

THEORETICAL AMBIGUITY OF SOCIALIST/MARXIST NATIONALISM IN KERALA: P KRISHNA PILLAI'S TRAJECTORY FROM GANDHIAN NONVIOLENCE TO REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT

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ABSTRACT

Socialists and Marxists in India had no objective theories on nationalism. Their political position during the national movement in India was shaped by the international political milieu. Krishna Pillai's transition from a Congress member to a communist cadre and leader help to understand his changing political perspective on violence and nonviolence. His ambiguous position on Gandhian nonviolence shows the complexity of socialist and communist perceptions of political means in an anti-colonial struggle. Unlike Gandhi, Krishna Pillai upheld peace and justice, not truth and nonviolence, as rightful means in political struggle. He advocated revolutionary spirit in political methods, not necessarily violent means.

Keywords: Socialist Nationalism, P Krishna Pillai, Nonviolence, Violence

INTRODUCTION

P Krishna Pillai was a pioneer of socialist and communist movements in the Indian state of Kerala. He was born in erstwhile Travancore state in 1908. He could not continue his formal education beyond the primary level. He initially worked as a coir worker in Alappuzha. He was an active participant in political and social reform movements across the state of Kerala. He founded and led trade unions and farmers' unions in the state. Since 1930 he has been an active worker of the Congress party (INC) in Kerala. Later he leaned towards socialist politics. He was the Kerala State Secretary of Congress Socialist Party (CSP) and the first Secretary of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in Kerala. He worked as an active cadre and charismatic leader of the Communist Party in Kerala.

MARXISTS IN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Marxists like M N Roy criticized Gandhi's mass movement against the colonial administration as a compromise with imperialismⁱ. They accused the leaders of the Indian National Congress of being the mouthpiece of bourgeoisie interests. Instead, they advocated a revolutionary movement against the imperial regime. Like some Marxists, Krishna Pillai was not a staunch critic of the activities of the Indian National Congress and Gandhi. However, he expressed his disillusionment and apathy toward the political programs of INC while cooperating with them. In a letter titled *To the Congress Workers in Kerala*, written on 9th July 1934, he wrote that Congress (INC) and Gandhi failed to organize people for a national struggleⁱⁱ. He also called congress workers as social and economic conservatives and accused them of appeasing Hindu Mahasabha, Muslim League, and landlords. He doubted that the current approach of the INC would deviate India away from real independence. For Krishna Pillai, Congress's refusal to abolish capitalism is the root cause for this deviation. The compromise with capitalism led Congress and Gandhi away from the masses. Krishna Pillai also distinguished between a Congress of the poor and a Congress of the rich in the late 1930sⁱⁱⁱ. He admitted that Gandhi endorsed mass politics. However, Gandhi was afraid to move with such means in politics, he argued.

To be precise, Krishna Pillai's criticisms of INC were aimed specifically at the traitors within the party (*ancham patthi*) whose actions would benefit only the enemies, i.e. the British. He tried to expose the political intentions of these traitors and vehemently criticized them. P C Joshi, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of India, in his visit to Kerala in 1943, also accused these traitors of propaganda against the Communists^{iv}. Krishna Pillai argued that these traitors who jeopardized the national movement were the actual anti-nationals. They were also responsible for the tussle between the Communists and the Congress workers. It would be a futile exercise to examine Krishna Pillai's opposition to the political programs of the INC without understanding his criticism against the traitors inside the INC itself.

As a leader of socialist and communist parties, Krishna Pillai also wanted political parties, including the Indian National Congress, to address the issues of workers and the poor in factories and farmlands. This economic determinism defined the socialist politics of Krishna Pillai. He declared that politicians who did not strive for economic freedom and economic reforms were not able to carry forward the national struggles against the imperialists. As the central figure of CSP leadership in Kerala, he declared the party's program in which economic freedom was made the chief goal. He believed that political struggles were the only effective means to address the issue of economic exploitation and oppression. In a meeting of the general factory workers union in Trissur in 1939, Krishna Pillai told the workers that catching political power by destroying imperialism should be their most important goal^v. He wanted the Indian National Congress to follow this political program in which economic freedom was declared as its chief goal. This would be possible only if Congress workers address the issues of agricultural and trade union workers. However, Krishna Pillai believed that Congress failed to reach workers and the masses. That is why he called the leadership of INC 'Sunday Congressmen'. For these reasons, Krishna Pillai urged congress people to elect socialist leaders to the state committee of Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC). He also used means like spreading messages through the selling of literary works, social activities, underground political programs and catching the leadership of KPCC to reach the masses.

