CHAPTER-VI

THE SWADESHI STEAM NAVIGATION COMPANY

(1906-1911)
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The Maritime activities of the Indians

India has been noted for its maritime activities right from the ancient period. It is quite interesting to note that the Indus Valley People had developed interest in ship building and it is proved by the remains of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. The use of shell bangles and an anchor seal found in Harappa and their food habits (they ate fish) are the supporting evidences to assure their contact with sea¹. The Lothal (Gujarat) had a fully fledged dockyard built of bricks. The dockyard was 710 feet long and about 120 feet broad. Another important feature of the Indus Valley civilization was their considerable commercial trade with the people of Sumeria, Egypt and Crate².

The Vedic literature gives an elaborate account of the boats and ships used and the sea voyages undertaken by the Indian merchants. A hymn in the Atharvana Veda observes. Those boats were “broad in beam, spacious, comfortable, resplendent with strong rudders and faultless in construction³. The naval activities of the Pandavas were mentioned in the Mahabharatha⁴. Ramayana has more references to overseas countries like China, Java and Sumatra⁵.

Chandragupta Maurya’s regime was remarkable for its maritime activities. Megasthenes Indica throws light on the administrative system that existed during

² Ibid. P.8.
⁴ Ibid, P. 11.
⁵ Ibid, P. 11.
the reign of Chandragupta; it refers to the War Office consisting of a board of 30 officers which was subdivided into 6 divisions each comprising Five members. The striking feature of the division is that the first division was in charge of the navy\(^6\).

Samudragupta is said to have led a big military expedition towards the south annexing the territories along the east coast of India and penetrated down to the kingdom of Pallavas. He too had conquered the main land in addition to the adjoining islands. Referring to this expedition, R.C. Majumdar says “Although there is no definite proof of this, we know that many islands in the Indian Ocean were either conquered by the great Gupta monarch, or submitted to him out of fear, thus clearly indicating his possession of a powerful navy)”\(^7\).

Strabo, Pliny the Elder, Ptolemy, Yuan Chuwang, Fahien, Niccolo Conti, Wang Tayuan, Ibn Batuta and Marco Polo had all left vivid accounts regarding the maritime activities of India.

The Kingdom of Vijayanagar too was noted for its overseas trade with places all over the world viz. Burma, China, Indonesia, Thailand, Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan and Portuguese\(^8\). South India had trade relationship with western countries like Rome, Greece and it is proved by the numismatic evidence. a large number of Roman coins in gold and silver have been discovered in many parts of south India, confirming the trade relationship between those countries\(^9\).

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\(^6\) V.D.Mahajan, *Advanced History of India*, (New Delhi: S.Chand & Company Ltd., 1983) P. 124


\(^9\) *Ibid.*, P.203
The Mughals encouraged the art of ship building, the Ain-i-Akbari gives information regarding the involvement of 40000 vessels in trade with the Indians\textsuperscript{10}. Akbar turned over a new leaf in trade by the conquest of Gujarat. By this expedition he came into contact with the European world.

"Besides placing its resources at the disposal of the Empire it secured for it free access to the sea and brought it in contact with the Portuguese, which in some ways influenced the history of India. But the Mughals made no attempt to build up any sea power and their short sightedness in this direction helped the intrusion of the European traders\textsuperscript{11}.

Under the patronage of Prince Henry, the Portuguese were the first to find a sea route to India. In 1498, Vasco da Gama landed at Calicut. The Portuguese brought revolutionary changes to the Indian sea trade. In the 15\textsuperscript{th} century Calicut became the centre of pepper trade\textsuperscript{12}.

The successful occupation of Malacca by Albuquerque in 1513 marked the complete supremacy of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean. While the Portuguese were thriving by the immense Eastern commerce, the Protestants raised their banner against the Papal grant of trade monopoly to the Portuguese in the east\textsuperscript{13}. After the defeat of the Spanish Armada, both the English and Dutch wanted to try their luck in India.

The Dutch were the first to break the trade monopoly of the Portuguese and on 20 March 1602, they struck at the spice and which had been their attraction over the years. The Dutch formed a monopolist body of rich merchants which was

\textsuperscript{10} The Illustrated Weekly of India, 5 Oct. 1972
\textsuperscript{12} K.Sridharan, A Maritime History of India, P. 48.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 59.
known as the united company. The Dutch conquered Malaya from the Portugese and acquired Ceylon in 1658. They got Nagapatnam too. in India. Company, they annexed Ambonia, Jakarta, Malacca and Colombo. The Dutch massacre of the British at Ammonia necessitated the British to come to India and came into conflict with the Dutch at Surat in 1612.

In 1668 Bombay was obtained by the East India Company on a nominal rent from Charles II who had secured it through his marriage with Catherine of Braganza. As Surat was not a suitable base, they shifted to Bombay in 1687.

During this Period the Britishers were troubled by the Maratha Power. In 1664, realising the importance of naval power Shivaji constructed 560 vessels and two fleets Bhandari and Dauled Khan. But the Maratha naval supremacy came to an end in 1765.

For the East India Company, the Wadias built 350 vessels at Bombay Dockyard during the period 1736-1884. They also built the battle ship Asia in 1824 and it became the flag ship of Admiral Cardington in the Battle of Navarino.

