

The Name and Fame of the Historical Characters in the translated Novel, Kalki's *Ponniyin Selvan*.

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A short reference to all the historical characters inside the novel is given here. One can understand the particular historical character and its importance through this article without reading the novel. The name, fame and familiarity of the characters during the Raja Raja Chola period become alive inside the novel. And it is translated in English by C.V. Karthick Narayan to identify it worldwide. Through this translation the historical characters attain fame throughout world. The impact of the novel forces D.Malikraj like people to make it as play and perform it throughout all seasons. And some directors to take it as a film either. This historical novel makes the readers to find out what type of life, culture was set up during the Chola Kings period in Tamil Nadu. The inscriptions of Thanjavur temple plays vital role in order to create the character as it is. Each character has its own identification inside the novel as well as history.

If there's one Tamil novel that has swept the imagination of readers, it's *Ponniyin Selvan* (Son of Ponna). First published in 1950, this epic has impressed readers for generations. The five-part historical novel has been adapted into stage plays for several years, and has captivated the audience every time. This time around, TVK Productions has produced Amaran Kalki in *Ponniyin Selvan*. The translated text in English set a good trend in Indian English Literature and also makes the other language learners to enjoy its goodness and its erotic richness.

Through this one can see the characters are become alive without reading the text. All characters are identified by readers interestingly and its fame gets growing always. The novel in a translated form makes the foreign readers to understand the culture and history of our country better. Real historical characters like Kundavai, Vandhiyathevan, Uttama Cholar, Aniruddha Brahmarayar, Adithya Karikalar, Ravidasan are presented here with illustration, inscription and also with proper explanation.

The first prominent and probably the most dominant Kundavai in the entire chola reign was certainly Rajaraja's sister, who was immortalized in Tamil literature by Amaran Kalki. The name Kundavai originated from Andhra. But she was not the first Kundavai. It was Arinjaya chola's wife who was the first Kundavai. Out of his respect for her, Parantaka Sundara Chola named his daughter as Kundavai and this was followed by Rajaraja, who named his daughter, in turn, as Kundavai out of his extreme regards for his sister.

So, the Kundavai list is:

- Mudhal Kundavai Arinjaya's wife
- Irandam Kundavai Rajaraja's sister and the most prominent
- Moondram Kundavai One who married Chalukyan prince Vimaladitya

Thanjavur temple inscriptions say: "Vallavaraiyar Vandhiyathevar Pirattiyar Aazhvar Parantakan Kundavai Pirattiyar" This is how one of the most powerful ladies of the ancient chola kingdom gets her introduction in the famous Thanjavur temple inscriptions. Pirattiyar, Most of the royal ladies are referred to as the wives of so and so. Aazhvar, this term only used to signify vaishnavite saints who lived 2 to 3 centuries before Cholas.

Why this lady was given such a title? No other royal lady or male, either before or after kundavai was ever awarded such a title. So what does this title really mean? Is it a title given with a religious sense? She was a true royal lady with no specific attachment to any religion. She built only 4 temples: One saivaite, One vaishnavite (Sundarach chozha vinnagarm) one buddhist and one jain (Sundarach chozhap perumpalli), probably all the 4 in the name of her father.

There was one more kundavai in the chola clan before this current kundavai, she was called veeman kundavai. She was from east chalukiyas. In order to distinguish herself from her senior, our kundavai called herself "Paraantakan Kundavai", tagging her most beloved father's name with her name. The love between daughter and king as portrayed in *Ponniyin selvan* is no fiction; she builds sundarach chozha vinnagaram, sundarach chozha vinnagara aadhura saalai (hospital) and even donates idols of her parents to periya kovil temple.

There is one very significant point about Kundavai Piratti and Rajaraja relationship, Rajaraja had great respect for his sister and that their love was not one sided. There are numerous inscriptions to prove this. Kundavai specifically donated many things to Dakshina Meru Vitankar of Rajarajeswaram(Periya Kovil)? And her contributions are only next to that of Rajaraja, none of his queens come next but kundavai.

Even in the famous "Naam kuduthanavum" inscription of Tanjore big temple, it is his sister' who comes first, not his queens or anybody else. "Naam kuduthanavum" inscription of Tanjore big temple, "Naam kuduthanavum nam akkaan kuduthanavum nam pendugal koduthanavum koduthar koduthanavum" (www.inscriptions.com).

