

The Great Patriot **V. O. Chidambaram Pillai**

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INTRODUCTION

The Tamil culture lays great stress on the virtues of love and bravery. The latter is given a greater importance. Tamil Nadu is the land which produced many brave warriors and kings like Raja Raja Chola, who conquered the islands of the South East and Chera Chenguttuvan who hoisted the Chera flag on the Himalayas. This was the land where the brave Kannagi was born. But in later days, during the 18th century Tamil Nadu ceased giving birth to such brave persons for a time. However, this trend was reversed in the 19th century.

At a time when many cowards, who danced to the tunes of British, were flourishing, Chidambaram Pillai was born; he was a lion amidst cats. It was, he, who established the bravery of Tamilians in the history of India.

Chidambaram Pillai is much remembered for his "Swadeshi Shipping Company" which provided merchant Ships against the British. It was, he, who led the labourers of the Harvey Mills of Tuticorin in their strike. It was, he, who infused the patriotic sentiments into the hearts of men to revolt against the British. As a result of this he was sentenced to 40 years of imprisonment by the British. He was made to work like an ox in the prison. He was compelled to draw the mill. The British autocrats thus wreaked vengeance on him. But Chidambaram Pillai was not to be vexed by all these; he bore all the miseries cheerfully; he worked for the nation which he dearly loved. But, in spite of all these, history seems to have forgotten this great soul altogether.

I glanced through the leaves of the "History of the Congress," published by Dr. Pattabi Sitaramya, with the permission of the Indian National Congress, but I was grieved to notice that there was no mention at all about V.O.C's services to India-absolutely no mention!! On the contrary, there are special references about the Chowri Chowrah Satyagraha, Nagpur flag revolt and such other small movements.

I am afraid that history might soon deny that such a man ever lived at all. I don't say that it will be wilfully done but probably because people may not know the real facts of events. Even his anniversaries were not celebrated until 4 years after his death. I was haunted by the great desire to make all the world know of V.O.C's service to India and its people. My opportunity came and I snatched it. When I was appointed the Secretary of the Madras District Congress Committee, in 1937, I arranged to erect the statue of V.O.C. on 21st December, 1939 in the Royapettah Congress Grounds under the auspices of the Madras District Congress.

This event awakened many national committees and all national newspapers wrote in praise of V.O.C. and his services. But, still, I have a feeling that facts of V.O.C's biography have not reached many millions of my countrymen. I, therefore, resolved to make efforts to collect all information about V.O.C.'s life and publish a book on his life. The task before me was a stupenduous one; however, I applied myself wholly to it.

I could secure interesting informations from Chidambaranar's books "தனிப்பாடற்றிரட்டு" and "எனது அரசியல் பெருஞ்சொல்". More over, I collected details

about the shipping company started by V.O.C.; his struggle against the English out of the case filed on V.O.C. and such other events, from the daily newspapers which were published in the years, between 1906 and 1908. I compiled all these information in the form of a biography and the first edition came out in 1944 under the name 'Kappalottiya Thamizhan'. Since then, V.O.C. came to be popularly called by the above name. This work, received an overwhelming ovation and more than a dozen editions were brought out.

But this year, I felt that it was my duty to see that the life history of V.O.C. should be made known to the non-Tamils also. I am, therefore, bringing out this edition in English on the 100th birthday of V.O.C. I sincerely hope that this will be welcomed by people all over the country.

I am particularly thankful to Selvi Soundara Mahadevan who has spared no pains to translate it within a short period of five days.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not express my appreciation to Thiru Soma. Swamynathan of Inba Nilayam for having undertaken to publish it.

Also, my thanks are due to Jeevan Press for the excellent get up they have given to the book.

I dedicate this book to all the brave men of Tamil Nadu who sacrificed their lives in their struggle for freedom.

PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

I am indeed very happy to bring out this English version of Kappalottia Tamizhan. Thiru M. P. Sivaguanam, its author is a person of outstanding merit who rose to an exalted position by the sheer dint of merit. He has been associated practically with every field of activity, political, cultural, social and intellectual.

Contributions of Maposi to various fields of activity are listed below:

Member, Indian National Congress
(1927 to 1954).

Founder—Leader of the Party TAMIL
ARASU KAZHAGAM.

Courted imprisonment six times under
the British Rule and twice under the
Congress Government.

Deputy Chairman, Tamil Nadu Legisla-
tive Council.

Chairman, Local Library Authority,
Madras for 3 years from 1953 to 1956
and again elected to the same post in
April, 1970.

President, Tamil Writers' Association
(1954—1956).

Alderman of the Madras City Corpora-
tion (1948—1954).

Member, Tamil Nadu Legislative
Council (1952—1954).

Member of the Senate, Madras University (1952—1953).

Chairman, Education Committee, Corporation of Madras (1958).

Member, Tamil Development & Research council (1959—1962).

Member, State Khadi & Village Industries Board from 1968.

Member, State Backward Classes Advisory Committee from 1968.

Member, Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly from 1967—71.

Member, Senate of Madurai University (1968—1970).

Member, State Police Commission.

Member, Syndicate, University of Madras.

Journalism : Editor, SENGOL for the past 20 years.

Literary career. Won the SAHITYA ACADEMI AWARD in 1967 for his book on the great saint of Tamil Nadu, "Ramalinga Swamigal" - "VALLALAR KANDA ORUMAIPADU".

HIS "VEERAPANDIA KATTABOM MAN" helped to foster a sense of active patriotism; his "KAPPALOTIA TAMILZAN" has greatly kindled Swadeshi spirit.

Author of more than 60 books in Tamil: honoured by the people of Tamil Nadu with the title "SILAMBU SELVAR".

Toured extensively and lectured on literature and politics in Ceylon, Burma and Malaysia.

Attended the First World Tamil Conference at Kuala Lumpur in 1965.

Member of a Delegation from Tamil Nadu for the Third Tamil Conference in Paris - July, 1970. Also, he visited Russia in the same year.

A staunch advocate of decentralisation of powers.

Ardent believer of division of States on the basis of languages.

He was awarded the title of PADMA SRI by the Union President on 26th January, 1972.

The space available is limited and hence it is not possible for us to give a complete catalogue of the activities of Ma.po.si.

I pray that a person of the calibre of Ma.po.si, who is endowed with many talents, will continue to serve the nation many more years.

I hope that this work, published on the occasion of the birth centenary of V.O.C., will receive a warm approbation from the reading public.

Soma. Swaminathan

KAPPALOTTIA THAMIZHAN

I. BARBERS BOYCOTT

"Why Sami! Is it true that you supported that Collector's move to increase the military strength?", asked the village barber, of lawyer Rangaswamy, while giving him a shave.

"In what way are you concerned with that ? It is none of your business", retorted the lawyer.

"Well, then, giving you a shave is none of my business either", said the barber and before long the lawyer saw him quit the place with his shaving kit.

The arrogant lawyer was now left out in shame with a half shaven face. All his attempts to plead politely to convince the barber did not succeed ; nor did any others agree to continue the work from where the other had left unfinished. Till noon, that day, no body came to his rescue. He was in a sad plight and could not enter his house ; he knew that his orthodox wife would slam the door against him. Again, he was aware that the people of the town would detest him as an "un-patriotic wretch". What was to be done !!

The lawyer had no other go but to seek the help of the Collector and appeal to him for help. Approaching the District Collector with his ugly face, he said, "Sir, those

barbers have all abandoned me. You and you alone can help me. Please order the police to take the necessary action". "No, Sir. I can't do that; there is no meaning in your relying on me", replied the Collector.

Finally, the lawyer, after begging every other barber to help him, without any result, went to the town of Tinnavely and had his much "coveted shave."

This incident, which appears rather exaggerated to the readers, did happen at Tuticorin; but it leaves a history behind it. Indeed it marked a new era in South Indian Politics.

The labourers of the "The Coral Mill" in Tuticorin (The present Harvey Mill) requested the Directors to raise their wages. But the latter did not consent. Hence, the labourers combined together and went on a strike. These poor men, who had very little to eat, even during those days, when they toiled hard to earn, could not support their families as the wages were suspended on account of the strike. Thus, they and their families were reduced to mere starvation. This kindled the tender feelings of a young man, who, with some of his lawyer friends, came forward to help them. He collected money from the local people and with this resource financed the poverty stricken labourers. On his request, nearly 1000 of the 2000 thrown out labourers were given temporary jobs by the people of Tuticorin. During the days of strike, public meetings were held in the evenings. In these meetings our young leader asked the labourers not to submit unless the mill owners conceded their requests. The labourers, enlightened and encouraged by the brave words of this young man, continued their strike. No wonder, the rich

mill owners became furious at this man. They appealed to the city magistrate and said that this man provoked the labourers to go on a strike with a view to harm them. They also held that his speeches would cause chaos in the city. The magistrate warned the new labour leader against addressing public meetings, for the thought that his speeches would destroy peace in the town. But this "brave young son of the soil" paid no heed to the words of the magistrate. On the contrary, he started participating in the labour meetings with greater initiative and interest.

The news of a strike in the Coral Mills soon spread to Madurai. The labourers of the Madura Cotton Mills, who were under the same management as that of Coral Mills, also refused to work. The strike at Tuticorin lasted one week and ultimately the Directors had to yield. They agreed to the increase in wages by half as much and to grant the benefit of 'sick leave'. The labourers returned to their regular work only after this agreement was made. The foreigners, who lived in Tuticorin, got frightened of the mob and fearing a riot retreated to the ships with their families and spent the nights there. The readers will be happy to know that this dynamic young man, who led the labourers in this historic struggle, was none other than the great patriot V. O. Chidambaram Pillai.

The speeches of Chidambaram Pillai kindled a patriotic spark in the hearts of the people and this roused the fear of the English Officers. Hence, the collector held a meeting with the prominent men of the place and discussed as to what action should be taken in order to prevent confusion; he also mentioned that he wanted to install more military men in the Tuticorin area and this was opposed

by the local population. But petty minded Rangaswami gave full support to the suggestion. He observed that the whole town would be destroyed by the heart-rending and thought provoking speeches of V. O. C. Unless a special military force was stationed, there will be a breakdown of law and order. From that moment onwards, this man became the enemy of his fellow beings. He was disliked by all. That is why the barbers of the place protested against him and refused to render their services to him. Lawyer Rangaswamy sank into insignificance and patriot V. O. C. shot into prominence.

The biography of Thiru V. O. C., who started the labour movement in Tamil Nadu and roused the patriotic feelings of the people, is an important event in the history of Tamil Nadu. His name will be remembered by historians as well as people of this country as long as the Universe lasts. V. O. C., as he is affectionately called, identified himself so much with the national movement that his name today is a synonym for patriotism. He is better known as the 'South Indian Tilak'; indeed, he was the greatest of all patriots.

2. CHILDHOOD

Pandyanadu, a part of Tamilagam, was once well renowned for its just kings, chivalrous soldiers, eminent scholars and honest traders. Naturally, this great kingdom attained prosperity in every field of activity. There was all round and harmonious perfection.

It was in this land of the Pandyas we hear of great rulers who governed their subjects with a high sense of justice. Who has not heard of Pandya Nedunchezian who gave up his life just to make amends for the harm done to Kannagi; who has not heard of Kannagi who created a political revolution just to avenge the injustice done to her innocent husband Kovalan. Again, who has not heard of the great Poets of the Sangam era who made even the "Stones to sing poetry". Also, it is here that the small village of Ottapidaram is situated. Territorially, it is part of the Thirunelveli District. The place is also called as Thennallagai.

This place acquired historical and national importance as it was once under the kingdom of the great South Indian Polgar Veera Pandya Kattabomman who challenged British authority by refusing to pay the "revenue subsidy" which meant subordination to foreign rule. Panchalankurichi, the capital of Kattabomman's kingdom, was situated in the neighbourhood of Ottapidaram. Not only that; but about eight miles to the north of Ottapida-

ram, is the town of Ettayapuram where the great and immortal poet Subramanya Barathi was born. Thus, South Pandyanadu, which gave to India these great national leaders, gave yet another freedom fighter to the then struggling India and this was V. O. Chidambaram Pillai. "What a tradition! What a glory! and what a gift" sighed the poet. Ottapidaram remains a centre of pilgrimage even to-day.