Indian ship builders and owners had to face a number of problems from the East India Company. The Tagore family wanted to revive the Indian Shipping. Tyohindranath, brother of Rabindranath also launched a steamer service in Bengal. But he was not allowed to continue the same for a long period.
The Bangiya Inland system Navigation and Trading company in Bengal also met with the same.\(^{20}\)

**THE SWADESHI STEAM NAVIGATION CAMPANY(S.S.N.Co)**

Thoothukudi in the early years of the 19\(^{th}\) Century was noted for its trade and commerce and it was especially noted for its maritime activities because of its ports with harbour which existed for many centuries. When V.O. Chidambaram Pillai moved to Thoothukudi in 1900, the port had been carrying on trade with Colombo and a daily steamer service with Colombo was operated by the British Indian- Ceylon passenger and Cargo traffic. It had been handling passenger traffic of at least one lakh annually because in those days indentured labour was being sent to places like Fiji and Mauritius, South Africa and South America\(^{21}\). In addition to this, the port had been exporting cattle, rice, cotton and salt, Hence the British Merchants established themselves in Thoothukudi because of its flourishing trade.

Even before the arrival of Pillai in Thoothukudi an attempt was made by a leading Christian, Dhanakoti Raju to overcome the British sea trade in the 1890’s. With the help of the public, he ran a rivalry steamer service to Ceylon against the weekly service of the British. The rivalry was keen and the Britishers converted their weekly service into daily service. But this Swadeshi venture did not last long\(^{22}\).

Earlier to this, in the same field, another attempt was made by a Chettiyar family of Athangudi in the nearby Ramanathapuram District. With overseas interests their “Na. Mu. Company” Openly challenged the British Company by its

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\(^{22}\) Ibid., P. 29.
service between Tamil Nadu and Andhra. Its 810 tones Cargo Vessel varied cotton from Nagapatnam Port to Kakinada passing Madras enroute\textsuperscript{23}.

Later Essaji Tajhbhooi, the enterprising ship owner of “Shah Lines” of Bombay started a Steamer service between Thoothukudi and Colombo\textsuperscript{24}. Essaji made arrangements and purchased one steamer S.S. Chusan from P and O Company and it was pressed into service between Thoothukudi and Colombo. Seena Vana and Company of Thoothukudi were their local agents\textsuperscript{25}.

S.S. Chusan captained by Mitchell had excellent accommodation for the I Class, II Class and deck Passengers. She was throughout fitted with electric fans and lights. Its special feature was that special arrangements had been made on board by the local merchants Seena and Vana co., of Thoothukudi, for meals and refreshments according to caste scruples. The steamer’s weight was 4636 tonnes gross and 2952 tonnes net. Regarding the fares, the first class cost Rs. 12/- Second class Rs. 6/- and third class Rs. 3/-\textsuperscript{26}

The S.S. Chusan left Thoothukudi on 30 June, 1906 on its maiden voyage\textsuperscript{27}. the service was on every other day till a second steamer was obtained. Though the B.I.S.N. Co. Steamers were playing between Colombo and Thoothukudi daily, the Swadeshi steam Service became a formidable competitor to it, successfully challenging its monopoly for which the credit went to the organisers of the Swadeshi steam Service\textsuperscript{28}.

The Swadeshi Steam Agency of Seena Vana and Co. enjoyed the bulk of business, carrying passengers and cattle to Colombo. The B.I.S.N. co. to win back

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\textsuperscript{23} R. A. Padmanaban, \textit{V.O. Chidambaram Pillai}, P.35
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid.}, P.36.
\textsuperscript{25} The Hindu, 25 May 1906.
\textsuperscript{26} The Hindu, 1 June 1906.
\textsuperscript{27} The Hindu, 25 May 1906.
\textsuperscript{28} The Hindu, 14 June 1906.
business reduced their charges by half\textsuperscript{29}. But this failed to have the desired effect resulting in heavy loss for the British Company. D.G. Waller, the Head Assistant Magistrate of Thoothukudi sympathizing with the colonial doctor, the sea port officer and the customs officer on this subject.

The Police officers thought to be sympathizers of the Swadeshi cased were warned. An attempt at collision with B.I.S.N. launch by the Swadeshi launch was alleged. And under the pretence of regulating the sailing of launches, Waller ordered that the Swadeshi launch should leave the jetty at 4.45 p.m. or quarter of an hour after the B.I.S.N. co had left.

The Agents of Seena Vana & Co. of Swadeshi steam Company denied the alleged attempt at collision and appealed against the order of Waller\textsuperscript{30}. On this appeal, Mudrock the District Magistrate of Tirunelveli Cancelled Waller’s order and declared that such rules could be issued by the Port officer\textsuperscript{31}.

Consequent to the order of the District Magistrate, on the appeal to himself by the Seena Vana & co, the port officer of Thoothukudi advised the Swadeshi Company as well as the B.I.S.N. Co that they should not race and start within five minutes of each other.

**PARTISAN ATTITUDES OF THE BRITISH OFFICIALS**

Right from the beginning the British officials had been behaving in a partisan manner against Swadeshi attempts in Navigation. Instead of sticking to a middle line, they went out of their way to favour the B.I.S.N.Co. quite a few officials were directed against the Swadeshi Companies by the British. Waller, the Head-Assistant Magistrate of Thoothukudi played an important role in this.

