CHAPTER-2
K.S. Venkataramani

K.S. Venkataramani (1890-1972), the voice of Renascent India, is one of the pioneers of Indo-Anglian novel. Gifted with the genius for observation, the talent for graphic description, an original interpretative way of expression full of beautifully chosen phrases, often poetic but never over-sentimental, Venkataramani possesses an eye for telling incidents, the talent for manipulating complex plot and an ability to individualise characters. He evokes an intimate picture of Indian rural life in which the old and the new mingle and separate so as to suggest a new order and harmony in things. Preaching with earnestness and intimacy the doctrine of love of the Earth, the 'Mother of All', Venkataramani seems to suggest that the divorce of human life from Mother Earth is surely a great cause of modern unhappiness. There is, however, a certain modicum of amorphousness about his rural idyllic picture of India.

Venkataramani is perhaps the earliest Indian novelist in English to identify himself with the Gandhian struggle for the emancipation of the country. He appears to have assimilated in his mental make-up Gandhian concepts of rural reconstruction, prohibition, ahimsa or non-violence, satyagraha and swarajya. He, therefore, recreates evocatively the image of the national awakening to the consciousness of self-determination and the involvement of the masses in the Civil Disobedience movement.

But his responsiveness to the national sentiments does not render his creative faculty as his exuberance is held in check by his interest in the lives of the individuals he portrays. His novels, therefore, do not boil down to mere political tracts, but evolve a pattern where personal problems of characters are fused with the larger issues of political or social nature. Though essentially an idealist, Venkataramani is not blind to the conflicts of tradition and modernity. His novels, therefore, seek to dramatize the assault of civilization on a traditional lifestyle.

Venkataramani’s Murugan the Tiller (1927) is probably the first Indian novel in English that weaves Gandhian emphasis on the villages into the texture of the story. It is a fascinating tale of South Indian Village life, and the novel is a passionate plea for a return to the villages. The action of the tale shifts from the village to the town and from the town back to the village till it leads to the regeneration of the rural society. Murugan the Tiller is an artist’s enactment of the Gandhian view of modern civilization which goads one on to material success bereft of the basic human and spiritual values. The novel gains in importance by exposing the hollowness of artificial life spent in the pursuit of vaulting ambitions and also by highlighting the beauty of rural life. Such a contrast allows the novelist to offer a literary transcription of political experiments, although they are not directly discussed in the narrative. Venkataramani seems to be an exponent of Gandhian economics which insists on the simple life of self-sufficiency so as to enable the individuals to achieve dignity through human understanding and mutual cooperation. One has, therefore, to discard the coarse vulgarities attendant on the mad devotion to material lust.
Huruoan the Tiller is the story of Ramachander (Ramu), who inherits a little coconut garden and a plot of agricultural land in the village Alavanti on the bank of the river Gauvery. On the advice of Murugan, the tiller, Ramu almost decides to settle down at his ancestral land after his failure in B.A., but Kedari, his intimate collegemate, entices him back to the city of Madras to prosecute his studies there. Ramu marries a city girl of Madras but flunks in the B.A. examination for the second time. He returns to the care of Murugan and takes to the tilling of the soil. Unfortunately, heavy rains fail his crops and Ramu is coaxed by Meenakshi, his city-bred mother-in-law, to become a low-paid clerk in the office of the Collector of a town. Murugan becomes the lessee of his land which is later sold to the village money-lender while coconut garden passes into the hands of Murugan. Soon Murugan grows rich but Thoppai, a town brat and a hired labourer, persuades Murugan to open a toddy shop in the village. The honest tiller, thereafter, gets involved in a riot and gets imprisoned but escapes with a robber Chieftain to Nagalapuram where the outlaws operate, posing thereby a threat to the law and order of the land.

Ramu who has now been promoted as Deputy Tehsildar, successfully executes a scheme for irrigation and the reconstruction of the rural economy. This enhances his prestige all around. Then he is deputed to curb the atrocities of the outlaws of Nagalapuram hills. When Ramu and his select band of policemen are resting in their camp near the hills, they are made captives by the bandits. Murugan recognises his master and the dacoits surrender themselves before Ramu who brings them back to normal life as peaceful citizens by rehabilitating them each with a
three-acre holding for cultivation in a new garden city among
the hills. Thus a replica of ideal India of Gandhi's dream is
created. The very opening words of the book strike the key-notes:

The Cauvery is a majestic river at the Village of
Alavanti. On the right bank, not far away from the
residential quarters, nestled the beautiful little
cocoonut garden of Ramachandran. Therein lay the
ancestral cottage of Murugan in peace and security
for over seven generations. The garden was the most
coveted thing in the village and Murugan was the most
valued of the hereditary tillers of the soil of
Alavanti.