V. O. Chidambaram Pillai was born on Thursday, the 5th September, 1872 to noble parents. His father Olaganatha Pillai was known for his integrity, honesty and wisdom and his mother Paramayi Ammayar was an example of ideal Indian womanhood. He had four younger brothers and two younger sisters. These children were brought up in the best of traditions with all tenderness and love by their loving parents.

V. O. Chidambaram first had his education in a small primary school. Right from his younger days, he developed great interest for Tamil. He was deeply interested in learning the language. He had a good teacher, his master Veeraperumal Annaviyar, who taught him carefully and in an interesting manner all the Tamil works that a student of Tamil should learn.

Starting from the alphabets, Chidambaram learnt a great deal and a great number of works without fault. His father wanted him to learn English also. But, in those days, there was no English school in Ottapidaram. And so, the father, who was rich and magnanimous built a new school in his place, bearing all the expenses on his own shoulders. One Mr. Aramvalarthana Pillai of Ettayapuram was made the teacher in the school. This

institution, started particularly for Chidambaram, also helped many others of the place to learn English. Chidambaram, after having had his education in this school for sometime, continued his studies in Francis Xavier High School. After completing the high school course he joined the Caldwell College from where he successfully passed his Matriculation. Even as a student, Chidambaram shone more brilliantly in Tamil, his mother tongue, than in English.

3. THE YOUTH

Chidambaram was very active during his youth. He was skilled in various games and was a talented athlete. As he himself says, "he trained himself in a number of games like walking on the wall, climbing on the trees, catapult in hand, disturbing birds and bees, indulged in playing games like hide and seek, counting over thousand afore a breath should sneek". And he goes on to say that he was good at Kabadi, wrestling, swimming, sword fight, shooting and many other sports, like even ball games. It is not surprising that Chidambaram, destined to be a great freedom fighter in his later years, excelled in all these sports during his younger days. He was to be controlled by no one. His impishness and audacity knew no bounds. His father Ulaganatha Pillai tolerated all the actions and mischiefs of his son because of the great love that he had for him. But, even he, sometimes could not bear. Chidambaram was so troublesome that his father had to beat him. Whenever his father beat him, it was Chidambaram's habit to run away from the house without telling anyone.

One day Chidambaram was beaten rather very severely by his father. Though Chidambaram was used to it, that particular day, he felt very much hurt. Atonce he decided to become a monk. Immediately, he took a clean shave of his head, cast away all the costly dresses that he

wore and left his house dressed like a "sanyasin". "Monk Chidambaram" went from place to place with neither food nor sleep and at last reached Madurai. His mind was changed because of the miseries that he had experienced so long. He thought of returning home. And he conveyed his desire to a friend of his at Ottapidaram. This news reached the ears of the father who was on the look out for the missing boy. He atonce went to Madurai to see his son. The father and the son embraced each other. Great was their rejoice. The father, then, advised his son and brought him back home. And so returned the "Prodigal son" for making great contributions to the world.

4. THE TRUTHFUL LAWYER

In order to make his son Chidambaram more serious and responsible, Ulaganatha Pillay made him a clerk in the Taluk Office. Chidambaram was not interested in this job. But still, he obeyed his father. Unfortunately, he could not continue in that job for more than one or two months. He requested his father to allow him to study law. The father agreed and sent his son to Trichy and made him study under two lawyers, namely, Ganapathi Iyer and Harihara Iyer.

In 1895, Chidambaram passed his course in law and became a lawyer. He first started his practice at Ottapidaram itself. Since Ottapidaram was in those days, the capital of the Taluk there was the Sub-Magistrate's Court, Chidambaram's grandfather, uncle and father were all lawyers. And so, Chidambaram's house was given the special name "Lawyers' house".

Chidambaranar worked in both civil and criminal fields. However, he was known as a talented criminal lawyer. In this regard, he was more famous than his ancestors. Though younger in age, he conducted his cases in such a fine a manner as to arouse the jealousy of his colleagues. He earned more than what experienced advocates would have secured. But V. O. C. paid little importance to the income he received; on the other hand, he attached greater importance to truth, sincerity and

honesty. He followed this policy throughout his life. Chidambaram won almost all the cases that he undertook. If he thought that success was not in vicinity, he used to approach the other party and tried to bring about a compromise between the two parties. He was always sincere to his clients. He considered the joys and sorrows of his clients as those of his own. Rich or poor, he treated all his clients alike. The judges who were astonished by his sincerity and loyalty—all held him in esteem. Presence of brokers in trading profession was not uncommon; but touts have no place in the legal profession. Unfortunately, the tout system developed in this profession too. They brought clients to the lawyer and naturally received a handsome commission for this. V. O. Chidambaram detested this kind of practice. He felt that such actions brought down the dignity of the lawyer's profession. The brokers were mainly utilised to extract as much money as possible out of the clients. In one of his poems, he calls such insincere lawyers as plunderers.

If ever he got an impression that the police were accusing somebody wrongly, Chidambaram never hesitated to render his services to the innocent accused. As a result of this, he became a victim of the anger and arrogance of many of the police officials. When they entered the witness box, he exposed their ignorance by his cross examinations.

The police officials who developed a great hatred for him, once involved him in a murder case—the murder of a head constable, by name Subramaniam. This, they did with a view to prevent Chidambaranar from arguing in favour of the other party the (accused). But he was told that his name would be deleted from the list if he promised

that he would not argue for the opposite party. Chidambaram, who was clever and cunning agreed to this proposal. But he did not fail in his duty to argue for the innocent man who was accused of murder. When the case was brought to the Court, he presented himself as the lawyer of the accused and what is more, won the case. This roused the anger of the police officials.

They, therefore, accused him of having tried to make the prosecution witness come round to his side. But Joint Magistrate Lionel Vipert suspended the case as a false one. The Head Constable who was responsible for this lost his job. After this incident, even the police were afraid of him and they began to look upon him with respect.

Chidambaranar was frustrated to see that corruption prevailed in the law and order department as well. He filed a case against a Sub-Magistrate called Ekambaram and saw to it that he was punished. He also accused two officials; Mr. Vasudeva Rao and Mr. Panchapakesa Rao, B.A., B.L., of having accepted a bribe. A case was filed and he won this also. These corrupt officials received severe punishment which they only deserved. All the while, Chidambaram's father did not like the way his son antagonised the officials. He asked his son to continue his practice at Tuticorin. Much against his will, Chidambaram left for Tuticorin in 1900 for the sole reason that his profession will flourish there.

5. FAMILY LIFE

Chidambaranar got married to Valliyammai, daughter of one Thiruchendur Subramanya Pillai, at the age of twenty three. With her hearty co-operation and attention, Chidambaram Pillai lived the ideal life of a Grihastha. There was everything that went to make their life not only harmonious but also pleasant and fruitful.

Once a relative of Chidambaram, brought a client to him and asked Pillai for a commission for the act done. Chidambaram discussed the matter with his beloved wife, who rightly observed, "Getting a case by paying a commission is a form of corruption. Return all the money atonce to the client". Should it be mentioned that this answer very much pleased the husband who was an embodiment of honesty?

Chidambaranar sheltered in his house a blind scholar by name Ramaiya Desikar who belonged to the backward class. Valliyammai, wife of Chidambaram, undertook the responsibility of feeding and helping the blind poet. The townfolk spoke ill of her for sheltering a person of low caste. Chidambaram related these words to his wife and asked her opinion in the matter. The benevolent lady replied "Don't you know that there is no such difference as high caste and low caste, especially among scholarly men? When all men are equal in the eyes of God, is it not foolishness to classify them as high caste and low caste? Does not God dwell in the heart of every living

being? Let those who speak ill of us continue to do so; we shall act according to our conscience".

Chidambaranar himself describes the above incident in a beautiful Tamil Song. He sang :

“ Once came a client brought by a kinsman,
 The client paid and left; but this petty man
 Stretched out his hand and asked a commission
 Confused, I went in to have a clear vision
 On my wife's thought, who said to me “No,
 It is indecent to do so for all that I know”,

The poet-lawyer, Chidambaranar explains in an exquisite manner the second incident also.

Valliyammaiar too was equally talented in Tamil language and literature. She had mastered the Thirukural and could, as V. O. C. himself says, explain any of the verses in a beautiful way bringing out the hidden meanings and ideas.

Valliyammaiar, who was V. O. C's friend, philosopher and guide, passed away in 1901. Chidambaram was deeply distressed and he wrote a number of elegies praising her good qualities. He recalled how his happy household had been a veritable sanctuary for many of his people. He also remembered how his wife used to serve food to them all without the least sign of dissatisfaction. It is well known that time is the best healer, Chidambaram too after sometime got reconciled to the loneliness caused by his wife's death. However, situations changed and circumstances compelled him to take one Meenakshiyammai as his second wife. This lady of great devotion and many

virtues belonged to the same family to which Valliammai belonged. In every respect, she filled the void left by the passing away of Valliammai. Chidambaram hated the prevalence of caste and creed differences. He was much against those people who called the Harijans as untouchables. He propagated the truth that all men were equal and that there were no such thing as high caste and low caste. That "all are equal in the eyes of God" was the truth to which he clung on to. He converted a scholar of an illiterate-so called low caste monk-named Swamy Sagajanauda. In his later days, soon after his release from the prison, he moved to the City of Madras for a brief period. It was here that he met Swamy Sagajananda and during the course of the conversation, the latter told the former that he belonged to the same caste as that of Nandanar. V. O. C. was mighty pleased and said "Having said the truth, you are a true Brahmin". He took Sagajananda to his house and had him as his guest for a long time; he taught him such great works of Tamil literature as Tholkappiam and Thirukkural.

When Chidambaram left Madras for his native village, Ottapidaram, he took Sagajananda also with him. Again, he also compelled him to attend all functions celebrated in his relative's houses; and if any enquired about his caste, he said that "it is not to be asked; monks have no caste". Sagajananda himself calls him as "the noble man who brought me up as if I am his own son". One of his letters tells us how he praised and esteemed V.O.C. as his parent, teacher and God.

6. SWADESHI SHIPPING COMPANY

The ancient Tamils were maritime traders and they carried on sea trading on a large—scale. In those days only the Tamils were skilled in the art of manning a ship. Historical evidences reveal that 5000 years ago, the Tamilians had their ships sailing the vast oceans. The broken pieces of pottery unearthed from the Indus region bear imprints of beautiful and big ships. At a time when the Romans were still using the rafts, the Tamils had attained considerable perfection in the art of shipbuilding. The ships were so made that nobody could easily find out how the pieces of wood were joined together. The ships looked beautiful with heads of lion and tiger engraved at appropriate places.

The History of Tamil kings unravels a great deal of interesting information about the strong navy they maintained. Evidence tells us of Raja Raja Cholan who conquered the islands of Ceylon and Malaya with his navel supremacy. Thus, ships were used in those days by our kings for trade as well as for war. In later days, India became a slave country of Britain. The English not only took over the kingdoms from us, but also got control over our trade and industry. As a result of this, even our sea borne trade went under their power. Thus, these Englishmen gained supremacy of our land and seas. All our wealth were taken away gradually to accumulate their treasury.

Patriotic Chidambaram was deeply distressed by the impoverished condition that prevailed in the country. But there was nothing that he could do single-handed. He was like a drop in the ocean before the mighty, powerful and cunning Englishmen who governed over nearly half the world. He knew well that there was nothing that could be done against these foreigners even if all the Tamilians united together. Chidambaram could do nothing but wait patiently for the appropriate time when he could oppose and revolt against the British.

