



Gods, Kings & Slaves: The Siege of Madurai

R. Venketesh

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Best Selling Historical Novel in Online stores.

In the first week of its sale it reached the Amazon's Number one position of Historical fiction best seller lists.

War is coming... An ancient kingdom will meet a devastating new enemy.

Peninsular India, fourteenth century. The Pandyan empire is at its peak, its enemies subdued and its people at peace. Having left behind his step-brother Sundar in the race to the throne, Crown Prince Veera Pandyan is set to rule from Madurai, reputed to be the richest city in the subcontinent. But invisible fractures within the kingdom threaten to destroy it, and a new enemy approaches, swifter than anyone can imagine.

In Delhi, Sultan Alauddin Khilji's trusted general, the eunuch Malik Kafur, has trained his eyes on the distant south, fabled for its riches. A slave captured by the Khiljis, Kafur is renowned for his ambition and cunning. None, not even the mighty Mongols, have defeated him – no empire can withstand the trail of destruction he leaves in his wake. And all he wants is to see Madurai on its knees, its wealth pillaged, its temples destroyed.

As an ancient city combusts in flames of treachery, bloodlust and revenge, brother will battle brother, ambition will triumph over love, slaves will rise to rule, cities will be razed to dust, and the victor will be immortalized in history...

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Gods, Kings & Slaves: The Siege of Madurai Details

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From Reader Review Gods, Kings & Slaves: The Siege of Madurai for online ebook

Pratip Vijayakumar says

It was an Amazing Read. Most of the names and incidents found to be true and I connected it with other few Historical books in Tamil.

It definitely a Page Turner and never found an Indian Author could portray a Historical fiction into a Page turner book.

Portrayal of Veera Pandiyan and Malik Kafur from their Childhood was fantastic and the way author linked the 2 Protagonists was Mind-blowing.

Aparna says

This is an exceptional debut novel from R Venkatesh. R Venkatesh is a renowned Tamil author and Gods , Kings and Slaves - the Siege of Madurai is his first novel in English.

This book is a historical fiction and deals with the history of Madurai. Not much is known about the history of South India and this is one of the main reasons why I picked up this book.

The plot revolves around 2 central characters - Veera and Malik Kafur. Veera is a Pandyan Prince and the ruler of Madurai. Malik is an enuch who due to his great strategic skills becomes the commander of Allaudin Khilji's army in Delhi. The story starts from their birth and spans across many generations when finally Veera and Malik meet during the siege of Madurai. Veera's story starts as that of a young boy who is the illegitimate son of Madurai emeperor Kulashekharan. It then traces his youth as a young brave prince and finally is shown as a very weak ruler of Madurai. There are extremely interesting characters which come across in his story - his friend Akshayan, step brother Sundar, love interest Sunanda who becomes his sisterinlaw and wife Radhika.

The second story of Malik Kafur is extremely interesting and well told. Malik, earlier known as Ram born in a Hindu family gets castrated when trying to elope with his love interest Chaula. The scene where he is castrated is highly moving and brings a chill down your spine. His rise from a slave looking after the harem to the commander of Khilji army is exceptional.Both the stories run parallely in alternate chapters and finally intersect when Kafur attacks Madurai.

All the characters are extremely well sketched and one can identify with their feelings, weaknesses and shortcomings easily. The writing is simple and hence not once do you tend to get bored in this 450 page long saga. This book has it all - love, lust, revenge, sibling rivalry, friendship and wars. R Venkatesh is able to bring about the emotions of each character beautifully. A lot of the books in the historical fiction genre focus a lot on the war details which I sometime find boring.What I loved about Venkatesh's writing was that the focus was mainly on the story without getting into too much gory specifics of the war action.

This is one of the most enjoyable books I have read in a very long time and hope to read more brilliant books from Venkatesh in future. A must, must read for all historical fiction lovers.

Raja Subramanian says

I love historical fiction. There are so few dealing with South India and I grabbed this book without hesitation. For a change, I read this book somewhat slowly through my trip to Jaipur, Bhilwara, Gurgaon and back to Bangalore.

The book tells the story of Veera Pandyan and Madurai on the one side and the story of Malik Kafur and the Sultanate of Delhi during the reign of Alauddin Khilji on the other side. Venketesh does a remarkable job of bringing out the lives and times of the two kingdoms with vivid imagery. The characters come to life as you read the gripping narrative.

Malik is born Ram in a Baniya family in Gujarat, but gets castrated when he attempts to elope with a young girl from the harem of the Rana. He is sold to an Arab in the slave market. Ram is renamed Malik, adopts Islam and helps his master amass immense wealth. He is captured by the invading armies of Alauddin Khilji and taken to Delhi. The story chronicles the stupendous growth of Malik from being a slave to an astute general to becoming one of the most powerful persons in the Sultanate.