What transpires afterwards is simply the chain of events,
artistically integrated, leading to the drifting away of Murugan
lured by the corrupting ways of wealth and wine and the ultimate
return of Murugan to the traditional life of a tiller in the
village under the guidance of Ramachandran. The rural paradise
of Alavanti, where Ramachandran is "a lord of seven acres" passes
into the hands of Murugan, the typical son of the soil, first
as a lessee and later as its proud owner. He wants to win
prestige in society "not by revolt but by patient work" (p.90).
He is happy in his little coconut garden, and is becoming
increasingly prosperous. When he comes to get "without toil more
money than he needed and he did not know what to do with the
surplus", he gives up the old path of industry and simplicity.
His mind changes "slowly moving into the haunted ways of the
civilisation of urban life" (p.153). Thoppai acts as the evil
genius, and introduces him to the pleasures of wine and city life.
Even otherwise, Murugan finds himself weary with his dull rural

2 K.S. Venkataramani, Murugan the Tiller (Madras : Svetaranya
Ashrama Mayapore, 1927), p.1. Subsequent references to the
page numbers from this edition of the book will appear in the
text.
life where all his shirts, coats and the new, pink, silk lenji are "getting mouldy like old cakes for lack of sunshine and air" (p.154):

From a loin-cloth Murugan progressed to a decent four cubit length, then from a single to double dhoti, then to a shirt and a turban; then from cold rice to coffee and from a thatched roof to a tiled house. But when he got such nice clothing and riches, could he parade them decently in his own village which knew his humble birth? (p.153).

Murugan and Thoppai visit Murugan's cousin who is a toddy shop contractor in a town. Partaking of his hospitality, Murugan drinks "the subtle poison for the first time and was happy beyond measure" (p.155). Later, Thoppai entices Murugan into opening a toddy shop in his village assuring Morgan of "a tidal wave of wealth and glory" (p.156). There is still something of the old in Murugan but he can no longer resist the temptation of easy money and the exhortations of Thoppai when the latter says: "Nothing is base, which makes men earn an honest living from nature's own sweet products, as town bred people do or say. Don't look for high justice or moral principles in making money. That is why the poor are always poor" (p.158). The toddy shop, thus established by Murugan, brings him money but soon leads to rioting and arson for which he is arrested and convicted although he asserts: "We are quite guiltless. The real rioters are our customers for the toddy shop" (p.187). Murugan is constrained to sell his coconut garden so as to meet the expenses of litigation. His money has already been squeezed out of him, "like water they came, like wind they go" (p.189).

In his saner hour the emaciated tiller confides in Thoppai that they are innocent of rioting only technically. They have starved the poor, robbed the children of their food by vending...
drink to their fathers, and stirred up indirectly riots in the village between the tiller and the landholder. Later, when Ramu finds Murugan as the leader of bandits, Murugan confesses: "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 in civic life" (p.244).

Murugan, thus, becomes an exponent of Gandhian economics when he is converted back to the peaceful life of the village away from the corrupting ways of urbanisation. Gandhi had perceived that the key to India's economic prosperity lay in the regeneration of villages. For him, urbanity meant industrialisation and exploitation of the people in the cities. His non-violent society was self-sufficient village society, standing for the good of all, with a balanced functional economy having a moral foundation and co-operative philosophy. Murugan longs for such a life: "Give us each three acres of land and a cow. We will work day and night for the production of the true wealth of the world. We will grow oil-seeds, cotton and corn, and help to nourish the life of towns. We will grow fruits and flowers and most delicious things for you" (p.246).

