

VELU NAATCHIAAR - A FEROCIOUS TIGRESS

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The formation of a baby in the royal womb was a climax for Naatchiar and her bliss was boundless and it was reaching the point of culmination over the days. During the ninth month of conception, as a mark of perfection of conception, a festival used to be celebrated in the name of *Valaikaappu or Seemantham*. This was the right time for such a celebration. In commemoration of the occasion the grandfather of Naatchiar viz., ChellamuthuThevar from Ramanathapuram arrived. All kinds of sweets, savouries, fruits, different kinds of variety rice mainly tamarind rice- a favourite food for the pregnant women- were all brought for the occasion.

At the Fort Temple, in front of the Chief Deity, Goddess Rajeswari, all the above things were arranged. All the relatives were assembled singing divine songs in praise of Goddess Rajeswari. Muthathaal embraced her daughter in complete contentment over the cause of the occasion, as she had to confront a stiff criticism and unpleasant remarks for the prolonged period of barrenness. As part of the function, the protagonist – Velunaatchiar was decorated with special attire and mainly glass bangles – a main item of the day. Though a queen, she was no different from an ordinary woman on such occasions; she was all in her shyness; the turmeric paste added glamour to her beautiful cheeks; yet, she could not conceal her shyness. All relatives returned to their homes after bringing all richness and glamour to the function; however, Muthathaal stayed back with her pregnant daughter to attend to all her needs till delivery. The day of delivery came and the labour pain started; all concerned were very much concerned over the situation praying for a safe delivery; Message was sent to Vaduganaathar. Finally, the baby was born and was with pride and pleasure handed over to the mother by her mother. A fantastic moment for Velunaatchiar and she caressed her heaven sent treasure and reached the height of heavenly joy.

The next day a small function was arranged in the shrine of Goddess Rajeswari for naming the new born baby; Since the baby was fair in complexion, the baby was named as *Vellachi(vellai* in Tamil means **white**).This babywas a gifted one as she had mothers to attend to all her needs.

Life is a blend of joys and sorrows; and the Sivagangai was not an exception. The British were looking for an opportunity to subdue them at the right time and this time their enemies came through an English man called De'guard.

THE INFURIATED MOB

The new princess VellachiNaatchiar was being brought up with the greatest importance and care; hence the child enjoyed all pride and pleasure of SivagangaiSeemai Palace. In the meanwhile, after the demise of the father of Velunaatchiar, the 12 year old

MuthuRamalingaVijayaRagunathaSethupathi was made the king and ThiruvayiNaatchiar was entrusted the administrative work of SethupathiSeemai. These arrangements were made by the government of Ramanathapuram. "After all, a 12 year old lad has been made the king; this can well be exploited to invade and conquer SethupathiSeemai"..... Such was the vicious plan of Arcot Nawab. On the other side, all Marathas were secretly plotting to capture Ramanathapuram; in this way, Ramanathapuram seemed to be targeted and isolated. But, ThiruvayiNaatchiar was not a vulnerable force to these enemies; also, the support of DalavaiVellayanChervaikkarar was a formidable force to defend Ramanathapuram Province. The Maharashtra King Thullaaji himself had been conducting the forces under his leadership; this war lasted for thirty days. Queen ThiruvayiNaatchiar managed the Maratha forces from being inside the fortress. ThiruvayiNaatchiar and Pitchai Pillai devised a plan to ruin the Tanjore forces that had besieged the fortress. On the west of Ramanathapuram there was a big reservoir with water full to its capacity; by causing a small breach in the reservoir, floods can be caused to destroy the forces besieging the fortress. The execution of the plan was amazingly successful and as a result most of the forces were destroyed. Thullaaji, the king of Tanjore surrendered, received compensation for all loss incurred in the war and then returned to his province. This was followed by calmness all over for some time.

Nawab was in receipt of taxes from most of the southern regions but some four provinces did not care to pay taxes to him. Specially, Ramanathapuram and Sivagangai had been criticizing the Nawab and his policies beyond any limit. Consequently, Arcot Nawab declared a war the very next year against Ramanathapuram under the joint leadership of his son UmthathulUmran and the Captain of Parangipet Captain.

