering the poor people on the plains. (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 173)

Everyone appreciates Ramu's work. He is a living example to the people of the entire rural area. Ramu enjoys this kind of work rather than being a mere camp clerk. He finds soul satisfaction in serving the needy farmers.

The hard work yields fruits. As the tank is ready, the monsoon floods the river Palar and the lake is filled. The surplus water overflows and fills the connecting chain of small irrigation tanks. The renovation of the Dusi-Mamandur Lake has lit up the life of the farmers of over fifty-four villages. There is smile on every one's face as this storage of water assures good yield from their lands for two years. This work brings about a change even in the lives of the dacoits. They change themselves and turn happily to agriculture. Because of this splendid achievement, Ramu is given a new charge: Cadell feels that only Ramu can find out the root cause of and solve the problems posed by the Nagalapuram gang of dacoits to the Government (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 214-16).

Ramu's simplicity, his love for farmers, his analytical thinking, his love of hard work for the common cause elevate him from a simple camp clerk to the rank of a Special Officer to solve serious problems of the Government.

On the contrary, Kedari, despite losing the case of Murugan and Thoppai in the Trichy court, extorts his full fees. There is a series of successes in court for Kedari. The word *success* intoxicates him and

he starts aiming at higher pursuits like contesting for the Delhi Assembly. His envious seniors encourage him falsely. His wife cautions him about the financial burden involved in such ambitions. But he does not bother about it (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 202-07).

Ramu accepts the Government's offer after considerable hesitation. He consults higher officials and starts his work immediately. He formulates his plan and leaves for the Nagalapuram Hills. The experts oppose his plan. But Ramu believes "in taking the offensive immediately and understanding the gang at its headquarters" (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 217). After a hard trek in the mountain ranges, Ramu's party settles in a place to take rest. Within half an hour they are the captives of the dacoits. They are taken to the head of the dacoits (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 219-2 .1).

To the surprise of Ramu, Murugan is in the gang of the Nagalapuram dacoits. When he sees Ramu, Murugan prostrates himself before him and begs his pardon. Ramu cannot believe his eyes. He wants Murugan to explain why he is with the gang. Murugan narrates his story. As he had more money than he needed he did not till the land himself; influenced by Thoppai, he started a toddy shop. He tells Ramu:

This toddy shop ruined me immediately in the eye of the village and in the long run, my purse, my soul, my conscience, my industry, my thrift, my honesty, my safety

and everything precious in civic life—and lastly it has landed me amidst these wild but very kind men in hilly tracts pursued by wild beasts and by you—wilder men.⁵
(Venkataramani, *Murugan* 223)

Murugan prays Ramu to save him and the gang. The gang is not really wicked and asks him to show them the good path:

We are not wicked, we want to be good citizens. Show us the way and send us not to jails or track us to death as the hound does the hare. Save us—Swami. God has sent you here in this holy hour of dawn for our salvation.’
(Venkataramani, *Murugan* 223)

. Ramu’s love for farmers and the poor is activated. He comes up with a new plan. Murugan understands this and agrees to his plan. Thoppai and the Chieftain also accept his words. Ramu’s nature changes even the hearts of the dacoits and they agree to return to a simple crime-less life (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 226).

Kedari contests the Delhi elections and wins. But the fire of envy is raging in everyone. Even his senior Markandam Iyar is jealous of him. He cannot digest his junior mounting to such a high place in such a short period. He anticipates gladly that he will one day fall from the height. Since Kedari has been too successful in every activity Markandam Iyar plots secretly to have his election set aside. Besides, when Kedari asks him for financial help, he refuses to help him. The

city-bred people have no pity for people in distress and they cannot bear the success of others (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 234-35).

Kedari is certain that Markandam Iyar is playing a “deep game in which all the low and the high estate of man—the strength of the brute, the agility of the bird, and the brains of man, played in fine team to hit the ball into the goal” (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 236).

Kedari is terribly upset. He knows that there will be a terrible clash between Markandam Iyar and himself one day. But he does not expect it right then but only when he is about to reach the top and create a record. Here again Venkataramani compares the town-bred ambitious Kedari to the village-bred simple and humble Ramu. Both Kedari and Ramu attain a high rank in their chosen field. But the means of achieving the positions are different. Kedari achieves prominence through a corrupt way, whereas, in the case of Ramu, everything comes to him because of his straightforwardness, his hard work and his sympathy for the poor.

Everyone appreciates Ramu’s plan of helping the Nagalapuram dacoits to switch over to a normal life. The press, the public and Cadell are happy about Ramu’s plan. The narrator says: “His Excellency the Governor also was personally happy that he could, crown his quinquennium with some lasting deed of benefit to the poor, instead of merely keeping the administration going for the good

of the ambitious, the grasping and the rich” (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 243).

Amidst his busy work, Ramu comes to know about Kedari’s troubles. The newspapers flash Kedari’s corruption and his running away from his family. He has financial troubles also. He has a solid debt of Rs.20000/-. He has no counsellor. Even his friends and his former senior have become his enemies. His heart now yearns for a friend and counsellor. He then thinks of his former friend Ramu and decides to meet him and seek his pardon. So he leaves Madras and goes in search of Ramu, not knowing that Ramu is at Madras right then. While Kedari goes to see Ramu, Ramu comes to Kedari’s house to meet Kedari (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 245-46).

Kedari’s wife Kokilam recognizes Ramu, welcomes him into the house and talks about their misfortunes. She knows very well that Ramu will be their only redeemer. So she clings to him and requests him to help her family. Kedari now accepts the merit of Ramu and prostrates himself before Ramu and begs his pardon (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 248-51).

