

## **The Contributions of Martyrs from Tirupattur District to the Indian Freedom Struggle: A Historical Study**

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**Abstract:** Tamil Nadu played a pivotal role in India's freedom struggle; in particular, the district of Tirupattur made a significant contribution to the independence movement. This study provides a detailed account of how prominent leaders from the Tirupattur district—such as the martyr V.G. Subramaniya Mudaliar, the martyr Govindammal, and the martyr Veerabhadran—dedicated their entire lives to the struggle. It is deeply distressing that the sacrifices made by these individuals remain largely unknown to the public. Therefore, this study aims to serve as a valuable resource, enabling everyone to recognize and appreciate their patriotism and sacrifices. They participated in numerous protest movements, making significant contributions—particularly against the repressive measures of the British government. Specifically, they played an active role in movements such as the Quit India movement, protests against liquor shops, and the August Revolution. No matter what remuneration the government provides to honor these individuals, it can never truly equal the contributions they have made. Furthermore—and particularly—it was deeply distressing to read that, during her final days, the martyr Govindammal was left entirely without assistance and was completely neglected by everyone. In this manner, this article has been explained.

**Keywords:** Freedom Struggle, Independence Movement, Martyr, Patriotism, Protests etc.

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### **Introduction**

Tirupattur District has made a monumental contribution to the Indian freedom struggle. This district is home to more than 50 freedom fighters and martyrs. This article highlights the contributions of just a few of these freedom fighters. In particular, the contributions made to the Indian freedom struggle by martyrs V.G. Subramania Mudaliar, Govindammal, and Veerabathiran were immense. Martyr V.G. Subramania Mudaliar operated a bus service connecting Gudiyatham to Vellore. When the British government sought to impose certain conditions for renewing his bus service—specifically stating that the renewal would be granted only if he refrained from participating in any protests against them—he steadfastly

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refused. Instead, he actively involved himself in movements such as the 'Quit India Movement', the August Revolution, and the protests against liquor shops, for which he was imprisoned. Notably, he endured months of severe hardships and atrocities while incarcerated in various prisons, including the Vellore Central Prison, Thanjavur, and Palayamkottai. Govindammal was born in Ambur; due to financial hardship, her family subsequently migrated to Malaysia. In Malaysia, her father established a jewellery store, thereby rescuing his family from poverty. Govindammal was married there. After listening to Subhash Chandra Bose's speech on the freedom struggle, she dedicated not only her jewelry but her entire life to the cause of India's independence. Specifically, she joined the Indian National Army in Singapore and became an active participant in the freedom movement alongside Bose. Govindammal, who sold her assets and dedicated them to the freedom struggle, spent her final days living in a rented house in Ambur and passed away amidst severe financial hardship. Martyr Veerabhadran joined the freedom struggle in 1940; furthermore, having participated in the Individual Satyagraha and the August Movement, he was incarcerated in Alipuram Jail for several months. It is noteworthy that, in his honor, a park named after him has been established near the Tirupattur District Head Post Office. In this article, the magnificent contributions of these martyrs have been clarified.

### **Martyr V. G. Subramania Mudaliar**

V. G. Subramania Mudaliar represents among the lesser-known yet deeply committed freedom fighters of the Vellore region, whose sacrifices at the grassroots level sustained the Indian National Movement during its most critical phases. Though absent from mainstream nationalist narratives, his life reflects the spirit of selfless dedication, moral courage, and uncompromising patriotism that characterized India's struggle for independence. Subramania Mudaliar was born in 1914 at Pallikonda. From a young age, he demonstrated a strong sense of national consciousness and political awareness. The spread of Gandhian ideas, the rise of the Indian National Congress as a mass organization, and the growing resistance to colonial rule in the Madras Presidency profoundly influenced him during his formative years. In 1931, at a relatively young age, he formally joined the Indian National Congress, signalling the beginning of a lifelong commitment to the freedom movement.

