



Revolutionary activities of Chempakaraman Pillai

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Abstract

Chempakaraman Pillai was one of the most dynamic and internationally active Indian revolutionaries of the early twentieth century, whose contributions to India's freedom struggle extended far beyond the subcontinent. His involvement with the Berlin Committee, the Ghadar Party, and the Hindu-German Conspiracy highlights his role in forging global alliances against British imperialism during World War I. Pillai played a crucial role in organizing revolutionary activities in Europe, establishing the Indian National Volunteer Corps, and contributing to the Provisional Government of India in Kabul as its Foreign Minister. He was also a pioneer in promoting nationalist consciousness through publications such as Pro-India and Hindostan. Despite initial German support, shifting political interests and the rise of Nazism led to persecution and personal suffering for Pillai. His interactions with prominent Indian leaders, especially Subhas Chandra Bose, significantly influenced later revolutionary movements, including the formation of the Indian National Army. Chempakaraman Pillai's life and work underscore the importance of overseas revolutionary networks in sustaining India's struggle for independence and bridging the gap between militant nationalism and mainstream political leadership.

Keywords: Chempakaraman pillai, indian revolutionary movement, berlin committee, ghadar party, hindu-german conspiracy, indian national volunteer corps, provisional government of india, subhas chandra bose, indian national army, overseas indian nationalism, anti-british struggle, world war i

Introduction

Chempakaraman Pillai was one of the most remarkable yet lesser-known revolutionaries of India's freedom struggle, whose activities extended far beyond the borders of the subcontinent. At a time when British imperial power seemed unassailable, Pillai carried the fight for India's independence onto the global stage, particularly in Europe and West Asia. Through his involvement with the Berlin Committee, the Ghadar movement, and various international revolutionary networks, he sought to mobilize foreign support against British rule. A visionary strategist, organizer, and ideologue, Chempakaraman Pillai played a crucial role in shaping revolutionary nationalism abroad, influencing future leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose and contributing to the ideological foundations of armed resistance against colonial domination. His life and work reflect the international dimension of India's struggle for freedom and the sacrifices made by revolutionaries operating far from home.

Berlin Committee And Ghadar Party Involvement

After Berlin Committee was established in Berlin, Lala Har Dayal was also persuaded to join the movement, thereby bringing forward the Ghadar Party for the same purpose. This resulted in the Indian Independence Committee getting involved with Hindu-German Conspiracy and Ghadar Party in America. Chempakaraman intelligence, brilliant organizational abilities, and undaunted courage helped him get accolades and appreciation from the German Kaiser. Such was his confidence amongst the Germans that he was permitted to lead the operations of German Navy in Indian Ocean. During this period, he directed the German vessel "Emden" and destroyed English war-vessels. Left with no option, the British government was forced to announce a reward of one lakh pounds to anyone who successfully captured Chempakaraman and handed him to them.

Formation Of Indian National Volunteer Corps

However, the cunning lion of India never fell into the hands of British hunters. Chempakaraman proved to be the predecessor of Rash Behari Bose and Subhas Chandra Bose in organizing an Indian Army outside India for striking the enemies at home. He established the Indian National Volunteer Corps during World War I and offered military uniform and discipline to the volunteers. In 1919, he met Subhas Chandra Bose in Vienna and explained his plan of raising revolt amongst Indian soldiers and attacking the British to set the motherland free. Such was the impact of Chempakaraman's words on Bose that he fulfilled his dream during World War II on forming the Indian National Army.

Provisional Government Of India In Kabul

Chempakaraman Pillai was one of the first freedom strugglers who gave India and Indians, living in India and abroad, fighting for the country's independence the slogan "Jai Hind". Apart from standing and struggling for the freedom movement from Europe, he became the Foreign Minister of the Provisional Government of India set up in Afghanistan in December 1915. Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh from Kabul became the President and Maulana Barkatulla the Prime Minister. But the defeat of the Germans in the war left the hopes of the revolutionaries ruined.

