

HISTORICAL CHARACTERS VERSUS REAL CHARACTERS IN KALKI'S *PONNIYIN SELVAN* TRANSLATED BY C.V. KARTHICK NARAYAN.

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Tamil historical novel written by Kalki Krishnamurthy and it is translated by C.V. Karthick Narayan has five volumes. This work narrates the story of Arulmozhi varman (later crowned as Raja Raja Chola I), one of the kings of the Chola Dynasty during the 10th-11th century CE period. *Ponniyin Selvan* is a historical novel which centers on a number of real historical characters and incidents. Kalki aptly turns the historical characters to be the interesting fictional characters.

The historical evidence that is available on the Chola dynasty is about the Chola king Parantaka Chola II son of Arinjaya, also known popularly as Sundara Chola as he was exotically handsome and ruled the kingdom particularly well; though later fell fatally ill as his legs were paralysed. He was the proud father of Rajarajan, Aditya Karikalan and Kundavai Piratti. Aditya II was the eldest son of Parantaka II and was the heir apparent of the Chola dynasty after Parantaka II. But before he could ascend the throne, he was taken by death due to the treachery.

He is killed in Kadambur Melakadambur Sambuvarayar Maaligai. Madurantaka, officially Uttama Chola, was the son of Gandaraditya and Sembian Mahadevi. Though he did not wish for the crown, it was thrust upon him by Rajarajan and his friend Vallavaraiyan Vandiyadevan. He ruled for a period of about 12 years, after whose death Raja Raja Cholan ascended the throne. In Kalki's *Ponniyin Selvan* these historical characters interestingly fictionalised and which is translated by C.V. Karthick Narayan most wonderfully. Historical/Fictional characters in the novel are sequenced as follows, Vandiyadevan, Kundavai, Alwarkadiyan, Nandhini, Vanathi, Arulmozhi varman, and etc.,

The story revolves around Vandiyathevan, a charming, brave and a brilliant young man who sets out to the Chola land to deliver a message to the King and the Princess from the Crown Prince Aditya Karikalan. The story shuttles between Vandiyathevan's travels in Chola country and the young Prince Arulmozhi varman's travels in Sri Lanka. Aditya Karikalan II was a great warrior who conquered Tondainadu from the Rashtrakutas. He performed many heroic deeds in the battlefields of Sevir and beheaded the long-elusive Pandiya king - Veerapandiyan.

Ponniyin Selvan was the sobriquet given to Arulmozhi varman. Ponni was another name for the Kaveri and Arulmozhi varman was the darling of the Kaveri as in *Ponniyin Selvan* to all his people. The original title of

Arulmozhivarman was *Rajakesari Varman, Mummudi-Chola-Deva*. He was the second son of the Parantaka Chola II/ Sundara Chola and Queen Vaanamaadevi. Raja Raja Cholan had an elder sister, Kundavai and an elder brother, Aditya Karikalan. He had a high regard for his sister, who spent her later life in Thanjavur with her younger brother, and named his first daughter after her. Kalki's other historical sources were stone inscriptions, copper - plates and other books. There is a stone tablet in the great temple of Thanjavur which has the following inscription: "The revered elder sister of Raja Raja Cholar, the consort of Vandhidevan, Azwar Paranthakar Kundavaiyar" (Nilakanta Sastri K.A.).

The book *History of Later Cholas* has a five line reference to Vandiyathevan, a Vana prince, a real historical character, who is the hero of this novel. The name of the conspirators also came from a stone inscription. A lot of the information about the activities of various kings came from inscriptions like these as well as copper plates like the one found at Anbil. The Thiruvallangadu copper - plates states that,

The Chola people were very keen that after Sundara Chola, Arulmozhivarman should ascend the throne and rule their country. But Arulmozhivarman respected the right of his Uncle Uttama Chola, the son of his grandfather's older brother, Gandaraditya, to the throne and crowned him King (Nilakanta Sastri K.A.).

