'Talking about political violence': Mapping the contested discursive space

of

North Kerala

By: Lipin Ram

Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Political Science

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Supervisor: Lea Sgier

Budapest, Hungary

(2013)

Abstract

One of the important ways in which the phenomenon of political violence can be studied is by paying attention to the ways in which people 'talk' about it. Looking closely at the discourses of the social actors in the violent milieu enables us to approach the study of political violence in a more embedded manner that goes beyond institutional and comparative approaches to the topic. The context of this study is the violent political culture of North Kerala in India. By adopting William H. Sewell, Jr's framework of 'event' theory, we enquire into the role of discourse in limiting the highly significant TP murder into a mere 'rupture' from past practices of the North Kerala society. Our analysis reveals that the themes/frames that have been predominantly used in the discourse on the TP murder have failed to make the TP murder into a 'transformational' event. Instead, we argue that the predominant themes of the discourse have led to contestation of meaning and made the discursive realm relapse into conflict. The study shows the significance of the ways in which political violence is 'talked' about and suggests that conflictual societies must search for alternate frames and vocabularies to escape the 'vicious cycle of violence.'

Key words: political violence, discourse, North Kerala, contestation, William H Sewe

Acknowledgements

Contents

1. Introduction

The phrase 'the vicious cycle of violence' has often been employed to refer to the peculiar force with which violence tends to reproduce itself in societies marked with deep cleavages. However, it is at once obvious to any serious student of violence that there is more to violence than viciousness and cyclicality. To study violence in a society, more often than not, is to study the socio-political and cultural institutions, modes and practices of that society that facilitate and sustain violent practices. Political science as a discipline has been engaged with the study of violence in a more or less institutional, comparative (Della Porta 1995) and/or meta-theoretical manner (Tilly 2003; Tarrow 2011). In contrast, sociological studies of violence have tended to be more embedded and look at the socio-cultural modes and practices that contribute to the seemingly endless relapse into violence in certain societies (Hohenbalken and Weiss 2011; Das and Klienman 2000). The studies that analyse the various ways in which discourse manifests itself in violent settings undertaken by scholars such as Erella Grassiani, Nerina Weiss, Janine Klungel and Esben Leifsen (Hohenbalken and Weiss 2011) are examples of such an approach. Although we draw inspiration from both ways of inquiring into violence, it is the latter stream of knowledge- embedded and dealing with issues of discourse – which we hope to follow and to contribute to in this project.

The violence that we are concerned with here has been unfolding between the activists of political organisations – mainly the Hindu right and the Marxist Left – in North Kerala in India over the last four decades. Murdering the members of the opposing group, inflicting crippling injuries and destroying the property of the opposing group have been normalised as part of everyday politics in North Kerala over the years (Chaturvedi 2011). On 4th May 2102, the communist rebel leader and TP Chandrasekharan, popularly called TP, was murdered at Onchiyam in North Kerala (*Malayala Manorama*, 5th May 2012). It is the discourse –

1

articles, commentaries and editorials published in the print media – that has been constructed in response to the TP murder that forms the subject of our analysis in this project.

North Kerala, especially the district of Kannur, has been afflicted by political violence between activists of various political organizations for the last four decades.[1] The Hindu right represented by the RSS[2] and the Marxist Left represented by the CPI(M)[3] have been the major forces to have consistently resorted to conflictual politics, although there are other organizations such as the Popular Front and the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) which have intermittently made the region volatile and violent. Workers of the Indian National Congress (INC), one of the largest national parties in the country, have also been guilty of noteworthy acts of violence in the early part of the second half of the 20th century in North Kerala (P.Karunakaran, *Deshabhimani*, 6th June 2012). However, before we proceed any further, it needs to be noted that although parties on one side of the conflict have tended to vary, the Marxist Left has maintained its position as the force to be reckoned with in almost

---

[1] The figures chronicling the political violence that unfolded in North Kerala since the late 60s vary. Through the 1980s and 90s, a total of 2000 clashes were reported in the region (Mary, 1999). *The Hindu*, a prominent national daily reports that a total of 127 political murders took place in Kannur in those two decades (Tampi, 1999). Another report state that at least 200 have died in the last four decades, and several others have been maimed (*Outlook*, 2008). *Mathrubhumi,* a leading vernacular newspaper in Kerala reports that 142 political murders took place in the period from 1980 to 2000 (Sasindran, 2000). As per the National Crime Statistics Bureau figures, there were 736 cases of rioting in the Kannur district in 2006 alone, the highest in the country (Chaturvedi 2011).

[2] Rashtreeya Sveyam Sevak Sangh. Founded in 1925 and has been ever since an important right wing cultural and political force in India. It has successfully mobilized a substantial mass of people by relying on the discourses of 'Hindu Dharma' over the years. It seeks to found a 'Hindu nation' that will have its normative and customary basis on their brand of Hinduism and derives its strength from the discourse of nationalism and the glory of tradition.

[3] Communist Party of India (Marxist). A political party formed in 1964 when a faction of the undivided Communist Party broke away in order to fight what it termed was the 'revisionism and sectarianism in the communist movement at the international and national level'. It claims to be the agent of the people's democratic revolution and seeks to apply Marxism-Leninism to Indian conditions. It leads the left democratic coalition in Kerala that has been in power several times in the past.

all of the conflicts. Referring to the violent political culture in North Kerala, Ruchi Chaturvedi points out that "violence has become the public face and means of enhancing influence and power among potential supporters" (Chaturvedi 2011,342-43). What is perhaps more important to note is that through various entrenched socio-cultural practices, there has occurred a legitimisation and acceptance of political violence in the democratic public sphere of North Kerala over the years as 'normal' (Chaturvedi 2011; Chaturvedi 2012).

The murder of TP, the rebel communist leader who was an ex-CPI(M) member, marked a 'rupture' from this usual practice of normalisation of political violence in the socio-political realms of North Kerala. In the weeks and months following, the Kerala society witnessed an unprecedented mobilization of public opinion that largely indicted the CPI(M), the biggest Communist Party in India, for the murder. The TP murder problematized the mundane reality of political violence in North Kerala and brought it to focus like never before. The amount of public attention and media coverage that TP's murder attracted and sustained was remarkable, especially given the fact that violence was almost a facet of political life for the people of North Kerala (Chaturvedi 2011). For the first time in history, the CPI(M) under public pressure had to declare an internal enquiry into a political murder to probe the involvement of its members (*Mathrubhumi*, 4th May 2013). Apart from producing a counter-discourse to defend itself from the overwhelming force of criticism on various public forums, the party also had to scramble to conduct meetings at various levels of the organisation and society to defend its position on the issue to its cadres and supporters (Malayala Manorama, 18th May 2012).[4] Many leaders of the party at different organisational levels have been arrested by the police as a result of an unusually fast paced investigation (*Mathrubhumi*, 2nd

---

[4] Ranging from the highest forum of the state committee to the lowest level of 'Kudumba yogam' or 'family gathering' , the party conducted a series of meetings on the topic of the TP murder (Malayala Manorama, 18th May 2012).

April 2013). In the weeks and months following 4th May 2012, the sheer amount of discourse generated, the unusually swift conclusion of the investigation, the strength of the public pressure and the voluminous protest and condemnation from the intelligentsia including actors, writers and poets had given the impression that the Kerala society was witnessing something altogether unfamiliar, at least when it came to political violence (M.N.Karassery, *Malayala Manorama*, 6th May 2012). It was indeed a 'rupture' from past practices.

To comprehend the significance of the TP murder as a 'rupture', we introduce the 'event' theory of William H Sewell Jr into our analysis (Sewell Jr 1996). It is by addressing the significance of 'ruptures' that Sewell begins to articulate his 'event' theory (Sewell Jr 1996). A historical 'event', for Sewell, is something that leads to a structural dislocation and/or transformation in a society. The beginning of all such transformations is marked by a rupture – "a surprising break with routine practice" (Sewell 1996, 843). Sewell delineates several ways in which a 'rupture' turns into an 'event'.[5] However, it is the interpretative and definitional functions of discourse, called 'cultural creativity' by Sewell, that form the most important aspect of the theory (Sewell Jr 1996, 845). The collective and spontaneous exercise of interpretation of social reality through various forms of discourse by social actors is what Sewell means by the said term above. In the Sewellian 'event' theory, 'cultural creativity' plays a crucial role in sustaining a 'rupture' and subsequently turning it into an 'event'.

Did the voluminous discourse produced in the aftermath of the TP murder take the form of 'cultural creativity' in the Sewellian sense? Did the discourse successfully sustain the 'rupture' and eventually make it into an 'event' that was dislocational or transformational of the structures in the Kerala society? A year after the TP murder, this does not seem to have been the case. The CPI(M), it is perhaps safe to say, seems to have weathered the storm of

---

[5] For a detailed discussion, see chapter 2.

4

public pressure to a considerable extent given the precarious position it had found itself in during the months following the murder. The organisational and political crisis that the political observers predicted for the party seems to have been contained (*Malayala Manorama*, 30th June 2012). More importantly, apart from the speedy conclusion of the investigation, nothing else seems to have changed as far as the judicial and state response to political violence is concerned. The TP murder case seems to be going down the same road of judicial delay and inefficacy of the prosecution that has been the staple of the judicial process as far as political violence in Kerala is concerned.[6] The witnesses of the TP murder case continues to turn hostile in the court one after the other, resembling the usual fate of cases of political violence in Kerala (*Mathrubhumi* 9th March 2013;*Mathrubhumi* 9th March 2013 et al). It seems a reasonable proposition to say that the effect produced by the 'unfamiliar' societal response in the aftermath of the TP murder has imperceptibly merged into the 'familiar'. The hope that the TP murder may become a 'signifier' that would alter the political culture of North Kerala seems to have been unfounded; at least by the way things stand after one year. In other words, the TP murder seems to have failed to become a transformational 'event' in the sense of Sewell (Sewell Jr 1996).

The question that we seek to answer in this project is the following: what role did the discourse play in limiting the TP murder from becoming a transformational 'event' in the North Kerala society? In our analysis we identify the predominant themes of the discourse constructed around the TP murder. We also identify the nature of the responses, i.e., the counter-discourse, which these themes provoked. On the basis of our analysis, we argue, to put it briefly, that the predominant themes around which the discourse on the TP murder has been centred have proved 'self defeating'. The 'partisan' and 'controversial' nature of the

---

[6] Ruchi Chaturvedi (2011, 340) notes that in 80 percent of the cases adjudicated from 1978 to 2003, alleged agents of violence have been acquitted.

discourse resulted in the Communist Party constructing a powerful counter-discourse in its defence. And instead of interpreting the reality of the TP murder in a transformational manner ('cultural creativity'), the discourse relapsed into the familiar realm of contestation and conflict. This played an important role, or so we argue, in rendering the TP murder merely a 'rupture' and not an 'event' of transformative potentials.

1.1 The background

In this section, we provide a brief sketch of the communist party and the context of the TP murder. Some of the information below has been obtained from the CPI (M)'s official website, especially those regarding the party's history. However, it has to be made clear that we do not rely on the references based on the party website to make any arguments and they are used mostly for factual background.

1.1.1 The CPI (M) – History and Formation

The political left in India, as in many other countries across the world, has several ideological and organizational shades to it. Here we will focus only on the prominent Marxist Party in India, namely the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or the [CPI(M)]. The first 'mainstream' Communist Party in India, the Communist Party of India or the CPI, came into existence at a time when the anti-colonial struggle was gaining steam in several parts of the country. Formed in 1920, this organization is retrospectively referred to as the undivided Communist Party of India today *('Party history', www.cpim.org).* Although the party was formed in 1920 at the national level, the formation of the Communist Party in Kerala came much later (ibid).

The first move towards forming a Communist Party in Kerala came initially in the form of what was called the Congress Socialist Party and then as a Communist group (in 1937) within the Indian National Congress Party – the largest national party in India at that point.

However, the decisive break came in 1939 when a small group of individuals assembled at a place called Pinarayi in the North Kerala district of Kannur and formed the Kerala branch of the Communist Party (ibid). Many members of this small group – such as E.M.S Namboothirippad, P.Krishnappilla and A.K.Gopalan – would later go on to become some of the most important leaders of the Communist Party in India. The period of the run up to the Indian independence in 1947 was also marked by several violent peasant struggles across the country such as the Telengana struggle (in the current state of Andhra Pradesh), the Thebhaga struggle (in West Bengal) (Chatterjee 1988) and the Punnapra-Vayalar struggle (in Kerala) (P.Radhakrishnan 1980). In these and many other struggles that continued to unfold even after the independence, hundreds of party workers were killed by police action and other violent confrontations. This was in a way the first wave of martyrs of the Communist Party in India (*The Struggles*, *www.cpim.org*).

In 1964, the party split into two – the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI (M)] – due to a combination of ideological and practical disagreements (Ram 1969). Whereas the former stood for a moderate approach to be followed in co-operation with the Congress Party and supported the Soviet Model of Marxism, the latter took a more radical ideological position and was in support of the Chineese Communist Party (ibid, 159-209) The Sino-Indian war of 1962 also accentuated the split (Ram 1969). The CPI(M) claims that it was born "in the struggle against revisionism and sectarianism in the communist movement at the international and national level, in order to defend the scientific and revolutionary tenets of Marxism-Leninism and its appropriate application in the concrete Indian conditions" (*Preface*, *www.cpim.org*).

1.1.2 CPI (M) Today

The CPI(M) today is the most prominent left party in India and leads the Left front – a coalition of left organisations – at the national level. In terms of electoral politics the CPI(M)

has been most visible in the three Indian states of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. The Left front government headed by the CPI(M) was uninterruptedly in power in West Bengal from 1977 until May 2011. In Tripura, the party first came to power in 1977 and then was out of power till 1988. Since then it has continued to be in power in Tripura. In Kerala, the party has been in and out of power since 1957 (*Election History,* CPI(M) Kerala party website).

It is worth mentioning that true to its proletarian and peasant moorings, the party implemented comprehensive land reforms in Bengal that proved to be a huge step in delivering labourers, peasants and petty producers from the erstwhile feudal system in which the productive forces, most importantly land, was concentrated under a few landlords. Aniket Alam writes that with only 3.5 percent of the country's arable land, the state of West Bengal accounts for nearly 20 percent of the land redistributed in the entire country (Alam, 2007:1595). However, off late the party in Bengal has faced serious criticisms from both inside and outside for what has come to be seen as its 'right wing deviations'. The inability of the Left administration to eradicate poverty completely and the intolerant and often violent political culture of its leaders and cadres have been some of the points on which the party has invited criticism. However, the severest of these criticisms have come in the aftermath of the now infamous Nandigram incident, where the state administration attempted to forcefully evict peasants from their land in order to be able to facilitate the installation of a large scale car manufacturing unit, leading to the death of many struggling peasants. It was this single incident that turned the table for the party in Bengal and ended its thirty year old rule in 2011(Banerjee 2007).

