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The Emergence Of Independence: Exploring The Influence Of Gandhism In K.S. Venkataramani's Kandan, The Patriot

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Abstract:

The Indian Independence Movement was a significant historical event. During social unrest, a strong sense of nationalism emerged, leading people from various social backgrounds to unite under Gandhi's guidance and strive for independence. In this tumultuous era, it was inevitable for conscientious Indian writers to address this significant national phenomenon, whether through direct or indirect means. Venkataramani believed that for the freedom struggle to have a more significant impact, it needed to resonate deeply with tens of thousands of villagers, who were considered the authentic representatives of the land. Kandan, the Patriot, Venkataramani's second novel, explores the central theme of the nationalist movement. The protagonist, Kandan, emerges as a symbol of the archetypal ideal for aspiring young freedom fighters. Although the novel is a work of fiction, it explores deep themes and offers insightful commentary on the human condition. The author skillfully weaves a complex narrative that captivates readers from beginning to end. With its "a picture – sharp and suggestive rather than complicated and comprehensive – of the Gandhian Age, fusing certain individual and the total national perspectives in terms of creating art, it achieves all this without actually introducing the Mahatma himself as a character" (Iyengar 282).

Keywords: Nationalism, Independence, Nationalist phenomenon, Archetypal Ideal, Gandhian Age.

Introduction

One of the most notable aspects of Venkataramani's work is his remarkable talent for seamlessly blending art and propaganda in a highly artistic and effective manner. Venkataramani is the first successful novelist whose writing propaganda and artistic skill attained a happy, harmonious combination in the history of Indo-Anglian fiction. His increasing understanding of man's inhumanity to man drives him to pay attention to the economic injustices done to the nation's teeming millions.

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The profound realisation of his creative sensibility becomes an irresistible force, propelling them towards the realm of propaganda. Driven by a burning desire to rectify inequality and inequity's pervasive social and economic injustices, they aim to bring about positive change. "Venkataramani is the first really successful novelist in whose writing propaganda and artistic skill attained a happy, harmonious combination in the history of Indo-Anglian fiction" (Sarma 201).

Venkataramani, a renowned novelist, demonstrates a deep concern for the challenges the agricultural labourers face and the overall welfare of rural communities. In addition to his literary contributions, the author addresses the prevalent social and caste prejudices during his time. In both his novels, *Murugan the Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan, the Patriot* (1932), the author passionately advocates for the rights of the underprivileged and directs his attention towards the plight of agricultural labourers (Naik 172). These individuals, whose dreams and ambitions are shattered by a select few who benefit from a carefully constructed system of social control, become the central focus of his work.

Venkataramani, a renowned novelist, is driven by a clear mission and a profound message. He consistently demonstrates a commendable level of sincerity and passion in his endeavours. In addition, he exemplifies the qualities of a poised and sophisticated artist, showcasing grace and virtue. His genuine and empathetic portrayal of rural India is the true essence of his literary prowess. As a novelist, he has made a significant impact through his sincere and sensitive interpretation of the country's rural landscapes and communities. The author has managed to encapsulate the essence of rural India within the pages of his novels and short stories.

The realistic and faithful portrayal of a community's life can sometimes become uncomfortable when social reformers criticise certain customs and orthodox beliefs. However, this can also intrigue both the writer and the reader, especially when the writer holds a different ideal than the majority. The Independence Movement in India is a remarkable chapter in history. During the tumultuous decades of India's struggle for independence, a powerful wave of nationalism swept across the nation, compelling individuals from all walks of life to rally behind the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. This surge of patriotic sentiment left an indelible mark on the collective consciousness of the Indian people, transcending social barriers and inspiring a united front in the fight for freedom.

Consequently, it became virtually impossible for any conscientious Indian writer of that era to evade the profound impact of this momentous national experience. Whether through direct or indirect means, these writers were compelled to grapple with the profound implications of this historic movement. In contemplating the effectiveness of the freedom struggle, Venkataramani likely believed that it would be crucial to evoke a deep emotional response from the countless villagers who were genuinely connected to their land, often referred to as the 'sons of the soil'.

