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Rani Velu Nachiyar: The Veeramangai

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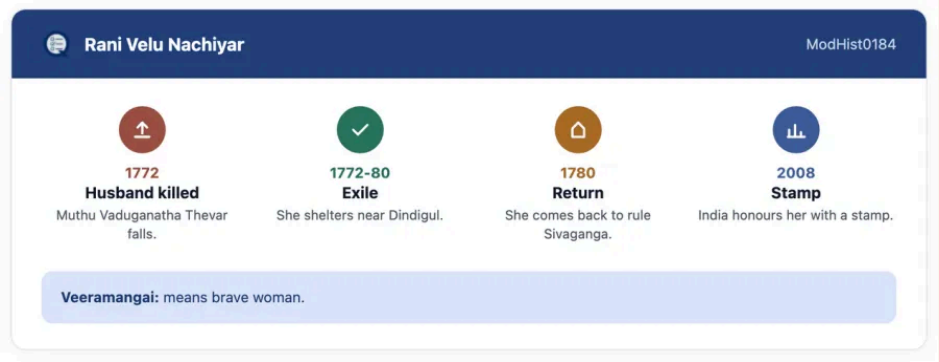
Rani Velu Nachiyar: The Veeramangai

A queen loses her husband and her kingdom in a single attack. She spends eight years in exile, planning her return.

In 1780 Rani Velu Nachiyar came back to rule Sivaganga. Tamil memory calls her Veeramangai, the brave woman.



India's 2008 stamp showing Rani Velu Nachiyar with a sword. It is an artist's picture, as no portrait from her own time is known. Image: India Post, Government of India, GODL-India, via Wikimedia Commons.



Four turning points in the story of Velu Nachiyar, from standard sources.

> **Kingdom.** Sivaganga, a small state in southern Tamil Nadu.
> **Husband.** Muthu Vaduganatha Thevar, killed in 1772.
> **Exile.** About eight years, near Dindigul, under Haider Ali's protection.
> **1780.** She returned to rule Sivaganga.
> **Allies.** The Marudu brothers and minister Thandavarayan Pillai.
> **Honour.** A stamp was issued in 2008.

Veeramangai: a Tamil title meaning "brave woman".

Tribute: a regular payment from a weaker ruler to a stronger one.

Exile: forced life away from one's home or kingdom.

1 What was Sivaganga?

Sivaganga was a small kingdom in the south of present-day Tamil Nadu. It had its own ruler and its own armed forces. Its neighbours were Madurai, Ramanathapuram and the lands of the poligars.

Two outside powers pressed on it. One was the Nawab of Arcot. The other was the East India Company. Both wanted tribute and control over foreign ties.

Velu Nachiyar was born in 1730. She was the daughter of the ruler of Ramanathapuram. She married Muthu Vaduganatha Thevar, the ruler of Sivaganga, in 1746. They had a daughter, Vellachi.

Later accounts praise her training in languages and weapons. Firm evidence for each childhood detail is thin. So the main story rests on her adult actions.

- Kingdom: **Sivaganga**, in southern Tamil Nadu.
- Husband: **Muthu Vaduganatha Thevar**.
- Daughter: **Vellachi**.
- Outside pressure: the **Nawab of Arcot** and the **Company**.

> **Quick check 1.** Rani Velu Nachiyar sheltered near Dindigul under Haider Ali's protection. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

2 What happened in 1772?

Company forces entered Sivaganga in June 1772. Muthu Vaduganatha Thevar fought near Kalaiyarkoil. He was killed in the fighting.

Velu Nachiyar fled with her daughter. The minister Thandavarayan Pillai went with them. The Marudu brothers also joined her circle.

In that moment the kingdom was gone. She had no army, no palace and no treasury. What she kept was her claim to rule, and her will to use it.

- Company invasion: **June 1772**.
- Husband fell near **Kalaiyarkoil**.

- With her: daughter **Vellachi**, minister **Thandavarayan Pillai**, the **Marudu brothers**.

3 How did exile shape her plan?

The group found shelter at Virupakshi, near Dindigul. This area was under the protection of Haider Ali of Mysore. She stayed there for about eight years.

Haider Ali opposed Company growth in the south. His protection gave her a safe base. Wikipedia quotes a letter written for her to Haider Ali. It asks for five thousand soldiers to help retake the two lost states.

Gopala Nayak is also named among her allies. The Marudu brothers became key partners. They later helped her run the state. Their own story is told in the Marudu brothers article.

Exile did not end her claim. It gave her time to build alliances. Without them she could not have returned.

- Shelter: **Virupakshi**, near **Dindigul**.
- Protector: **Haider Ali** of Mysore.
- Duration: about **eight years**.
- Allies: **Marudu brothers**, **Gopala Nayak**.

4 How did she return in 1780?

Velu Nachiyar returned to Sivaganga and took power in 1780. That much is shared by every account.

How she did it is told in two ways. The district history says the Nawab let her return under a tribute agreement. A government profile says she fought and won with allied military help.

The two accounts may describe parts of one longer story. War and talks can run together in one struggle. These short accounts do not list each clash or deal. So the careful statement is simple: she came back to rule.

Many popular pages call her the first Indian ruler to defeat the Company. That is a bold claim. Other Indian rulers had fought the Company earlier. It is safer to say she was an early and notable resistance leader.