In contrast to many individuals who attempted to reconcile nationalist sympathies with personal career advancement, Subramania Mudaliar made conscious material sacrifices for the cause of freedom. Between 1934 and 1942, he operated a bus service along the Vellore–Gudiyatham route, earning a modest livelihood. However, when seeking permit renewal from

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authorities, the Regional Transport Officer and District Collector demanded that he provide written assurance pledging non-participation in anti-British activities.<sup>1</sup> Regarding such a commitment as tantamount to abandoning the national cause, Subramania Mudaliar firmly refused. Consequently, he relinquished his transport business entirely and committed himself wholly to the freedom movement. This incident demonstrates not merely his political principles but also the moral integrity that characterized his approach to nationalist activism. During the movement's decisive phase, Subramania Mudaliar assumed an active role in the 1942 Quit India Movement, known colloquially as "Vellaiyane Veliyeru" (British Quit India) or the August Revolution. He participated energetically in mass demonstrations, anti-colonial protests, and toddy shop picketing (kallukadai mariyal), which constituted essential tactics of Gandhian civil resistance throughout Tamil Nadu. His activities drew the attention of British authorities, resulting in his arrest and extended detention.

Between 1942 and 1945, Subramania Mudaliar endured imprisonment totalling 20 months and 11 days, detained in multiple facilities including Vellore Central Jail, Thanjavur, and Palayamkottai.<sup>2</sup> Significantly, during his imprisonment, he was incarcerated alongside several distinguished freedom fighters and future political leaders, including O. V. Alagesan, Perumalsamy Reddiar, T. S. Avinashilingam Chettiar, and veteran nationalist R. Jeevarathnam Mudaliar. This association firmly establishes Subramania Mudaliar's connection to Tamil Nadu's broader nationalist leadership network.

Following independence, Subramania Mudaliar did not seek political power or public prominence. Instead, he remained a symbol of quiet sacrifice and integrity, respected within his region as a "*maraintha thyagi*" – a forgotten patriot whose contributions were known more through memory than public record. In recognition of his role in the freedom struggle, the Government of India honoured him with the Tamra Patra Award on 26 January 1973, a distinction conferred upon freedom fighters who had endured imprisonment and hardship for the nation's liberation.<sup>3</sup> The life of V. G. Subramania Mudaliar underscores the essential contribution of regional and local leaders to India's freedom movement. His refusal to compromise with colonial authority, willingness to sacrifice personal livelihood, endurance of long imprisonment, and unwavering commitment to Gandhian ideals exemplify the moral strength that sustained the national struggle.

### **Martyr Govindammal**

Govindammal stands as a remarkable yet largely unrecognised figure in the history of India's freedom struggle, representing the courage and sacrifice of Indian women who fought for

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independence beyond the geographical boundaries of the subcontinent. Her life story powerfully illustrates the transnational character of the Indian National Movement and the decisive role played by women in the Indian National Army (INA), particularly in Southeast Asia under the leadership of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Govindammal was born on 22 February 1927 in Ambur (the North Arcot district of the Madras Presidency, present-day Tirupattur district region). Owing to severe financial difficulties, her family migrated during her childhood to Malaya, then under British colonial rule, covering territories that today form Malaysia and Singapore. Like many members of the Tamil Indian diaspora in Malaya, her family initially faced economic hardship. Through perseverance and enterprise, her father eventually established a gold shop, rising to become a gold merchant and stabilising the family's livelihood.

In 1940, Govindammal was married to Arunachala Chettiar, who was employed in latex processing, a common occupation among Indian migrants in Malaya's plantation economy.<sup>4</sup> Despite domestic responsibilities at a young age, Govindammal remained deeply aware of political developments affecting India. The turning point in her life came during the Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia in 1943, when Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose emerged as the supreme commander of the INA and issued a historic call urging Indian men and women abroad to rise against British imperial rule.<sup>5</sup>

Govindammal was profoundly inspired by Bose's speeches. His call for sacrifice and armed resistance stirred her nationalist consciousness and transformed her personal life into one of political commitment. In an extraordinary act of devotion, she donated her gold bangles to Netaji Bose for the cause of India's freedom. This sacrifice marked only the beginning of her commitment. Determined to contribute more meaningfully, she sold one acre of land to Veerappa Chettiar and resolved to place the proceeds at the disposal of the freedom movement.