The narrative deals with attempts by his sister Kundavai to bring back Arulmozhi varman(as Raja Raja Cholan was called before his crowning) to establish political peace in a land seemingly getting beset with unrest and signs of civil war, plotted by vassals and petty chieftains like Pazhuvettaiyars and Sambuvaraiyar. When the story starts, the emperor Sundara Cholar is ill and bedridden. Aditya Karikalan is the general of the Northern Command and lived in Kanchi. Arulmozhivarman (who would be famous later as Raja Raja Cholan I) is in Sri Lanka in battle. And their sister Kundavai Piratti lived in Chola royal household at Pazhayarai. The story is set in motion, when rumor starts that there is a conspiracy against Sundara Chola and his sons. One person who gets a glimpse of the Pandya conspirators is a warrior the Vanar kula veeran Vallavarayan Vandiyathevan at the palace of his friend kandhamaaran.

It is through Vandiyathevan that we meet most of the characters in the novel such as Arulmozhivarman, the prince whom all the people loved, and Periya Pazhavettaiyar, the chancellor who married Nandhini,(the main conspirator) when he was sixty. During his youth, Aditya Karikalan had fallen in love with Nandhini, but she turned vengeful after Aditya Karikalan killed Veerapandyan. It was a confusion which revolves in the story, some says it was her father, and she vowed to destroy the entire Chola dynasty. It is she whom we are going to find out the real greatness fictionalized by the author even greater than reality. We also meet Kundavai Devi, who after hearing the news of the conspiracy sends Vandiyathevan to Sri Lanka to give a message to Arulmozhivarman to come back immediately.

Besides these, there are other characters like Maduranthaka Thevar(the man whom the conspirators want to crown as a king), the son of Gandaraditya. And Aniruddha Brahmarayar,Sundara Cholar's Prime Minister and the man who has eyes and ears everywhere. But the most wonderful character in the book is

Brahmarayar's spy Azhwarkadiyan Nambi, a person who roams around the country challenging for debates. He collects information for the Prime Minister and is always around Vandiyathevan, rescuing him during his trouble.

There are some lovely and adorable women too, like Vanathi, Kodumbalur princess (the woman who becomes Arulmozhi's wife later) who is in love with Arulmozhivarman; Poonkuzhali, the boat woman who rows the future king to Lanka; Mandakini, the deaf and dumb step mother of the original Maduranthaka Chola and the aunt of Poonkuzhali. Most memorable among these is Nandhini, whose beauty is said to have the power to influence any man. Manimegalai, the sister of kandhamaran (the kadamboor prince) who helps Nandhini without any knowledge that she herself is the conspirator and also Kandhamaran turns against Vandiyathevan, his best friend because of Nandhini. Fictionalised character of Nandhini is to be discussed later after all the characters discussion is over.

In the meanwhile, With Poonkuzhali's help, Vandiyathevan reaches Sri Lanka, meets Arulmozhivarman, and becomes his close friend. In Lanka, Arulmozhivarman realizes that his father had spent some time in an Island near Lanka and had been with a girl born deaf and dumb. He meets her and realizes from her drawing that she and his father have had two children. Later one day in Thirupurambayam forest Vandiyathevan sees Nandhini and the Pandya conspirators place a small boy on a throne and take a vow in front of him.

While coming back from Lanka, Arulmozhivarman is caught in a cyclone and goes missing. Rumor spreads that he is dead, but he survives and stays at Choodamani Viharam, a Buddhist monastery inn. Then slowly the dispersed family starts assembling. The conspirators meanwhile choose one day in which both the king and both of his sons would be assassinated. Nandhini in the mean time calls Adithya Karikalan to Kadambur Palace to discuss about the future of kingdom, though Karikalan knows that his life is in utter danger. He goes to Kadambur palace despite the warning from his grandfather. Adithya Karikalan was then assassinated there it was till debated about the assassination whether Nandhini (fictionalized real character) killed or as per historians Ravidasan, the loyal guard of Pandiya king killed the prince. Later this case was tabled before Raja Raja Cholan and he punished him with ceasing his property as Ravidasan was Brahmin by birth so he were not punished to death in olden times.

Arulmozhivarman in mean time recovers and returns to Tanjore, where he was forced to crown and he accepts to get crown initially. Later he tricks everyone and crowns to his uncle Uthama Cholan. Thus, the story gets its end in the fifth part named as *Tyaga Chigaram* in Tamil and *The Pinnacle of Sacrifice* in English. Again we are going to trace out the importance of fictionalized real character Nandhini toned by the author Kalki. The author created real character Nandhini as a memorable fictional character though she plots against the hero of the novel Vandiyathevan. Being born in a joint family Kalki reflects his experiences in his novel especially in *Ponniyin Selvan*. He had many sisters and so his novel expresses every innate tendency of feminine in an elegant manner.