So there can be no doubt that the sister – brother relationship was very special and what has been portrayed in *Ponniyin Selvan*, in this respect is all but truth. That tells the power this lady enjoyed in the kingdom; she gives enormous offerings in gold to periyakoil, establishing her financial strength.

The major contributions of periyakoil were carefully monitored. Not all could give anything even though they could afford. When it was rajaraja who presents the main utsava idol dakshinameeru vitankarana aadavallar it is kundavai who is permitted to present vihara. Just by analyzing who has made which contribution, one is able to realize the order of power in Rajaraja's time. Inscription in thirukovillur temple says: ...raajarajan ennum puliyai payandha pon maan.. surandha mulaip paal magavodu piriyaithaiyai....(www.inscriptions.com).

Which is based on the assumption that the child is Arumozhi, probably Kundavai could have raised Rajaraja and that could be one of the reasons for their love and affections. With respect to Vanthiyathevan, except the big temple inscription, there is no reference to both of them together in any other inscriptions.

Vallavarayan Vanthiyathevan was a real personality who existed in Chola regime under Rajaraja and before. His origins and clan are subjects of great debate. Sadasiva Pandarathar suggests that he might have belonged to eastern chalukya but without offering much evidence to support his claim. From evidences gathered so far he is a Rashtrakuta king and absolutely nothing to prove his connectivity with Vaanar Kulam. We don't know why Kalki strongly believed his clan is Vaanar Kulam.

To add more evidence that he is a Chalukyan, if you look at chola dynasty since Adithya Chola it has been a trend to strengthen their ties through marital alliances. Right from Adithya, Paranthaga and Sundara we see kings marrying many daughters, sometimes from potential would-be enemy empires and forge solid relationship with them. And in case of Vanthiyathevan, we see that he married Kundavai, perhaps the most powerful princess of her times. It's worthwhile to ponder whether this had any gains to Chola Empire.

In this light, it makes sense to view Vanthiyathevan as an east chalukyan prince; because later we see Rajaraja has very strong relationship with them by giving his daughter to Vimaladitya, who is of chalukyan origin. (This resulted in a completely different set of chola - chalukya clan, from the time of Kulothungan I). It is evident that Raja raja would not have done this marriage unless he had a strong faith in their relationship. This could have been due to Vanthiyathevan.

Coming to Vanthiyathevan's character which Kalki created, the first thing that should be held in mind is that, initially he was not intended to be a hero. Kalki wanted to sideline him, just like Paranjyothi of Sivakamiyin Sabatham, after making use of him to introduce the characters and places. But it so happened that the character grew steadily on his own mind, and in spite of the elaborate introductions, Arumozhi failed to capture the hearts of people as much as Vanthiyathevan did.

In fact, in certain portions where Vanthiyathevan is not featured for several chapters, his absence can be noticed so vividly that during his reappearance Kalki will write, "We have deserted our hero for a

long time...” This is the first occasion in which Kalki recognizes him as the true hero of this story. This is a typical example for the case in which imagination triumphs over its own creator.

Vanthiyathevan is closer to life than ever perfect Arumozhi. He makes many mistakes; he is quick in decisions and is often proud about his good looks. He undergoes the pleasures and pains of royal service. He is a true friend and a sincere lover. As we read more and more of history, the young, adventurous, naughty, lucky and attractive character portrayed in *Ponniyin Selvan* was Kalki’s brainchild, Vallavarayan Vanthiyathevan just being a name borrowed from the pages of history to attach credibility to the character he created. He seems to have ruled a region called, Bramadesam and around, living with his wives. And Kundavai spent most of her time in Thanjavur.

His name is referred in Thanjavur Big Temple inscription in which he is referred to as the husband of Kundavai. As per Thiruvallangadu inscriptions “Uttama did wish for the throne”. Thus, in order to avoid a serious domestic conflict, Arumozhi would have decided to give room for his step father’s wishes. It is absolutely possible that the power camps were divided in this issue as *Ponniyin Selvan* succinctly portrays and since the overall Chola Empire was under the threat of disintegration; Arumozhi gave way for Uttama and decided to move his coins cautiously as Uttama did.