In Kerala, the first democratically elected Communist government in the world came to power in 1957. The party website claims that this government initiated several measures such as the land and educational reforms and the eradication of the feudal system that fundamentally altered the social landscape of Kerala and paved the foundation for the fairly

8

distinct (in comparison with other Indian states) and modern outlook that it has today. It also points out that it was the Left government which came to power in 1967 that further consolidated the progressive measures it initiated in 1957 and implemented comprehensive land reforms (*The Communist Party in Kerala*, CPI(M) Kerala party website). With the advent of neoliberalism in the 1980's and 90's, the party was subjected to several ideological as well as organisational changes referred to as 'deviations' by its critics outside and 'empericisations' by critical insiders (Patnaik 2011). The increasing sway of factionalism has been another cause of concern in the last decade for the party. The factional fight between V.S. Achuthanandan, the current leader of opposition and the most popular leader of the CPI(M) and Pinarayi Vijayan, the powerful state secretary of the party has been a cause of concern for the party for a long time (Johny, 2012; Malayala Manorama, 13th May 2012).

And perhaps most importantly for us, the allegations of intolerance and violence levelled against the party, especially in North Kerala, has been a serious challenge. In fact of all its challenges, it's the violent character of the party's political culture that has been raised as the most significant criticism in recent times (Chaturvedi 2011). This is especially so in the context of the murder of T.P.Chandrasekharan, our point of focus in this project (Chaturvedi 2012).

1.1.3 The TP Murder

Before elaborating on the event of the TP murder per say, the historical and ideological significances of Onchiyam – the region in the North Kerala district of Kozhikode where TP hoisted his breakaway organisation – need to be roughly sketched out. The Kerala party website claims that Onchiyam is one of the most important names for the party in the entire state of Kerala. It was at Onchiyam that the party had some of its first martyrs in 1943. As a result of the repressive police action ten party workers were killed in Onchiyam on 30th April 1943. The political and historical geography of Oncihyam, therefore, is something that is

deeply etched in the minds of the party workers and supporters in North Kerala. And like many other places with 'revolutionary' histories in North Kerala such as Kayyoor, Punnapra-Vayalar and Morazha, Onchiyam had become over the years the stronghold of the party in every sense of the term (Aboobakkar 2011). While the commemorative performances and structures for the Onchiyam martyrs keep the event ever alive in the conscience of the party workers, the name Onchiyam, along with such other significant place names, is evoked by the party to the general public on various occasions as a signifier of its ideology and revolutionary legacy (*The Struggles*, CPI(M) Kerala party website). Thus, it would not be an overstatement to say that any challenge to the party hegemony in Onchiyam would inevitably have been construed as a challenge not merely at the realm of everyday politics but also at the symbolic and ideological realms by the party.

It is in the background of this rich ideological and political significance of the historical geography of Onchiyam that we should locate the event of the TP murder. It was in 2008 that T.P Chandrasekharan, a party activist and local leader of the CPI(M) at Onchiyam for almost three decades, broke away from the party to subsequently found the rebel organisation called the Revolutionary Marxist Party (RMP) (*Deshabhimani,*7th June 2012). What exactly led to the act of dissension is still a contentious question and to an extent forms part of the discourse that we will analyse later. Briefly, those who defend the party argue that the act of dissension was a product of the power hungry politics advocated by TP and his supporters. They argue that the dissenters led by TP did not want to adhere to the power sharing agreement that the party has entered into at Onchiyam in the Panchayath (the lowest tier of local self government in India) with another of its ally organisation called the Janata Dal. The members of RMP and others refute this and maintain that it was a result of a long protracted ideological struggle between the 'revisionists' in the party and TP and his supporters that culminated in the founding of a new party called RMP (Asad, 'The politics of 51 hacks',

133). What needs to be noted here is that the founding of the RMP by TP was neither the first instance of dissension nor of expulsion in the history of the CPI(M) in Kerala. Leaders who were much more prominent than TP had been expelled by the party for anti-party activities before. The expulsion of MV Raghavan in 1986 and KR Gauri Amma in 1994 had led to the creation of new parties in the past. However, what distinguishes the political rebellion of TP and the subsequent foundation of RMP is the fact that unlike the splinter groups or parties that came out of the CPI(M) in the past, the RMP did not align itself with the right wing coalition in Kerala (Johny 2012). The party led by TP claimed to be standing for an alternative that upheld the true revolutionary politics of the left and refused to align itself with the right wing or even moderate political forces in the state (ibid). What was most significant about this challenge to party hegemony was that it was produced by a former 'insider' who had until recently been a very important figure in party circles of the region. It also needs to be mentioned that TP and its rebel outfit had made clear their support for the CPI(M) faction led by VS Achuthanandan, popularly called VS, one of the tallest and senior most leader in the party who has been at odds with the party leadership for a long time (Johny 2012). VS's homage to TP as a "brave communist" following his death and his subsequent visit to the slain leader's house at Onchiyam had generated euphoria among the ranks of the rebel activists and uproar among the CPI(M) leadership (*Malayala Manorama*, 13th May 2013).

The brutal murder of TP took place on 4th May, 2012 at Onchiyam in Kozhikode (Malayala Manorama, 5th May 2012). What followed the murder of TP was an outpouring of articles, editorials, reports, speeches and debates that indicted the CPI(M) and its leadership for the crime. Both the local and national media continues to focus on the murder and the ongoing trial. The workers of RMP and a substantial section of the civil society and intelligentsia believe that a conspiracy was hatched by a section of the leaders of the CPI(M) in the two

11

neighbouring districts of Kozhikode and Kannur to murder T.P whose dissident outfit was seriously threatening to erode the party base. There was a remarkable outcry from various sections of the society following the event which clearly went beyond the usual 'condemnations' of political violence all too familiar to the people of North Kerala Political parties (including some allies of the Marxist Left), civil society, media (both local and national) and other sections of the society reacted with outrage and disbelief. The CPI(M) was forced to be on the defence as even some of its tall leaders expressed solidarity with the slain leader's family and comrades, leaving a substantial mass of its followers and workers perturbed and sceptical (Asad, 'The politics of 51 hacks',133). The state machinery was kicked into action with the kind of rapidity and efficiency unknown in cases of political violence hitherto. As of now, the police have concluded their investigation and the accused (including CPI(M) leaders at different organisational levels from the two neighbouring districts of Kannur and Kozhikode) are being tried *(Mathrubhumi*, 12th April 2013).

2. Theoretical Review

As Nerina Weiss and Maria Six Hohenbalken argue, part of what makes the inquiries into violence problematic is the assumption that all acts that might be termed 'violent' share certain typological characteristics (Hohenbalken and Weiss 2011, 3). Recognizing the various shades of meaning that the term 'violence' can have and acknowledging the limits of human language in expressing the reality of violence are some of the recent advances that scholars have made in studying violence (Das and Klienman 2000; Hohenbalken and Weiss 2011). The study of violence has tended to be a largely disparate affair. Donatella Della Porta seems to recognise the lack of a coherent body of work on violence when she points out the fact that political violence has never been an established or mainstream area of research in either sociology or political science and one has to borrow concepts from several fields to study it (1995, 2). In other words, we lack a cumulative body of knowledge on the subject of violence from which theoretical frameworks to base our project can be easily drawn. Hence, in this project, we make use of theoretical elements from disciplines ranging from political science to historical sociology.

This chapter is in two sections. Firstly, we provide a limited and general review of literature on the subject of political violence which is meant only as a reference. Secondly, and more importantly, we elaborate on the theoretical elements and positions that will inform our own analysis in this project.

2.1 Political Violence: a brief review of scholarship

Donatella Della Porta's *Social movements, political violence, and the state: A comparative analysis of Italy and Germany* (1995) introduces an approach that integrates the macro, meso and micro level analyses of political violence in a historical comparative framework. Sidney Tarrow mentions in his Foreword to the book that one of the most important contributions of

Della Porta's work is the attempt to go beyond the traditional dichotomies of comparative study of political conflict: between violence and social movement, movements and institutions, comparative politics and sociology and history and social science. While being an important work on political violence, Della Porta's work also gives us a very useful survey of the literature on the subject.

There are a few things that need to be made clear before we look at Della Porta's work more closely. Firstly, as the title makes clear, Della Porta's enquiry is largely confined to instances of political conflict and violence that stem from the context of social movements. Secondly, as she herself admits more than once in the book, the theory of political violence Della Porta puts forth is limited by the context of her analysis, namely, the post-industrial western democratic society. These two considerations are important for us in more than one way. It is quite clear that the instance of political violence that we are interested in –the murder of a rebel communist leader in North Kerala in India – could not be satisfactorily dealt within the framework of social movement theory, although we may be able to utilize certain theoretical positions in social movement theory that concerns itself with political violence. Besides, the socio-political and cultural distinctions between western democracies and post colonial democracies such as India are factors that limit the usefulness of Della Porta's theory for our project. However, as said earlier, Della Porta's summary of the evolution of scholarship on political violence over the years is valuable.

Traditionally, Della Porta points out, there have been two distinct fields of study that have dealt with political violence, terrorism studies and social movement theory. The former had its origin in the early seventies when incidents such as the massacre of the Israeli athletes in the Munich Olympics and airplane hijackings shook the world with their unprecedented intensity and unique characteristics. She points out that these studies did not take into consideration 'normal politics'; in fact, in the tradition of collective behavior studies,

differences between 'normal' political behavior and 'deviant' political behavior were stressed. Scholars like Steven I. Wilknson emphasized the role of ideological characteristics of political organizations engaging in violent political campaigns, especially in the case of terrorist organizations (Della Porta 1995,5). Della Porta argues that these approaches fail to take into consideration the influence of the context in formulating the specific aims and integrative capacities of democracies (Della Porta 1995,6).

In the case of social movement theory, whereas European sociologists identified 'new social movements' as the central sites of conflict in post-industrial societies of the West, scholars in the US looked at social movements as rational collective actors through the prism of 'resource mobilization' (Della Porta 1995,7). Political violence, as formulated within the field of social movement studies, can be "explained as an outcome of the interaction between social movements and their opponents" (ibid, 8). However, Della Porta points out that except for a few scholars such as Charles Tilly, William Gamson and Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, social movement theory has largely failed to engage specifically with the questions raised by political violence.

It is into this theoretical vacuum that Della Porta steps in with her integrative approach to the study of political violence which seeks to bring together the hitherto distinct macro, meso and micro analyses of political violence. Macro level approaches to political violence refers to the role of systemic characteristics; the meso level the role of groups and the micro level deals with analysis based on individual motivations and actions. Della Porta applies in her work an integral approach that encompasses the systemic, organizational and individual perspectives.

McAllister and Rose (1983) give us another summary of the evolution of scholarship on conflictual politics. The theoretical positions on conflictual politics, according to the authors, are grouped broadly under four headings. *Secularization theories*, mainly deriving from the

Weberian paradigm, hold the position that since religions propagate values through social institutions, they form a potential source of value conflict in multi-religious societies. *Modernity theories* argue that the condition of differential modernization leads to political conflict in societies. This more or less stems from the assumption that modern individuals are more likely to accept institutionalized procedures for conflict resolution. The classical Marxist position deems that *class relations and material prosperity* are crucial in producing violent political conflict. Finally, there is what the authors call the *generational change* theory, which is mainly derived from political socialization studies. It holds that "younger generations in society should be least prone to endorse 'older' or 'traditional' political conflicts" (McAllister and Rose 1983, 538).

H.L Nierburg (1963), one of the early scholars to have engaged with the topic makes an unusual argument regarding political violence in democratic countries. He argues that the risk of violence is necessary and useful in preserving national societies, especially in democratic countries. By allowing a pluralistic basis for action, he contends, democratic states permit "potential violence to have a social effect with only token demonstration, thus assuring greater opportunities for peaceful political and social change" (Nieburg 1963, 43). The possibility of violence, according to the author, acts as a powerful solvent of political rigidities, which renders such violence unnecessary and in turn makes democracies more viable and stable.

Sidney Tarrow's *Power in Movement* (1994, 2008, 2011) is perhaps the most important work to have come out on social movements till date. Again, although social movement literature does not directly apply to our research project, there are certain concepts in Tarrow's most famous work that we may benefit from. Perhaps the two most important concepts for us are 'political opportunity structures' and 'cycles of contention'. Tarrow emphasizes the role of political opportunity structures in creating incentives and sustaining contentious actions.

When the 'original insurgents' take advantage of these political opportunities, it paves the way for late comers and eventually for opponents and power holders. Hence the term cycles of contention. Tarrow also maps what he calls the 'repertoires of contention', various strategies that actors engaged in contentious politics adopt in order to mobilize supporters and the wider public. These repertoires include strategies that range from voting to arson (Tarrow 2011).

We conclude this section with perhaps the most famous work to have been published in mainstream political science in recent times on violence. In his self admittedly ambitious work *The Politics of Collective Violence* (2003) that has been the culmination of almost thirty years of engagement with the topic, Charles Tilly seeks to arrive at "explanations of variability: not general laws or total explanations of violent events, but accounts of what causes major variations among times, places, and social circumstances in the character of collective violence" (Tilly 2003, 20). Tilly's review of scholarship on violence is based on the categorisation of what he calls 'idea people', 'behaviour people' and 'relation people'. Emphasizing the role of consciousness in human action, the first group of theorists argue that the "ideas concerning the worth of others and the desirability of aggressive action significantly affect the propensity of a person or people to join in collective violence." (ibid, 5). The second group of theorists stresses the importance of "needs and incentives for domination, exploitation, respect, deference, protection, or security that underlie collective violence." (ibid). The third group, amongst which Tilly locates himself, believes that "restraining violence depends less on destroying bad ideas, eliminating opportunities, or suppressing impulses than on transforming relations among persons and groups" (ibid, 6).

17

2.2 Topical theoretical elements

In this section, we undertake a more focused discussion of theoretical elements that could potentially inform the understanding of our context – the violent political space of North Kerala – and the analysis of the discourse generated in the aftermath of the TP murder.