Ramu explains the ways of life and the nature of life to Kedari. He explains the cause of man’s despair:

It’s the easiest thing to do Kedari. Untwist the threads that have fallen now into a knot, patiently and steadily with a fixed eye. Begin it straight away. Do not labour for

more food, than you need for the day. Produce yourself the little you need. You have no right to enjoy the things which your own little fingers can't shape for your joy. It is a golden rule which will shed half your burden and misery and bring you much nearer God. Don't sweat for others. This selfish rule bears the most selfless fruits. Then you will have the leisure for the richest dreams and the most pacific joys of life. This is the first step in the flight. This is the first rugged hill in a range of seven. Beyond lies the valley where life is even with the Gods, passionless, painless, hungerless, full and alive, and clad in the triple light of cosmic peace, love and knowledge.'

(Venkataramani, *Murugan* 264-65)

Based on these ideals Ramu plans a settlement. Accordingly, three hundred families are settled at Meenakshipuram. They are "as joyous and active as birds building their nests" (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 277). Everyone works and they work for the pleasure of working. There is no difference among the people who work. Everyone feels equal. Therefore there is no room for jealousy or any kind of evil. Ramu mingles freely with everyone and shares every kind of labour. The new settlement is complete after three years of strenuous work. After a long and serious consideration Ramu feels that if people are financially independent and if they have some property through which

they can earn their livelihood, they will never be slaves to the rich.

Therefore he tells Kedari:

‘I give every one, male and female, child, youth, and old age, three acres of land and a garden site to build a cottage on. They go with the person forever under all stress and strife. This inheritance shall be impartible, inalienable and descendible by primogeniture. This will assure every one a modicum of economic independence and lay the foundations for peace and culture, a life truly and nobly lived. It will eliminate the many sided struggles that range now round the problem of food.’

(Venkataramani, *Mumgan* 281)

Kedari, who represents city-bred people, questions Ramu regarding the practical difficulties involved in implementing his ideals. But Ramu clarifies all his doubts and convinces him. Everyone who is involved in shaping Ramu and Kedari is given three acres of land in the new settlement. They also change their character, whoever they might have been, and crave for nothing more than a simple life and they find peace in the new settlement. Ramu rejects the post of District Collector offered to him for his service to the country and to the Government. He is more attached to the settlement. All the characters in the novel find peace only when they settle in Meenakshipuram (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 282-89).

Venkataramani shows not only the divide between the colonized and the colonizer but also the resistance of the colonized to the colonizer. Kedari, Murugan and Meenakshi find the colonizer's culture to be superior. So they shun the native culture and imitate the colonizer's culture. Their success in life is only temporary and at the end they fail, whereas Ramu and women characters like, Kokilam, Sita, Janaki and Ponni do not accept the colonizer's culture as superior and life giving. They withstand the temptation of the colonizer's culture and are successful in their life and they are appreciated by everyone.

As a child Ramu is sent to the English School, where he can learn the foreign tongue, as his mother wants him to be a Collector one day. But this is much against the wish of his father. His father wants him to learn only Sanskrit. Because of the influence of colonization the women of the village want their sons to rule the district with the foreign tongue. Ramu's mother does not think about the money involved in such a scheme. So, when Ramu spends his money on coffee clubs, she does not curtail it, but gives money raised by the sale of her jewels and remitted to him without even a night's delay (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 5). But all the hard-earned money is spent in vain as Ramu does not pass his B.A. examination. He settles in Madras and marries Janaki. To mobilize the extra money he needs to run the family in the city, he first leases and then sells all his

lands, which he possesses in his native village of Alavanti.

Colonization changes the character of the people and persuades them that if they live in a town, their life will prosper. But exactly the opposite happens in Ramu's life. He sells all the property which was the fruit of the hard labour of his forefathers, to lead a decent life in the city. But Ramu understands subsequently that only village life can provide peace to human beings. Therefore he rejects the offer of the post of District Collector and settles in Meenakshipuram.

Murugan, when he is a simple and hardworking peasant and tiller, is happy and his family flourishes. Ramu, because of Murugan's sincerity, leases his lands to him at a very cheap price. The monsoon is kind, the land flourishes, and the yield increases above his needs. Therefore Murugan becomes lazy and his friendship with Thoppai corrupts him. Though he hesitates a little he ultimately agrees to open a toddy shop at Alavanti, which has so far remained untouched by the evils of colonization. The opening of the toddy shop in the village siphons off the hard earned money of the labourers. It becomes the breeding house of all evils. The labourers of Periyasamy Iyar plot to riot, induced by the intoxication of the toddy. Both Murugan and Thoppai are arrested and are named accused number 1 and accused number 2. They lose all their hard-earned money because of the trial. Murugan becomes a pauper and is arrested and put in jail. When they are in jail, Murugan tells Thoppai:

Technically, Thoppai, we are innocent of rioting. But did we not in three years, starve the poor, rob the children of their food by vending drink to their fathers, stir up indirectly riots in the village between the tiller and the land-holder. You did it by your philosophic preaching at the drink shop hour in, hour out in the lucid interval between one pot and another. I did it by my own example in another way—how from a tiller, I became rich and the envy of all the *pallees* and *padayachees* of the village.’

(Venkataramani, *Murugan* 196)

He escapes from jail and joins the Nagalapuram dacoits and ultimately finds freedom only with Ramu’s help. He once again becomes a God-anointed tiller when he starts working in the new settlement at Meenakshipuram.

Ramu leaves for Madras for his education. He returns to the village after his course is over. Later he comes to know that he has failed in the B.A. examination. At the same time he also loses his mother. He decides to complete his B.A. by staying at Madras with Kedari. Even in the second attempt he fails in the B.A. examination. Therefore he plans to go back to Alavanti with his wife Janaki. His mother-in-law Meenakshi, who is very ambitious, does not allow him to stay in the village. She urges him to apply for a government job. He

receives an appointment as a camp clerk to the Collector of Cudappah District. But he finds out that it is a hard job:

Soon Ramu found out the hard nature of a clerkship under the very nose of the Collector in the hot and barren district of Cuddapah. Life was one uncomfortable journeying for him in the midst of loose canvas, tents, pegs, folded-chairs, tables and such sundries set in motion in bullock carts over county tracks generally during the nights. (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 80)

Ramu very rarely meets his wife. He goes home once a month. In the beginning he works only for the money and promptly sends it to his mother-in-law.

