

Horse of the Servant: Synopsis

Blood and Thrones series, Part 1: Marthanda Varma

Overview

They break him in a Portuguese cellar under Goa, nail by nail, question by question, until his name feels like a lie.

Nagoji Sawant was *huzurat* cavalry under Chimaji Appa, a rider sworn to drive foreigners from the Konkan coast. Captured at the edge of victory, he is shipped south in chains. A storm tears the vessel apart. He lives.

He does not wash up in safety. He washes up on the pepper coast, where every kingdom is a bargain and every bargain is backed by steel. In Venad, the ambitious king Marthanda Varma is crushing rival houses and dragging small polities into a single state. The Dutch East India Company wants that state divided. Cochin and northern powers want it stopped. The sea is full of flags that smell of monopoly.

Pulled into court as a useful stranger, Nagoji is set to train horsemen for a war no one can afford to lose. As alliances tighten and old grudges ignite, the decisive clash comes at Colachel, where sand, smoke, and discipline decide whether Europeans can be humbled on an Indian beach.

Horse of the Servant is the first instalment of Blood and Thrones, a visceral work of historical fiction about loyalty, statecraft, and the price a kingdom pays to become untouchable.

Book I: Chains and Surf

Nagoji Sawant, a twenty-five-year-old Maratha cavalry officer from near present-day Nashik, is broken in Portuguese hands, survives a slave ship and a storm he is utterly unprepared for, and is carried into Travancore as valuable wreckage in **1738**. By the end of the book he has met the king and diwan, poised to enter a kingdom on the brink of internal transformation.

- **Chapter 1: Dungeons of Goa** - Nagoji is interrogated and tortured in a Portuguese prison in Goa while Father Duarte watches, and we learn his Maratha cavalry past through the questions hurled at him.
- **Chapter 2: The Slave Ship South** - Chained in a crowded hold with younger comrade Keshavrao, Nagoji is loaded onto a Portuguese transport as monsoon weather darkens the Arabian Sea.
- **Chapter 3: The Choice in the Storm** - A violent storm tears the ship apart, chains snap, some prisoners drown bound while others scramble for freedom, and Nagoji fails to save Keshavrao before

he is flung into black water.

- **Chapter 4: The Fishermen of the Pepper Coast** - Nagoji wakes on a Malabar beach, is debated over by local fishermen, and is claimed by Ibrahim Marakkar, who recognises the value of a cavalryman scarred by European war.
 - **Chapter 5: Road to Travancore** - As he travels up the pepper coast, Nagoji registers the strangeness of Malabar, hears of Padmini Amma the estate holder and Revathi Bayi the sharp-tongued princess, and glimpses Travancore's coastal forts.
 - **Chapter 6: The Coastal Hall** - In a campaign hall above the sea he meets King Marthanda Varma and Diwan Ramayyan, who question him about horses, guns and politics, leaving him unsure whether he is guest or weapon.
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Book II: Court of the Tiger

Nagoji learns the workings of Travancore's court and countryside, discovers how much power Malabar women wield, falls into a dangerous attraction with Princess Revathi Bayi, and helps prepare a trap for the Dutch he has not yet seen.

- **Chapter 7: Horses in Wet Sand** - Ordered to train Travancore and Arcot cavalry in 1738, Nagoji struggles until he adapts Deccan tactics to wet coastal ground and wins grudging respect from local horsemen.
- **Chapter 8: Padmini Amma's Estate** - Billeted on Padmini Amma's matrilineal estate, he is startled by a woman who commands land, men and pepper revenue, and she explains how royal women like Revathi Bayi sit at the top of this order.
- **Chapter 9: Princess of Velinadu** - Introduced by Padmini Amma at a Velinadu gathering, Nagoji meets Revathi Bayi, spars with her over politics, feels an immediate pull, and is stung when she dismisses him as a man lending his sword to a king he barely understands.
- **Chapter 10: Lessons in Travancore** - Over the years 1738-1740, Nagoji rides in the King's internal campaigns against the *Ettuveetil Pillamar* (Eight Houses). He sees how religion, landholding and army mesh, and how Ramayyan's unseen hand links them to break feudal power.
- **Chapter 11: Dutch on the Horizon** - From coastal watch posts, Ibrahim brings reports of disciplined Dutch ships offshore under a hard-drilling commander Nagoji never quite sees, and De Lannoy's name is heard only as a rumour.
- **Chapter 12: Threads of Alliance** - In court, Nagoji watches Dutch envoys, chieftains, temple men,

Padmini Amma and Revathi Bayi manoeuvre while Ramayyan quietly shapes the outcome, and he realises he is just one piece on a board that stretches to Batavia.

- **Chapter 13: The Eve of Colachel (1741)** - With Dutch fleets finally near after years of shadow war, Nagoji readies his veteran cavalry. Padmini Amma secures her estates, Revathi Bayi moves inside the palace to manage aristocratic fears, and the king and diwan tighten their trap.
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Book III: After the Dutch

The battle of Colachel shatters Dutch power, introduces De Lannoy as a prisoner turned adviser, and forces Nagoji to face both the possibilities of this new Travancore army and the pull of the distant Maratha world. He is adopted into Padmini Amma's house and marries Revathi Bayi.

