

## **Velu Nachiyar: The Veeramangai who petrified the British**

Anchal Mishra<sup>\*</sup>, Muskan Mishra<sup>\*\*</sup>, Lavanya Paluri<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Professor, Faculty of Management, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, NCR Campus, Delhi-NCR Campus, Delhi- Meerut Road, Modinagar, Ghaziabad, U.P, Indi, anchalm@srmist.edu.in

<sup>\*\*</sup>Research Scholar, D.P.S.G, Meerut Road, Ghaziabad

<sup>\*\*\*</sup>Assistant Professor, School of Education, lavanya@lingayasvidyapeeth.edu.in

### **Abstract**

Indian freedom fighters have struggled for years to attain the freedom we have today. Unfortunately many of these freedom fighters remain unsung to date. One such unlauded freedom fighter was Rani Velu Nachiyar. Born in the era where only men used to rule, she was skilled in handling weapons and martial arts. She was married to the prince of Sivagangai in 1746. In 1772, the British attacked her kingdom, killing her husband and forcing her to flee from her kingdom. But, this did not stop her and she planned to fight against the British to win her kingdom back. Her army commander Kuyili set herself on fire and jumped in British's ammunitions store to destroy every bit of it and became the first suicide bomber in Indian History. In 1780, she fought with the British and took the command in her hand once again.

**Keywords:** Velu Nachiyar, Sivagangai, Freedom Fighter

### **1. Introduction**

When the British (East India Company) came to Surat, India in 1608 (seventeenth century), who would have thought that the foreigners whom they were welcoming for trade and burgeoning of Indian economy, were actually yearning for under laying their rule over our country. As the trade started to flourish, the power of British also started to expand. By 1750, the East India Company started intervening in the Indian Political system.

Soon the British government took direct control over the East India Company. Slowly and steadily the British government spread its dominance over the Indian land starting from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Bengal and reaching to the Northern, Southern and Eastern tips of India. The kings who agreed to work under the British rule were safe but the rulers who refused to be ruled by the British were grappled and executed. Many kings and queens fought with the British to save their kingdoms, some of them were killed and some had to hide themselves.

Rulers such as Tipu Sultan, Rani Laxmi Bai, Puli Thevar, Yashwantrao Holkar and many more fought with the British. Even before the first war of Indian Independence in 1857 took place or Tipu Sultan, Rani Laxmi Bai and other freedom fighters gallantly fought against the British rule, some obscure Indian warriors had already initiated the struggle of freedom against the British.

The history books frequently focus on the contribution of the Indian kings in the independence of our country, overlooking the hardships experienced by the queens, even when the queens have played an equal role if not any bigger, overcoming the stereotypes and prejudices, going against their families and people of their kingdoms and winning their reign back<sup>1</sup>.

One such queen was **Velu Nachiyar**, the chivalrous Indian warrior who fought against the British tanks with sword and spear.

## 2. Literature Review

Born in the kingdom of Ramanathapuram, she was the only child to Raja Chellamuthu Vijayaragunatha Sethupathy and Rani Sakandimuthal of the Ramnad kingdom. Since her childhood she was interested in learning new languages and fighting techniques, She was raised like a male heir and was trained in She was also acquainted in assorted languages including Urdu, French and English and was known by many because of her talents.

But many people criticized their parenting and were against the idea of a woman learning the skills that only the men were supposed to learn. The king and the queen disregarding what the people said, continued to teach their daughter the 'manly adroitness'. Her upbringing molded her into a strong and vigorous woman. She always dreamed of being free from the control of the British. She was also against the practice untouchability and did not support discriminating others on the basis of their caste<sup>2</sup>.

### After Marriage

At the age of 16, she was married to Muthuvadugananthur Udaiya Thevar, son of the King of Sivagangai, Sasivarna Periya Udaiya Thevar with whom she had a daughter, Vellachi. Even after getting married, she did not step down from practicing the languages and martial arts she had learnt. After being separated from the kingdom for Ramnad in 1680, the first ruler of Sivagangai was Sasivarna Thevar followed by Muthuvadugananthur Thevar<sup>3</sup>.

They ruled over their kingdom for over two decades from 1750 to 1770. They lived in their own contented world until 1772, when King Muthuvadugananthur Udaiyathevar along with his second wife, his children and many of his ministers was killed in the 'Kalaiyar Kovil War' against the British army led by Colonel Joseph Smith, and the son of Nawab of Arcot who wanted to expand his kingdom to the Southern India<sup>4</sup>.