In his second novel, titled *Kandan, the Patriot*, Venkataramani delves into the subject of the nationalist movement. It appears to have been planned to motivate the Indian people to fight tenaciously for their country's independence from the British and instil a sense of national fervour in them. There is an undeniable truth that a significant national experience often acts as a pivotal factor "reservoir of literary material which can assume significance beyond mere historical reality" (Mukherjee 34).

In the realm of literature, *Kandan, the Patriot* stands as a remarkable treatise on the subject of patriotism. This captivating work delves deep into the essence of love for one's country, exploring its various facets and implications. At the heart of this narrative lies Kandan, the hero whose character embodies the archetypal ideal for aspiring young freedom fighters. *Kandan, the Patriot* serves as a poignant reflection on the significance of patriotism in the context of societal and political struggles. Through its compelling storyline, the novel sheds light on the multifaceted nature of this noble sentiment, inviting readers to contemplate its complexities and virtues. The central figure of Kandan, the hero, emerges as a symbol of unwavering dedication and commitment to the cause of freedom. His portrayal resonates deeply with readers, particularly young individuals who aspire to make a difference in their societies. Throughout the narrative, one cannot help but notice Gandhi's undeniable impact on the Indian masses. His influence was nothing short of extraordinary. The profound impact of this eminent advocate of truth and non-violence extended to every corner of India, encompassing cities, towns, and villages alike. In this captivating novel, a collective of highly educated and deeply patriotic individuals embarks on a courageous mission to challenge and transform the prevailing societal structure. In a captivating tale of inspiration and leadership, a group of patriotic individuals find themselves drawn to the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi and rally behind the guidance of Kandan, a fervent advocate of Gandhian principles. United by their shared commitment to the cause of freedom, these men and women embark on a noble mission to expand the horizons of the freedom struggle. Their unwavering determination instils a deep sense of patriotism and fearlessness within the villagers' hearts, igniting a spark of courage that will shape their collective destiny. In the wake of Gandhi's influence, the British established higher education to cultivate a bureaucratic class to uphold their ideals and maintain their authority. This has become a breeding ground for patriotic Indians determined to free their nation from foreign control. In a bold display of their intellectual prowess and unwavering commitment to the cause of freedom, these highly educated individuals have chosen to voice their dissent against the British Raj. By relinquishing their esteemed positions, they have dedicated themselves to enlightening the masses about rebelling against what they perceive as an oppressive regime, often called the 'Satanic government'. In pursuing their goal, these young men and women embrace political enlightenment rooted in Ahimsa, Dharma, benevolence, charity, tolerance, and sympathy. Their approach focuses on peaceful means rather than promoting armed rebellion.

In the bygone era, it was not uncommon for every village or town to have its revered figure, akin to Gandhi, who would guide and inspire the local populace from within their midst. The clarity of the author's intention is evident in Kandan's remarks. "Men like Gandhi, instead of being a world phenomenon to be worshipped like the Sun, must grow on every hedge like black berries. At least every cottage must have one Gandhi working for its renovation till it is resorted to healthy life" (22).

Kandan, the son of Nagappan, who served as the first Lieutenant of Gandhi, and Rangan, a young and talented boy from a humble background, embarked on a probationary period at the prestigious Oxford University following their impressive performance in the I.C.S. Examination. At Oxford, they had the pleasure of encountering Rajeswari Bai, a captivating young woman who happened to be the daughter of a wealthy Marathi millionaire. Instantly, they found themselves irresistibly drawn to her, and love blossomed between them. Rangan's remarkable intellectual brilliance and exceptional oratorical skill have captivated the attention of Rajeswari Bai, drawing her closer to him. In a profound display of disappointment, Kandan makes the difficult decision to relinquish his position in the Indian Civil Service (I.C.S.) during the probationary period. He embarks on a journey to India, specifically to the town of Akkur, with an earnest

desire to actively contribute to the freedom struggle and devote his life to improving the conditions of the underprivileged. In a heartfelt plea, he reaches out to the impoverished and industrious peasants, urging them to relinquish their consumption of toddy. Kandan's exceptional honesty and saintly demeanour have left a profound impression on the local peasants. In the narrative, Chockalinga Mudaliar, the esteemed Mirasdar and proprietor of the local toddy shop, gradually develops a sense of animosity towards the protagonist, Kandan.

