

## IVANHOE AND MARTHANDA VARMA – A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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### **Abstract**

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), the inventor of modern Historical Novel was a Scottish novelist who through his novels like *Rob Roy (1817)*, *The Heart of Midlothian(1818)* and *Ivanhoe(1819)* immortalized the heroism and daring of Scotland’s romantic past. C.V. Raman Pillai (1858-1922), one of the founding fathers of Malayalam Novel, is well-known for the three great Historical Romances –*Marthanda Varma (1891)*, *Dharmaraja (1913)* and *Ramarajabahadur (1918)*. Thus Sir Walter Scott and C.V. Raman Pillai were two novelists who were separated by the barriers of nationhood, race and culture. They were also not contemporaries. But all these factors did not prevent the former from influencing the latter. This paper is an attempt to study the influence of Sir Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe* on C.V. Raman Pillai’s *Marthanda Varma*.

## Introduction

C.V. Raman Pillai's *Marthanda Varma* resembles Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* in many respects and the resemblance is most evident in the area of characterization. When we take into consideration the characters which appear in *Marthanda Varma*, we can find their respective counterparts in *Ivanhoe*. King Richard's position in *Ivanhoe* is occupied by the title character in C.V. Raman Pillai's novel. Similarly, in the place of Ivanhoe, Rowena and Cedric of Rotherwood, we have Ananthapadmanabhan, Parukutty and Thirumukhathu Pillai, respectively. The negative characters in *Ivanhoe* are Prince John and the Norman feudal chieftains like Sir Brian de Bois-Guilbert. In *Marthanda Varma*, we can find their respective counterparts in PadmanabhanThampi and the feudal lords called 'EttuveetilPillamar' (the lords of the eight houses). S. Guptan Nair observes: "But the fact remains that *Marthanda Varma* was written under the heady influence of *Ivanhoe*. Many of C.V.'s characters have their prototypes in Scott." ("Foreword". *C.V. Raman Pillai* 8). Indeed, C.V. Raman Pillai is greatly indebted to Scott's *Ivanhoe*, as far the characterization is concerned. The title character of Scott's novel, Ivanhoe is an epitome of chivalry and adventure, a typical knight who after perilous adventures is happily reunited with his lady in distress, Rowena. Ananthapadmanabhan of *Marthanda Varma* is also a thoroughly romantic character like Ivanhoe. He too is a chivalrous warrior who gets separated from his love and after several exciting adventures, gets reunited with his love, Parukutty.

At the beginning of the novel *Ivanhoe*, we find England in a very miserable condition. Confusion, chaos and total anarchy is prevailing in the kingdom. While King Richard was away fighting the Crusades, his brother Prince John usurped the throne with the help of Norman nobles like Brian de Bois-Guilbert, Reginald Front-de-Boeuf and Maurice de Bracy. When King Richard comes to know the treachery of his own brother, he tries to return to England, but gets imprisoned on the way in Austria by the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry VI. Thus when the novel opens, King Richard is supposed to be in captivity along with his assistant, Wilfred of Ivanhoe. However, Ivanhoe makes a dramatic entry at the Ashby-de-la-Zouche tournament held under the auspices of Prince John. On the first day of the tournament, he comes disguised as 'the Disinherited Knight' and defeats all the Norman lords supporting Prince John. On the second day, when Ivanhoe comes on the verge of defeat, a mysterious Black Knight (King Richard in disguise) comes to his rescue. Like the 12<sup>th</sup> Century England portrayed in *Ivanhoe*, the Kingdom of Travancore was also passing through

