Swadeshi Movement in Tamil Nadu (1905–1911) – Madras and Tuticorin–Tirunelveli Centres, Swadeshi Steam Navigation, 1908 Uprising, Repression & the Ashe Assassination | TNPSC Notes

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The **Swadeshi Movement**, which began against the **Partition of Bengal (16 October 1905)**, grew in Tamil Nadu in three forms: **constructive work** (V. O. Chidambaram Pillai's **Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company**, 1906), **mass struggle** (the **Coral Mills strike** and the **Tirunelveli Uprising of 13 March 1908**) and **revolutionary action** (the shooting of Acting Collector **Ashe** at Maniyachi on **17 June 1911**). **Madras** (Bipin Chandra Pal's 1907 lectures, Bharati's journal "India") and **Tuticorin–Tirunelveli** were the main centres; after the repression, **Pondicherry** became a refuge. The Partition was annulled on 12 December 1911.

தமிழில் படிக்க

These notes are written for TNPSC Group 1, 2/2A and 4 aspirants. They give the **whole picture of the movement** – causes, centres, phases, repression and assessment. Detailed life stories are in our notes on VOC, Subramania Siva, Vanchinathan and Bharathiyar, and are not repeated here.

At a Glance

Detail	Fact
All-India cause	Curzon's Partition of Bengal – in force 16 October 1905; boycott resolution – 7 August 1905, Calcutta
Tamil Nadu centres	Madras; Tuticorin–Tirunelveli; (after 1908) Pondicherry
Main leaders	V. O. Chidambaranar, Subramania Siva, Subramania Bharati; in Madras V. Chakkarai and Ethiraj Surendranath Arya; on the revolutionary side Neelakanta Brahmachari, V. V. S. Aiyar, Vanchinathan
Constructive work	Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company (registered 16 October 1906) – ships Gallia and Lawoe
Peak	Coral Mills strike (27 February 1908) → arrest of VOC and Siva (12 March 1908) → Tirunelveli Uprising (13 March 1908)
Revolutionary phase	Bharatha Matha Association; Ashe assassination – Maniyachi, 17 June 1911
End	Partition annulled – 12 December 1911 (Delhi Durbar)

Background: From Bengal to the Tamil Country

- **Partition of Bengal (1905):** Curzon divided Bengal in the name of administrative convenience; nationalists saw it as "divide and rule".
- **Swadeshi and boycott:** boycott of foreign goods, use of Indian goods, national education and self-reliance (atma shakti).
- **Extremist nationalism:** led by Lal–Bal–Pal (Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal) and Aurobindo; at the **Surat split of 1907** the Tamil Extremists, including VOC, backed Tilak's group.
- **Tamil setting:** a British company's monopoly on the Tuticorin–Colombo sea route and low wages and long hours for mill workers turned economic grievance into a political movement.

Centre 1: Madras – Journals and Lectures

Event / body	Detail
Bipin Chandra Pal's visit (1907)	Lectures on Swadeshi and boycott on the Madras beach; a great impact on students and youth
Swadesamitran	Tamil paper started by G. Subramania Iyer; Bharati worked on it from 1904
"India" (1906)	Tamil weekly edited by Bharati – an Extremist voice; moved to Pondicherry in 1908
Madras leaders	V. Chakkarai (Chakkarai Chettiar) and Ethiraj Surendranath Arya – Swadeshi propaganda (as named in the Tamil Nadu textbook)

Centre 2: Tuticorin–Tirunelveli – From Economic Swadeshi to Mass Uprising

Phase	What happened	Significance
Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company (1906)	Registered by VOC at Tuticorin (16 October 1906); ships Gallia and Lawoe; faced fare-cutting by the British BISN company	A rare attempt to make Swadeshi an economic reality
Coral Mills strike (1908)	From 27 February 1908 after speeches by VOC and Siva; demands including higher wages were accepted	One of the early links between labour and the national movement
Celebration of Bipin Chandra Pal's release (March 1908)	Held in defiance of Collector Wynch	Open challenge to the government
Arrests (12 March 1908)	VOC, Subramania Siva and Swadeshi Padmanabha Iyengar	–
Tirunelveli Uprising (13 March 1908)	Police station, court and municipal office set on fire; four killed in police firing	One of Tamil Nadu's first big spontaneous nationalist mass outbreaks

Sentences (July 1908)	VOC – transportation for life; Siva – ten years (both reduced on appeal); VOC made to pull the oil press in prison	The shipping company declined and was later wound up

For details see the notes on VOC and Subramania Siva.