As Ramu is tired after three years of continuous service, he wants to return to the village life. Therefore he takes a decision and tells Janaki, "I am going to resign this petty, touring menial job and go back to my village. It is three years since I have had a bath in flowing water or even seen a running river. This arid waste is like myself. Like the Pennar, my life is one stretch of sand and no water, many months in the year" (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 99). But his firm resolve is broken by his mother-in-law's harsh words. She asks him to shed idealism and have the ambition of becoming a Deputy Collector. To achieve that height, one has to work hard at the initial stage. She orders him to follow this path and does not let him resign his job.

Ramu feels that he can never go back to his village and lead a simple life. He sells all his lands and his garden.

While he is about to leave his village, he washes his legs in the village tank. At the time he perceives a change in his character; “He felt a strange liberation. He lived no more for himself. He lived for the world. A Sanyasin spirit seized him, a passionless ardour for work” (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 116). Only with this spirit he is able to do wonders in his job. From camp clerk he is promoted to Deputy Tahsildar, from Deputy Tahsildar to Special Officer and from Special Officer to District Collector.

He finds his soul’s happiness only when he settles in Meenakshipuram. He also gives others—from Murugan to Cadell—a place at the new settlement and also helps them to enjoy real peace and happiness. Kedari, a close friend of Ramu's, though not brighter and more intelligent than Ramu, passes the B.A. examination. Then he joins the Law College. Because of his success in his studies, he feels that Ramu is inferior to him. This superiority complex separates them. Ramu leaves Kedari. Kedari does not bother much about it. He begins to feel false pride in everything. He has changed even his dressing habits and he feels proud about it.

Ambitious Kedari applies to Markandam Iyar to become his junior. Markandam Iyar suspects Kedari’s character but accepts his application:

By a delightful mixture of audacity, toadyism and threat—a combination against which all great men abjectly yield—and on an unexpressed understanding that he would play an active drum to the small but efficient virtues of his “boss,” Kedari was admitted as an apprentice into the office of Mr. B. Markandam Iyar in spite of the third class B.L. and the traditions of his office. (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 119)

Kedari marries Kokilam and hires a beautiful house. But he finds it difficult to lead a good life without money. Contrary to his expectations Iyar does not help him. It is only Ramu who refers Periyasamy Iyar of Alavanti to Kedari and thereby helps him to receive his first brief within the first year of his apprenticeship. But Kedari is not ready to acknowledge the help. His ego prevents him from expressing his gratitude to Ramu, a mere camp clerk. He feels that he deserves the case because he is more talented than others. He is very happy that he will become rich soon. “My reputation will go rippling wider and wider and bring me more men and more money—and more files will walk into my parlour” (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 126).

He learns how to keep his senior close to him. He can easily overcome any meek and simple character:

‘I protect him from many juvenile attacks and he is becoming more and more attached to me, in spite of his

chauffeur, clerks, friends, poor relations and other juniors. Conquest is simple for the brave, and impudent-minded. I have simply annexed myself to him [one] or the other way. I surround him. I don't allow others to go near him. Might is right. And the might of impudence is indeed very great—and very right. The meek shall never inherit the earth.' (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 148)

The character of Kedari is revealed very clearly here. Further he tells Kokilam that gratitude is a very weak virtue and if one always thinks about it, one can never flourish. As he happens to be successful at that time, his philosophy seems correct to him.

He becomes more popular and begins to earn more. Though he is in debt, he wants to buy a car, as it is a status symbol. He is just waiting for an opportunity. Just becoming popular in Madras does not satisfy Kedari. He aims higher. One day he tells his senior that he is going to contest for the Delhi Assembly. Iyar is shocked to hear that. But he hides his feeling and pretentiously encourages him to contest. He even guides him in how to bribe others and get their votes. Kedari, following the advice of Iyar, spends a lot of money for the election. He is in great financial trouble. But he is happy because he wins the election. Markandam Iyar cannot digest this. Therefore he plots secretly to have the election set aside. He succeeds as many people are against Kedari.

When Kedari is in great trouble it is Ramu who comes to his rescue. Ramu advises Kedari to stay with him in the new settlement and lead a simple and peaceful life. As Kedari has had very bad experiences, he understands the meaning of life and willingly joins Ramu in Meenakshipuram. He learns to forgive others. He forgives Iyar for the evils he did to him. He recommends Iyar to Ramu and gets him an allotment in the new settlement. Only at the end Kedari realizes that his own philosophy of life is wrong. He understands the way of Nature.

The women characters do not play a major role in the novel. They counsel their husbands whenever necessary. Kedari's wife Kokilam often checks him. But he explains his behaviour to her which, however, fails to convince her. She tells him: "You will rue all this one-day, dear. I feel it, though I am a woman. There is a God ruling even over the vakil world. But for Ramu's help, you would never have become a vakil. But for Ramu's letter, you would have never got your first brief—a big one" (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 150-51).

Her words come true. She listens to what her conscience tells her. She is also bold enough to talk about her feelings openly to her husband. She is sensible and longs only for a simple life rather than a posh one, which Kedari promises. Therefore she happily agrees to live in the new settlement.