### The Kalaiyar Kovil War

Nawab's army could not manage to compete with the ferocious Thevar army but with the help of the British army and modern British ammunitions, they managed to get through to Thevar's defence forces. They assassinated all those who came in front of them and did not even reprove the children and killed them ruthlessly. Her bodyguard Udaiyaal fought with the British to save the queen.

She was taken as a prisoner, was asked to tell the queen's location again and again and was tortured mercilessly, when she did not tell anything even after days of interrogation<sup>5</sup>, the Nawab beheaded her. Rani Velu Nachiyar built up an all-women army to honor her valor and perseverance and named

it 'Udaiyaal' and trained these women in different types of warfare. After taking the control over the kingdom of Sivagangai, the Nawab changed the name to Hussain Nagar<sup>6</sup>.

### The Escape from Sivagangai

After the death of her husband, she had to flee from her kingdom with her daughter. She hurriedly went to a nearby temple at Kollangudi where two of the late king's loyal chieftains the Marudhu Pandiyar brothers found them and helped her in finding a safe place for them. Marudhu brothers were commanders under the leadership of Muthuvadugananthur Thevar. They were the king's most faithful commanders.

She found a retreat at Verupakshi in Dindigul under the sanctuary of Palayakaarar Kopala Nayaker. She stayed there for eight years. She was overwhelmed with different types of emotions like shock, despair and woe but she did not let this stop her or become a barrier between her and her objective of reclaiming her kingdom from the British.

### Years in Dindigul

In Dindigul, she met Haider Ali, the then ruler of Mysore. He was very influenced by her hold on various languages especially Urdu, her courage and her perseverance. She accumulated support from Palayakaarar Kopala Nayaker and Haider Ali who pledged to be with her in her fight against the British. The king also built a temple in his place as a symbol of their friendship. In addition to this, he also provided the queen with a monthly financial support of 400 Pounds and 5000 infantry and cavalry troops each.

His support in finances, cavalry troops and weapons helped the queen in assembling a powerful army to fight against the British. The Marudhu Pandiyar brothers raised an army<sup>4</sup> but she believed that the army made by them was not enough to defeat the British and built a robust army. She did not believe in the caste system and her army comprised of Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudra. She included everyone in the infantry, men and women. She kept changing her base to baffle the British.

### The Planning For Her Vengeance

Determined than ever before, the queen vigorously fought with the British in 1780. While the planning the attack, she realized that the walls of the fort were so high that it would be very difficult for the soldiers to climb up on them and could easily be pushed by the Indian sepoys and British army guarding the Fort. This left her with two choices, firstly, forcing the army to come outside the fort, which was nearly impossible, secondly, destroying their ammunitions to weaken them. As a result, she planned a suicide attack in the ammunition store of the British. Kuyili, her army commander and a staunch acolyte, stepped forward and carried out this attack. Many people also believe that Kuyili was the queen's adopted daughter.

The Ambush on the British Coincidentally, the occasion of Vijaydashami was only a few days away. Traditionally the women from all the nearby villages would come to pray in the temple situated in the fort. She entered the fort along with some of her female soldiers disguised as rural women, soaked herself in ghee, set herself on fire, jumped in the British's ammunition store and demolished every bit of it, becoming the first suicide bomber in the Indian history.

The explosion hit the others by a surprise and before they could realize anything, the women of her army slashed the Indian and the British soldiers. Rani Nachiyar waiting outside for the signal entered the fort annihilating every soldier she could see. Helpless by the brawly attacks of joined forces of Rani Velu Nachiyar, Marudhu Pandiyar brothers, Palayakaarar Kopala Nayaker and Haider Ali, the British and the Nawab of Arcot could not do nothing but run away and capitulate to Velu Nachiyar and she regained her power in the kingdom of Sivagangai.

#### Return to the Kingdom Of Sivagangai

Rani Velu Nachiyar along with her daughter and the Marudhu brothers returned back to her kingdom. The first change she made was changing the name of her kingdom back to Sivagangai. She started to govern Sivagangai. She recognized the work of the Marudhu Pandiyar brothers by appointing the older Marudhu brother, Periya Marudhu as Commander in Chief and the younger Marudhu brother, Chinna Marudhu as her Chief Minister. Thereafter, she succeeded her husband from 1780.

