Chapter VI

Political Riots at Tinnevelly and Cocanada

South India is distinct from the rest of India by the importance of pre-Aryan elements attached in its social structure. The Muslim invasion came much later than in the North. The Muslim invasion did not leave so deep an impact. The region was considered to be a quite province where the moderate had a commanding influence. Nevertheless the Madras Presidency could not remain calm or indifferent to the National Movement. The extremist leaders too were fully aware of the trend in the Madras Presidency and planned to send its leaders to carry the propaganda machinery.

However, there have not been proper studies or sufficient efforts in connecting the national movement of the Madras Presidency with that in the rest of India. The Indian national movement has often been studied without due recognition of the contributions of the Madras Presidency. The feeling of nationalism in South India manifested itself as late as the middle of the 19th century owing to the works of some individuals and organizations who evinced an ardent desire for administrative and political reforms. The political agitation in the Madras Presidency has actually begun with the

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2 Murugan, T., op.cit., p. 19.
foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885. By this time several newspapers especially, The Hindu in English and others in Indian languages had come into existence both in the city and in the districts, and these became no mean instrument in the hands of the nationalists. Coupled with this, the propaganda machinery of the Indian National Congress succeeded in promoting the strengthening political education among the people and in making them more patriotic and more critical towards the British. Consequently, there arose a change in the attitude of South India towards the British, which ultimately contributed to violent outbursts.

6.1. The Spread of Swadeshi Movement in Madras

There were various factors responsible for this change of attitude. The various acts of political, economic, administrative and racial discrimination against the Tamils, the forest laws, the Criminal Tribes Act, the barbarous treatment of coloured people in European plantations, the mercantile policy of the British, the introduction of western ways and habits, oppressive taxes, etc. were some of the causes which led to great misery and anti-British feelings in South India. By this time, the Indian press also had

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3 The Hindu of Madras was started in 1878 as a weekly and became a Daily in 1889.

become a strong critic of the British administration. It described the salt tax as “the most unjust and cruel of all the taxes imposed on the country”.

The period from 1900 to 1906 was tumultuous in the history of India in general as well as in the history of the Madras Presidency. During this period the resonance of revolutionary terrorism was reported from various parts of the Presidency. The unpopular anti-Indian measures of Lord Curzon’s regime had created a wave of resentment in the country against the British. The Swadeshi and boycott movement against the Bengal wrongs created a sympathetic response in the Madras Presidency. During the course of the Swadeshi movement, Bipin Chandra Pal travelled extensively throughout the Madras Presidency in 1907, and found there a convenient place for organizing revolutionary groups. Soon, a large number of young radicals, who had no faith in the liberal policies of prayers and petitions, constituted themselves into the extremist party. The warm reception accorded to Bipin Chandra Paul during this short crusading campaign in Madras in 1907 was indicative of a changed attitude towards the British among the Youth of South. Revolutionary groups sprang up in several parts of South India which went unnoticed for some time. “The wind of change in the South went quite unnoticed basically because the southerners were

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5 Baliga, B.S., op.cit., p. 3.
6 Mūrugen, T., op.cit., p. 113.
generally taken for granted as a race of obedient and loyal, God-fearing and law-abiding people, perhaps due to their ethical, geographical and social bearings. The terrorist milieu thus dawned in the south was therefore obliquely obvious of any surveillance by the authority.8

It was Bipin Chandra Pal and the Bengali influence that sowed the seeds of militant nationalism in the South. The spark of the Bengali revolution was fanned into flames in the South by native newspapers like Swadesamitran9 and Vrithantha Chintamani.10 Baikuntranath opposed the partition plan from its early stages. Bengal influence had very much contributed to the emergence of revolutionary movements in the south. During this period, revolutionary trend exercised a profound influence in the south. Consequently, seditions publications, conspiracies and disturbances increased in the south after 1907.11 Some of the terroristic occurrences since 1907 were the Tuticorin bomb outrage in 1907, the Kakinada (Concanada) riot on 31st May 1907. Some minor assaults upon Europeans during the visit and after the departure of B.C. Pal, the Tinnevelly and Tuticorin riots of March 1908, and the Tennali bomb case in Krishna. The background for the

9 Swadesamitran stated that public meeting would be held in the Pachayappa College campus for propagating Swadeshi Movement. So all citizens of Madras are requested to attend the meeting without fail. MNNR, Swadesamitran, 16 Feb, 1906, p. 54.
10 Sankaran Nair, V., op.cit., p. 23.
terroristic activities had already been laid by the spread of anti-British feelings roused by Tilak, Lajpat Rai, B.C. Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh. The revolutionary preachings of the above leaders triggered off violent reactions among the youths of South India.

It was V.O. Chidambaram Pillai who kindled the Swadeshi spirit in the Madras Presidency. From the very beginning of 1905, Swadeshi and boycott movement gathered momentum in Madras. The progress of the movement was reported from Trichinopoly, Madura, Salem, Coimbatore and many other places. In the meantime, the extremists brought down the powerful Bengali orator Bipin Chandra Pal to tour through Tamil Nadu and Andra and to speak in favour of the boycott. The visit of Bipin Chandra Pal, as emissary of Bengal politics gave a stimulus to the Swadeshi movement. The warm reception he received everywhere during his short visit was a gesticulation of a changed mood of the people. His forceful oratory buttressed by the cogent presentation of historical facts in a powerful

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12 Sankaran Nair, V., Role of Students in Freedom Movement with special reference to Madras Presidency, Delhi, 1988, p. 38.
14 VOC – he was born on 5th September 1872 at Ottapidaram in Tiruvelly district. His parents were Ulaganatha Pillai ad Parmai Ammal. He got his B.L. degree in 1895 and engaged in local practice at Tuticorin. He commanded great respect among the people. G.O.No. 1542, Judicial Department, Confidential, dated 5th October, 1911.
15 Dr. Sivagnanam, Ma. Po., op.cit., p. 105.
voice set the south on fire. The subjects on which he spoke were “Swadeshi and Boycott”. The educated people, particularly, the students and lawyers, were excited by his fiery speeches, which stimulated anti-British feelings in Madras. His oratory roused the indignation of the authorities, and many dailies like the Mail, Madras Times attacked him vehemently. Madras Times wrote: “This wretched Bengali has converted the people of Madras into traitors. The government should not tolerate him even for an instant. He must be put in prison or sent to Andamans”. According to Lord Minto, the lecturing of Bipin Chandra Pal was greatly dangerous than any number of newspaper articles.

