

Target Readership and Market Analysis

Horse of the Servant

by RV Menon

Target Readership

Primary Audience: - Readers of literary historical fiction aged 25-55 - Fans of Amitav Ghosh, Perumal Murugan, and Shashi Tharoor's historical works - Readers interested in South Indian history, particularly Kerala and Tamil Nadu - The growing market of readers seeking Indian historical fiction beyond Mughal-era narratives - NRI readers with connections to Kerala and Maharashtra seeking literary engagement with their heritage

Secondary Audience: - History enthusiasts interested in colonial-era India and European trading companies - Academic readers exploring pre-colonial state formation in South Asia - Book clubs seeking substantive historical fiction with discussion-worthy themes - Students of Indian history looking for accessible entry points to the period

Market Potential

Growing Demand for Regional Historical Fiction: Indian readers increasingly seek historical fiction rooted in regional histories. The success of authors like Perumal Murugan (Tamil Nadu), S. Hareesh (Kerala), and the translation boom in regional literature indicates strong appetite for stories beyond North Indian settings.

Underserved Niche: The 18th-century Malabar coast remains almost untouched in English-language fiction. While Manu S. Pillai's non-fiction works (*The Ivory Throne, Rebel Sultans*) have demonstrated commercial interest in this period, no major novel has dramatised the Battle of Colachel or Marthanda Varma's reign.

Series Potential: *Horse of the Servant* is positioned as the first in the *Blood and Thrones* series, offering long-term commercial potential across multiple titles covering pivotal moments in South Indian history. The second book will follow Dharma Raja, Marthanda Varma's nephew and successor, as he confronts Tipu Sultan's southward expansion and ultimately seeks British alliance, a narrative arc that connects the first book's themes of independence to the complex compromises of the late 18th century.

Comparable Titles

Sea of Poppies by Amitav Ghosh (2008)

- **Publisher:** Penguin / John Murray
- **Recognition:** Booker Prize shortlist
- **Comparison:** Both novels use maritime settings and the colonial-era Indian Ocean world. *Sea of Poppies* focuses on the opium trade; *Horse of the Servant* examines the pepper trade and VOC monopoly. Ghosh's novel covers the 1830s; this novel covers the 1740s, an earlier and less-explored period.
- **Distinction:** *Horse of the Servant* centres South Indian politics rather than North Indian diaspora, and features an indigenous victory over European forces rather than colonial subjugation.

The Ivory Throne by Manu S. Pillai (2015)

- **Publisher:** HarperCollins India
- **Recognition:** Bestseller, Tata Literature Live! Award shortlist
- **Comparison:** Both cover Travancore royal history. Pillai's work is non-fiction focusing on the 19th-century queen Sethu Lakshmi Bayi.
- **Distinction:** *Horse of the Servant* fictionalises an earlier period and offers novelistic engagement rather than historical biography.

Scion of Ikshvaku by Amish Tripathi (2015)

- **Publisher:** Westland
- **Recognition:** Bestseller
- **Comparison:** Both are historical/mythological fiction set in India, targeting readers who enjoy immersive world-building.
- **Distinction:** *Horse of the Servant* is grounded in documented history rather than mythology, targeting readers who prefer literary historical fiction over fantasy elements.

White Mughals by William Dalrymple (2002)

- **Publisher:** HarperCollins
 - **Recognition:** Wolfson Prize
 - **Comparison:** Both explore the complex relationships between Indian kingdoms and European presence.
 - **Distinction:** *Horse of the Servant* is fiction rather than narrative non-fiction, and focuses on military and political rather than romantic entanglements.
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Competitive Advantages

1. **Unique Historical Setting:** No comparable novel covers the Battle of Colachel or Marthanda Varma's Travancore in English-language fiction.
 2. **Dual Regional Appeal:** The Maratha protagonist and Travancore setting create natural readership bridges between Maharashtra and Kerala, two of India's most literate states.
 3. **Historical Significance:** The story of an Indian kingdom defeating a European power appeals to national pride while avoiding jingoistic simplification.
 4. **Series Foundation:** Established world and characters can support sequels covering subsequent rulers and conflicts.
 5. **Adaptation Potential:** The visual richness of the setting (coastal forts, pepper plantations, monsoon battles, court intrigue) offers strong film/series adaptation potential.
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Author Platform

RV Menon's background as a software engineer with roots in both Kerala and Maharashtra provides authentic cultural grounding for the novel's dual perspectives. While this is a debut novel, the author brings professional discipline to the writing process and has deep personal investment in these regional histories through family connections.