

AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT OF P.KRISHNA PILLAI FROM KERALA

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ABSTRACT

The main character (Comrade) Krishna Pillai might be viewed as an amalgamation of a number of communist figures renowned for their political integrity and altruism, including P.Krishna Pillai. One of the original members of the Communist Party in Kerala, P.Krishna Pillai, also known only as Sakhavu (comrade), is frequently seen as the model for a communist leader. The division of labour had not yet enslaved the heroes of that era, whose successors frequently exhibit its limiting traits and tendency to produce one-sidedness. But what sets them apart from ordinary people is that practically all of them carry out their activities and live in the midst of current movements and struggles; they choose sides and join the battle, some using words and writing, others using a sword, and many using both. Due to their strength and richness of character, they are complete men.

1. INTRODUCTION

E.M.S. Namboodiripad and A.K. Gopalan are Kerala's best-known communists. When the dust settles, you'll see another person near the icons. This man was a remarkable organiser and selfless crusader who, along with "EMS" and "AKG," formed the communist movement in the State and unified its leadership.

P. Krishna Pillai was called "Kerala's first communist" He was a native of the state, impishly daring and sensitive to injustice, and a product of the 42-year-old movement he helped build. Since the 1930s, no other leader in Kerala was as effective in organising the masses, identifying talent, and shaping the cadre and their dedication. Krishna Pillai, known for his bravery, dynamism, humanity, and unyielding struggle against exploitation and tyranny, died from a snake bite on August 19, 1948. Krishna Pillai was tasked with travelling the state "to meet comrades individually" and uniting the party, EMS reported. Krishna Pillai was CPI's "itinerant centre" if EMS was its "intellectual centre."

Krishna Pillai joined the Indian National Congress as a Gandhian and afterwards a Congress Socialist, like other Left movement pioneers. Krishna Pillai began his political career in the 1930s amid anti-British radicalism in north India. P. Sundarayya, a communist leader and Telengana armed struggle veteran, recruited him as one of the first members of the "illegal" CPI, and he became a lifelong communist.

His first act of defiance, when Congress officers disobeyed a salt prohibition on the Malabar beaches, brought him to prominence. Krishna Pillai, in his early 20s, suffered the British police's blows while keeping the tricolour. He was the first non-Brahmin to ring the Guruvayoor temple's holy bell after being released from prison in September 1931. He joined the Congress campaign on behalf of the four fifths of Hindus who were denied temple access. Eyewitnesses that Krishna Pillai kept ringing the bell and yelling, "Let the bold Nair ring the bell and let the fearful Nair living on crumbs beat on his back" as he was hit.

Such events sparked a radical movement that rapidly swept throughout Kerala, unleashing the populace's democratic inclinations, altering the exploitative agrarian system, opposing caste discrimination, and uniting people from all backgrounds in the battle for freedom.

2. HISTORY OF KRISHNA PILAI

Due to poverty and the early death of his parents, KRISHNA PILLAI was reared by himself. He was born to a Nair family in Vaikom, Travancore, in 1906. (now south Kerala). He earned odd jobs before seeing India. He studied Hindi and received a degree. He spent two years in Allahabad in the late 1920s, when revolutionary terrorists, communists, and militant union leaders were looking for new tactics to confront the British because of the October Revolution in Russia and the first open CPI congress in India (Kanpur, 1925).

3. POLITICAL LIFE

Krishna Pillai, who joined the Indian National Congress in his early years as a Gandhian and supporter, gradually evolved into a socialist with communist leanings. Krishna Pillai was named the party's secretary in Kerala when Congress Socialist Party members founded it in Bombay in 1934, all the while operating under the Indian National Congress's banner.

Krishna Pillai, who had previously restricted his political activities to the Malabar region, began running for office in Cochin and Travancore by 1936. He led the well-known workers' strike in Alappuzha (Alleppey) in 1938, which was a great success and served as inspiration for the Punnapra-Vayalar Struggle of 1946 and the eventual overthrow of C. P. Ramaswami Iyer's rule in Travancore.

Krishna Pillai's tireless efforts were a major factor in the Malabar branch of the Congress Socialist Party's successful transformation into the Kerala branch of the Communist Party of India (CPI). The Kerala CPI unit was formally established on January 26, 1940. Years later, in 1948, when the CPI adopted the Calcutta Thesis, which explicitly called for engaging in military conflict with the Indian government, the organisation was subject to a national ban, and most of its leaders—including Krishna Pillai—were sent into exile.