Janaki, though she enjoys her stay at Alavanti, influenced by her mother, urges Ramu to leave the village and settle in Madras. Janaki does not have the power to take any decision. Her mother Meenakshi takes decisions on behalf of her daughter and her son-in-law. She never hesitates to use harsh words when she wants her son-in-law to act according to her wishes. Ramu pleads with his wife Janaki to support his decision of quitting the camp clerk's job. But Meenakshi overhears the talk and tells him in harsh words not to quit the job. Ramu has no other go and obeys her direction without any protest. However, at the end, Ramu names the new settlement Meenakshipuram as she was the reason for his growth and was an inspiration for him to attain the status of a Deputy Tahsildar.

Sita shares Ramu's ideal of renovating rural India. She easily befriends everyone. When she becomes the queen of Alavanti by inheriting a large property, she does not use it for herself alone. She openly tells the village folk that she will spend her money for renovation work in the village. She even persuades her brother, who is an engineer at Madras, to help her in renovating the village.

Ponni, the faithful wife of Murugan, counsels him now and again. But he does not listen to her. She even predicts that, if he maintains close association with Thoppai, he will ruin himself. Thoppai becomes the cause of his downfall and of his joining the Nagalapuram dacoits.

The women characters in the novel understand human nature. This is common to Kokilam, Janaki, Ponni and Mrs. Cadell. They are bold enough to open their hearts to their husbands and also openly criticize their misbehaviour and try to correct them.

Janaki, with rustic wonder, admires the pomp of town life. But Kokilam rightly comments, “But, dear Janaki, all this glitter covers a lot of ugly things within. You don’t know town life. This high life, false and showy, runs like a rot unseen within the flower” (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 255).

Another postcolonial feature in Venkataramani’s *Murugan - the Tiller* is opposing the educational system introduced by the British in India. Venkataramani longs to introduce again the traditional system of education with slight modifications.

The colonizers introduced a new system of education, which was totally contrary to the culture of India. It had many drawbacks. Venkataramani points them out in the course of the story.

Ramu fails in Economics. Kedari and others cannot believe that he has failed. Kedari, in his letter, writes: “Your failure and in Economics, too, is to me a puzzle. Probably you wrote above the head of the examiner” (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 9).

The alien education system did not bother about the creative sensitivity and originality of the students. It just demanded that they reproduce what was taught. The teachers tested only the memory

power and not the creative originality. Kedari, while commenting on receiving his medal for History, writes, “I hear that the history medal comes to me. You know that it was all a liberal cram of the notes of the professor who was the examiner. But our university honours nothing else. Your original studies in Economics got you not even a pass” (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 10).

Cadell, representing the British Government, asks the Vice-Chancellor of the Madras University how they failed such a bright man like Ramu in Economics. Ramu’s plan of renovating the Dusi-Mamandur Lake proves a success and many villages flourish consequently. This plan did not strike even persons who had passed the I.C.S. examination and who were serving as Collectors. Again and again the validity of the colonizer’s system of education introduced in India is questioned throughout the novel.

Ramu, while having a talk with Mr. Cadell and Mr. Craig, pinpoints the fault of the system thus:

The fault is you have shaped our education to serve a definite end, clerkship in Government. The higher aspects are ignored. The narrow gorge holds back the whole flood-water of youth. It stagnates behind and ferments. The Indian unrest is but this, widen the sluice and free the stagnant waters,—they will go down and fertilize the

plains not only of India but of the whole world.’

(Venkataramani, *Murugan* 136)

He urges reform in education. The students have to be trained for a better life than to be mere clerks. The system should encourage, appreciate and develop the originality of the students.

The colonizer invariably influenced every aspect of the life of the colonized, including their minds. Before colonization people lived happily in the village, satisfied with their simple life. But, after the colonization, people were attracted by the luxurious ways of life of the city. But, only much later, they realized that they had come to the city only to toil without hope and draw nectar in a sieve to adapt S.T. Coleridge’s words quoted, in Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve*, (Epigraph, n.pag.).

The British government did not try to satisfy every section of the society. For effective governance they used only the rich people, who were the local authorities and did not bother about the poor. Therefore the rich became richer and the poor became poorer. The poor had to live at the mercy of the rich. Therefore the rich *panniars* (landlords) exploited the poor tillers of the soil. One of the postcolonial features is opposing the exploitation of the poor/ rural people or the marginalized. Venkataramani deals with this concept in detail through the character of Mudaliar.

When a single person owns vast agricultural lands the poor people of the area become slaves to him. They work hard on empty stomachs whereas the *pannaiar* becomes rich and rules the poor. The *pannai* agents cheat their own people and they do not pay the wages promptly. They keep them waiting. Town creatures like Thoppai become intolerant of their behaviour and want to rebel. When Murugan tries to dissuade him, he does not accept his reasoning. “But a hungry stomach does not make a patient thinker. I can’t think of anything but arrears of wages and the hard work for the morrow with an empty stomach” (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 85).

Thoppai urges Murugan to become rich quickly. But Murugan is satisfied with what he has. Thoppai never tires and keeps urging Murugan, saying, “Labour in the field is not paying. Agriculture is a profession for the stupid and the poor” (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 145). In the town people make money very quickly. Therefore he wants Murugan to open a toddy shop at Alavanti. This toddy shop siphons off the hard-earned money of the poor. It also influences the poor people to engage in riots. Murugan and Thoppai are arrested, as they are the root cause of the riot. Murugan, when he is a tiller, is happy and leads a simple life. But when he earns more than his needs, he does not work but at the same time wants to become richer. Ramu corrects all these evils in the society by designing a reformation plan by which everyone can have only three acres of land and

everyone has to toil for food. As this plan cannot be implemented everywhere he tries it out in the new settlement.

Only the intellectual is appreciated as a successful person. Plain and simple persons are considered weak and not made for success in life. Ramu insists that this system of thinking should be changed. "Intellect is now worshipped as a fetish, and character and humane ideals are left into the virtuous keeping of the simple-minded as proper custodians" (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 279). Persons with tricky minds like Kedari and Markandam Iyar face ultimate failure in life, whereas a simple man like Ramu grows up gradually in name and fame and proves a grand success. A person who prefers to lead a simple life should not be underestimated as he/ she can render real service to the society.