\textsuperscript{29} The Hindu, 28 June 1906.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} The Hindu, 7 August 1906.
Waller became jealous of the Swadeshi movement and imposed restrictions on the movements of the native steamers. He also warned the Police officials who were suspected to be encouraging the Native Steamer Services. In view of this, some officials in the station had gone on leave and some others had even asked for transfer fearing the displeasure of Waller who interested in British India Steam Navigation Company (B.I.S.N.Co.)\textsuperscript{32}. The officials were so much afraid of Waller that they did not want to work under him. When complaint was made about the collision of B.I.S.N.Co against the S.S.N.Co. by the latter, Waller simply transferred the case to his file. He also asked the police inspector not to interfere in it\textsuperscript{33}.

Annakutti who was working for the Shah Line was prevented from attending the port and the station\textsuperscript{34}. The station House officer of Thoothukudi, Gurusamy was warned because of his interest in the Native Stemmer Service and was later transferred to Kulasekarapatanam\textsuperscript{35}. The S.S.N.Co was given a step–motherly treatment by the British officials and it was proved by the case of Murugaiah, an employee of the Swadeshi Company.

Even though the native merchants of Thoothukudi were responsible for increasing the earnings of B.I.S.N.Co they had to face a number of problems as preference was given only to the British merchants. Hence the merchants approached Pillai to start their own company\textsuperscript{36}. While the S.S.N. Co. was making arrangements to buy its own ship, it also came into contact with Shah Lines of Bombay, an Indian Company, to run a chartered service between Thoothukudi and Clombo. The Shah Line of Bombay sent its ship “Shah Allum” for Thoothukudi –

\textsuperscript{32} TNA. MNNR: 14 July, 1906. \textit{Jananukulam}.
\textsuperscript{33} TNA: MNNR: 18 July 1906. \textit{The Swadesmitran}.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
Colombo service as it was requested by the Thoothukudi Merchants. Even though the Shah Line was running of a huge profit\textsuperscript{37}, it was withdrawn all of a sudden on 19 August 1906, by the proprietor Essajee Tajbhoy of Bombay inspite of the fact that he was bound to continue the service up to September 1906.

It was suspected that such a thing happened only because of the conspiracy of the B.I.S.N. Co., since the native merchants unanimously resolved to boycott the B.I.S.N Co. on 19\textsuperscript{th} August 1906. Because of this unfair attitude, the Seena Vana & Co. sent a telegraphic lawyer’s notice to Essajee Tajbhoy against the heavy damage caused to it by him\textsuperscript{38}.

Again the Shah Line ship resumed its service on 20 November 1906, at the instigation of B.I.S.N. Co. under new condition.

An agent of the shah Line Company came on December 1906 to insist on the execution of an agreement. He returned on 13 December 1906 after giving an oral notice that if the agreement was not signed in three days, the steamers would be withdrawn. The merchants did not execute the agreement till 20 December 1906 and the Shah Line gave twenty four hour notice for the same.

The merchants of Thoothukudi were not pleased with the terms and conditions of the Shah Line and therefore they were unwilling to accept their terms. Again it was the same case with the Asiatic Line Service with whom the merchants of Thoothukudi came into contact. The Asiatic Line, probably at the instigation of B.I.S.N.Co refused to issue shipping orders after inviting the merchants of Thoothukudi to send their cargo through them and wired for instruction to Headquarters in Calcutta and took shipments only after getting

\textsuperscript{37} V.O.C, Enathu Suyacharithal, P. 51.
\textsuperscript{38} The Hindu, 20 August 1906.
permission. Thus a painful situation was caused by the behavior of these two companies.

THE SWADESHI STEAM NAVIGATION COMPANY

The S.S.N.Co.Ltd. was registered on 16 October 1906 under the Indian Companies Act of 1882 under registration no.13 of 1906. The capital of the company was Rs.10,00,000/- divided into 40,000 shares of Rs.25/- each. This company was to be held exclusively be Indians. Ceylonese and citizens of other nations of the East.

P.Pandithoreysamy Thevar, Zamindar of Palavanatham, a great Tamil scholar and the President of the Madura Tamil Sangam, was the President and Secretary of the company.

Along with the President, the company had thirteen members on the initial board of directors. P.Pandithoreysamy Thevar (Ex.oficio), S.V.Nallaperumal Pillai, A.M.M. Arunachala Pillai, S.S.V.Krishna Pillai, S.T.A. Arumugham Pillai, A.S.V. Velayutham Pillai, V.A.A. Venkatachalam Chettiar, A.A.A. Arumugham Chettiar, N.S. Deivanayagam Pillai, M.V. Maya Nadar, Ismail Haji Abdul Rahim Sait, A.D. Solaimalai Thevar and others, were elected as the Directors during the first meeting of the Directors and its maximum strength was raised to thirty five.

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39 The Hindu, 20 August 1906.
40 The Hindu, 8 November 1906.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 V.O.C. Enathu Suyacharithai, P. 56.
ASSISTANT SECRETARY

V.O. Chidambaram Pillai was appointed as the Assistant Secretary of the company. The main work of the company was looked after by him. As some of the share holders were jealous of Pillai, they asked him to resign from the post of Assistant Secretary. As the company’s welfare was important to Pillai, he resigned the same post. But as C. Tha. Arumugham Pillai and Arunachalam insisted that the company could not function without him, he was asked to take the post of agent. But even this post was not granted to him since it might add some more fame to him and he was appointed only as Superintendent

To deal with the judicial affairs of the company, five legal advisors namely C. Vijayaragavachariar, District Court Vakil, Salem, K. R. Gurusamy Iyer, B.A., B.L., High Court Vakil, Tirunelveli, M. Krishna Nair, B.A., B.L., District Court Vakil, Thoothukudi were appointed.