- **Chapter 14: The Siege of Colachel** - Nagoji rides the slow grind of a coastal siege until a lucky shot hits the Dutch powder magazine and turns the beachhead into fire. In the smoke, he finds the weak seam in a disciplined square, strikes with cavalry at the precise moment, and watches the foreign order collapse into capture.
- **Chapter 15: Prisoners of a New King** - Dutch prisoners are screened, De Lannoy is interrogated by Marthanda Varma and Ramayyan in a scene that echoes Nagoji's own first questioning, and he accepts Travancore service while Nagoji feels his uniqueness fade.
- **Chapter 16: Building a New Army** - Time jumps forward as De Lannoy reshapes forts and infantry drills, Nagoji rebuilds cavalry doctrine, Ramayyan keeps everything aligned with the crown, and Padmini Amma negotiates how her estate survives within this tighter military net.
- **Chapter 17: Adoption of the Stranger** - The King, Senior Rani, and young heir visit Padmini Amma's estate. It is revealed she sheltered the King as a hunted child. To anchor Nagoji to the land, the King arranges a paid ritual to 'discover' a lost Nair lineage, and Padmini formally adopts Nagoji into her house.
- **Chapter 18: Dutch Come Bowing** - Dutch envoys return to court seeking trade and recognition, forced to pay for rights they once took by force, while De Lannoy stands between old allegiance and new oath and Ramayyan tells Nagoji to remember every detail.
- **Chapter 19: Shadows of the Deccan** - Letters and rumours from the Maratha heartland, including hints about Keshavrao and old sardars, stir Nagoji's sense of unfinished duty. He sends his final bag of gold north, severing financial ties to his old home.
- **Chapter 20: Guest in Velinadu** - Nagoji is summoned by Revathi Bayi. She confronts him about his loyalties and accepts him in marriage, with the condition that in matrilineal Velinadu he will always

be a ‘guest’ and visitor to his own children’s lineage.

- **Chapter 21: Ramayyan’s Ledger** - Nagoji discovers that Ramayyan keeps files on everyone, including him, and their quiet argument about control, loyalty and necessity ends with the diwan updating his ledger to reflect Nagoji’s marriage and deepening roots.
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Book IV: Teeth of the Tiger

Nagoji chooses to stay in Travancore, rises to command cavalry under De Lannoy, faces internal and external crises that force him to hurt people he loves, breaks an old border house tied to Revathi, and ends as an older general who knows exactly what his kingdom has cost.

- **Chapter 22: Command of the Marches** - After a *chevar* assassination attempt at a temple, the king offers Nagoji a permanent cavalry command on the northern marches. He accepts, formally placing his sword in Travancore service.
- **Chapter 23: First Campaign for the Tiger** - Nagoji leads cavalry against Kollamkara, a Dutch-backed chief. He forces his cavalry to act as hammer to De Lannoy’s infantry anvil, fighting near Padmini Amma’s estates and proving the new army’s worth.
- **Chapter 24: Under De Lannoy’s Standard** - Nagoji and De Lannoy work as a real partnership shaping cavalry and fort design. The king orders European-style uniforms; Nagoji struggles with wearing clothes that remind him of his Portuguese torturers. He trains the young prince in combat, and Syrian Christian artillerymen and Jewish merchants add new dimensions to the army.
- **Chapter 25: Ramayyan’s Test** - A letter arrives from Pune offering Nagoji estates and status if he returns with intelligence about Travancore. Ramayyan shows him the letter and watches. Nagoji burns both the letter and his reply, choosing silence toward his Maratha past. Ramayyan notes in his ledger: “Is ours.”
- **Chapter 26: Fire in the Pepper Fields** - Dutch-backed raiders and internal revolt strike at once. Nagoji orders a scorched strip through Padmini Amma’s pepper fields to deny cover to enemies. He saves the kingdom but wounds his relationship with both Padmini and Revathi, who sees he will always choose the king’s project over the old houses.
- **Chapter 27: The Last of the Old Houses** - After Padmini Amma’s death, Nagoji becomes caretaker of her estate. The king moves against Kottarakkara, the last independent house. Princess Savitri, Revathi’s kinswoman, claims succession; the king refuses. She flees to Dutch support. A bitter war ends with her exile to Cochin.
- **Chapter 28: Servant of Padmanabha** - In 1750, Marthanda Varma surrenders the kingdom to

Lord Padmanabha in the *Thrippadidanam* ceremony, making the state untouchable by noble rebellion. Revathi confronts Nagoji one final time, choosing to be ‘the one who remembers’ what the kingdom cost. In 1753, the Dutch sign the Treaty of Mavelikkara. Years later, an aged Nagoji stands on the walls as monsoon falls, asked by a young officer what Travancore was like before. “I miss what it cost,” he says. Some things do not wash. Some things we carry.