In the Madras Presidency, revolutionary spirit gained considerable intensity in the Andra delta region and Tinnevelly district. Revolutionary activities, not of a very organized nature, raised their dragon heads in the Presidency during the freedom struggle. In Madras, Tarakanth Das, a revolutionary from Bengal, in 1906, found an appropriate plan for organizing revolutionary groups. Chidambaram Pillai, Subramanya Siva, Nilakanta Brahmachari, V.V.S. Iyer and others were the early recruits to the

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16 Murugan, T., op.cit., p. 80.
18 Dr. Sivagnanam, Ma. Po., op.cit., p. 106.
movement. The Sedition Committee report said that revolutionary sentiments had found their way to Madras as a result of the visit of Bipin Chandra Pal, and his lectures on complete freedom from British control.

The credit for launching the Swadeshi and Boycott movement in Tinnevelly goes to one Ramakrishna Aiyer and V.O. Chidambaram Pillai. Their work was more substantial for they could use the pre-existing social economic tension as a base. V.O.C. created several Swadeshi institutions like the Tuticorin Industrial Welfare Association, the Dharma Sangam, the National Emporium, a spinning and weaving centre, the Chennai Jana Sangh and the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company Limited, became the champion of the weak. From June 1906, he conducted extensive lectures on Swadeshi, boycott and swaraj and called upon people to work for the liberation of the country. In one of his speeches he described Bipin Chandra Paul as the lion of Swaraj. His Swadeshi ventures and speeches were a source of irritation to the government.

In August 1906, G. Subramania Aiyer, the prominent swadeshi dignitary of Madras Presidency visited Tuticorin and addressed a few public

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20 Arun Chandra Guha, op.cit., p. 316.
21 Manmadnath Gupta, History of Indian Revolutionary Movement, Bombay, 1972, pp. 88-89.
23 Manmadnath Gupta, op.cit., p. 89.
meetings there. His lectures on swadeshi, boycott and Indian unity were mischievous in the eyes of the government. He concluded his visit by stressing on the benefit to be derived from starting of a permanent Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company. Simultaneously V.O. Chidambaram Pillai began his extensive tour in the other districts too.

6.2. The Swadeshi Navigation Company

In October 1906, the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company was registered at Tuticorin with a nominal capital of Rs. 10 lakhs to run steamers up to Colombo, with Chidambaram Pillai as the working officer. The Company was started to challenge the monopoly of the British Indian Steam Navigation Company of Tuticorin, which had enjoyed the monopoly of plying steamships between Tuticorin and Colombo for a very long time. The prestige of Swadeshi Navigation Company was growing day by day, and the people were determined to use the Indian ships alone for travel and transport of goods and also to avoid foreign ships. Consequently, the starting of Swadeshi Company had become a source of constant anxiety and had caused much irritation to the authorities of the British Indian Steam Navigation Company and in consequence the feelings between the authorities of the two companies had become very much strained, and there

24 Dr. Sivagnanam, Ma. Po., op.cit., p. 100.
had happened several magisterial proceedings in connection with the same.\textsuperscript{25} The attitude of the authorities towards the Swadeshi Company roused anti-foreign feelings in Tuticorin.

In March 1907, Chidambaram Pillai visited Madras to procure money for the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company. At Madras Chidambaram Pillai and G. Subramania Aiyar held public meetings on the south beach of Madras. In his speech, Chidambaram Pillai preached the message of swaraj and the boycott of everything foreign. The Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company was inaugurated in 1906 with 40,000 shares.\textsuperscript{26} When the Swadeshi Steam ships began to run regularly between Tuticorin and Colombo from 17\textsuperscript{th} April 1907, stiff competition developed between Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company and the British Steam Navigation Company. It was followed by a regular boycott of shops selling foreign goods, but there were no untoward incidents.\textsuperscript{27}

In July 1907, Subramania Aiyar again visited the district and delivered lectures on swadeshi and boycott. The same work was carried out by Subramania Siva (whose original name was Subramania Aiyar), a plebian agitator from Madras, who visited the district in January 1908. In

\textsuperscript{25} Judicial Proceedings, (Miscellaneous), No. 842-845, dated 18\textsuperscript{th} June, 1908.
\textsuperscript{26} G.O.No.1542, Judicial Department, 3 October 1911, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{27} Political Development in Tamilnadu 1905-1907, Unpublished M.Phil Dissertation, M.K. University, 1995, p. 47.
February 1908, Siva went to Tuticorin and gave a series of lectures there also along with Chirdmbaram Pillai. With his arrival there, a sharp turn towards radicalism became apparent. He preached the message of Swaraj and extended boycott, and (according to police reports) occasionally urged the adoption of violent methods, if necessary. On 23rd February, at a large meeting in Tuticorin, Subramania Siva said that “in order to obtain Swaraj the Hindus should try their best to put down oppression”. In his speech on the 26th he advised the coolies of the European mills to strike for extra wages. On both these occasions Chidambaram Pillai also gave lectures in a similar tone.