He had developed into a proficient speaker and prolific writer in Hindi by the time he got home, and he had also picked up a working grasp of English. As part of the first Civil Disobedience Movement, Krishna Pillai quit his work as a Hindi pracharak earning Rs. 30 per month and signed up to participate as a volunteer in the "Salt Satyagraha March" from Kozhikode to Payyannur (in today's Kannur district). Soon he was leading the early communist organisers in Malabar and was the adored leader of hundreds of young volunteers.

However, Malabar's peasants and labourers lacked enthusiasm for the Civil Disobedience Movement, and the lower castes gave it little support. Given that the Congress was still an exclusive entity, it didn't give anything to them. However, Kerala at the time, particularly the Malabar region under British administration, was a hotbed of severe caste, class, and agrarian distinctions, as well as illiteracy and poverty that were made worse by the effects of the Great Depression. For the 'crime' of participating in the Salt Satyagraha, Krishna Pillai was imprisoned at Kannur, and while there, he frequently engaged in conversations with other prisoners about tactics for enlisting the general public in the independence cause. In 1931, Krishna Pillai asked a prisoner who had just been freed from custody to discern between the "Congress of the poor" and the "Congress of the affluent" and to work for the peasants if he belonged to the former.

By the time the Congress made the decision to picket the Guruvayoor temple in September 1931, Krishna Pillai had already established himself as "the famous man from southern Travancore," a valiant leader who broke the mould by confronting the hated British, comforting atrocity victims at the risk of his life, and mocking satyagrahis who chanted Gandhian mantras for freedom. Such tenacity was uncommon in landlord-ruled Malabar and

gave the campaign a much-needed boost. Gandhiji departed from the struggle, though, when it was at its height.

4. ORGANISATION OF AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

With the growth of trade unionism among the factory labourers, the agricultural workers too felt the necessity of an organisation. Towards the close of 1942 the Communist leaders engaged themselves in organising the agriculturists throughout Travancore. They entrusted the work of formation of kisan sabhas (Peasant Unions) to C. S. Gopala Pillai, a veteran Communist. The Communist leaders of Malabar took special interest in the organisation work. They circulated at Alleppey the printed leaflets in Malayalam, published solely for the agriculturists of Kerala, which portrayed their difficulties. In order to secure the co-operation of the agricultural workers, they conducted study classes and vehemently attacked the food policy of the Government. The organising committee of the All-Kerala Kisan Sangham called upon the riots of Travancore to join the kisan sabha for safeguarding their rights. As a result several Karshaka Thozhilali Sanghams (Agricultural Workers' Unions) came into being at different places. In June 1943 they opened an office of the All-India Kisan Sangham at Koothattukulam in central Travancore and enlisted into its service a large number of volunteers.

The leaders of different parties now felt the necessity of creating a common organisation for the agriculturists of Travancore. Accordingly, on 16 September 1944 they, in the presence of the delegates sent by the Communist Party, the State Congress and the labour unions, inaugurated an All-Travancore Agricultural Union at Poonjar in central Travancore. K. Sanku Pillai was elected as the president, C. Kesavan, P. T. Chacko and K. K. Chellappan Pillai as vice-Presidents, C. S. Gopala Pillai as secretary and K.R. Elankath as treasurer. Though it was organised with the active co-operation of the State Congress, this Agricultural Union too passed under the control of the Communists. Organising them into a strong union the Communists instilled revolutionary ideas. In consequence disputes between the agricultural workers and their employers for fixing wage rates, working hours, etc., assumed violent overtones in the agricultural areas particularly Kuttanad.

5. JEEVAT SAHITYA

Damodaran's groundbreaking drama addressed landlords and tenants' class struggle. Changampuzha Krishna Pillai's "The Bunch of Bananas" was the first narrative poem on the same theme (Vazhakkula). Kerala's social and political scene changed as VT's social classic gave way to Damodaran's class conflict tale. In the decade from 1929 to 1939, Kerala's modern borders were set. 1937 is the fulcrum of this volatile decade. Rajagopalachari founded the Congress Ministry in the Presidency under the 1935 Government of India Act, giving the northern half of Kerala a taste of democracy in 1937 (unlike Kochi and Travancore in the south). In the same year, P. Krishna Pillai, EMS Namboodiripad, N.C. Shekhar, and K. Damodaran founded the Communist Party of India. Travancore State gave so-called untouchable castes access to all Hindu temples a year before launching a campaign for representative government the following year.