The British Government did not directly control the rural people but used the shallow penetration method, which is the prototype of modern imperialism. Many villagers did not even see an Englishman in their life. The village people led a peaceful life, following faithfully their own culture. But the rich, who followed the alien culture, disturbed them. Therefore, even in remote villages, there was a clash between the colonizer/urban culture and the colonized/rural culture. As a result, the rural people faced psychological trauma and economic depression. Psychological trauma and economic depression are postcolonial features. Venkataramani anticipates such clashes and

expresses it through the main characters like Ramu, Murugan, and Kedari. Kedari follows the colonizer's culture. He too faces psychological trauma and economic depression as he imitates the wrong culture while living in India.

Ramu faces a dilemma over whether he should live in the village or in the city. Due to his education and the money spent on it, he can never live in peace in the village. He has lost his mother and also the money spent on his education. He expresses his grief by sobbing to Murugan, his tiller. Murugan advises him to stay on in Alavanti itself. But, influenced by the letter of Kedari, Ramu leaves for Madras. Once there, he cannot be happy. Seeing Kedari's success, he feels inferior. Therefore he leaves Kedari and takes his wife Janaki to Alavanti. Even there he cannot stay in peace for a long time. Meenakshi, his mother-in-law, nags him to apply for a government job, as life in the village will not be flourishing. He gets the job of a camp clerk and suffers mentally for long. But he overcomes this trauma by working like a *Sanyasin*. Once he attains that stage, he is able to concentrate on his work. Then there is a further growth and he begins to think about others and expresses his concern for the poor. After completing his mission of renovation of the Dusi-Mamandur Lake and of converting the Nagalapuram dacoits to normal life, he decides to enjoy peace of mind by living in the new settlement.

Kedari, from a simple B.L., ascends to the level of contesting the election to the Delhi Assembly. Because of his ambitious character he suffers a trauma, which ends only when he chooses a simple life in Meenakshipuram at the end. He joins as apprentice to Markandam Iyar and becomes a successful lawyer and wins many cases. His popularity rises. His excessive ambition draws him to Delhi. But his senior cannot tolerate his success. So he plots to set his election aside. He succeeds. Therefore Kedari becomes bankrupt and loses his image instantly. He loses all interest in his profession and, joining Ramu, he wants to lead a simple life at the new settlement.

Murugan starts his life as a simple tiller of the soil leading a peaceful life. But, motivated by Thoppai, he takes to rioting. He is arrested along with Thoppai and is put in jail. He spends all his wealth for the case. But he loses the case. Murugan, unable to bear the suffering in the jail, tells Thoppai:

I have forgotten in my later-day luxury, even the mild work of plaiting coconut leaves or roping coconut fibres. My palms are bruised with work and have not yet hardened—it is but a month; my muscles have grown tender with a decade of luxury. But I do the work with fortitude. But the jail wardens are cruel. They punish us for nothing and for the mere joy of it as a preventive and

playful measure . . . men are made into beasts.’

(Venkataramani, *Murugan* 194)

Murugan has to face physical and psychological trauma in the jail. He escapes from the jail. Leaving his family to suffer at Alavanti, he joins the Nagalapuram dacoits. Later, Ramu comes to his rescue and offers him peace of mind by giving him a place at the new settlement.

Before colonization, when the characters live in the village, they live with prestige and pride. But once they leave the village and come to the city they lose their self-esteem and they have to stoop to their superiors to satisfy them. The British considered the Indians uncivilized brutes. It is Mrs. Cadell who advises Cadell to invite Ramu and his wife for dinner to make up for the wrong done to him. Mr. Cadell explains the way of administration to his wife, “I should be laughed at and the administration would fall into contempt and chaos. The prestige of my class would go. Once we lose the reserve and the power of silence we are undone” (Venkataramani, *Murugan* 97).

The British fail to recognize that Indians too have prestige, pride and self-esteem. Ramu suffers a lot under the direct control of Cadell for three years. Only thereafter Cadell understands that Ramu has brilliance behind his simplicity. Ramu bears all the insults because of his salary, which feeds his wife and mother-in-law. Kedari is very careful and ambitious. He does everything to please his senior

Markandam Iyar. But, when Markandam sees the success of his junior, he waits for an opportunity to pull him down. Kedari acts according to the advice of Markandam and wins the election. But Markandam works underground and gets the election set aside on the ground of corruption. Kedari loses his money and his self-esteem due to this election. He regains the lost peace of mind only at Meenakshipuram by leading a simple life.

Murugan—The Tiller has fifty chapters and the story runs for twenty years at different places involving many characters, resulting in a multitude of actions and locales. Unlike *Murugan—The Tiller*, *Kandan, the Patriot* has only seventeen chapters and the duration of the action is just a week and the locales are only Akkur and Tranquebar, with a brief scene at Adyar (Madras).

After a day's hard work, people flock to the toddy shop at Akkur. Only there, there is no difference among the people. People of different castes and statuses meet there and engage in conversation. The novelist paints the scene very clearly, underlining the mentality of the people who come to the toddy shop.

Nanden, Mookan and Katteri are aged veterans who enjoy the drink, as it is cheap and easily available. Irullan, Karuppan and Irullappan are youngsters who are ready to rebel at any time and for any cause. The two groups are contrasted.

The Padayachi clan of Govindan, Pavadai and Nallan also march vigorously to the toddy shop but with averted faces as their consciences prick them. They are always ready to find fault with the other groups. Nochi, the *Talayari* of the village, is also present in the toddy shop.

