CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

One of the primary fallouts of international relations has been the escalation of conflicts. Their genesis, factors governing their growth and resolution have become foremost concerns in global politics. One such conflict upon which world attention had focussed, in recent years, was the crisis that occurred in Cambodia. The conflict in Cambodia can broadly be classified as two dimensional—internal and external. These two dimensions are closely interwoven to form the complex fabric of the crisis. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the problem, the two aspects must be viewed in totality. Originally commencing as an internal struggle it later had international ramifications. Similarly, in terms of its resolution, the first changes occurred within the changing world atmosphere and eventually trickled down to the internal warring factions.
Profile of the Country

Originally known as Cambodia or Kampuchea\(^1\), the People's Republic of Cambodia has also been referred to as 'Kambuja' in early Indian literature\(^2\); and as the 'gentle land of the smiling people'.\(^3\) Located in the southwest part of the Indochinese peninsula, along with Laos and Vietnam, it comprises the territorial extent of what was formerly known as Indochina. The land area is 69,898 square miles (181,035 square kilometers) and is bordered on the west and northwest by Thailand, on the northeast by Laos, on the east and southeast by Vietnam and on the southwest by the Gulf of Thailand (Siam).\(^4\) While the north-south extent of land is 280 miles, the east-west is 360 miles.

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1. The names Cambodia and Kampuchea are transliterations of the country's traditional name in Khmer. Cambodia was the western spelling of the French Cambodge. Both have been applied and it is presently called the Kingdom of Cambodia. David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder, 1983), p.iv.

2. This name is derived from a Khmer legend recorded on a tenth-century inscription which ascribes the origin of the royal family to the marriage of a hermit, Kambu Svayambhuva with the celestial nymph Mera. See, D.G.E. Hall, *A History of Southeast Asia* (London, 1970), p.94.


Most of the land territory is divided between mountain ranges and low lying alluvial plains. Set above the Gulf of Thailand, the country is surrounded on three sides by mountains. The fourth side on the east is bordered by the Mekong river. The Annam Cordillera mountains bound the eastern tracts while to the north and northeast lie the ranges of the Dangrek. To the south and southeast lie the Cardamom and Elephant ranges. The maximum altitude is at Phnom Aural which is 5,810 feet (1813 metres) above sea level. 5

The Mekong river forms an important physical feature and extends 2,600 miles. Springing from the Tibetan plateau and running southwards, it bends past the Burmese border, through Laos, encircles Thailand and goes through the rice lands of Cambodia, to its delta in Vietnam. 6 Another feature of the drainage is the Tonle Sap, a lake which is joined to the Mekong river by one of its tributaries, Tonle Sab. The Tonle Sap acts as reservoir for the river. During the monsoons (June-October), when the water level in the Mekong rises, the excess flows into the Tonle Sap. Likewise during

5. ibid.

the dry season the reverse process occurs.7

The country enjoys moderate climate with heavy rainfall. The climate is characterized by two major seasons-mid-May to October are the monsoon months when strong prevailing winds blow from the southwest bringing heavy rains and high humidity. From early November to mid-March winds are from the northeast and are light in velocity. At this time cloudiness is variable, precipitation and humidity low. Annual rainfall is about 200 inches on the seaward slopes and at least 55 inches in the central lowlands.8

There is rich vegetation consisting of wooded lands or rainforests in the north and northwest. Rice, sugarcane, rubber, timber, banana and bamboo form a significant part of the flora. A large animal life comprising of deers, buffaloes, monkeys, tigers and elephants are part of the wildlife. The country's natural wealth is yet to be fully assessed using modern remote sensing facilities.

The Cambodian population in 1987 was approximately seven million (6,747,000).9 The dominant group consists of

8. Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.4, p.798.
9. ibid., p.799.
the Khmer or the ethnic Cambodians that form about eighty per cent of the population. Speaking the Khmer language and espousing Theravada Buddhism, they resemble the Mongoloid race with dark skin and small, stocky builds.10 The ethnic majority of the Khmer stock has produced a homogeneity that is unique in Southeast Asia and has encouraged a strong sense of identity. The Khmers are basically an agrarian community, comprising farmers, fishermen and craftsman.

Among the non-Khmer population there were two main immigrant minorities - the Chinese and the Vietnamese. The Chinese generally live in isolation, though some Sino-Cambodian intermarriages have been recorded. They preserved their own laws and traditions and were involved in commercial activities at the urban centers. Vietnamese immigrants also formed an important group and had settled in Cambodia in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries during the French Colonial rule. They were mainly engaged in civil service in Phnom Penh and as artisans, fishermen, builders and plantation workers on the French rubber estates.11

10. ibid.
11. Hunter, n.6, p.25.
Of the indigenous minorities, the Chams were significant.\textsuperscript{12} Born of Malayo-Polynesian stock, they inhabited the rubber growing regions of the north and east. They were predominantly Muslims with a small percentage of Hindus. Other tribes of lesser importance are the Stieng, Mnong, Bahnar, Pear, Somre and Saoch, who were collectively termed as 'phnong or barbarians'.\textsuperscript{13} These were the hill tribes who lived in isolated pockets.