Repression and the Pondicherry Refuge (1908–1910)

- **Laws:** Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act, 1908 and the Indian Press Act, 1910 – security deposits and forfeiture for papers.
- **Bharati:** to avoid arrest he moved in 1908 to **Pondicherry**, then under French rule; "India" continued from there.
- **Pondicherry – refuge of nationalists:** Aurobindo and **V. V. S. Aiyar** (returning from London) also came there in 1910; young men received political training.
- **Result:** with open mass work crushed, some youths turned to secret revolutionary methods.

Revolutionary Phase: Bharatha Matha Association and the Ashe Assassination (1911)

- **Bharatha Matha Association:** a secret body organised by Neelakanta Brahmachari; driven by anger at the repression of 1908.
- **17 June 1911: R. W. D'E. Ashe**, who as Sub-Collector and Joint Magistrate of Tuticorin in 1908 had acted against the Swadeshi movement and in 1911 was Acting Collector of Tirunelveli, was shot dead at **Maniyachi** junction by **Vanchinathan**, who then shot himself.
- **Tinnevelly Conspiracy Case (1911):** many were tried; this ended the revolutionary phase of Swadeshi in Tamil Nadu. The station is now called **Vanchi Maniyachi**.

For details see the note on Vanchinathan.

Three Streams Compared

Stream	Method	Example	Leaders
Constructive / economic Swadeshi	Indian enterprise, Indian goods	Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company (1906)	VOC
Mass agitation	Meetings, strikes, boycott	Coral Mills strike; Tirunelveli Uprising (1908)	VOC, Subramania Siva
Journalism / cultural nationalism	Songs, journals, speeches	"India", Swadesamitran; Bharati's national songs	Bharati, G. Subramania Iyer
Revolutionary	Secret society, arms	Ashe assassination (1911)	Neelakanta Brahmachari, V. V. S. Aiyar, Vanchinathan

Bengal and Tamil Nadu – Differences

Aspect	Bengal	Tamil Nadu

Immediate cause	Partition of its own province – direct impact	National solidarity; local economic grievances
Special feature	National educational institutions, Swadeshi mills	Swadeshi shipping company; workers' strike – nationalism joined with labour rights
Peak	1905–08	1908 (Tirunelveli) – 1911 (Ashe)
Spread	Towns and countryside	Mostly Madras and the southern districts; weaker elsewhere

Assessment

- **Achievements:** linked Tamil Nadu with the all-India Extremist current; a rare national model of economic nationalism (the shipping company); brought workers into politics; national literature in Tamil flowered through Bharati's songs.
- **Limitations:** severe repression; a leadership vacuum as leaders were jailed or exiled; little spread among peasants; revolutionary action did not win mass support.
- **Long-term impact:** prepared the ground in Tamil Nadu for the Home Rule Movement (1916) and the Gandhian movements; VOC is honoured as "Kappalottiya Thamizhan" (the Tamil who sailed the ship).

Writing Mains Answers (Group 1 / Group 2)

The Swadeshi Movement in Tamil Nadu – nature and significance (about 200–250 words)

- **Introduction:** Partition of Bengal (16 October 1905); Swadeshi and boycott.
- **Madras:** Bipin Chandra Pal's lectures (1907); "India", Swadesamitran.
- **Tuticorin–Tirunelveli:** Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company (1906); Coral Mills strike; 12–13 March 1908.
- **Repression:** the 1908 and 1910 Acts; Bharati to Pondicherry; harsh sentences on VOC.
- **Revolutionary phase:** Bharatha Matha Association; Ashe assassination (17 June 1911).
- **Conclusion:** economic nationalism and the labour link – Tamil Nadu's distinctive contribution.

The Tirunelveli Uprising of 1908 – causes and results (about 150 words)

- Causes: success of the Coral Mills strike; Collector Wynch's hostility; the arrests of 12 March 1908.
- Event: 13 March – government buildings burnt; four killed.
- Results: harsh sentences; decline of the shipping company; a push towards revolutionary methods.