The return to the rural ways is for Murugan and the bandits a new vision of life, a revelation. Even earlier, Murugan realises that oppression and exploitation of the weak are the baneful offshoots of the system. The system is the source of evil, and the individual is but a minor wheel which goes blindly whizzing round the major wheel. Murugan reflects: "He who exploits others, will be in turn exploited by another, none can escape for ever this true law of life" (p.217).
Ramachandran, therefore, wants to make the colony for Murugan and others an ideal one, an abode for men like gods, modelled on Gandhian concept: of Sarvodaya: "Banish all strife and exploitation. Man shall never rob his fellow to enrich himself at the expense of another. Hunger and misery, we shall never know in this new place under the hills. For our wants here are but little, and Nature gives everyone the little he wants. Each works for himself and never slave for another" (p.306).

Ramachandran is an idealised character cast in the Gandhian mould. If Murugan is an exponent of Gandhian economics, Ramachandran stands for Gandhian revolution in social life in its entirety. When Iyengar remarks that Murugan the Tiller could only have been written after the occurrence of Gandhi on the Indian horizon, he is perhaps bearing witness to Gandhi's influence in the creation of a fictional character like Ramu. Ramu is the vision of future contrasted with Kedari, the despicable present, who represents consuming passion of material success, power and status as an advocate turned politician. Ramu is, therefore, a symbol or an echo of Gandhi, and his life and utterances are couched in the Gandhian way of life. With his moral stature, wholesome influence and radiating idealism, Ramu is an embodiment of virtue, and seems to have risen from Moralities of the Middle Ages to illustrate certain ideas. His idealism overshadows all and he is, as Gowda observes, at times, too good to be true. 5

The Gandhian character has learnt that virtue dwells only

4 Indian Writing, p.279.
5 Fiction and the Reading Public, p.58.
among the humblest folk of the land. He calls ambition "a flooded river which would eat its own banks" (p.6). He cannot be, therefore, a mere paw in the tempting game of town life. Ramu settles down in the village so as to lead "a prudent, godly, and cultured life" (p.64). He is keen to undergo his breadlabour by working with plough and spade. He wants to set an example to the rich idlers of the town who live on the sweat of the poor; "No one, dear, is entitled to anything in this world which his own hands have not shaped for his joy" (p.65). When the vagaries of weather destroy his crops, he is driven to become a low-paid camp clerk of Mr. Cadell, an I.C.S. Officer. Ramu still retains his dignity and idealism. Mr. Cadell calls him a rare type among Indians:

He has strong views but never forces them on you. He states them and leaves them there. He is courteous but not servile. He is self-respecting but not arrogant, never carries tales, never complains, never takes or gives a bribe, even the smallest coin of the realm. He goes on in his own way, as he says doing his dharma ...(p.102).

Ramu believes in such female education as should be conducive to the growth of their personalities in a natural manner. He holds that "our women had a kind of it till now, not fed by letters or books but full of it in a natural way as a spring is full of bubbling water" (p.147). His views on education in general are reminiscent of Gandhi's criticism of the system of education. There is also a suggestion to relate education to some kind of practical work. Expansiveness of education, which has taken away from him the joy of his natural calling, is what irritates Ramachandran. This type of education hinders the growth of personality. With a fair amount of Gandhian truthfulness he tells Mr. Cadell: "The fault is you have shaped
our education to serve a definite end, clerkship under Government. The higher aspects are ignored. This narrow gorge holds back the whole floodwater of youth. It stagnates behind and ferments" (p.148). Ramachandran knows too well that his college education has cost him his economic independence, for it has wiped out his ancestral estate: “And it is so academic that I am fit only to drive a clerical pen and quote in its trail a line of Shelley or of Shakespeare. I wonder not if I am but a slave" (p.148).

Gandhi was highly critical of modern civilisation and its excessively commercial temper. Ramu realises that civilisation is demonstrated merely in its material adjuncts, but material progress divorced from moral considerations is simply chaotic:

One lives upon nine: Comfort for the few and misery for many; civilisation is now merely an affair of shirts and coats. The soul and body starve. The breathing is strained. The pulse is feeble. The heart aches. Plain living is lost, and high thinking is rare (pp.174-75).