It was at this moment, that the revolt over the partition of Bengal occurred in the sub-continent. The forces against the partition move gained strength. Viceroy, Lord Curzon, divided Bengal into two parts, according to the religion of the people, namely Hindu Bengal and Muslim Bengal. Thus, he created a split between the Indians who were always united through sun and rain. Instead of trying to bring unity among the subjects the British Viceroy, tried to spoil the spirit of brother-hood that existed among the Indians.

But the Bengalis did not fall a prey to this trick played by the British ruler. Instead, they united together and revolted against the partition move. This revolution did not stop with Bengal, but spread throughout the country. In order to oppose the partition of Bengal the patriotic Indian, started the bonfire of foreign goods. Heaps of foreign clothes were burnt. In Bombay city, all foreign cloth was piled up, and were set fire to by the freedom fighters. Tilak started this ceremony of burning foreign clothes and the movement soon spread throughout the country rousing the patriotic feelings in the hearts of one and all.

V. O. Chidambaram Pillai, who was awaiting for the right time, rose to the occasion as it was the right time. Mr. Pillai was a brave warrior born to bring freedom and glory to his Motherland and the bread winning job of a lawyer could hardly prevail upon him to desist from fulfilling his life's mission. He set fire to all the foreign clothes that he possessed. Thereafter, he resolved never to buy any foreign goods. He flew into a rage if he saw any Indian dressed in foreign textiles. He refused to have a shave from a barber who used a foreign knife. He was very happy to learn that the war of independence had begun in Bengal. He rejoiced that a part of his dream had been fulfilled. He felt that it was now his duty to awaken his kinsmen of Tamil Nadu and begin the attack against the foreigners. The destiny of the British rule in India, he thought, was now in the hands of Indians.

Chidambaram opined that the British came to India not to rule over it but to seize all her wealth. He, therefore, started attacking the English traders. The exports and imports between Tuticorin and Ceylon were carried out by the "British India Steam Navigation Company". This company belonged to the British traders and it arrested the growth of Swadeshi movement in India. Naturally, the Indian businessmen felt that it was trying to curb the growth of Indian trade.

In order to put down the activities of the British Company, Chidambaram Pillai wanted to establish a "Swadeshi Shipping Company" with the help of the Indian traders. Many a number of traders eagerly came forward to render financial and other assistance for this attempt. Many promised to contribute money. But, there were a

few cowards who made fun of V. O. C. and called his attempt, 'foolish'. "To run ships against the British Company! Impossible!", they said. But Chidambaram Pillai was determined not to withdraw.

As per the Indian Companies act of 1882, the Swadeshi Shipping Company was registered on the 16th October, 1906. It was proposed to collect 10 lakhs from the shareholders. A rule was passed that not only Indians but all Asians inclusive of the Ceylonese, could become share holders in the Company.

Mr. Pondy Dhuraiswamy Thevar, Zamindar of Palaganatham, and President of the Madurai Tamil Sangam, was made the president of the Company while our beloved V. O. C. volunteered to be its treasurer. As many as thirteen bankers agreed to be the directors of Swadeshi Shipping Company. Four lawyers including Salem C. Vijayaraghavachariar and Mr. Krishnan Nair were appointed as legal advisers of the company.

Soon after the registration of the Company, work began for securing shareholders for it. One Mr Janab Hajee Mohammed Bahir Sait alone bought 8000 shares for two lakhs of rupees. These two lakhs of rupees formed the initial capital for the company. All the organisers of the company met together and brought out the aims of the company as follows:

"Make comfortable the voyage and trade between India and Colombo and other places decided by the company by having ships moving to and fro permanently."

"Train Indians, Ceylonese and other Asians in building and manoeuvring ships."

“Establishing Universities to teach the students of India, Ceylon and other Asians countries technically the art of manning and building a ship.”

“To create units among Indians and other Asians in shipping and in trading.”

Appoint such Asians as Indians and Ceylonese as agents in order to know about the ‘gives and takes’ of various trading centres.

“Have harbours in order to construct ships and machine boats and to repair them”.

The aim of Swadeshi Shipping Company was not only to work for the good of the Tamils or Indians alone; but for the good of the Asians as a whole. The company also thought of seeking the help of Japan, which was taking great strides towards industrial progress, to accomplish their plans.

To start with, the “Swadeshi Shipping Company” had no ship of its own. They hired ships from ‘Shaline Steamers Company’. But the British Companies did not like the establishment of Indian Shipping Company. They tried their level best to make it a failure. The owner of Shaline steamers, Mr. Essaje Tajpaye, relieved himself from the contract made with the Swadeshi Shipping Company, for, he was cautioned by the British Company. The Swadeshi’s were now left without even a single ship. The Tamil traders, who antagonised the British Company, trusting the Swadeshi Shipping Company, were perplexed. All these did not worry Chidambaram Pillai. He rushed to Colombo and hired a big ship from them and brought

it to Tuticorin harbour. Great was the joy of traders of Tuticorin when they saw the ship.

Chidambaram soon realised that the company cannot last long unless it had its own ship. He indulged in collecting money for buying new ships. The tradesmen of Tuticorin extended the maximum financial help. However, it was not enough. V. O. C. did not stop with Tamil Nadu alone but went to Bombay, Calcutta and other cities, and collected money to finance his company. The English took over the country mainly to grab our resources. "Unless we put an end to their trade which fetches them more money than anything also, they will not leave India." He expressed the above opinion publicly at many places.

The powerful speeches of Chidambaram Pillai induced quite a number of north Indian traders to become shareholders of the company. When he left Tamil Nadu a second time for North India to collect resources for the company, he vowed that "he would either return with a ship or never."

When V. O. C. was in Bombay, his only son died at Tuticorin. But this did not deter him from doing his duty. His wife also being pergenant, his friend begged him to come home once atleast, Chidambaram paid no heed to all these requests. He simply said "The Almighty God is more powerful than I. He will protect my son and wife". This proves how patriotic a man he was. He considered his service to his country and Indian Society as something more valuable than his duty towards his family.

A few months after going to Bombay, Pillai returned to Tuticorin with a ship, by name Kaliah. The Tamilians

were very happy to see that he had fulfilled his vow. They all praised him and cheered him for his success. This ship could carry 42 1st class passengers, 24 2nd class passengers, 1300 ordinary class passengers and 4,000 bags of cargo. In the meantime, a patriot by name) S. Veda-murthi bought a ship from France. Two Machine boats were also bought at the sametime.

Magazines of all India repute congratulated and praised Chidambaram for having bought 2 huge ships for Tamil Nadu at the same time. There was practically no national magazine which did not write an editorial in admiration of Chidambaram Pillai. Subramaniya Bharathi, who conducted a weekly called India, published a cartoon of the Ship Kalia, with a flag having Vandemataram written on it nearing the Tuticorin harbour as though the people were giving a hearty welcome to V. O. Chidambaram. In the same magazine, Bharathiyar also remarked "Our Barathamata would now be as proud and happy as the woman who gives birth to twins after having had no children at all for a long time. Bharathamata now has two big ships".

Swadeshi Shipping Company was growing bigger day by day. The people were resolved to carry their goods only in these ships and they practiced it also. Of course, there were at first a few traders who were tempted by the sweet but deceitful words of the English, supported the foreigners. But soon they also came round to V.O.C.'s side.

Seeing the power gained by the Swadeshi Shipping Company, the British reduced by far their fares. They also sent brokers to Indian merchants. They made their men wait in Railway Stations and spread a false propaganda that the Swadeshi goods were carried only in their ships. But the Swadeshi Company on its part, conveyed the truth to merchants and passengers and sought support for their company.

Perceiving that, neither the reduction of fares nor the use of cunning tricks brought the desired result, the English Company announced that people could travel free of cost in their ships. This had no effect on the people either. On the other hand, they became more and more united and patriotic. The owners of the British Shipping Company now requested Chidambaram that they would give him one lakh of rupees if he left the Swadeshi Shipping Company. But what Chidambaram wanted was freedom and not a large sum of money. He was prepared to lay down his life for the country rather than betray his country for the sake of securing some "perishable money."

'Can you keep the bee from raging' Or the ring dove's neck from changing? Who indeed could attempt to barricade the route of the Ganges? Chidambaram Pillai was sure of himself and nothing could deter his ambition to relieve India from the hands of the British.

Without stopping with sea trading, Chidambaram also showed interest in growth of handicrafts and agriculture. On October 11th, 1921, he inaugurated the "Madras agricultural Handicrafts Association Ltd" in Madras. Many persons experienced in industrial field assisted him. At

the rate of 10 rupees per share, he planned to collect a sum of ten thousand rupees. The association informed that the share value of Rs. 10 could be paid in 10 monthly instalments. The concession was given chiefly to make poor labourers and farmers the shareholders of the Association. Its aims were :

“To uplift the standard of living of the farmers and labourers;

To develop agriculture and handicrafts by following modern methods:

To start factories to manufacture,
Candles and buttons;

To establish a polytechnic college to teach Swadeshi handicrafts to students.

To buy the extra cultivable land from the different districts of Tamil Nadu and train farmers to use modern techniques in farming.”

In the North, British rule was a bit weakened by the movement against the partition of Bengal. Whereas in the South, Chidambaram was trying to put an end to British trade. The ruling class now feared that the British rule in India would be routed.

Some Government officials were engaged to curb the power of the Swadeshi Shipping Company and thereby helped the owners of the British company. The sub-magistrate of Tuticorin, passed a secret circular that no Indian official should travel by the Swadeshi ships. The

British Officials approached some of the Indian merchants and forced them not to send their goods through the Swadeshi ships. Each and every Indian official was compelled to do this kind of work in order to overthrow the Swadeshi Shipping Company. Some of them, who were unwilling to do so resigned; while a number of others changed over to other districts.

Once the managers of the British Company reported to the officials that a Swadeshi Ship attempted to dash against their own. The Sub Magistrate, therefore, observed that the Swadeshi Company ships should start only after the departure of the British ships. This, he said with the intention of making people to send their goods by the ship that leaves first. The Swadeshi Company protested and appealed to the district magistrate against this unjust order. They also proved that their ships neither competed nor dashed against those of the British Company. Realising that the Sub Magistrate was unjust, the magistrate declared that the Swadeshi Ship could depart at any time.

Even if a person of Tuticorin had mild diarrhoea it was sufficient cause for the British Shipping Company owners to influence the doctors to say that Cholera was prevalent in the city. Naturally, the health authorities prevented the people from making voyages. Thus, every official, including the colonial doctor, excise officers and harbour officials, tried to cause much harm to the Swadeshi Shipping Company. But all their attempts proved a failure.

7. PILLAI AND POLITICS

Chidambaram Pillai did not stop with serving the Swadeshi Shipping Company; he also took an active part in politics. He was much pained to see that the poor condition of his motherland left barren on account of the economic exploitation of the British - it was a consequence of the political enslavement. Hence, he felt that it was his duty to recover his native country from the shackles of alien rule and establish a Republican Government of the people by the people and for the people. With a view to achieve this objective he joined the Indian National Congress as its member.

Chidambaram Pillai attended all the Congress meetings as its representative from his area. In those days the masses had little voice in the Congress. It was a monopoly of the rich and those who held the legal profession dominated it. Even then, the organisation was divided into two wings; the moderates and the extremists. Mr. Pillai, being a disciple of Lokamanya Tilak, was an extremist. However, in the Congress only the moderates were greater in number and so they exercised greater powers. They held meetings every year; but did nothing except to talk and pass resolutions. "Speech-making was developed into a fine art". To those early leaders independence just meant that the "Blacks should

govern in the place of the Whites"—a modest ambition indeed!

In 1907, the meeting of the Congress was dissolved after the confusion caused on account of the difference of opinion between the moderates and extremists. Afterwards, the extremists, under the dynamic leadership of Lokamanya Tilak, proposed to spread their principles all over the country and prepare the people for a War of Independence. The onerous responsibility of carrying out this work successfully in Tamil Nadu devolved on the shoulders of V. O. C. Rajaji once remarked in a public meeting that it is Tilak's opinion that "in the whole of South India V. O. C. is the only true freedom fighter". He was right. There was nobody as brave and as courageous as V. O. C. It is not surprising that Tilak should hand over the mantle of southern leadership to V. O. Chidambaram Pillai.