After re-establishing her rule over Sivagangai, she expressed her gratefulness to Sultan Haider Ali by constructing a Mosque and Church at Saragani. Even after regaining her power, she maintained good relations with Haider Ali and considered his son, Tipu Sultan as her brother<sup>7</sup>. Even after witnessing her immense valor and brawn, some people did want to accept her still. Despite all these stumbling blocks, she was able to rule over her kingdom. She ruled the kingdom Sivagangai for ten years from 1780 - 1790 and then she was succeeded by her daughter Vellachi who ruled the kingdom from 1790 – 1793.

During her 10 years of dominion over the kingdom of Sivagangai, the land was never attacked by the British or Mughals. Frightened by her vengeance on the Nawab and the British, no ruler could ever plan an attack on the kingdom for many years. She passed away in 1796 at the age of 66 because of heart problems and had even been treated in France.

She became the first woman of Indian origin to fight against the British and one of the few Indian rulers to recapture her kingdom from the British. She is also known by the name 'Veeramangai' which means a brave woman<sup>8</sup>. Although she is not known by many people but she has played a very eminent role in the freedom of India from the British control. She also became the first female warrior to raise the victory flag of Indian war for independence.

### 3. Conclusion

The renowned author, Prof. S. Sanjeevi mentioned in his book 'Maruthiruvar' that Rani Velu Nachiyar was a 'Joan of Arc'<sup>9</sup>. She rose from all the stereotypes, prejudices, hardships and travail. She is an inspiration not just for women but also all the people out there. At the time when even seeking for equal rights respect for women was nothing less than a sin, Rani Velu Nachiyar shattered the gender roles. This may also be marked as one of the first fights in opposition to the discrimination against women.

Although she is not known by a large part of the country, but she is treasured, glorified and venerated by the people of the Southern India especially Tamil Nadu. The famous Indian - American hip-hop artist, Prof. A.L.I. dedicated the song 'Our Queen' of her album Tamilmatic to Rani Nachiyar. The

philosopher Lt. Sriram Sharma researched about her life and directed a ballet performed in Naradha Gana Sabha, Chennai followed by another grand ballet performed by the OVM Dance Academy in Chennai narrating the life of the Brave queen.

On December 31, 2008, a stamp was released in her remembrance. On 14 July, 2014, the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, late J. Jayalalitha inaugurated a six-foot tall bronze statue of the queen as a tribute to her. It was also announced that January 3<sup>rd</sup> will be celebrated as her birth anniversary.

### References

- 1) Gupta, A. G. The Women Who Ruled India: Leaders. Warriors. Icons. Hachette Book Publishing India. (2019).
- 2) Kimura, R. Social or Business' or 'Social and Business': ProblematiqFTFue of the Hybrid Structure of Community-based Ecotourism in Cambodia. EVERGREEN Joint Journal of Novel Carbon Resource Sciences & Green Asia Strategy , 38-49(2017).
- 3) R.Ambika, D. K. MONARCHS AND GROWTH OF SIVAGANGA SEEMAI AT THE TIME OF COLONIAL PERIOD. Journal for Crtical Review , 4218-4224. (2020).
- 4) Mrs. T. Jayasutha, D. A. Role Of Velunachiyar In Indian Freedom Struggle In The First Decade Of 20th Century With Special Reference To Tamilnadu. International Journal of Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity , 1. (2020).
- 5) MD. Ahsan Habib, K M Ariful Kabir, Jun Tanimoto. "Do humans play according to the game theory when facing the social dilemma situation?" A survey study", EVERGREEN Joint Journal of Novel Carbon Resource Sciences & Green Asia Strategy. pp.-7-14(2020)
- 6) S.Santhi, A. South Indian Freedom Fighter The Queen of Velu Nachiyar: A Historical Perspective. INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SCIENTIFIC & TECHNOLOGY RESEARCH VOLUME 9 , 1244-1252. (2020).
- 7) Sato, Tsuyoshi, "How is a sustainable society established? A case study of cities in Japan and Germany"", EVERGREEN Joint Journal of Novel Carbon Resource Sciences & Green Asia Strategy, vol.2, no. 2 , pp. 25-35, (2016).
- 8) Vimala, D. S. ARC-VEERA MANGAI VELUNACHIYAR IN ANTIQUITY INDIA (1772–1780). 23-30. (2016).
- 9) Na.Sanjeevi. Maruthiruvar. Shree shenbaga pathippagam.(2020)