Ramu believes that the commercial and exploiting attitude should change. He realises that mind-power which has no roots in moral and human ideals, in character and simplicity, is combustible and self-destructive. He pleads: "This brute worship of mere mind-power, unscrupulous and destructive, in all its manifestations, must go. There must be change of heart and ideals in every stroke of work we do in modern civilisation" (p.305). Ramu wants civilisation "a matter of the spirit and the soul", not merely "a matter of the body and a little of the mind". Med competition and exploitation should have no room in this civilisation: "Let each grow to his fullest in his own mould and soil but not as a parasite upon the flesh, harvest and labour of another.... But let none live on another, or extirpate
another. There is room for all in this wide, free and rich world" (p.312).

The novelist has exploited the device of contrast to bring in the evil manifestations of the worship of Mammon, rampant in the present set-up. Ramachandran and Kadari are, therefore, adroitly harmonised into the pattern of the narrative. The ambition, drive and ruthless energy of Kadari expose him to the hollowness of what Gandhi called "satanic civilisation". He finds his tranquillity in the humanistic philosophy of Ramachandran who establishes a sort of Gandhian republic at Nagalapur. The evils of exploitation and capitalism would be unknown in this ideal colony. Ramu explains that production would be shared by all according to the needs of the people. He states in a prophetic vein: "Credit is misery. That is the burden of my song. None shall be a lender or a borrower in my republic" (p.309). A modicum of economic independence would lay the foundations for peace and culture with the minimum interference from the government. He remarks that government "exists only to enforce such moral law or dharma on the rich and the strong, and to help the poor" (p.308).

The agrarian reforms undertaken by Ramachandran are based on his "creed that in an agricultural country like India rural reconstruction is the primary thing" (p.171). These reforms are aimed at restructuring village society in a non-violent manner with the active cooperation of the villagers. Irrigation receives the immediate attention of the crusader in Ramu. Communal strife in a village is composed through the initiative of this practical idealist by involving the people in the repairs of a public building. A dispute between the capital and
labour is resolved by diverting their energies to constructive channels. Ramu wants his rural society to usher in an era where none is hungry and the surplus is shared by the needy. The peasants, he concludes, turn decoits only when they are faced with starvation. Communal factions arise thereafter: "Communal troubles no less than national wars are hatched in hungry stomachs. When people have nothing to eat, they try to eat each other — the simplest and most primitive thing to do" (p.174).

A very striking aspect of the narrative is the way Ramu brings the decoits and criminals back to normal course of life as peaceful citizens. The willing surrender of the decoits before Ramu anticipates the movements of the known followers of Gandhi, Vinobha Bhave and Jaya Parkash Narayan, Sarvodya leaders, for the surrender of notorious bandits in the recent past. What appears to be a figment or a freak of the novelist's imagination in Murugan the Tiller has been translated into reality in our own days. Gandhi had his abiding faith in the basic goodness of human soul. He sought to convert the hearts of the people through his appeals to their souls. Ramu heralds a non-violent revolution when he succeeds in effecting spontaneous surrender of arms by the bandits and their chieftain by the magic of his soul-force. Ramu rouses their conscience when he says: "All wicked men of the world are wicked only till the higher 'flowering' impulse is set free by an unknown, upremediated breath of wind or ray of light from God" (p.248).

Ramu is, thus, a Gandhian character who, though never
mentioning Gandhi by name even once, disseminates the message of the Mahatma in an astonishing degree. Like Gandhi, Ramu always spiritualises "the decorous silence of the rich and the hushed subservience of the poor" (p.276). Murugan the Tiller is verily a sage of Gandhian revolution with its emphasis on Rural Reconstruction, Prohibition and other ramifications of Gandhian economics.

The task of village reconstruction is given a new dimension in Kandan the Patriot (1932) wherein Indian intelligentsia mix with the masses and work for the cause of freedom. The novel projects a mass movement for liberation during the stirring times of Civil Disobedience movement, and presents a picture "sharp and suggestive rather than complicated and comprehensive," of the Gandhian Age. Whereas Murugan the Tiller is an artistic rendering of Gandhian economics, Kandan the Patriot is the fictional treatment of Gandhian politics. The burden of the novel is on satyagraha of the masses against the alien government through the power of suffering, sacrifice and love. It is perhaps the earliest novel in which the freedom movement forms the main plot. Venkataramani has extended the intellectual brilliance of Kedari and idealism of Ramu of his earlier novel to Kandan, the hero, but it is the prevalence of Gandhian ideas that dominates the narrative, not the hero.