The company was financed by three Chettiar firms, viz. A. L. A. R., V. E. N. K. R. M. A., A. R. A. S. M., and also by the South India Bank Ltd., Tirunelveli.

Regarding the qualification for the directors, anybody who was holding 100 and more shares was allowed to become a director. A dividend of 100% was assured, since the prospects of the company were promising. The copies of memorandum, articles and application forms for shares were available at the office at Thoothukudi. The price of the memorandum and article was Eight Annas. (8 annas are equivalent to 50 paise) All correspondence, application and remittances

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44. V.O.C. Enathu Suyacharithai, p.34
45. The Hindu, November 8, 1906.
46. Ibid.
were requested to be addressed only to the Assistant Secretary of the company at Thoothukudi.

The objects for which the company was established were stated to be:

1) To facilitate travelling and trade as well as to establish a cheap and reliable steamer service between Thoothukudi and Colombo and all such other ports and places as the company may hereinafter decide.

2) To popularize the art of Navigation to the Indians, Ceylonese and other nations of the East and to make them profit by it.

3) To impart practical instruction in the art of ship building to the Indians, Ceylonese and other Eastern Nation. To establish schools for teaching the Indians, Ceylonese and other Asiatic students, the theoretical portions of the art of Navigation as well as the rudiments of the art of ship building.

4) To promote and bring about union and co-operation among the Indians, Ceylonese and other nations of the East with regard to the Navigation and trade.

5) To employ Indians, Ceylonese and other Asiatic travelling agents for studying the question concerning the demand and supply in various commercial centres.

6) To open docks and yards, for (its) cleaning, repairing and building of steam ships, sailing vessels, steam launches, boats etc.

7) To carry on trade and to improve such indigenous industries as the company may from time to time think expedient.
8) And generally to do all such acts and things as in the opinion of the company, are incidental or conducive, to the attainment of all or any of the objects of the company.\textsuperscript{47}

Thus the objects of the company were quite patriotic and it was established mainly to promote steamer service between Thoothukudi and Colombo. In addition, it aimed to impart the art of Navigation among Indians, Ceylonese and other nations of the East. It was started not with the intention of profit making business but with true patriotic spirit. When S.S.N.Co. was started in the remote corner of India at Thoothukudi it had wild publicity and was welcomed at all India level. Tilak was much Maratta he welcomed it. It was the same case with Aurobindo Ghose at Calcutta. He supported the company by getting more shares. G.Subramaniya Iyer in his paper Swadesamitran too welcomed it. Poet Subramania Bharathi in his paper India appreciated Pillai’s venture. Kasturiranga Iyengar, the editor of The Hindu observed, “This is one of the greatest national wants at present, and in whatever humble and limited a scale the company may succeed in supplying it, it shall have the remarkable credit for having been the pioneer in that direction”\textsuperscript{48}.

The company had a good start with its capital. Hajee Mohamed Fakir Sait, the Bombay businessman purchased 8000 shares worth of two lakhs. This was the major purchase of the company. The President and Secretary of S.S.N.Co., P.Pandithoreysamy Thevar, himself alone purchased 2000 shares valued Rs. 50,000\textsuperscript{49}.

\textsuperscript{47}The Hindu, November 8, 1906.
\textsuperscript{48}R.A. Padmanaban, \textit{V.O. Chidambaram Pillai}, P.34
\textsuperscript{49}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 35.
Under the influence of Mandayam Srinivasacharya of Madras, the public spirited Mandayam family both men and women contributed their might by purchasing a considerable number of shares valued at Rs. 70,000\(^{50}\). Thus the company received much response from the public and the Managing Director went on record saying, “The preliminary work of the company in the collection of shares is in full swing, over 10,000 shares have been subscribed”\(^{51}\).

In order to continue the service between Thoothukudi and Colombo, on any account. Pillai went to Colombo and returned with a big ship on lease\(^{52}\). As the S.S.N.Co. was not satisfied with such lease-ship, since it proved uneconomical, Pillai somehow or other wanted to buy ships of their own. For this cause he went to Bombay towards the last week of December 1906\(^{53}\).

At Bombay, Pillai was much appreciated by his friend Tilak. He encouraged this Swadeshi enterprise by asking his friends and influencing merchants to buy the shares of the company\(^{54}\). In those days it was very difficult to get new ships, since India was not good in shipping at that time and he could get only second-hand ships. Pillai also tried to get new ships from Japan through Ogale, the Indian Glass student who was in Japan to learn the art of glass technology but it did not materialise\(^{55}\).

\(^{50}\) R.A. Padmanaban, *V.O. Chidambaram Pillai*, p.34
\(^{51}\) Ibid., p.36

\(^{52}\) Ibid., p. 40.
\(^{53}\) Ibid., p.42
\(^{54}\) Ibid., p.43
\(^{55}\) Ibid., p.44
However when Pillai came to know that new ships were available in France, he sent his friend Vedamurthi to Paris and got two ships S.S. Gaelia and S.S. Lawoe. In addition to this two more steam launches were also procured\textsuperscript{56}.