Economy was predominantly agrarian, with production rich in rice and rubber. Limited mineral resources and oil reserves were found off the coast. Small industries such as textiles, food processing and wood products existed. During the transition to socialism, nationalization and public control became evident. At present, economic progress is of vital concern to the ruling coalition government and attempts are being made to draw foreign investment and aid

\textsuperscript{12} It is believed that the Chams originated from the area around the Mekong Delta which was earlier the Champa Kingdom. They later migrated towards Tongkin and Annam, and were thus the ancestors of the present day Vietnamese. See, Peter Scholl-Latour, \textit{Death in the Rice Fields: An Eyewitness Account of Vietnam's Three Wars 1945-1979} (Stuttgart, 1966), p.99; Guy Hunter, \textit{Southeast Asia: Race, Culture and Nation} (London, 1966), p.24; \textit{Encyclopaedia Britannica} (Macropaedia), vol.27, (USA, 1987), p.799.

\textsuperscript{13} Hunter, n.6, p.24.
The tradition, culture and education show unmistakable signs of Indian heritage and influence. Education was non-secular and was the preserve of the Buddhist Sanga. Under the French Colonial rule education was diversified and this policy continued under Sihanouk. During the social experiment of the Khmer Rouge, education came to a grinding halt and reemerged only under Heng Samrin. In tradition and culture several influences can be traced. Earliest influences are Indian which began with the advent of Hinduism and later continued during the period when Buddhism gained popularity. Later influences were those imbibed under French colonialism. These external influences intermingled with the indigenous themes, thus enriching Cambodia's cultural mosaic. According to Dr. Seanglim Bit,

"Cambodian culture at various points in its long history has alternated between creative adaptation and integration of outside cultural influences in creating its own unique culture and excessive dependency on foreign forces as a substitute for its own independent directions, or exaggerated and rigid xenophobia in the name of nationalism which precluded even minimal contact with the outside world."\(^{14}\)

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The above quotation is significant as it explains how a society with such varied cultural components, at one point in its history remained totally isolated from the outside world. With respect to this, it becomes essential to trace the emergence of Cambodia to its present form.

Political Evolution of the Cambodian State

An attempt to study the evolution of the Cambodian state, must take into account certain characteristic features of its political development, which have almost remained static over the years. These are geography, concepts of hierarchy and patronage and the inertia that is characteristic of a rural agrarian society. Of these features the geographic location of the country has been of primary significance. In fact "almost since the decline of the ancient Khmer empire, geography has combined with politics to shape the fortunes of the Cambodian state". 15

Probably one of the first powers to be established in Southeast Asia, the Khmer Empire, now modern Cambodia, had borders extending from Burma to the coast of Vietnam and in

the north upto Laos while to the south it goes right down to
the Malay peninsula.\textsuperscript{16} In fact Hall states that, the early
empires upon which the later day Cambodia was founded
'stretched over Southern Cambodia and Cochinchina of modern
times and occupied the lower and middle Mekong from Stung
Treng northwards and its original centre was in the region
of Bassala just below the mouth of the Mon river'.\textsuperscript{17}

With regard to its geographic location, the presence of
Vietnam and Thailand as her neighbours has been crucial even
from the thirteenth century. Thailand was probably the first
power to check the might of the Khmers. The Vietnamese came
into the picture later, around the early seventeenth
century. For about two hundred years, the presence of these
two powerful, antagonistic neighbours forced Cambodia to
prefer one to the other, or attempt to neutralise them by
appealing to an outside power. Thus, its geographic location
contributed to the nature in which the Cambodian state has
politically evolved.

\textsuperscript{16} M.L. Jumsai Manich, \textit{History of Thailand and Cambodia:}

\textsuperscript{17} Hall, n.2, p.94, see also, D.R. Sardesai, \textit{Southeast
Cambodian thinking, in terms of political advancement has been dominated by the concept of hierarchy and patronage. Those in power were considered to be more meritorious than others, leading to the subordination of the individual identity as opposed to that of the ruler. According to Coedès, 'the king, master of all from the highest to the lowest', was the pivot of the whole political organization of the state, 'the source and sum of all authority'. But this did not mean that the king was an absolute despot ruling for his own pleasure. The king was 'bound by the rules of the princely caste and by the maxims of policy and royal conduct; he was the guardian of the law and established order, the final judge of cases litigants wished to submit to his decision'.

In this regard, the king, in Angkorean society was considered the most important of all and was the source of political and moral authority. This was the essence of the 'Devaraja' cult which believed that the king represented the

20. ibid.
only intermediary between cosmic order and mortal life.22 Devaraja or god-king', according to Hall was 'a form of Saivism which centered on the worship of a Linga as the kings sacred personality transmitted to him by Siva, through the medium of his Brahman chaplain'.23 The prosperity of the kingdom was bound in the welfare of the royal linga which resided on the summit of a temple mountain that was considered the centre of the capital and the axis of the universe.24

Therefore, the king protected and preserved his subjects who in turn served him. As such, throughout Cambodian history, the 'government or rajakar', 'literally meaning royal work', was the privilege enjoyed by people freed in some way from the obligation of growing their own food. The governed grew for them in exchange for their

22. Even in the architectural remains of the Angkorean period, the concept of the king as an embodiment of divinity is well portrayed where the statues of the Hindu pantheon of Gods bore facial resemblance with the members of the royalty. Only a few of these were impersonal. Majority of the images were of kings, princes or great dignitaries represented with traits of the God into which they have been or will be absorbed at the end of their earthly existence. See, Coedès, n.19, p.121; and Bit, n.3, p.18.