The untouchables and the labourers of the land find joy only in taking a pot of toddy. To get their pleasure they will do anything. They keep their families starving and also plunder the small savings of their wives and spend it at the toddy shop. They also take pride in it. They beat their wives and children if they ask for their share of the money. So the toddy shop spoils the domestic peace at Akkur. The conversation between Irullan and Karuppan on how the former got money for his drink reveals this:

Well, Karuppa, how to find the money! I beat my wife till I got it.'

'How?'

'How? This way,' he brandished his brawny right hand stroking the air and said, 'till she gave up her secret treasure—the little silver anklet.'

The silver anklet of your dear boy, now no more!

'Yes, she treasured it that she might weep hours over it and do no work. I'll have no more of it, and the bother is over.' (Venkataramani, *Kandan, The Patriot* 9).

Irullappan even steals the golden necklace of a guest of Mudaliar's and sells it to the salesman of the toddy shop. Therefore the toddy shop at Akkur not only harms the family life of the village but also encourages all sorts of evils.

The other group is talking about how Mudaliar is becoming careless about his *pannai*. The people who are working in his *pannai* are starving while some strange men are feasting at the house. They anticipate some misfortune to the *pannai*. He is encouraged to do wrong deeds. He does not believe the people who really work for his *pannai*:

The *pannaials* and agents are in arrears of wages now for several months; good work is not rewarded but bad counsel fed with royal bounty. And the greedy official world, from a petty peon to the Collector, fatten ou him and they pat him on the back the wrong way. Already there's great discontent in the *pannai*. It would soon break into crime and arson. Hay-ricks and grain-heaps high as hillocks may catch fire in an angry moment and ungratefully burn to ashes.' (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 36)

Kandan checks their stream of thought and points out the evil in it. But though they are convinced for the moment, there is looting later.

One day, in the dark night, all people, young and old, men and women of two thousand families gather before the *pannai* granary and

request Chokalingam Mudaliar's mother to distribute the wages.

When she hesitates, they all loot the grain and set fire to the hay-ricks. No one is able to control the mob. The *pannaials* loot their own master's granary and they never feel any qualms about it. They also burn the toddy shop, which is the root cause of all the evils.

Everything is burnt to ashes. The pride of seven generations turns to ashes because of the irresponsibility of Chockalingam. The *pannaials* even say with happiness: "Let a new life spring from these ashes"

(Venkataramani, *Kandan* 152).

The downtrodden tillers of the soil work hard, steeped as they are in ignorance and poverty. But, when their stomach is kept empty for long, they become fierce and courageous and loot their master's treasure to fill their stomach. They feel happy about it and enjoy the loot.

The uneducated villagers are not cared for by the Government and by the government officials. Those who have passed the I.C.S. examination are faithful to the Government alone. Rajeswari Bai points this out to Rangaswami, "Work is everything. Talk, schemes, and wise words are of no use now; we have done it all enough these wasted years, and the country's call is for deeds, direct action at the very base of life, the village" (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 20). Rajee persuades Rangan to quit his Government job and join the national movement. But Rangan, representing the metropolitan society, speaks

for the Government and insists that nothing constructive can be done without the help of the Government.

Rajee is not convinced by Rangan's words and tells him that he is spending his life in futility: "It's a sin for an Indian to toil at the desk in these critical days when the making of a new India is going on before our very eyes under the glorious leadership of the greatest living man in the world" (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 22).

Rangan tries using his power to avoid *lathi* charges and bullet shots. He helps the freedom fighters in an indirect way. For this, he is transferred to Tanjore. Rajee again and again asks him to quit the Government job through which he can never do good to the people. Then they decide to take rest for a week at Tranquebar, as they consider it a very calm place (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 23-29).

They do not know about Kandan, their classmate, who is working for the common cause at Akkur. Kandan too passed the I.C.S. examination, but, when he was about to assume the Collectorship, he rejected the posting and started working for the nation. Venkataramani says: "Disappointed love in the pregnant hour of change destroyed the self and changed itself into the higher love for all beings" (*Kandan* 39). He easily mingles with the village people and gives them proper direction and motivates them to work for the nation.

In Shiyali too, the neighbouring village of Akkur, the people begin to think about freedom for the nation. One among them, who motivates the public, is a seventeen-year-old boy named Padma, the youngest son of Neelakshi. He gathers his schoolmates and organizes a huge procession against some ill-conceived act of the Government. The elders of the village, his mother and also the Headmaster of his school resent his action. The Headmaster shows his anger by removing his name from the selection list. This is a great disappointment to him and he feels that it is an injustice done to him. He also loses his image in the eyes of his friends. His mother and brothers start scolding him (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 151-56). Padma's brother Raghu tells his mother.

‘I should check him, mother!—and get a slap in the face! Already he is advising me to kick off my job and respond to the country’s call,—and that God would feed us all as he feeds the sparrow. He is an unruly colt, mother, though he looks so soft and speaks so soft. The blood of the rebel is in him.’ (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 52)

Padma cannot tolerate all these insults and slips into the Parcel Express, which takes him to Coleroon. He feels he is inferior to everyone and wants to vanish like the wind. The English try to suppress the youth of India by assaulting their psyche. Padma wants to drown himself in the sea “and the sea throw up as feed for the

vultures on the shore the body from which life had been taken out by the human vultures on the land” (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 58). But he drops that idea and wants to escape to Australia and come back as a grown up boy to change the educational system of India. As he changes his mind he gets into the Boat Mail, in which Rangan and Rajee are travelling. Padma meets them on the Mail and Rajee advises him to follow her and tells him that there is no use in flying from the mother country at the crucial time. While conversing with. Rajee, Padma tells her, “The whole order must undergo a change in the same hour or there’s no progress for a generation” (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 121). Padma joins them in working for the common cause.