After bringing the fortress under siege for three days, a prolonged discussion went on with Queen ThiruvayiNaatchiar. However, the Queen did not accept to pay certain taxes like "PESH" and KUSH". The infuriated UmthathulUmran ordered the canons around the Fortress to go off. As a result, the fortress on the eastern part of the battlement had a breach. Vigorous war ensued between MaravaSeemai Forces and Nawab Forces. At the end of the war, the Ramanathapuram Province surrendered after losing the lives of 3000 soldiers. The thirteen year old Prince Muthu Ramalinga Vijaya Sethupathi, his mother MuthuThiruvayiNaatchiar and her two sisters were taken into custody and were imprisoned in Trichy Fort. Also Ramanathapuram came under the control of Nawab.

SivagangaiSeemai was more attached to the Dutch rather than the British. This very much irritated the British and the Nawab. Hence as a follow up action, Sivagangai became the next target of the British and the Nawab. The British Captain Smith and Pant chore plotted against Sivagangai. To confront Muthuvaduganatha directly face to face in the war was not possible and that too, when he was assisted by ChinnaMaruthu and Periya Maruthu. Hence it could be made possible only through treacherous means and hence they were waiting for an apt time.

KAALAYAR KOIL WAR

Only three Regions namely, Ramanathapuram, Sivagangai and Pudukkottai in the southern Seemai resisted to the payment of taxes. Among them, Ramanathapuram came into the fold of Nawab. Hence, next target was Sivagangai. Among them, Ramanathapuram came into the fold of Nawab. Hence, next target was Sivagangai Region. But how to face and overcome Muthuvaduganatha, which is same as fighting with a lion! Also, when Maruthu brothers are always with Muthuvaduganatha, it remained a dream almost. But, still, anything can be done when treachery is there and the British and the Nawab are of the same colour namely

Treachery and Plotting! They had almost reached the end of execution stage; they had collected all information through spies about the movement of Muthuvaduganatha in a day. Who's friends were and the places of his visit and with whom. The first move in their plan was to invite Muthuvaduganatha for a Peace Treaty and accordingly Muthuvaduganatha received a letter from the Nawab. But no one in his Camp liked this idea and everyone suspected some foul play. But Muthuvaduganatha declared his consent for the Peace Treaty and sent his acceptance through the messenger. The day for the Peace Meeting happened to be one Full Moon Day and it was customary for Muthuvaduganatha to offer his prayers on Full moon Day to KalayaarKoil Deity. While proceeding to the Temple, Maruthu Brothers would be assigned some duties and they would not accompany the King; no soldier or arms would be with him. All this information had already been collected by the enemies and they were ready for the ambush. Their plan and target did not miss this time; Vaduganaathar was going to be trapped and there was an intuition that was troubling VeluNaatchiar making her totally uncomfortable and restless; she strongly felt that some disaster was going to happen. Hence, she had deputed a private team to go after Vaduganaathar for his safety.

Thevar had a plan to visit the temple first and then to attend the discussion session. He had brought Younger NaatchiarGowri with him. In the meanwhile, the forces had divided into two divisions and the first one was to be led by Captain Smith and the other by Pan Chore. Time had turned out to be bad and was prosperous for scheming villains. And political justice had been sold out for dirty ends and vice was replacing virtue. Just after prayers, Muthuvaduganatha and Younger Naatchiar came out and they were about to get into the coach; then and there appeared the British soldiers headed by Pan Chore and surrounded them. However, the secret force appeared in protection of Vaduganaathar but they were just seven whereas the British force had more than two hundred soldiers.

This dreadful news reached Sivagangai. But there was shocking news was waiting there; a very big battalion was approaching Sivagangai led by Captain Johnson Smith. Immediately it was decided that Maruthu Brothers face the approaching army while Queen VeluNaatchiar and the Princess VellachiNaatchiar escape from the fortress guided by Captain Thandavarayan. When VeluNaatchiar was half way across, the sad news reached her through spy- The Sivagangai Lion was attacked and killed by Pan Chore and his army. This itself being the climax, what else will happen at Sivagangai, - may be only known to the Deity of KalayaarKoil. Muthuvaduganatha and GowriNaatchiar were surrounded by the British forces led by Pan Chore, as soon as both of them came out of the Temple. The King became very angry. "In what way could it be justified to attack a person when he is without weapons? Was it not a breach of war rules? Having invited for Peace Talks, sudden assault on a person cannot be other treachery! Hence, clear out of here and we will meet on a war field" so shouted the king, like a lion.