Veera is the illegitimate son of Kulasekharan Pandyan, the ruler of Madurai. Indeed the book starts with the sentence "He was born a bastard" and the first chapter gets you hooked. Veera and Sundar (the second, legitimate son of Kulasekharan Pandyan) both covet the throne of Madurai. You get to see love, ambition, greed, lust, bravery, cowardice and a whole range of emotions. Venketesh is at his best when he narrates the history of Madurai. For those who do not have much exposure to the history of Southern India, I strongly recommend this book.

The lives of Veera and Malik intersect when Malik leads the Turkish army to invade Madurai. The Siege of Madurai is probably not a "siege" in the conventional sense of the word since Madurai actually capitulates without much resistance.

The other characters also come alive and are interesting, but my favorites are Malik and Veera.

If you are a fan of historical fiction, you must read this book! This is an awesome debut novel in English! I wish that Venketesh writes more books bringing out the history of the South India! Power to you, Venketesh!

Akshay says

The approach to history in India has been unfortunate. Generally, we avoid taking an investigative approach and abide by the generally accepted "facts" which are taught to us at various points in our lives. "Gods, Kings and Slaves" is based on The Siege of Madurai when Malik Kafur invaded the city in 1311 which was followed by two invasions by the Delhi Sultanate in 1314 and 1323 which shattered the revival of the Pandyan Empire beyond any hope.

The author, R. Venketesh, has done a commendable job with substantial research. He has also maintained a

tight grip on the narrative flow by keeping it authentic. The book introduces the reader to a lesser known episode in Indian history. Vivid portrayals of emotions experienced by the main characters and the situations make the book realistic. Honestly, "Gods, Kings and Slaves" is a commendable job for a first time author!

Bookish Indulgences with b00k r3vi3ws says

Mythological and Historical fiction are the latest fad in Indian market and I am grateful because I love these more than the same love story being told over and over again.

Gods, Kings & Slaves is however quite different from what I have read so far. Frankly speaking, I have very little knowledge about the South Indian History. I know only the very basics and that too the outlines of the historical events. So, instead of researching about the period before picking up the book, I decided to let this book tell me the story. With the Pandyan Empire at its heights, Crown Prince Veera Pandyan is all set to rule his kingdom from Madurai. Malik Kafur is Sultan Alauddin Khilji's trusted general who has his eyes on Madurai – a city well known for its riches and culture. Kafur is a cunning and ambitious. What plots have been set in motions and what roles do these men play in the siege of Madurai? Read to find out.

The books best superiority lies in the way the author has set up the intricate plot and all the while adding flavours to it by including the well known events from that era. Detailed description and well fleshed out characters only adds to the glamour of this title. Having no clue about this character beforehand, Kafur was the most interesting character in the novel. I enjoyed seeing him grow as the plot evolved and often found myself trying to get into his head. An interesting part of history requires great narration to do it justice and the author has managed it well.

There's love, betrayal, treachery, ambition and every other element that you can think of to make a story interesting. History fan or a fiction fan – this book caters to the individual need of every reader.

Karthik M says

This book was recommended by a fellow tam, just as interested in good historical fiction as me. A lot of South Indian history is not known to mainland Indians, due to paucity of good translations/authors. Thankfully, this book comes out good in all markers - good writing, accurate portrayal of history, right amount of fiction to flesh out the characters.

By far, this book's protagonist/anti-hero is the eunuch general of the Khilji dynasty, Malik Kaffur. Born a Hindu to simple merchant father and ends up in the court of Alauddin Khilji, is destined to rewrite the history of his time through sheer willpower and cunning,. How he eventually decides to raid the South Indian lands fabled for their wealth is best to be read from this book. But what I especially liked was his initial observations of the Turkish originated rules of Delhi, their ruthlessness which was to become the reason for their inability to assimilate with the populace. As their greatest king observed, the Hindu populace shall never be subjugated by an alien invader. No attempts were made by any of the Delhi sultanate rulers to absorb and grow the local culture, as they believed in their affiliation to the Caliph of Baghdad.

The Pandyan royalty, captured in great detail, Kulasekharan, Veera and best of all, Vikrama, was quite

refreshing. A just and amiable ruler may appear strong to his subjects, but it goes without saying that the weight of the crown is always heavy. This eventually affects a major decision which was to cause the end of a great line and start of a new page in the Pandyan lands. The details of the rich Cauvery/Kaveri lands is written in detail, and also the customs of the Pandyan kings, centred around the Goddess Meenakshi. The temple of Meenakshi in Madurai is now a major tourist attraction and is considered to be most important pilgrimage stop for Hindus. The story of how Madurai was founded on the banks of Vaigai is a good refresher course in history lessons.

