

History as Narrative: Intertextuality in Su Venkatesan's *The Bastion* and J H Nelson's *The Political History of the Madura Country Ancient and Modern*

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Abstract

*Intertextuality, a postmodern concept invented by the Bulgarian-born French Semiotician Julia Kristeva in the late 1960s, refers to the emergence and understanding of any individual text from the vast network of discourses and languages that make up culture. In the light of Intertextuality, no text stands alone: all texts have their existence and meaning concerning a practically infinite field of prior text and significations. Intertextuality can be defined as a set of relations between texts. The intertextual elements can be found in quotations, allusions, literary conventions, imitations, parodies, unconscious sources, and sometimes translations. The present paper attempts to study the Intertextuality between the historical novel *The Bastion* by Su Venkatesan and the historical document of J H Nelson, *The Political History of Madura Country, Ancient and Modern*. Su Venkatesan's *The Bastion* incorporates the history of Madurai from 1310 to 1910. The novel consists of two parts: *Monarchy* and *The Citizens*. The story opens with the invasion of Malik Kafur in Madurai; the*

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remaining chapters of the novel deal with the History of the Vijayanagar Dynasty, the Telugu Migration, the formation of the Nayak kingdom in Madurai, the formation of the Poligar System, the ethnic history of the Kallar community, British company rule, and the British colonial rule in Madurai. The proposed article juxtaposes the intertextual relationships between the historical novel The Bastion and J. H. Nelson's historical document The Political History of Madura Country, Ancient and Modern, the third part of The Madura Country – A Manual.

Keywords: Intertextuality, Madurai, The Bastion, Vijayanagar Dynasty, Nayak Kingdom, Textuality, and Historicity

Intertextuality refers to the reality that all texts are derived from earlier texts and draw their meaning in relation to those earlier texts. Numerous intertextual explanations acknowledge that meaning is found between texts rather than within the text. According to intertextual theories, meaning is always relational, never solitary, and therefore never rigidly bounded. Meaning is understood in terms of dialogue, conflict, competition, collaboration, and overpopulation, i.e. richness of meaning and difference.

Malik Kafur, also known as Hazar-Dinari, was a slave general of Allaudin Khaliji who was captured by Nusrat Khan in 1299 during his invasion of Gujarat. He later gained prominence and became a general. He was died in 1316. The invasion of Malik Kafur in Madurai was one of the first invasions by the Mohammedans during the 14th Century. Kafur invaded Madurai after conquering Warangal, the capital of the Kakatiya kingdom, in present-day Telangana. After reaching Warangal, he learned that the southern parts of India were even more wealthy. So, he marched towards Madurai between 1310 and 1311. On his way to the Pandya kingdom, he defaced many Hindu temples, and he plundered plenty of cattle, grains and gold from Madurai. The political reason behind the invasion of Malik Kafur was the civil war between the legitimate younger son and the illegitimate older son of Maravarman Kulasekara Pandya I, Jatavarman Sundara Pandya III, also known as Parakkrama Pandya III and Jatavarman Veera Pandya II respectively. Jatavarman Sundara Pandya III eventually sought help from the Delhi sultan, Allaudin Khaliji. He sent Malik Kafur to help Jatavarman Sundara Pandya III but intended to plunder the southern region's wealth. But it was an unsuccessful invasion. Later, two more attempts were made by Khusrau Khan in 1317 and Ulugh Khan (Mohamad bin Tuglaq) in 1321-1323 under the Delhi Sultanate.

About the year 1324 A. D. a Mohometan Chief, described in Tamil Chronicles as Athi Sultan Malak Nemi, invaded the Pandya country, and driving away the king, Parakkrama, took possession of the capital. This invader must have been the notorious Malleck Naib Cafoor of Ferishta, the pathic of the infamous Alla I. (Nelson 80)

Later, in 1335, due to financial crisis and political reasons, Jallal-udin-Asam-khan declared independence from the Delhi sultanate, laying the foundation for the

Madurai sultanate.

Though the novel *The Bastion* begins with the invasion of Malik Kafur in Madurai, the author does not mention the year of the invasion. Still, in the blurb, it is clearly stated that *The Bastion* covers the history of Madurai from 1310-1910. From the observations of J H Nelson, based on the information furnished by one of the Mohammedans of Madurai, it is evident that the 1311 invasion was not the only invasion made by the Mohammedans later in the year 1317 and also in 1323, it took place, and the 1323 invasion by Ulug Khan was the successful conquest.