6.3. Strike at Coral Mill

V.O.C. began to preach the gospel of Swaraj to the people. This enraged the English. They felt that of all the areas of the Madras Presidency, Tamil Nadu was considered to be a peace loving area, because the Tamil speaking area was dominated by the Moderates. The preaching of V.O.C. and other leaders, slowly influenced the people to accept extremism. Tinnevelly area was the only area where anti-British feelings

29 Ibid.
30 Home - pub/Pol-A, June 1908, Proceedings No. 95.
31 Judicial Proceedings (Miscellanrous) Nos. 842-43, June 18, 1908.
32 MNNR, Swadesamitran, 18 March 1908, p. 212.
was developed quickly. Tuticorin Town has become a sheat of anti-British activities, because of the activities of V.O.C. and Subramania Siva.33

V. Chidambaram Pillai eyed on the native labourers. He preached among the mill workers and other working class about the Swadeshi and boycott movement and the rights of the workers. His preaching and teaching brought sweeping changes among the working class. The English officials who were watching the development could not tolerate the militant feelings and consequent developments. Hence, they decided to punish the leaders and the workers.34 The British found that the Swadeshi leaders were responsible for the development of militant movement among the workers. So they took action against the workers. The leaders were asked to appear before the District Magistrate on 10th March 1906. They were arrested illegally on March 12th.35 This forced one of the major contributory factor for the revolutionary activities in Tinnevelly area. The first outbreak came from the workers of the Coral Mills.

The Harvey brothers, Andrews and Frank established a spinning factory known as Coral Mills at Tuticorin in 1889 because of the coastal area. The British management did not treat the workers fairly. The Mill

33 G.O. No. 1542, Judicial Department, 3 October 1911.
34 MNNR, Swadesamitran, 10 March, 1908, p. 212.
35 Ibid.
had a sanitary arrangement but it was not at all satisfactory. The working hours were almost twelve hours a day. After extracting heavy work they were paid low salary. Factory acts were not followed. Even infants were employed. The Swadeshi leaders wanted to improve the working condition including wages of the labourers. Leaders like V.O.C. and Padmanabha Iyengar actively involved in the issue of justice. A feeling of oneness was created among the workers and the leaders. The leaders worked to create awareness among the working class of the Coral Mills. When it was brought to the notice of the government, the government did not give any attention to this. The inadequate pay, frequent fines and illegal punishments, unsatisfactory housing conditions forced the workers to seek the leaders for the redressal of the grievances. Making use of this opportunity, the leaders made appeal to the workers of the Coral Mills that if they stood united, the British Mills in India would cease to exist. Subramania Siva pointed out that the Jute Mill workers in Bengal and North-West Railway workers struck work and got increase in their wages. He advised them to adopt strike as a means to achieve their ends. The leaders spoke the fact that while workers getting a wage far below their subsistence, the Mill was declaring a dividend of sixty percent which

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36 The Hindu, 6th April, 1908.
37 G.O. 1542, Judicial (Confidential) Department, 3 October 1911.
enriched the British shareholders. V.O.C. and Subramania Siva, in 1908, explained to the workers the need of attainment of Swaraj by means of Swadeshi enterprises. As a result of their powerful and convincing speeches the workers of the Coral Mills stopped works on 27 February 1908. Consequently, the Management declared a lock-out. Sympathising the workers of the Coral Mills the workers of the Madura Mills under the same management struck work.

The press particulatly, Swadesamitran welcomed the change of attitude of the workers in Tuticorin and praised them for using strike as a weapon to wrest concessions from the British Management. The strike turned to be violent. The striking staff pelt stones at the Mill. The Mill officials trembled with fear. Fearing further violence and danger to their life, they requested the District officials to take action against the striking staff. The District officials took action against V.O.C. and Subramonia Siva under section 144, Criminal Procedure Code. They were prohibited from holding meetings. The assistance of Secret Police Force was sought

38 Padmanabhan, R.A, Subramania Sivam, p. 25.
40 G.O. No. 1542, Judicial (Confidential) Department, 3 October.
41 MNNR, Swadesamitran, 27 February 1908, p. 160.
42 MNNR, The Hindu, 16 March, 1908.
from Madras and other places to terrorise the workers. The leaders violated the prohibitory orders addressed labour meetings and encouraged the strikers to continue the strike with the help of street collections and donations. The leaders took all possible steps to help the families of the striking staff. All attempts of the local officials for negotiation were in vain. More than half of the strikers got employment elsewhere. Only 24 people reported to the Coral Mill. Supporting the cause of striking workers the locals boycotted the British residents. The British residents were frightened to stay at night at Tuticorin. They spent the night in the office of the British Navigation Company. The local merchants refused to sell foods to the Britishers, the servants and butlers of the British resident refused to work. The local barbers and the jutkawalas refused to serve the Britishers and their supporters.