But perhaps, the most important lesson of the book is told by Vikrama, the general of Pandyan kingdom and uncle to both Veera and Sundara, that the seeds of an empire's decline are often grown in its glory - through complacence, decadence and belief that their rule is eternal. Tidings of change are written in unlikeliest of places, and this holds today as well - when all states in India are beset by nationalist, inward looking forces and are looking to rewrite our majestic history to suit their ideology.

Despite all the pressures from centuries of alien invaders, the fact the Meenakshi temple still stands to the test of time and that it was assisted in times of need by a king from Hampi, shows that heroes can come from anywhere, but no empire has truly stood the test of time.

Souparnika Chander says

Took me a little longer than usual to complete this, but enjoyed to the core. Venkatesh sir, had nailed it. Thanks to him for writing this novel, based on Tamil Kingdoms. A book in English about the Tamils is very rare and the author had done justice to it. Expecting more from this author in the similar lines of Ponniyin Selvan.

Harish Puvvula says

Great read!

I came across this book on amazon deals and was touch apprehensive. The blurb got me hooked.

Sasikumar says

Exceptionally well written. Facts and imagination combined to tell the loss of Pandyan kings. The author has built a beautiful story line.

Wish the book available in Tamil ;(

Vivek says

I personally haven't come across non mythological historical accounts of South India hence this piqued my interest. Whilst it did open me up to names, I felt the book did a better job of painting the invader from the North - Malik Kafur and one of the good reads on him.

Leaving names and meetings aside, the rest is historical fiction - whilst the style of writing doesn't offer too much novelty - you'd expect love, tyranny, back stabbing, loyalty and all those ingredients in any royal court and the author offers it all on a silver platter. What is different in this narration is grayness of all the characters created by summing up their black and white moments versus being gray throughout. Hero turns villain turns hero , the author makes us realise all the characters at the end of the day are humans who become superhumans at moments and similarly supervillians at their weakest.

Overall, a briefer on politics of South India and interesting fictionalised accounts of some of the major players in history around the Khiljis and Mongols in the North and Pandyas and Cholas of the South.

Vikalp Trivedi says

'Gods, Kings & Slaves' by R. Venketsh is set in the reign of the second Sultan of Khilji Dynasty- Allauddin Khilji. The Khiljis, at that time, were eager and relentless in their pursuit of seeing India ruled under their banner. But the book is not completely about Khiljis and their pursuits. It is based on Malik Kafur- one of the two protagonists- an unlucky lover who lost his battle for his first love and was forcefully changed entirely into something else. On the other hand there is Veera Pandyan. The first born son of the king of Pandyan Empire. Though he is first born yet his position as the next king is in doubt because of the relationship of his parents. Veera has faced a stiff rivalry from his half brother Sunder and like Kafur he has also lost his first love. These two men are at constant struggle to make their place in the world and mark the brands of their names in history.

At the initial stage the book seemed a promising one. The one consisting all the royal politics, internal rivalries and other intriguing aspects. But the book has more emphasis on telling the incomplete love stories of both the protagonists while almost neglecting other aspects. The political layers were present in Veera's story but were not completely developed. The parts of book which were worthy of development were very hurriedly written. But when it comes to describe Veera's relationships and Kafur's journey through herems, the description goes too vivid and stretched.

2 Stars.

Arvind says

I think, historical fiction comes in 2 flavours. One driven by the setting and narrated by/thru laymen, and the other by the story and historical figures. This book belongs to the latter category and was a historical thriller set in late 13th-early 14th century India. The 2 central characters 'Malik Kafur' serving Alauddin Khilji and 'Veera Pandya', the king of Madurai have roughly equal and alternating halves devoted to them and the novel builds towards the first sacking of Madurai by Kafur. The pace is good, the twists are good, the battle scenes were well thought out and u never feel the author has lost it.

In this age of SM, this gem of a book has not been publicised and the author is not on twitter/ facebook. Came to know solely by a tweet from Amish Tripathi (Shiva trilogy). If there are any Tamilians here they may identify the style with Kalki's Ponniyin Selvan and others maybe with Conn Iggulden's Conqueror/Emperor series. Recommended read.

Ashish Iyer says

The author uses historic facts and myths surrounding Madurai during 1300 A.D. and spins a compelling fiction around it. What I liked most about it is he does not try to sugar coat it. He sticks very close to the facts and so it makes it all the more realistic. The character descriptions and story line add to the fervour.

The way the story starts building up with how the two adversaries were shaping up from their childhood days and their turbulence coming of age and how it contributed to their actions in later history (some of them unexplained in normal history) is built up very well. The story depicts the time after the glorious Chola rule that extended till northern parts of India & speaks about ascendancy & end of two dynasties & cultures that clashed - Khiljis & Pandyas. Book moves in a seamless alternating pattern between the two cultures & protagonists that keeps you hooked on it till the very end.