2.2.1 Radicalization

To begin with, we go back to Della Porta, especially her discussion of radicalization of politics (1995, 83). Based on in-depth interviews that assume the form of life-narrations with activists in both Italy and Germany, the author points out that certain historical periods tend to produce a " mentality of embattlement", and hence lead to a vision of the world as one that is divided between 'us' and 'them' (Della Porta 1995,139-49). Such periods are marked by the emergence of dense social networks, alternative value systems and a severing of communications between the 'inside' and the 'outside'. The above argument regarding radicalization of politics does not hold completely for North Kerala. Although it is true that the frequency and intensity of political violence – assassinations, maiming and destruction of property – vary, the radicalization of politics in North Kerala took place over a long period of time and through entrenched socio-cultural modes and practices of legitimization (Chaturvedi 2011). However, the latter part of the argument, namely the emergence of dense social networks, alternative value systems and a severing of communications between the 'inside' and the 'outside' all hold true in the case of North Kerala's divided and contested socio-political life.

Della Porta also observes that political violence, at least in Italy and Germany, stemmed from the initial reluctance of the political elites to accommodate the reformative demands from different sections of the society. Further, the creation of martyrs and myths as a result of state repression strengthens the violent tendencies of the movement. Another important factor, at the systemic level, is the existence of political subcultures that are sympathetic to violence

(Della Porta 1995, 137-163). All the above observations seem to be pertinent in our context. TP's breakaway from the dominant communist party was indeed a rebellion against the elite leadership of the party. Martyrs and the myths of heroism and courage, as will be clear from our Analysis, have played a crucial role in sustaining the violent political culture in North Kerala.

2.2.2 Characterizing the violence

From Tilly (2003), we make use of the typology of interpersonal violence that the author advances in order to locate the 'kind of violence' we are engaged with in our project. Tilly's typology could prove useful in characterizing the nature of political violence in North Kerala in general and the TP murder in particular. The typology is summarized below (Tilly 2003. 14-16):

1) Violent rituals: Involves well defined group or groups following " a known interaction script" of violence as it strives for recognition or priority within a certain area; examples of such violence include shaming ceremonies, lynchings, public executions, gang rivalries and so on.

2) Coordinated destruction: Takes place when "persons or organizations that specialize in the deployment of coercive means undertake a programme of damage to persons and/ or objects; war, terrorism, genocide etc are examples of this type.

3) Opportunism: Individuals or collectives engaging in generally forbidden ends; looting, gang rape, piracy, revenge killing etc are the examples of this type.

4) Individual aggression: Immediate and predominantly destructive interaction with another actor; single-perpetrator rapes, assaults and vandalism belongs to this type.

5) Scattered attacks: In the course of a generally non-violent interaction, some of the actors resort to physical damage in order to overcome obstacles; sabotage, clandestine attacks on symbolic places, assaults on governmental agents and so on.

19

6) Broken negotiations: Collective action that generate resistance or rivalry to which actors respond in ways that lead to damage to persons and/or objects; demonstrations, governmental repression and military coups are examples.

2.2.3 Violence as 'Event'

In the Introduction, we discussed the transformational potential that the TP murder had by virtue of it having been perceived as a signifier of and rupture from the reality of political violence in North Kerala. The theoretical ground for this has been the 'event' theory of William H. Sewell, Jr as proposed in the long piece 'Historical events as transformations of structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille' (1996)[7]. By 'event', Sewell means sequences of occurrences that result in structural transformation. And structure, he defines as " sets of cultural schemas, distribution of resources, and modes of power combining in an interlocking and mutually sustaining fashion to reproduce consistent streams of social practice" (Sewell Jr 1996,842) The beginning of all such transformations is marked by a rupture – " a surprising break with routine practice" (Sewell 1996, 843). This initial 'rupture', to form an 'event' in the Sewellian sense, has to initiate a chain of occurrences that has the effect of transforming previously existing structures and practices. In order for this to happen, the rupture in one particular structural location should also produce consecutive and reinforcing ruptures in

---

[7] Sewell makes use of the momentous happenings that took place in the French society in the summer of 1789, widely known by the metonymic phrase 'taking of the Bastille', to develop and illustrate his theory. Sewell illustrates the above theoretical framework by a careful narration of the happenings in the twelve days stretching from July 12 to July 23 in the French society of 1789, an extraordinary period, in Sewell's words, of " fear, rejoicing, violence, and cultural creativity that changed the history of the world" (1995, 845). The 'taking of the Bastilles' on the 14th of July stands for the initial rupture in Sewell's narration, which would then lead to further occurrences such as the withdrawal of the royal troops from Paris, the victory of the National Assembly over the King and the formal establishment of Parisian municipality and the national guard. The single event of 'taking of the Bastilles' – Sewell's rupture – assumed proportions that far exceed its factual and practical relevance and came to stand metonymically for a number of occurrences and changes that unfolded in its aftermath. It was construed as a legitimate uprising to decide the fate of the country, and more importantly, as an act of the people's sovereign will.

other locations. This is essential because a single isolated rupture cannot usually have the effect of transforming structures since the 'standard procedures and sanctions' can usually accommodate it and " repair the torn fabric of social practice "(ibid, 844). Sewell's definition of a historical event is that of a " ramified sequence of occurrences that is recognized as notable by contemporaries and that results on a durable transformation of structures." (ibid).

Something unique and unprecedented in French history took place, argues Sewell, in the aftermath of July 14th in 1789. Two modes of activity hitherto unconnected came together to herald a new understanding of reality. The political and philosophical claims about the sovereignty of the people on the one hand and the acts of crowd violence as seen during the 'taking of the Bastilles' on the other was fused together in a mutually reinforcing narrative. " In the excitement", Sewell writes, " terror, and elation that characterized the taking of the Bastille, orators, journalists and the crowd itself seized on the political theory of popular sovereignty to explain and to justify popular violence" (ibid, 845). This collective and spontaneous exercise of interpretation of social reality is termed as 'cultural creativity' by Sewell. What had begun as an act of defence against the monarch's aggression came to be seen as a "concrete, unmediated, and sublime instance of the people expressing its sovereign will" and eventually articulated the modern category of 'revolution' for the first time (ibid).

This act of collective interpretation and construction of meaning, in Sewell's words 'cultural creativity', is done precisely through discourse – newspapers, pamphlets and National Assembly debates – of that particular period in French history(Sewell Jr 1996,852-60). It is the nature and content of the interpretation and the construction of meaning of the TP murder that we subject to enquiry by undertaking an analysis of the discourse that has been produced in the aftermath of the TP murder. In other words, we seek to discover to what extent there has been a 'cultural creativity' in the discursive space of North Kerala, and what effect it had on the conflictual life of this region, following the TP murder.

21

It is the exposition of collective and discursive interpretation that occupies the most space in Sewell's theory and it is certainly the most important one for us too. But below we briefly mention some of the other elements of his theory, which also contributes to the sustenance of a 'rupture' and its eventual shaping into a transformational 'event.'

Historical events are shaped by particular conditions. Sewell highlights the importance of 'conditions peculiar to the circumstance' in formulating the course of the events in a particular society. Apart from the large and general conditions which are denoted by the phrase 'structural dislocations', Sewell stresses on the importance of local or particular conditions that facilitated the event and its consequential outcomes. Sewell refers here to Marshall Sahlins' term 'structure of the conjuncture' – meanings, accidents and causal forces that shape events – to further clarify his argument. This is conceptually similar to the idea of 'opportunity structures' from Sydney Tarrow (*Power in Movement* 1998).

Historical events are characterized by heightened emotion. Sewell argues that emotional action can be an important sign of structural dislocation and rearticulation. Sewell also contends that "it is absolutely crucial to recognize the emotional significance of the bloodshed, if we are to understand the unfolding of the event over the following hours and days" (Sewell 1996, 865). Any analysis of an event without taking into consideration the transformative potential of its " collective effervescence" is bound to remain incomplete (Sewell Jr 1996,866).

Although we concentrate mostly on the interpretative and constructive aspect of the discourse in our Analysis, we attempt to briefly look at the above aspects of the TP murder also.

2.2.4 Violence and Discourse

The various ways in which social actors construct their discourse around violent events form a crucial part of our project. It is by analyzing the discourse of the critical commentators on the TP murder and the responses it evoked that we reach our conclusion.

The following works, although not providing any frameworks into which we can squarely fit our inquiry, show us the different roles which discourse plays in violent contexts. Erella Grassiani, Nerina Weiss, Janine Klungel and Esben Leifsen map the varied and rich discursive strategies that members of violent societies engage in order to maintain a sense of normality and coherence about their lives (*Violence Expressed: An Anthropological Approach,* 2011). The four authors above look at the way discourse has shaped and interpreted the meaning of reality in their respective ethnographic milieus. Grassiani, through in depth interviews conducted with Israeli soldiers occupying the West Bank, bring out the strategy of assuming a state of intransigence and passive acceptance by the soldiers in dealing with the reality of their occupation (ibid). Weiss, in what seems to be the closest study to our project, analyses the narratives surrounding two political assassinations in the conflictual society of Eastern Turkey, where the Turkish military and the Turkish Workers Party have been engaged in sustained conflict over the last twenty years. Weiss discovers that when it comes to the political assassination of a local man allegedly by the Turkish military, the narratives take the form of testimonies and 'mythico-histories' that weave themselves into larger nationalist discourses of victimhood and the global discourse of human rights. On the other hand, in the case of the murders of two village men who were acting as 'village guards' at the behest of the military, the societal response was largely confined to a profound silence and evasion. Weiss argues in the light of the differential narratives that were presented to her that any understanding of narratives of violence has to be by looking at the social alliances and networks in the particular society (ibid). Klungel's article focuses on the metaphoric

23

power of the substance of blood in expressing the reality of violence in the French Antillean island of Guadeloupe. Leifson, based on her research conducted in Ecuador, demonstrates the link between everyday violence and discourse (ibid). By analysing the discourse around the TP murder, we hope to reveal the predominant ways in which the event has been talked about (themes), the responses they evoked and their eventual failure to make an 'event' out of the TP murder.

Sara Mills' (1997) work on discourse is crucial to our understanding of the way the discourse and the counter-discourse have evolved in the aftermath of the TP murder. Mills, referring to Michel Pecheux and Michel Foucault, provide us with certain fundamental insights into the contested, conflictual and situated nature of discourse. The way this conflictual nature of discourse manifests in our context – the discourse and counter discourse formed around the TP murder – will be made clear in our Analysis.

She points out that,

" …a discourse is not a disembodied collection of statements, but groupings of utterances or sentences, statements which are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context and which contributes to the way that social context continues its existence" (Mills 1997, 11).

Further, she points out that social context plays an important role in the 'development, maintenance and circulation of discourse.' The conflictual character of discourse, in Mills' opinion, has been brought out clearly by the Marxist linguist Michel Pecheux. Referring to Pecheux, Mills argue that " discourses do not occur in isolation but in dialogue, in relation to or, more often, in contrast and opposition to more other groups of utterances" (Mills 1997,11). Mills notes that Pecheux stresses more than Foucault the conflictual nature of discourse and that " it is always in dialogue and in conflict with other positions" (Mills 1997,

24

14). This constitutes a form of ideological struggle which is the essence of discourse structure.

From Mill's detailed discussion of Foucault's engagement with the concept of discourse, we talk about just one aspect here. Foucault argues that,

" truth is of the world; it is produced there by virtue of multiple constraints…each society has its regime of truth, its 'general' politics of truth: that is the type of discourse it harbours and causes to function as true: the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements, the way in which each is sanctioned...the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true" (cited in Mills, 1997, 18).

 This contextual and 'negative' aspect of truth is important since it is one of the forces that give discourse its effect. In our analysis of the discourse following the TP murder, it is crucial to keep in mind this relationship between discourse and truth. This is because, as we will see in chapter 4, the very 'truth' of the TP murder – in terms of what it 'means' – forms a site of contestation.

We conclude this section by referring to Mieke Verloo's scheme of 'critical frame analysis'(Verloo 2005). It offers us a useful way of analyzing the different positions/frames that have been employed in the discourse that has formed around the TP murder. Verloo's scheme stands half way between the typical methods of frame analysis and discourse analysis. Rather than " constructing a hierarchical set of codes or typologies of frames", Verloo puts emphasis on "analyzing the dimensions of frames" (Verloo 2005,21). She points out that such an approach that does not "categorise beforehand can follow a grounded theory approach and has more chances to capture the unexpected or distorted elements" (Verloo 2005,21). Such an approach, as she argues, can capture 'potentially contradictory frames' and forms the right one for our analysis. The most important elements from Verloo's scheme for

us are: 'Voice' (speaker, perspective, words/concepts); 'Diagnosis' (the problem, why is it a problem, form of argumentation/style/dichotomies/metaphors/contrasts) and 'Responsibility' (who is seen as responsible for the problem) and 'Prognosis' (Verloo 2005, 31). Although we may not be able to employ each of these elements on all of our quotes in the Analysis, the emphasis is put on correctly identifying, as Verloo mentions (Verloo 2005, 21), the 'dimension' that a particular quote expresses.

3. Methodology

In this project, we analyse the discourses constructed in response to the TP murder in North Kerala in order to reveal the predominant themes involved. By discourses, we mean the articles, commentaries, reports and editorials published on the TP murder in Malayalam, the language spoken in the state of Kerala.

3.1 Data body

The data that we subject to analysis comes from three sources – two of them newspapers and one an anthology of articles. Among the newspapers are *Malayala Manorama* and *Deshabhimani.* The former is the most widely circulated Malayalam newspaper and the latter is the official mouth piece of the CPI (M). The time frame of our data from these two sources is from May 2012 to August 2012, the four months following the TP murder (4th May 2012) in which the topic has been most discussed in the media. The anthology titled 'The politics of 51 hacks'[8] was first published by Mathrubhumi Books in July 2012. It is a collection of articles, poems and cartoons that have been published on the topic of the TP murder on various publications in Malayalam. The book has had three more editions since, the last being in September 2012. In addition to this, on two occasions in our analysis in Chapter 4, we have used references that have not been mentioned above. Firstly, in our analysis, we briefly mention the special features published in newspapers (*Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi*) on the first anniversary of the TP murder on 4th May 2013. Secondly, we begin our last chapter (Chapter 5) by quoting from the preface of an anthology of poems, 'The hackway poems', published by DC books in June 2012. However, both these references are for purposes of illustrations and do not form part of our main analysis.

---

[8] TP's dead body had 51 wounds on it (*Malayala Manorama*, 6th May 2012).