Being a critic of Congress politics did not prevent Krishna Pillai from associating it with crucial junctures in the national movement. He began his political career in the Indian National Congress and was an active volunteer in its political and social reform programs. His first experience in the social reform movement was during the Vaikom Satyagraha at the age of sixteen. He was an active participant in the Salt Satyagraha at Payyannur in 1930. Being a

Congress worker, he strictly followed Gandhi's instructions in this program of Satyagraha. He refused to surrender the national flag and was brutally beaten and arrested by the police at Calicut during this struggle. He also participated in the KPCC led Guruvayur Satyagraha in 1931.

An ideological divide led to a tussle in KPCC leadership since the 1930s. The revolutionaries under the leadership of Krishna Pillai were in conflict with the Gandhian leaders of KPCC. However, as an obedient Congress worker, he was never hesitant to hail Gandhi as the leader of India's anti-colonial struggles. The disillusionment with the effectiveness of the civil disobedience movement (1930-1934) and inspirations from socialist ideology led to the formation of a new political section in the country. The left wing leaders formed the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) within the organizational framework of INC. The close contact with revolutionaries, success stories of the planned economy in Soviet Russia, the failure of the civil disobedience movement and Nehru's writings on socialism were the reasons for the spread of socialist ideology in India's national movement. The INC leadership believed that this new socialist party was against the nonviolent strategy of Gandhi. The Kerala branch of CSP was founded on 2nd July 1934 in Calicut under Krishna Pillai's leadership^{vi}. Krishna Pillai admitted that members of the party hardly had the scientific knowledge of socialism and Marxism when it was formed as part of the Congress in the state^{vii}. The CSP leadership condemned the All India Congress Committee's (AICC) accusation that the former was against the policy of nonviolence. However, it was true that CSP leadership had vehement objections to Gandhian strategies, especially to moderate politics. The socialists also tried to hold the leadership of KPCC with preplanned strategies.

The Leftists tried to hold the offices in KPCC to spread the socialist principles among cadres and masses. When leftists started to hold offices and pass resolutions rejecting Gandhian political programs, right wing of the party began to resign from their positions. In order to stop the tussle between two groups in KPCC, leftists decided to withdraw from the leadership. They were following a general instruction of the general secretary of CSP Jayaprakash Narayanan to avoid conflicts with INC. As a consequence of this compromise, the right wing came back to the leadership of KPCC. However, the left-right cooperation in the party was short lived. The division between the two groups severed following Subash Chandra Bose assumed leadership of INC. Krishna Pillai found that this division was inimical to the national struggle.

Krishna Pillai stood for the unity of the groups in the KPCC though he led the socialist camp within the party. For him, unity in the organization was the essential precondition for the success in political struggles against the British imperial administration. Congress-League harmony was also an important precondition of Krishna Pillai to support their political programs. He expressed his wish to support Congress-League candidates in the election to the Central Assembly in 1945 on the condition that both INC and League should work in harmony and pass resolutions for socialist policies. He had listed the details of socialist policies for which support of INC and the Muslim League was sought. He also wanted campaigns for Congress-League candidates to approach workers and request them to be members of the trade unions. These might be part of his efforts to strengthen the foundation of the Communist Party as a mass mobilization in Kerala.

As a socialist, Krishna Pillai expressed his ideological difference with Gandhi^{viii}. For instance, socialists had expressed the difference over Gandhi's approach to class unity. However, these ideological disagreements did not hinder them from cooperating with moderates under Gandhi's leadership. They were willing to associate with the political programs of INC to gain complete independence for the country despite the ideological difference with Gandhi and INC. In short, politically, it was hard to identify CSP and INC as different units, though the ideological disagreements have been growing since the formation of the former. Krishna Pillai believed that the political activities of CSP members among the workers, farmers and the poor helped INC to reach the masses. Hence, socialists being part of Congress was also a corrective force from inside. However, he wanted to clarify that INC and CSP are 'political opponents.' Pretending to be political friends despite the ideological differences was not considered an adoptable policy, he argued. He further explained that the political opposition should not hinder the formation of a united front against the common enemy, i.e., imperialism. He alluded to the similar political unity of the Communists and liberals in Spain and China against common enemies. However, he categorically stated that the call for a united front was not the absolute submission of socialists before the political programs and ideologies of the Congress and Gandhi.