To crown these major events, the Purogamana Sahitya Sanghom (Progressive Writers Association, PWA) was created in 1937. Famous Hindi author Prem Chand's 1936 Lucknow convention inspired this. EMS, K. Damodaran, A. Madhavan, K.P.G. Namboodiri, and K.A. Damodara Menon led the effort. EMS led the group's Thrissur meeting ideologically. He published the movement's founding manifesto, "Jeevat Sahityavum Soundarya Bodhavum," in the Mathrubhumi weekly on July 19, 1937. EMS refuted the criticism that progressive literature devalued beauty. This was the first attempt to analyse Malayalam literature and art using social, historical, and Marxist criteria. The PWA's founding and EMS's essay in 1937 sparked a 60-year literary and artistic boom in Malayalam.

When Jeevat Sahitya debuted in 1937, its founders and conventional writers debated whether art is for art's sake or social progress. EMS analyses these events and their aftermath thusly. In Jeevat Sahitya, the characters argue that literature shouldn't focus on societal advancement. They said anti-imperialism, anti-feudalism, and socialism should drive social progress. Opponents objected. "Those who founded Jeevat Sahitya Action were tied to left-wing politics, peasant and working-class organisations, including those who participated in the 1930s civil disobedience campaign. In 1943 and 1944, several famous authors joined the movement and embraced "writing for social change" with "defined social purposes." Left-wing political militants and others joined the burgeoning Progressive Writers Movement. At EMS's suggestion, the organization's name was changed to the Progressive Writers Association in 1944. "By this point, the "Art for Art's Sake" dispute had subsided. Disagreements arose while defining social progress. These gaps grew when the British left India and Congress assumed control. Malayalam Literature and Marxism

Krishna Pillai became disenchanted with Gandhian approaches and became convinced that independence cannot be accomplished without including the aspirations of Kerala's downtrodden people. Krishna Pillai and his fellow militants travelled around Kerala organising secret political meetings, protests, youth conferences, and organising labour unions and peasant organisations, while a segment of Congress officials limited their actions to the uplift of "Harijans" (Dalits). Between 1934 and 1939, about 80 industry-specific local trade unions were formed in Kerala's metropolitan areas. An all-Kerala union body and two central unions in Kozhikode and Kannur were also formed. Krishna Pillai, a lively leader, established factory committees in each enterprise to negotiate workers' rights. EMS says Krishna Pillai helped pull down the elitism that had been deeply established in Kerala politics and pave the path for a common leadership, especially among the working people and peasants.

Krishna Pillai sowed the seeds for similar conflicts in northern Malabar a decade before Punnapra-Vayalar, which brought responsible administration to Travancore. Krishna Pillai's effective and researched leadership helped peasants defeat their oppressors' machinations. He and his friends recruited full-time Congress cadre.

Krishna Pillai and his Left-leaning party companions had big aspirations for these activities. Large-scale peasant protests would turn landlessness, debt, and caste oppression into a popular movement, and the spontaneous expression of brotherhood and comradeship would help dismantle caste and class barriers. These battles provided perfect training for cause leaders. Nearly all union leaders who joined the CPI trained during these wars. Krishna Pillai, who never claimed to grasp Marxism well, helped them become decent communists.

By 1935, left-leaning Congress workers had established committees in almost every hamlet in Malabar, supported by a core of volunteers, peasants, and labour unions. "Local activists organised study groups and trained illiterates to read communist books and flyers" Krishna Pillai's tireless organising boosted Congress membership from 800 in 1930 to 70,000 in 1937–1938.

When the all-India congress of Congress Socialist workers (Bombay, 1934) created the CSP, EMS was named one of its general secretaries and Krishna Pillai its Kerala secretary. The CSP rose to prominence within the Congress organisation in Kerala after winning six of nine KPCC seats and five of eight All India Congress Committee seats for Kerala (AICC). The Krishna Pillai-led CSP pushed through Left-leaning resolutions at the KPCC congress in October 1934.

Travancore's first State Congress was held four years after CSP's formation. CSP and Krishna Pillai fought for accountable government. This battle included the famous Alappuzha strike. During Krishna Pillai's four-week strike, the Dewan terrorised dissident workers. It allowed Travancore's working class to unite and bargain. The movement inspired the

Punnapra-Vayalar military struggle, which took place eight years later and led to Travancore's independence. Krishna Pillai emerged as a mass leader.