Malayala Manorama, while being the most widely circulated newspaper, is also widely acknowledged to have an anti-communist outlook and editorial policy. *Deshabhimani*, the party mouthpiece has a wide circulation among the party members and supporters. However, both these newspapers have a readership that goes beyond their core constituencies. Analysing the discourse in these newspapers, therefore, give us an opportunity to map both positions on the topic. Supplementing this, the anthology gives us a collection of articles from publications across the spectrum in Malayalam. Some of the articles that have been quoted from the anthology had already been published in either *Malayala Manorama* or *Deshabhimani*. However, in such cases, reference is made only to the anthology and not to the newspapers.

3.2 Data Analysis

Our most important focus in the analysis of the data is to capture the predominant themes in the discourse and the predominant ways in which the counter-discourse responds to them. In doing this, we use certain elements from Mieke Verloo's model of 'critical frame analysis' derived for the MAGEEQ project (Verloo 2005):

Voice: Identify the voice(s) speaking and their perspective.

Diagnosis: Identify what is represented as the problem and notice the 'form' (argumentation/style/conviction techniques/ metaphors/contrasts).

It is by employing the element of 'voice' in Veerloo's scheme that we have arrived at the 'discourse'- 'counter-discourse' separation in the analysis. We also use the element of 'diagnosis' to identify the exact theme of a particular article or quote that we subject to analysis. However, the most emphasis in the analysis has been given on correctly identifying the exact dimension/frame/theme of a particular quote. As Verloo herself points out, "the methodology based on dimensions allows for the occurrence and systematic description of

multiple, and potentially contradictory frames" (Verloo, 2005, 21). This is exactly what we seek to achieve in our analysis.

Attempting to define the term 'discourse' has been shown to be an impossible exercise by Sara Mills (Mills, 1997, 1-28). Instead, in this project, we adopt an intuitive understanding of the term based on Mill's idea that " a discourse is not a disembodied collection of statements, but groupings of utterances or sentences, statements which are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context and which contributes to the way that social context continues its existence" (Mills, 1997,11).

4. Analysis

Before analysing the discourse in response to the TP murder, it is important to accurately characterise the 'kind of violence' that we are dealing with in this project. To this end, as mentioned in chapter 2, we make use of Tilly's typology of interpersonal violence (Tilly 2003, 14-16).

4.1 The nature of violence

Ruchi Chaturvedi observes that unlike other instances of violence in India studied by scholars such as Thomas B. Hansen (2008), the violence in North Kerala does not feature crowds in which individuals lose their singularity to merge and become one (Chaturvedi 2011,343). Unlike in communal and other forms of violence in other parts of India, crowds have not been driven to "devour all they can" and eliminate large sections of people in riotous violence in North Kerala (ibid, 343-46). She points out that although some elements of crowd violence have been present, the violence in North Kerala has been largely between small groups belonging to opposing political organisations or targeting a single member of the opposing group (ibid). In these violent acts – murders, infliction of grievous physical injuries, destruction of property of the opposing group etc – spanning over a period of three to four decades, the Marxist Left, specifically the CPI(M) has almost been a common denominator, appearing in one or the other side of the conflict most of the times (T.P.Rajeevan, *Malayala Manorama*, 6th May 2012).

It is difficult to characterize these acts of violence in general, and the TP murder specifically, into one particular 'type' in Tilly's scheme (Tilly 2003, 14-16). At best, we can characterize the violence in North Kerala as a combination of two types in his scheme, namely, 'violent rituals' and 'opportunism'. Firstly, 'violent rituals', according to Tilly, "involve well defined group or groups following 'a known interaction script' of violence as it strives for recognition

or priority within a certain area" (ibid). There is indeed a 'known interaction script' in the everyday life of violent politics in North Kerala that involves standard 'condemnations', justifications and even set modus operandi of violent acts. These violent acts between the conflicting political organizations – mainly the Hindu right and the Marxist Left – are aimed to gain influence and power in a particular region and have had the effect of gradually normalising the 'interaction script' of violence in North Kerala (Chaturvedi 2011). Secondly, 'opportunism' is described by Tilly as 'individuals or collectives engaging in generally forbidden ends' (ibid). Looting, gang rape, piracy, revenge killing etc, Tilly says, are the examples of this type. There is also an element of opportunism in the violent acts – committed for reasons that range from strategy to revenge – in the everyday political life of North Kerala. Sometimes, as in the case of the TP murder, these opportunities are deliberately created and the member(s) of the opposing group is assassinated (*Malayala Manorama*, 5ᵗʰ May 2012).

4.2 The TP murder: remarks on aspects other than discourse

As has been mentioned in the previous chapters, our fundamental interest in this project is to explore the reasons for the failure of the TP murder to become a transformational 'event' in the Sewellian sense. In exploring this, the primary site of our inquiry is the discourse produced in the aftermath of the TP murder in North Kerala. However, before looking at the predominant themes of this discourse closely, let us briefly examine some of the other features that Sewell considers to be characteristic of an 'event.' The following discussion is not integral to our analysis. However it would give us a better grasp of the context while indicating other dimensions of the TP murder that we do not subject to detailed analysis.

To begin with, it should be noted that there are strands in the socio-political and cultural context of North Kerala following the TP murder that fit well with Sewell's conception of an 'event', but there are also instances where this may not be the case. Events, according to

31

Sewell, are to be conceived as sequences of occurrences resulting in structural dislocation or transformation. The beginning of such a transformation is to be found in a 'rupture', which he defines as a " surprising break with routine practice" (Sewell Jr 1996, 843). Following the TP murder, there were indeed several ruptures or departures from the usual routine associated with instances of political violence in North Kerala, the unprecedented strength and quantity of the discourse not being the least among them. Or, alternatively, the several unfamiliar responses associated with the TP murder – the discourse, the swift conclusion of police investigation leading to the arrest of party leaders, the public pressure on the party and its response in the form of a counter-discourse and the general strength of public protest and condemnation – could all be construed as constituting the 'rupture' Sewell considered essential to begin a structural transformation.

Another criterion or characteristic that Sewell considers essential for something to be an 'event' is what he calls a 'chain of occurrences' that will sustain the impact of the initial 'rupture' and eventually lead to structural transformation (Sewell Jr, 1996, 844). The visit of the powerful V.S.Achuthanandan – the most popular leader within the CPI(M) who has been at odds with the 'official' faction in the party – to the slain leader's house at Onchiyam was one such 'occurrence'. This visit which was widely covered by the media had spontaneously mobilised a large crowd at Onchiyam that was highly emotional and anti-CPI(M) (*Mangalam*, 6th June 2012).[9] The highly controversial 'Danke'[10] remark made by VS in a

---

[9] VS's visit to TP's house was on the day of by-election to Neyyattinkara constituency in the Trivandrum district of Kerala. The election was a very important one for the party. Hence, the visit was viewed as a treachery by the party loyalists and as moral by TP's supporters and commentators (*Mangalam*, 6th June 2012)

press conference (*Malayala Manorama*, 13th May 2012), the CPI(M) leaders' arrest in connection to the murder (Mintu P. Jacob, *Malayala Manorama*, 14th August 2012) and a series of other such significant occurrences had taken place in the days following the TP murder. Whether this was a 'chain of occurrences' strong enough to produce "consecutive and reinforcing ruptures" in other locations and whether it would have prevented the accommodating effect of "standard procedures and sanctions" is another question that needs to be answered through sociological research (Sewell Jr, 1996, 844).

Another characteristic of historical events as conceived by Sewell is 'heightened emotion' (Sewell Jr 1996, 844-47). He argues that it is quiet crucial to understand the "emotional significance of bloodshed", if one is to understand the unfolding of the event following the initial rupture. This too seems to have been largely fulfilled in the case of the TP murder. As we will see in our analysis of the discourse, the martyrdom of TP and the significance of his 'blood spilled on the streets of Onchiyam' has been a very prominent theme in the discourse that followed the murder. The symbolic interpretations of the TP murder as 'courageous martyrdom' and 'sacrifice' also conforms to Sewell's scheme, but whether it contributed to the 'event' resulting in 'cultural transformations' is, again, an open question (Sewell Jr, 1996, 861). Also, whether there were in place 'opportunity structures' (Tarrow, 1998) in the Kerala society conducive for a 'rupture' to become a transformational 'event' is yet another question that needs to be answered through further research.

---

[10] S.A.Danke was a leader of the undivided communist party who is supposed to have played a crucial role in the party's split in 1964. Comparing Pinarayi to Danke is demeaning as the former is a hated figure in party circles (Johny 2012).

4.3 The TP murder: analysing the discourses

In the following pages we analyse the ways in which the murder of T.P.Chandrasekharan at Onchiyam in North Kerala has been predominantly framed by the discourses constructed around it. By discourses we largely imply the various responses, articles, editorials and commentaries written in the aftermath of the violent act in question. To employ the element of 'voice' in Verloo's scheme (Verloo 2005) in an overarching manner at the outset, these responses can be largely categorised into two - by those who have maintained a critical stance towards the CPI (M) over the years and by those who have sought to defend the party at the time of its crisis. It also needs to be mentioned that the above categorisation of the 'voices' of the discourses is meant to be only a general one and does not rule out the possibility of, to modify Verloo's term, 'mixed voices'. We will try to locate each commentator and/or article in the broad political spectrum of the Kerala society ranging from the far left to the far right as we proceed, and thereby further perfect our identification of the 'voice' involved in particular instances

The analysis is broadly divided into two sections, 4.3.1 and 4.3.2. In the first section, we identify and examine the predominant themes that have been present in the discourse of the commentators who are critical of the communist party. These are the themes of factionalism, ideology and brutality. In the second section, we show the responses of those who sought to defend the party against the critical discourse. Although there are many strands here, we focus on those which respond to the predominant themes in the critical discourse. The analysis will show that the themes of factionalism, ideology and brutality ended up provoking opposing and forceful counter-narratives from the defenders of the party. Thus, instead of sustaining the 'rupture' that was the TP murder and reinforcing its transformational potentials (Sewell Jr 1996), the discourse ended up being deeply conflictual and relapsed into the familiar realm of contestation.

4.3.1 The discourse

Factionalism, ideology and brutality are the major themes around which critical commentators have mainly anchored their discourse on the TP murder. We show below how each of these themes has been presented and how they take the form of an indictment of the communist party.

4.3.1.1 Highlighting factionalism

Factionalism has been one characteristic feature that communist parties across the world seem to have had in common. [11]The very founding of CPI (M) in India, as we mentioned in the Introduction, was a result of factionalism in the undivided Communist Party in 1964. The party has ever since had factional tendencies of various dimensions.[12]

In the following pages we show that the language or discourse of factionalism has been a predominant way in which the TP murder has been talked about by commentators critical of the party. There is no explicit 'diagnosis' (Verloo 2005) of factionalism as the problem or, in this case, the direct cause that led to the political murder. However, the articles and editorials that dwell on the topic of the TP murder tend to follow a more or less common argumentative trajectory. They begin by referring to the violent event – often only in a few words as the socio-political milieu in which the writing takes place had already rendered a detailed description of the event unnecessary – and then swiftly move on to a discussion and/or critique that highlights the factionalism in the party. We show below how the responses to the

[11] One of the most famous instances of factionalism within communist parties undoubtedly has been the fallout between Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin in the Russian Bolshevik Party following the death of Vladimir Lenin. If this was a result of leadership ambitions at an individual level, there were also substantial variations in the ideological and political visions of both the leaders, especially in matters such as the evaluation of the Bolshevik Revolution and Soviet bureaucratisation (Thatcher 2003). The bitter culmination of this factionalism was Stalin's persecution of Trotsky for long years which ended in the latter's murder in 1940 in Mexico.

[12] For a detailed account of the factional tendencies in the CPI(M), see Background in chapter 1.

TP murder take the form of a discussion of factionalism within the CPI(M) ; the alleged

merits of one faction over the other, highlighting of the factional struggle within the party,

equal condemnation of both factions and so on. Eventually, as we will show later, these

discussions on the factionalism in the party would be construed as right wing attack on the

party and counter-discourses would be framed.

In an article titled 'Pinarayi : indeed a traitor to the tribe; VS: not a traitor to the tribe', the

author highlights that Pinarayi's[13] controversial reference to TP as the 'traitor' was opposed

by VS.[14] As mentioned above, the commentator – a detractor of the 'official' faction within

the CPI (M) for a long time and a member of the right wing political coalition in Kerala –

briefly mentions the murder of TP and then contrasts the differences in the responses of

Pinarayi and VS to the TP murder:

"After Pinarayi repeated the 'traitor to the tribe' expression in Thrissur [a district in Kerala],
VS stated that it is only a personal opinion of the former, not the opinion of the party. He also
made clear that he doesn't hold that opinion about TP" (M.P.Vireendrakumar, *The Politics of
51 strikes*, 23).

The quote below shows how the responses of the two factions within the CPI (M) to the TP

murder are contrasted in order to highlight the alleged righteousness of one faction and the

moral decay and insensitivity of another:

" In responding to the fact that a long time co-activist and communist has been brutally
slaughtered, none of these people [the Pinarayi faction] had even a trace of sadness or anger
on their faces, instead, there was indifference and lack of emotion. At times it seemed as if
their faces even had a faint smile on them. The only exceptions were V.S, Pradeep Kumar
and Simon Britto [the last two being leaders who don't belong to the official faction].
Although ordinary activists of the CPI (M) who followed the funeral procession of
Chandrasekharan [TP] seemed sad and angry." (M.P.Vireendrakumar, *The Politics of 51
strikes*, 23).

---

[13] Pinarayi Vijayan, the long time state secretary of the CPI(M); allegedly represents the 'official faction' within
the party. Pinarayi had repeatedly referred to TP as 'traitor to the tribe' after he broke away from the party to
found a new organization (*Malayala Manorama*, 13th May 2012).
[14] VS Achuthanandan, the leader of opposition in the state legislature and the most popular leader of the
CPI(M). Has been at odds with the 'official faction' represented by Pinarayi for long.

To accentuate the contrast further, the commentator attempts a critique of the body language of Pinarayi, the representative of the official faction of the party, while responding to the TP murder:

" All the people in Kerala have seen the words used by Pinarayi and his body language [while responding to the murder]. They reflected arrogance and self righteousness. Such statements from someone who leads an organisation will only create an atmosphere of fear, especially among the mothers and sisters [a typical phrase in Malayalam, the language spoken in Kerala] of our society...If this is how the leadership of the CPI (M) reacts to death, then there will be a time when people will ask them, 'are you a human being or a communist?'" (M.P.Vireendrakumar, *The Politics of 51 strikes*, 23).