- Return and rule: **1780**.
- District history: return under a **tribute agreement**.
- Government profile: **fought and won** with allied help.
- “First to defeat the Company” is a **disputed claim**.

5 How did she rule, and what of Kuyili?

Velu Nachiyar governed for about ten years. The Marudu brothers helped run Sivaganga and led its forces. In 1790 her daughter Vellachi took the throne. The brothers stayed on to help her.

Sources do not agree on when she died. One popular date is 25 December 1796. But the district history says the exact date is unknown. A government profile says only that she died some years after her rule.

Tamil memory also tells of Kuyili, a woman commander loyal to her. The story describes a women's unit and an attack on an armoury. It honours women who fought for their home and queen. It matters to many people today.

But the sources I could find give no battle record from that time. Calling Kuyili the first suicide bomber in history is too strong. It turns an uncertain tale into a world first. For exams, keep Kuyili as a remembered story.

India issued a stamp for Velu Nachiyar on 31 December 2008. Her struggle came decades before 1857. It belongs to the early resistance to Company power.

- Ruled about **ten years**; daughter took over in **1790**.
- Death date: **uncertain**; 25 December 1796 is one popular date.
- **Kuyili**: a **remembered story**, not a documented battle.
- Stamp issued: **31 December 2008**.

6 What are the exam traps?

Keep these points straight.

- Do not confuse her with **Rani Lakshmibai** of Jhansi. They lived in different times, decades apart.
- Dates: **1772** invasion, **1772-80** exile, **1780** return.
- Her protector was **Haider Ali**, not Tipu Sultan.
- The **Marudu brothers** rose later, in **1801**.
- Do not call "first to defeat the Company" a settled fact.

- Do not treat the **Kuyili** tale as a battle report.
- Read about Mysore under Haider Ali.
- Read about Kattabomman.
- Read about Kittur Chennamma.

> **Quick check 2.** Velu Nachiyar returned to rule Sivaganga in 1801. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Remember: 1772, husband killed and exile begins. About eight years near Dindigul under Haider Ali. 1780, she returns to rule. 1790, her daughter takes over.

> **Think it through:** Why did a queen without an army look to Haider Ali for help?
>
> Haider Ali ruled Mysore and opposed the Company's growth. He had soldiers and a reason to help. A queen with a claim to a throne gave him a useful ally in the south. Both sides gained from the deal.

> **Quick check 3.** The claim that she was the first Indian ruler to defeat the Company is disputed. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Practice MCQs

1. After British forces killed her husband in 1772, whose protection did Rani Velu Nachiyar seek during her exile?

A. The Nawab of Arcot

B. The Peshwa of Pune

C. Hyder Ali of Mysore

D. The Nizam of Hyderabad

See answer ↓

2. In 1790, after a decade of rule, Rani Velu Nachiyar handed the throne of Sivaganga to whom?

A. Her son-in-law

B. Her daughter, Vellacci

C. The Marudu brothers jointly

D. The British East India Company

See answer ↓

3. Kuyili served as a trusted military commander to which exiled queen of Sivaganga?

A. Rani Durgavati

B. Rani Chennamma

C. Rani Velu Nachiyar

D. Rani Abbakka Chowta

See answer ↓

4. Who was the Sivaganga ruler and husband of Rani Velu Nachiyar, killed in 1772?

A. Veerapandiya Kattabomman

B. Puli Thevar

C. Gopala Nayak

D. Muthu Vaduganatha Thevar

See answer ↓

5. Which Sivaganga minister went into exile with Rani Velu Nachiyar in 1772?

A. Haider Ali

B. Tirumala Nayak

C. Marudu Pandiyar

D. Thandavarayan Pillai

See answer ↓

6. Near which town in the Dindigul area did Velu Nachiyar shelter during her exile?

A. Palayamkottai

B. Panchalankurichi

C. Kalaiyarkoil

D. Virupakshi

See answer ↓

7. By what epithet is Rani Velu Nachiyar remembered?

A. Dheeran

B. Veerapandiya

C. Senapati

D. Veeramangai

See answer ↓

8. In which year did India issue a commemorative stamp for Rani Velu Nachiyar?

A. 1947

B. 1977

C. 2008

D. 2017

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.** She fled to Dindigul, within Hyder Ali's territory, and later secured his military support. ↑ Q1
2. **B.** She passed the throne to Vellacci, the daughter she had once fled with as an infant in 1772. ↑ Q2
3. **C.** She served Rani Velu Nachiyar, and became one of her military commanders during the campaign to retake Sivaganga. ↑ Q3
4. **D.** He was killed when Company forces entered Sivaganga in June 1772. His death began Velu Nachiyar's years in exile. ↑ Q4
5. **D.** Thandavarayan Pillai stayed with her in exile. He also wrote on her behalf to Haider Ali seeking military help. ↑ Q5
6. **D.** She stayed at Virupakshi, near Dindigul, under Haider Ali's protection. She lived there for about eight years. ↑ Q6
7. **D.** Veeramangai means brave woman. It is the title Tamil memory gives her. ↑ Q7
8. **C.** The stamp was issued on 31 December 2008. It shows her in royal dress with a sword. ↑ Q8

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** ↑ 1
2. **False.** ↑ 2
3. **True.** ↑ 3

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