For all this, Pan Chore responded just by displaying his unpleasant teeth and cackled. "This is our plan to trap you alone. After a lot of plotting and planning, we got you here and how can we leave you and if I leave you, I will be killed; this is a "do or die" situation! Also, in a short while Sivagangai Fortress will come under our control; so you have no business on the earth; hence bid farewell and take leave with bliss. With an atrocious cackle, unexpectedly he pressed the trigger and the bullet killed GowriNaatchiar. Even before gaining balance after holding Gowri, another bullet was released which pierced through Vaduganaathar ship. Thus both had fallen dead, one on the other just at the entrance of the temple, with no one to attend

them. Pan chore proceeded towards Sivagangai with his army. When the news reached Thandavarayan, he rushed to Kalayaar Temple with Vellachi and others. When VeluNaatchiar looked at the gruesome sight, she felt desperate and depressed. She witnessed the roaring lion lying on the ground motionless. The mountain lay shattered down on the ground! The royal king who used to decorate the throne with his stately posture had fallen down! And the innocent younger one too had been shot dead mercilessly. VeluNaatchiar, completely in a helpless state abused the Almighty for this misfortune. All the sacred items like flowers, turmeric, thread, and the red sign on the forehead – all true identity for a married woman with her husband living now disappeared in an instant for her. The Kingdom without the King; the fatherless child, the wife without the husband- all calamitous conditions, she called upon the Minister to generate the funeral fire and declared she would join her husband and sister like GowriNaatchiar in their death. Thus the emotionally affected VeluNaatchiar prattled about her vain role thereafter and wanted to finish her life. Thandavarayan Pillai slowly approached the forlorn queen and consoled her and then he started speaking to her. “Mother Queen, is it going to be your final decision? You have two great obligations before you. Number one will be to take vengeance upon the treacherous Pan chore and retrieve the Fortress from him. Number two will be to protect the life of the young Princess who has nobody else except you. Death is not a wise decision and it is mere shirking your royal obligations. It is our earnest desire that VeluNaatchiar wears the crown of Sivagangai once again. As the Chief Minister and assuming the role of your father, it is my responsibility to remind you about your obligations. Only then the stigma attached to Sivagangai will be removed.

VeluNaatchiar very patiently listened to what all was spoken to her by Thandavarayan Pillai and indulged in deep thoughts. Finally, she pledged before the funeral pyre. “I, VeluNaatchiar, make a pledge that I will destroy Pan Chore in retaliation to your present miserable state caused by him; also, I vow to take back Sivagangai and become the Queen”

NOMADIC LIFE

‘Twenty six long years – inseparable life with her husband, the rule over the Kingdom of Sivagangai to the complete satisfaction of the people, mainly the Marriage Sacred Thread (a married woman will have to part with when her husband dies)—all gone. Such miserable state should not come to anyone’ with these heavy thoughts, VeluNaatchiar addressed her Minister,” What I am to do now?” He, in turn replied,” Divine Mother, There is nothing that you do not know! Anytime, Nawab and the British army are likely to take us around. Hence there is little or no time to waste, Hence we should immediately precede to VirupatchiGopalNayakkar Palace. He is bound to Mysore Government. Besides, that is the only place where we can take asylum.

Once again, VeluNaatchiar burst into fury and swore to reap vengeance on the British and the Nawab who had reduced her to this depressed state. She gave orders to leave for VirupatchiGopalNayakkar Palace. Also she made it clear that there was a heavy schedule to accomplish before they execute the offenders. It was a four long day expedition on foot through forest treading on rough path. The group consisted of old Thandavarayan, young inexperienced and delicate young princess and the mentally agonised VeluNaatchiar. The journey was totally insecure, uncomfortable and without any food provisions. However they reached the destination. GopalaNayakkar, who had already been informed about their arrival, was waiting to receive them even at the entrance of the palace with a welcoming note. A man of medium height, dark hair, slightly fat received them with a smiling face.