The activities of CSP in Kerala gradually led to the secret meetings and formation of CPI in Kerala^{ix}. Krishna Pillai met a communist for the first time and was attracted to the ideology of communism at the Bombay Congress in 1934^x. He also distributed communist pamphlets in the Lucknow Congress of 1936. He became a communist between the Bombay Congress of

1934 and the Lucknow Congress of 1936^{xi}. Krishna Pillai, along with E M S Namboodiripad, met the central committee leaders of CPI in Madras^{xii}. They had close contact and a detailed exchange of views with the CPI leader Sundarayya^{xiii}. Sundarayya also visited Kerala and kept in touch with socialist leaders there. S V Ghate and Sundarayya had important role in the formation of CPI in Kerala^{xiv}. Namboodiriapad, in his autobiography,^{xv} acknowledged that due to the poor family background and prior familiarity with revolutionary methods, Krishna Pillai's journey from Congress Socialism to Communism was easier and faster than that of himself. CSP came under the disciplined organization of the Communist Party in 1937 when a faction of CPI was formed in Kerala^{xvi}. There has been little ideological difference between CPI and CSP since then. The undeclared communists in Kerala strictly followed their central leadership in political activities. Finally, S V Ghate formed the five-member party fraction in Kerala with Krishna Pillai as its secretary at Calicut in 1937^{xvii}. The formation of the state wing of the Communist party in Kerala was publicly declared at Parappuram (Pinarayi) only in 1940^{xviii}. At the Parappuram conference, Kerala CSP converted into the branch of the Communist Party of India in Kerala. However, the political activities of the party had to be restricted to the underground till 1942. Krishna Pillai said that the Communist Party in Kerala stemmed off the Congress party but with different goals and political programs^{xix}. The communists believed that their party was as important and indispensable as INC to fight for complete independence for the country.

Even after the formation of CPI, leftists continued to work with KPCC. And the fight between leftists and Gandhians also continued in KPCC. Following the Morazha incident of 1940, in which Kuttikrishna Menon and one police officer were killed, KPCC, with the left majority, was dissolved by the Congress Working Committee^{xx}. This compelled communists in Kerala to come out of the shell of KPCC. Krishna Pillai was arrested during his underground political activities in 1940^{xxi}. British government lifted the ban on CPI following their support of the anti-fascist front during World War II and reinstated it in 1946 after the call for a labour strike by CPI in Kerala. Krishna Pillai was disappointed by the oppression of the communist workers by the new Congress government in Madras province. He condemned such repressive policy of the police against his fellow party workers and called it the tactics of imperialists.

Krishna Pillai clarified his position on Congress and its politics on 27th June 1943 in Desabhimani^{xxii}. He wrote that he joined INC in 1930 to be part of its strive to gain independence for the country. His intention was relatable to the goal of the Congress party.

Later he felt that means of the party would not help it reach its declared goal. This conviction compelled him to search for other political alternatives. After examining the political programs of various organizations, he found that the Communist Party alone could reach the final goal. He explained that this conviction made him join CPI. The end of the Congress was acceptable for him, but not its means. However, political conditions compelled him to associate with the political programs of Congress despite his disagreements with its means. However, most of the time, he expressed his difference with Congress policies while being part of it. He was also not hesitant to hail the leadership of Congress as the leading figure of the national movement. The leftists' difference with INC was more or less ideological. They tried to unify their interests. Krishna Pillai found no issue in cooperating with the political programs of the Congress and Gandhi and forming a united political front against British colonialism. Nevertheless, his criticism against KPCC was particular. He accused the right-wing leaders of KPCC of being anti-communist. However, he stood for the unity among the political sects in a fight against the common foe – imperialism.

INDEPENDENCE AND IMPERIALISM

Imperialism constituted one of the major determinants of Krishna Pillai's political thoughts on the future nation. He wrote in *Desabhimani* in 1942 about the need to make people in allied countries aware that British policies in India were against their interest^{xxiii}. He found contradictions in the declared policies of allied powers against imperialism and their activities in colonies. Similarly, he analyzed the international milieu which compelled Britain to introduce the Wavell plan in *Desabhimani* weekly on 17th June 1945^{xxiv}. Pressure from the labour party and the communist party in Britain, the Bulabhai-Liaqat agreement and the role of Soviet Russia compelled the British administration in India to introduce the plan. Krishna Pillai urged INC and Muslim League to approve the Wavell plan and help Britain against the Japanese invasion. He believed that these tactics would make India's way to independence easier. He also believed that India's fate in the future was not detachable from the international milieu. This conviction was reflected in his political programs.