Around the same time as TP's murder, a highly controversial speech made by another leader of the CPI (M) in which the violent political culture of CPI (M) was audaciously and somewhat proudly endorsed had come to light. In this speech the leader of the party in the Idukki district of Kerala, M.M.Mani, had brazenly revealed how the party murdered its political opponents in the past (*Mathrubhumi*, 6th April 2013). Another ardent critic of the party refers to this speech and points out that neither faction has the moral right to be critical of the other. Unlike the commentator above, there is no enforcing of the moral stature of one faction over the other here. However, the theme of discussion still remains the factionalism in the party:

" The change that it [the speech] has brought into the power struggle within CPI (M) is notable.....it has made the spear that VS has been sharpening against Pinarayi really blunt [reference to factionalism]. Because VS was the District Secretary of the Party during that time and because Mani [the leader who made the controversial speech] supported him, the former has lost his moral power to criticise Pinarayi regarding the TP murder. It is known to the party members that such a thing [the violent acts mentioned in the speech] would not have taken place without VS's knowledge (K.Venu, *The Politics of 51 strikes,* 98).

The article by another right wing commentator begins, as usual, by referring to the 'shocking' murder of TP:

"The brutal murder of TP, the true communist and revolutionary leader at Onchiyam, has shocked the society",

but then seeks to align the slain leader and his rebel organisation with the ideological strand allegedly represented by the VS faction in CPI (M) in a retrospective manner:

37

" When TP was leading his fight outside the party as a staunch communist, he had the firm belief that VS was fighting from inside the party for exactly the same things that he and his supporters stood for" (Nasarudeen Elamaram, *The Politics of 51 strikes,* 118*).*

Finally, it turns into a plea to 'act now' to the specific group inside the party led by VS and thereby define and highlight the role of the 'true communist' faction inside the current corrupted organisation.

"This is where the moral responsibility of VS begins in this act of sacrifice. VS who has appointed himself as the symbol of right has to show his sincerity through his acts now…he has been seen as very saddened by the event of the TP murder. It seems he represses himself a lot when he speaks on this topic…. Therefore it is VS who should make the call now on whether the blood of another true communist should be spilled on this soil" (Nasarudeen Elamaram, *The Politics of 51 strikes,* 118*).*

It is not an isolated one and forms a prominent part of the discourse that has been produced in the aftermath of the TP murder, although we cannot reproduce each of them here for obvious reasons. This is especially so in the case of articles and responses by the critics of the CPI (M), some of which have been quoted above. The idea seems to be to make use of the legitimacy crisis that the organisation has found itself in after the widely condemned murder in order to highlight, and to an extent, accentuate, the factionalism in the party.

An editorial in a prominent newspaper under the title 'Mourning in the land, Battle in CPI (M)' begins with the fact of the TP murder and then focuses on the factionalism within the party. It stresses the fact that the factional fight between VS and Pinarayi has deepened the crisis that the party already faces in the wake of the TP murder:

"…at a time when the party is struggling to deny the allegations [of its role in the TP murder], the battle between VS and the state secretary Pinarayi is driving the CPI (M) into deeper crisis" (*Malayala Manorama*, 13th May 2012).

And finally, it brings to focus the disunity in the party in Kerala due to factionalism as follows:

"The VS-Pinarayi war is more than a decade old. However, now that VS has publicly lashed out against the party secretary and the official faction, it needs to be seen how the party that considers organisational discipline imperative deals with it...The stand adopted by VS seems

to be 'if the party is complicitous in the murder, let those responsible for it save it now'. It needs to be mentioned that now that the CPI (M) has come under the shadow of doubt in the eyes of the public following the TP murder, only a few leaders have come out to justify the official faction" (*Malayala Manorama*, 13th May 2012).

Although operating within the frame of factionalism, not all commentaries resort to drawing a contrast between the allegedly corrupt, insensitive official faction inside the party and the righteous and morally superior faction led by VS. Some, like the one quoted below, are critical of the VS faction too:

"Even after four years, VS has not been able to do anything for those who have been expelled from the party in Onchiyam for sloganeering in favour of him…VS has decided to stand with those who believe that the CPI (M) leadership has its hand in the murder…But, the brutal murder of TP has made it impossible for VS to continue with his political play anymore" (*Malayala Manorama*, 13th May 2012).

Some of the commentaries attempt to cast the factional fight within the party as something driven exclusively by 'power politics' and argue that it was the disenchanted supporters of the party, like TP, that later imbued it with the colours of ideological struggle:

"It was the fight for power among the CPI (M) leadership that later turned into factionalism. The supporters of the party who were disillusioned by its deviations from the old communist values took this as a struggle against its ideological decay and joined VS. People such as TP continued this struggle even after VS disowned it. …VS realizes the fact there may not be such a good opportunity to dominate Pinarayi and his faction again and has decided to battle it out disregarding the dangers in so doing" (*Malayala Manorama*, 13th May 2012).

Some of the commentaries like the one quoted below clearly demarcate the factional lines in the party and employ the metaphors of battle and war to further stress the point. Sometimes the official faction is referred to as the party itself and pitted against VS, the individual:

"…the party is anxious about whether VS will make his doubts about its role in the TP murder public. In this factional war that has been touted as the final one, the ongoing murder investigation seems to be VS's decisive weapon" (*Malayala Manorama,* 24th May 2012).

Some commentaries employing the theme of factionalism while speaking about the TP murder seem less sure of such a clear demarcation:

" By paying tribute to TP as a 'brave communist', VS has implicitly mentioned the role of the party in the former's murder and has thus become acceptable even to the official faction of the party." (*Malayala Manorama,* 12th August 2012).

To sum up in the light of the above quotes, the discourse on factionalism generated in the context of the TP murder has functioned largely in the following way. Firstly, the commentators – majority of them detractors of the CPI (M) – seek to highlight, and in some cases even accentuate, the factionalism in the party. This is often done by casting the so called official faction in the party as those who represent and are responsible for everything that is wrong with the CPI (M). There is also an implicit attribution of the responsibility of the TP murder on them. Simultaneously, the VS faction is cast as the upholder of morality and right. While this seems to be the case with the majority of the commentaries, there are also commentators who treat factionalism as the outcome of 'power politics' and not as a result of political disagreements (as in *Malayala Manorama*, 13th May 2012, cited above).

These discourses largely serve the function of jeopardising the image of the party in the public eye by pitting the positions adopted by VS against the allegedly unsympathetic and arrogant positions adopted by the 'official faction'. The point to be noted here is how the theme of factionalism becomes a predominant one in the discourse produced in the aftermath of the TP murder. Now this not entirely surprising given the fact that the responses of VS have been in stark contrast with the official responses of the party. But it is when the discourse moves beyond a mere acknowledgement of the divergent stances of the party leadership on the TP murder, as has been shown above, that it becomes important for us. In other words, it is the emergence of factionalism as a major theme of the discourse in the aftermath of the TP murder that needs to be noted.

4.3.1.2 Party ideology as the problem

The critique of the ideology of the CPI (M)[15] forms an important theme in the discourse generated around the event of the TP murder. The commentators move swiftly between the immediate and overwhelming reality of the brutal murder of a political activist and the critique of the ideological moorings and organisational structure of the CPI (M). This movement often leads to an indictment of the communist ideology and organisational structure as anti-democratic. Furthermore, this allegedly intrinsic anti-democratic quality of the party ideology and organisational structure is 'diagnosed' to be the force that led to the murder of TP (Verloo 2005). It is to be noted that we do not, at least in this section, attempt an evaluation of this proposition. Instead, we show how the discourse around the TP murder turns into an indictment of the alleged ideological intolerance of Communist Parties in general and the CPI (M) in particular.

The rebellion as 'ideological' and ideology as 'problematic'

There are two ways in which the commentaries on the TP murder deal with the theme of ideology and/or organisational structure of the Marxist Party. Needless to say, the 'voice' (Verloo 2005) here is again largely that of those who are critical of the party. Firstly, they frame the founding of Revolutionary Marxist Party by TP solely in terms of ideology, and

---

[15] The question of compatibility between the ideological and organisational structure of communist parties and democracy has been a persistent one in India. In fact, this is a question which the CPI, and after the split the CPI (M), have themselves dwelled on at various organisational levels including the highest level of the Party Congress multiple times. The party programme adopted at the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party of India held at Calcutta in 1964 and updated at the Special Conference of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) held at Thiruvananthapuram (October 20-23, 2000) demonstrates the party's prolong reflection on this matter. It views the Indian state as dominated by the big bourgeoisie and the feudal class and makes the establishment of a socialist society under proletarian statehood its objective. However, the party puts before the people as its immediate objective the founding of a 'people's democracy' by remaining within the current democratic framework in India (CPI[M] Programme, Thiruvananthapuram, 2000). The party programme and ideological statement is available at *www.cpim.org*.

ovoid any mention of practical or political reasons that may also have played a role in this act of rebellion.[16] Secondly, these commentaries 'diagnose' (Verloo 2005) the Communist ideological and organisational structure in general and that of the CPI (M) in particular as the problem behind the violent nature of politics in North Kerala, of which the murder of TP the most prominent instance in recent times.

To illustrate the first point, i.e., the framing of the political rebellion by TP as an exclusively ideological action, let us look at the following quotes. The quote below is from what is perhaps one of the first pieces written on the TP murder, published on the very next day of the murder. The reason behind TP's departure from the party is clearly identified as ideological here:

"TP who was a firm supporter of the VS faction had become the enemy in the eyes of the party ever since he came out of the party publicly criticising its ideological deviations. Ever since he founded the RMP in Onchiyam his life was under threat" (*Malayala Manorama*, 5th May 2012).

Again, the commentator below is fully convinced that the act of founding the RMP was an exclusively ideological one:

"TP had held positions in both SFI and DYFI [student and youth wings of the party] and had also been a member of the Onchiyam Area Committee of the party. It was in the middle of this that TP parted ways with the party leadership for reasons of ideology and formed the RMP" (T.P.Rajeevan, *Malayala Manorama*,6th May 2012).

For the first time in history the party had lost power to TP's organisation in the panchayath (lowest tier of local government in India) elections in Onchiyam, a party village with a heritage of martyrdoms. RMP had also managed to overtake the party in terms of popular support in other panchayaths in the region (*Malayala Manorama*, 6th May 2012). After noting the above, an editorial titled 'Sacrifice' mentions how the ideological rebellion that was initiated by TP had led to his murder:

---

[16] The disagreements between a section of the party and the party leadership regarding coalitional agreements in certain Panchayaths in the district of Kozhikode had played a role in founding TP's breakaway organization (V.V Dakshinamoorthy, *The politics of 51 hacks,* 49).

" Those who share TP's system of thought believe that he was assassinated by those who did not have answers to the ideological questions raised by TP. The public challenge raised by TP to the ideological deviations of the party by forming the Revolutionary Marxist Party was not a small one" (*Malayala Manorama*, 6th May 2012).

Note how the act of rebellion, i.e. the founding of RMP, and the challenges it raised for the party, are construed exclusively as ideological. This is a constant theme in many instances of the discourse, and almost all write-ups including day to day reports on the progress of the murder investigation follow the above editorial in referring to the ideological departure that TP had committed by founding the rebel organisation. There is no mention of the practical reasons that may have contributed to TP's decision to break away from the party he had worked for such a long time and found RMP. The controversies surrounding the coalition arrangements between the CPI (M) and the Janata Dal (a former member party in the Left Front coalition in Kerala) in the panchayaths of Eranmala and Azhiyoor in the district of Kozhikode had played a significant role in antagonising one section of the party which included TP (*Malayala Manorama,* 6th May 2012). In the entire discourse composed of critical voices towards the party that we reviewed, there was only one instance of a commentary mentioning the above practical and political aspect involved in the founding of the RMP.

Let us make a brief digression here to point out a very crucial act of omission which conforms to the Foucauldian notion that 'the process of exclusion is essential to discourse' (Mills, 1997,63). This is something that in a way delegitimizes the entire discourse of the critique of communist ideological and organisational structure delineated above. Although the theme of ideological departure that TP had committed is quite ubiquitous, there is no mention of what exactly the ideological position of RMP, the organisation that TP had founded, is. This is surprising since commentators have dwelled on the relatively 'serious' discussions of the corroding effects of class struggle and Stalinist and Leninist approaches at considerable lengths even in articles written for the general readers (K.Venu, *The Politics of*

51 strikes, 96; Archbishop Mar Joseph Powathil, *The Politics of 51 strikes,* 62; M.Leelavathi, *The Politics of 51 strikes,* 44 and so on). Therefore, it is only reasonable to expect specific descriptions of RMP's ideology that goes beyond terminologies such as ''true' Marxism', and yet, a closer look at the discourse reveals that it has been absent. What explains this?

Most of the commentators quoted above are well known for their critical stance towards the CPI (M) and Marxism for various reasons. An explication of the ideological moorings of TP and his organisation would eventually have been an explication of, and presumably a justification of, fundamental Marxist principles from which the dominant communist party had 'deviated'.[17] There would not have been any room for the commentators to be critical towards the hard core or 'pure' ideological premises that TP supposedly adhered to, given the fact that the entire discourse had been built upon the edifice of the righteousness of the rebel and the decay of the party from which he had broken away. An explication of the ideological moorings of the RMP would have, therefore, left the commentators with only two choices. Either endorse the foundational Marxist principles which the rebel organisation allegedly sought to preserve and practice, or be critical of them. The former choice would have been completely against the well known positions these detractors of the Marxist party had held for a long time, and the latter, more importantly, would have broken down the dichotomies – moral decay versus moral righteousness, ideological deviation versus ideological purity – that these commentators painstakingly strived to build up through their discourse. Thus,

---

[17] It is quite clear that unlike past breakaways from the CPI (M), the founding of RMP by TP was not a movement to the right of the political spectrum; if anything, it was a movement to the further left. Unlike many other leaders who have been either expelled from the party or parted ways with it in the past, TP strongly adhered to his version of Communist politics. He never joined the right wing coalition in Kerala like his rebelling political predecessors and advocated a more radical communist position (Johny, 2012; Malayala Manorama, 6th May 2012).

maintaining a pregnant silence about what exactly TP and his organisation stood for was probably the only viable option for the efficacy of the discourse

If construing the 'rebellion' of TP as an exclusively ideological act was one way in which the theme of party ideology has been dealt with in the discourse, a much more open attack on the ideological and organisational structure of the Communist Party has been another aspect of the theme.

