



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

English Literature

THE EFFECT OF THE KHMER ROUGE REGIME ON THE CAMBODIAN SOCIETY

KEY WORDS:

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ABSTRACT

Through this paper, I would like to highlight the impact that the regime of Khmer Rouge had on the people of Cambodian Society and how they were displaced, destroyed, and devastated as they had to leave their homes and livelihood behind and live as refugees in their land. The issues that are focused upon in this paper are multi-dimensional as they focus on the society's economic, political, social, and overall well-being.

THE IMPACT OF THE KHMER ROUGE

Khmer Rouge is the name given to the followers of the Communist Party of Kampuchea in Cambodia, led by the Pol Pot. In 1975, they infiltrated Cambodia's capital city, Phnom Penh, and began genocide. Under the pretence of security, equality, and socialist reformation, soldiers removed the wealthy, the educated, and the most civilised from their homes. They began relocating them as a part of a relocation process.

The citizens were forced into physical labour while on the brink of starvation, and many were tortured and killed without reason. Eventually, Pol Pot and Khmer Rouge were attacked by Vietnam and forced westward where their power was finally dissolved. Due to the sudden intervention of the regime, traditional social institutions were destroyed and an estimated 1.5 to 3 million people died as a result of the destructive effects on Cambodian society. The fallout still impacts the nation's psychological health, cultural identity, and demographic makeup.

Social Dismantling

The Khmer Rouge forcibly relocated urban residents to rural areas to establish a classless agrarian society. Temples were demolished, Buddhist monks were persecuted, and traditional customs, faiths, and cultural expressions were repressed. The government broke social and familial ties by outlawing private property and enforcing communal living. As seen in the book, 'In the Shadow of the Banyan by Vaddey Ratner' (2012), the family belonged to royalty, as Raami, our 7-year-old protagonist is the daughter of a minor prince, but their family have to leave their home as the Khmer Rouge regime is targeting the educated and royalty. This is why, they have to migrate and live under the false identity of mango farmers. This shows how the people were seen from the same perspective and all of them were asked to grow crops in surplus without caring about their own health. The distancing of the educated was due to the fact that they were considered as rebels who would disturb and distract other people from reaching the goal of producing the highest quantity of rice from a country.

Cultural Turmoil

Through the work, 'First they killed my Father by Loung Ung' (2000), we can see the perspective of the author as she shares her story of survival during the Khmer Rouge regime. Loung's family is uprooted from their luxurious home and is forced to evacuate, which leads to a drastic change in their lives. The challenge of continuously hiding their true selves and avoiding persecution became their daily struggle. The regime's devastating impact on Cambodian society forced the author's family and others to live in a village like peasants. Now deemed as third-class citizens, the author's family, are now mercilessly oppressed. The lack of basic necessities and insufficient food distribution forced many recent arrivals to succumb to starvation.

Impact On The Mind

Survivors of genocide and loss have severe psychological scars that impact their mental health and sense of community. The memories of brutality, grief, and fear engendered by the dictatorship still plague many Cambodians. With continuous debates concerning justice and reconciliation, the Khmer Rouge's legacy has shaped modern Cambodian identity and the confusion surrounding how they had to lose their identity as the educated and modern in order to merely survive in their homeland. The book, 'Never Fall Down by Patricia McCormick' (2012) is based on the true story of Arn who is merely a typical youngster until the army arrive in his hometown. However, his life is irrevocably altered when the troops force the entire populace into the countryside. Arn is sent to a labour camp, away from his family, where he works in the rice paddies under the scorching sun while seeing the deaths of other kids. He loses the majority of his friends, family, aspirations, and values. As a juvenile soldier, he is compelled to carry out unspeakable deeds, numbing his heart and mind to survive till the following day. And when the nation is ready to be freed, Arn is given a gun and made to be a soldier while not caring about anything else. We can see through this, how this regime did not even spare children and forced them into a life filled with violence that left long lasting impacts on their mind, which affected their adult life and changed their perception about the society.

Political Repercussions

Political unrest did not end with the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge in 1979; the Vietnamese occupied the nation for ten years. The Khmer Rouge's existence as a guerrilla group and the ensuing civil wars postponed the country's progress and recovery. The political climate and government of Cambodia have been impacted by the convoluted and contentious efforts to bring Khmer Rouge leaders to justice. 'Brother Enemy: The war after the war by Nayan Chanda' (1986) examines the difficulties of reconstructing a country ravaged by war, concentrating on the political battles and disputes that ensued after the Khmer Rouge's downfall. Chanda emphasizes how the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and the subsequent overthrow of the Khmer Rouge regime were caused by a series of events that began with the fall of Saigon. He examines how the ideological disputes between China and Vietnam, the socialist "brothers," contributed to the instability in the region. The book also looks at how US foreign policy affected the area, showing how Washington's efforts to limit Vietnamese influence unintentionally helped the Khmer Rouge and made the war last longer.

Economic Consequences

Widespread hunger and economic collapse were caused by the Khmer Rouge's extreme economic policies. Food shortages brought on by agricultural mismanagement contributed to the high death rate during the period. The genocide's after effects have impeded economic growth and

recovery, and poverty and infrastructure issues still plague Cambodia. It took decades for Cambodia to start to recover economically from the devastating effects of the war and the Khmer Rouge government. The nation continues to struggle with issues including poverty, inequality, and a lack of economic diversity.

The following are a few of the war's economic effects on Cambodia like GDP decrease as during the conflict and the Khmer Rouge rule, Cambodia's GDP per capita experienced a notable decline. The economy needed many years to bounce back and begin expanding once more. Along with that, the Cambodian people experienced widespread poverty and hardship as a result of the conflict and the economic collapse that followed. The population faced limited economic opportunities because of fewer economic options as a result of the loss of human capital and the destruction of infrastructure. On top of all that, the significant environmental damage was also brought on by the war and the Khmer Rouge rule, which further hampered economic growth.

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