After having relinquished I.C.S. at the probation period, Kandan joins the freedom struggle and comes to preach the

6 Indian Writing, p.282
Gandhian ideal of prohibition in a village called Akkur but invites the hostility of the village landlord, the owner of the toddy shop. Rangan, another I.C.S. officer and a contemporary of Kandan at Oxford, is transferred from Guntur to Tanjore as a punishment for his leanings towards the national struggle for freedom. His beloved and a fellow Oxonian, Rajeshwari Bai, the daughter of a Bombay based millionaire, is also in the thick of the freedom struggle. She urges Rangan to give up his I.C.S. and join the national struggle. The train that carries them from Madras to Tranquebar, stops at Akkur, where the Mirasdar seeks the help of Rangan to stem the growing tide of nationalism among the workers. This leads to the accidental meeting of old friends, Kandan and Rangan, and the Mirasdar himself becomes a nationalist and a follower of Kandan.

Ranjan resigns his job and joins Kandan and Rajeshwari Bai in the freedom struggle. A meeting is organised by these patriots at Tranquebar where the police open fire. Kandan is seriously wounded. Before he expires, he urges his followers to devote their lives to the cause of freedom and the service of the poor.

*Kandan The Patriot* is thematically a sequel to the earlier novel. It begins with the untouchable workers who, though in touch with Mother Earth as the real tillers of the soil, have not a square inch of ground for home or for field but toil on "with sweat on brow in the narrow ruts of an ancient system now ploughed to deep mire by modern economic forces". These straggling landless workers who are denied recognition as

individuals with basic human needs are driven by their desti-
tution to the toddy-shop for revels. Venkataramani addresses
himself to the evil of toddy-drinking, but the approach is
unmistakably Gandhian in its plea for re-structuring village
community so that the pockets of exploitation and concentration
of wealth are eliminated. The suggestion is not for violent
upsurge but for a peaceful revolution so that the tiller must
get his basic minimum needs fulfilled. That seems to be the
ideal way to wean away the workers from the lure of drinking.
Kattari, a pariah, calls for social justice when he bursts:

A pot of toddy is the only friend the pariah has
the world over. Have we milk or honey, fruits or
flowers, or any of the dainties that go to feed
our ruling folk? Have we an inch of ground for
home or field? Even our wedded wives are but our
master's farm servants; our darling child is the
shepherd boy of the pannai roaming over mud and
mire, stones and thorns, tending the cows whose
milk goes only to feed another (p.7).

These pariahs beg, borrow or steal for evening drinks
although Kandan, their reforming saint, assures them of a better
social order provided they "stand together and work for the
common good and give up this drink — a curse indeed"(p.13).

Kandan whom another Pariah named Pavadai calls "a saint,
a noble soul" represents Gandhi and his movement. He is an
idealised character who has found sublimation of his unrequited
love for Rajeshwari, a fellow student at Oxford, in the service
of the people. He stays in an ashram and popularizes charkha
and Khaddar among his countrymen. He is a local Gandhi who has
relinquished the I.C.S. in his zeal to serve the suffering poor.
His earlier connections with Natal is meant, perhaps, to fix
this character and through him the narrative in historical
perspective. Gandhi who had gone to South Africa as a barrister
came back to India as a Mahatma to prepare his countrymen for Swaraj through suffering and sacrifice. Kandan, likewise, has spent his early life amid luxuries in Natal, goes to Oxford to don the cap of a barrister, finds entry into I.C.S. through sheer merit, abandons the prestigious career in preference to the call of freedom and dedicates himself to the cause of the poor among the downtrodden people in an obscure village Tillyadi in Tamil Nadu. The pariahs among whom Kandan lives in the manner of Gandhi feel that his persuasive words would change the heart of landlord Mr. Muddaliar who has exploited them, but they realise in their saner moments that the toddy shop must go as it has been the unmaking of their families: "Kandan is the man to make men of us. Let us follow his words. Maybe, he could even change Mr. Muddaliar too some day, — there's a magnet glow in his eyes, a purifying fire in his speech" (p.14).