The history of a Mohammedan invasion in the 14th Century forms the backdrop for the Intertextuality between the novel *The Bastion* and the historical account of J. H. Nelson, which draws upon the chronicles and information furnished by the Mohammedans residing in Madurai. This intertextual relationship highlights the blending of historical fact and literary fiction to reconstruct the narrative of the invasion, shedding light on the era's cultural, political, and social dynamics. In this context, the history of the particular invasion cannot be understood only by reading the novel; rather, one can comprehend it by concerning the previous or prior texts.

The rule of Madurai sultanates ended in 1377-1378, during the reign of Ala-ud-din Sikandar Shah (1368-1378), after the invasion of Kumarakambana or Kampana Udayar, the son of Bukha I and the prince of Vijayanagar. Kumarakambana left Duvarasamuthiram along with his garrison towards Madurai in 1371. To rescue the city from Ala ud din Sikandar Shah (1368-1378), who ruled Madurai then. Kumarakambanan is likely the representative of Bukha (1356 - 1377), the ruler of Vijayanagar, and Kambanan could be his General.

A manuscript abstracted in page 438 of Mr Taylor's catalogue speaks of a Kampana Udeiyar as being in 1371 the agent of Buk'ha the Rayar of Vijayanagar, and as a Bukha was the Rayar of that time, there seems to be good reason to suppose that Kampana Udeiyar was general in the service of the Rayar, and was sent by him to oust the Mohometans from Madura. (Nelson 82)

The conquest of Kumarakambana was the shortest of all the invasions by the Hindu kings. But the preparation for the conquest was not that short. Still, it is difficult to find the exact year of his conquest towards the south. It is believed that Kampana started his journey in 1352; later, he arrived at Kanchipuram in 1359, and then he became the ruler of Thondaimandalam, which covers the Nellore, Chittoor, North and South Arcot of the present-day Andhra Pradesh and Chengalpattu of present-day Tamil Nadu. Another view is that Kampana arrived at Madurai during 1345-1357 when the Sultans produced no coins. Kampana Udeiyar invaded Madurai in 1372, and according to the fictional account, it was on the 17th of Masi (Tamil month), 1371. "Kumarakambana's Vijayanagar brigade left Duvarasamuthiram on 17th of the Month of Masi in 1371" (Su Venkatesan 10). After defeating the Mohammedans, Kampana Udeiyar reopened the Meenakshi Amman Temple in 1378. The defeat of the Sultanates by Kumara Kampana in 1378 led to the reopening

and restoration of many Hindu temples in Madurai, including the iconic Meenakshi Amman Temple, symbolising the revival of Hindu cultural and religious practices in the region. Venkatesan mentions that the temple was shut for fifty years.

It has remained closed for over fifty years now. I just opened and looked into. I could not enter. It is a scene of dense clumps of bush and shrubs; flocks of parrots on the wing inside. There is no the idol of Meenakshi in the Sanctum sanctorum, they say. Fearing Muslim assault, they took it away and kept somewhere down the south in Southern region. I have asked them to search for and bring it back. (Su Venkatesan 28)

According to the historical account of J H Nelson, it is forty-eight years. The chapter in which Venkatesan mentions about the reopening of the Meenakshi Amman Temple, there is a reference to the consecration ceremony that took place in 1323, which was organised by the Parakkrama Pandya, also known as Jatavaraman Sundara Pandya III (1310-1332). If the consecration had been held in 1323, the temple could have been shut sometime around 1329 or 1331, when Madurai was under the control of Delhi Sultanates. Still, it is not clear when the temple was shut, but it was reopened in 1378 after the conquest of Kumara Kambana.

Kampana was taken on an appointed day to witness the re-opening of the great Pagoda, and on his entering and approaching the shrine for the purpose of looking upon the face of the god, lo! And behold! Everything was first shut up just forty-eight years previously. The lamp that was lighted on that day was still burning. (Nelson 82)

The intertextual elements in both texts give the readers information about the historical event that Su. Venkatesan and J H Nelson are interconnected. The year of the successful conquest led by Kampana towards Madurai is more or less similar. Venkatesan says it is the 17th of Masi, 1371, whereas J H Nelson mentions it as 'about the year 1372'. The phrase 'about the year' usually describes or mentions any historical event when the details are inaccurate.