Practice: Match the Following

Item	Match
16 October 1905	Partition of Bengal in force
16 October 1906	Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company registered

Gallia, Lawoe	Ships of the Swadeshi company
27 February 1908	Coral Mills strike begins
13 March 1908	Tirunelveli Uprising
17 June 1911	Ashe assassination, Maniyachi
12 December 1911	Partition annulled
"India" (1906)	Bharati's journal

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Ashe was killed in 1911 (Maniyachi) – not during the 1908 Tirunelveli Uprising.
- The Collector who opposed VOC in 1908 was Wynch; the official killed in 1911 was Ashe – do not mix them up.
- Arrest on 12 March 1908; uprising on 13 March 1908.
- Ships: Gallia and Lawoe – the company ran on the Tuticorin–Colombo route.
- The Partition was annulled in 1911 (Delhi Durbar) – not by the Morley–Minto Reforms of 1909.

Key Terms – Tamil / English (for the bilingual paper)

தமிழ்	English
சுதேசி	Swadeshi (one's own country's goods)
புறக்கணிப்பு	Boycott
வங்கப் பிரிவினை	Partition of Bengal
தீவிர தேசியவாதிகள்	Extremists
சுதேசி நீராவிக் கப்பல் நிறுவனம்	Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company
ஆயுள் நாடுகடத்தல்	Transportation for life
இராஜத்துரோகம்	Sedition
சதி வழக்கு	Conspiracy case

Quick Revision Table

Year / date	Event
7 August 1905	Boycott resolution, Calcutta
16 October 1905	Partition of Bengal
1906	"India" (Bharati)
16 October 1906	Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company
1907	Bipin Chandra Pal in Madras; Surat split

27 February 1908	Coral Mills strike
12 March 1908	Arrest of VOC and Siva
13 March 1908	Tirunelveli Uprising
1908	Bharati to Pondicherry; Newspapers Act
1910	Indian Press Act; Aurobindo and V. V. S. Aiyar at Pondicherry
17 June 1911	Ashe assassination
12 December 1911	Partition annulled

TNPSC Key Points (PYQ-style facts)

- Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company: VOC, Tuticorin, 1906; ships Gallia and Lawoe.
- Coral Mills strike, Tuticorin – 1908.
- Tirunelveli Uprising: 13 March 1908; four killed.
- Bengal leader who lectured in Madras in 1907: Bipin Chandra Pal.
- Bharati's "India": 1906; from Pondicherry after 1908.
- Ashe assassination: 17 June 1911, Maniyachi – Vanchinathan; Bharatha Matha Association – Neelakanta Brahmachari.
- Madras Swadeshi leaders named in the textbook: V. Chakkarai, Ethiraj Surendranath Arya.

Related notes: VOC, Subramania Siva, Vanchinathan, Bharathiyar, Singaravelar.

Frequently Asked Questions

What were the main centres of the Swadeshi Movement in Tamil Nadu?

Madras (Bipin Chandra Pal's 1907 lectures, Bharati's "India", Swadesamitran) and Tuticorin–Tirunelveli (VOC's shipping company, the Coral Mills strike, the 1908 uprising). After 1908, French-ruled Pondicherry became a refuge for nationalists.

Why was the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company important?

Registered by VOC at Tuticorin on 16 October 1906, it ran the ships Gallia and Lawoe on the Tuticorin–Colombo route against a British company's monopoly. It is a rare example of Swadeshi as Indian enterprise rather than boycott alone.

When and why did the Tirunelveli Uprising take place?

After VOC, Subramania Siva and Swadeshi Padmanabha Iyengar were arrested on 12 March 1908, people rose the next day, 13 March 1908. The police station, court and municipal office were burnt, and four people died in police firing.

How is the Ashe assassination linked to the Swadeshi Movement?

After the repression of 1908 some youths turned to secret revolutionary methods. Vanchinathan, of the Bharatha Matha Association organised by Neelakanta Brahmachari, shot Ashe, Acting Collector of

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Tirunelveli, at Maniyachi station on 17 June 1911.

How did Swadeshi in Tamil Nadu differ from Swadeshi in Bengal?

Tamil Nadu was not directly affected by the Partition, but local economic grievances (a shipping monopoly, mill wages) strengthened the movement. The Swadeshi shipping company and the joining of a workers' strike with the national movement were its special features.