24. ibid.
Another element evolved from the inertia that is characteristic of a rural, agrarian society. During the course of history few alternatives to subsistence agriculture were sought which led to a kind of conservatism or clinging to the old methods. This trend of thinking, which was distinctive to Cambodian society has given it an element of 'changelessness'. The inherent conservativeness has been instrumental in causing writers to suggest that its people were 'unchanging' and 'asleep'. This suited her colonial masters since it carried with it an implication of docility. Any kind of revolutionary effort was categorized as un-Cambodian. Insofar, the Cambodian society and the evolution of the present state have often been viewed with an essence of 'changelessness'.

One of the most noteworthy phases of Cambodia's political development was the process of Indianization which carried its mark for several centuries. Essentially, Indianization can be defined as the expansion of organized culture which was founded upon Indian conception of royalty,

25. Chandler, n.1, p.3.
26. ibid., p.10.
was characterised by Hinduist or Buddhist cults, the mythology of the Puranas, the observance of the Dharmasastras and was expressed in the Sanskrit language.27 Even in the nineteenth century, Cambodian peasants wore Indian costumes and certain behavioural patterns such as eating with the fingers, carrying goods on their heads, wearing of turban were evident.

Interestingly, the influences from India were imbibed into the Cambodian lifestyle with a graciousness and ease which failed to produce any kind of identity crisis. Unlike in Vietnam, where Chinese influences were imposed by colonization and force, in Cambodia there seemed to be a smooth absorption. As a result, Cambodian nationalism and national identity does not project itself as a product of constant struggle against a foreign invader. Its nationalism is seen more in terms of being a sum total of the social and political arrangements which existed within Cambodia. Thus, Indianization and the elements of life which are traceable to India are merely components of that sum total. Coedès states that

"the countries conquered militarily by China had to adopt or copy her institutions, her customs,

her religion, her language and her writing. By contrast, those which India conquered peacefully preserved the essentials of their individual cultures and developed them, each according to its own genius. It is this that explains the differentiation and in a certain measure the originality of the Khmer, Cham and Japanese civilizations, inspite of their common Indian origin". 28

In this respect the term Indo-China gains special significance because it is not only the area that geographically lies between India and China, but also enjoys a historical pre-eminance since it was influenced by both these cultures.

Mythological Ancestry and the Early Empires

Mythologically, Cambodians trace their ancestry to the marriage of a foreigner named Kaundaniya to a dragon princess or 'nagi' who received a kingdom from the brides father. 29 Kaundaniya established his capital and gave the

28. ibid., p.35.

29. It was believed that Kaundaniya was a brahmin, apparently driven away from a place near Delhi. He married a local princess and established the Funan empire. See Jumsai Manich, n.16, p.13.
country an Indian name-Kambuja.  

Historical evidence suggests that the early states began to emerge around the end of the second century A.D. and were confined to three regions - the lower Mekong and its delta; north of Hue in modern Annam and the northern part of the Malay Peninsula. Ancestors of the present day Cambodians lived around the prosperous region of the Great Lake which in Sanskrit was called Suvarnabhumi. At this time, two states emerged which were contemporaneous with each other. One was the Linyi, the inhabitants of which have been traced as the ancestors of the Chams. The second was

30. This name appeared in a Cambodian inscription of the ninth century. The mythological story of Kaudaniya's marriage to the princess has also been described as an union between culture and nature. See, Chandler, n.1, p.24.


32. The name Suvarnabhumi has also found references in early Indian texts such as the Ramayana and the Buddhist Jataka tales which describe voyages to this region. It has been referred to as Chrysonese by Ptolemy. See Hall, n.2, p.13; Jumsai Manich, n.16, p.13.

33. Linyi was around the region of modern Chaudoc and was started by a Javanese known in Chinese chronicles as Houen-Houei and married a local princess called Lie-Ye. See Hall, n.2, p.28; Jumsai Manich, n.16, p.13.
Funan, established by Kaundaniya.\(^3\)\(^4\)

Funan, the strongest among the early states, had its capital at Vyadhapura and extended to South Vietnam, Kampuchea, Central Thailand, North Malaya and Southern Borneo.\(^3\)\(^5\) The Funan court had trade relations with India and China and also exchanged emissaries with them.\(^3\)\(^6\) Though a centralized form of government was non-existent, several feudatories owed allegiance to the king and the vassals were influenced by the customs and traditions of the court.\(^3\)\(^7\) As the Funan empire was strengthened the Linyi were driven further away to the region of Champasok.\(^3\)\(^8\)

Towards the fifth century, two states northwards of Funan were united to form the state of Chenla. By the second half of the sixth century, the Chenla king

\(^3\)\(^4\). Funan represents the modern Chinese pronunciation of the word B'iu-nam, considered to be the original pre-Khmer settlements and lay in the region between Chaudoc and Phnom Penh. See, Hall, n.17, p.24.

\(^3\)\(^5\). Sardesai, n.17, p.21.

\(^3\)\(^6\). ibid., pp.21-22.


