



Ummal Udaiyal: The Unsung Heroine of Velu Nachiyar's Revolution

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ABSTRACT

Ummal Udaiyal, a lesser-known yet important figure in the resistance against British colonial forces, played a crucial role in supporting Queen Velu Nachiyar's revolutionary struggle during the 18th century in Tamil Nadu. Often overlooked in mainstream historical discourse, Ummal Udaiyal's bravery and self-sacrifice stand as a testament to the collective spirit of women's resistance. A close aide of Velu Nachiyar, she is remembered for her extraordinary act of martyrdom ultimately enabling the queen's strategic victory. Theeba Krishnamoorthi, 2024. In the pages of India's history, the story of Queen Velu Nachiyar shines as a tale of defiance, courage, and early resistance against British colonial rule. Yet, hidden within this larger narrative lies the lesser-known but equally powerful story of Ummal Udaiyal, a young woman whose sacrifice changed the course of history. Her courage remains a timeless symbol of patriotism, selflessness, and the indomitable spirit of Tamil women. Sastri, K. A. N. (1955). This paper aims to reclaim her legacy and highlight the significance of grassroots female warriors in anti-colonial movements. Through an analysis of oral traditions, historical records, and regional narratives, the study underscores Ummal Udaiyal's enduring legacy as an unsung heroine who contributed immensely to India's early freedom struggle, long before the nationalistic movements of the 19th and 20th centuries. Ramaswamy foregrounds Ummal Udaiyal's role in the anti-



colonial struggle, not merely as a footnote in the legacy of Queen Velu Nachiyar or other well-known leaders, but as a figure whose sacrifice and agency demand a deeper feminist re-reading of historical memory. Ramaswamy, V. (2016).

Introduction:

Rani Velu Nachiyar, the queen of the Sivaganga estate in Tamil Nadu, is often celebrated as “Veeramangai” for her valiant resistance against the British East India Company in the late 18th century. After the death of her husband, Muthu Vaduganatha Periyavudaya Thevar, in battle against the British, Velu Nachiyar regrouped in exile, sought alliance with Hyder Ali, and trained an army including a women’s regiment—to reclaim her kingdom. Press Information Bureau K.M.Ravindran &M. Srividhya (2014)

The Ultimate Sacrifice:

In the rich tapestry of India’s freedom struggle, countless names have imprinted their place in history. Among them, Ummai Udaiyal, a brave and loyal woman soldier, stands out for her extraordinary sacrifice in the service of Queen Velu Nachiyar, the first Indian queen to fight against British colonialism.

Udaiyal’s sacrifice, while elevated in cultural memory, has often been interpreted through patriarchal lenses that celebrate women for their self-effacement rather than their political consciousness. Yet, her act was not just emotional—it was deeply political, militarily significant, and born out of unwavering commitment to the anti-colonial cause. Through this lens, Udaiyal transforms from a background figure to a central agent of resistance whose legacy challenges the male-centric understanding of warfare and nationalism. Ramaswamy (2016)

Legacy of Bravery:

Ummai Udaiyal’s name may not be etched in school textbooks, but her heroism is remembered with reverence in the oral traditions of Tamil Nadu. She embodies the spirit of unsung heroines who sacrificed everything for their motherland, without seeking recognition or reward.

In an age when women were often confined to the background, Ummai Udaiyal stepped into the battlefield and left behind a legacy of bravery, sacrifice, and patriotism. Her life is a reminder that behind every great leader, there are loyal warriors whose contributions make victory possible. Shubendra (2023)



Honoring Her Memory:

As we remember the sacrifices made in India's long struggle for freedom, Ummai Udaiyal's story must be told and retold — not only as a tale of sacrifice but also as a source of inspiration for future generations. Her courage teaches us that true patriotism lies in putting the nation above self, and that even a single act of bravery can alter the course of history. S.Ponnusamy, (2010)

A Young Girl of Loyalty and Courage:

Ummai Udaiyal, often simply called Udaiyal, was a humble cowherd girl whose unyielding loyalty to Rani Velu Nachiyar marked her as a true heroine of resistance. When British forces captured her and demanded the whereabouts of the fugitive queen, Udaiyal refused to betray her—even under the threat of torture. She was mercilessly executed, but her silence and sacrifice safeguarded Velu Nachiyar and her daughter, enabling their escape and eventual return to power. Kadhivel.s. (1977)

Udaiyal Woman Army :

After getting the full support from Hyder Ali, Velu Nachiyar returned Virupakshi and formed the army in groups. She formed young army and imparted war field training and decided to form woman army. Women who were sharing and sorrow in the life of Velu Nachiyar, thought they should join in the army service. Velu Nachiyar escaped from Kalaiyar Koil and reached Ariyakurichi Ayyanar Koil and hid herself. The cow shepherd woman saw Velu Nachiyar and did not inform to the English army. British army killed that shepherd women. That woman, whose name was "Udaiyal". So Velu Nachiyar decided and named the woman army as "Udaiyal Woman Army". She welcomed the women army with the mind set of assurance and wished them to boldly gents. While Velu Nachiyar imparted training to women in the army. A.Jekila &Dr. P.Barathi (2020)

Velu Nachiyar's Acknowledgment

According to regional lore, when the British were searching for Rani Velu Nachiyar, they encountered a 12-year-old girl named Udaiyal who was tending goats. Despite their threats, she refused to reveal Velu Nachiyar's location and was executed. In her honor, Velu Nachiyar founded the temple for Vettudaiyal Kaliyamma at that very spot. The name "Vettudaiyar" comes from the Tamil word vettudai (meaning "cut with a machete") combined with "Ayyanar," referring to a local guardian deity. The deity emerged under a peepal tree after being discovered split open—hence the name "Vettudaiyar Ayyanar"—and the goddess worshipped opposite him became known as Vettudaiyal Kaliyamma. Sathiya Priya (2025)



Conclusion

While Queen Velu Nachiyar is rightly celebrated as "Veeramangai" (brave woman), it is equally important to remember the courageous figures like Ummal Udayal, who made the ultimate sacrifice. Her story should be taught in schools and remembered in public memory as a symbol of youthful bravery, patriotic spirit, and the power of ordinary people in extraordinary times. In response to Udayal's courage, Velu Nachiyar later established an all-women regiment named the Udayal Padai in her honor. Additionally, she erected a Veera Kal (hero stone) and a temple at the site of Udayal's martyrdom, where the local people even began worshipping her as a deity. Dr.J. Stellanmathialagan, (2018.)

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