Kandan, a person of noble birth, effortlessly engages with the common folk, generously offering them valuable counsel and guidance. Driven by a strong desire to contribute to the national struggle, Sarasvati is compelled to join the cause. Through her encounter with Kandan, she becomes an engaged and dedicated worker, actively participating in the movement. The train accident at Akkur resulted from unfortunate events involving negligence and irresponsible behaviour. Sundaram and Karian failed to exercise due care in their duties, while Mr. Mudaliar displayed a reckless attitude by driving the engine for mere amusement. These factors collectively contributed to the tragic incident. In a remarkable transformation, the once unassuming and lacklustre railway station has blossomed into a vibrant hub of bustling activity. At the station, a group of individuals, including Sundaram, Sarasvati, Kandan, Mudaliar, and Kamakshi, an enchanting orphan, find themselves in an unexpected gathering. Fortunately, Kamakshi manages to evade the unwelcome advances of the inebriated Karian and the prying eyes of several curious onlookers. As the investigators diligently assess the accident site, their focus is suddenly captivated by a vivid crimson hue emerging in the distant sky. Upon immediate investigation, the cause of the incident becomes apparent. In a display of frustration, a group of individuals, commonly called "pannials," have taken drastic measures against Chockalinga Mudaliar. They resorted to setting fire to his hayricks and looting his granary, causing significant damage to his property. In a surprising turn of events, Kandan finds himself in shock. With swift action and determination, he quickly makes his way to the location of the devastating arson incident. His primary objective is to intervene and end the destructive actions of the individuals involved, thereby preventing any additional harm or destruction. In a significant turn of events, Rangan, who has recently assumed the esteemed position of Assistant Collector, arrives in the bustling city of Madras. He has recently received transfer orders to Tanjore. During his time at Adyar, he had the opportunity to meet Rajeswari Bai, a remarkable individual who had transformed into a passionate and dedicated freedom fighter. She boldly and daringly urges Rangan to tender his resignation from his current position despite the potential consequences of facing lathi charges and imprisonment. In a heartfelt exchange, she assures him of her unwavering commitment, promising to stand by his side indefinitely on the condition that he aligns himself with the esteemed ranks of Congress.

Rangan, taken aback by the sudden transformation in Rajeswari, makes a heartfelt plea for her to accompany him on a week-long sojourn to Tranquebar. He intends to engage in thoughtful discussions and reach a satisfactory consensus with both parties. With a mutual consensus, they embark on their journey as they step onto the train at Egmore station. Unbeknownst to them, every word spoken and action taken by individuals is meticulously documented and relayed to the government by a covert operative named Ponnai. Intriguingly, as the story unfolds, Ponnai gradually transitions from a spy to a trusted ally of these unsuspecting individuals. The scenic journey from Madras to Tranquebar takes passengers along a picturesque branch line, with one of the notable stops being Akkur station. In an unusual move, Chockalingam Mudaliar, a prominent figure in the community, has expressed his belief regarding the ongoing incidents of arson and looting. According to Mudaliar, he strongly suspects that his long-standing