In the first conference of Kerala's CSP division, a resolution calling for communication and cooperation with countries oppressed by capitalism and imperialism was passed^{xxv}. However, Krishna Pillai was concerned about party members' lack of information on international

politics and conditions. In a review of the sixth congress of Kerala Congress Socialist Party in 1939 held at Thalasserry, he said that only a few talked and debated K Damodaran's thesis on international conditions^{xxvi}. It came out of a lack of information and preparedness on the topic. He believed that it was difficult to carry out party works without disseminating adequate knowledge about Marxism and international political conditions to cadres.

The perception of communists in India on World War II is important to understand their position on imperialism. In the initial years of war, they tagged it 'imperial war' and agreed with the anti-war position of INC. Krishna Pillai called for mass support for Congress's anti-war position^{xxvii}. However, the German attack on the Soviet Union changed their perception and they started to call it 'people's war.' Leaders like Namboodiripad called for support for the anti-fascist front in the war. As a result, they refused to directly fight with colonial administration and decided to completely detach from the anti-British front in India. Following this, the ban on CPI was lifted by the British administration. Krishna Pillai believed that the approach of CPI to people's war would eventually weaken British imperialism in India. He believed that this political position was accepted by the people in Kerala except Japanese agents, propagandist bureaucrats, and misguided nationalists and congress workers. He also condemned the allegations that communists joined the part of the British government by accepting bribes. Krishna Pillai argued that the present policy of INC against the anti-fascist war would lead India to the hands of Japanese invaders.

The Communist Party was not in favour of the Quit India movement declared by INC. This has caused severe political damage to the nationalist politics of the communist parties in India since then. The Communists thought that their support for the anti-fascist front would help India to achieve freedom. In the Bombay Congress of 1942, communists supported the goal of the national government but expressed their reservations in continuing direct struggle with the colonial administration. In the background of threat of the Japanese attack, communists thought that the political program of INC would be a 'national suicide'^{xxviii}. Communist amendments to August Offer were rejected, and they earned the title of 'anti-nationals' since then. However, Krishna Pillai found this 'anti-national' tag as the outcome of the false allegation. It came out of misconception and propaganda of the anti-communists. He argued that even Gandhi and INC had the same political approach towards World War II. It was also true that communists were also attacked by the British administration during the Quit India movement (Murali, 2009). Krishna Pillai also argued that the pro-war stand of the Communist Party was not

fundamentally in conflict with the political intentions of Gandhi and INC. Krishna Pillai wanted the British government to unconditionally release Gandhi and the fellow Congress leaders and workers who were jailed following the announcement of the Quit India movement. He wrote in *Desabhimani* in 1943 that releasing Gandhi from jail was as equal to getting independence for India^{xxxix}. He also defended Gandhi against the British government's strategy to create turmoil in Indian politics. Krishna Pillai urged to use this political condition to unify political sects against British colonialism. He viewed the mass demand to release Gandhi from jail as a ground for such unity. He wanted INC to rethink its 1942 Bombay resolution and clarify its position against fascism. Krishna Pillai also claimed that the political program of the communists alone qualified to achieve the goal of independence of all sections of people during the war^{xxx}. The unity between the Congress and League was the precondition for such a political move, he argued. He also stated that the political program of his party was not necessarily in conflict with the Congress people, who strive hard to attain complete independence.

The communists celebrated the victory over fascism in 1945. However, they refused to be part of the celebrations of British officials in India. This clarifies their position on the anti-fascist front, though they had a dilemma in supporting the anti-fascist front and fighting against British imperialism in India. In sum, for communists, the question of national security was not detachable from the global fight against fascism but was not ready to compromise with British imperialism at home. Nevertheless, they could not effectively clarify this position to the masses and earned the title of 'anti-nationals.' At the end of the war, Krishna Pillai and others broadened the definition of imperialism so as to include the British administration in India into it.