Later, when the Chola king Vira Shekhara conquered Madurai in 1502, the Pandya king Chandrasekara Pandiayan, who was the feudatory of Madurai under the Vijayanagar Dynasty, went to Vijayanagar to seek support from Krishna Devaraya (1509 - 1529). Rayar ordered Nagama Naicker to drive away Vira Shekhara and give the throne to Chandrasekara Pandiayan. Nagama Naicker came from Chandragiri to Madurai with his force and fought with the Chola king Vira Shekhara, defeated him and announced him as the authority.

Râyar determined to assist him and ordered Kotiya Nagama Nayakkan to march against Tanjore, chastise its rebellious Raja, and reinstate the refugee upon the throne of the Pandyas. Agreeably to this command, the general put himself at the head of a sufficient number of troops, and marched southwards. It did not take him long to attack and defeat the king of Tanjore: and he soon afterwards gained possession of the fort of Madura, and within a few days reduced the surrounding country to

submission. But having obeyed his Lord to the lotter up to this point, he suddenly threw off his allegiance: and declining to do anything for the self-styled Pāndya, began to administer the country on his own account and of his own sole benefit. (Nelson 89)

This made Krishna Deva Raya angry, and he wanted to behead Nagama Naicker. “Nagama or Nagappa and well known by the title of Kotiya, which he bore as being in charge of the Palace *Kotis* or store-houses.” (Nelson 88) As Nagama Naicker was the exclusive administrator for defence-related activities and the eldest, nobody from the court of Krishna Devaraya was willing to arrest Nagama Naicker.

where amongst you all is he, who will bring the rebel’s head?” The councillors looked round one another but no one spoke a word. Again, the question was asked: and again, there was no reply. At last, to the astonishment of all present, Viswanatha stood up declared his willingness to undertake the duty required. (Nelson 89)

At that time, Viswanathan, the only son of Nagama Naicker, was the one who showed his willingness to imprison him. “He appears to have been the only son of an officer of the Vijayanagar government who was named Nagama or Nagappa and well known by the title of *Kotiya*, which he bore as being in charge of the Palace *Kotis* or store-houses” (Nelson 88). The information furnished by Su Venkatesan in his fictional account and J H Nelson’s historical account has slight differences. Venkatesan presents the narrative history with flashbacks and more emotions, Nagama Naicker’s love towards his only son, Viswanatha, and his daughter-in-law, Veeranagamma and his passion towards his land. At first, Krishna Devaraya was hesitant to send Viswanathan to behead his father because of the disappointment he got from his father. But Viswanathan reassured that he would behead his father for his Lord. J H Nelson documents the same incident as a fight between Nagama Naicker and Viswanatha. Viswanatha won a one-on-one battle with his father, Nagama Naicker. “He soon justified the extraordinary confidence placed in him, and Nagama was defeated in a pitched battle, and taken prisoner and placed in close confinement.” (Nelson 90). In Su Venkatesan’s narrative, there are many characters, emotions, and dramatic elements that enhance the fictionalisation of history. At the same time, it has the historical accuracy.

The narration goes on. Thammaiya Naicker, a very good friend and servant of Nagama Naicker, went to Nagama Naicker as an intermediary of Viswanatha. But Nagama Naicker refused to surrender himself and imprisoned Thammaiya. The imprisonment eventually led to the death of Thammaiya, of which Nagama Naicker was unaware. As Nelson mentions, Nagama Naicker declared him as an authority of Madurai for his benefit; we can relate to this while reading Su Venkatesan’s text. Venkatesan observes it as the cold war between the Kollavars and the Kappu Balijas. It is evident from the conversation between Nagama Naicker and Tammaiya Naicker about the history of Kollavars. Vijayanagar was an empire raised

by the Kollavars, who fought with the enemies on the battlefields and by other clans such as Chillavars, Vallakkavaras and Vekkiliars. But Vijayanagar is now ruled by the Kappu Balijas without shedding even a single drop of blood. Nagama Naicker says that comparatively, Kappu Balijas, who are now ruling the land, are less numerous, and their participation in activities to safeguard the land is also less, yet they are ruling. Still, the people who belong to the clan Kollavars have little recognition of power and position and do not hold pasture for their sacred cows. Thus, it is very much clear that the interplay and interconnectedness between Su Venkatesan's *The Bastion* and J H Nelson's *The Political History of the Madura Country, Ancient and Modern*, shapes the meaning of a particular historical event where the sense of Nelson's observation that Nagama Naicker was imprisoned for disobeying the king's order can be understood while reading Venkatesan's text which reveals the reason behind Nagama Naicker's action. Su Venkatesan's *The Bastion* influences the meaning of Nelson's text.