\(^3\)\(^8\). In this region the Chams strengthened their empire with its capital at Vijaya or Binh-Dinh and later at Amaravati and Quang-Nam. They expanded their territory along the coast of Annam from Cochinchina right upto Tongking. See, Jumsai Manich, n.16, p.13; Sardesai, n.17, p.23.
Bhavavarman annexed Funan and Chenla together and also subjugated the feudatories of Funan. There seems to be much authenticity in this because according to Chinese accounts, the final collapse of Funan occurred due to the rebellion of one of its feudatory states, that is, Chenla.  

Unable to reach the might of the Funan empire, Chenla was soon divided into upper or land Chenla and the lower or water Chenla. Chenla's division made it more vulnerable to outside threats especially from the Sailendras of Java who aspired to conquer the mainland. This caused the Khmers to rally under Jayavarman II and the two Chenla's were reunited, thus leading to the foundation of the Angkor dynasty.

As such, it becomes apparent that pre-Angkorean Cambodia seems to have been a collection and sequence of principalities. According to Claude Jacques,

"inscriptions give evidence in the Khmer country of a multitude of little realms and princedoms; those which the Chinese called Funan and Zhenla, on grounds unknown so far, were among them and may have been the most important. It seems that some princes managed, sometime to take the leadership of a more or less, large groups of realms; but this situation was to all appearances only temporary".

40. Sardesai, n.17, p.25.
By the seventh and eight centuries the coastal centres such as Funan had disappeared; the political centres had shifted further inland and Cambodia gained coherence as a political entity. From the beginning of the ninth century till about the fifteenth century, the Angkor kingdom dominated the political scene. The empire evolving against a flourishing background of Hinduism extended beyond the frontiers of present day Cambodia. 42 The Khmer empire from its centre at Angkor Thom ruled a kingdom of advanced military, economic and cultural might of which the temples still bear testimony. The magnificence of the Angkor kingdom is almost synonymous with the personality of its greatest ruler Jayavarman VII. The end of Jayavarman VII rule heralded the disintegration of the Angkor kingdom. Moreover, the grandeur and pride of the Angkor dynasty, its architecture, came to an abrupt end with the passing of Jayavarman VII. 43 In the later stages, internal power conflicts and external encroachments of the Thai and Vietnamese rulers led to the collapse of the Angkor Kingdom. Thus according to Hall,

42. Scholl-Latour, n.12, p.96.
43. Hall, n.2, p.123.
"from 802 A.D. until far into the 12th century the heartland of the Khmer kingdom enjoyed quite exceptional tranquility. But royal megalomania, showing itself in increasing extravagance in building and in wasteful wars of aggression undermined the economy and bred discontent with the established order. And when the machine was already beginning to show signs of strain, the persistent Thai raids into the metropolitan area ultimately wrecked it beyond repair". 44

Cambodia's history following the death of Jayavarman VII appears to have been dominated by internal conflicts and external power struggles. In fact its existence and survival in this epoch occurred within the framework of rivalry between Siam and Vietnam. Rivalry sprang from the unwillingness of either to accept the other as equal or superior; this unwillingness in turn can be traced to the traditional language of tributary diplomacy, which stressed the inequality between the sender and the recipient. 45 In fact, the relationship between the three states had often been pronounced in terms which hinted at family like images. As such, the Thai and Vietnamese became respectively, 'the father' and 'the mother' of the Khmer kingdom, which was referred to as their 'child or servant'.

44. ibid, pp.134-135.
45. Chandler, n.1, p.113.
Chandler opines that this could well be 'interpreted as the continuing struggle between increasingly incompatible parents for the custody of a weak but disobedient child'.

Evidently, several factors affected post-Angkorean society and politics. First, the lack of cohesiveness in the internal power structure led to factional struggles in which the leaders sought outside support. Second, the power centre shifted from Angkor to Phnom Penh which had other ramifications. Phnom Penh's vulnerability came from its geographic position which lay along a cultural fault-line. To the west was the seat of Theravada Buddhism which included Siam and Burma; to the East was Sinicized Vietnam. Third, the ambitious designs of Siam and Vietnam further reduced the Khmer strength.

Colonial Rule: The Emergence of Indochina

The earliest beginnings of French involvement in Cambodia can be traced back to the eighteenth century when missionaries began their activities in the country. From the question of political evolution, the French advent occurred when King Ang Duong, fearing the Thai and Vietnamese

46. ibid, pp.115.
incursions, wrote to Napoleon III seeking 'intervention and assistance'. With increasing French influence in Vietnam and the French desire to establish a stronghold there, Cambodia too began to dominate their interests.

In August 1863, King Norodom accepted the French proposal to establish a protectorate over Cambodia and the Franco-Khmer treaty was signed. Between the years 1863 and 1874, the region remained a protectorate. With the complete subjugation of Vietnam in 1874, the French consolidated its rule and from 1883 up to its independence, Cambodia was directly under the rule of French administrators. Thus emerged the entity, French Indochina, divided into Annam, Tongking, Laos, Cochinchina and Cambodia. For the first time, the entire region was under the banner of a single political and administrative authority.