An association was established at Thirunelveli by Chidambaram pillai in 1908 for the purpose of explaining to the people about the disadvantages of foreign rule and to rouse up the patriotism in them. Members of this association held public meetings frequently to speak to the people about the necessity of boycotting foreign goods, patriotic love and national education. The efforts of the association were not fruitless; on the other hand, it gained authority and popularity day by day.

SUBRAMANYA SIVA

Subramanya Siva was born of a village Munsiff in the hamlet of Vathalagundu situated on the foot of Kodai hills near Madurai. Being a born genius, he mastered

Both English and Tamil and become a scholar of outstanding merit. From boyhood he was little inclined to material pleasures. Even as a youth, he abandoned his beloved wife; renounced all pleasures of life and began to lead the life of a monk. In King Asoka we hear of the monarch turning into a monk where as in Siva we hear of the scholar becoming a monk. But the person who gave up everything could not abandon his high sense of patriotism. It looked as though that he renounced everything else in the cause of patriotism.

Siva, who was young energetic and revolutionary minded, wanted to play an active role in the freedom movement. He was very capable and talented to accomplish anything that he wanted to do. This ascetic patriot went from village to village talking to people and kindling Swadeshi feelings in their hearts. In 1907, he reached Thirunelveli. Those of the patriots Association made the best use of his talents for propagating the ideals of nationalism. Siva spoke continuously for several hours in several public meetings. People came pouring down from all parts of the country to listen to his speeches. Besides, he gave a number of orations at many villages in and around Tuticorin. At this time Chidambaram Pillai who was the Secretary of Swadeshi Shipping Company, attended every meeting where Siva spoke. He was much captivated by the speeches of young Siva who was yet to complete his 23rd year. Each developed a liking for the other. Patriotism brought them together. Soon Siva and Pillai became close friends. History has never known a friendship of this kind. Often we speak of ideal friendship. The example of the friendship

between Siva and Pillai serves even to this day as a model for others to follow and will continue to serve so.

THE VOICE OF V.O.C.

In course of time, upon the compulsion of the public, Chidambaram Pillai, also started speaking in public meetings. His speeches infused courage into the hearts of the workers of Harvey Mills who were suffering a great deal under the whites. The spirit of patriotism existed in their minds to a great extent. V.O.C. argued vehemently for the boycott of foreign goods. "If anyone observed that the Swadeshi articles cost more than the foreign goods", he would say : "Higher price ? To whom you give it ? Is it not that you, give it only to your own people your kins men ?".

The British always had their own excuse to give for not handing over the Government to the Indians. They said, "Indians do not know how to rule; if they are given the power to rule, then peace will be destroyed, it will have adverse effects." The moderates danced to their tune. But V.O.C. condemned their action. He observed :

"They say that they will hand over the Government to us, soon after we have learned to rule ! It is foolishness. This is just like telling a person who wants to learn swimming;" You first learn how to swim and then come to me. You can then enter the waters. If a child, is to be trained to run, it will fall down a number of times; get hurt; only after all these, it will learn to run about and play. So also, we should have Swarajya; rule our land ourselves; make many mistakes and then learn the right.

nothing to do from the mistakes. If our inefficient administration is going to bring about our ruin, that ruin is all the same welcome - rather than live as slaves to foreigners". The moderates could only keep quiet.

The British officials soon became aware of the freedom consciousness that was spreading among the people and they foresaw a political agitation any moment. Therefore, they passed an order to the effect that 'none of the people should carry any weapons or sticks or any other kind of armament or weapon when going out'. Chidambaram Pillai was greatly annoyed. The brave Tamils were now powerless to do anything against the British. He said :

"The English have dared to ban the carrying of even batons and Swadeshies are not allowed to carry sticks more than 5½ ft. long. In fact, it is now that we have gained power. The Government which possesses great military strength is now afraid of our carrying even batons. Please don't give up the carrying of these batons. For, if you give up even these, then our future generations will have to live in misery under these British".

He ordered people to go against the authority of the British rulers. When he described the miseries suffered by the enslaved Indians, under the all-powerful English, he used to weep bitterly. Sometimes, not being able to control his tears, he used to weep alone and lament. The very next moment, he would control his emotions. He roused the people from their ignorance when he said : "Are we, who are born to rule, to

live as slaves? Are we to watch quietly when our country is being ruled by these men who came as mere traders to sell their goods? Is it not a great name to us, that we Indians, who are 30 crores in number are ruled by just 5 lakhs of Englishmen who came from a land 6000 miles away?" Such speeches of V. O. C. were responsible for the Tinnaveli agitation. Not being satisfied with the public speeches, he collected an army in Pandya Nadu against British rule. Besides, the educated young men, barbers, dhobies, cartsmen and such other workers also joined his army. In every village and in every street, the ringing voice of V. O. C. could be heard urging the people to indulge in a revolution to gain the lost freedom.

8. BIBIN CHANDRA PAL

Bibin Chandra pal, was one of the leaders of Indian National Congress. He was an eminent scholar. Besides, he was also an excellent orator and there was practically no one who could excel him in the art of public speaking. He expressed his views against the British, openly, without caring about the after-effects. People were prepared to listen to him continuously for hours together. So powerful were his speeches ! It was at this time that a case had been filed against Arvind Ghosh who was the leader of the congress extremist. Bibin Chandra had been called as a prosecution witness. But he refused to give witness against Ghosh. He was sentenced to six months imprisonment for having insulted the Court. When his imprisonment period was over, on the 9th March 1908, Bibin Chandra Pal was released. The members of the 'Patriots Association' of Tinnaveli resolved to celebrate the day with great festivity. This invoked fear in the hearts of the Government officials. The magistrate passed an order banning any procession, or public meeting in Tuticorin on the 9th March. These foreign rulers did not give to our men, the liberty even to celebrate the release of their leaders. It was because they felt that Bibin Chandra Pal was an enemy of the English rule.

The Magistrate also called V.O.C. personally and warned him against taking part in any procession or

meeting connected with the release of Bibin Chandrapal. Chidambaranar asked him to give him a written statement of the order which the magistrate refused.

The organisers of the Swadeshi Shipping Company, convened an urgent meeting of the managing Committee to discuss the effects which the attitude of V.O.C. may bear on the company. They decided that Chidambaram Pillai should not participate in political activities for the sake of the welfare of the Company. Pillai was deeply offended by such an action of his own men.

Most of the share holders of Swadeshi Company had become so and they looked forward only towards its profits. There were a group of selfish people who wanted to make personal gains out of the nation wide Swadeshi movement. But the motive of Chidambaranar, who founded the Company, was different. He had started it only to drive the British out of the Indian sub-continent. This being his ambition, he refused to act as per the will of the management.

Besides the managers of the Shipping Company, many of V. O. C.'s close friends also asked him not to indulge in Politics. "Let us work for the growth of the Swadeshi movement. Let others take over the responsibility of boycotting foreign goods"—they said. But this idea did not impress Chidambaram Pillai who replied thus :

"Some tell me, persuade the Swadeshi spirit. But don't speak about boycotting foreign goods. This is meaningless. How can we improve the use of Swadeshi goods without casting off foreign goods! If you want to

Speak the truth you must abstain from falsehood. Good habits must be followed and bad habits should be denounced. In the same way, if the Swadeshi movement must flourish, then it is essential that we boycott foreign articles. Is this not obvious even without my telling it ?

Swadeshiyam does not stop with the mere use of Swadeshi articles. In trade, education and Government, we should have "Swadeshiyam". It is my desire that in every sphere of our life, we should be Swadeshis.

We should solve all our cases and disputes ourselves. We should not go to the Courts which are under the control of the foreigners. Each town, should have its Court; each street, its Panchayat.

The British, who by now realised, that Pillai had started the Swadeshi Shipping Company only to assist the war of Independence, gave them a great deal of troubles. But Chidambaram Pillai was not the least afraid. He cared little for the collector's warning or about the order of money minded company managers.

As pre-planned, the celebrations following the release of Bibin Chandra Pal went on well. In order to avoid any chaos, the Police had careful arrangements. Chidambaram and Siva, violating the order of the collector, took part in the procession in which 10,000 people participated and also spoke in public meetings.

Thus, in Thirunelveli District, the fight for freedom was more aggressive than in Bengal. Everywhere, people heard talks of freedom. People shouted the slogan 'Vande matharam' anywhere and everywhere; they detested the

very sight of the English, grew wild with these who wore foreign clothes. The dhoby would not wash the clothes of these men who backed foreign shipping companies, wore foreign clothes and co-operated with the officials in putting down the Swadeshi movement; no barber would give them a shave; no sweet seller was prepared to sell them sweets; no cartsmen was ready to drive for them. Thus, in the whole of Thirunelveli district, whatever V.O.C. said, people followed it. None dared to oppose him; people were even ready to swallow the fire if V.O.C. asked them to do so.

The Officials now got frightened by the increasing popularity and power of V.O.C. among the public. They decided that if the British Empire was to last long, then they must arrest Chidambaram Pillai. Collector 'Winch' fearing that the people might rise in revolt if he was arrested in Tuticorin, sent word to Chidambaram Pillai and Siva to come and meet him at Thirunelveli.

9. V. O. C. COURTS IMPRISONMENT

Having accepted the invitation of Collector Winch, V.O.C. was determined to go to Thirunelveli. All his friends excepting Siva tried to prevent him from proceeding there. They had a premonition that the Collector would order the arrest of Chidambaram Pillai at Thirunelveli. V.O.C. too was not unaware of this. At the same time he was also conscious of the fact that his troubles would only be increased by his declining the Collector's invitation. After consoling all his friends, who objected to this meeting the Collector at Thirunelveli, he went to meet the Collector on March 12, accompanied by Siva.

During the interview, Collector Winch called him names and abused him in the most unpleasant language. But brave Chidambaram was not the least frightened by the wrath of the Collector. On the other hand, he retorted fearlessly. Poet Bharathi has portrayed their conversation in one of his inspiring poems :

“Having Held meetings without permission and
talked

ill of the Government is one fault.

Having made the innocent people to

shout ‘Vandamatharam’ is another great mistake.

Besides, having abused the ruling Caste of Englishmen, having run Swadeshi Ships to make them run away is another proof of your arrogance".

"If you still continue to do so, I will shoot you and teach your men a bitter lesson. Who will dare to question? If any does, I will wreak vengeance by putting him in the prison".

The above accusations made by the Collector were denied by V. O. C. who answered back by saying :

"Should we get your permission, if we want to meet together and talk in our own land? Does such an injustice prevail in any other country? Will the gods bear this?

"It is wrong even to cry 'Vandematharam'. What is the meaning of this Vandematharam? 'Doesn't that mean 'Oh' Motherland, we bless thee and bow to thee!' If you call it a mistake to shout 'Vandamatharam', than we shall do that offence till we breath our last. It is not a misdeed to bless the motherland.

"If we run ships it is because we want our trade to flourish. Is that a guilt? Should we simply witness and watch when our treasures are being carried away by foreigners? Are we born only to die of hunger? We have the manliness in us to revolt against tyranny. Once we have started hating this world, should we desire to stick to this life.

"All the 30 crores of us have decided to oppose you in unity. It will no longer be possible for you to rule

over us by the might of force. We don't bother if you shoot us; even if you are going to cut us to pieces. we will not yield. Nor will the patriotism in our hearts perish. This is certain".

The Collector flew into a rage when he heard the words of Chidambaram Pillai. He asked Chidambaram to leave Thirunelveli district and to give an undertaking to the effect that he will no longer participate in political agitations. But V. O. C. replied that he could neither give the undertaking nor leave the district and said that they could arrest him if they desired. At once both V.O.C. and Siva were arrested in the presence of the Collector himself. The police searched Chidambaram's house and took over a few letters.