German Motives And Weakening Of Support

Unknown by the fact, the Germans were helping the Indian revolutionaries in Germany with selfish motives. Even though the Indian patriots had made it very clear to the Germans that they would be equal partners in revolting and fighting against their common enemy, the British, the Germans held a dominating position as they had been providing funds, arms, and ammunition to the revolutionaries, both abroad and at home. As such, the

Germans intended to exploit the Indians for their work. Thus, when Germans started losing the battle, they lost interest in the revolutionaries. To add on, they even started looking at them with suspicion, thereby weakening the relationship between Indian revolutionaries and Germans.

Contact With Indian Leaders

In course of his activities the British rule in India, he met some of the Indian national leaders, like Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel. In 1933, he met Subhash Chandra Bose in Vienna. He requested Bose to organise revolutionary groups in Asia to fight European domination, and then to join him in Germany to fight for an independent India

Through such meetings, Chempakaraman Pillai sought to connect the international revolutionary networks with the mainstream leadership in India, emphasizing the importance of uniting efforts to overthrow British imperialism. His discussions with leaders of the national movement highlighted the role of Indian revolutionaries abroad in keeping the spirit of freedom alive and linking it with the struggle at home.

Although his strategies often differed from those of the Congress leadership, Chempakaraman Pillai maintained dialogue with key figures, bridging the gap between constitutional politics in India and revolutionary activities overseas.

Influence On Subhash Chandra Bose And Others

One of Pillai's most significant contributions was his influence on later Indian leaders, especially Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. His activities in Germany and connections with anti-British networks in Europe laid the groundwork for Bose's later efforts in forming the Indian National Army (INA). Pillai had earlier collaborated with the Berlin Committee and other revolutionary groups, creating channels that Bose would later use to mobilize international support. His writings and speeches also inspired Indian students and workers in Europe, encouraging them to dedicate their lives to the freedom struggle.

Pro-India Magazine

In 1914, while in Zurich, Pillai launched Pro-India, a monthly magazine published in both German and English. The publication aimed to highlight India's rich cultural heritage and present the Indian perspective to the German public. It served as a platform to garner support for India's freedom struggle and to educate the international community about the injustices of British colonial rule.

Hindustan Newspaper

Additionally, Pillai contributed to the production of Hindostan, a propaganda newspaper intended for South Asian prisoners of war held in Germany during World War I. This publication was part of the efforts by the German Foreign Office's Information Bureau for the Orient (Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient) to encourage anti-British sentiments among Indian soldiers and prisoners. While Pillai was not the sole editor, his involvement was significant in promoting the cause of Indian independence within these communities

Clash With Hitler And Nazi Persecution

Hitler then emerged in Germany. He was sarcastic about the ability of the Asian peoples to govern themselves. Dr. Pillai

protested non-grata with Hitler and the Nazis. Dr. Pillai soon fell ill and left for Italy to regain his health. While there, he heard that all his possessions in Germany had been seized and sold away by the Nazis for a nominal price. In despair he returned to Germany and complained to the authorities about the injustice done to him. Naturally, one day he was beaten up by the Nazis. He was physically injured shocked that he should be so treated and mentally in his adopted country.

Conclusion

Chempakaraman Pillai's revolutionary activities stand as a powerful testament to the global nature of India's freedom movement. From organizing the Indian National Volunteer Corps and participating in the Provisional Government of India in Kabul, to inspiring leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose and popularizing the slogan "Jai Hind," Pillai's contributions were both pioneering and far-reaching. Despite facing betrayal, political isolation, and persecution—first from shifting German interests and later under the Nazi regime—he remained unwavering in his commitment to India's independence. Though his name does not occupy a central place in mainstream nationalist narratives, his efforts bridged revolutionary movements abroad with the struggle at home. Chempakaraman Pillai's legacy lies in his courage, international vision, and enduring influence on India's revolutionary tradition, making him an indispensable figure in the history of India's fight against colonial rule.

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