“Welcome to the Queen VeluNaatchiar, the chief Minister Thandavarayan; I knew what had happened; the slaughter of an armless warrior was totally inhuman and cowardly act. It is funny that in a world of impermanence what are they going to achieve through such wrong means? What other atrocities are they both – the Nawab and the British – going to do? That nobody knows! Only God knows about their design!” so shared his feelings with the royal guests. He greeted them inside the palace and arranged for their refreshing, rest, and food; he also promised that they would discuss and decide the future course of action later on. After disposing the guests, GopalaNayakkar indulged in deep thinking. In a short while, a spy brought news from Maruthu brothers about the condition of Sivagangai. The spy spoke like this.” My respects to you Sir! I have brought news from Maruthu brothers. The condition of Sivagangai Fortress is almost desperate. It would be very difficult to manage the fortress even till this evening. Smith and Nawab from the East and Pan chore from the West have been progressing towards the Fortress; as a result, Sivagangai army has been destabilised and greatly destroyed. The final hour has come to quit the fortress, or else, it would be suicidal to resist and fight the enemies. Hence, Maruthu brothers and some chief officers are to escape from the fortress and reach this place within three days!” Nayakkar understood the situation and decided to be guided by the Prudence.

Then he said to the spy,” I will arrange all necessary things and before the arrival of the Maruthu brothers I have to complete the work. The queen and Pillai are taking rest. I will convey the news to them in a befitting manner later on. You go back to the Maruthu brothers and inform them that all the three are quite safe here and the future actions can be decided later. Thus Nayakkar dismissed the spy and once again indulged in deep thinking. Inside the palace, Vellachi and the Minister Thandavarayan had a deep slumber due to the hardship during the travel. But, VeluNaatchiar could not settle down; whatever happened to her husband and GowriNaatchiar still was burning within her making her totally restless.

The next day dawned and the sun spread his rays and removed the darkness of the night. The chirping of the birds was another sure sign of dawn. But it did not dawn yet in the horizon of VeluNaatchiar; still it was immersed in darkness. Physical tiredness had disappeared with the rest taken but her mind was still turbulent; inside her, there was the furnace still alive and furious.

The present state of the queen was one of humiliation and total defeat; she had lost her Kingdom, her husband and other close relative. She was now hiding under the protection of another king. The reason for the entire calamity is treason and treachery conspired by the internal Nawab and the external accomplice namely the British. Simply she has been teased and provoked with fatal ends and expensive loss of lives. The concerned shall never sleep anymore until they shall pay back for all this and that too very dearly; until all losses are repaid by me, I shall never sleep; with these thoughts, VeluNaatchiar was rambling on the battlement. Such emotional disturbance was interrupted by the intervention of GopalaNayakkar who duly conveyed the news about the predicted capture of Sivagangai fortress within two days; he also communicated that Maruthu brothers would be joining them very soon. He also sought an excuse for not passing the news immediately as he did not want to disturb her from her respite after a tiresome journey. The queen thanked GopalaNayakkar profusely for all hospitality and giving her and her team a sense of security and shelter. Without expecting any returns, Nayakkar extended a helping hand at the right time and he deserved a world of thanks and this was registered in emotional terms and with tears in her

eyes. In response to her sense of gratitude and guilty conscience, GopalaNayakkar thus consoled her,” O Mother! I pray that you do not use such words to thank me and make me a stranger! You can take me as your father and enjoy all privileges. Now this is time for taking our food and afterwards we shall discuss our future course of action. Minister Thandavarayan Pillai is waiting downstairs for us. The food was very sumptuous, delicious and the menu was very rich accommodating all varieties; but only the dinner was grand and rich; no one was in a mood to consume. The gravity of the sad situation was the reason. After dinner, VellachiNaatchiar was sent to a separate room with a maid and the rest started the discussion. After heaving a long sigh, Gopalanayakkar initiated the talk thus: “It is my duty to inform our Pillai that a spy came last night with a bad news; the Sivagangai Fortress will be captured within a day or two and Maruthu brothers will join us shortly. Henceforth, we will have to face several challenges. At this juncture, the future course of action should be planned meticulously.”

The queen, after listening to all this, called Nayakkar and submitted to him certain secret tasks as a request. She further proceeded, “As of now, we cannot face the combined forces of Nawab and the British. Hence my plan will be like this. First of all, I want to form an army-well disciplined and experienced soldiers will be selected and imparted training at confidential camps. The second proposal will be the production of quality arms in workshops by skilled weapon smiths. Number three- I want a section of army exclusively of ladies. These proposed secret Training Camps should be well separated from one another and never contiguously. At the same time I should have access to any of these camps at my will. There is no time for relax and without quick action, liberation of our Providence and Fortress will be a distant dream, hence, immediate action is the need of the moment. Kindly help us. ” Nayakkar, in turn, assured all assistance to the Queen. “I will propose the places for the secret camps and you can choose for yourselves. Next about the manufacture of arms and weapons, I will take responsibility and you need not worry about it. Let us hope to see better days in future; maybe we are in a disadvantageous position; but it is only transitory; we will come up very soon and shouted slogans of success. Thus another day lapsed. With the fortress gone, conquered by the enemies at Sivagangai.