Despite the colonisation of the whole of Indochina, Vietnam remained the main focus of French interests. Cambodia continued as an area of peripheral interest till about 1920's when it became significant for rubber cultivation, most of which was exported. Though aspects of

47. Sardesai, n.17, p.191.
urbanisation and expansion of western institutes, such as those dealing with commerce and banking emerged, there seems to have been little economic advance as regards industrial growth and development.\textsuperscript{49} Thus there were no direct economic benefits for the country. There were, however, indirect benefits for Cambodia, \textquoteleft since the highly radicalised and politicised plantation workers were to play a prominent role in Cambodian armed resistance to the French and later American imperialists soon after the Second World War\textquoteright.\textsuperscript{50}

Politically, Cambodia remained outside the mainstream as the French preferred to employ the Vietnamese in civil and police services. Education too received little attention and remained the preserve of the monastic orders. The neglect of economic, political and educational spheres had an impact upon the national movement, since the emergence of an independent, intellectual and elite class was slow to occur. Therefore, in Cambodia, nationalism developed quite slowly as compared to its neighbour Vietnam, where the unrest had started earlier.


\textsuperscript{50.} ibid.
The Independence Movement

The genesis of the national movement can be traced to the 1930's. At this time, articulation of nationalist sentiments was led by Son Ngoc Thanh. Educated in Saigon and France, he alongwith Pach Chhoeun, started a newspaper called the 'Nagaravatta'. 51 Two other channels which were used as a forum for nationalist expression were the Lycee Sisowath or the National Library at Phnom Penh and the Institute Boddhique (Buddhist Institute of Phnom Penh). Son Ngoc Thanh was closely associated with both and organized demonstrations and distributed political literature. 52 In 1942, the French authorities clamped down on the Institute Boddhique and arrested Pach Chhoeun while Son Ngoc Thanh escaped to Japan. 53

With the beginning of the Second World War, events changed with rapid succession. The period between June 1940 and October 1945, is a watershed in the history of entire Indochina. In Cambodia, the French policies initiated a different kind of response which sharply contrasted with the

52. Sardesai, n.17, p.307.
53. ibid.

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earlier one when the Cambodian nationalists were slow to emerge. Four events dominate the period between 1940 and 1945, by the end of which, Cambodian independence, which was unthought of in 1939, took concrete shape and coherence. These events are discussed below.

First, the Franco-Siamese War took place between 1940 and 1941. The war and the Thai ambitions were instigated by the Japanese.\textsuperscript{54} The pro-Japanese government of Phibun Songram took advantage of French vulnerability and seized territory within Cambodia and Laos, which Siam had earlier ceded to the French. The result of the peace which the French negotiated in Tokyo, was the loss of Battambang and Siem Reap and parts of Laos. A total of more than 65,000 square kilometers were ceded to the Thai s for a sum of six million piastres.\textsuperscript{55}

Second, in April 1941, King Monivong died, embittered and humiliated after the loss of Cambodian territory. His successor, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, was crowned king. The nationalist movement gained pace. The Japanese by this time had posted troops within Cambodia and both the intellectuals

\textsuperscript{54} Hall, n.2, p.816.

and the Buddhist Sangha looked towards Japan for leadership.

Third, the monks demonstration in July 1942 led to the crushing of the Sangha's influence which seemed to offer an alternative system to the existing colonial one. The Sangha comprised of two sects - the Mahanikay and the Thammayut, of which the latter was smaller but received royal patronage. While they shared common doctrinal issues, they differed over procedural ones. Hem Chieu, a monk of the Mahanikay sect had been implicated in an anti-French conspiracy which led to his arrest in July 1942. The sangha took objection to the arrest of Hem Chieu and another fellow monk. Japanese support was sought by the nationalists and the 'Nagaravatta' also opposed the arrest. The demonstration was severely crushed by the French, following which Son Ngoc Thanh went into exile in Tokyo. The collapse of the monks demonstration reiterated two facts, namely, the over emphasis of Japanese support to the movement and the severity of the French measures to curb the revolt.56

Fourth, the Romanization issue flared up in 1943. George Goutier, the French Resident decided that the Cambodian alphabet which was based on Indian models would be

56. Reddi, n.7, pp.82-84.
replaced by the Roman one. The methods of transliteration were worked out by George Coedès but the phonetics remained Khmer. This was viewed as an attack on the sangha and the traditional education of the Cambodian society. By 1945, the Romanization plan was pushed through by the French. Japanese occupation of Indochina put an end to the debate and status-quo-ante was restored.57

One of the most significant event which occurred contemporaneously along with those mentioned above, was the expansion of the Japanese in the regions of Southeast Asia. With the intention of establishing a "co-prosperity sphere", they set the pace for the total occupation of Southeast Asia. The amazing rapidity and success which they achieved had two impacts. First, they were able to eradicate the influences of western colonialism and culture.58 Second, the invading army gave an impetus to the already existing national movements.

In Cambodia, the Japanese occupation took place on 9 March, 1945 and on 12 March, 1945 King Norodom Sihanouk

57. ibid.
declared Cambodia's independence.\(^{59}\) In the period between March and October 1945, the Cambodian nationalist sentiments received greater emphasis. Sihanouk was made the Head of State with Son Ngoc Thanh as his Prime Minister. Despite these advances, Japanese defeat saw the return of the French. Nevertheless, as the situation in Indochina had radically changed, the people were in no mood to accept the French, who were cognizant of the fact that their time in Indochina would eventually come to an end.