A commentator refers to the rigid and allegedly anti-democratic organisational structure of communist parties, especially as employed by Stalin in Russia, and then swiftly superimposes this on the CPI (M) and its political practice in Kerala:

"History is full of examples of how cadre oriented organisations of 'professional revolutionaries', like the one Lenin built up, turn invariably anti-democratic in the end. The one party system developed by Lenin based on centralised power turned into a license to kill anybody under Stalin. The CPI (M) in Kerala that has been in power alternatively has been using this Stalinist approach to deal with its opponents outside. The VS camp has never objected to this practice in the past and now they have become the victims of it [reference to the TP murder]. This has led to a situation where there does not remain even an iota of democracy in the lower levels of the party like the branch, local and area committees." (*Malayala Manorama*, 13th May, 2012).

Comparing the murder of TP to an equally high profile murder that took place in Kerala years ago – that of a Muslim dissident cleric – another commentator points out how both were results of the same intolerant ideological position, namely, 'the punishment for a rebel is death itself':

"There are some communists who believe that the individual who leaves the party by disobeying the leadership (renegade) deserves the punishment of death. It is in accordance to this ideology that TP was killed. There are Muslims who believe that the individual who leaves Islam by disobeying the laws of the religion (murthad) deserves the punishment of death. It is in accordance to this ideology that Chekannoor [the cleric] was killed. Both were victims of anti-democratic ideologies, the only difference being that the first was a political party and the second a religion. Except in their names, there is not much difference." (Malayala Manorama, 26th May, 2012).

Invoking infamous figures such Stalin, Pol Pot and Hitler and weaving their infamous history into the response to the TP murder in order to signify the current violent practice and organisational structure of the CPI (M) is another strategy adopted by the commentators. In

the quote below, the author who is a prominent expert on Malayalam language and a literary critic also justifies her distance to the Left politics here:

"It is the left parties who believe in using murder to end opponents and in using murdered activists as martyrs. This is why many intellectuals do not stand with the left parties although they firmly believe in the goals of these parties. Those who believe that it is all right to kill your opponents in order to make the world better are demonic sadists like Pol Pot, Stalin and Hitler" (M.Leelavathi, *The Politics of 51 strikes,* 44).

However, given the antagonistic relationship that the CPI (M) in particular and communist parties in general have had with the Church, it is not surprising that perhaps the most vehement criticism of the party's ideology has come from a head of the Church. After repeating the same trope about Stalin et al as above (*The Politics of 51 strikes,* 61), Archbishop Mar Joseph Powathil, the influential head of the Syro-Malabar Catholic church in Kerala tears into the party and its ideology in a piece titled 'Ideologues lose their way'. The Bishop quotes from the writings of the first Communist chief minister of Kerala and one of the greatest Communist leaders in India, EMS,[18] in the following passage to illustrate his point. The Bishop strives to make the point that the Communist ideology is inherently violent and devoid of values below:

" Even if we forget all the above [the cruelties of Stalin et al], isn't this what the Marxist teacher E.M.S has taught here? : '…it is foolishness to think that this process of class struggle and revolution will take place non-violently. When the oppressing class tries to retain its power and the oppressed to seize power, both sides will use every useful way' [*Marxism: A Study*]. Isn't the summary of the above 'the end shall justify the means'? In fact, which morality can these materialists speak of? Is there any mention of the eternal values of truth, love and compassion in their ideology? … no materialism, even if it is dialectical materialism, has nothing more to say than this – whether murder or lying through teeth, anything can be done as long it is helpful" (Archbishop Mar Joseph Powathil, *The Politics of 51 strikes,* 62).

The Bishop characteristically concludes that it is neither Communism nor Capitalism – both 'materialisms' – but the third way of the Catholic church that the society needs now (*The Politics of 51 strikes,* 63).

---

[18] E.M.Shankaran Namboothirippad

We will conclude this section by quoting two other instances of indictment of the communist

party ideology and/or organisational structure. The first one traces the ideological origins of

violence of the CPI (M) to their 'strategic' co-operation with the democratic framework as a

political party.

" The Communists declared their adoption of the parliamentary route in 1951. However, they
reassured their supporters of their revolutionary intentions by ensuring them that they will
continue with the secretive style of party activism. In the name of preventing
parliamentarianism, they also encouraged unlawful activities [picketing etc], calling them
extra parliamentary struggle" (K.Venu, *The Politics of 51 strikes,* 95).

And further that the very nature of the communist organisation and politics has led it to being

incompatible with democracy:

"…strategic or temporary co-operation of the communists with the democratic framework
has led to a general lack of respect towards democracy, not only within the communist party
but also among its supporters and sympathisers" (K.Venu, *The Politics of 51 strikes,* 96).

The next quote below wonders if there is something corrupting about the Marxist ideology

per se that turns even 'good human beings' into bad ones. Again, the figures of Stalin, Pol Pot

et al make their appearance in the critique of the corrupting influence of Communist

ideology. The commentary goes as follows:

" Even today these 'revolutionaries' reminisce fondly about their violent and destructive
actions in the past, although none of these justify the state brutality that these people have had
to face. However, it is possible that they might become emotional about comrade Stalin in
their weak moments even today….why do people think about the value of democracy only
when they are standing in the weak light of the hinterlands of the organisation? Could it be
that the core problem is of the ideology? Isn't it that even good people lose their direction
when in the shadow of the ideology?"

It closes by implying that the Communist ideology and organisation is facing its invariable

extinction because of its ideological content:

"Therefore, it is time to doubt the ideology itself. It is possible that an interrogation of the
ideology might make the organisation fall apart. Let it. Anyway it is going to remain here
only for another hundred years." (E. Santhoshkumar, *The Politics of 51 strikes,* 110).

There seems to be a narrative emerging from the above instances of the critique of communist ideology and organisational structure that have been constructed around the murder of TP. Firstly, TP's act of breaking away from the CPI (M) to found the RMP is shown to be an exclusively ideological departure. There is barely any mention of the practical and/or political reasons that might have also had a role to play in this act of rebellion undertaken by this erstwhile activist of the CPI (M). Given the history of such breakaway organisations in Kerala – parties hoisted by former communists such as M.V.Raghavan and K.R.Gauri Amma (Johny 2012) – and indeed in other parts of the world, these are always acts brought about by a combination of practical, political and ideological reasons. However, the departure that is supposed to have been committed by TP in founding the RMP is construed only as an act of ideology and against the 'deviations' of the dominant Marxist party. In other words, TP and his organisation have been elevated into symbols of a 'pure' communist past as opposed to the opportunist and ideologically bankrupt CPI (M) today (*Malayala Manorama*, 19th May 2012). Once this has been established, the discourse swiftly moves on to the critique of the ideological and organisational structure of communist parties, particularly the CPI (M). The commentators emphasize the intolerant and flawed ideological position of the CPI(M) and argue that the violent political culture of North Kerala is being derived from this ideological and organisational structure of the party.

. 4.3.1.3 Condemnation of brutality

Couldn't he, TP, have been finished

 with a single hack?

Then why so many of them?

Each of those fifty one hacks,

48

to blow out

each letter

in the language of justice[19]

that was him…

(K.G.Shankarappilla, 'The hackway', *Mathrubhumi* weekly, 27th May - 2nd June, 2012).

The murder of T.P. Chandrasekharan was one of the most brutal political murders to have ever occurred in Kerala, or for that matter, even in India. The dead body was found to have fifty one wounds, all made with hatchets and swords. The face was hacked beyond recognition and the post mortem report revealed damage to the brain (*Malayala Manorama*, 6th May 2012). Such violence should evoke wide spread condemnation in any democratic society, as it surely did in Kerala. However, in the following pages, we attempt to show how a discourse that emphasizes the brutality of a violent act in order to evoke condemnation can have unintended and even undesirable consequences, especially in the context of societies like North Kerala with a long history of violence (Chaturvedi 2011). We show how the discourse of brutality provokes a counter-discourse that highlights instances of brutal violence in the past in order to blunt the force of the former. But first, let us look at how the critical commentators emphasize the brutality involved in the murder of TP in order to put the CPI(M) under pressure.

 An editorial subtitled 'Would the Party bid adieu to the politics of murder?' reminds the readers that brutal violence has been part of the CPI(M)'s politics in the past too and that this

---

[19] There are fifty one letters in the Malayalam alphabet.

had brought it under criticism. But unlike in the past, the editorial argues, there is no unified

defense of its actions inside the party in the case of the TP murder:

"The CPI (M) has been under such criticism only once before when the YuvaMorcha [the youth wing of the Hindu Right] leader and teacher K.T.Jayakrishnan was killed in front of students in a class room…the demonic act of hacking Jayakrishnan to death before the kids was much criticised then. However, it is notable that unlike today the entire party had come forward to defend itself at that point" (*Malayala Manorama*, 13th May 2012).

Drawing a contrast between the image of the 'enlightened' Kerala society that has full

literacy among its people and the cruelty of the TP murder, another commentator says:

" What was TP's fault to deserve a death so cruel?…If newspaper reports are to be believed, it was only from his 'identity card' that people could realise the murdered person was indeed the CPI (M) rebel leader of Onchiyam T.P.Chandrasekharan. The ever pleasant and energetic face of TP was that much disfigured from the hacks of those 'strangers'" (*Malayala Manorama*, 6th May, 2012).

In a highly emotional passage that retrospectively and somewhat imaginatively reconstructs

the murder, another commentator weaves in the narratives of brutality and the glory of

courageous martyrdom in a few lines. To make clear the emphasis it puts on the brutality of

the murder and the 'bravery' of the martyr, the quote below has to be a bit lengthy:

" Even when the murderers struck him down the revolutionary called TP refused to run away. Even when they spread terror by exploding bombs he did not shout to gather people. He did not scream out even when his eyes and ears, open always for the people, were being split up with the hacks; even when his brain, filled with dreams for his land, was being hacked. He gave even his pain to death …he proved that the name revolutionary, which also happens to be the name of his party, was befitting him by falling in the pool of blood on the street of Vallikkad [the place in Onchiyam where the murder took place]… the marks that the lethal weapons had left on the face and head of TP shows the kind of demonicity that has not been seen even in the most cruel political murders in Kerala. This was a demonicity that even failed the language of Malayalam…the kind of demonicity that the US imperialism had been afraid to show even towards Saddam Husein or Osama bin Laden" (Appukkuttan Vallikkunnu, *The Politics of 51 strikes,* 65-66).

Suffice it to say that the theme of outrageous brutality involved in the murder of TP has been

a consistent one throughout the entire discourse (*Malayala Manorama*, 18th May, 2012). The

unacceptability of the brutality involved in the murder is conveyed in various ways ranging

from the selective quoting of responses in social network forums (*Malayala Manorama*, 18th

May 2012) to the repetitive reporting of the murder in vivid detail (*Malayala Manorama*, 6th May 2012). Special features published on the day of TP's first death anniversary repeats with the same vividness the details of the murder and emphasize that such brutality is unacceptable (*Malayala Manorama*, 4th May 2013; *Mathrubhumi,* 4th May 2013).

4.3.2 The counter- discourse

Here, we introduce into our analysis the articles and commentaries written by the leaders and spokesmen of the party that assume the form of a counter-discourse and attempt to defend the party against the relentless pressure of its detractors in the wake of the TP murder. The counter-discourse that has been produced to defend the party, much like the discourse, has several strands in it. The criticism and the indictment that the party had to face from its critics as well as from other sections of the society in the wake of the TP murder is portrayed as an organised attack on the party. In an article titled 'The ultimate aim is party itself', the author construes the entire discourse criticising the party for the TP murder as " propaganda of the right wing media to destroy the left front" (Prabha Varma*, Deshabhimani*, 26th May 2012). The lengthy statement produced by the CPI(M) state secretariat exhorts the party members, supporters and the masses to defend the party against the conspiracy of the right wing forces to destroy the party *(Deshabhimani*, 6th May 2012). Another commentator argues that the whole allegation regarding the TP murder is a ploy " by the established forces of capital to destroy the left leaning orientation of the Kerala society so that the vested right wing interests can gain permanent upper hand" (*Deshabhimani*, 6th May). We will not go into each of these frames in detail. Here we will focus only two themes. Firstly, how the articles and commentaries written in defence of the party seek to counter the discourse on ideology that we analysed above. Secondly, how they produce an account of past brutality against the activists of the Communist party in order counter the discourse on brutality.

4.3.2.1 The rebellion as 'non-ideological' and the correctness of the party

If the discourse that we analysed above seemed to frame the rebellion of TP as an act motivated exclusively by ideological convictions, the commentaries that have been produced by the party in response to it do the exact opposite. They argue that the founding of the RMP by TP was completely based on certain practical and political reasons. Specifically, they highlight the disagreements between party leaderships at different levels regarding the power sharing agreement that the CPI(M) had with its former coalition partner the Janata Dal at the panchayaths of Eranmala and Azhiyoor at Onchiyam. One faction of the party including TP was against handing over the president post of the Eranmala panchayat to the Janata Dal as per the coalition agreement made earlier (V.V.Dakshinamoorthy, *Deshabhimani*, 11th May 2012). By asserting that there was nothing ideological about the rebellious actions of TP, the party seeks to simultaneously counter its detractors and delegitimize the rebel organization.

Below, the commentator who also happens to be a prominent leader of the CPI(M) in Kerala, justifies the phrase 'traitor to the tribe' employed to designate TP and his comrades:

" The phrase has been subjected to a lot of discussion in the media. The people will judge those who have cheated the party to become the stooges of the class enemies for sure. They will surely judge them to be betrayers of the people and traitors to the tribe" (M.V.Jayarajan, *The Politics of 51 strikes,* 52).

The author then proceeds to characterise the departure of TP and his subsequent mobilisation of people as an act that was purely practical, or to put it differently, political:

"The CPI(M) wasn't ready to break the principles of coalition politics and adopt a position of political betrayal as suggested by TP and his comrades. That is why TP left the party, but later he made it into an issue of ideology. And then he tried to align all anti-communists along with class enemies against the party" (M.V.Jayarajan, *The Politics of 51 strikes,* 52).

