Rebellion in the Raj

THE WOMEN WHO FOUGHT FOR FREEDOM



Chapter 3:

Velu Nachiyar and Kuyili

The women who defeated the British!

Swipe

1780, Sivaganga

A daring plan unfolds

It was Vijayadashami, the tenth day of Dussehra. The Raja Rajeshwari temple in Sivaganga fort was beautifully decorated. It was also heavily guarded by the red-coated soldiers of the British East India Company (EIC).

Women devotees crowded the temple, dressed in colourful sarees and carrying flowers and pots of ghee. Hidden beneath the flowers were small swords, destined to fight the British

Outside the fort, a queen and her troops patiently waited.



Swipe

A Queen in exile

Eight years earlier, in 1772, the British East India Company (EIC), egged on by the Nawab of Arcot, had killed the ruler of Sivaganga. His queen, Rani Velu Nachiyar, fled into exile along with her young daughter and a handful of loyal warriors. She watched, waited and planned her return.

With help from Hyder Ali of Mysore, and later from his son Tipu Sultan, she rebuilt her army, introducing something almost unheard of for the time, a women's regiment!

Leading the regiment was the fearless Kuyili – commander of the regiment, spy, and the Rani's trusted friend.



Mission Impossible!

By 1780, the Rani finally had enough soldiers, but she still could not attack the British. There was one problem — nobody knew where the EIC stored its weapons.

Kuyili, disguised as an old flower seller, discovered the location - the arms and ammunition were stored in the temple! She drew up an impossible plan - to storm the fort and defeat the mighty British!

The EIC thought they had guarded well their precious ammunition depot. They allowed only women to enter the temple and only on festival days. What could mere women do?!

The British soon found out.



Kuyili's flame of courage

On that fateful day, as the queen waited outside with her troops, the women inside the Sivaganga fort charged at the confused British soldiers. Meanwhile, Kuyili walked to the ammunition depot hidden inside the Raja Rajeshwari temple. She calmly poured the ghee they had brought and set herself on fire.

The explosion tore through the armoury! In the chaos, the women threw open the fort gates.



Victory at last!

These were no ordinary women. The loyal soldiers of the Udayaal Padai, Rani Velu Nachiyar's women's regiment, were more than a match for the British!

Kuyili's brave sacrifice wiped out the entire British stock of arms and ammunition. With nothing left to defend themselves, the EIC forces soon caved in and surrendered.



A legacy that lives on

After years of exile and struggle, Velu Nachiyar and Kuyili had done the impossible – they had defeated the British and reclaimed their kingdom!

The Rani ruled as the undisputed Queen of Sivaganga until her death.

Their courage, and that of every woman in the Udaiyaal Padai still inspires us today!