Taking stock of the seriousness of the situation, Mr. Wyner, the District Collector asked V.O.C. to call off the strike and gone to the extent of threatening him, but in vain, instead he encouraged the workers to prolong the strike. The Britishers with the help of their local agents sought

43 MNNR, The Hindu, 5 and 18th March, 1908.
44 MNNR, India, 7 March 1908, p. 178.
45 MNNR, The Hindu, 4 March 1908.
46 G.O. Nos. 842-843, Judicial Department, 18 June, 1908.
47 MNNR, The Hindu, 5 March 1908, p. 135.
the help of the influential people to make the workers to resume work. But the striking staff refused to return unless the management redress all their grievances.48

As expected, the Britishers wanted end the strike. On the 6th March, 1908, Subramania Pillai, the head clerk of the Coral Mill met V.O.C. and told him that the management of Coral Mill was ready to accept the demands of the workers. V.O.C. met the manager and re-submitted their grievances. In the afternoon of the same day the manager announced 50% increase in wages, reduced the working hours and declared Sunday as holiday. The workers accepted the terms of the settlement and called off the strike on 7th March 1908.49 The Tuticorin strike was a perfect example on labour strike. The strikers operated with one will and spoke with one voice. Individual interests were shunned and united they stood and won the battle. Bande Mataram, a pre-nationalist paper observed that “every victory for Indian labour is a victory for the nation and every defeat is a defeat to the movement”. Leaders like V.O.C. and an array of ring leaders should be given the credit with which they fought. They worked for the complete realization of the true inwardness of the nationalist gospel which made

49  G.O. No. 1542, Judicial (Confidential) Department, 3 October, 1911 and the Hindu 7th and 9th March, 1908.
them to identify with the interest of the nation.\textsuperscript{50} The Coral Mill strike was an eye opener to the workers of other industries and to the managements. After the struggle, all public and private companies run by Europeans as well as the Indians raised the wages of the workers by half and treated the workers with kindness and courtesy.\textsuperscript{51}

The Tamil daily, Swadesamitran, dated 27\textsuperscript{th} February 1908, observed: “This wonderful practice of labourers striking work to wrest concessions from their employers was hitherto peculiar to North India where with the help of this weapon workers have taught a lesson to many Furinghee employers. We are glad to see this spirit now spreading to South India and that the people of Tuticorin have begun to realize the value of this weapon. If only to earn money, do? Can they shake their little finger without the help of the natives of the land”.\textsuperscript{52}

6.4. Sedition case of Tinnevelly

Swadeshi meetings were continued to be held in Tinnevelly and Tuticorin. On 1\textsuperscript{st} March 1908, a large meeting was held at Tuticorin.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} Bande Mataram, 13 March 1908.
\item \textsuperscript{51} MNNR, The Hindu, 5 March, 1908.
\item \textsuperscript{52} MNNR, Swadesamitran, 27 February 1908.
\end{itemize}
Padmanabha Iyengar was the speaker. He urged everyone to join the Swadeshi movement.\textsuperscript{53}

V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Subramania Siva proposed to conduct a procession on 9\textsuperscript{th} March to celebrate the advent of Swaraj.\textsuperscript{54} On 8\textsuperscript{th} March the District Magistrate of Tinnevelly issued notices under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code to V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Subramania Siva prohibiting them from holding any procession on 9\textsuperscript{th} March and to the public generally prohibiting from attending any such procession in Tuticorin.\textsuperscript{55}

On 9\textsuperscript{th} march 1908, Bipin Chandra Pal was expected to be released from prison. He was imprisoned for six months for his refusal to give evidence against Shri. Aurobindo.\textsuperscript{56} The people of Tinnevelly decided to celebrate his release in a grand scale.\textsuperscript{57} V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Subramania Siva assisted by Padmanabha Iyengar led a procession in Tinnevelly on 9\textsuperscript{th} March.\textsuperscript{58} The procession moved from the Swami Sannadhi Mandapam. The photo of Bipin Chandra Paul was mounted in a

\textsuperscript{53} V.O. Chidambaram Centenary Souvenir, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{54} Indira Devi, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{55} Tinnevelly Riots Conspiracy and Asha Murder, Vol. I, p. xi.
\textsuperscript{56} Rangaswami Parthasarathy, \textit{A Hundred Years of the Hindu}, Madras, 1976, p. 188.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{The Liberal}, Weekly Reports, Confidential, 15\textsuperscript{th} March 1908, p. 144.
\textsuperscript{58} V.O. Chidambaram Centenary Souvenir, p. 22.
big frame with inscription "Bande Mataram". It was placed on an elephant and taken through the four car streets of the town and then to Viraraghavapuram. From there it was taken to Taipusam Mandapam on the bed of the Thambraparni river.

The procession consisted more than 500 people, accompanied by a band and blue lights. It reached the Mandapam at 9 pm. In the Mandapam, the photo was exhibited to the public view. The audience called for speeches from Subramania Siva and V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and they delivered speeches. V.O. Chidambaram Pillai invited the attention of the audience to his fact that they were all assembled there to celebrate the release of an honoured citizen in India who was great in his thought and action. Next he commended to them the idea of establishing swaraj in India.

On the evening of 9th March the District Magistrate sent notices to V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, Subramania Siva and Padmanabha Iyengar to appear before him in Tinnevelly and asked them to explain why they should not act in good behaviour. All the three of them went to Tinnevelly on 9th

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59 G.O. No. 1542, Judicial Department, Confidential, dated 3rd October 1911.
60 G.O. No. 1542, Judicial Department, Confidential, dated 3rd October 1911.
62 G.O. No. 1542, Judicial Department, Confidential, dated 3rd October 1911.
March and refused to sign bonds of good behaviour, as requested by the District Magistrate.\textsuperscript{64} They again went to the Court at Tinnevelly on 10\textsuperscript{th} and the case was adjourned to 11\textsuperscript{th} March.\textsuperscript{65}