But this book also explain a lot of historical characters. How Alalauddin khilji send his general Malik Kafur to destroy south India. It also explain how Malik Kafur captured deogiri fort and how kakatiya dynasty & Hoysala dynasty surrendered. Malik Kafur even destroy Chidamabaram and Madurai temple and he tries to convert every hindus.

Good read though. I can say emphatically that this book is lucidly written without misrepresenting facts. The author appeared to be hurry to complete the second half but worth reading. Overall its gripping narrative.

Rajesh says

Brilliant! I cant believe I've started this year by reading two books I could call thus!

Throughout the book I had this exhilarating feeling of being propelled by two parallel forces, building up towards the final clash. The manner in which these two are made to intersect is subtle enough. Vivid portrayal of emotions bring the characters/situations alive making it hard to believe this as the first english novel for the author.

If not for the names of the characters and the locale, its easy for me to see a Jeffrey Archer (and other such accomplished authors I might've not read yet) in there!

Sumeetha Manikandan says

I chanced upon this book in Goodreads and thought that I would give it a try. I was not disappointed.

Gods, Kings and Slaves: The siege of Madurai is a wonderful historical novel that will suck you right into the story. The story is told from the perspective of two protagonists; Veera, the illegitimate son of a Pandya King and a young boy named Ram Chand, whose amazing destiny will take him to dizzying heights.

Veera Pandyan is the bastard son of the Crown Prince of Pandya Kingdom, yet he enjoys the recognition and the privileges that his father showers on him. The story begins with his father's, the crown prince's wedding and the anticipation of his downfall from favor. Ironically that doesn't happen. The Crown Prince treats

Veera's mother and her son with respect and honour and ensures that Veera gets a good education despite his lowly birth.

Things become complicated when a legitimate son is born to the King. Sundara, the second son is born to the Chola Princess and the Queen and everybody expects him to ascend the throne. And the rivalry between the two brothers begins. As they grow, they are sent to a gurukulam to learn kingly conduct, politics, economy and to undergo military training. The sibling rivalry worsens between the two, despite living together in the spartan gurukulam.

In a parallel world, the author chronicles the trials and tribulations of Ram Chand. Born in an ordinary Bania family, Ram Chand would have gone on to become a portly bania with a well-stocked shop, wife and children of his own. But that was not to be. His amazing destiny makes him fall in love with Chaula, a harem girl in the Rana's household. Charmed by her innocence, Ram Chand elopes with her, thus sealing his fate. Captured and beaten by the Rana's soldiers, his fate hangs in balance as they decide on a fitting punishment. The Rana decides to castrate him and sell him as a eunuch in the slave market.

The resultant scene is the only problem that I had with this book. It was eerily reminiscent of Wilbur Smith's popular novel, *The River God*, where Taita is neutered by his Lord's General, even as his lover sits watching.

This deed seals his fate and he is sent to be sold as a eunuch in the slave market. At the market, Ram Chand catches the eye of a rich Arab merchant who buys him for 1000 dinars thus earning the name, 'Mallik Kafir hazar dinari'.

Juxtaposing both these characters in parallel scenes, R. Venkatesh brings out the stark difference between their upbringing and their unpredictable life.

In Madurai, things come to a head, when both the brothers fall in love with Princess Sunanda and Veera is sent to Sri Lanka to cool off his ardor. And in Gujarat, Malik Kafur, becomes the head eunuch of the Arab's harem and the steward of his master. From this point on, his career will soar to great heights. Caught in the middle of a Mohammedan attack, Malik is soon captured by Alladin Khilji's general and is put once again on harem duty. He soon catches the attention of Alladin Khilji and rises to become his trusted companion.

Veera comes back from Madurai, to see his lover, now the wife of Sundara, his half brother. He also learns that his lover had borne a son through him though everybody believed him to be Sundara's. Heartbroken and disappointed, he finds balance in life when he meets Radhika, his trusted friend's lover and gets married to her. Veera's father who is getting old is forced to decide the next heir and he crowns Veera as the crown Prince. Surprised and shocked by the turn of events, Sundara revolts, setting in process a civil war that would embitter the world of Madurai forever.

Malik and Veera are portrayed beautifully in this novel. Malik's ruthlessness and Veera's Hamlet-like procrastination destroys the very fabric of an ancient empire. I loved the narrative style of the author. It pulls the reader right into two alternate worlds; Veera's and Malik's.

Plus Points: fantastic narrative, crisp descriptions and dialogues, impeccable research, unforgettable characters

Minus Points: Castration scene of ram chand.

Verdict: A must read for all those who love historical fiction.
