

## THE MARUDU BROTHERS DURING THE REIGN OF MUTHUVADUGANANTHA DEVAR

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### Abstract

This article highlights the rise of King Muthuvaduk Devar, who became the ruler of Sivagangai in 1750 amid threats from the Arcot Nawab and European forces. To strengthen his kingdom, he appointed the brave and skilled Marudu brothers as commanders. Their remarkable contributions, especially Vellai Marudu's heroic acts, earned them respect and key roles in the kingdom. Under Muthuvaduk Devar's leadership, Sivagangai saw military, infrastructural, and cultural advancements, including fortifications, temples, and Vedic schools. Despite challenges from British-backed forces in Madurai, the king successfully reclaimed the city, solidifying his leadership and ensuring the kingdom's prosperity and stability.

**Key words:** Muthuvaduk Devar, Marudu Brothers, Sivagangai, Fortifications, Madurai Reclamation

### Introduction

King Muthuvaduk Devar's reign in Sivagangai, beginning in 1750, was marked by significant challenges and triumphs that solidified his leadership. After the death of King Sachivarnath Devar, Muthuvaduk Devar ascended the throne at a time when external threats from the Arcot Nawab, supported by European forces, loomed large. Recognizing the need for strong allies, he appointed the formidable Marudu brothers—Vellai Marudu and Chinna Marudu—as his key commanders. Their bravery, strength, and wisdom played a pivotal role in strengthening the kingdom. Under Muthuvaduk Devar's leadership, Sivagangai flourished with military advancements, cultural development, and strategic fortifications. His dedication to both the protection and prosperity of his people was evident in his construction of temples, canals, and schools. Despite facing challenges from British-backed forces in Madurai, Muthuvaduk Devar's strategic alliances and military prowess helped him reclaim the city, solidifying his legacy as a resilient and visionary ruler.

## The Rise of Muthuvaduk Devar Amidst Challenges

In the year 1750, King Sachivarnath Devar passed away. After his demise, on May 14, 1750, Muthuvaduk Devar assumed the throne as the second king of Sivagangai. During this period, with the support of the Europeans, the Arcot Nawab, along with a large army, came and subdued each territory, eventually capturing Ramanathapuram as well. The king Muthuvaduk Devar was well aware of the Nawab's plans. Velu Nachiyar, who possessed all skills and qualities, was a great leader in her own right. Muthuvaduk Devar had immense strength and bravery. Velu Nachiyar, who was widely admired as a victorious queen, was guided by the advice of the minister Thandavarayar. He was distinguished not only by his experience but also by his wisdom. Despite all this, the concern of Minister Thandavarayar was that Muthuvaduk Devar lacked powerful commanders and strong allies on his side.

## The Marudu Brothers

Muthuvaduk Devar, who had the intention of strengthening the fort and increasing the number of warriors, successfully carried out his plans. To serve as commanders, Muthuvaduk Devar brought the mighty Marudu Pandiyars—namely, the Marudu brothers—with the help of Minister Thandavarayar. There is a small village named Mukkulam in the Ramanathapuram district. The Marudu Pandiyars, who hailed from this village, belonged to the Mokka Palaniyappa Chettiyar community. Their mother's name was Ponnathal. In the year 1748, a male child was born to them. The child was named Vellai Marudu. He was named Vellai Marudu because of his fair complexion.

## Heroes of Strength, Wisdom, and Valor

Vellai Marudu, the elder of the two, had a commanding appearance, with hands as strong as the Kanai tree, a body as solid as a rock, and muscles like twisted iron rods. His curled mustache would instill fear in anyone who looked at him. His broad chest and lion-like gaze created an aura of awe. Vellai Marudu possessed another remarkable strength—he could bend a solid Arkattu silver coin in an instant with the strength of his fingers. His hands were so powerful that they could bend the coin effortlessly. In 1753, another child was born to them, and he was named Chinna Marudu. During their schooling years, both brothers were sent to school, where they excelled in their studies. They also distinguished themselves in military training from a young age. The two brothers were known for their strong physiques and determination. They were fearless and highly skilled, known for their deep wisdom and composure. They were regarded as men of high moral character, particularly for being people of integrity who spoke honestly and acted accordingly. Their sense of self-respect, intellect, and wisdom made them stand out. They were also deeply devoted to God. Chinna Marudu was not an ordinary person either. He too was known for his greatness and distinguished himself as a man of noble qualities. Both brothers excelled in character and virtue. Chinna Marudu particularly stood out in swordsmanship and combat, showcasing exceptional skills in both the art of the sword and martial prowess.