Meanwhile, Sundaram, the Station Master of Akkur, is startled to see the No: 13 train coming on the wrong track and at the wrong time and colliding with the ballast train on the second line. Chockalinga Mudaliar, the owner of two thousand acres, is driving the train and is the cause of the collision. But he is not bothered about his action. Instead he says that it is natural and tells Sundaram that he is ready to share the silver coin with him if he sets everything right. Sundaram rings up to Mayavaram and reports the accident (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 123-30).

Saraswati, Sundaram’s wife, thinks this to be the right occasion to quit the railway job and work for the nation. “It was a turning point in her life. The static became the dynamic and she felt a fine release of

energy. The call of the country for work, for immediate work seemed to come to her in a flood” (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 126).

The collision is symbolic to Mudaliar. At the time of the collision, his granary is looted and his hay-ricks are set afire. The rioters do not spare the toddy-shop too. The Deputy Collector, Rangan, Rajee, Ponnann, and Padma everyone is present at Akkur. Everyone goes to Mudaliar’s house. They have an informal enquiry into the loot at the *paracheri*. While the Collector and the Deputy Collector are conducting the unofficial enquiry, Padma and Kandan hold a different view of the situation. Padma feels pity for the *paracheri*. He compares the affluent life of Mudaliar with that of the poor people who make Mudaliar richer by their hard work in his lands. Mudaliar spends the money carelessly and, to maintain his car alone, he shells out Rs.300. But if this amount is used for the poor people in the *paracheri*, wonders can be wrought (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 179-82). In this connection, Padma tells Kandan:

‘Three hundreds a month!’ Padma began a new line of thought. What a miracle you cannot achieve with this princely gift in the humble life of these *pariahsl* This *paracheri* can be changed into a paradise. You can work and feed on the most generous scale twenty families, or employ for ever twenty teachers to teach the way to live a decent life to these ignorant, little boys and girls in all

grades of dirt and disease, that now crowd round us wondering at the car. How long, sir, you think the system has been vicious like this?—Or will it endure for ever?’ (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 182-83)

Padma points out the defects in the existing system and says that these have to be corrected so that that everyone will be treated equal and everyone will enjoy freedom. Kandan approves of Padma’s view and says: “All I crave for is economic equality and no chance for one to exploit another” (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 183). Kandan advises Padma that young ones like him should work on the lines of tradition to change and perfect the social order so that the next generation will be very happy.

So Kandan, Rangan, Rajee, Sundaram, Saraswati, Ponnann and Padma join together and turn their mind to the common cause. Rangan decides to resign his job and Rajee tells Kandan, “The loss to the civil service has become a gain to true Service” (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 190).

Kandan also appreciates Rajee’s devotion to the nation, “How high-born ladies like you, fed in luxury, have answered to the call of the Mother and sacrificed everything! This is truly selfless and rare indeed” (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 190).

They decide to lead the life of *sanyasins* as they feel that it will enable them to serve the country better. Rajee tells Kandan:

The love of the Mother, Kanda, the grand passion for my country fills my being and floods my heart night and day, like the sea that ebbs and flows into the little creek at the mouth of the river. I must work for the freedom of my country first; for which I must have my own freedom. This is the most fateful time, now or never.'

(Venkataramani, *Kandan* 193)

Rangan is hesitant to join his friends' group and work for the nation, as he is a government servant. He has to be faithful to the government rather than his mother country. But Ponnann brings Rangan's transfer orders posting him as Assistant Settlement Officer in Palani. This removes his moral bond to the government and he responds to the urgent call of the country. Rangan starts his service to the country by persuading Mudaliar to join the freedom movement. Chockalinga Mudaliar consents. They discuss how they can serve the country; Rangan is for campaigning through words, whereas Kandan insists on engaging themselves in doing action. He tells Rangan that words have:

'not even cured its [India's] own slave-mind. Yoga is disciplined action. India has preached since the *Vedic* days the loftiest ideals, perfect as the Himalayan peaks, and left them there unrealized in deeds. In action, we are nowhere. That is why our life is so uneven, and we so low

and poor among the nations; stagnant, shallow pools, at different levels, what should have flowed into a glorious, fertilising river fed by eternal snows.’ (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 206)

Kandan also points out the reasons for the present state of the nation. Indians procrastinate over action and indulge in mere words. Therefore he urges immediate action and stresses that it is what the country needs. He also exhorts his friends that they should be ready to die while engaged in the country’s cause.

But Rangan says that words will do wonders in politics. Therefore he wants to start their movement by organizing a big meeting. He explains the psychological advantages of the meeting thus:

It pours courage into the quaking heart; crowd psychology creates a kind of courage, a new vision of life. In a great national movement like ours which has to cover the whole of a sub-continent, nothing like the spreading glory of words. Rajee, words and deeds are one. That is the highest concept.’ (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 210)

Everyone accepts Rangan’s idea as they are convinced by his talk and plan to have a meeting in Tranquebar itself. Rangan tells them that he will give wide publicity by announcing the news in the Madras newspapers.

The higher officials of Tanjore District are worried about the progress of the group led by Kandan. They are sure that the meeting will disturb the peace of the district. After studying the situation very closely they decide to bring in the Malabar Reserve Police. Mr. Lance, the Collector of Tanjore District, plans to camp in Akkur and watch the situation himself.

By this time, at Tranquebar, the preparation for the meeting is gaining momentum and everyone starts working for its success. Kandan also begins to feel the importance of the meeting. He feels strongly that this meeting will bring about some changes among the poor:

Are the poor, dumb, suffering, helpless unmoving masses of a nation like this log of wood—inert and dull to all appearance, till the fateful hour for swift motion comes when the flood of nationalism touches them? Then how quick and wondrous they float along the current with a sovereign air of gaiety, as if born to water and waiting for it these years like a Spanish galleon! (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 235)

Kandan, though he believes that some good may come out the meeting, has a dream which is an ill-omen. Saraswati wants to cancel the meeting but Kandan does not agree and decides to continue the work.