It is out of this faith in Kandan that the poor labourers feel elated in his presence, although they find it difficult to resist the lure of the sweet drink. Kandan, whom his first cousin Karian believes to be "stirring gentleness to revolt and good work to destruction"(p.37), is for the downtrodden pariahs "their saviour, their prop in the hour of need, the hero and saint of the place" (p.30), who has come all the way from across the blue seas to reform them and to speak to them a gentle word of cheer.

Kandan is neither a creation of fine frenzy of Venkataramaiah nor an isolated case of self-sacrifice. He represents the whole class of those brilliant youngmen who abandoned the coveted Indian Civil Service in deference to Gandhi's call as a protest against British imperialism. His baptism through a life
of voluntary poverty and service further stands for Indian intelligentsia mingling with the masses and working for the cause of freedom. Rajeshwari Bai, the daughter of a millionaire of Bombay, believes that it is a sin for an Indian to toil at the desk in these critical days when "the making of new India is going on before our very eyes under the glorious leadership of the greatest living man in the world" (p.22). She tells Ranga, another I.C.S. Officer and a fellow Oxonian that the educated Indians can do something good only "when Swaraj is won and freedom for all is gained" (p.28). She echoes Gandhian thrust on creating a social order based on love and justice: "We must so order the new course that God's water flows equally to all the heads and fields. That is the real meaning of all this unrest, and the plan and purpose of these reascent times" (p.28).

Rajeshwari assures her lover Ranga that she is no more the stormy petrel in the life of any one but her own. The love of Motherland has driven off her mind all thoughts of love of worldly things. She has taken a vow of Brahmacharya. With a pure glow in her face and a ring of dedication in her voice, her alchemic touch is felt by all who come in contact with her. She may well be taken as the symbol or spirit of new India. She explains:

A vow of brahmacharya has seized me till freedom's cause is won. That's why I think our ancients have consecrated the sanyasin order of men to work for the commonweal and the spiritual welfare of our race —- transmuting the sex-energy into the purer and higher forms of work, work that is worship at the altar of universal life (p.110).

Ranga feels the magic ring in her voice and interprets his position of a Settlement Officer as "a mark of degradation, in
Venkataramani recreates a lively picture of Gandhian revolution which involved the intellectuals and the masses alike in the task of liberation of the people from the tyranny of foreign rule and the unjust social order. It was call for positive constructive action. This call seems to be the refrain of the novel. Kandan urges Rājan to put their dreams into action and realise them as "Without honest, untiring, selfless work, there is no happiness for our long ailing land" (p.207). Only a band of devoted workers can work up ideals into an active social order. What is needed is a sanyasin order radiating the joy of sacrifice, selflessness and compassion. Gandhi alone is not enough. Every enlightened individual has to be a local Gandhi in his place. Venkataramani is, thus, suggesting Gandhi's greatness that could claim unalloyed allegiance to his ideals on the one hand and anticipating Sarvodaya workers on the other hand!

Men like Gandhiji, instead of being a world-phenomenon to be worshipped like the sun, must grow on every hedge like black-berries. At least every village must have one Gandhiji working for its renovation till it is restored to healthy life and needs no Gandhiji for a trumpet call to pure, selfless public work (p.249). This noble and fearless order of men, pure, selfless and self-controlled, would usher in true Swaraj in which every Indian village will be "free, autonomous and perfect like an atom that holds in its tiny bosom the whole range of cosmic power" (p.253).

The novelist has sought to project an image of Gandhian revolution in its totality. Due attention has, therefore, been paid to the involvement of students, women, government employees, workers and other categories of people in the scheme of the revolution. Padma, a high school student, organises students meeting, throws his text books into the temple tank and is lost
to his widowed mother in the Gandhian flood, as she puts it.

He joins Kandan in the service of the Motherland and bids farewell to his mother saying: "The call of the country calls me away from home" (p.54). Later, his elder brother Raghu, who is an accounts clerk in Tehsildar's office, gives up his job to work for the uplift of India. When his mother angrily asks if he is mad or drunk, Raghu explains: "Yes, mother, drunk with the wine of freedom. No more am I a slave at the desk grinding accounts for an alien rule to keep a pampered system going. I'm no more a slave" (p224).