**Vellai Marudu, the fearless hunter and hero of Sivagangai"**

Vellai Marudu had a great passion for hunting. He would venture into dense, dark forests where not even sunlight could penetrate and hunt with immense courage. When he spotted wild animals, he would take great pride in it. If he encountered a tiger in the forest, he would not back down. His companion, Vellai Mesar Velchu Durai, a mighty warrior carrying a bow, arrows, and a sword, was present during many of these hunts. Even when he was struck with fear, Vellai Marudu would boldly leap forward, grab the tiger's tail with both hands, and drag it for about twenty feet with a "thud." Then, like a lion, he would spin the tiger's hind legs tightly and slam it to the ground. As the tiger tried to bite him, Vellai Marudu would force its mouth open with his strength and trample its head beneath his foot. After subduing the tiger, he would tear its mouth open with both hands, pull out its teeth, and proudly show them to his friends.

**Marudu Brothers, the trusted warriors of Muthuvaduk Devar**

Mesar Velchu Durai documented all of these heroic acts in his book. Recognizing these feats of bravery, the Prime Minister Thandavarayar, on his recommendation, appointed Vellai Marudu as the chief of the hunting party in 1767. Afterward, Muthuvaduk Devar, impressed by the valiant deeds of Vellai Marudu, made him his personal bodyguard. Like Vellai Marudu, Chinna Marudu also proved himself to be skilled in brave and decisive actions. Muthuvaduk Devar, recognizing his abilities, brought Chinna Marudu into his palace and entrusted him with important responsibilities, keeping him close. It was, once again, Thandavarayar who played a key role in bringing Chinna Marudu into the palace and ensuring his place there. The increasing threat of wild animals in the forest began to cause great distress to the people living on the outskirts. The animals' attacks grew more frequent, and the people, in fear, approached the king to seek help. In response, King Muthuvaduk Devar decided to set out to hunt and eliminate these creatures. Accompanied by his warriors, the king was joined by Vellai Marudu, his personal bodyguard. Although many warriors joined the expedition, the king believed that with Vellai Marudu by his side, they would be able to hunt down even the fiercest of animals.

**The Hunt for Wild Beasts**

The plan was to use loud sounds from hunting horns and drums to drive the wild animals from their hiding places in the forest. The noise would lure them out into the open, where they could be easily killed. With this strategy in mind, the warriors began to beat their drums and blow their horns, making a loud sound that echoed through the forest. Unexpectedly, a leopard sprang at the king. As soon as it lunged at Muthuvaduk Devar, Vellai Marudu, who was accompanying the king, quickly reacted. At the perfect moment, he grabbed the leopard's hind legs, pulling them back. The animal struggled and tried to leap back at the king, but Vellai Marudu swiftly tightened his grip on the hind legs, spinning the leopard around as though it were a small goat. With a powerful motion, he slammed the animal against a rock, throwing it into a deep pit with force, ensuring it was subdued. The claws of the leopard that had pounced on the king were found on his

back. After Vellai Marudu had pulled the attacking leopard, slammed it against a rock, and thrown it into a pit, the area where this happened was later named "Puli Adithammam" (Leopard Slaying Place).

Impressed by Vellai Marudu's heroic act of capturing and killing the leopard that had attacked the king, Muthuvaduk Devar rewarded him with gifts and praised his bravery. In addition, he bestowed upon him the title "Puli Marudu" (Leopard Marudu) as a mark of honor for his remarkable feat.

Before joining the king's palace for official duties, Vellai Marudu often ventured into the forest, where he would hunt down fierce wild animals. He would kill tigers and drag deer cubs back with ease, demonstrating unmatched courage. Observing his fearless actions, the common people began to refer to him as "Kaattarasan" (King of the Forest). After capturing and killing the tiger that had attacked King Muthuvaduk Devar, Vellai Marudu proudly came to be known as "Puli Marudu" (Tiger Marudu). Through his bravery and actions, both Vellai Marudu and Chinna Marudu became trusted commanders of the king, earning a place of honor as his most reliable and fearless leaders.