In the chapter titled “A Log of Wood” Venkataramani thinks ahead of how India can be changed and a new milieu created, favouring everyone in the country. He pools all his ideas and expresses them through Rangan in this chapter. He wishes to change the land-tenure system prevailing in India:

The evil that paralyses our life . . . [is] the most iniquitous and irresponsible system of land-tenure which sucks the blood of the poor in a hundred ways, and all toil goes to feed only the parasite. The hand that works in the mud and mire of the field only labour as an eternal coolie hand, and gathers the golden grains of the harvest only for a callous overlord’s bank account and spendthrift life’ (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 244)

He also suggests that the elders should share their experience with the youngsters and they should show their loyalty in return. Only if this takes place, knowledge can be transferred from one generation to another.

The novel was published in the year 1932. Even at that time Venkataramani was very certain that India would get Swaraj very soon. So, in his narrative, he concentrates on what has to be done next.

The tyrant and the coward shall not grow in this ancient land of courage and love. The difficulty is not in getting

Swaraj; for we are surely getting it. For ours is now a fight to the finish; to live or die as a nation. The test of our new life is not only in winning freedom but in applying it selflessly and courageously to the freedom of ail, even the humblest in the land.’ (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 246)

If the aim is to be attained a sea change in politics is necessary:

The old system that goes to make the rich richer and the poor poorer must be broken up from its very foundations, and the nation’s energy moved along new channels, feeding all the plants and trees alike, so that each may share in and get according to its needs the full benefits of Nature. . . .’ (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 248)

To achieve all this, society needs more men like Gandhiji who work for the “renovation till it [the Indian village] is restored to healthy life and needs no Gandhiji for a trumpet call to pure, selfless public work.”

Everyone can enjoy Swaraj only if it is achieved through non-violence, because war will lead to another war and not peace (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 24-9) .

If power is centered in one, it will lead to corruption. For selfless work power has to be decentralized, which shall be “complete and life-giving.” Everyone should feel that the neighbours are as sacred as oneself and love everyone, which will lead to total peace in the world (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 251).

When they are discussing important matters related to the uplift of the country, the Malabar Reserve Police come to Tranquebar and take up position. Mudaliar feels his pride wounded. He wishes to meet the Deputy Superintendent of Police. But he is blocked by a constable who directs his gun on him. When Chochalinga Mudaliar's men see this insult, they attack the police. This sends a warning to all the police and the police ask the crowd to disperse immediately. First, there is a *lathi* charge, and then they open fire. One of the bullets hits Kandan's heart. Even at the point of his death he tells Rajee, "But my life will not be one lived in vain if only you all work together and carry out our plan, consecrating your life and love for the freedom of the country and the uplift of these down-trodden masses—foodless, homeless and hungry for ages" (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 279)

Kandan also asks Rajee to marry Rangan, Chockalingam to marry Kamakshi. But they all vow to shun worldly desires and remain unmarried till the country is free. Kandan dies after getting a promise from everyone to work for the country and its freedom. Due to the Tranquebar rioting case everyone from Rangan to the *pannaials* of Chockalingam are sentenced to rigorous imprisonment. When Padma is in jail, he contemplates on the riddles of life. Venkataramani ends the story by echoing the essence of the Bhagavad Gita, which asks people to work according to *dharma* and with detachment. Only such

actions give pure *ananda* (bliss). Kandan's life stands as an illustration of this philosophy.

Mudaliar's ancestors lived happily by helping the poor. But Chockalingam does not take care of his own *pannaials*. He does not directly pay wages to his labourers. He does not take pains to monitor whether the wages have reached his workers. They are starving while he is enjoying his life in luxury.

Despite being a *Mirasdar* (big landlord) he does not work for the welfare of his people. He fails to take any effort to close the toddy shop. The toddy shop becomes the breeding house of all evils. It is only in that shop that his *pannaials* decide to burn his granary down. Intoxicated by the toddy they do not care for the warning given by Kandan. Their empty stomachs blind them and make them wild.

Mudaliar, too much influenced by the West and city life, wants to enjoy life with his money. He fails to help his own servants. Instead, he spends lavishly on modern equipment. For the sake of pleasure he drives the train and crashes it in Akkur. Because of his unthinking behaviour, Sundaram, the Station Master, has to lose his job. When he crashes the train, he does not bother about it. He feels that he can solve everything with his silver.

Only after seeing the sacrifice and the work of Rangan, Kandan, Rajee and others, Mudaliar decides to join their group and work for the country's freedom. He has for a long time considered the Western

way of life superior, but imitating their style of life has only lost him all his wealth and turned his own people against him. Later he finds that the Indian way of life will lead to bliss and peace.

The women characters in *Kandan*, *The Patriot*, unlike those in *Murugan—The Tiller*, are not confined to the home alone. Here they are educated on par with their male counterparts. Rajeswari Bai has studied at Oxford. Saraswati has learnt to sing. When the situation demands, they actively engage in action and contribute to building up the nation. Everyone in *Kandan*, *The Patriot* is attracted to Saraswati and they feel that she can guide Sundaram in the right way. She boldly asks Sundaram to quit this government job as Station Master and work for the freedom movement. She lends moral support to the entire group who stay at Akkur to work for the country. Rajeswari openly comments on Saraswati thus:

The Feminine has reached perfection in her: gentle and sweet as a fawn in play but decided and powerful in her views and work. There's a mysterious charm in her voice and a cosmic quiet in her eyes. There is a healing touch in her words and a rhythmic song in the very air she breathes in and out. I'm sure, it's the result of a perfect cycle of lives, devoted, pure, simple, and true. She's just the Eternal Feminine that would go to make causes great by a mere look or word of blessing, and keep the freedom

of man from being sold.' (Venkataramani, *Kandan* 194-95)