On 24 December 1906, the Managing Director of S.S.N.Co. announced the purchase of a steamer with all its particulars. “Its net tonnage is 1817, gross 2504. It has accommodation in saloons for 44 first class, 24 second class and 1000 third class passengers on deck. It can carry 2,500 tons of cargo. It is fitted with electric lights. Its speed is 15 knots per hour. The steamer will be placed on the Colombo – Thoothukudi line before the middle of January”\textsuperscript{57}.

The purchase of the second steamer was announced on 25 January 1907. Its gross weight was 1303 tonnes and 555 net tonnes. Her speed was 18 knots and could touch 20 knots per hour. She had excellent saloons and cabins for 35 first, 25 second and 40 third class passengers. In addition to this, she had a beautiful deck for 500 passengers and 600 cattle. She could carry 7000 packages of cargo and was fitted with electric lights\textsuperscript{58}. The ships that were purchased on 24 December 1906 and 26 January 1907 could not leave their home land immediately because of the fact that these two ships had to be re-conditioned and fitted to be suitable for plying as passenger cum cargo vessels. They left home on 4 February 1907 and reached Thoothukudi before the end of February. These two ships were purchased for nearly 30, 000 pounds\textsuperscript{59}.

These ships were given a red carpet welcome by the citizens of Thoothukudi. Poet Bharathi in his weekly India gave a warm welcome\textsuperscript{60}. The

\textsuperscript{56} R.A. Padmanaban, \textit{V.O. Chidambaram Pillai}, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{57} The Hindu, 24 December 1906.
\textsuperscript{58} The Hindu, January 26, 1907.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Ellasi Maniyan, \textit{Bharathi Tharisatham}, p. 2.
company negotiated for the purchase of some more steamers. But till the beginning of February 1907 hardly 50% of the shares had been sold, in spite of a share costing as low as Rs. 25/-. The company appealed to rulers, leaders, journalists and all other ladies and gentlemen to purchase more shares, since it would keep the company in times of need.

THE SAILING OF S.S.N.CO.’S STEAMER S.S.LOWOE

The Swadeshi steamer S.S.Lowoe sailed from Thoothukudi to Colombo on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It left Thoothukudi at 6 P.M. and reached Colombo at 6 A.M. the next day. From Colombo, she started on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at 5.30 P.M. and reached Thoothukudi at 6 A.M. the next day.

Cargo and cattle which were to be carried by the steamer had to be booked at the Railway stations of South Indian Railway. Passenger tickets were also available at the company’s agencies at Tiruchirapalli, Quilon, Madurai, Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi. At Colombo, the tickets were available from the Agency office, at Queen’s Street, Fort. The Company had daily service between Thoothukudi and Colombo, except on Sundays. Passengers to Colombo were conveyed from the pier to the steamer about five miles out, by the Company’s launches. The steamers left for Colombo at about 5.30 P.M. and reached there at about 7.30 A.M. the next day. The first and second class passengers might obtain a pass from the Ceylon Quarantine Medical Officer who would meet every train in order to restrict plague in Colombo.

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61 The Hindu, 2 February 1907.  
62 The Hindu, 9 November 1907.
Passengers suspected to be from infected areas were not granted pass for 10 days unless they deposited Rs. 50/- each as security.\(^{63}\)

**PARTICULARS REGARDING B.I.S.N.CO.’S SERVICE, TICKET BOOKING, TIME ETC.**

The passengers, who were going to Europe and Burma, and Europe and Australia respectively by B.I.S.N.Co, and the Bibby and Royal Mail Lines, were asked to get their concerned tickets from the Traffic Manager, South Indian Railway, Tiruchirapalli after paying the necessary amount.

The passengers who were sailing by the B.I.S.N.Co to Colombo from India were directly taken by the Boat Mail train to the Pier, and again from the Pier to the B.I.S.N.Co, they were taken by the Madura Company’s steam launch. Including Sunday, the steamer left for Colombo at 5 P.M. and reached at 8 A.M. the next morning.\(^{64}\)

**PLAGUE RESTRICTIONS**

The first and second class passengers who were proceeding to Colombo were asked to obtain a pass from the Ceylon immigration agent at Thoothukudi, who met all the trains. The native passengers, including the servants of the Europeans, from a plague infected area were not granted a pass until 10 days had expired from the date on which they left the plague infected area.

If the Europeans wanted to take a servant from the plague infected area, they should send the servant away from the plague infected area, a sufficient number of

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\(^{63}\) The Hindu, 8 October 1907.

\(^{64}\) The Hindu, 25 November 1907.
days before hand, with which the time occupied in travelling to Colombo would make up the prescribed ten days\textsuperscript{65}.

Along with these formalities, the Port Health officer, under the instruction of the Government of India, inspected all passengers and disinfected their clothes. The officer too could detain a third class passenger if he was suspected of having any plague infection. An enquiry office was opened at Colombo at No.22, Victoria, Arado, to get all information regarding the service of the British company\textsuperscript{66}. The Custom House was situated near the landing pier at Colombo. Heavy luggages were deposited there, after paying a small fee.