a dark period at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The reason was the fight for succession and it brought the country on the verge of a civil war. The kingdom of Travancore followed the 'Marumakkathayam' Law of matrilineal inheritance. This entitled the nephew of the ruling king to be the successor rather than the son. Marthanda Varma was the nephew of the ruling king of Travancore and PadmanabhanThampi was the son of the king. In the kingdom of Travancore, the feudal chieftains or 'Madampis' were quite powerful. They had private armies and the power of the king was thus greatly reduced. The chief among the feudal chieftains were 'EttuveetilPillamar' (the lords of the eight houses). Marthanda Varma was bent upon reducing the power the feudal chieftains and it created a furore among the powerful feudal lords. 'EttuveetilPillamar' thus hatch a conspiracy to kill Marthanda Varma and also extends their support to PadmanabhanThampi to be the next king of Travancore. Thus Marthanda Varma is forced to flee for his life. He receives help from some feudal lords like MankoyikalKurup and starts to lead an underground life. Ananthapadmanabhan gives Marthanda Varma full support and serves him loyally. However, when Marthanda Varma and Ananthapadmanabhan were staying at Nagercoil, Ananthapadmanabhan receives information about his mother's illness. Ananthapadmanabhan thus leaves the prince and while passing through Panchavankadu forest, VeluKurup, the henchman of PadmanabhanThampi, attacks and wounds him severely. VeluKurup then leaves the place thinking him to be dead. The novel *Marthanda Varma* begins in medias res describing the young man, Ananthapadmanabhan, lying in a pool of blood at Panchavankadu forest. Ananthapadmanabhan is later saved by two Muslim merchants, Biram Khan and Hakim who take him to the Pathan camp at Manakkad. VeluKurup later returns to the spot and finds the 'corpse' of Ananthapadmanabhan missing. VeluKurup then spreads the story that Ananthapadmanabhan was eaten by the vampire Neeli of Panchavankad forest. At the Pathan camp, Ananthapadmanabhan adopts the name Shamsuddin and it becomes a safe abode for him. Living in the Pathan camp, he dedicates himself to the cause of saving Marthanda Varma from the evil machinations of PadmanabhanThampi and EttuveetilPillamar. Whenever a grave danger seemed to befall Marthanda Varma, Ananthapadmanabhan started intervening, disguised as a Mad Channan (member of a lower caste). His exploits as the Mad Channan resemble the actions of mythical heroes, a larger-than-life figure, a superhero, who makes his entry at crucial situations to save people in distress. Thus despite the titular significance, Marthanda Varma is not the real hero of the novel. The real hero of the novel is Ananthapadmanabhan, a product of C.V. Raman Pillai's imagination. It emphasizes the fact

that *Marthanda Varma* is not a historical document and that it is a Historical Romance. The novel *Ivanhoe* is also a Historical Romance. But in *Ivanhoe*, the titular fictional character created by Sir Walter Scott does not enjoy the privilege of being the hero, in the real sense of the word. No great heroic actions are performed by Ivanhoe. Even his victory at the Ashby-de-la-Zouche tournament was made possible due the powerful assistance rendered by the Black Knight (King Richard in disguise). In this context, it is worthwhile to consider the opinion of critic M.P. Paul: “In *Ivanhoe*, it is King Richard who saves Ivanhoe from several difficult situations while, in *Marthanda Varma*, it is Ananthapadmanabhan who saves the King from almost impossible situations.” (qtd. By S. Guptan Nair in *C.V. Raman Pillai* 28-29 from M.P. Paul’s *Gadyagati*). In other words, though the title of C.V. Raman Pillai’s novel is ‘Marthanda Varma’, the real hero of the novel is Ananthapadmanabhan and in Sir Walter Scott’s novel, the real hero is King Richard, even though the title is ‘Ivanhoe’. This reversal becomes quite conspicuous when we compare a rescue scene in *Ivanhoe* with a similar scene in *Marthanda Varma*. In *Ivanhoe*, King Richard comes to the rescue of Ivanhoe like a thunderbolt exclaiming in a loud voice like a trumpet-call “Desdichado, to the rescue!” (*Ivanhoe* 108). In *Marthanda Varma*, Ananthapadmanabhan comes to the rescue of Marthanda Varma, exclaiming in a loud voice “I will...save...him” (*Marthanda Varma* 84).

Another point of similarity between these two novels is the love-triangle involving major characters. In *Ivanhoe*, there is a love-triangle involving Ivanhoe, Lady Rowena and Rebecca. In *Marthanda Varma*, the love-triangle involves Ananthapadmanabhan, Parukutty and Zuleikha. The use of epigraph or motto at the beginning of every chapter is another feature which shows the direct influence of *Ivanhoe* on *Marthanda Varma*. Each chapter of the novel *Ivanhoe* has an epigraph or motto. These epigraphs are excerpts from the works of great literary masters like Shakespeare, Webster and Pope. In *Marthanda Varma* the epigraphs are taken from Malayalam literary giants like Ezhuttachhan, UnnayiWarrier and IrayimmanThampi. In both the novels the epigraph at the beginning of a chapter is indicative of the main events of that chapter. For example, the epigraph of chapter five of *Ivanhoe* is the oft-quoted ‘Hath not a Jew eyes’ passage from Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*. The epigraph is apt as the chapter introduces a Jew called Isaac. The epigraph of the first chapter of *Marthanda Varma* is taken from MahabharathamKilipattu by Ezhuttachhan. It describes the Abhimanyu lying in a pool of blood at the Kurukshetra war field. The epigraph is apt for the first chapter as it describes Ananthapadmanabhan lying in a pool of blood at Panchavankad forest.

## Conclusion

Thus it is quite evident that *Marthanda Varmaw* was written by C.V. Raman Pillai under the direct influence of Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. However he cannot be termed as a plagiarist. In the foreword written to the first edition of *Marthanda Varma* C.V. Raman Pillai declares his real intention behind the writing of the novel. He categorically states that the novel has been written with an intention to create in Malayalam, a model of what has been called 'Historical Romance' in English. Indeed, he succeeded in accomplishing his aim.

## Work cited

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