A kappu Balija who came from the riverside of Godavari, not shedding even a drop of blood is on the throne of Vijayanagar today”

“.....”

“Now the Vijayanagar army Chiefs, governors, and the courtiers are balijas. But those who face the challenge of the enemy and fight taking positions in the forefront are only kollavaru brigadiers and soldiers. They have no grazing fields for their sacrificial cows. Not even a little span of earth for them to spread their carpet. (Venkatesan 42-43)

Su Venkatesan narrates Krishna Devaraya announcing Viswanatha as a governor of Arava Nadu in a more personal tone. Veeranagamma, wife of Viswanatha Naicker, a distant relative of Krishna Devaraya, wants to release her father-in-law, who her Husband has imprisoned. “Soon after his return from Rathnagiri, his marriage to Veeranagamma was finalised. A distant relative of Rayar's and Registrar of the palace, Ramabatra Naicker's granddaughter was the bride” (Venkatesan 59). After imprisoning Nagama Naicker, Viswanatha went to Vijayanagar to hand Nagamar over to Rayar. As Veeranagamma is Rayar's close relative, she wants him to release her father-in-law before Viswanathan arrives at Vijayanagar. As she took it as a family issue, she wants Rayar to judge without inquiry.

“Bhava! I would not want to earn the dishonour of my family exposed to the public ridicule”.

“And then...?” Still laughing, Rayar asked. “You have to meet him in private”.

“And then...?” “Here and now”.

My cute little baby! Will it be right to attend to affairs of the state at this hour at night?” How could you so torture a hip-broken old man?

You may be the supreme ruler of a huge kingdom surrounded by all the

three seas. But to me you are my Bhava, aren't you?"

"That's right. As a kid you had made my clothes wet. Now your little boy is doing it. What else a grandpa deserves?" (Venkatesan 81)

Rayar accepted her point and decided not to imprison Nagama Naicker. He met him on his way to Vijayanagar and discussed the past. Rayar and Nagama Naicker talked about Rayar's young age when he went to the Godhavari war with Nagama Naicker to fight the Kalingas. Rayar wants Nagama Naicker to continue as Mandaleswarar and Viswanathan to rule Arava Nadu (Tamil Nadu), which incorporates the southern region of river Kaveri.

Dismounting from his seed, Rayar walked closer to Nagamar. He then declared in a loud voice so that all of them around could hear his proclamation: "Nagamar alone will continue in his position as the governing ruler of Southern hemisphere. I am giving the Arava (Tamil) region South of Kaviri to Viswanathan. (Venkatesan 85)

Rayar wants Viswanatha to rule Arava Nadu independently but with the same flag and emblem of Varaga to avoid the consequences from other governors but with the condition that the army forces have to be joined when needed.

Nagamar! Let Viswanathan rule his part of the land in his own way. He need not pay any tributes to Vijayanagar. It is enough if we can come to the help of each other exchanging armed forces in an hour of need. But surely the flag will bear the emblem of boar. But If the governors of other spheres come to know that he is ruling his region under his own exclusive authority, he won't be able to face their challenge. (Venkatesan 86-87)

After the fall of the Pandya Dynasty, The Muslim invaders ruled Madurai for about 4 decades, and then after Kumarakampana's successful conquest in 1378, Madurai came under the direct rule of the Vijayanagar Empire. It is impossible that the Pandya kings gave up their power and pride immediately after Kamapana's conquest in 1378. There are inscriptions stating that the Pandyan kings ruled some parts of Madurai until 1381, amidst the frequent invasion of the Chola kings. After 1381, they gained prominence in the Tinnevely. However, it is impossible that during the reign of Krishna Deva Raya, he did not appoint Viswanatha as the King of Madurai. But there is a possibility of governors ruling under Vijayanagar ruled Madurai for around thirty-five years. J H Nelson, in his documentation, states that Madurai was ruled by three governors before Viswanatha Naicker from 1500 to 1535. Viswanatha Naicker became the governor of Madurai only in 1535 when the Vijayanagar was ruled by Achyuta Deva Raya (1529-1542), younger brother of Krishna Deva Raya.