The return of Son Ngoc Thanh to the political arena, witnessed the organization of a movement called the Khmer Issaraks or Free Khmers. With about two thousand armed volunteers they joined the Vietminh to oppose the return of the French to Indochina.\(^{60}\) Thanh's supporters had retreated to the forests where the Khmer Issarks or Free Cambodia Movement had actually been established with the view of wresting independence from France by militant action.\(^{61}\) Gaining inspiration from the Vietminh, this group, with its leftist ideas formed the base of the anti-French activities


\(^{60}\) Sardesai, n.17, p.307.

\(^{61}\) Leifer, n. 59,p.27.
in Cambodia. The movement took deep roots and organised the peoples efforts against French imperialism and towards independence which had become its raison d'etre.

In view of the stiff opposition which met the French return in the aftermath of the Japanese occupation, certain constitutional concessions were initiated. On 7 January, 1946, a modus vivendi agreement was signed, 'recognising Cambodia as an autonomous state within the Indochina Federation' which would 'enjoy self-governing status within the French union'.

In this atmosphere of political change the French introduced an electoral act in 1946, which for the first time allowed political parties in Cambodia. Three parties came into existence under the leadership of the royal family. According to V.M. Reddi,

"...all of them were led by princes, all of them shared a fear of neighbouring countries, and all of them professed loyalty to the monarchy".

The first was the Democratic Party led by Prince Sisowath Yuthevong. Having been educated in France, Yuthevong favoured a democratic set up and wanted to

62. ibid, pp.28-29.
63. Reddi, n.7, p.120. See also Leifer, n.59, p.33.
negotiate for Cambodia's independence at the earliest. This view contrasted with that of the Liberal Party led by Prince Norodom Norindeth, a conservative, who believed in education of the people and a semi-dependent relationship with France.64 The third party was the Progressive Democrats led by Prince Norodom Montana. All three parties feared the growing influences of the Vietnamese movement and also viewed Thai support to the Khmer Issarks with scepticism.

In the elections of 1946, the Democrats won fifty of the sixty seven seats. They formed themselves into a consultative assembly which would advise the King on the framing of the Constitution. Sihanouk viewed their victory with apprehension, since the constitution they framed greatly reduced the monarch's authority. It was probably from this time onwards that Sihanouk completely entered the nationalist movement, combining the 'mystique of divine kingship, party leadership and even world statesmanship'.65

The Democrats slowly lost their position of pre-eminence. Lack of independence from French rule and internal

64. These two parties played important roles while the third remained insignificant. Both were commonly known by their Khmer names- the Democratic Party or Krom Pracheathipodei and the Liberal Party or the Karaq Sereipheap or 'Freedom Group'. See ibid, p.120.

65. Sardesai, n.17, p.308.
discussions crippled their strength. Moreover the death of Prince Yuthevong in July 1947, followed by the assassination of his successor Luc Koeuss further weakened the structure of the party. Added to which, the Democrats did not receive any support from the affluent classes of Cambodian society, which also led to their isolation.

Simultaneously, the post World War period saw the growth of the left wing. Evidence of sources for communist ideology in Cambodia have been found in the doctoral thesis of Khieu Samphan and Hu Nim. Khieu Samphan's newspaper, L'Observateur also throws light on the roots of the party ideology and programmes.66 The sources of Khmer radicalism which are available do not match those that are found in Vietnam or Laos, either in quantity or quality. The available material traces the origins of its links to the Vietnamese. Cambodian radicalism expressed through the Khmer Vietminh had close association with the Vietminh from which it received inspiration and encouragement.

Initially communist activity was rather low mainly because there were few landless peasants and agrarian

discontent was low. By October 1930, the smaller communist movements in Vietnam had merged to form the 'Indochinese Communist Party' or the 'Dong Duong Cong-Sen Dang'. The ICP promised 'complete independence to Indochina and land to the peasants'. By 1951, this United Front dissolved and led to the constitution of individual communist parties in each state. Cambodian communists had at this time formed themselves into a group called the Pracheachon or the People's Party. This was later reiterated by the Communist Party of Kampuchea, a title which it took in 1966. The 1951 group had called itself the Revolutionary Cambodian Peoples Party; its statutes copied those of North Vietnam Lao Dong Party and its Secretary-General, Sieu Heng, had close links with the Vietminh.

Towards the end of 1949, the French signed a treaty with Sihanouk that granted 'fifty percent independence', which meant a large measure of internal autonomy including

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autonomous military zones in Battambang and Siem Reap.71 Despite this, areas relating to foreign policy, police, judiciary and defence remained under French control.72 The reasons for the change in French policies were based on several factors. First, with the intensification of the war in Indochina under Vietminh influence, they did not have much of an alternative. Second, with the emergence of Communist China and the acquisition of nuclear capability by the Soviets, the global scenario too had changed. Third, the Korean War had broken out and the French began to view themselves as crusaders against communism. The easing of French control was aimed at keeping the communists at bay. This led to the emergence of right-wing political groupings and anti-communist military forces which were to play a significant role in the move towards independence and the two decades following it.