The press release of the State secretariat of the CPI(M) (dated 16th May 2012), like almost all pieces written on the theme of ideology by party spokesmen, repeat the above position. It delineates the allegedly practical and political reasons that led to the departure of TP from the party – the disagreement between TP et al and the party leadership over the former's demand

to allegedly violate coalition principles in the panchayaths at Onchiyam – and then strips away the ideological rationales attributed to TP by the detractors of the party. The standard Marxist terminologies of 'parliamentary ambitions' , 'ideological deviation' and so on come into play in the following quote from the press release:

"…this was nothing but naked craving for power, parliamentary ambition and lack of communist values. They [TP et al] left the party and founded the Revolutionary Marxist Party because the party district leadership wasn't willing to violate the principles of coalition politics. There were no issues of communist ideology here. Even if there were, the ideological deviation of these separatists from communism is very evident. It's pathetic to see that these people call themselves revolutionary Marxists" (*The Politics of 51 strikes,* 182).

Pinarayi, the state secretary of CPI(M) himself, in an article titled 'The CPI(M)'s stand on the brutal murder of Chandrasekharan' that he wrote in the party mouthpiece *Deshabhimani*, refutes the ideological rationale of TP's rebellion:

" The founding of RMP at Onchiyam is now being interpreted as something based on huge ideological issues. This is wrong…most people who left the party at Onchiyam did so because of misunderstandings, not because they had ideological disagreements" (Pinarayi Vijayan, *Deshabhimani*,6th June 2012).

K.K.Rama, TP's widow, had written an open letter titled ' To the Marxist comrades who haven't lost their humanity' in which she indicted the party for TP's murder. The letter makes a plea in the name of "a communist widow of a communist martyr" to all supporters of the party to condemn the party leadership and leave the party (K.K.Rama, *The Politics of 51 strikes,* 13). Responding to this article, another leader of the CPI(M) repeats the 'base' and practical reasons behind TP's departure from the party. After explaining the real reason for TP's rebellion according to the party - the disagreements regarding the power sharing agreement mentioned above - in detail, the author argues that there were no ideological issue involved:

" On what ideological claim were they publicly challenging party's organisational principles? It was just to hold on to the post of a mere panchayath president. Is it an ideological deviation to the right if the party took a firm position to enforce the unity of the left coalition? Could an

attempt to split the party on the basis of a local issue be construed as ideological struggle at all?" (Elamaram Kareem, *Deshabhimani,* 6th May 2012).

Here, we make a brief digression once again. The term 'ideological', as used in common parlance and to a large extent in social science, has a distinctly negative connotation about it. The origins of such a critical attitude towards anything that is touted as 'ideological' can be traced to the basic Marxist positions themselves. Classical Marxists and even later Marxist theorists like Loius Althusser used 'ideology' to mean the false consciousness which people have been subjected to and argued that only the 'scientific critique' based on Marxism can go beyond ideology to realize 'truth' (Mills, 1997, 32). Although the original Marxist meaning is hardly invoked as such, the general meaning of the term 'ideology' even today is something that is not 'true' or 'scientific' (Guha 2008). However, we have in our analysis, the interesting instance of the term ideology being used to impart legitimacy to the act of 'rebellion'. While the critical commentators constantly tried to assert the 'ideological' and hence legitimate status of TP's rebellion, the party's response to this was to repeatedly stress its 'non-ideological' nature. Indeed, this was one of the most important points of contention that has been revealed in our analysis. 'Being ideological', therefore, imparts certain legitimacy for actions in the social milieu of North Kerala. The historical and socio-cultural reasons for this will have to be further investigated; however, what it surely shows is the 'situated' and contextual quality of concepts and categories that we sometimes assume to be universal.

Earlier, we noted that despite their consistent framing of the founding of the RMP as an ideological departure from the dominant Communist party, none of the critical commentaries made specific what the ideological moorings of the RMP were. We also attempted to give an explanation for this in terms of the difficulties such an explication might have posed for the critical commentators. Interestingly, it is an article produced as part of the party's counter-discourse that comes closest to making the ideological position of the RMP clear, but for

different reasons altogether. In an article titled 'RMP: A copy of Loius Blanc',[20] the author

begins to address the ideological stance of the RMP, but only in order to delegitimize the

'revolutionary' credentials of the organisation and to prove that the rebellion wasn't

ideological at all to begin with. He repeats the familiar argument that the rebellion was

essentially against the CPI(M)'s decision to abide by the coalitional principles in the

panchayaths at Onchiyam:

"It is those who rebelled against the party's decision to follow the coalitional principles by giving the president post to Janata Dal who found the RMP. They had no ideological disagreements with the party initially, but later they established a different position on ideology in order to gain an impression of principles and virtues. Their main aim was to destroy the CPI(M) as much as possible" (R.S.Babu, *Deshabhimani*, 6th June 2012).

The author quotes from RMP's ideological statement which, to put briefly, alleges that the

CPI(M) had given up its claims of being a revolutionary party by amending the party

programme in 2000. The author interprets this claim of the rebel group to be essentially

saying that the tallest communist leaders of the country had betrayed the revolution. He

argues that the amendment in question was the right choice as it updated the party

programme to the changed national and international circumstances. Thus, although the

article addresses the ideological position of the rebel group partly, it is only to assert the

ideological correctness of the party and to delegitimize the claims of the former:

"…that is, what the RMP is trying to establish is that Harkishan Singh Surjith, Jyoti Basu and Prakash Karat [all three belong to the first rung of CPI(M)'s leadership, Prakash Karat is the current national secretary of the party) have betrayed the revolution. And this is what they claim to be the reason behind the founding of RMP…when the RMP states that updating the

---

[20] 19th century French socialist. Here the author of the article characterizes him as someone who played a role in defeating the Paris Commune of 1871. He argues that with to the help of Louis Blanc and supporters, the enemies of the Commune could murder around 30,000 Parisian citizens. The article begins by claiming that to call RMP - which in the author's opinion is merely a group trying to help the right wing forces – a revolutionary party is against the principles of Marxism and Leninism. The RMP is likened to the betrayal committed by Louis Blanc. Like Louis Blanc who betrayed the Paris Commune, the argument goes, the RMP has betrayed the Communist Party in Kerala to help the right wing forces (R.S.Babu, *Deshabhimani*, 6th June 2012).

party programme is anti-revolutionary, they are actually denying the greatness of communist leaders such as EMS and Nayanar"[21]

The article ends by yet again turning to world history, this time to Russia and to Lenin, to make the correctness of the party's position apparent:

" Lenin had expressed his strong angst when the Tsar government hanged his brother for attempting to assassinate the Tsar. But he also pointed out that his brother's was not the correct path of revolution. Similarly, the CPI(M) has made its protest clear on the TP murder, but has rightly pointed out that TP's and his supporters pathway is anti-revolutionary." (R.S.Babu, *Deshabhimani*, 6th June 2012).

To sum up, we see in the above quotes the party leaders and spokesmen constructing a counter-discourse that contests the meaning of TP's rebellion while simultaneously asserting the ideological correctness of the party's position. They argue that the founding of the rebel organisation was purely out of practical and political ambitions and had no ideological moorings. The discourse of 'ideological departure' of the rebel and the intolerance of the communist ideology ended up being strongly contested and to a large extent refuted by the counter-discourse of the party. This, in retrospect, have had the effect of making the discourse on the TP murder conflictual, and eventually making the meaning of the murder and the significance of the victim themselves relapse into the realm of contestation.

4.3.2.2 An inventory of brutality and assertion of revolutionary legacy

Faced with a discourse that emphasized the brutality of TP's murder, the party builds up a defence by invoking the violence that has been meted out to its own activists in the past. The counter discourse of the party emphasizes that it has always been the victim of violence and brutality and not the perpetrator. This is done by repeatedly bringing up the murders of its activists in the past, who have now become martyrs and have been etched in the party lore. Almost every article written in defence of the party goes back to these martyrdoms somehow

---

[21] The late EMS and Nayanar, hugely popular leaders of the party in the past, belong to the 'golden era' of communism in Kerala. These leaders were instrumental in establishing the revolutionary legacy of the party through their participation in several historic struggles led by the party and had implemented land mark legislations as rulers that gave the Kerala society its current progressive shape.

or the other and makes a case of its victimhood in the socio-political space of North Kerala. Below we show instances of how this is done in the counter discourse of the party.

Almost all of these articles start with the 'mandatory' condemnation of TP's murder, and then diverge into arguments in defence of the party. Most of these articles have been published in *Deshabhimani*, the party mouth piece. Here, we look at how the commentators construct almost a genealogy of brutality by referring to past events of political violence in which the victims have been party members or supporters:

" There is no doubt that the murder of TP was extremely cruel. It is not the policy of the party to murder those who have different opinions. However, we should remember the brutal murder of Azheekkodan [a party leader]. It was Congress activists who killed Kunjali. The murder of the very young Ibrayi was done after exploding bombs to create fear in the middle of the city. In Kallachi, Binu was killed in the middle of the city in the evening. The youngster K.V.Sudheesh was killed in his own home in front of his parents. There were more than seventy hacks on his body. It can be seen that most of the victims were CPI (M) activists" (V.V.Dakshinamoorthy, *The Politics of 51 strikes,* 48).

Pointing out the fact that TP's murder was not the first political murder in Kerala, another commentator draws attention to the murders of young activists of the Left in the past. Incidentally, Prabha Varma, the commentator quoted below who also happens to be a poet, was boycotted from a prominent Malayalam magazine for defending the party (*Malayala Manorama*, 18th May, 2012). The boycott of his poem came after an article he wrote in defence of the party, from which we quote below:

" There have been so many lives that have been burned out even before they had begun. These were people who were killed even before they turned twenty by Congress activists and forces of communalism. When G.Bhuveneswaran was hacked to death in Panthalam N.S.S College, the kid had turned only eighteen. C.V.Jose was killed in Pathanamthitta Catholicate College; M.S.Prasad who was killed while he was playing with his friends on the day of Thiruvonam [an auspicious day in the festival of Onam in Kerala]; Anil, the school kid in Chittar; Saithali and Musthafa at Pattambi College and so many other kids like them. All of them had been hacked to death before they turned twenty. Simon Britto was left on the verge of martyrdom with a stab on his backbone…why do people who behaved like hermits during these murders shed tears on the Onchiyam murder alone? (Prabha Varma, *The Politics of 51 strikes,* 79).

The official communiqué of the party in the form of press release (dated 16th May 2012) also

resorts to the evocation of past violence committed against it, especially martyrdoms, to

counter the present allegations levelled against it:

" It is amazing to see how the thick skinned Congress [the party in the opposition] attempts to create a smokescreen of CPI (M) violence. It was the Congress activists who burned to death five comrades in Chimeny without any reason. It was they who brutally beat to death the brave freedom fighter and Congress historian Moyarath Shankaran when he decided to join the Communist movement. Congress activists and terrorists had joined together to murder Azheekkodan Raghavan…it is also relevant that Onchiyam is remembered in history for the murders of our comrades; two of them were killed in police custody and eight were shot dead during the demonic rule of the Congress" ('Face the conspiracy with unity', *The Politics of 51 strikes, 179).*

Another commentator points out that it is the CPI(M) that has been victimised over the years

and that even its prominent leaders have been brutally murdered:

"The CPI(M) is not a party of murderers, it is a party of those who are murdered; not a party of hunters, but of the hunted. It is those who have brutally murdered prominent CPI(M) leaders that now assume the form of angels of humanity. No other party in Kerala has had so many of its prominent leaders murdered" (*Deshabhimani*, 6th July 2012).

Another article graphically describes the attacks on party activists in the past to counter the

discourse of brutality as follows:

" It was in broad daylight that Congress activists bombed a restaurant in Kannur to kill K. Nanu. In this attack many people who were having their meal were injured…In Chimeny, a group of Congress activists had attacked our comrades in the party office. Our comrades had nothing but pen and paper in their hands. The party office was torched. Many of the comrades died of suffocation and those who got out hacked to pieces and burned to death. In the entire history of Kerala, there has not been an incident as brutal as this" (*Deshabhimani*, 6th June 2012).

An article titled 'The art of turning the victim into the culprit' construes the entire discourse

of brutality as an organised campaign by the anti-communists to destroy the party:

"What is going on now is an organised attempt to portray the party of the victims as the party of murderers. This is the art of turning the victims into the culprits….in this move to destroy the party, we see that former communists, anti-communists, naxals, former naxals, hardcore right wingers, pretentious intellectuals, anarchists and those who have been expelled from the party for anti-party activities have all joined hands" (Deshabhimani, 6th July 2012).

Almost all articles written in *Deshabhimani* and other party mouthpieces and speeches done in party forums evoke the themes of past violence and brutality against its members and activists (P.Karunakaran, *Deshabhimani,* 6th June, 2012; R.Ranjith, , *Deshabhimani* 6th June, 2012; P.M.Manoj, *Deshabhimani,* 13th June, 2012 and so on).

Another major theme in the party's counter-discourse is the emphasis on its revolutionary and progressive legacy. The discourse on the TP murder is construed as an attack on this legacy of the party. We only quote a couple of them here.

The article below argues that the discourse has been constructed to destroy the party that has been the source of the progressive, secular and welfare oriented society of Kerala:

"…it is because the party activists were willing to forsake their lives for secularism that Kerala today is a secular society. Kerala has become a model state in India in terms of welfare because the CPI(M) had the political conviction to implement it. Those who are trying to destroy the party today are essentially destroying the force behind social change" (*Deshabhimani,* 6th June 2012).

Another commentator repeats the same argument below and enumerates a list of progressive and revolutionary contributions of the party that is too long to be entirely reproduced here:

" Anyone who supports this organised discourse to destroy the party will be committing an unpardonable offence to the future generations. This is because, it is this party that transformed Kerala into a modern society that we see today; that protected the society from the disruptive communal forces; that exposes and resists the forces of imperialism trying to destroy the sovereignty of the country…it is the party that eradicated the caste system and altered the relations of productions in favour of the dispossessed…it is the left front that remains the only silver lining in the dark sky of Indian politics…" (*Deshabhimani,* 6th July 2012).

4.3.3 Analytical comments

In the light of the above analysis, we make some preliminary conclusions in this section that are to be consolidated in the final chapter of the thesis.

The analysis above shows that we have here a discourse – counter-discourse continuum that imperceptively slides into conflict, contestation of meaning and an infinite regression of

victimhood. These discourses did not contribute to a 'transformational' interpretation in the Sewellian sense (Sewell Jr 1996). The narratives that were constructed – of factionalism, ideology and brutality – were confronted with forceful and persuasive counter narratives – of the 'non-ideological' status of the rebellion, assertion of the party's correctness, victimhood, past brutality and revolutionary legacy of the party . The discourses failed to give rise to the Sewellian form of 'cultural creativity' (Sewell Jr 1996, 845) that gave the reality of the violent political culture of North Kerala signified by the TP murder a meaning that was transformational and 'positive.'