Sometimes persons who accomplish big things fail before very small things! That is the way of the world! Time will set a setback for us and that is Nature. So also, the mighty queen has sought asylum as a guest before a person like Gopalanayakkar, having lost everything in life. The only option before her was to form an army, train them and equip them with arms and defeat the Nawab and the British. The preliminary work in this regard had been entrusted to Gopalanayakkar. She had also wanted all the training camps in uninhabited and secret places. Such locations had been identified by the joint efforts of GopalaNayakkar, ThandavarayanPillai and Maruthu brothers; such locations were Thiruppathur Fort, Chakrapathi Fort, AranmanaiSiruvayal Fort, Padamathur Fort, Pandiyan Fort, Ariyakurichi Fort, and Manamathurai Fort and so on. These places were totally deserted areas. Only these forts were going to serve as weapon warehouse, Confidential Meeting Places, Training Centres for the soldiers, and military exercises. Also these forts will serve as hideout for the queen for the next eight years.

Trustworthy Spies were sent around all the places for recruiting soldiers for the New Army. Women were also recruited in the army. Maruthu brothers imparted training to the new recruits in the martial art of *Kuyili*. The furnace at the weapon smith’s factory reflected the

fury of VeluNaatchiar. Swords and spears and arrows and the like were being made and piled up in large quantities without break. In the meanwhile, VeluNaatchiar visited all the training camps and sometimes she herself imparted training to the soldiers. She formed a Women Unit in the Army and named it after Child Udayal, in her memory. DalavaiThandavarayanPillai and VellachiNaatchiar stayed at Virupatchi Fort. From here, Pillai analysed the political situation and the political crisis of Sivagangai and enlightened the queen on the same; the other subjects for discussion were warfare strategies and the Military Training being imparted to their soldiers.

It was at this time that news about the arrival of Hydar Ali reached VeluNaatchiar through GopalaNayaka; the possible arrival of Hydar Ali seemed to VeluNaatchiar a good and auspicious sign and was delighted. Without any delay, VeluNaatchiar jumped into action in making efforts to meet Hydar Ali with the help of GopalaNayakkar. She was looking for right time to approach Hydar Ali and she was finalizing issues like what type of assistance and at what appropriate time can she request Hydar Ali for the assistance. She was also thinking about the means of reaching Dindigul fort.

Finally, Gopalanayakkar received the consent from Hydar Ali for the Interview. This made Naatchiar extremely happy and she prepared herself to send note to Dindigul fort. Gopalanayakkar had informed Hydar Ali that four soldiers would bring message on horseback. Hence Hydar Ali had instructed his security at the Main Gates about this. According to rules, only people with Identity could enter the fort. Four soldiers with good physique on horseback came to the fort. They showed their Identity and entered the fort and walked towards the Court. When they were asked about Queen VeluNaatchiar, one among the four soldiers removed the headband and the cloth covering the face, the complete court turned still and silent in amazement.

Rani VeluNachiyar and her daughter VellachiNachiyar lived under the protection of Hyder Ali at Virupakshi near Dindigul. Frustrated by the joining of forces against him, the Nawab ordered that VeluNachiyar and the Marudhu brothers were permitted to return to Sivaganga to rule the country subject to payment of Kist to the Nawab. Abiding by this Order, Rani VeluNachiyar accompanied by the Marudhu brothers and VellachiNachiyar entered Sivaganga. An agreement was reached whereby Rani VeluNachiyar was permitted to govern the Sivaganga Country and ChinnaMarudhu; the younger was appointed her minister and the elder VellaiMarudhu as the Commander-in-chief. Thus the widow Queen VeluNachiyar succeeded her husband in 1780.

The Queen VeluNachiyar granted powers to the Marudhu brothers to administer the country in 1780. VeluNachiyar died a few years later, but the exact date of her death is not known (it was about 1790).

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