From 1950 onwards the move for independence once more gained acceleration. In October 1951, Son Ngoc Thanh was once again released from prison and his return was hailed as

71. Sardesai, n.17, p.308.
72. Leifer, n.59, p.36.
that of a political messiah. In June 1952, Sihanouk had assumed power as the Prime Minister and appointed his own cabinet with the exclusion of the Democrats within the National Assembly. Sihanouk's movement met with opposition which criticized him of being a 'traitor to the nation' since he was not fighting with the French but was instead trying to negotiate with them. When in January 1953 the assembly did not approve Sihanouk's budget, it was dissolved and Sihanouk took over the government.

After this, his ploy changed and he began to assert Cambodia's right to complete independence from the French. Between February and May 1953, he travelled widely, in an attempt to solicit international support for Cambodia's independence. By June 1953, the French were facing the prospect of loss in Vietnam and began to consider Sihanouk's demands. Finally, in October 1953, Sihanouk was placed in charge of foreign affairs, judiciary and the armed forces. Independence was granted on 9 November, 1953 and by the time the Geneva Conference took place in 1954, Sihanouk had strengthened his position vis-a-vis the leftists and

Democrats, thus receiving the mandate to govern Cambodia.74

The year 1954 was a watershed in the history of Indochina. It was marked by two emotions—jubilation and sorrow. Jubilation over the independence of the three states of Indochina and sorrow due to the partition of Vietnam. The Geneva Conference which brought an end to the First Indochina War recognised that the 'reestablishment and consolidation of peace in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam', could be realised only with 'respect for the independence and sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam'.75 Vietnam was divided into North Vietnam or the Democratic Republic of Vietnam under the leadership of Ho Chih Minh and South Vietnam or Republic of Vietnam under Ngo Dinh Diem.76

The convention also set up an International Control Commission with India as Chairman, and Canada and Poland as

74. For a detailed account see, V.M. Reddi, n.7, pp.204-10.


the other two members. The task of the Commission was to look into the successful implementation of the truce and see to the withdrawal of rival forces. While the Vietnamese communists represented their country at the conference, both Cambodia and Laos were represented by their governments. Thus Jean Lacouture sums up the position of the Cambodian and Laotian left at the conference as follows,

"since the revolutionary parties had not sufficient time to co-ordinate their efforts, Laos and Cambodia were represented there by governments whose only wish was to separate their problems from those of Vietnam and to draw a veil over the existence on their territories of groups that were more or less Marxist".

In the post-Geneva period Cambodia emerged not just independent but also neutral and non-aligned. This is significant considering that the global scenario witnessed the outbreak of the Cold War and the alliance systems. Western efforts were targeted against the spread of communism which led to the establishment of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO). It was formed in 1954, under American influence and included the United States, Britain, France, Pakistan, Australia, Philippines and

77. Sardesai, n.17, p. 399.

Thailand. American intentions under the SEATO were quite obvious. In an appendix to the articles of the treaty, the United States specifies that, "its agreement and adhesions, apply only to communist aggression". 

The espousal of neutrality proved favourable as it allowed Cambodia to establish ties unhindered by ideological considerations. It established ties with the United States in March 1955 and was willing to receive aid both for development and defence purposes. However, US willingness to enter into relations with Cambodia had deeper implications. With the increasing American interest in Vietnam, Cambodia's position was vital and its brand of neutrality was viewed with less tolerance. In fact, in April 1955, the SEATO members met at Bangkok and had decided to place Cambodia along with Laos and South Vietnam under their protection without prior consultation. According to a National Security Council study of September 1956, the US policy was to "maintain Cambodia's independence and to reverse the drift towards pro-communist neutrality, encourage

80. Caldwell and Tan, n.49, p.93.
individuals and groups in Cambodia who oppose dealing with
the communist blocks and who serve to broaden the political
power base in Cambodia'.

Cognizant of this underlying objective in the US policy
towards Cambodia, Sihanouk accepted an invitation to visit
China in February 1956. The Chinese visit resulted in a
grant of 22.4 million US dollars for Cambodia and led to the
signing of a Sino-Cambodian Declaration of Friendship.

Finding this unpalatable the United States used fishing
boats to carry out intrusions into Cambodian territory. The
US also stopped its aid for the construction of a road or
railway to the port of Sihanoukville.

The effect of these measures were counter productive as
it forced Cambodia into forming closer ties with the Soviet
Union. The US then began to support and assist the Khmer
Serei which tried to destabilize Sihanouk. As relations

82. William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissenger, Nixon and the
83. Sihanouk, n.81, p.82
84. ibid., p.83. See also Shawcross, n.82, p.52.
85. Sihanouk's destabilisation occured as a result of the
    US support to the Khmer Serei who were provided
    assistance through the adjoining areas of Thailand and
    South Vietnam. Sihanouk proclaimed that the Khmer Serei
    were terrorizing the provinces while right wing faction

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deteriorated, Cambodia broke off ties with Thailand in May 1961 and with the United States in March 1965. While relations with the West worsened, those with the East improved. Throughout the late fifties and early sixties, the Cambodian leadership grew closer to China and the Soviet Union. In the early 1960's when the Sino-Soviet split became evident, Cambodia cast its lot with China.

