

V.O. Chidambaram Pillai

September 8, 2021

In news— Recently, the Prime Minister paid tribute to V. O. Chidambaram Pillai, on the occasion of his 150th birth anniversary.

A brief note on V. O. Chidambaram Pillai(1872-1936)-

- He was born on 5 September 1872 in a **Vellalar family in Ottapidaram, Tirunelveli District.**
- The legendary freedom fighter was popularly known as **'Kappalottiya Tamizhan (the Tamil Helmsman)'** and Sekkizuththa Semmal (scholarly gentry who suffered at the oil press).
- He graduated from Caldwell College, Tuticorin.
- **He entered politics in 1905 following the partition of Bengal.**
- Towards the end of 1905, **VOC visited Madras and was drawn closer to the Swadeshi Movement** initiated by Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai.
- It was not until the arrival of **V.O. Chidambaram Pillai (VOC) at Tuticorin (Present day Thoothukudi)** that the **Swadeshi movement** in Tirunelveli district began to gather force and momentum.
- VOC was drawn **towards Ramakrishna Mission and came into contact with Subramania Bharati** and the Mandayam family.
- He founded the **Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company(SSNC)** in 1906 to compete against the monopoly of the British India Steam Navigation Company.
- He launched the **first indigenous Indian shipping service between Tuticorin and Colombo** with the SSNC, competing against British ships.
- VOC won the active support of another fiery Tamil orator, Subramania Siva.
- VOC and Siva were aided in their efforts by a number of

Tirunelveli-based lawyers, who formed an organisation called the **Swadeshi Sangam**, or 'National Volunteers'.

- He supported the **Tuticorin Coral Mills strike**.
- Even prior to Gandhiji's Champaran Satyagraha, **VOC took up the cause of the working class in Tamil Nadu**.
- Hence, **Tuticorin Port Trust, one of India's thirteen major ports, is named after him**.
- At one time a **member of the Indian National Congress**, he was later charged with sedition by the British government and sentenced to life imprisonment, and his barrister license was revoked.
- He was awarded a **double life-sentence by the British court**.

His literary works-

- He had **penned commentaries on Tirukkural and Sivagnana Potham**.
- He also had **a special interest in self-help books of James Allen and translated some** of them when he was in the Coimbatore prison.
- The **autobiography in Tamil verse** which he started in prison was completed upon his release in 1912.
- He also **compiled ancient works of Tamil grammar, Tholkappiam**.
- He showed ingenuity in **his works of Meyyaram and Meyyarivu**, praised for spontaneous style.