The absence of a proper Marxist theory on nationalism made the movement for national government amorphous. This, in turn, made the political situation in India unfavourable to Marxists^{xxxi}. The perceptions of CPI on India's independence further worsened the political condition. The call for the 'Telangana Model'^{xxxii} for complete freedom isolated the communists from independent India's politics. "The party's interpretation of the Mountbatten award was cautious. India had not gained full independence. Imperialism and feudalism were too well entrenched for that; and so the party would need to continue its united front policy after the transfer of power"^{xxxiii}. In the popular Calcutta or Ranadive theses of 1948, India's attainment of independence was dismissed as 'chimaera'. Instead, they declared people's democracy through prolonged struggle as their objective^{xxxiv}. The Central Committee of CPI

accepted the Mountbatten plan in June 1947. However, some sections of the party differed with this decision. They stood for the call for unity. There arose a conflict between these two opinions in the second congress of CPI in Calcutta in 1948. Both the political thesis and the report of reformers were approved by the party. The political thesis of Calcutta stated that the power shifting from colonial administration was not the real victory of the people in India. They considered the submission of national leadership as an act of treachery. It was also considered as a strategy to defeat the revolutionary activities in India. They called for people's democracy instead of national democracy in India. They believed that only an alliance of workers, farmers, and the lower class could only gain real freedom for India. Hence, they declared to continue the revolution against the new government and wanted to expel the Nehru government^{xxxv}. Although Krishna Pillai was elected to the Central Committee of CPI, he didn't attend the Calcutta conference in 1948. Communists in Kerala also had expressed no objections to the new party line. However, they declared no political struggle against the new government. Krishna Pillai continued the clandestine activities to uphold the new political lines of the party. CPI was again banned after the Calcutta thesis but continued the clandestine political activities and had a severe conflict with the new government.

Krishna Pillai's instruction about the participation of members of the Communist Party in the celebrations of India's independence in 1947 exposed his perception towards India's independence. He instructed in *Desabhimani* on 13th August 1947 that members of the party might participate in all Independence Day celebrations. Krishna Pillai himself led celebrations at Calicut^{xxxvi}. However, he warned his fellow party workers about the possibility of suppression by the new government. There were changes in the strategies of the party following independence. He taught the cadres new ways of working in the changing political environment. For instance, Krishna Pillai told his comrade Kunhi Kannan to stop using weapons in the new political scenario^{xxxvii}. This shift in political means was a hint on his slight affinity to the government in independent India despite bindingness to the party's declared goal. Moreover, it was true that communists like Krishna Pillai were not satisfied with the condition of the country even after independence. They criticized the new Congress governments for deviating from their own commitment to democracy. Krishna Pillai asked his fellow party members to correct the Congress by constantly reminding them of their commitments to democracy. He accused the Congress government in independent India of deviating from the spirit of freedom and democracy^{xxxviii}. In sum, Krishna Pillai believed that

India needed to go further to enjoy the fruits of real independence. The goal of people's democracy was attainable only when the issue of economic exploitation was addressed as part of the political struggle. This was not yet attained by the new Congress governments in India. He wanted to adopt a slightly different approach to native government. However, he had no clarity on the nature of the future struggle against the independent government though he continued to work on party lines. This confusion arose out of the conflict between the party's declared strategy and the position of Krishna Pillai as an active cadre among the masses.

VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL ACTION

Younger and impatient volunteers of the Indian National Congress during the civil disobedience movement were disillusioned with Gandhian methods^{xxxix}. Krishna Pillai was dissatisfied with Gandhi and his policy of nonviolence which could not save Bhagat Singh and other revolutionaries from being hanged to death^{xl}. He once said that his goal, i.e., independence of the country, was relatable with INC but not with its means^{xli}. Leaders like P Krishna Pillai had political education on revolutionary methods from the leaders from the northern part of India in jail, especially from the close association with the members of Anusilan Samiti^{xlii}. Later he became a member of Anusilan Samiti of Bengal^{xliii}. However, the activities of Anusilan Samiti were short lived in Kerala. Members like Krishna Pillai were attracted to communism and had little interest in extremist strategies in politics. Krishna Pillai also had contact with revolutionaries in Kannur jail in 1932^{xliv}. Even before this, he was familiarized with revolutionary writings and activities during his early life in Allahabad^{xlv}. He was moved by the revolutionary spirit since then. In order to fight the British colonial administration directly, he moved from his native place of Travancore, a princely state, and chose Malabar, which was part of the British province of Madras, as his stage of political action. The urge to reject moderate politics was visible from his activities in KPCC.