Not only Nandhini, all the other women character in this novel are known for one or other ardent trait which they possess, for instance, the courageous Poonkuzhali; the intelligent Kundavai and the innocent Manimegalai. The plots and counter plots of Nandhini and Kundavai are centered upon Arulmozhivarman and Aditya Karikalan. Nandhini married Periya Pazhuvettaiyar in order to take revenge for the death of Veerapandiyan. Nandhini also helped the pandiya conspirators secretly.

Once in a meeting a small boy belonging to Pandiya clan is crowned in front of the secret Pandiya conspirators and Nandhini. Nandhini undertook the responsibility to kill Aditya karikalan and the conspirators vowed to kill Sundara Cholar and Arulmozhivarman. But in reality Ravidasan killed Aditya Karikalan not Nandhini. In order to make the story and character Nandhini interesting to the readers Kalki fictionalized with imaginative concept. Not only this character but all the historical characters are fictionalized by the author aptly. Though Nandhini has evil intentions, she is very clear about her destination and she never gets distracted.

This shows his talent of creating such a wonderful fictionalized real life characters. It is Nandhini who plans and plots most of the events in the novel. Moreover she evades from the novel in the last volume but she leaves a strong imprint in the readers mind as real characters would do. Our Protagonist Vandiyadevan is able to realize the political and magical power of Nandhini. Vandhiyadevan talks to her about it as such the whole world knows about the influence of Nandhini over the Dhanathikari, Pazhuvettaiyar. In *Ponniyin Selvan Part V Vol I* it is reflected as per the hero's saying about Nandhini is as follows, "Devi you are the queen of the Dhanathikari, who is all powerful. You can achieve whatever you want" (p 87).

Nandhini has another two names as such Pazhuvoor Rani, Pandima Devi. In reality Nandhini has a royal blood though she is brought up by a vaishnavate Azwarkadiyan Nambi her father is either Sundara Cholar or Pandiyan. This remains a mystery, since Mandhakini is deaf and dumb and she never reveals her secret to anyone else till her death. At last we came to the conclusion that the character Nandhini who belongs to Dravidian origin who leads a pious and religious life in her childhood. And whom she later gets the power to control the entire Cholar regime. Fictional characters of Kalki is more powerful than the real characters of history, there lies the victory of Kalki.

Copyright rules and their strict enforcement by the Kalki group dissuaded many writers from attempting a sequel (though Kalki himself broad mindedly suggested other writers to take it up in the book's afterword). Nandhipuraththu Nayagi by Vembu Vikiraman is one sequel in which the author uses different spellings for all major characters to avoid infringement accusations. The prequel of the ponniyin selvan is written by Dr L. Kailasam in his novel Malarchchulai Mangai. After nationalization of the works of Kalki Krishnamurthy, the copyright of Ponniyin Selvan ceased to exist. Many publishers now print the same book free of royalty charges. Balakumaran's *Udayar* and are sequels to *Ponniyin Selvan* published around 2000 and 2007 respectively. Balakumaran's *Kadigai* runs parallel to *Ponniyin Selvan* showing the lives of

Ravidasan, Nandhini and ends with the assassination of Adithya Karikalar.

Earlier, M. G. Ramachandran had tried to adapt the film's story to silver screen with himself playing the role Vallavaraiyan Vandiyadevan, Vyjayanthimala as Kundavai, Gemini Ganesan as Arulmozhi Varman in the lead with Padmini as Vaanathi, Savitri as Poonguzhali, Saroja Devi as Manimekalai, M. N. Rajam as Nandhini, Nagesh as Sundara Chozhan, T. S. Balaiah as Azhvakadiyan and M. N. Nambiar as Chinna Pazhuvettarayar forms an ensemble cast. However, the film was dropped later due to unknown reason. In 2009, a play based on this novel was staged by San Francisco Bay Area Tamil Manram in San Ramon, CA. The novel is also to be made into a Television serial by Makkal TV. There are at least three different translations of *Ponniyin Selvan* available in English - by Indra Neelamegam, C.V. Karthik Narayanan, and an ongoing one by Pavithra Srinivasan.

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