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Practice questions

1. On which date did the Partition of Bengal come into force?

A. 16 October 1905
B. 7 August 1905
C. 12 December 1911
D. 16 October 1906

2. Who founded the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company?

A. Subramania Siva
B. V. O. Chidambaranar
C. Bharathiyar
D. V. V. S. Aiyar

3. Which were the ships of the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company?

A. Gallia and Emden
B. Komagata Maru and Lawoe
C. Gallia and Lawoe
D. Victoria and Lawoe

4. On which sea route did the Swadeshi company's ships run?

A. Madras–Rangoon
B. Cochin–Aden
C. Nagapattinam–Penang
D. Tuticorin–Colombo

5. Workers of which mill at Tuticorin struck work in 1908?

A. Coral Mills
B. Buckingham Mill
C. Harvey Mills
D. Binny Mill

6. On which date did the Tirunelveli Uprising take place?

A. 12 March 1908
B. 13 March 1908
C. 17 June 1911
D. 27 February 1908

7. How many were killed in police firing in the Tirunelveli Uprising?

A. Two
B. Ten
C. Four
D. Twenty

8. Which Bengal leader lectured on Swadeshi on the Madras beach in 1907?

A. Aurobindo
B. C. R. Das
C. Surendranath Banerjea
D. Bipin Chandra Pal

9. In which year did the journal "India", edited by Bharati, begin?

A. 1904
B. 1906
C. 1908
D. 1910

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10. Where did Bharati go in 1908 to avoid arrest?

A. Colombo
B. Pondicherry
C. Karaikal
D. Thiruvananthapuram

11. Where was Ashe shot dead?

A. Tirunelveli
B. Tuticorin
C. Maniyachi
D. Kovilpatti

12. On which date was Ashe killed?

A. 13 March 1908
B. 23 July 1925
C. 12 December 1911
D. 17 June 1911

13. Who organised the Bharatha Matha Association?

A. Neelakanta Brahmachari
B. VOC
C. G. Subramania Iyer
D. Ethiraj Surendranath Arya

14. Who was the Tirunelveli Collector who opposed VOC and Siva in 1908?

A. Ashe
B. Wynch
C. Jackson
D. Bannerman

15. In which year was the Partition of Bengal annulled?

A. 1909
B. 1910
C. 1911
D. 1912

16. Whom does the Tamil Nadu textbook name as Swadeshi leaders in Madras?

A. Rajaji and T. S. S. Rajan
B. Satyamurti and Kamaraj
C. Theagaraya Chetty and T. M. Nair
D. V. Chakkarai and Ethiraj Surendranath Arya

17. In which year was the Indian Press Act passed?

A. 1905
B. 1908
C. 1910
D. 1919

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18. Who was arrested with VOC and Siva on 12 March 1908?

A. Vanchinathan
B. Swadeshi Padmanabha Iyengar
C. Neelakanta Brahmachari
D. V. V. S. Aiyar

19. Who started the Swadesamitran?

A. Bharathiyar
B. VOC
C. G. Subramania Iyer
D. Thiru.Vi.Ka.

20. Which statement on Swadeshi in Tamil Nadu is correct?

A. Ashe was killed in the 1908 uprising
B. At Surat VOC backed the Moderates
C. Tamil Nadu was directly affected by the Partition
D. A workers' strike was joined with the national movement

Answers with explanations

1. A) 16 October 1905 – 16 October 1905.

2. B) V. O. Chidambaranar – VOC, at Tuticorin, 1906.

3. C) Gallia and Lawoe – Gallia and Lawoe.

4. D) Tuticorin–Colombo – Tuticorin–Colombo.

5. A) Coral Mills – Coral Mills – from 27 February 1908.

6. B) 13 March 1908 – 13 March 1908 – the day after the arrests.

7. C) Four – Four.

8. D) Bipin Chandra Pal – Bipin Chandra Pal.

9. B) 1906 – 1906; from Pondicherry after 1908.

10. B) Pondicherry – French-ruled Pondicherry.

11. C) Maniyachi – Maniyachi junction – now Vanchi Maniyachi.

12. D) 17 June 1911 – 17 June 1911.

13. A) Neelakanta Brahmachari – Neelakanta Brahmachari.

14. B) Wynch – Wynch; Ashe was the official killed in 1911.

15. C) 1911 – 12 December 1911 – Delhi Durbar.

16. D) V. Chakkarai and Ethiraj Surendranath Arya – V. Chakkarai and Ethiraj Surendranath Arya.

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17. C) 1910 – 1910; the Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act was 1908.

18. B) Swadeshi Padmanabha Iyengar – Swadeshi Padmanabha Iyengar.

19. C) G. Subramania Iyer – G. Subramania Iyer; Bharati worked on it from 1904.

20. D) A workers' strike was joined with the national movement – The Coral Mills strike was joined with the national movement; the rest are wrong.

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