**THE CRUDESADE AGAINST S.S.N.Co-THE RATE WAR:**

The B.I.S.N.Co was alarmed to see the growth of S.S.N.Co. Since the latter attracted more passengers than the former. The facilities provided by the S.S.N.Co. was more modern and up-to-date when compared with the B.I.S.N.Co

**RUMOURS REGARDING THE INVESTMENT OF THE SWADESHI COMPANY:**

The whites spread rumours regarding the finance of the S.S.N.Co. following reports in the Newspaper in Ceylon and other places that the company lost huge amount of money because of the financial catastrophe of M/s. Arubthnot & Co. and the National Bank of India. Pillai wrote in The Hindu to allay the fears of the shareholders of the above company. He wrote that those reports had no foundation and “are only the outcome of the enemity and spite of out rivals”\textsuperscript{67}. Two changes

\textsuperscript{65} The Hindu, 25 November 1907.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{67} The Hindu, 15 November 1906.
were brought about in the Board of Directors. Pandithoreysamy Thevar, the President, was appointed as the officiating Secretary in the place of Ms. H.I.A.R. Haji Fakir Mohamed Sait & Sons. A.S. Solaimalai Thevar of Vaitheswarankoil was appointed as Director in the place of Mohammed Hashim Sait.\footnote{The Hindu, 15 November, 1906.}

Taking over charge as officiating Secretary by Pandithoreysamy was necessitated by the refusal to be or withdrawn as honorary secretaries by M/s. H.I.A.R. Hajji Fakir Mohamed Sait & Sons. They had stated that they had nothing to do with the Company.\footnote{The Hindu, 16 November, 1906.}

More and more cargo was sent through, and more and more passengers were travelling by S.S.N.Co. which aroused the jealousy of B.I.S.N.Co.

In Thoothukudi, the booking offices of S.S.N.Co. and B.I.S.N.Co were opposite to the Railway station. The B.I.S.N.Co., to lure away unwary customer, went to the extent of even placing a board claiming the company as “The Swadeshi Tapals and passengers carrying company.”\footnote{The Hindu, 10 December 1906.} Since the competition was tough and rough, the joint Magistrate Waller instructed the Sub-Magistrate and the police to attend the railway station when the morning train, full of passengers for Colombo, arrived. One morning in December 1906, the sub Magistrate did not attend the Railway station. At that time, a scuffle ensued between a ticket Collector and Murugaiah of S.S.N.Co. The police arrested Murugaiah, brutally assaulted him and produced him before the Sub-Magistrate, who in turn, without giving Murugaiah the benefit of a counsel or witness, sentenced him to undergo imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 10/-. This trial and pronouncement of judgment lasted barely thirty
minutes inside the railway station itself, even before the news of arrest could reach Murugaiah’s office hardly a furlong away from the Railway station.  

Hearing about the absence of the Sub-Magistrate through the Station Master, Waller, and the Head Assistant Collector of Thoothukudi summoned the Sub-Magistrate to offer an explanation. Palaniyandi, pleader, moved a bail petition and filed an appeal before Waller. Subsequently Murugaiah was released on bail and a re-trail was ordered by the Joint-Magistrate of Thoothukudi. So great was the enthusiasm, so prominent were the indignation and disapproval of the Sub-magistrate’s Act, that the public took Murugaiah in a chariot through the important streets in Thoothukudi, all the while shouting.

The Sub-Divisional first class Magistrate bailed Murugiah on the last day of his sentence. On his order, the Sub-Magistrate of Thoothukudi instructed Murugiah to furnish a list of witnesses. The case was postponed to 3 January 1907. Murugiah presented Ibrahim Khan, Kondal Naidu and Mohideen Sheriff as his three witnesses. Summons was not served on one witness, one was dispensed with and the third alone was examined. The other two witnesses appeared before the court late and the Magistrate ordered their prosecution for disobeying the summons. This was in contrast to the treatment given to Varaprasadam, head clerk of B.I.S.N.Co, though he was to be at the court at 11 A.M., he attended at 1 P.M. only. Even then without getting the permission of the Magistrate, he went away to the railway station to send off his master and returned from the station only at 3 P.M. Then he stayed at home and produced a medical certificate. The vakil of

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71 The Hindu, 10 December 1906.
72 The Hindu, 14 December 1906.
Murugaiah were there. But the Magistrate took no note of it. The absence of Varaprasadadam Pillai made the case to be adjourned.

THE ISSUE OF THE CERTIFICATES

At times, the share holders did not receive their share certificates and the company received complaints regarding non-receipt of share certificates by them. Pillai, the Assistant Secretary, clarified through the newspapers, the circumstances under which the share certificates were not sent in time. One reason was the short supply of the Swadeshi paper on which a certificate had to be printed. Secondly, each share certificate must bear the signature of the Secretary and one Director. Since the Secretary was mostly away on business, he could not sign the certificates as speedily as could be issued. He assured that every step was being taken to quicken the process of issue of the certificates and requested the share holders to condone the delay.

On 8 October 1907, the company was running with its President P. Pandithoreysamy and thirty two Board of Directors, viz.

1. R. Venkataramanujulu Naidu Garu, Banker, Thoothukudi.
2. C.Vijayaragavachariar, B.A. High Court Vakil, Salem.
3. A.Sndara Sastriar, B.A., B.L., High Court Vakil and Public Prosecutor, Thoothukudi.
4. N.A.V. Somasundar Pillai, B.A., B.L., High Cout Vakil, Palayamkottai.
5. M.D.Devadass Pillai, B.A., B.L., High Court Vakil, Palayamkottai.
6. T.S. Subramania Pillai, District Court Vakil, Thoothukudi.
7. S.S.V. Krishna Pillai, Merchant, Thoothukudi.