What is interesting to note is that the themes in the discourse such as the emphasis on brutality is something that initially appears to be a fully legitimate and even natural way of responding to the kind of violence that the TP murder has been. However, it is when we analyse the response it has evoked in terms of the counter-discourse that has been generated that there seems to be something seriously flawed in it. At least on the surface, the counter-discourse narratives of past sacrifices, martyrdom, 'our' victimhood and suffering of brutality seem to be at least as legitimate as the themes of the discourse. This is because almost all the events and martyrdoms quoted in the counter-discourse narrative are very much 'real', both in the literal sense and in the symbolic world of the Left in Kerala, whose history is invariably a history of struggles and martyrs. Hence, any discourse that strives to indict and to cease political violence by emphasizing the brutality involved, especially in a society like North Kerala that has a history chequered with political murders, is susceptible to a counter-discourse of the above form. In plain speak, there will always be one instance of violence in the past that was either more brutal than or comparable to the act that one seeks to condemn in the present. And this would invariably lead to a moral stalemate, if not defeat, and eventually sustain the proverbial 'vicious cycle' of violence.

60

Confirming Della Porta's argument about the radicalization of society and politics (Della Porta 1995, 139-49), the discourse has shown itself to be emerging from a socio-political space where there is a 'severing of communications between the 'inside' and the 'outside'. Moreover, the ways in which the TP murder has been predominantly talked about have made the discursive space of the Kerala society all the more conflictual (Pecheux 1982, cited in Mills 1997). Instead of interpreting the reality in transformational manner, this has led to a discursive space where the very meaning of the reality is contested forcefully by the conflicting elements in the society. This, in retrospect, can be seen to have played a significant role in the failure of the TP murder to become a historical 'event' with structural consequences.

5. Conclusion

" In my memory, never before has there been an event upon which so many poems have been written...an electric impulse seemed to have been transmitted through so many of our poets. There was a sharing of a responsive sensibility sans generational boundaries".[22]

It was not just the poets in Kerala who 'shared a responsive sensibility' amongst themselves like never before to react to the TP murder on the 4th of May in 2012. It was a political murder that evoked vociferous responses from different sections of the Kerala society in an unprecedented manner (*Malayala Manorama*, 13th May 2012), a 'rupture' that had the potential to transform the political culture of the society (Sewell Jr 1996). And yet, as we mentioned in the first chapter, this potential does not seem to have been fulfilled after a year. In this project, we have subjected to analysis the predominant themes of the discourse on the TP murder. Our attempt has been to comprehend the nature of this discourse so that its role in limiting the scope of the 'rupture' – the TP murder – becomes apparent.

Let us first briefly summarize, for clarity and perspective, the predominant themes in the discourse and the responses it provoked from the party spokesmen on the basis of our analysis in Chapter 4.

5.1. Discourse and its predominant themes

From the discourse – articles, editorials and commentaries in print– that has been subjected to our analysis, there has emerged three predominant themes, or as Verloo would call it, frames (Verloo 2005). These are the themes of factionalism, ideology and brutality – three central foci around which the discourse on the TP murder has been formed.

---

[22] (P.N.Gopikrishnan, poet, in the *Preface* to ' Hackway Poems', an anthology of 46 poems written in response to the TP murder, published by DC Books in June 2012).

In highlighting the *factional tendencies* that has allegedly plagued the CPI(M), the critical commentators have tended to follow a more or less similar pattern of argumentation. After briefly mentioning the murder of TP, these commentaries engage in a discussion of factionalism within the party in detail. By evaluating the responses of the warring factions – the 'official' one and the one represented by VS – within the party to the widely condemned violent event, these commentaries seek to frame an ethical and moral dichotomy within the party. Most commentaries 'diagnose' (Verloo 2005) the 'official' faction as the 'problem' that has affected the party and portray the VS led faction as the only remaining source of right in the party. While some of the commentaries are critical of both the factions, the general strategy of the detractors of the party seems to highlight, if not accentuate, the factionalism in the party in the wake of the TP murder.

Ideology has been the second predominant theme of the discourse. The critical voices employ the theme of ideology in talking about the TP murder prominently in two ways. Firstly, they construe TP's act of breaking away from the party and subsequently founding the RMP as motivated exclusively by ideological considerations. It is argued that TP's departure from the party was due to the ideological 'deviations' of the latter and in order to preserve 'true' communist values. Secondly, the Communist ideology and organizational structure itself is 'diagnosed' (Verloo 2005) as the problem. Commentators superimposed the infamous legacies of Stalin and Pol Pot on the ideological and organizational structure of the CPI(M) in Kerala and argue that the party ideology is inherently anti-democratic, materialist and corrupting. In effect, the murder of TP has been used as a vantage point to subject the ideological content of the party to criticism and to indict the communist ideology for the violent political practice of the party in Kerala. However, true to Foucault's notion of 'exclusion' (Mills, 1997, 63), the critical voices largely shun making explicit the exact

63

ideological position of the rebel organization, as it may have had the effect of jeopardizing the dichotomies that have been constructed in the discourse.

Thirdly, the theme of *brutality* figures prominently in the discourse. The critical voices seek to mobilize condemnation of the murder of TP and protest against the party by emphasizing the sheer brutality of the act. The details of the murder are vividly reproduced many times and the terms 'brutal', 'demonic' and 'barbaric' are frequently employed to describe the crime. Along with emphasizing the allegedly unprecedented brutality of the violence, the 'sacrificial' and 'courageous' martyrdom of TP is imaginatively and retrospectively reconstructed.

5.2 The Counter-discourse

The counter-discourse that has been produced by the party leaders, spokesmen and supporters has mainly been in response to the above themes. The counter-discourse in turn emphasizes the non-ideological nature of TP's rebellion, asserts the party's correctness, evokes past brutality and the party's status as the victim and construes the entire discourse as an attack on the progressive and revolutionary legacy of the party.

The *non-ideological* character of the act of 'rebellion' – the founding of RMP – has been emphasized by showing it as an act of merely practical and political dimensions. The spokesmen emphasizes that there were no ideological disagreements involved and the 'rebellion' was purely pragmatic and was a result of parliamentary ambitions and craving for power on the part of TP and those who were his followers. The ideological differences of the rebel group– which according to the party commentators form merely an afterthought and a pretext - if at all, are brushed aside as right wing deviations and the correctness of the party's ideology is reasserted.

The discourse of brutality of the TP murder was forcefully countered by constructing what can be called an inventory of past brutality in the socio-political life of North Kerala. The victims, the spokesmen argued, have always been the party activists and not the other way around. Along with this, the progressive and revolutionary legacy of the party enriched by martyrdoms in the past is carefully delineated. Instances of political violence in which party activists have lost their lives are reproduced and the brutality involved is highlighted. The entire discourse on the TP murder is construed as an attack by vested interests to destroy the party and the revolutionary and progressive values it stood for.

5.3 'Contestation' instead of 'transformation'

An analysis of the discursive space in North Kerala in the aftermath of the TP murder has revealed the absence of 'cultural creativity' in the Sewellian sense (Sewell Jr, 1996,845). The discourse, instead of interpreting the reality of the violent political culture in North Kerala and the TP murder in a transformative manner, provoked a powerful counter-discourse from the party. The narratives based on the themes of factionalism, ideology and brutality, in retrospection, have proved to self defeating. Instead of reinforcing the 'rupture' and transforming it into something 'positive', these narratives provoked forceful counter-narratives of 'non-ideological' stature of the rebellion, past brutality, victimhood and revolutionary legacy of the party. Instead of cultural creativity, what is revealed in our analysis of the discourse – counter- discourse structure is a relapse in to the familiar. With its peculiar history of violent politics, in the case of North Kerala the familiar implies conflict and contestation.

Sara Mill's observation that social context plays an important role in the 'development, maintenance and circulation of discourse' has been eminently demonstrated in our project. The self defeating narratives/themes of the discourse have meant that the violent political life in North Kerala remains largely unaltered. Mills' reference to Michel Pecheux's emphasis on

the conflictual nature of discourse - " discourses do not occur in isolation but in dialogue, in relation to or, more often, in contrast and opposition to more other groups of utterances" (cited in Mills 1997,11) – is extremely relevant for us. It is indeed the conflictual character of the discourse that is demonstrated in our analysis. The ways in which the critical commentators chose to 'talk' about the TP murder were the 'wrong' ways. They made it convenient for the communist party to present, and present rather forcefully, other 'ways' of 'talking' about the TP murder. The theme of brutality - a predominant frame in the discourse – is an example. Instead of sustaining the impact of the 'rupture', a discussion of brutality involved in the TP murder led to situation where the party could easily do an inventory of its own victimhood and brutality suffered by its own activists in the past. Instead of 'transformation', the opportunity presented by the 'rupture' therefore turned into an occasion for an infinite regression into victimhood. Similarly, a discussion of the 'ideological' character of TP's rebellion ended up being forcefully countered by the party's own version of the rebellion, which portrayed it as exclusively political and pragmatic. In this process, the meaning of the TP murder itself happened to be contested.

Foucault argues that " truth is of the world; it is produced there by virtue of multiple constraints…each society has its regime of truth, its 'general' politics of truth…" (cited in Mills, 1997, 18). Hence the question is not whether the critical commentators or the party spokesmen represented the reality in its true and accurate form. Thus - whether the founding of RMP was ideological or not, whether TP's murder was unprecedented in its brutality or not, whether the factionalism in the party was of any consequence or not – are all questions of relatively less import. What is important to note is that because the discourse was predominantly constructed around the 'controversial' themes of factionalism, brutality and ideology, there arose a powerful counter-discourse from the party under pressure. This contested nature of the discourse – in the attribution of meaning (of the TP murder) and in the

66

interpretation of the reality (of the violent political culture of North Kerala), in retrospection, seems to have prevented the kind of 'cultural creativity' that would make an 'event' out of a 'rupture' and lead eventually to structural transformation. To put it rather simply, by privileging the themes mentioned above, the discourse failed to rise above the familiar realms of conflict and contestation, in the process limiting the TP murder into a mere 'rupture' that lacked the ability to influence the socio-political structures of North Kerala.

This is not to say that the above themes were the only ones present in the discourses that we analysed, far from it. Frames of legality, democratic freedom and even justice had figured in the various commentaries that we analysed. However, the way these frames have been rendered relatively invisible by the dominant frames of factionalism, brutality and ideology and the counter frames of the party spokesmen is a matter worthy of further reflection. In fact, the lack of these subordinated and 'non-partisan' voices in significant proportions in the discursive space is notable. Resituating the discourse around more tangible and 'positive' frames such as democratic plurality, citizenship and justice may have had a different result. Perhaps what was needed was not a gradation of brutality, but a re-sensitising of the socio-political realms of the society to everyday forms of violence, violence that is seen as 'ordinary' and even 'acceptable'. James C. Scott's work, although dealing with resistance, is one such attempt to be sensitive towards the mechanisms of everyday life of communities (Scott 1985). The very process of searching for alternate frames to talk about political violence is valuable for a society like North Kerala whose political life has been violent for so long. In the radicalized world of the violent actors in North Kerala "marked by the emergence of dense social networks, alternative value systems and a severing of communications between the 'inside' and the 'outside'" (Della Porta, 1995,139-49), even 'talking' about violence in new ways could lead to a de-escalation of conflict and violence.

Bibliography

Aboobakkar, C.P, ed. 2011. *The History of the Communist Party in Kannur District*. Kannur: Patyam Gopalan Smaraka Pathana Gaveshana Kendram.

Alam, Aniket. 2007. "Reflections in the Aftermath of Nandigram." *Economic and Political Weekly* 42 (18): 1594–1597. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/4419538.

Banerjee, Abhijit Vinayak; Bardhan Pranab et al. 2007. "Beyond Nandigram : Industrialisation In." *Economic and Political Weekly* 42 (17): 1487–1489.

Chatterjee, Partha. 1988. "For An Indian History of Peasant Struggle." *Social Scientist* 16 (11): 3–17.

Chaturvedi, Ruchi. 2011. "'SOMEHOW IT HAPPENED': Violence, Culpability, and the Hindu Nationalist Community." *Cultural Anthropology* 26 (3) (August 21): 340–362. doi:10.1111/j.1548-1360.2011.01102.x. http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2011.01102.x.

Chaturvedi, Ruchi.2012. "North Kerala and Democracy's Violent Demands." *Economic and Political Weekly* 47 (42): 21–24.

Das, Veena, and Arthur Klienman. 2000. *Violence and Subjectivity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Della Porta, Donatella. 1995. *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Guha, Ramachandra. 2008. "Autonomy and Ideology." *Economic and Political Weekly* 47 (5): 33–35. http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic642734.files/hays_abstractions appearance.pdf.

Hohenbalken, Maria Six, and Nerina Weiss, eds. 2011. *Violence Expressed: An Anthropological Approach*. Surrey: Ashgate.

Johny, Stanly. 2012. "VS' Legacy and the CPI(M)'s Crisis." *Economic and Political Weekly* 47 (32).

Nieburg, H.L.1969.'Violence,Law and Informal polity.' *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 13 (2): 192-209

Mills, Sarah. 1997. *Discourse*. London/ New York: Routledge.

McAllister, Ian, and Rose, Richard. 1983. 'Can Political Conflict be resolved by social change? Northern Ireland as a test case.' *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 27 (3): 533-557.

Radhakrishnan,P 1980. "Peasant Struggles in and Reforms Malabar." *Economic and Political Weekly* 15 (50): 2095–2102.

Patnaik, Prabhat. 2011. "The Left in Decline." *Economic and Political Weekly* 46 (29): 12–16.

Ram, Mohan. 1969. *Indian Communism: Split Within a Split*. Delhi: Vikas Publications.

Scott, James C. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale: Yale University Press.

Sewell Jr, William H. 1996. "Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille." *Theory and Society* 25 (6): 841–881.

Tarrow, Sidney. 2011. *Power in Movement*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.

Thatcher, Ian D. 2003. *Trotsky*. London/ New York: Routledge.

Tilly, Charles. 2003. *The Politics of Collective Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Verloo, Mieke. 2005. "Mainstreaming Gender Equality in Europe. A Critical Frame Analysis Approach." *The Greek Review of Social Research* 117 (B): 11–34. http://www.grsr.gr/pdf/117_11-34.pdf.

Appendix

Data Sources:

Malayala Manorama – from May 2012 to August 2012

Deshabhimani – from May 2012 to August 2012

'The Politics of 51 hacks', [n.a]. July 2012, Kannur: Mathrubhumi Books.