On 11\textsuperscript{th} evening Subramania Siva and V.O. Chidambaram Pillai went straight from the District Magistrate’s court to the river bed. In front of it they again addressed a meeting.\textsuperscript{66} The District Magistrate found that the word “Bande Mataram” was inscribed on the walls of his court. Further a mob followed to the house of the Magistrate shouting the same war-cry.\textsuperscript{67} Being afraid of the activities of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, Subramania Siva and Padmanabha Iyengar, the District Magistrate ordered to arrest them and confined them at Palayamkottai jail.\textsuperscript{68} But this was held to be irregular by the High Court of Madras. Under the orders of the High Court these three leaders were released. The District Magistrate of Tinnevelly obtained an order from the Government informing the law and order situation was bad due to the release of these leaders and rearrested V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Subramania Siva.\textsuperscript{69}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item \textbf{The Indian Patriot}, Weekly Reports, Confidential, 12\textsuperscript{th} March 1908, p. 128.
\item Tinnevelly Riots Conspiracy and Ashe Murder, Vol. I, p. xiv.
\item Somayajulu, N., \textit{Nellai Mavatta Sudanthira Porattavalararu}, Tinneveli, p. 82.
\item V.O. Chidambaram Centenary Souvenir, p. 22.
\item Chief Secretariat Stock File, Confidential, p. 326.
\item V.O. Chidambaram Centenary Souvenir, p. 21.
\end{thebibliography}
Under section 108 of the Criminal Procedure Code, V.O. Chidambaram and Siva were tried for holding seditious meetings in Tinnevelly and Tuticorin from 5th February to 9th March 1908.\(^70\) They were eventually convicted under sections 124 and 153 A of the Indian Penal Code.\(^71\) Two cases were leveled against V.O. Chidambaram Pillai. One for abetting Subramania Siva and one in respect of his own speech on 9th March.\(^72\) The speeches delivered by Subramania Siva on 23rd, 25th, 26th February and 5th March were considered to be seditious.\(^73\) V.O. Chidambaram Pillai was sentenced to life imprisonment. Ten years rigorous imprisonment was given to Subramania Siva. On the further appeal the High Court reduced it for six years for both of them.\(^74\)

Mr. Finkey, the High Court Judge observed that the conviction of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai was not merely to punish him but also to deter other people from committing the same crime.\(^75\) But the people had lost all sense of indignity attached to imprisonment and were not at all afraid of it

\(^{70}\) Vinod Kumar Saxena, *Indian Reaction to British Policies (1898-1911)*, Delhi, 1978, p. 130.

\(^{71}\) G.O. No. 478, Judicial Department, Confidential, 24th March 1908, p. 6.

\(^{72}\) Tinnevelly Riots Conspiracy and Ashe Murder, Vol. I, p. xvi.

\(^{73}\) Somayajulu, N., *op.cit.*, p. 81.

\(^{74}\) Tinnevelly Riots Conspiracy and Ashe Murder, Vol. I, p. xvi.

\(^{75}\) _The Swadesamitran_, Weekly Reports, Confidential, 13th July 1908, p. 482.
as in former times. Subramonia Siva remarked that he felt it an honour to go to prison.\textsuperscript{76}

With reference to the trial and conviction of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Subramonia Siva, \textit{The India} of 11\textsuperscript{th} July 1908 remarked that the trial was nothing but a farce. The notes taken by the police about the speeches of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Subramania Siva were false and incorrect and yet Mr. Pinkey relied only on these notes. He came to the conclusion that V.O. Chidambaram Pillai was guilty even before the hearing the Counsels on either side. This paper also ridiculed Mr. Pinkey for giving a strange interpretation to the term ‘Swaraj’ as ‘Our Own King’.\textsuperscript{77}

Subsequently after the re-arrest V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Subramania Siva were imprisoned at Tinnevelly jail.\textsuperscript{78} With the arrival of Subramania Siva there had been unrest in the Tinnevelly Central Jail.\textsuperscript{79} During the imprisonment he was engaged in kambli making as a result of which he contracted leprosy.\textsuperscript{80} V.O. Chidambaram Pillai who had been transferred to Coimbatore and Kannanur jails underwent untold indignities,

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{The Swadesamitran}, Weekly Reports, Confidential, 13\textsuperscript{th} July 1908, p. 482.
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{The India}, Weekly Reports, Confidential, 11\textsuperscript{th} July 1908, p. 481.
\textsuperscript{78} Somayajulu, N., \textit{op.cit.}, p 71.
\textsuperscript{79} Swadeshi Movement 1901-1914, Confidential, p. 65.
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physical and mental sufferings.\textsuperscript{81} At Coimbatore jail, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai ate gruel and was used as a bullock in pulling oil grinder (Chekku). For this he was called as pullar of the grinder (Chekkilutha Semmal).\textsuperscript{82}

6.5. Tinnevelly Riots

When V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, Subramania Siva and Padmanabha Iyengar were arrested on 12\textsuperscript{th} March 1908, riots broke out on 13\textsuperscript{th} March at Tinnevelly and Tuticorin.\textsuperscript{83} On 13\textsuperscript{th} morning the shops and schools were closed, the Principal of the M.D.T. Hindu College and the Agent of Messrs. Parry & Co., were stoned.\textsuperscript{84} There was public parading of the mob in the streets. Municipal lights were broken. Even the jutka drivers refused to work. In addition to this there was great law and order problem.\textsuperscript{85}

The crowd set fire to the Municipal Office and the Kerosene oil stores and attacked the Post and Telegraph Office.\textsuperscript{86} They also entered the police station, destroyed the weapons kept there and then set fire to the police station. The police could not resist the mob.\textsuperscript{87} So the District

\textsuperscript{81} V.O. Chidambaram Centenary Souvenir, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{82} Subramania Iyer, M.S., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{83} Tinnevelly Riots Conspiracy and Ashe Murder, Vol. I, p. VIII.
\textsuperscript{84} The Indian Patriot, Weekly Reports, Confidential, 13\textsuperscript{th} March 1908, p. 144.
\textsuperscript{85} The Liberal, Weekly Reports, Confidential, 15\textsuperscript{th} March 1908, p. 144.
\textsuperscript{86} Tinnevelly Riots Conspiracy and Ashe Murder, Vol. I, p. XVII.
\textsuperscript{87} Subramania Iyer, M.S., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 48.
Magistrate, the Superintendent of Police and the Reserve police Inspector came to Tinnevelly to disperse and to arrest the mob. The police resorted to firing. Consequently a settlement office peon, a bazaar boy and a bricklayer died instaneously and one admitted in the hospital.\textsuperscript{88}