The Left wing within the KPCC started questioning Gandhi's strategy of nonviolence in the early 1930s. For instance, when KPCC president K Kelappan introduced a resolution condemning the murder of Governor Sir Ernest Huston and Garlic Dware on 2nd August 1931; Krishna Pillai objected to it^{xlvi}. He was dissatisfied with Gandhian leaders' oblivious objection to revolutionary methods. He was disillusioned by the moderate politics of the Indian National Congress. However, while being part of it, he refused to openly criticize it. He once said that

it was unfortunate that Congress was not led by adequate revolutionary means^{xlvii}. Nevertheless, rebuking the leadership of the Congress was not the way to correct it, he believed. During the struggle for responsible government in Travancore, Krishna Pillai upheld the nonviolent means of Gandhi as a method of mass politics^{xlviii}. He defended Gandhi in a controversy following the failure of the movement for responsible government by the State Congress. In sum, Krishna Pillai's position on Gandhi's political programs was ambiguous, though he was disillusioned by the absolute nonviolent methods in politics. He never rejected Gandhi's nonviolence completely.

Krishna Pillai always showed a revolutionary spirit, even when he was part of the Gandhian program of Satyagraha. During the Guruvayur Satyagraha for temple entry of lower caste Hindus, on 22nd December 1931, he entered the temple and rang the bell, which was not permitted for non-Brahmins^{xlix}. He repeated this for the next two days. Each time he was beaten by the Nair guards in the temple. Being a nonviolent satyagrahi, he passively received physical suppression. His intention was to deconstruct the Brahmin claim that any non-Brahmin ringing the temple bell would immediately collapse. Krishna Pillai urged the Nair caste to rethink about their own status inside the temple as protectors of God. This incident alludes to the ambiguous mix of revolutionary spirit and bindingness to the Gandhian principles in Krishna Pillai while he was part of the nonviolent programs of Congress.

Krishna Pillai had allegiance to Gandhian methods when he was an active volunteer in the social and political programs of KPCC. However, his biographers like Murali^l quoted other satyagrahis in Guruvayur who revealed that Krishna Pillai physically fought with temple guards following the brutal attack on A K Gopalan on 28th December 1931^{li}. The fight between leftists and rightists over the means of political struggles became more apparent in KPCC in 1934. The leftists in the party wanted the means of political struggle to be peaceful and justifiable. For them, Gandhi's suggestion that political means should be strictly truthful and nonviolent was unacceptable. Leftists succeeded in passing this restated resolution in KPCC^{lii}. Similarly, the second conference of CSP also passed resolutions against the will of Gandhi and INC despite its functioning within the organizational framework of Congress. The INC leadership believed that this new socialist party was against the nonviolent strategy of Gandhi. Kerala branch of CSP condemned the All India Congress Committee's (AICC) accusation that CSP was against the policy of nonviolence. However, it was true that CSP leadership had

vehement objections to Gandhian strategies. Moreover, this ideological objection was not a sufficient reason to non-cooperate with the political programs of INC.

Krishna Pillai, E M S Namboodiripad and other members of the Communist party secretly supported the Youth League's struggle against Sir C P Ramaswami of Travancore^{liii}. Krishna Pillai also formed a secret committee to support the responsible rule movement in Travancore against the wish of Gandhi to withdraw the allegation against Sir C P Ramaswami. He supported the formation of a 'radical group' within the state congress in 1939. He advised that their activities should not weaken the State Congress^{liv}. He also publicly hailed radicals as a revolutionary wing of the State Congress and their preaching of revolutionary spirit among people in the princely state of Travancore^{lv}. He wrote in Prabhatham on 17th July 1939 that the formation of 'radical group' in Travancore was a welcome step^{lvi}. He believed that this revolutionary spirit could lead the movement for responsible rule in Travancore further amidst the oppression by the state. He wanted the revolutionary spirit to lead the political struggles as well as the trade union activities.

Krishna Pillai was at the forefront in inculcating the revolutionary spirit in labour unions in Travancore, which was hitherto worked through the methods of pray and petition. He tried to create a class consciousness, conducted study classes and spread the socialist principles among the workers. His own experience as a worker in a coir factory in Alappuzha helped him to identify and address the core issues in the factories. He believed that the labour strike was the only means to end the inferior condition of factory workers in Travancore. He actively worked as a cadre to organize and mobilize the workers. His intention was to liberate trade unions from moderate leadership and inculcate revolutionary spirit among the workers. In a message to workers in Alappuzha, Krishna Pillai said that the poor condition of labourers was the result of strictly limiting political programs within legal frameworks by the peace mongers^{lvii}. Instead, he wanted his union members in the factories to expose each case of violence, brutality and exploitation of capitalists and the police and warn them of the consequences of labour strikes. In 1938, workers started a strike in Alappuzha and were suppressed by the police firing and brutalities. Krishna Pillai's political activities helped leaders of trade unions to complement economic demands with political agitations. It was believed that Krishna Pillai had led underground leadership to help the workers during the Alappuzha labour strike^{lviii}. This is how Krishna Pillai spread and popularized his alternative to Gandhian methods of politics. He tried

to emulate this experience in the political struggles too. The revolutionary activities were counted as significant chapters in his accounts of political history.