The name Aniruddha is derived from one of the Vyuhā manifestations of Lord Vishnu. Altogether there are 4 forms (Vasudeva, Pradyumna, Sankarshana and Aniruddha). Anbil was a recognized town in chola regime, probably because of its proximity to Uraiyur. Today it is a small village near Trichy. There is a Vishnu temple of ancient origins located here. (Lord name is Appak kudathan)

Brahmarayan or Brahma marayan are various names given to Brahmin’s involved in high society royal services under the chola regime. Some of them enjoyed high privileges under the power of autocracy. The Anbil plates not only talk about royal family but also about the Brahmaraya|Brahmaraya’s family and these details are finely made use of by Kalki during the Rameswaram meeting between Azhwarkadiyan Nambi and Brahmarayar.

There are not many details about this Brahmaraya in some of the historical references. In fact, as a rule, only little details are available about people who were associated with the royal service. The entire society seems to have revolved around the king and we only find details about the kings and their conquests.

From the *Ponniyin Selvan* point of view Aniruddha assumes very significant importance. Perhaps he is the only person who is aware of the birth secret of Nandhini as well as several other things concerning royal family. He keeps changing his role and sometimes it may be confusing as to which side he really belongs to. Kundavai once remarks “Even God may not know what is in this man’s mind!” (Part V 251).

Aniruddha is a personification of intelligence and royal wisdom gained over a period of time. In the entire novel, he is perhaps the only one who behaves like a typical politician.

It is not clear whether he served Madhuranthaka Uttama Chola as well. Considering the fact that the killers of Adithya were brahmins serving under chola regime and as on date historians are unable to identify the real motive behind this killing. Ravidasan is a real historical character in the novel *Ponniyin Selvan*. He and his associates are portrayed as Pandiyan Abathudavigal who conspired to kill Sundara Chola's heirs (Adithya Karikalan & Arumozhi) to revenge Veerapandiyan's Murder.

Adithya Karikalan's Murder is mentioned in the Thiruvallangadu copper plates. These copper plates are quite sentimental in expressing this untimely death of Adithya Karikala, It had an effect on Kalki who very specifically recalls the sentences in the copper plates wrote: "Due to his wish to see heavens early, the sun set early and the entire world was surrounded by the darkness called kali." (www.varalaaru.com).

The word sun, in this phrase, represents Adithya. The extreme melancholy that comes out of this poetic phrase fittingly portrays the mood of Chola regime at that time. In the chola temple of Udaiyarkudi (covered in Mudhal Yaathirai), there is an inscription that talks about the punishments given to those involved in crown prince Adithya's Murder. But, unfortunately, till date there is no other inscription related to this murder. *The inscription talks about* "Throgigalana Ravidasanagia Pachavan Brahmahirajan, his brothers Soman Sambavan etc etc..." (www.varalaaru.com), through this inscription is very vague in many respects, it still gives room to deduce many things.

The director of the play, *Ponniyin Selvan* D. Malikraj, has brought magic to the stage. The audience cheered during the happy moments, and was absorbed by the story during the intense scenes. The play opens with the core element of the story. The stage is lit beautifully. The backdrop of the set changes according to the scene, and the props used are almost nothing. The costumes aren't too elaborate and they seem apt for the characters. Condensing five volumes into a play is quite a task but the director has managed to pull it off. The likeable stage presence of the artists and a delightful romantic angle make this play seem perfect. This was indeed a commendable performance.

With a theme like this, it would've been easy for this play to become unimaginative and boring. But it turns out to be remarkably good! This wouldn't have been possible without exuberant performances by seasoned actors. Vandhiya Thevan (T.V. Krish) brought his distinct antics to the stage. The lead character of the story, Ponniyin Selvan or Adithya Karikalan (played by Nadana Sabapathi) did delight us. He carries the story on his shoulders. One can't forget the performances of Kundavai (Naanjil Revathi) and Arulmozhivarman (V. S. Sridar) either. If you're a lover of Tamil fiction and historic tales, then don't miss

TVK cultural academy's Ponniiyin Selvan. If not for anything else, watch it for the sincere performances by the artists. Go watch the ancient tale come alive when it performed next.

Thus through this discussion, one can conclude with a point that the name and the fame of the novel *Ponniyin Selvan* and its characters will never be eradicated even when it is get translated. The historical characters in the novel are very real and lively at times comic also which makes the novel famous and its name remains forever. One can understand the importance of each character in the history of Chola regime during the period of Raja Raja Cholan. Arulmozhi Varmar/ Raja Raja Cholan is named as Ponniiyin Selvan here but Vandhiya devan the vanarkula friend become unforgettable hero in readers mind. The impact of this character make the people to name their sons as Vandhiya devan during 19th Century.

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