On 13\textsuperscript{th} March at about 12 noon a disorderly mob consisting of more than 200 people entered the court house in Tinnevelly. They broke the screens of the court and damaged the walls and the pandal there with sticks and commenced to cry out that no court should conduct trial.\textsuperscript{89} The advocates and the parties presented in the court were very much afraid of this mob and left the court. Thereon, the crowd proceeded eastwards. Again in about five minutes the crowd returned to the court house and the police station. Stones were being freely thrown.\textsuperscript{90}

Then the mob forced open the doors of the court house, broke the padlocks, threw away the chains and table clothes.\textsuperscript{91} They also set fire to the library books in current use and some file books.\textsuperscript{92} In its fury the mob

\textsuperscript{88} The Madras Standard, Weekly Reports, Confidential, 17\textsuperscript{th} March 1908, p. 146.
\textsuperscript{89} G.O. No. 470, Judicial Department, Confidential, dated 23\textsuperscript{rd} March 1908, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., p. 3.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Majumdar, R.C., History of the Freedom Movement in India, Vol. II, p. 296.
set the pandals on fire and went away on the arrival of the Reserve Police. They then set fire to a Cutcherry at Thatchanallur near Tinnevelly.

The mob also entered into the old C.M. College and compelled the principal to pronounce the word ‘Bande Mataram’. The Principal obeyed the orders of the mob and pronounced ‘Bande Mataram’ three times. Then the mob threw away the college properties into the street resulting considerable damage and loss. The students also took part in the agitation, demanded for the release of leaders in jail and cried for the quitting of the British from India.

In the meantime the people of Tuticorin were very much enraged. They attacked and set fire to the government buildings. On 13th night a meeting at Tuticorin was dispersed. The police and the Sub-Magistrate were beaten. The District Magistrate had passed orders under section 144 Criminal Procedure Code, according to that more than five people should not assemble within Tinnevelly, Palayamkottai and Tuticorin Municipal limits. Great excitement prevailed against this order.

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93 G.O. No. 470, Judicial Department, Confidential, dated 23rd March 1908, p. 3.
94 Subramania Iyer, M.S., op.cit., p. 50.
95 Somayajulu, N., op.cit., p. 48.
96 Subramania Iyer, M.S., op.cit., p. 50.
97 Ibid.
98 The Liberal, Weekly Reports, Confidential, 15th March 1908, p. 146.
In spite of the prohibitory order about 4,000 people assembled in the Tinnevelly Pettai to attend a meeting. Hearing of this assemblage, Mr. Ashe, the District Magistrate proceeded to the scene anticipating disturbances. The Deputy Superintendent of Police ordered the meeting to disperse. The crowd responded to the request by pelting stones at the police. To defend the pelting of the stones police fired one round of buck-shot at the mob. It resulted in the unlawful ending of the meeting. Subsequently the mob assembled in the Great Cotton Road and in the houses adjoining it. The object of the mob was to assault the police and the Magistrate. Thus the police and the Magistrate found it very difficult when they tried to make their way out of the Pettai by the main entrance. Stones continued to be hurled at them.

The Deputy Superintendent of Police ordered the mob in Tamil to disperse. But the mob refused to obey the order. Immediately the police had to fire some more shots. The riot was a very serious one but no lives were lost. Those who threw stones were considered as guilty of rioting under section 147. Many were sentenced to one year rigorous

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99 Somayajulu, N., op.cit., p. 82.
100 V.O. Chidambaram Centenary Souvenir, p. 23.
101 Indira Devi, op.cit., p. 29.
102 Ibid., p. 30.
imprisonment and some others with three months rigorous imprisonment.\textsuperscript{103}

The excitement of the people was great till 15\textsuperscript{th} March.\textsuperscript{104} Thirty persons were arrested at Tuticorin and twenty in Tinnevelly town. Gurunatha Iyer, a head constable was arrested and remanded.\textsuperscript{105} Apart from this Kanagasabapathi Pillai of Tinnevelly was arrested during these riots.\textsuperscript{106} The riots resulted in wholesale and deliberate destruction of government properties and in open defiance of the constituted authority. About twenty seven were convicted and sentenced for participation in the riots.\textsuperscript{107}

The District Magistrate had to encounter so many difficulties as to suppress the riot. At last peace was restored with the arrival of the Reserve Police.\textsuperscript{108} Troops were stationed at Tuticorin, Thatchanallur and Tinnevelly.\textsuperscript{109} The Government ordered that the expenses of the troops

\textsuperscript{103} Indira Devi, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{104} Tinnevelly Riots Conspiracy and Ashe Murder, Vol. I, p. ix.
\textsuperscript{105} The Madras Standard, Weekly Reports, Confidential, 15\textsuperscript{th} March 1908, p. 147.
\textsuperscript{106} The Swadesamitran, Weekly Reports, Confidential, 11\textsuperscript{th} May 1908, p. 291.
\textsuperscript{107} Vajpayi, J.N., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 192.
\textsuperscript{108} V.O. Chidambaram Centenary Souvenir, p. 22.
should be met out by the people. The European merchants in Tuticorin were afraid of the riots and spent their night in the ship which was stationed in seven miles away from the harbour. The people of Tinnevelly district were very much angered with the arrest of the patriots. The unjust convictions and unjust laws of the Europeans wounded their feelings.