### Strengthening the Kingdom

In this way, the Marudu brothers gained great respect and honor in King Muthuvaduk Devar's palace. Whenever the king needed to discuss important matters, he would consult with Minister Thandavarayar, but he would also invite the Marudu brothers to join the discussion, seeking their advice as well. Their fame and reputation grew to such an extent that they became integral advisors to the king. The Marudu brothers were also known for their honesty and integrity in all their dealings. They helped increase the number of warriors, and new weapons were purchased for the kingdom's defense. This shows that King Muthuvaduk Devar did not only prioritize warfare but also placed importance on strengthening the kingdom and its army. At locations such as Kaalaiyar Koil, Kollang Kondan, and Chiruval, forts were established. Following this, the king took measures to improve the underground pathways leading from Sivagangai to these forts. To enhance security, all the trenches and moats surrounding the forts were deepened further. However, merely deepening the trenches was not enough to ensure peace.

The forests surrounding the forts were cleared, and new trees were planted and nurtured to strengthen the defense. By reinforcing the forest around the fort, the king ensured that enemies would not be able to easily approach and attack the fort. The king also ordered the cultivation of wild animals and venomous snakes in the forests. This was part of a strategy to prevent any invaders from approaching unnoticed. The king left no stone unturned in his efforts to safeguard his kingdom, ensuring that every necessary measure was taken to secure the forts and deter potential attackers.

After strengthening the country's security, plans were drawn to improve the prosperity of the Sivagangai region. On the advice of Minister Thandavarayar, canals and ponds were constructed. In areas where there were no irrigation channels, the king ordered the digging of canals, which greatly assisted agriculture. Once the necessary facilities for enhancing agriculture were established, King Muthuvaduk Devar's thoughts turned toward the construction and renovation of temples. His vision expanded to include religious and cultural advancements, ensuring the development of not just the economy but also the spiritual and social aspects of the kingdom.

### **Revitalizing Faith and Learning**

The king renovated old and famous temples and constructed new ones in villages that lacked them. He firmly believed that no village should be without a temple. In addition to building temples, the king ensured that they were properly maintained and cared for. He didn't stop at constructing these temples; he also set up facilities for Vedic studies at Kaaliyar Koil for those who wished to learn. The king arranged for Vedic schools, providing an opportunity for people to study sacred texts.

Furthermore, to ensure the defense of his kingdom, King Muthuvaduk Devar set up weapon training centers for the youth. An armory and training ground were established at the "Arasakulam" to prepare young men in weaponry, so they would be ready when the kingdom needed them. The king did not stop at these initiatives; he also built rest houses (chatrams) along pilgrim routes to provide for the comfort and welfare of travelers. In all these efforts, King Muthuvaduk Devar demonstrated a deep concern for the welfare of his people.

### **Reclaiming Madurai**

During this time, while the king worked tirelessly for the well-being of his kingdom, he faced increasing challenges. In 1752, Captain Cope led a British-backed force that captured Madurai, causing significant distress for King Muthuvaduk Devar. This added to his troubles, but he began to strategize on how to drive out the invaders and reclaim Madurai.

### **Conclusion**

To this end, the king united the forces of Sivagangai and Sethunadu and appointed Minister Thandavarayar to lead the combined army. Thandavarayar set out toward Madurai, determined to reclaim it. After intense battles, Thandavarayar's forces succeeded, and he crowned Vijayakumaran, the son of Meenakshi's brother, as the ruler of Madurai. With this victory, Thandavarayar returned to Sivagangai. However, the reign of Vijayakumaran, known as Vijayakumar Pangaalu Thirumalai Nayakkan, lasted only about 15 months. Muhammad Ali, the Nawab of Arcot, had other plans for the throne of Madurai. Being a puppet of the British, Muhammad Ali plotted to remove Vijayakumaran from power. One day, Muhammad Ali's forces,

under his direction, attacked and defeated Vijayakumaran. Faced with defeat, Vijayakumaran had no choice but to seek refuge with King Muthuvaduk Devar. The king, showing his support, helped Vijayakumaran regain his position on the throne. He sent the combined forces of Sivagangai and Ramanathapuram to march toward Madurai once again, this time with an even stronger force. Muhammad Ali's troops, fearing the oncoming army, fled, and Vijayakumaran was restored as the ruler of Madurai. Having solved the Madurai crisis, King Muthuvaduk Devar's efforts to ensure the stability of his kingdom brought him peace for a short while. However, new challenges began to emerge.

### End Notes.

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