In the five years between the CSP's inception in 1934 and its metamorphosis into the CPI throughout 1939, Leftists controlled the KPCC, and leaders like Krishna Pillai could coordinate mass struggles in Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar. Peasants, workers, educators, students, young people, and women formed separate class organisations and coordinated uprisings against capitalism and the landed gentry. In Kerala, the working class's solidarity took on new meaning, and its leaders connected all of these struggles to their cause and the liberation campaign. EMS' memoirs say Sundarayya inspired him and Krishna Pillai to become communists.

Krishna Pillai and the little Communist League in Thiruvananthapuram met often in 1934 to coordinate their operations. His Marxism wasn't obvious yet. Krishna Pillai distributed communist literature at the 1935 Lucknow Congress. Krishna Pillai raised the communist flag at the 1937 All India Labour Conference in Thrissur after EMS' home was searched. Kerala's CPI was founded in 1937. In light of the ban, the party decided EMS and Krishna Pillai should remain Congress and CSP members and recruit CPI cadres discreetly. They were to hold a cadre gathering and proclaim the party unit's establishment.

Krishna Pillai was more emotionally committed in communism than EMS, according to his memoirs. Krishna Pillai had a better emotional connection to "the spirit of the communist struggle" than he did, he said. Krishna Pillai's low-income childhood and early departure from home to find work helped him understand working-class desires and aims. Krishna Pillai's contact to north Indian revolutionaries helped him "understand that Gandhi and Nehru were bourgeois leaders" (who were not all communists). Krishna Pillai, in contrast, was at conflict with rightist Congress leaders in the State Congress and fought for workers' rights. EMS says Krishna Pillai's experience with communism was easier than his.

The CPI opposed World War II. The CSP protested by sending government anti-war postcards. The 1939 semi-legal convention of 90 important CSP militants at Pinarayi, near Thallassery in Malabar, decided to transform the Kerala chapter of the CSP into the CPI. Three months later, the party declared its founding "with tarred sentences on buildings, culverts, and government offices." Krishna Pillai transformed the CSP into the CPI in Kerala. "The Kerala unit of the party joined the communists in 1939, and the CSP leadership went to Gandhi's side," he said. "That was the only efficient way to fulfil one's socialist and revolutionary duties," he said. Krishna Pillai went into hiding to secretly organise the party. When he returned to Vaikom in December 1940, the police were waiting. He was taken to Kanyakumari's Edalakudi sub-jail (near Suchendram in Tamil Nadu).

A sweet romance began. Krishna Pillai made friends with a guard in prison and begged for help collecting Hindi books from a passing schoolgirl. When books were returned, shreds of paper were slipped inside. Name? Hindi-scrawled notes were demanded. Krishna Pillai began writing the terrified girl political notes when she said "Thankamma." Thankamma was perplexed, but she was clearly joining the celebration.

When Thankamma covertly translated Krishna Pillai's Hindi texts into Malayalam and passed them to CPI members, the friendship developed. She became an instructor to pay the jail guard. She met her mystery man when he was carried outdoors to bathe. Then Krishna Pillai proposed, warning, "Life with me will be tough, strange." My wife should support me and the party's goals. She'll be happy then. After his release in July 1942, they married. After the party, Krishna Pillai fell for Thankamma.

Krishna Pillai was elected State Secretary at the first all-Kerala CPI congress in Kozhikode. He led the party during a time of extraordinary complexity, marked by ideological differences and a local organisational crisis. Krishna Pillai dissolved the State committee as party secretary. The CPI rejected the candidate.

After the CPI's second conference in March 1948 approved the "Calcutta Thesis" as its new policy, party members like Krishna Pillai were again driven into hiding. This thesis advocates for armed conflict with India. He became a martyr in free India when he was obliged to lead the party discreetly.

Krishna Pillai was bitten by a snake near Kannarkat (Muhamma), Alappuzha, on August 19, 1948. Krishna Pillai died 30 minutes after the incident, despite the efforts of those who sheltered him and party members who ensured his safety. Because officials were looking for him to be detained, he had trouble getting the greatest medical care. Later, stunned followers walked and drove his body for hours to Kollam and Alappuzha.

While composing a speech for the CPI State committee, a snake bit Krishna Pillai. There's criticism, but no self-criticism, he wrote as if addressing the group. Before dying, he scribbled on the same paper, "My eyes are getting dark." I'm weakened. I understand. Go, brothers! Salutations."

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