73 The Hindu, 17 January 1907.
74 The Hindu, 26 August 1907.
75 The Hindu, 8 October 1907.
8. A.M.M. Arunachalam Pillai, Merchant, Thoothukudi.
10. A.S.V. Velayutha Pillai, Merchant, Thoothukudi.
11. S.T.A. Arumugham Pillai, Merchant, Thoothukudi.
12. V.A.A. Authi Narayanan Chettiar, Merchant, Thoothukudi.
13. V.A.S. Venkatachalam Chettiar, Merchant, Thoothukudi.
14. N.S. Devanayagam Pillai, Merchant, Thoothukudi.
15. A.S. Thiruchittambalam Chettiar, Merchant, Thoothukudi.
17. A.M. Syed Ibrahim, Merchant, Colombo.
18. A. Solaiamalai Thevar, Vaitheswarnkoil.
19. Thirunarayana Pillai, Kavilanjeri, Shiyali (Sirkazhi).
20. K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar.
22. S. Ramasami Pillai, Kannapadi.
25. A. Somasundaram, Cuddalore.
27. Annan Thirumalai Iyar, Salem.
29. A. Arunachalm Chetty, Salem.
32. S.D. Krishna Iyengar, B.A., B.L., District Court Vakil, Thoothukudi.
33. V.O.C. Pillai, Vakil, Thoothukudi – Assistant Secretary.
When the S.S.N.Co. was established, it was ridiculed he Britishers as a nine day wonder which would have an speedy ending. But to the Britishers surprise the S.S.N.Co., with its two steam ships, strongly challenged the British sea trade monopoly. A rate war started between these two companies. In order to attract more passengers, the B.I.S.N. Co. reduced the fare. In those days the fare from Thoothukudi to Ceylon was Rupees Five. The B.I.S.N. Co. reduced the fare to two and a half rupees. Pillai also reduced the fare to the same level. But the British company further lowered its fare to one and a quarter rupees. Again Pillai went to the level of reducing the fare to one Rupee. But the B.I.S.N.Co. again reduced the fare to half a rupee. The competition reached its climax when Pillai offered a free trip to Ceylon. But the B.I.S.N.Co. came forward not only with free trip but also offered an umbrella.

On March, 1908 Pillai’s political activities were questioned both by the British Government and the S.S.N.Co.’s directors. As the directors were running the S.S.N.Co. with commercial motive, they were afraid that Pillai’s activities against the British authorities might spell doom for the company. As they felt that it might affect the prospects of the company, in their proceedings, the directors requested Pillai to refrain from organizing or participating in political lectures and demonstrations. Such participation created doubts about the company’s methods and thus prejudiced the Government against the company’s business. Pillai was asked to desist from his propaganda in Thoothukudi. The directors had asked all the servants of the company to traffic and to act with utmost care and avoid apprehension. However, Pillai did not attend their meeting but called a public

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76 R. A. Padmanaban, *V.O.Chidambaram Pillai*, p. 44.
77 V.O. Chidambaram centenary souvenir, V.O.C. centenary committee Tuticorin, 1972, p. 64.
meeting in the evening to find the wish of the public, regarding the celebrations over Bipin Chandra Pal’s release\textsuperscript{78}.

Before the beginning of the meeting itself, Pillai and Subramania Siva were served with a notice that they could stop all processions in and around Thoothukudi. During the meeting, Pillai, Subramania Siva and Padmanaba Iyengar were served with notice to appear at Tirunelveli to show why action should not be taken against them on account of seditious speech.

**BRITISHERS AGAINST PILLAI**

The British authorities adopted various measures to stop the growth of the S.S.N.Co., especially by severely link with Pillai. The Swadesmitran wrote that the quiet and subsequent shooting at Tirunelveli was the sequence of the following reasons.

Pillai uplifted the S.S.N.Co. so successfully that its rival English company started losing financially. The English were also annoyed to know that Pillai’s part in the coral Mill strike helped the employees to get higher wages. To top it all Pillai also joined the extremist camp and preached Swaraj. The Britishers were determined to stop the S.S.N.Co. by arresting Pillai at any cost.

The same paper also opined that confinement of such people as Pillai would not keep the people quiet, nor could they prolong the confinement and once released, these patriots would again be involved in these activities\textsuperscript{79}.

The same thing was felt by Bipin Chandra Pal. He described the British Government as “Half trader, half ruler”. The Government was playing a dual role causing a lot of inconvenience to the Indians. The Government was provoked even

\textsuperscript{78} The Hindu, 9 March 1908.

\textsuperscript{79} TNA. MNNR. 18 March 1908. *The Swadesamitran.*
if the Indians worked honorably to improve his trade. All the confusion in Thoothukudi resulted from “our people having started and worked a Steam Navigation Company of their own”. The Government was trying its best to upset the company. Pillai had to incur the displeasure of the Government because he was “the heart and soul of the company”\(^{80}\).

The Indians were not allowed by the Britishers to become members of the British companies. Yoke of the Tuticorin Chamber of Commerce said in the Madras Legislative Council that the Europeans were not against the Indians become shareholders in British company, in fact, they were free to buy shares in the European companies. But the actual truth was that the Indians were willfully excluded from taking shares in European companies such as B.I.S.N.Co. or the cotton mill at Papanasam. Though a large number of Indians had deposited their money in the Madras bank, no Indian was allowed to become a member of the Board of directors\(^{81}\).

