

# V.O. Chidambaram Pillai

February 27, 2021

## Biography

- Born on 5 September 1872 to Olaganathan Pillai and Paramyee Ammai in Ottapidaram, District Tirunelveli in modern Tamil Nadu.
- He graduated from Caldwell College in Tuticorin (former name of Thoothukudi) before working as a Taluk office clerk.
- In 1894, he went to Tiruchirappalli to pursue law. After that, he became a leader in 1895 practising in his birthplace Ottapidaram.
- He met Ramakrishnanathar, a saint of the order of the Ramakrishna Mission and was deeply influenced by him to work for the nation.
- His entry into politics happened in 1905 when he joined the Congress Party after the Bengal partition. He was a follower of Bal Gangadhar Tilak. He was also a great believer in the Swadeshi movement.
- Tuticorin was a business centre and the merchants there did a lot of business with Sri Lanka. At that time, shipping, both passenger as well as cargo, was entirely controlled by European shipping companies.
- The British Indian Steam Navigation Company Ltd., the only shipping business that had a regular steamer service between Tuticorin and Colombo was infamous for its shoddy treatment of its Indian patrons.
- In 1906, V.O.C decided to establish an Indian shipping company called the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company. The company was founded on 16 October 1906, largely due to the efforts of V.O.C with support from his merchant-friends. This was a hit for the British company which began to take reactive steps.
- Along with a fiery speaker Subramania Siva, V.O.C

started the 'Swadeshi Sangam'.

## **Role in the Indian Freedom Struggle**

- In February 1908, they decided to go on a strike demanding better pay and a reduction in the number of working hours.
- He took up the workers' cause and gave many fiery speeches which drew the people's attention to the plight of the workers. The cause gained widespread sympathy and support.
- V.O.C, Siva and Padmanabha Iyengar decided to hold a procession on 9 March 1908 to observe the release of national leader Bipin Chandra Pal from prison. They also wanted to unfold the Swaraj flag.
- Tuticorin Collector Wynch warned the Madras government and informed them of the prominence and danger of the national leaders in Tuticorin.
- He wanted to stop the procession from taking place. On 12 March 1908, the three leaders including V.O.V, Siva and Iyengar were remanded to the district jail.
- There was widespread condemnation in Tuticorin of the arrest and the people reacted violently.
- The court sentenced V.O.C to two life imprisonments for charges of sedition.
- An appeal to the Madras High Court reduced the sentence to 6 years in prison and 4 years in transportation both to run concurrently.
- V.O.C and Siva had to undergo rigorous imprisonment. V.O.C was subject to hard labour in prison and his health suffered a great deal.
- For instance, he was put in place of an ox and made to draw an oil press in the hot sun. His sentence was reduced and he was released in December 1912.