There is no doubt that the outbreak in Tinnevelly was due almost solely to political causes. The keen commercial rivalry between the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company and the British Indian Steam Navigation Company estranged the feelings between the natives and the Europeans. The riot was due to the determination of the authorities to strange and Swadeshi Navigation Company and thwart swadeshi spirit in the region. Added to this, the successful strike of the operators of the Coral Mills and the grand preparation made to celebrate the release of B.C. Pal from jail, further embittered the feelings of the English towards the natives. It is admitted by everybody that but for the unlawful imprisonment of Chidambaram Pillai the disturbance in Tinnevelly would have broken out. When popular leaders were arrested and remanded, the infuriated mob got provoked and committed excesses. The riot accompanied by loss

110 Subramania Iyer, M.S., op.cit., p. 50.
111 Somayajulu, op.cit., p. 70.
112 Home, Public/Pol-A, June 1908, Proceedings No. 95.
113 MNNR, Navayuga, March 26, 1908.
of life could have been averted, had the authorities met the situation, with some patience and restraint or with a spirit of broad-minded sympathy and firmness or by some conciliatory measures. The two great patriots were strong advocates of swadeshi and highly esteemed by the people; and sedition had not taken so deep a root in the Madras Presidency as in other Presidencies. The trial was a farce. During the conduct of the case, Pinhey, the Session Judge, completely relied on the evidence of the police, who shaped their reports in accordance with the views of the higher officials and the Magistrates, while he totally disbelieved that of many witness for the defence.\(^\text{114}\) The disturbance, it is fairly clear was an premeditated sudden and spontaneous owing to the state of mass feeling in respect of the action against Chidambaram Pillai and others.\(^\text{115}\) The riot did not stop with the Tamil speaking area but it spread to the adjoining Andhra Pradesh too.

6.6. The Cocanada or Kakinada Riot, 1907

The political riot did not end with the Tamil speaking area of the Madras Presidency. The neighbouring Andra Pradesh of the presidency too was facing problems similar to that of the Tamil speaking area but with a different magnitude. The Swadeshi Movement and the shouting of Bande Mataram spread there. The people were well aware of the visit of Lala

\(^\text{114}\) MNNR, Swadesamitran.
\(^\text{115}\) The Hindu, March 18, 1908.
Lajpat Rai and his aim of spreading the Swadeshi and Boycott Movement. In an attempt to spread the movement they formed Bala Bharati Samiti.

The Cocanada riot of 31st May 1907 was a typical outburst of the extremist movement in the Madras Presidency. It gives a fine example of the Indian temperament in moments of political unrest. "A highly religious and God-fearing people, who shuddered even at the thought of killing a fly or hurting an ant, had suddenly swung to the other extreme, when seized by a blind fury, to kill men and pillage."

The seeds of the riot were sown by a series of events that proceeded it, particularly the Swadeshi movement.

On 11th February 1907, a procession of students and teachers and some prominent public men paraded the town of Rajahmundry headed by S. Bhimasankaran Rao and S. Rama Rao, pleaders, carrying 'Bande Mataram' flags and shouting swadeshi slogans. Leaflets were circulated and placards were carried advocating swadeshi and boycott of foreign goods. On the same day they founded in Rajahmundry, an association called "Bala Bharat Samiti", for promoting swadeshi with G. Lakshmanan as President. Its objects were:

(1) To cultivate a profound love for the mother country.

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116 MNNR, Swadesamitran, July 9, 1908.
(2) To cultivate self-help and self-reliance and to co-operate in the spread of Swadeshi Movement.

(3) To encourage physical culture and to receive and popularize national sports.

(4) To impart useful knowledge to the masses by opening night schools.

(5) To establish a reading room and library to promote the study of history, political science, and political economy with special reference to India.\footnote{G.O. No. 1266, Jdl., 16 July 1907.}

The Samiti was founded with the object of enlisting the support of the Rajahmundry students to the cause of swadeshi and boycott movements. Many students joined in it. The participation of the students in the procession marked the beginnings of the ‘Bande Mataram’ movement in the Godavari district.\footnote{Sankaran Nair, V., op.cit., p. 28.} Very soon, the students and others began to shout ‘Bande Mataram’ at European officials in the streets. The Europeans were greatly enraged and annoyed at these shoutings. On 19th March, the Principal of the Rajahmundry College advised the students to desist from the shouting of ‘Bande Mataram’ and prohibited them from associating
themselves with the Bala Bharat Samiti, and participating in public processions and from wearing Bande Mataram lockets. But, one of the students, J. Ramachandra Rao, a senior B.A. student, turned up at the college the next day wearing a Bade Mataram medal. He was suspended for impertinence and insubordination.\textsuperscript{119} Later, the Principal readmitted him to the college on 26\textsuperscript{th} March on unconditional submission.