Accompanied by her mother, Govindammal travelled to Singapore, where Bose had established the headquarters of the Provisional Government of Free India.<sup>6</sup> There, she met Captain Dr. Lakshmi Sahgal, the commander of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, the women's wing of the INA.<sup>7</sup> Govindammal donated the entire amount obtained from the sale of her land for the purchase of arms and military supplies. She was subsequently directed to Platoon Commander Ponamma and accommodated in the regiment's barracks.<sup>8</sup>

Govindammal was officially enlisted in the INA and assigned to Third Barracks, Section 9, with INA Service Number 4800. She underwent rigorous military training, including physical

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drills, weapons handling, and ideological instruction. Her training later advanced to jungle warfare, preparing her for combat conditions in Burma (Myanmar). As a member of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, she was ordered to fight alongside male soldiers in active war zones, marking a historic departure from conventional gender roles.<sup>9</sup>

In preparation for frontline engagement, Govindammal and her unit travelled for sixteen days through Siam (present-day Thailand) toward the Burmese frontier. She was stationed at the Alfam Rogue Camp, located near the Burma airport, where she received advanced training in modern weaponry, including the Bada rifle, hand grenades, pistols, and the Tomić anti-tank rifle. Under the supervision of senior INA officers such as Colonel Chatterji, Colonel Cycle, Colonel Somasundaram, Colonel Kertharsam, and Colonel Rao, Govindammal demonstrated exceptional discipline and competence. In recognition of her abilities, she was appointed commander for guard and sentry duty.<sup>10</sup>

One incident from this period vividly illustrates her unwavering commitment to military discipline. During a time of heightened alert following reports of enemy infiltration, Govindammal stopped a civilian attempting to enter the camp gates and denied entry in strict adherence to security protocol. Only later did she discover that the civilian was Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose himself, travelling incognito. This episode, often recalled in INA narratives, highlights her sense of duty and fearlessness, even in the presence of the movement's supreme leader.<sup>11</sup>

Govindammal was later deployed with nearly 200 women soldiers toward the Imphal front, one of the most critical theatres of the INA's campaign. However, as the tide of war turned against the Japanese and INA forces, the women's contingent was forced to retreat. During their withdrawal, they were instructed to abandon a train in a forested region, where they survived for three days with minimal food and resources.<sup>12</sup> Eventually, they were evacuated aboard another train alongside Japanese soldiers and transported toward Bangkok, even as British forces launched attacks on the route. After days of perilous travel, Govindammal and her companions reached Bangkok safely and met Netaji Bose once again.<sup>13</sup>

Following the collapse of the INA and the reported death of Subhas Chandra Bose in 1945, Govindammal's military journey came to an end. Like many INA veterans, she faced uncertainty and displacement in the aftermath of defeat. She ultimately returned to Ambur, carrying with her memories of sacrifice, struggle, and unwavering patriotism. In 1949, she settled in Ambur along with her husband, Arunachala Chettiar, who earned his livelihood as a lorry driver. Their modest life was tragically disrupted when he lost his life in a road accident

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in 1960, leaving Govindammal to shoulder the responsibility of survival on her own. Despite her earlier service as a soldier of the INA, she lived a life marked by hardship and dignity. She worked as a midday meal cook in a school, contributing to child welfare, and later found employment in a flour mill, performing manual labour to sustain herself. In her later years, owing to old age and declining health, she became incapable of continuing work. Without ownership of a house or steady family support, she has lived on the meagre pension provided by the Tamil Nadu State Government, a stark contrast to the extraordinary sacrifices she made during the freedom struggle.<sup>14</sup> Govindammal's life epitomises the courage of women who transcended domestic boundaries to participate directly in armed resistance against colonial rule. Her story enriches our understanding of the Indian freedom struggle by foregrounding the contributions of the overseas Indian community and the women of the INA.<sup>15</sup>

## **Martyr Veerabadran**

Veerabadran (S/o Lingayya Goundan, b. 1915, Tirupattur) joined the freedom struggle in 1940<sup>16</sup> and participated in the Individual Satyagraha of 1941 and the August Movement of 1942.<sup>17</sup> Arrested under the Defence of India Rules, he was imprisoned for nine months in Alipuram Jail.<sup>18</sup> His early death in 1955 underscores the lasting personal toll of imprisonment and political struggle.<sup>19</sup> Veerabadran's life exemplifies the sacrifices made by ordinary citizens whose contributions, though often undocumented, were crucial to India's independence. The government erected a park in his name to honor the head post office of Tirupattur district.<sup>20</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Thus, this article has detailed the lives of individuals whose sacrifices are truly worthy of the highest praise and appreciation. The primary objective of this study is to ensure that we never forget these martyrs, whom we ought to honor and celebrate, and to disseminate their stories to a wider audience, particularly among the general public and students.

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