rival, Kandan, may be the mastermind behind these nefarious activities. Upon arriving at the station, the protagonist encounters the Deputy Collector, who kindly shares some intriguing news. It appears that the esteemed Assistant Collector, Rangan, is en route to Tranquebar aboard the train they find themselves on. In a hopeful gesture, Mr. Mudaliar invites Rangan to secure a booking for Kandan and his loyal followers. Kandan's hopes of seeking revenge are shattered as he develops a close relationship with the new collector. In a heartwarming turn of events, Rangan quickly comes to the realisation that Sarasvati is, in fact, his beloved sister. In today's fast-paced world, events are constantly unfolding at an unprecedented rate. The rapid pace at which things happen has become a defining characteristic of our modern society. In a collective decision, all individuals, including Mr. Mudaliar, embark on a journey to Tranquebar. Ponnann, the dedicated spy, diligently provides detailed reports of the individual's words and actions to the government. Rangan receives news of his transfer to Palni Hills as an Assistant Settlement Officer. It is widely acknowledged that the current situation can be attributed to Rangan's display of sympathy towards the national struggle. In a remarkable turn of events, the transformative power of individuals has brought about a profound change in the outlook of Mr. Mudaliar. The saintly nature of Kandan, the enigmatic allure of Sarasvati's voice, the serene depth in her eyes, Rajeswari's unwavering love for her country, and the heartfelt sincerity of her plea, as well as Rangan's resignation, have collectively worked their magic on Mr. Mudaliar, leading him to embrace a newfound sense of nationalism. It is through the virtuous character of Kandan that Mr. Mudaliar's transformation begins. Kandan's saintliness, with its inherent goodness and moral compass, serves as a guiding light for Mr. Mudaliar, illuminating a path towards a greater purpose. As Mr. Mudaliar witnesses Kandan's selflessness and devotion to the welfare of others, he is inspired to reevaluate his priorities and values. Equally captivating is Sarasvati, whose voice possesses an inexplicable charm that captivates Mr. Mudaliar's attention. Her melodic tones resonate deep within his soul, stirring emotions and evoking a sense of wonder. As he listens to her, Mr. Mudaliar is transported to a realm where beauty and harmony reign supreme, prompting him to question his previous indifference and embrace a more profound connection with his surroundings. Furthermore, the cosmic tranquillity reflected in Sarasvati's eyes leaves an indelible mark on Mr. Mudaliar's consciousness. In those serene depths, he finds a reflection of the vastness and interconnectedness of the universe. This realisation fosters a newfound appreciation for the interplay between individuals and their environment, compelling Mr. Mudaliar to seek a deeper understanding of his place within the grand tapestry of life. Rajeswari, with her unwavering passion for her country, plays a pivotal role. In surprising events, Even Ponnann has recently embraced the nationalistic creed. This shift in ideology has caught the attention of many, as Ponnann was previously known for holding different beliefs. The reasons behind this conversion remain unclear, but it has undoubtedly sparked discussions and debates among supporters and critics. Ponnann's newfound allegiance to nationalism is likely to have far-reaching implications. In a surprising turn of events, it has recently come to light that Ponnann has been identified as the long-lost brother of Kamakshi. This revelation has astounded individuals and their families, as they were unaware of their familial connection. The discovery of this sibling relationship has undoubtedly brought about a mix of emotions and raised numerous questions about their shared history. In a heartwarming romance tale, Mr. Mudaliar is captivated by the enchanting Kamakshi.

In a bold move, Rangan, a visionary leader, has decided to convene a significant gathering in the historic town of Tranquebar. The purpose of this momentous meeting is to ignite a sense of purpose and motivation among the residents, urging them to take action. While there is a consensus among individuals, it is worth noting that Kandan, in particular, expresses a desire for a greater emphasis on action rather than

mere speeches. A crowd of ten thousand individuals gathers at the designated location in a remarkable display of unity and enthusiasm. Mr. Mudaliar's associates and individuals named Karian and Sundaram attend the gathering. In a swift response, the vigilant government authorities have taken decisive action by deploying a competent Reserve Police Force to ensure that Rangan's ability to address the public is effectively curtailed. In a display of proactive measures, Mr Mudaliar takes the initiative to meet with the Deputy Superintendent of Police (D.S.P.) to reassure him that no untoward incidents will occur if the scheduled meeting is allowed to proceed. In a rather unfortunate turn of events, the protagonist is forcefully pushed back by a rather ill-tempered constable diligently carrying out his duty. In a display of remarkable agility and strength, Mudaliar's men swiftly pounce on their unsuspecting target, overpowering the sentry with the ferocity of wounded tigers. Amid a chaotic situation, law enforcement authorities were compelled to employ forceful measures, including batons and firearms. During the chaotic altercation, Kandan finds himself struck by a bullet. In a dramatic turn of events, the protagonist suddenly collapses, prompting an immediate gathering of his loyal friends and devoted followers. The atmosphere becomes charged with concern and anticipation as they rush to his side, eager to offer support and assistance. In a passionate call to action, he implores them to dedicate their lives and hearts to the noble cause of securing their country's freedom and uplifting the marginalised and oppressed masses. They assure him, "We will think of no earthly pleasures till the freedom of the country is won" (256), and Kandan breathes his last.