It will have been observed that in 1500 a Narasa Nayakkan took possession of Madura, and stayed in it for a short time; and it seems not unlikely that this man was the Narasa who was Governor of the country from 1515 to 1519.

In 1319 Narasa was succeeded by a Nayakkan named Kuru Kuru Timmappa, who ruled five years, In 1524 a Nayakkan named Kattiyama Kameiya succeeded, and made way for another named Chinnappa two years afterwards. This Governor ruled for four years, and was succeeded by a Nayakkan named Iyakarei Veyyappa, who ruled five years. In 1535 the government of the country fell into the hands of a man named Visvanāṭha Nayakkar Ayyar. He ruled nine years: and was succeeded in 1544 according to the Sritala book by the Vathamannans, or Varatliamannans, who ruled for only one year. This name, as well it might, has puzzled Mr. Taylor sorely: but it is only a slight mistake for Varathappa Nayakkar, the name which comes in here in the list given by the historical memorandum of the Record Office. (Nelson 84-85)

The fictionalised history found in Su Venkatesan's *The Bastion* claims that Viswanatha Naicker was the first governor to rule Arava Nadu under the kingship of Krishna Devaraya (1509-1529).

Nagamar! Let Viswanathan rule his part of the land in his own way. He need not pay any tributes to Vijayanagar. It is enough if we can come to the help of each other exchanging armed forces in an hour of need. But surely the flag will bear the emblem of boar. But If the governors of other spheres come to know that he is ruling his region under his own exclusive authority, he won't be able to face their challenge. (Venkatesan 86-87)

J H Nelson, in his documentation, observes that no one from the Vijayanagar Dynasty was directly appointed as King of Madurai. Instead, governors were appointed while the Pandyas were ruling the land. According to historical accounts, the Pandya had no son and gave the entire kingdom to Viswanatha to stop the Chola monarch from usurping it again. The existence of a copper-plate inscription in the hands of the great Pagoda authorities makes it abundantly evident that the Pandya had two sons, Vira and another, who both grew up and were invested with a sort of mock sovereignty during the time of Viswanatha and his immediate successors, makes these accounts extremely suspicious in and of themselves. Naturally, the inscription could be a fake. Nelson registers those three years from 1557 when there was great confusion in the country. It was in 1559 that Viswanatha Naicker became the King of Madurai, beginning the Nayak Dynasty in Madurai. "I see no sufficient reason to doubt that 1559 is the correct date of Viswanatha's assumption of the government" (Nelson 87).

The present article discusses the historical events surrounding the invasions and political changes in Madurai from the 14th to the 16th centuries, comparing the accounts in J.H. Nelson's *The Political History of the Madura Country, Ancient and Modern* with Su. Venkatesan's historical novel *The Bastion*. It emphasises the Intertextuality between the two texts, highlighting how historical documentation and literary fiction intertwine to present nuanced perspectives on significant events. Malik Kafur's invasion of Madurai in 1311 marked the beginning of Muslim

dominance in the region. Subsequent invasions by leaders such as Khusrau Khan and Ulug Khan (Mohamad bin Tughlaq) led to significant political upheavals, including the ousting of Pandya rulers like Parakkrama Pandya. This period saw the closure of temples, including the Meenakshi Amman Temple.

Also, it highlights how Venkatesan's fictionalised account contextualises Nelson's historical observations. For instance, Venkatesan's focus on the socio-political dynamics and cultural identity of the Kollavars and Kappu Balijas complements Nelson's administrative records, offering a more vivid portrayal of the era. Both authors emphasise the role of leaders like Kampana Udeiyar also known as Kumarakampana and Viswanatha Naicker in reviving Madurai's cultural and religious heritage. Su Venkatesan, however, incorporates Characters, emotional and dramatic elements, and familial conflicts to enrich the historical narrative. The interplay between Nelson's factual account and Venkatesan's fictional retelling enriches the understanding of Madurai's history, illustrating the blending of documented events with imaginative storytelling to explore the complexities of political power, cultural resilience, and historical memory.

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