The firebrand of Bengal politics, Bipin Chandra Pal, reached Cocanada on 17\textsuperscript{th} April and delivered two lectures on religion, swadeshi, swaraj and national education. He reached Rajahmundry on the 19\textsuperscript{th} and gave several lectures on Brahmoism, Swadeshi, Boycott, Swaraj and national education before he left Rajahmundry on the 24\textsuperscript{th}. The very day he left Rajahmundry, the students defied the Principal of the college by wearing Bande Mataram medals and leaving the college when the Principal directed to remove them.\textsuperscript{120} Those who left the college took an oath not to return to the college until the Principal made unconditional apology to them.\textsuperscript{121} When the college was closed for vacation on 26\textsuperscript{th} April, the students returned home. Matters did not end with Rajahmundry but spread to the other parts of Andhra.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[119] G.O. 1266, Jdl., 16 July 1907.
\item[120] Ibid.
\item[121] Sankaran Nair, V., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 50.
\end{footnotes}
The patriotic fervour that was inspired by ‘Bande Mataram’ was felt in Cocanada otherwise called Kakinada. After the visit of Pal, little school boys began to shout Bande Mataram at Europeans. Quickly it spread among the older boys. Meanwhile the students of the Rajahmundry College formed a society called “Vande Mataram Protection League” with the object of protecting their rights of Bande Mataram propaganda. Subsequently, the cry of Bande Mataram became very popular in Cocanada, and even coolies began to shout Bande Mataram ostensibly instigated by students. There can be no doubt that it was shouted with the intention of provoking the victims, and it did provoke several.\(^\text{122}\) The Municipal Chairman who attempted to stamp it out in the municipal schools as a result became very unpopular with the students. Students began to shout Bande Mataram at him wherever he went. One day when a school boy of 14 yelled Bande Mataram at him. This irritated him. The enraged Municipal Chairman slapped the boy. Immediately a complaint was filed against the Municipal Chairman. However, the case was compromised due to the mediation of certain prominent men of the town. Similarly a European assistant in a local firm punched a coolly when he shouted Bande Mataram at him.\(^\text{123}\)

\(^{122}\) G.O. 1266, Jdl., 16 July 1907.
\(^{123}\) Sankaran Nair, V., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 9.
The Cocanada riot is a concrete instance of mob outburst in a climate charged with political fervour. The immediate cause though not the sole cause of the riot was the chastisement administered by Captain Kemp on a school boy who had provoked him on the 31st May 1907. That evening Captain Kemp, the District Medical and Sanitary officer was returning home. Koppalle Krishna Rao, a Brahmin boy of 16, shouted Bande Mataram at him. This enraged Capt. Kemp. He slapped the boy on his face. He further kicked the boy with his boots, and caused serious injuries in the thigh and the back. They boy was taken to the police station in a senseless condition. The distressed father of the brutally attacked boy applied for medical help, but it was not offered till the following morning.

The inhuman act of Captain Kemp roused the people for resorting unconstitutional methods to take vengeance. Soon a mob with sticks and stones broke into the club house. They threw stones and bricks at the club, smashed furniture, lamps, stores, etc., in the ground floor of the club and damaged two bicycles. The District Magistrate with a posse of constables,

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124 G.O. No. 1681, Jdl., 30.9.1907.
125 MNNR, Andhrakesari, 7 June 1907.
126 MNNR, The Swaraj, 8th June 1907.
127 G.O. No. 1264, Jdl. 15 July 1907.
128 G.O. No.1266, Jdl., 16 July 1907.
immediately arrived there and dispersed the rioters. A party of the Reserve Police from Rajahmundry was brought into Cocanada with commendable promptitude and was soon reinforced by parties from other districts, but there was no further trouble.

On the basis of the police investigation 52 persons were arrested, of whom 39 were coolies or petty traders. Many of the rioters were arrested from outside Cocanada. Fifty persons were prosecuted for participation in the riot, of whom 13 were finally convicted and punished. According to the claim put forward by the Secretary of the club, for damages done to property, the District Magistrate fixed the amount of compensation at Rs. 543.13.8, which was to be paid by the inhabitants of the municipal town of Cocanada, other than the resident members of the Cocanada Club. Besides this, an additional amount of Rs. 1,970/- was imposed on the inhabitants of Cocanada for their attack. In consequence of the riot a punitive police force consisting of one Inspector, one Sergeant, six Head Constables and 75 Constables were stationed in the town for six months and

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129 G.O. No. 1195, Jdl., 31 August 1908.
132 G.O. No. 1681, Jdl., 30.9.1907.
133 MNNR, The Swadesamitran, 18 September 1907.
its cost was to be collected from the inhabitants of the said area.\textsuperscript{134} Regarding the stationing of the punitive police force, a sub-editor in the Kerala Patrika observed, "it is surprising to see that the government have thought it proper to punish the whole population of a town by quartering on it a punitive force for the offence committed by a few and that, too, under excitement caused by the ill-treatment of a boy by a European medical officer".\textsuperscript{135} According to the leading men of Cocanada, the riot was the outcome of a blaze of sudden anger and the deadly action of Captain Kemp. The Collector could have got control of the situation if he had punished. Dr. Kemp and paid heed to the public opinion.\textsuperscript{136} He put the blame on the inflammatory speeches of some men, particularly those made by Bipin Chandra Pal. But it was not at all true. On the other hand, "even the infants in our province knew that the Cocanada riots were the offshoot of the atrocity of Kemp, towards a boy who heard no more". Referring to the riot at Cocanada, on 16\textsuperscript{th} June 1907 the Desabhimani observed: "Dr. Kemp’s unjust and deadly assault on a boy is not looked upon as a great crime, perhaps because he is a white gentleman".\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{134} G.O. No. 12195, Jdl., 31 August 1908.
\textsuperscript{135} MNMR, Kerala Patrika, 3 August 1907.
\textsuperscript{136} Sankaran Nair, V., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{137} MNMR, Desabhimani, 16 June 1907.
Though the Cocanada riot seems to be an isolated incident, it was a clear symptom to show that opposition to the British was mounting and patriotic fervour was growing in the minds of the people of the presidency. The incident clearly proved the misbehaving of the situation. It was an easily manageable incident, but, due to the hatred of the English towards the Indian citizens and their patriotism it became serious. Thus the Cocanada or Kakinada incident was the indication that more serious trouble was in the anvil. The revolutionaries wanted to reap vengeance on the Europeans either by killing them or by murdering them.