Right from the beginning, the English traders wanted to block the Swadeshi trade and adopted various methods for the same. The European merchants of Thoothukudi had requested through a telegram the Registrar of Joint stock companies to proceed legally against the S.S.N.Co., if their half yearly balance sheet had not been published yet. They had thrown quite a number of obstacles to the Swadeshi Company paying the last instalment of Rs.47, 000 /- towards their ship.

As he had gone to the Swadeshi Jetty at 6 P.M. one when the office was being closed. He insisted on the company’s books being shown to him. Since this could not be done, as all officers had left, as he got wild and threatened prosecution

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\(^{80}\) TNA. MNNR. 28 March 1908. *The India.*

\(^{81}\) TNA. MNNR. 10 April 1908. *The Swadesamitrana.*
against the company. If as he had really wanted to know of the company and its affairs, he could have written to the secretary of the company, instead of pouncing upon the clerk at an untimely hour\textsuperscript{82}.

Examination of some European witnesses on behalf of the Government in the Tirunelveli seditious case had revealed some very surprising facts. The European merchants were getting the help of the authorities in their efforts to destroy the S.S.N.Co. A secret agreement existed between the authorities and the foreign Steam Navigation Company. On the basis of this, if the consignors preferred the foreign steam navigation company, then the Indian and Ceylon Railway allowed concessional rates for the goods\textsuperscript{83}.

The Assistant Commissioner of Salt, Abkari, instead of making entry in his diary matters regarding his work, was taking notes of the Swadeshi activities. He himself had confessed the fact that he was asked to do so by the authorities. Thus every European had been asked to serve the Government as its spy\textsuperscript{84}.

Since the Swadeshi Company had launched a stiff opposition to B.I.S.N.Co. it had been faring so badly that it was even seriously contemplated to remove it at the earliest to some other parts of the country. If the opposition to the B.I.S.N.Co. collapsed, it would continue to possess its former monopoly. Ashe was told that Brahmin vakils formed the real strength of the S.S.N.Co. and that if they were taught a lesson, the opposition to B.I.S.N.Co. would collapse. Therefore, a campaign was started against Venkatarama Iyer and other Brahmin Vakils. The local merchants were troubled by the Agents of Madras Bank and whenever the directors of S.S.N.Co. were in need of a financial aids they had to face all sorts of difficulties from the Bank. The Directors were forced to yield to the officials’ wish

\textsuperscript{82} TNA. MNNR. 23 March 1908. \textit{The Swadesamitran}.

\textsuperscript{83} TNA. MNNR. 2 May 1908. \textit{The Madogannadi}.

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Ibid}.
that their agent Pillai be stopped in his political work. When the troubled merchants appealed to Venkatarama Iyer, asking him to go to Madras, to bring to the notice of the Government, Ashe and Waller threatened the Vakils that he and others would be bound down to peace, if things did not go on peacefully at Thoothukudi. When Venkatarama Iyer was about to leave for Madras, his plans were thwarted. Along with five other Brahmin Vakils, he was brought before the court, tried on before the Magistrate and humiliated before the very public, who regarded them as their leaders. Though a shame, their enquiry fulfilled its aims in harassing the S.S.N.Co.\textsuperscript{85}. The native company was harassed in a thousand ways by the British authorities. The Port officer restrained the S.S.N.Co. from clearing S.S. Gaelia as it did not satisfy the rules. Again the cargo vessels loaded by the passengers were not allowed to be sailed by the Fort British officials in spite of the fact that it was allowed by the Colombo authorities\textsuperscript{86}.

The British officials did not even spare the water supply to the S.S.N.Co. The water carrier to the S.S.N.Co. launch was forced to empty his vessels by the sepoys and the policemen\textsuperscript{87}. Also the Hotel keepers who were sending their guests and customers to the S.S.N.Co. were arrested. Passenger Superintendent Devaram Pillai who saved the Sub- Magistrate from the Tirunelveli mob violence, was bound for a year under sec.108 Cr. Pc. without even recording any evidence. He was asked to appear before Ashe on 23 March at Thoothukudi Police Station and was asked to execute a bond of Rs.50/- without committing any offence\textsuperscript{88}. Once he was put behind the bars, the S.S.N.Co. found it impossible to maintain its competition with the B.I.S.N.Co., which had “all the backing of unashamed

\textsuperscript{85} The Hindu, 30 March 1908.
\textsuperscript{86} The Hindu, 25 March 1908.
\textsuperscript{87} The Hindu, 26 March 1908.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.,
officialdom”. Funds were badly needed for its daily existence and to pay the last instalment due on one of the ships bought. All efforts to sell more shares and to raise funds proved futile. In addition, confusion prevailed in the company owing to the bickerings among the executives of the company. In the end, the S.S.N.Co. played into the hands of the very company against which it was waging a war. It sold its ships to the B.I.S.N.Co. “This surrender came like a stab in the heart to nationalist India”. Poet Bharathi remarked that “it would have been better if the ships had been sunk in the Bay of Bengal”\footnote{R.A. Padmanabhan, \textit{V.O. Chidambaram Pillai}, p. 83.}. 