Ponnusami, a cousin of Kandan from Tanjora District, who confesses to have wasted the best part of his life in the ways of degraded urban life at Madras, joins Kandan in his rural reconstruction work and temperance work as the call of the village has come to him. Gandhi has given him the mission of his being. He says: "Mahatmaji's call has come to me as well, the lowest of the low" (p.114). Kamakshi, a village girl and Saraswati represent the women folk from ordinary families to join the national movement. Venkataramani is perhaps hinting at the fact that Gandhi's call for service of the nation was responded to by women as well, and it was not the exclusive participation of educated women from the wealthier section of society as represented by Rajeshwari in the novel. Gandhian influence percolates to the grass roots of society when the poor tillers of land and toddy addicts at Akkur village — Nandan, Mookhan, Kallair, Irullen, Kasupen and Karian — come to accept Kandan as their friend, philosopher and guide.

The novelist takes care to suggest that whereas Gandhian struggle was enthusiastically carried on by the enlightened rich
and the poor masses, the vested interests scorned it as a challenge to their authorities and privileges since it aimed at the amelioration of the down-trodden. The landed aristocracy, in particular, viewed Gandhi with alarming concern. Mr. Mudaliar, the lord of thousand acres and the ally of the British government is actively up against Kandan, the local Gandhi. He tells the Collector that Kandan is the arch-enemy of myself and your Government, Sir. He is stirring these poor tillers of the soil to walk the path of fire, disturbing the peace and order of ages (p.157). Mr. Lance, the English Collector of Tanjore district, cannot apprehend the far-reaching impact of Gandhian revolution. He seems to look at Kandan and his public work as a localised affair:

Yes, I know Kandan quite well. He is a good and sincere worker. He may touch and improve a few men or villages here and there, but he has not that blazing power to rouse to action on a grand scale a large body of men. He is not an advertiser, and without it no work, not even patriotic selfless work, can spread. Even a saint can't work magic under modern conditions without publicity (p.215).

Mr. Nataraja, the Indian Deputy Collector, makes light of Gandhi's appeal to the masses and his boastful utterances may be taken as an attempt to impress the senior authorities with his administrative acumen. He tells Mr. Lance, the English Officer, that "Nothing can disturb the chronic quiet of my own District, even if Gandhi shifts his headquarters from Sabarmati to Tanjore"(p.215). It seems that the English officer appreciates Kandan and through him Gandhian movement better than his Indian subordinate. When the poor labourers indulge in arson and loot, Mr. Mudaliar holds Kandan responsible for it. This view is supported by the Indian officials but Mr. Lance finds it difficult to believe that Kandan, with his creed of non-violence
and vague socialistic theories, can be a direct party to loot, plunder and fire, although he knows that Kandan "talks sedition" and "has a determined will" (p.158).

The novel also offers glimpses of public meetings held in defiance of the prohibitory order imposed after the incident of burning food grains and hay stalks to crush the surge of nationalism. Kandan who has all along stood for non-violence gets killed in one of such meetings where mob bursts into violence. He dies, as Rajeshwari puts it, a patriot saint. The toddy shop is also burnt down and Kandan becomes a martyr. It is proposed that his Samadhi should rest by the side of the tank where the toddy-shop once stood. His followers plan to convert that place into an ashram for rural service and for the uplift and joy of the millions poor.

The novel also elucidates Gandhian ideology in an astonishing degree, but this elucidation is not properly worked out in the narrative. It would have been more satisfying if the novelist had let this ideological explanation grow out of the action of the piece. Venketsaramani seems to be thoroughly conversant with Gandhian movement, and his words have a ring of authority. Kandan explains that Swaraj should mean freedom to all, even the humblest, to grow to his fullest in his own land: "We should work for a Swaraj that would bring out from each his best, in all the patterns of God's own infinite variety, both in the inner and the outer life of the individual, and reward each with the fruits of Nature according to his needs, the needs of a simple and pure life" (p.243).

In this Swaraj there will be no brokers at the top who deal carelessly with the lives of millions. The tyrant and the
coward shall not grow in this ancient land of courage and love. The novelist aptly brings in Gandhian ideal of freedom as a means to higher ends in life. Kandan, the local Gandhi, explains: "The test of our new life is not only in winning freedom but in applying it selflessly and courageously to the freedom of all, even the humblest in the land" (p.246).