CHAOS IN THIRUNELVELI

The news of the arrest of V.O.C. soon spread throughout Thirunelveli as wild as jungle fire. The next day (13th March) all shops closed, students went out on processions. On the whole, there was complete pandemonium in the town. Patriots and Swadeshi institutions conducted public meetings and processions to condemn the arrest of Chidambaram Pillai. A police force was installed in the town to maintain law and order. Labourers formed small groups and carried out banners in different parts of the town. All the street municipal lamps were pulled down. The petrol store-house, which belonged to the municipality, was burnt down. Some people went to the Municipal Office, set fire to all the things which were inside. They entered the Church Mission College and compelled its principal to shout thrice the slogan 'Vande-

matharam'. The principal took refuge in his bungalow in order to save his life. All the valuable articles in the college were thrown out and broken. They, then, damaged all the ammunitions and rifles in the police station and even set fire to the building. The Collector and the Superintendent of Police arrived at the scene to have control over the situation. Deputy Collector Ash shot blindly at the crowd and as many as 4 died and 3 were injured. A seventeen year old boy, who was serving in the Vallampuri Amman Temple, bent down to pick up the cocoanut which had fallen from his hand. Lo! the very next moment a bullet whizzed through his head; killed him on the spot. An 18 year old bakery boy who was returning home with the keys after closing the shop for the day, also fell a victim to Ash's bullet.

Of the four people, who were killed by the Deputy Collector's bullets, two were Hindus, one Muslim and the other a tribal. The officials caring, neither to give treatment to the injured nor lay aside the corpse of the dead, left them abandoned in the streets. The dead bodies lay on the streets till evening when their relatives came and took them away.

Due to the stone throwing of the agitators, the police inspector was severely injured on the head; the Collector too had minor bruises. There was confusion in the town continuously for three days. At the same time there was hartal! and chaos in Tuticorin and Thachanallore. The Union Office in Thatchanallore was set fire too. Realising that the ordinary police cannot quell the revolt, the Madras Government, sent its armed police to Thirunelveli, Tuticorin and Thachanallore. They also said that their

expenses will be met by the people themselves. The police guarded the house of every Englishman. Honourable Mr. Guruswamy Iyer and two or other prominent men of Tuticorin came to Madras and appealed to the Government to withdraw the armed forces from their district. The Governor replied that since persons like Mr. Iyer did not help the police to suppress the revolts at the right time, he could not recall the armed police. These men returned home utterly disappointed. At this time, in Thachanallore, Thirunelveli and Tuticorin as many as 80 persons were arrested for taking part in the agitations. Of these, one was freed the others were awarded varied punishments.

THE PUNISHMENT

The police filed a case on Mr. Pillai according to section 123-A for speaking ill of the Government on 23, 26th February and 1st and 2nd March in 1908. He was also accused of providing Siva with food and shelter violating section 153-A. This case was taken up for examination before the District Additional Magistrate, Mr. E. H. Wallace on the 26th March. On the prosecution side, the following statements made by Chidambaram Pillai in the course of his speeches were objected.

“If the people unite together, the English can be driven away. Once they know that we have all united together they will run away.

“There are 50,000 whites in India. They can be easily sent out by force. But we should not indulge in violence. Even so, we need not be afraid of the English.

"If the Indians, as decided earlier, keep away from buying foreign clothes, sugar, enamels etc, they will quit India of their own accord."

There are still many people who help the British Shipping Company. I am not going to question them. Some even came to me and said that they would harm them. But I prevented them. They said that they were prepared to take the risk.

Barbers have sworn that they will not work for those who wear foreign clothes.

Is there is any one who prefers foreign rule to Home rule? Let anything happen. There is absolutely nothing that we should fear!

Mr. N.K. Ramaswamy, an advocate of Tanjore, appeared on behalf of Chidambaram Pillai and argued the case. As the case was proceeding V.O.C. refused to have his arguments carried out because of the fact that the magistrate was not impartial towards arguments. After the preliminary investigation the magistrate committed the case to the Sessions. The case was conducted for two months in the Session Court. While Messrs. Sadagopachari, Narasimbachari and Venkatachari argued for V.O.C., Barrister Powell and Richmond argued for the prosecution.

Many learned men including Subramanya Bharathi were witnesses on V.O.C.'s side. Of those, who bore witness against Mr. Pillai, many belonged to British Steam Navigation Company and some others were the English policemen. Details of this case were published not only

in Tamil Dailies but also in all India news papers. 'Yugandaram' a Bengali paper published from Calcutta gave exact accounts of the Court proceedings in a special supplement.

On the 7th of July, the judgement was passed. Chidambaram Pillai, was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment in the Andamans for abusing the Government and another 20 years imprisonment in the island for helping Siva. It was also said that V.O.C. should undergo these punishments one after the other continuously for 40 years. Siva was sentenced to 10 year of jail in Andamans for talking ill of the Government.

The significant portions of the judgement of Justice Pinhay are as follows;—

"Chidambaram Pillai under the presumed air of working for industrial development has only been creating a racial enmity between the Englishmen and the Indians. This accusation cannot be denied as false. PILLAI IS A TRAITOR. EVEN HIS SKELETON HAS THE QUALITIES OF A TRAITOR. Siva has been a tool in his hands. These two are responsible for the confusion in Thirunelveli".

"Pillai has been preaching to his people the ways of attaining freedom all the while saying that he has only been labouring for the prosperity of cottage industries."

"Legally, the Indians have not the time to discuss politics. For they do not have franchise like the English. Law does not allow them to change or correct rules and orders passed by the Government by directly plunging into

action. The Indians can meet together, discuss and send a petition to the Government. Even then, it is not essential that the official should take action in the matter."

"In England a person who talks politics, talks only to voters. They exercise franchise. He speaks to these men in order to pull over their votes to his side in the forth-coming election. In this country, there is no possibility of doing such a thing. For, the common people of Tuticorin and Thirunelveli do not have the power of franchise. This is because they do not possess the strength to accomplish their desire. In this country, these people to whom one talks of political affairs do not have the power to use any of the legally granted powers. Then, what is the purpose of his speeches? He talks to them only to induce them to exercise their only power, namely, their physical strength."

"There is nothing wrong in asking people to ban foreign goods. But will the masses, who listen to these speeches, leave things at that. They were asked not to co-operate with the Government. This goes to very dangerous limits according to Section 124-A".

Chidambaram Pillai, who was a lawyer, a political leader, "karma vira" who dared to run ships to compete with the British, a generous soul who pitied the poor, a proficient Tamil Scholar was sentenced to life for 40 years in the hell of Andaman islands with social traitors, murderers and burglars. Pillai who was then only 35 still in his youth, had to part his old parents, young wife and two infants children.

Meenakshi Sundaram, Chidambaram Pillai's brother, went mad hearing the sentence on his affectionate

The brave Tamilian Chidambaram was not the least affected by the cruel judgment passed on him. While he was taken to the prison from the court, he told one Mr. Masilamani Pillai, who was standing sadly at the entrance, "fear not the least; there is the High Court. I will soon come out". Saying so, he went to the prison; where he toiled hard and shed even his blood to win freedom for his dear motherland.

At the time when Chidambaram was punished in the South, in North India, Logamanya Tilak was sentenced to 6 years imprisonment in the islands and a fine of Rs. 10,000 was imposed on him for writing against the Government in his paper 'KESARI'. The Guru and the Disciple, both went to the prison at the same time. But, much more than the Guru, it was the disciple who was cruelly avenged by the British rule.

10. COMMENTS FROM THE PRESS

The sentence passed on Chidambaram caused great consternation not only in Tamil Nadu but in the whole of India. Many newspapers criticised Judge Pinhay's judgement strongly in their editorials. The following extracts give their substance.

Bengali : The day, when the principles of Judge Pinhay come to be followed in India, will be a fatal day for the English rulers and the people as well. If it is wrong on the part of Mr. Chidambaram Pillai to have toiled for the development of Swadeshi handicrafts, then all Indians can be said to be guilty ?”

Amirita Bazzar Patrika : The British judiciary system has brought shame upon itself by the cruel sentence passed on Mr. Pillai to undergo 40 years of imprisonment in the islands for expressing the desire for freedom. No other person in all the world except the brave V. O. C., could have suffered such an injustice. We pay our respects and bow before him. According to Judge Pinhay a traitor is one who prefers Swarajya and British rule. Every patriot who experiences a severe punishment like Mr. Pillai, is laying a stone for the grave of the British autocracy”.

Swadeshamitran: Never did we even dream that Pillai will be punished so severely. There is not any punishment which can be more cruel. The Judge has utilised all his powers which are legally allowed. The whole of India has plunged into sorrow after knowing the misery that has befallen V. O. C. The very thought of it makes our hairs stand on ends. How will the South Indian ever bear this? Will the Judge have reduced his sentence, if Pillai had not established the Shipping Company; if he had not striven for the growth of handicrafts and if he had not helped the poor labourers of Coral mills at the time of the strike. Pillai's patriotic service for public cause brought him only ruin".

Even one of the English dailies severely criticised the action of the British judiciary.

Statesman: A daily, published from the Calcutta, said: "The punishment given to patriot V. O. C. is very much against law and justice. Even those, who hold the British Empire in high esteem, will not welcome this action".

Standard: Another English paper of Madras wrote thus: "What led to the imprisonment of V. O. C. are two public speeches made by him. Judge Pinhay observed that an Indian has not the legal right to talk on Political matters. If that is so, then it looks as if, what men like Morley, Hume, and Digby have said of the freedom of speech is wrong".

There was, however, one newspaper which praised Judge Pinhay on his step, "The sentences imposed are

just. It is fortunate that the Madras Government has been able to secure the services of such an honest Judge. These Indians, who accept the judgment as just, alone are patriots. Those who condemn him are traitors".

The patriots of Andhra, on hearing the unjust judgement in V. O. C.'s case, held meetings condemning the British. "Swarajyya", a Telugu daily which was published from Bezawada, strongly criticised the British autocracy in its Editorial. This editorial was accused of being provocative and inducing violence. Its editor was arrested, his press was kept under seal, and finally the editor was sentenced to imprisonment.

The same fate befell the Tamil Weekly 'India' of which poet Bharathiyar was the Editor. Its publisher Mr. Srinivasa Ayyangar was taken to task for condemning Judge Pinhay's final judgement and for inducing people to indulge in opposing the British Government. Consequently, the Office of the Newspaper was transferred to Pondicherry which was under French control.

Lord Morley, who was then a minister of the British, Cabinet was very much vexed by the news of life sentence on V. O. C. He wrote a letter to the then Viceroy Lord Minto as follows :

"The sentence imposed on Subramaniya Siva of Thirunelveli and Chidambaram Pillai of Tuticorin cannot be given any support. The judgement will come for my supervision in the next mail. These punishments will be changed. I cannot on any account stand such acts of injustice. You must at once take notice of these mistakes and foolish acts. It is true that we should establish peace

and order. But how can there be order when torture goes beyond bounds. This paves the way, moreover, to violent revolts".

Judge Pinhay, who became a victim of Lord Morley's criticism, was soon transferred to another district. The Government explanation was given and perhaps this was done to pacify the people who were furious.

Chidambaram Pillai appealed to the High Court asking them to reconsider the verdict of the Sessions Judge. The appeal was taken for examination on 13th October, 1908 by Chief Justice, Arnold Wright, Judge Munroe and another Barrister. Richmond, argued in defence of the prosecution against changing the verdict passed by the sessions court. On the 4th November, the final Judgement was pronounced as below.

It is the aim of Chidambaram Pillai to put end to the rule of English. If he persuaded his people to ban foreign goods, it is not for providing the Swadeshi small industries, but **ONLY FOR DRIVING OUT THE ENGLISHMEN**. Hence, we agree with the session Judge that Chidambaram Pillai is guilty. But, we however, reduce the 20 years imprisonment for helping Siva to 6 years and the 20 year sentence for abusing Government to 4 years. The two sentences can be undergone concurrently instead of one after another".