Krishna Pillai cherished the valour and spirit of revolutionaries and their contributions to the Indian national movement. In an article titled *Study Class*, published in the newspaper Prabhatham on 20th May 1938, he argued that it was revolutionaries that stood for complete independence even before the Indian National Congress declared its goal of *purna swaraj*^{lix}. He defended their revolutionary activities as the natural outcome of disillusionment with the political programs of moderates in the early phase of the national movement. He further argued that revolutionaries reformed their strategies with the growth of the mass political movement against imperialism in India. Hence, he found that it was inappropriate to criticize the radical activities of the revolutionaries in the past from the perspective of present politics, in which anti-colonial politics became more active and valorous. The clandestine activities of the extremists in the early phase of the national movement were incomplete strive for independence but an inspiring phase for patriots^{lx}. He tried to equate the service and self-sacrifice of the extremists with that of moderate politicians in the Congress Party without overtly mentioning the latter^{lxi}. The silent revolution of extremists was a lesson of sacrifice and service to the nation, he argued. In that sense, the history of extremism in India needs to be studied carefully. For Krishna Pillai, their life stories and political activities are important to understand the valour, sacrifice and service in a national struggle. He also argued that radical politics started to disappear with the growth of socialism and mass politics in India.

Martyrdom is also an important category to understand the communist movement in India. Krishna Pillai cherished the spirit of martyrdom and sacrifice of life in the struggle against imperialism. He met fellow comrades in Kayyur who were sentenced to death in jail. In an exchange with them, Krishna Pillai told them that communists should not fear death in their commitment to duty and should not mourn over their comrades who sacrificed their life in this struggle against imperialism^{lxii}. He wrote about their courage and indomitable will in the journey to martyrdom^{lxiii}. He also stressed the importance of supporting the families of martyrs. He, along with P C Joshi visited the families of Kayyur martyrs. Like the idea of martyrdom and sacrifice, self-defense is an important category to examine one's perception of violence and nonviolence.

The communist Krishna Pillai did not hesitate to threaten his opponents publicly. Masculine courage characterized his underground political activities. He also urged his followers to use

physical force against opponents who beat them during the 1946 election to the Assembly^{lxiv}. He threatened to use physical force on those who tried to attack labourers striking at the Amaron mill in 1946. Krishna Pillai had to suffer a lethal attack by goondas of the mill owner^{lxv}. On the other hand, he warned his followers not to revenge and not to resort to the policy of attack first. He also advised against the disruption of the political activities of others. If any party members were involved in such activities, they would cease to be communists, he warned^{lxvi}. However, he found no issues in using violent means against a repressive state for the purpose of self-defense. He believed that people have all rights to use arms for 'self-defense'^{lxvii}. In sum, he suggested violence as a measure of self-defense. Krishna Pillai himself resorted to violence and threat of violence to defend himself against the opponents who used physical force on him. However, he did not explicitly suggest retaliatory violence and provocation of violence by disrupting political activities. He had no abstract theories on violence. The position of communists on armed struggle against opponents is also a debatable issue.

The Communists in India had no issues in resorting to armed struggles against the colonial administration. Krishna Pillai also led the camps to train party workers about using armaments. He recruited cadres from Kerala to training camps in Bombay and conducted similar secret camps in Kerala^{lxviii}. The cadres were provided training in capturing and using weapons. The political and physical training went in parallel in his camps. He also wanted young people to enter into military services and get trained in the use of weapons. He also sent party members to military services to spread communism in it and to work as spies for the party^{lxix}. Those who relived from the military services had trained volunteers and party workers in these camps. They were taught to attack opponents with anything. They were also trained to escape from bullets and capture and use guns^{lxx}. These historical evidences suggest Krishna Pillai's position on violence and the use of arms.