In his literary works, Venkataramani skillfully captures the essence of Indian society during the Gandhian era, shedding light on the profound significance of freedom for the Indian people. Through the dialogues of his characters, he effectively conveys the multifaceted understanding of freedom that prevailed among Indians at that time. Rangan, for instance, says to Kandan:

The greatest danger is that the vineyard of liberty reclaimed, tilled and pruned by the labour of the Patriot and manured with the blood of the unknown volunteer may be annexed at harvest time by a few at the top, the merchant, the land-lord and the usurer. They may use the gathered power against their fellowmen and exploit the million poor. That must be made impossible in our Swaraj. (221)

Furthermore, Venkataramani attempts to bring out his ideology on Swaraj and the freedom movement through the words of Kandan: "We must build our Swaraj in such a way that we produce no brokers at the top, like worms in cheese, who deal carelessly with the lives of the millions . . . The test of our new life is not in winning freedom; but in applying it selflessly and courageously to the freedom of all, even to the humblest in the land" (223 – 24).

However, politics is not the whole life of a subject nation. Venkataramani "has wisely allowed various emotions other than politics also to have their play" (Iyengar 281). In the novel *Kandan*, the Patriot, a captivating pattern of motive, character, and action emerges as personal and domestic problems intertwine with the more significant political issue. This fusion creates an evident connection between the individual struggles and the broader context, offering readers a compelling narrative. In the grand scheme of the novel, every character and incident holds significant importance.

Venkataramani's keen awareness of his surroundings is evident in his deliberate selection of the primary setting for his activities. To create a sense of authenticity, the author strategically situates his work within a believable geographic backdrop. Located in the picturesque countryside, Akkur is a charming village that exudes a sense of tranquillity and simplicity. Nestled amidst rolling hills and lush greenery, this idyllic settlement offers a peaceful retreat from the village under discussion, which embodies the quintessential traits of a traditional Indian rural settlement, showcasing the prevalent dynamics of agricultural labour and landlordism. The heartbeat of India resonates within its rural communities. In the rural villages of India, one can often find individuals who embody the archetypal image of the average Indian: humble, untainted by corruption, easily swayed, and lacking in knowledge. Venkataramani demonstrates a deliberate decision-making process driven by multiple factors in selecting the village. The author's clear objective is to expose the systematic exploitation of impoverished individuals by those who possess wealth and privilege. In addition to the factors above, it is essential to consider other variables that may also play a role in the situation. Like the renowned writer Henry David Thoreau, he possesses a deep appreciation for the wonders of nature. Much like Thoreau, he believes that true beauty can only be found in the simplicity and tranquillity of village life. The novel's well-knit plot is a testament to the imaginative prowess displayed within the work. The plot of a story is often structured in a cycle that encompasses a beginning, middle, and end. This carefully crafted structure provides readers with a sense of aesthetic completeness. The plot of this story consists of three main episodes, namely "Chockalinga Mudaliar and the Tillers of His Lands," "Rangan and Rajeswari," and "Sundaram and Sarasvati." These episodes are skillfully woven together by the character Kandan, who plays a crucial role in connecting them into a cohesive and coherent narrative.

In the novel, the author skillfully portrays the multifaceted nature of the freedom movement, shedding light on the diverse perspectives surrounding the concept of 'Satyagraha'. Throughout the narrative, readers are exposed to a wide range of opinions, both in favour of and opposed to this nonviolent form of resistance. The user's text sheds light on the authoritarian and repressive nature of the British Raj, which made relentless efforts to suppress the freedom fighters. However, it also highlights the unwavering resolve of the rural masses and their leaders to persist in their struggle for independence. "If all roads ultimately lead in Murugan to the tiller's way of life in rural surroundings, in Kandan all roads lead at last to 'Satyagraha', to a defiance of the 'Satanic government' through the power of sufferings and love" (Iyengar 281).

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