Chidambaram's friends, who wanted to release him somehow or other, not satisfied by the High Court Judgement, appealed to the Privy Council. As a result of this the imprisonment in the Andamans was reduced to 6 years rigorous imprisonment.

PRISON LIFE

Chidambaram Pillai spent most of his sentence in the prisons of Coimbatore and Cannanore. In those days, there were practically no political prisoners in jails. And so Pillai had to meditate in solitude. There were no class divisions or other amenities. No special rights were awarded to political prisoners either. The sad plight of Chidamabram in the jails can hardly be described in a single chapter. The torture inflicted on him were numerous. The jail officials treated him even worse than that of a person convicted for murder. Chidambaram Pillai, who led a princely life, at home, with tasty dishes, had to live on Ragi gruel. He wrote letters to his wife describing his plight in the form a poem wherein he mentions the fact that he now has Ragi gruel for his food and he lovingly recalls the delicious meals she used to give him. He wrote to her of the bad conditions of the food served to him. "After agitations by the people, criticisms of newspapers, countless fasts, life sacrifices, many reforms in the Congress government" if, there are worms, insects, stones and sand, in the food supplied to 'C' class prisoners, today then, should anything be said of the poor condition of the food supplied more than half a century ago, especially at a time when there were only few political prisoners other than Mr. Pillai. What a horrible food our Chidambaram Pillai must have eaten in the prison !!

Due to the tortures suffered in the prison, Chidambaram Pillai was growing weaker in body. When he went to prison his weight was 130 pounds. But by 6 months after his imprisonment his weight had come down by 27

pounds. The jail Superintendents started giving him rice meals only after the doctors had warned that continuing to give ragi gruel might even result in his death. Letters written by V.O.C. to the family in a poem evoke the sympathy of the readers. They are simple, short and spirited poems, which when read, in the original, kindle the tender sentiments of even a hard-hearted man. He describes in one of his poems (a letter to his wife) his appearance as it was when in prison. The sum and substance of the poem can be put thus: "My dear wife, who excelled in every field of life! My heart, I share between two women, you and Bharathmatha! This is the truth. I now wear two small shirts and a prisoner's cap. I wear cuffs in my legs. I am a bit weak and lean"; and he proceeds in a beautiful way. The real beauty of V.O.C.'s letters will be lost in our trying to translate it.

The feet, which ought to be adorned with ankles, a sign of bravery, were now tied together by cuffs, an ordinary cotton shirt replaced the silk shirt which he usually wore; a clean shaven head, a chain around the neck showing the date of release; this was the appearance of our beloved leader V.O.C. while in prison.

Weakened by bad food, even as Chidambaram Pillai was struggling for life, the jail officers ordered him to do arduous labour. Poet Bharathi sang of the plight of the labourers that they laboured like oxen in the sugarcane fields, Chidambaram Pillai too worked like an ox drawing the oil-mill which was usually drawn by oxen. Once he even fainted while working. What was the mistake committed by learned and capable Chidambaranar; that he

should work and suffer like this, labour like an ox at drawing the mill. All his fault was that he desired to win freedom for his dear motherland. Chidambaram Pillai did not shed even tears thinking of the miseries he had to suffer. He would never have thought that "he was drawing a oil mill used for extracting oil" Had he thought so, he would have been much wounded physically and spiritually as well. Even as he was toiling with the country type mill, he would have imagined as though he was going round the divine abode of free Bharthamatha. It is only natural that a poet like him should think so.

THE BETRAYAL

Besides the trouble created by the jail officials within the prison walls, Chidambaranar was troubled by the shareholders of the Swadeshi Company. Once V. O. C. entered the prison, the Shipping Company, which was run by him, all these days had to close down. After Chidambaranar's exit, the management of Swadeshi Shipping Company could no longer tackle the keen competition from the British Company. Moreover, they feared that the Government which imprisoned the erudite scholar, V.O.C., would not hesitate to throw them in the prison. They, therefore, sold away both the ships which Chidambaram Pillai valued very much. Another heart-breaking news was that the ship called S. S. Gaelia which V.O.C. bought by collecting money from all over India, was sold to the British Shipping Company itself. What a pity!!

Chidambaram Pillai, who was toiling in the prison was very much offended by this news. For several days,

he did not sleep or eat. He could not bear the news of closure of the company. But what he could not bear was the selling of the ship to that very company against which he fought all these days and even received 40 years of life imprisonment. He was saddened by the thought that his men turned cowards at the time of test when they should stand up and face the rising opposition. He silently wept for the people of India who did not hesitate to betray their own country and kith and kin even in times of danger to their own selves.

The managing committee of the Swadeshi Shipping Company did not stop with selling the ships. They blamed the esteemed Chidambaram Pillai and said he was responsible for the closure of the company and tried to take legal action on him to get back the money that they invested. This wounded V.O.C.'s feelings to a great extent. From the prison, he wrote a letter to Sri C. Vijayaraghavachariar, legal adviser of the Swadeshi Company as follows :

"Convey my great regards to all those who financed the Swadeshi Shipping Company, started by me. It is only just and proper that the losses incurred due to the closure of the company should be borne by the share-holders. If they refuse. I shall repay those debts myself. But, please ask them to wait patiently till I come out of prison".

V. O. C., has also written a few poems on this Swadeshi Shipping Company. In these, he mentions that he is prepared to repay the debts back to the creditors and tells us that he will not be the least affected even when he is imprisoned again. He vows that even

CHAOS IN JAIL

When Chidambaranar was undergoing the sentence in the Coimbatore prison, he had to struggle with the jailers day in and day out. One day, they compelled him to do the work of a scavenger. Pillai refused to do this even at the risk of his life. The jail officials, knowing the strong will power of V.O.C., left him without persuading him to do the work.

Another day, the jailor while supervising the rooms came to where V.O.C. was. For no particular reason whatsoever, Chidambaram Pillai laughed. "Why do you laugh" asked the jailor. "Do you then ask me to weep?" V. O. C. replied indifferently. The jailor, who grew angry, reported to the Superintendent that he was insulted by Chidambaram Pillai. V. O. C.'s sentence of 40 years imprisonment was increased by 2 more weeks!

Another day, a convict warder, by name Raman, bowed to V.O.C. on seeing him and thus paid his respects to him. The jailor, who was watching, said angrily, "If you do this once more, I will slipper you." Raman, who was enraged, murmured something and walked away.

Many men, who were arrested, during the confusion in Thirunelveli, were not in the Coimbatore prison. Those, who were in another ward, came to know of the increase

in the sentence of V. O. C. and also of the jailor scolding Raman for bowing to venerable Mr. Pillai. They were already furious seeing the troubles given everyday to their dear brave leader. The above incident added fuel to the fire. The other criminal convicts, after hearing of the cruelties imposed on V. O. C, flew into a rage. They all planned together to kill the jailor. One afternoon, the jailor's office was attacked all on a sudden. Being a Sunday most of the constables were on leave. Making the best use of this opportunity, the prisoners, who were angry with the jailor, caused confusion as preplanned. For nearly two hours there was chaos in the prison. The siren blew continuously. At the moment, when the prisoners were about to escape, after breaking the locks of their cells, the Reserve Police came there and prevented the prisoners from escaping by surrounding the whole building. There was conflict between the police and the convicts. One of the convicts died. All things were brought under their control. But their plan was successful in that the jailor was seriously injured. It took several months to regain the original health.

The jail officials filed a case against many of these convicts as being responsible for this confusion. In this case, all the opponents were sentenced to one or two years of imprisonment. But the sentence was reduced on making appeal to higher courts. Chidambaram Pillai gave witness in favour of the prisoners. He said that they revolted only because they could not tolerate the cruelty of the jailor and he said that the jail officials had conspired together to give this a political colour. After this incident, Chidambaram Pillai was transferred to the Cannanore prison.

II. A POET'S AGONY

V. O. Chidambaram Pillai and Poet Subramaniya Bharathi were like Achilles and Patrocles; they were both followers of Tilak; they shared their joys and sorrows alike. When Bharathi came to know of the cruelties suffered by his friend Chidambaram in the prison, he was greatly distressed. His noble heart could not bear the very thought that his friend was undergoing an ordeal behind the bars. The poet shed tears on hearing the news that the hands which created moral works like "Meyyaram" were now drawing a mill.

Poet Bharathi probably felt that the liberation of his friend from his mental agonies was beyond human powers. We see him pleading to the almighty God : he asked God if he does not see great men and scholars suffering in the prison, working like oxen, under the mills! He begs God to cast his eyes on these young men who pine away in the prison, separated from their wife and children. It is obvious that Bharathiyar is having his close friend Chidambaram in his mind when he wrote these lines.

Bharathiyar introduces Chidambaram Pillai to God through the words "Great man and scholar". He asks God whether he does not see such a man, toiling day and night in the jail working like a bull under the mill and suffering

far away from his loving wife and children in the prison of Cannanore. One wonders if they are Daymon and Pythias reborn !

Though Bharathi uses the plural forms like "Scholar" and "Great man" we have no doubt that the words are particularly addressed to V. O. C. For, noboby else, who deserved such great respect and admiration, went to the prison at that time; no one else ever made travails under the mill, drawing it, a work for which only oxen are used.

Bharathi's poems are inspiring and heart-rending. They invoke the tender feelings in our heart and unknowingly as we read his poem we shed tears. He asked the All powerful, if it be his will, that a growing plant watered and protected by the tears shed by every patriotic soul should die away. That patriot is none other than our Great V.O.C. He compares V.O.C. to a beacon guiding the ships. The ships are the Indians themselves. He begs God if they should lose such a leader like V.O.C. who came as inspiration to the disheartened Indians after many years of penance.

VIOLENCE IN TAMIL NADU

The British Government succeeded, in imprisoning Chidambaram Pillai who sowed the seeds of National revolution in Tamil Nadu. Even then, the agitation did not subside. Since the Government suppressed the peaceful revolt, by the use of arms, it soon became violent.

The youth of Thirunelveli, who were enraged, by the cruel sentence imposed on Chidambaram Pillai, by the

“Some say that the path to Swarajya lies in our waging a war with the aid of a great empire or in the whole country revolting together at the the same time. But these will only bring about the ruin and destruction of men and money ; they are much against the principle of the Congress ; they are means which we should not handle. Therefore, let us abandon those methods as unsuitable to the present state of our nation and attain Swarajya.”

The above idea expressed by V. O. C. will bear witness to the fact that he was, in no way, responsible for the confusion at Thirunelveli or for the murder mentioned in later pages.

While there were peaceful, political revolts and national movements, springing up in different parts of Tamil Nadu, under the leadership of V. O. C. there were some people who were preparing themselves for a revolu-

tion using armaments. Their fury was increased by every atrocity committed by the Government.

In the North, in the Maratha State and in Bengal, the armed revolutionists had plunged into action in 1906 itself. On 30th April, 1908, they bombed and killed an English lady by name Kennedy and her daughter in the town of Muzaffarpur of Bihar. They accidentally killed the two ladies in their attempt to kill the district Judge Kingsfort. Gudhiram Bose, an eighteen year old youth, who was considered to be responsible for the murders, was hanged. Such political murders occurred frequently in North India. These incidents must have inspired the South Indian revolutionists. The report made by the Rowlatt Commission, describes the violent agitation that took place in India during the period of 1908 to 1912, that is, from the time of imprisonment of Chidambaram Pillai to the time of his release. But, all the facts contained in the report of the Rowlatt Commission cannot be taken to be true. For, the aim of these who compiled the report was to invent reasons in support of the British autocracy. In any case, we come to know a great deal about the fury of the Tamil Youth, angered by the imprisonment of Chidambaram Pillai.