Gandhi spiritualised politics and aimed at the unity of spirit that arises out of common culture and philosophy. Kandan also believes that the motives of action should be spiritualized and politics itself should suffer a sea-change so that the dream of a renascent India should be made possible. When such a Swaraj is attained through non-violence, "The seeming discords of the day, of tribe and religion, will close into kinship"(p.250).

Like Gandhi, Kandan is opposed to British imperialism but he is not against British people. He claims: "The days of narrow nationalism are over. The future Government of man shall be carried on only by two agencies — The League of Nations and the Village panchayat or the urban council. Decentralisation shall be complete and life-giving" (p.251).

Kandan stands for agrarian reforms and absence of exploitation in all walks of life. All that he craves for is "economic equality and no chance for one to exploit another"(p.183). He echoes Gandhian emphasis on economic and social justice to all labour, skilled and unskilled. He explains it to young Padma that modern economics sadly ignores the tiller of the land: "Skilled labour which produces the true wealth of the world is coldly treated with a handful of rice so that the body may be kept alive for tomorrow's toil" (p.183). Kandan is keenly aware
of the impact of Western Civilization on our civic and social virtues. Our old moorings have snapped, and we have not yet found the new. He exhorts Padma to consecrate his life to revive ancient virtues. "To gain freedom and peace and perfect social order once again we must work hard and build a new tradition on old, old foundations" (p.184).

The novelist has repeatedly emphasised Gandhian plea for the adoption of Brahmacharya by the social workers devoted to public uplift. This emphasis remains within artistic norm so long as characters are involved in it but the Epilogue in which Padma discusses Brahmacharya as the basis of 'ananda' which springs from pure action, reads like a treatise on Vedanta and transports the reader from the realm of literature to that of philosophy.

Venkataramani betrays intimate knowledge of Gandhian literature and particularly Gandhi's own writings. There are echoes of words, phrases and expressions that Gandhi so often employed in his writings and speeches. It is more by accident, perhaps, than by design that the following lines from Kandan the Patriot bear close resemblance to Gandhi's writings:

Nalipan's record of humble and devoted work in the passive resistance movement in Natal under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi is the record of work of all unknown volunteers in the struggle for justice and freedom. It is rarely chronicled in the books of men but has always the first place in the scroll of the recording angel (p.239).

The novelist has not only captured the spirit of Gandhian revolution and ideology but also the accent of his words:

Many volunteers rendered spontaneous help, whom I do not know even to this day. Such workers are generally selfless and put in a sort of invisible service inspite of themselves. No one takes note of them, no one awards them a certificate of merit.
Some of them do not even know that their nameless but priceless unremembered acts of love do not escape the sleepless vigilance of the recording angel. 8

Mahatma Gandhi is giving his observations on the sacrifices made by Indian settlers in South Africa for the repeal of £3 tax, while Venkataramani is recording the services of Kandan's father, Nallapan, under the leadership of Gandhi in Natal. The background is the same in both the cases and the impact of Gandhian observations on the narration of Venkataramani is unmistakably clear.

Kandan the Patriot is, therefore, a novel of Gandhian struggle for freedom wherein Gandhi's call for sacrifice so as to establish Swaraj and ideal polity with its thrust on village reconstruction becomes the motif of the novelist. The novel is an idealised picture of how educated Indians took to the task or rural uplift and prohibition along with their vows of Brahamacharya.

K.S. Venkataramani is the earliest novelist to have shown deep interest in Gandhi and his thoughts. The analysis of novels in the foregone pages leads us to conclude that Gandhian revolution forms the motif of his novels, although Gandhi is not introduced as one of the dramatic personae. The liberal humanistic sentiments of Venkataramani seem to have impelled his creative talents to Gandhi for substantiation in the aesthetics of his creations. The invisible presence of Gandhi dominates the narratives of both novels wherein Gandhian ethos and the popular image of Gandhi as a saint-figure capture

the imagination of all. Venkataramani possesses prodigious talent, what Mark Schorer defines as inexhaustible verbal energy, to grasp his material pertaining to 'back to the village movement of the Gandhian era' and Gandhian revolution in Indian politics. But the immoderate preponderance of the Gandhian motif, at times, renders the narrative as mere communication of bare facts of the rudimentary kind. The commentator in Venkataramani sometimes gets better of the artist and the characters are idealised to a plane where they do not readily stand the test of credibility.