Participation of Krishna Pillai in the armed struggle against the British in Kerala continues to be a debatable issue. It is argued that he had secretly led the armed movements in Kerala. However, it is true that he had engaged with workers and had a significant role in training them for armed struggle. What was his role in these violent struggles? He was responsible for inculcating class consciousness among labourers in Travancore. He also led the labour strike in 1938. He had done clandestine works in assisting workers in Cherthala and Alappuzha for violent struggles against the State^{lxxi}. He secretly visited these places during the Punnapra-

Vayalar uprising in 1946. Krishna Pillai being the secretary of the Communist Party in Kerala was regularly informed at each stage of the labour strikes in the state. He also worked as a channel between the workers and the central leadership of the party^{lxxii}. He staunchly criticized the atrocities of police in Punnapra-Vayalar in his writings in Desabhimani weekly. E M S Namboodiripad also acknowledged the leading role of Krishna Pillai as a moving force behind the Punnapra-Vayalar uprising. In sum, Krishna Pillai's perception of violence and nonviolence reformed with his shift from a Congress worker to a Communist cadre. He had carried a revolutionary spirit in both his nonviolent and violent struggles. It was immanent in his political.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Krishna Pillai's transition from a Congress member to a communist cadre and leader help to understand his changing political perspective on violence and nonviolence. His ambiguous position on Gandhian nonviolence shows the complexity of socialist and communist perceptions of political means in an anti-colonial struggle. For Krishna Pillai, complete rejection of nonviolence was as disastrous as a complete rejection of violent means. He upheld peace and justice, not truth and nonviolence, as rightful means in political struggle. He called for adequate revolutionary spirit in political methods, if not violent means. This revolutionary spirit was immanent in his political struggles, no matter violent or nonviolent.

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ENDNOTES

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- ⁱ Sarkar, 1990
- ⁱⁱ Krishna Pillai, 1989, pp. 8-11
- ⁱⁱⁱ Nossiter, 1982, p. 70
- ^{iv} Krishna Pillai, 1998, p. 257
- ^v Ibid p. 437
- ^{vi} Murali, 2009, p. 115
- ^{vii} Krishna Pillai, 1998, p. 193
- ^{viii} Ibid p. 197
- ^{ix} Namboodiripad, 1995
- ^x Krishna Pillai, 1998, p. 266
- ^{xi} Murali, 2009, pp. 551-552
- ^{xii} Ibid p. 553
- ^{xiii} Namboodiripad, 1995; Nossiter, 1982
- ^{xiv} Namboodiripad, 1995
- ^{xv} Ibid
- ^{xvi} Nossiter, 1982
- ^{xvii} Ibid
- ^{xviii} T V K, 2007
- ^{xix} Krishna Pillai, 1998, pp. 275-276
- ^{xx} Murali, 2009, p. 597
- ^{xxi} Ibid p. 603
- ^{xxii} Krishna Pillai, 1998, p. 265
- ^{xxiii} Krishna Pillai, 1989, pp. 21-22
- ^{xxiv} Ibid pp. 56-57

xxv Murali, 2009, p. 123
xxvi Krishna Pillai, 1998, p. 210
xxvii Ibid pp. 81-83
xxviii Ibid pp. 231-232
xxix Ibid p. 120
xxx Ibid p. 250
xxxi Sarkar, 1990
xxxii Namboodiripad, 1995
xxxiii Nossiter, 1982, p. 87
xxxiv Ibid
xxxv Murali, 2009
xxxvi Ibid p. 950
xxxvii Ibid p. 952
xxxviii Krishna Pillai, 1998, p. 349
xxxix Nossiter, 1982
xl Murali, 2009
xli Ibid p. 555
xlii Bhaskaran, 2006
xliiii Murali, 2009, p. 101
xliv Ibid p. 83
xlv Ibid p. 28
xlvi Ibid pp. 63-64
xlvii Krishna Pillai, 1998, p. 28
xlviii Ibid p. 41
xlix Murali, 2009, p. 70
l Ibid
li Ibid p. 75
lii Ibid pp. 126-127
liii Ibid p. 465
liv Ibid p. 488
lv Ibid p. 491
lvi Krishna Pillai, 1998, p. 78
lvii Ibid p. 423
lviii Murali, 2009
lix Krishna Pillai, 1998, pp. 21-24
lx Ibid pp. 582-583
lxi Ibid pp. 594-595
lxii Murali, 2009, p. 668
lxiii Krishna Pillai, 1998, p. 258
lxiv Murali, 2009, pp. 769-770
lxv Ibid p. 841
lxvi Ibid p. 770
lxvii Krishna Pillai, 1998, p. 426
lxviii Murali, 2009, p. 693
lix Ibid p. 696
lxx Ibid p. 876
lxxi Murali, 2009
lxxii Ibid