ABINAVA BHARATHA SANGA

In South Pandya Nadu, the youth, who were furious with the Government, united together and founded a secret association by name 'ABINAVA BHARATHA SANGA'. They all swore on the occasion, that they would willingly sacrifice their body, wealth and spirit for the cause of the nation. And, what is more, they signed

these statements with the blood taken from their body. These agitators also owned a printing press which they called 'Anti-white Printers'. The secret publication of these revolutionary youths were published only from these printers. As a result of these publications, the Government began to chase the patriotic youth. Over hundred young men, including the famous Karoor Krishnaswamy, were given cruel punishment. Some of the revolutionaries sought asylum in the French territory of Pondicherry. Of these, the notable are Mr. Neelakanda Brahma Chari, Sankara Krishna Ayyar and M. P. Thirumalachari. The Tamil youth, who were hiding in Pondicherry, maintained contacts with the other Indian revolutionaries in London, Paris and other foreign countries. At that time, the 'India Mansion' in London was a secret meeting place for the Indian freedom fighters. These men were led by Mr. Vinayaga Damodara Sawarkar. V. V. S. Iyer of Tamil Nadu was his right hand.

The India Mansion focussed its attention in giving new life to the agitation in Tuticorin. Some of the revolutionaries, who sought refuge in Pondicherry, reached London via Paris. A plan was drawn up by the end of 1901, for South Indian revolutionism. Mr. V. V. S. Iyer, Shyamji, Krishna Varma and many other people left London and came to Pondicherry through Paris. A stormy agitation began in South Pandya Nadu.

MURDER OF COLLECTOR ASHE

Ashe was then the Collector of Thirunelveli district. The agitators in Pondicherry resolved to wreak vengeance on him for the atrocities done by him when he was sub-

collector. On the 17th June 1911, Collector Ashe was travelling by train to Kodaikanal. When the train reached Maniyachi junction, a young man who was travelling with the Collector, shot him dead with his revolver. The very next moment he went into the toilet and shot a bullet through his mouth. His head was smashed and he died instantaneously. He adopted this expedient of shooting a bullet through the mouth so that he may not be recognised; the Government, then, will not be able to arrest any of his friends who took part in the revolution. But his objective was not accomplished. He was recognised as Vanchinatha Iyer, the son of Shencottah Ragupathy Iyer, a Forest Officer. Many letters were taken from his shirt pockets. In one of them, he had remarked that he had planned to assassinate the Collector only because he was responsible for the great cruelty inflicted on Chidambaram Pillai. The letters contained requests to his friends to continue their struggle.

The news of the assassination of Collector Ash reached the ears of Chidambaram Pillai. He did not like the youngmen losing their valuable lives in their attempts to wreak vengeance on those who were ruling. It was said that those young men, who should rule the land, were ruining their lives thus. From the prison, he wrote a letter to Sri C. Vijayaraghavachari. In it, he wrote about the violence which prevailed outside. What he said can be summed up as follows :

principles. We are opposing only the British rule. It cannot be brought to an end by assassinating the English officials. My principle is that one should not harm them because they are bad. Please inform this to those indulging in violent methods”.

After this murder, the Police made a thorough investigation, and arrested 14 people including men like Erukkoore Neelakanda Brahmachari (who was living in Calcutta) and Tenkasi T. S. Chidambaram Pillai. They were accused of conspiring to start violent agitation in different parts of Tamil Nadu simultaneously and for establishing secret associations in Thirunelveli, Tuticorin, Tenkasi and Shencottah. These cases were examined by the sessions court and as many as nine of them were punished severely. Five persons were released.

THE RELEASE

Chidambaram Pillai, after his term of punishment, in the jails of Coimbatore and Cannanore, got released on December, 1912. After this, he lived for many years at the Chintadripet and Perambur areas of Madras. When Chidambaram Pillai was released from the prison there was not a single soul, excepting Subramaniya Siva to welcome him. Siva was moved to tears on seeing Pillai return from prison after enduring a long period of suffering. “O! My friend Chidambaram, is that you, come?”, so saying he embraced him affectionately.

V.O.C. was deprived of “Sannad” for practising as an advocate since he had been arrested for the guilt of abusing the authority of the Government. Pillai suffered for long

without any means of income to support himself. He wrote a letter in the form of a poem to his friend describing his plight in which he says. "That Chidambaram, who gave unboundedly to the poets, who came to him, now goes from place to place with his poems, asking for charity. The poem will rouse the sympathy even in the heart of a cruel hearted person when read in the original as written by V.O.C. himself. The brave heart, which did not fear the prison, feared poverty. But even under these poor circumstances, V.O.C. did not cease from doing service to his mother-land. He served as the Vice-President of the Perumber Railway Workers Union and did much to improve their lot.

He regained his "Sannad" with the help of justice E. H. Wallace. After this, he stayed at Kovilpatti for some time and practised there as a lawyer, after which, he returned to Tuticorin.

NON-CO OPERATION WITH THE NON-CO- OPERATION MOVEMENT

Mahatma Gandhiji, the father of the nation, wanted to start a movement of non-co-operation with the British Government, opposing the Khilafat injustice, Punjab murder and the good-for-nothing Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. He also drew an itinerary for it and presented it to the nation. The main aims of his plans were to boycott courts, Universities and the Cabinet.

A special meeting of the Congress was convened at Calcutta in 1920, to examine the plans of the Non-co-operation movement and take a final decision. Pillai

attended it as one of the representatives. But he did not very much welcome the suggestion of non-co-operation movement. He opposed every aspect of it. In short, he did not have much trust in the leadership of Gandhiji himself. He was now in a dilemma to follow Gandhiji or to act according to the conscience? He had to decide between the two course. Ultimately, he resigned from the Congress since he respected his conscience more than Mahatma Gandhi. Although he left the Congress, he did not have any unpleasant feelings towards either Gandhiji or any other leader. In fact he held Gandhiji as a saint, having great qualities, praised all over the world proves this. He was attracted by the simple, disciplined life that Gandhiji led. But he did not like the principles of Gandhism namely, Ahimsa and Non-co-operation. Moreover, V.O.C. was one who virtually worshipped Lokamanya Tilak. To him Tilak was father, mother, teacher, God and everything in the world. It is only natural that he refused to accept Gandhism which sprang up opposing the principles of Tilak. However, his dislike for Gandhism, never turned out to be a hatred for the Congress even till the very end. Till he died, he looked upon Congress as his political party and worked for its growth.

Gandhiji too loved V.O.C. even though the latter refused to agree with him in his principles. The reason for this is that Gandhiji was aware of his unselfish patriotic spirit. Gandhiji was in South Africa when V.O.C. was leading the revolt in Tuticorin. Even during these days, they had letters of communication between them. Later on, after Gandhiji involved himself in Indian Politics, he was able to maintain direct contact with him.

Though the non-co-operation movement was strongly opposed in the Calcutta Congress meeting, the suggestion was accepted as the majority supported it. As soon as Pillai returned to Madras, he resigned from Congress after announcing the struggle for independence will not be a success because of the non-co-operation movement. The idea of V.O.C. about non-co-operation is this :

“Our moderates tell us that we should respect the British Government and co-operate with it in the matter of administration of the country even if they refuse to grant us these rights which we wish to attain. This is like doing good to others by laying all blame on fate if one does not get what he deserves.

The contemporary leaders (namely Gandhiji and his followers) say that we should refuse to co-operate with the Government in the administration of the nation till it grants us the rights that we demand. This kind of non-co-operation is like the action of a child who gets angry with his parents till they give him the whole lot of the sweets and refuses to accept the portion offered to him.

Our desire is to respect and co-operate with the Government if they are prepared to give or bestow only the rights we demand and refuse to co-operate with them and differ from their views if they refuse to grant us even one of the demands. This is like the deed of a youth who is happy when his demands are met with and is enraged when they are not. In short, it is our desire that co-operation and non-co-operation should exist side by side.

In 1927, V.O.C. again entered the Congress and presided over its 3rd Conference held at Salem in the same year. He said in his speech :

"I decided to re-enter the Congress because it has once again attained the same state as it was before the Calcutta Special Conference especially after the exit of those methods like boycott of Courts, Universities and Cabinets which were against my principle. For the past several years I who had resigned, was thinking as to how I could come back again. Just, as a friend in need is a friend indeed, those of you who are my friends ordered me at the right time to preside over the conference. You thus helped me at the right time. I cannot forget what a barrister abusively said of me. He said, 'when the people are fighting against the Government to regain the nation's freedom by peaceful means, you run away without the least patriotic spirit in you'. I cannot also forget what a journalist wrote to me. He said that 'Chidambaram has accepted a bribe from the Government betraying his own country'. 'Patriotism can only grow, day after day, and never decrease, nor will it perish. Just as darkness cannot prevail where there is light, the gloom of treachery cannot be present where there is brightness of patriotic spirit. May they know this truth'.

"I am very happy that the good days have come when people talk high of me as the 'disciple of Tilak'".

After this conference, however, Chidambaram Pillai had no contacts with the Congress.

Even after quitting the Congress, Chidambaram Pillai did not divert from the principles of Tilak. Till his very end, he was against the British autocracy. The Justice Party, which was then the 6th party, tried to rope in V.O.C. But Mr. Pillai, whose only aim was Swarajya,

refused to join the party which maintained caste differences. He was greatly interested in improving the conditions of the non-brahmins. He was immensely sorry that most non-brahmins were backward in several fields. He has many a time, expressed this thought in his speeches. But, he did not approve of a political movement on the basis of brahmin non-brahmin caste differences.

12. A MAN OF IDEAL CHARACTER

Chidambaram can be said to be an embodiment of love, benevolence, hardwork, kindness and wisdom. He was of the opinion that atleast a few should come forward to sacrifice their body, wealth and spirit for the freedom of the nation. Many people chant slogans and make great shows in public. But Chidambaram Pillai really sacrificed a great lot for the country. His advises were to "abolish Poverty" "Fight for right" and "fear not the prison". Even after his resignation from the Congress, he did not join any other party. This was because all that he wanted was freedom for the country. What matters, how or who brings it ?

Chidambaram Pillai was one who never forgot his friends ; he was very greatful to those who did any good. He named one of his sons after Mr. Arumugam Pillai who inspired and encouraged the growth of the Swadashi Shipping Company. He named another as Valeeswaran after Judge Wallace who had helped him to regain his "Sannad". His daughter was named Vedavalli in remembrance of Mr. VEDIYAPPA Pillai who helped him with money whenever he needed.

Chidambaram Pillai was very generous. During the days of his happy family life, his house had been a veritable home for many people. Day-in and day-out his house-

hold was humming with life and activity. Relations in grief and friends in need were readily received with warmth and relieved speedily of their distress. One day, a person approached, V.O.C. and requested him, "I have fixed the date of the marriage of my daughter. But I have not a single pie in my hand. Please help me with a thousand rupees". Pillai gladly gave him the sum at once. There were many poets and others who were helped magnanimously by him. The golden words of the Bible 'Knock and it shall open; ask it shall be given' were translated into action by Chidambaram Pillai. He was praised by one and all. Saving for a lean year was never known to him. Serving the needy was always his watch-word.

Chidambaram Pillai was a man of great virtues. His heart was not stained by petty qualities like boasting, vanity and jealousy. He was a follower of truth who opposed evil wherever it was and was considerate and kind even to his enemy. He published a magazine by name 'Viveka Banu' with a view to spread good and check evil. He had a school friend by name Vallinyagam. They were inseparable friends even when they were practising as lawyers. Later on, when Vallinayagam abandoned his profession and became a 'Sanyasin' he accepted V.O.C. as his disciple. From Vallinayagam V. O. C. learnt the Sastras and other works.

Chidambaram Pillai was a selfless man who followed everything that helped for the country's benefit. It will only be apt to recall here his having refused the one lakh of rupees offered to him by British to leave the Shipping Company. In fact, when he was imprisoned, it was offered that he should be released on bail. He declined this offer too because his friend Siva had to be in the jail. Even at

a time when he had lost all his money in the service of the nation and had no earnings, he did not cease to help others. When he was in Kovilpatti, he argued a case for Mr. M. S. Subramaniya Iyer of Madras without accepting a fee.

During those days, when men hid themselves on the mere sight of an armed police man, the name of V. O. Chidambaram Pillai, made even the British soldiers to shiver. Justice Pinhay himself once said, "On hearing Pillai's speeches and Barathi's songs, even a corpse will come back to life. The enslaved country will soon regain freedom. Great revolts will occur should anything more be said of Pillai's Courage".

Chidambaram Pillai had a great interest in listening to the stories of brave Warriors and in praising them. It is not least surprising that such a brave man as he, when in the prison, brought together all the criminals, for singing the history of Madurai Veeran, Kattabomman and others. He was very much fascinated by the courage of Veerapandya Kattabomman whom he admires in his autobiography. In the same way he says proudly that his birth place Ottappidaram is situated very near Panchalamkurichi from where Kattabomman ruled.

SERVICE TO TAMIL

Chidambaram Pillai was not a mere politician. He was an artist, talented practically in every field of activity. The art of speaking was born with him; the art of literature was his inseparable friend; the art of writing was his wife; the drama was his affectionate child; courage was

his ancestral property. On the whole, V. O. C. was an all round genius.

Chidambaram Pillai had a great love for Tamil literature. During his leisure hours, he strove hard for the improvement of the Tamil Language. V. O. C. was proficient in the Literature and Grammar of the Sangam Age. He was indeed poetic of the Madurai Tamil Sangam.

V. O. C. has written a great number of poems with a deep meaning and profound sweetness. His letters in the form of poems, written to his mother, father, wife and friends from the prisons of Cannanore and Coimbatore, are capable of moving even a hard-hearted person. They rouse our pathos and pity. He had also written many poems on a variety of subjects-abstract and concrete. His books 'Meyyarivu', (Real knowledge) 'Meyyaram' (Real morality) and others are as good as any other works written to infuse good morals among people.

Pillai taught Tamil to many people. He was very particular that what he taught the first day should be repeated the very next day. It was not easy for everyone to learn under him. Rajaji, who wanted to learn the Thirukkural under him, was not pleased with the conditions which he imposed. He, therefore, said, "Neither have you the patience to teach me, nor have I the patience to learn under you." So saying he took leave of him.

He explained Thirukkural using only the commentary given by Mannakkudavar. He also condemned the meanings, given by Parimelazhagar which he thought were irrelevant when viewed from time. Pillai some times even

gave his own interpretation. Further, he provided food, clothing and shelter to those who were deeply interested in learning Tamil. Swami Sagajananda, of whom we mentioned earlier, is an example of this.

Pillai worked arduously and enthusisastically in translating into Tamil the great works into foreign languages. He has translated the first section of Thirukkural (Arathupal) with Mannakkudavar's interpretation, Tholkappiyam and Innilai.

He says in one of his books :

"In my long experience, I have found that the kind of treatment which suits the climatic conditions of Tamil Nadu and the general bodily condition of Tamilians is "Siddha Vaidya". The Siddhas have written their books on medicine, after living in Tamil Nadu for a long time and having studied its climatic conditions; after having known personally about the customs, habits and life of the Tamilians. And that is why, their science of Siddha Vaidhya suits Tamil Nadu very well. Still many of the Tamil books on medicine are in the verse form. The Government must take steps to see that they are published in prose form and also see to it that the students of Tamil

'Siddha Vaidhya' are taught modern methods of surgery. Organisations should come forward to establish a 'Siddha Vaidhya Shala', in every town, and one for two or three villages. Chidambaram Pillai was a man who was deeply interested in every science and art.

What rewards did V.O.C. get for serving his country? Nothing but poverty and misery. What else, will a true patriot who fought for his nation, not expecting any reward, will get? The idea will be brought out in Bharathi's poem where he asks God, if it be, his will that true patriots should suffer in poverty and agony and that foreigners should enjoy our wealth and prosperity.

Chidambaram Pillai fell ill in 1936. He was bed-ridden for more than a month. He was only sad that he could not do anything for his country during these days. This savant, who saw nothing but misery all his life, right from the day of his entry into politics, was not on his way to see his last day. Doctors gave up hope. His wife, children and friends wept bitterly. None could console them. On 10th November, at midnight, the great soul merged with the eternal life; the light went off leaving all the others in darkness. That tongue, which spoke so bravely and fearlessly, against the British was dead for ever; those eyes, which shed tears, seeing the sad plight of the poor, were closed for ever. Chidambaram Pillai was dead; but he is alive in what he did for the nation.

The news of the death of Chidambaram Pillai spread throughout Thirunelveli and Tuticorin. People were in great distress. They were, now, without a leader in the

struggle. The beacon, which was guiding their lives, was no longer there to do so. Men rushed in thousands to his house, to pay their homage to the departed leader.

Chidambaram Pillai was not an athiest. On the other hand, he had great belief in God. But he had no faith in the system of a God for each religion or caste. His religion was the human society. His holy book was the Thirukkural. His principle was Sanmarga which held the religions to be one. Service to humanity, in his view, was service to God.

It is usual, that dying men ask for religious songs to be sung at the time of death. It is said that before his death, Chidambaranar asked for the songs of Bharathiyar to be song and joy filled his heart. A Saivaite may ask for Thevaram or Thiruvachagam to be sung and a Vaishnavaites, the Prabhandhams. But Chidambaram Pillai to whom the nation was more than anything else, asked for Bharathi's song; "When will our thirst for freedom be quenched?" ("என்று தணியுமிந்த சுதந்தரத் தாகம்"), to be sung.

Even as early as 1936, at the time of his death, Chidambaram Pillai prophesied, "India will gain freedom because of the World War which will soon rise". This is an evidence of his profound knowledge of politics. V.O.C.'s friend, one Mr. Masilamani Pillai, went to see

him just a few days before Pillai's death. V.O.C., then, asked his friend, if he knew by experience about the misery of poverty. Masilamani Pillai replied that he had never experienced it. Chidambaram Pillai then narrated the following story to him :

"Once Kambar was staying in a small village during his Dig Vijaya. One early morning, he got up and went for a walk. On his way, he heard a young woman weeping in a house. In the midst of her sob she said "சில்லென்று பூத்த....." and before long somebody closed her mouth so that the other words did not come out of her mouth. Kavi Chakravarthi Kambar was greatly puzzled. He wanted to know the rest of the words but he could not complete them. He enquired the neighbours about it. They said that the voice belonged to a young widow who very recently lost her husband and who every morning used to weep as soon as she wakes up. They added that it was the duty of the old women, who were near by, to stop her while mourning. Kambar went to the same house and waited there the next morning. He again heard the sob; but this time he could hear all the words. The widow cried :

"சில்லென்று பூத்த சிறு நெருஞ்சிற் காட்டினுள்ளே
நில்லென்று சொல்லி நிறுத்தி வைத்துப் போனீரே."—

Chidambaram Pillai burst into tears soon after relating this incident. He said: "There are crores and crores of such hungry families in our country; when will they be relieved of their misery?"

Masilamani Pillai was worried and he consoled V.O.C.

Even in his death bed, Chidambaram Pillai was thinking only of the miseries of the people; he was only longing for the day when they will all be able to lead a happy and prosperous life.

13. PRINCE AMONG PATRIOTS

In the history of Modern India, the name of V.O.C. stands out prominent, like a tall Himalayan peak, clear against the sky and resplendent in the sun. Chidambaram Pillai's service to the nation was so vast that it cannot be depicted in a small book of this kind. His patriotism was pure and has no tinge of selfishness. He made a name as patriot at a time when patriots were rarely respected; he was the only person who dared to say to Collector Wynch that he will chant "Vandematharam" till his last breath and that too at a time when people were frightened to whisper the same even in secrecy. He addressed most of the meetings in Tamil and thereby inspired his audience during the days when it was considered an honour to speak only in the foreign tongue.

We are made to believe from certain incidents that Chidambaram Pillai was more popular in the North than in the South. A few of these are quoted.

During the Surat Congress, at the Representatives Hostel, eminent men like Saint Aurobindo, Lala Lajapat Rai and some others were sitting and discussing. Suddenly, Aurobindo, turned round and asked, "Where is my Pillai?" The others were surprised at this question. Aurobindo, then said, "I mean the great Patriot, Chidambaram Pillai of Tuticorin". Quite a number of them were

astonished. At this moment, Pillai entered. Aurobindo's joy knew no bounds. They both embraced each other.

In 1935, when the Congress President, Babu Rajendra Prasad visited Tuticorin, he heard about V.O.C.'s illness and immediately rushed to his residence and enquired the sick man about his health. "I was fortunate enough to pay a visit to Tuticorin where lives the great nationalist V.O.C. I am one of those whose patriotic feelings were roused by reading about Chidambaram Pillai's arrest", observed Rajendra Prasad while addressing a public meeting, the same evening, at Tuticorin.

The last words heard by Chidambaram Pillai were those from the patriotic songs of Bharathiyar. His last words of respects were spoken to the patriots who had surrounded his death-bed. What V.O.C. wanted to see during his last moment was a free India; what he wanted to hear was an inspiring song of Barathi, the persons whom he wanted to adore were the patriotic savants! There are not enough words in the English language to pay the right type of encomium to the services rendered by V.O.C. to this country!

The statements made by Judge Pinhay and Collector Wynch testify to the fact that the first great leader who sowed the seeds for the "Quit India Movement" was none other than our venerable V.O.C. May his name be remembered not only by the present generation but also by generations unborn.

14. MEMORIALS FOR THE PATRIOT

Since V.O.C. had practically retired from politics during his last few years, he was almost forgotten by the people. Until the first three years after his death, the politicians of India did not even think of the celebration of his death anniversaries. But such a state of affairs was not to last long. The people soon proved that they were not after all ungrateful. In order that future generation might remember and know his services to the country, statues were erected for V.O.C.

On 21st December 1939, the Madras Congress Committee, erected a bust-sized statue of V.O.C. in the Royapettah Congress Hall. The late Mr. T. S. S. Rajan, who unveiled the statue under the Presidentship of the veteran Congressmen, Thiru S. Sathyamoorthy, observed "Chidambaram Pillai is a true Tamilian. He is a perfect image of the bravery and capability of Tamilians. I was a revolutionist when I was in England and for some days later on too. The inspiration for this came to me from the revolution at Tuticorin conducted by V.O.C. And I take great pride in saying that V.O.C. is my first political Guru. Though Chidambaram is dead, his ideals still live with us. I believe that Chidambaram Pillai's soul will help us in our war of independence and guide our destinies as an angelic spirit".

Salem C. Vijayaraghavachari in a message to the function observed !

"I know Chidambaram Pillai very well. A patriot with absolutely no fault, Chidambaram was a pure hearted person. I am greatly moved by the mere thought of the brave revolt he led against our alien matters. He deserves to be honoured by the erection of a statue" Quite a number of great men, who served the nation with Chidambaram Pillai, in his Shipping Company, participated in this function.

Poet Namakkal Ramalingam Pillai and Swami Suddhanandha Bharathi paid their tributes to Chidambaram Pillai through their poems.

No Citizen of Independent India can afford to forget Chidambaram Pillai. When a ship by name 'Jala Prabha' was set on sail into the seas, India's Deputy Prime Minister, the late Sardar Vallabhai Patel, spoke highly of the courage of V.O.C. who ran a shipping service during British days.

Moreover, the merchants of South Pandya Nadu who bought a ship to provide transport between Tuticorin and Ceylon, named it as 'V. O. Chidambaram'. The ship was set afloat on the 9th February, 1949, while being cheered by a crowd of over 50,000 strong. Chidambaram was punished by the British for organizing a shipping service; on the contrary, he was now praised by one and all including the Governor-General. Well, that was free India ! The dream of this great man had at last come true.

The war of independence begun by V.O.C. gained victory. Those English men whom he wanted to quit, had now left. What is it that we can give to our leader Chidambaram Pillai as a reward—a big statue, a marble mansion, or a merchant ship. Nay! these are after all perishable; what we can bestow in memory of Chidambaram Pillai is to follow the ideals for which he stood.