Sihanouk's Domestic Policy

By the promulgation of the Constitution of 1947, the two thousand year old Khmer monarchy had effectively come to an end. Cambodia after 1947, had a parliamentary form of government with a bicameral assembly. It had the National Assembly or the Lower House and the Kingdom or the Upper House. The Monarch would appoint the Premier who in turn selected his own cabinet. Despite this, the King remained the highest symbol of authority.86

Within the domestic scenario, Sihanouk's authority came to be challenged by the Rightists, especially the Democratic

...Continued...

fomented dissatisfaction in the capital. See Shawcross, n.82, p.54.

Party which rallied under the followers of Son Ngoc Thanh. Realising the potential threat to his authority, Sihanouk abdicated the throne in favour of his father and entered political arena and set up the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (Popular Socialist Community). The setting up of this one party system was a significant political change. The idea behind the Sangkum was the achievement of a "true socialist and egalitarian democracy", a movement which would open its membership to all Cambodians who belonged to no political party.87

Another new institution was the Sakmach Cheat or the National Congress - a town meeting of people and leaders to decide on domestic and foreign policy issues. In the 1953 elections, the Sangkum won a large percentage of seats. The Democratic Party seemed to dissolve and the left parties maintained a very minor existence. By this time, Sihanouk had, to all purposes, secured his domestic political base but despite the monopoly of the Sangkum, the opposition to it had not completely dissipated but had merely adopted itself to a new situation.88

One of the prime domestic considerations was the development of the economy which suffered due to the stoppage of US aid. Realising these implications Sihanouk stated that,

"if we die, we prefer to do it in a more courageous and honourable way than by suffocation and rotting to death through American aid". 89

The economic consequences of such a stance had grave implications and radical changes had to be implemented. One of the measures was the incorporation of left wing leaders like Hou Youn, Hu Nim and Khieu Samphan in the government set up. Private banks, financial institutions and trade were brought under public control. Exports and imports were placed under the control of mixed state and private companies: SONEXIM to handle exports and imports and SONAPRIM for distributing imported goods.90 This was done at the urging of certain left-wing technocrats such as Chau Seng who believed that the effective economic power should be with the state.91

89. Sihanouk, n.81, p.137.
90. ibid.
91. Cadwell and Tan, n.49, p.203.
The elections of 1966 were a landmark change in the Cambodian political process. Unlike in previous elections, Sihanouk did not involve himself in personally selecting candidates from the Sangkum. Two facts are of crucial importance concerning this election. Even though it was not contested on any ideological terms, the conservatives under Douc Rosy became prominent and eventually brought a strongly moderate character to the parliament. As for the leaders of the left, Sihanouk did not encourage their re-entry into the political scenario, but they returned with an increased majority. The right-wing factions became prominent and under their influence the left elements of Sihanouk’s government were increasingly repressed. In 1967, they disappeared underground, from where they organised and carried out peasant uprisings which were severely put down.

As early as October 1966, change and unrest in the political sphere had set in. Sihanouk called General Lon Nol to form the government; sensing that his policies had steered Cambodia into a dead end, he looked towards the


rightists. More particularly he saw the right as the only group which would keep him in power. Thus by acting as he did, and allowing the conservatives to triumph in the 1966 elections, he paved the way for his own political demise.94

With the right-wing faction directing state policies, diplomatic ties with the United States were reestablished. Matters came to a turn when in March 1970, Sihanouk was overthrown by a coup d'état led by General Lon Nol.95 There has been much speculation that the coup was instigated and carried out with the help of external forces. Jean Lacouture opines that "the Ultras - South Vietnamese, Cambodians, Thais (and perhaps, but not probably, Americans), prepared and carried out the Phnom Penh coup d'état".96

Despite numerous doubts raised over the involvement of the CIA in the overthrow of Sihanouk, it is significant to bear in mind that during the later years of Sihanouk's rule, degeneration set in within the royal family. According to

95. Sihanouk learnt of the coup while in Moscow. He then proceeded to Peking where he was given political asylum and headed a government-in-exile until the fall of the Lon Nol regime in 1975. In a book written while in exile Sihanouk has blamed the CIA for his ouster. See Sihanouk, n.81.
96. Lacouture, n.78, p.623.
J.S. Girling,

"The degeneration of Sihanouk's regime raises the gloomy question whether the type of 'Buddhist Socialism', in Cambodia as indeed the 'Burmese way of Socialism', or Nasser's 'Arab Socialist Union' can probably present a genuine alternative to dictatorial communism on the one hand and to capitalist exploitation or right wing authoritarianism on the other". 97

Within this context it becomes imperative to recognise that the domestic conditions and the decay within the royal family are factors which greatly contributed to the collapse of Sihanouk. Milton Osborne states that,

"to dwell on the issue of external involvement in the coup of March 1970 is to diminish the all important fact that Sihanouk fell in the final analysis because of disenchantment and finally the open dissidence of opponents within his state". 98

Lon Nol and the Republican Period

With the deposition of Prince Sihanouk, Cambodia under the Lon Nol regime embarked upon a new phase in her history. What is significant is that despite the change in the political leadership and the shift from the royal to the

republican form of government, the residual presence of Sihanouk remained a part of the new system.\(^9^9\) In the five short years of Republican rule, there were developments both internally and externally which proved catastrophic to the political interests of the country.

Internally, though the Republic replaced a monarchical 'system', very little administrative changes seem to have been introduced. This was because the system remained structurally similar to that of the monarchical system, with the power shifting from the King to the republican president.\(^1^0^0\) Interestingly, though the country was renamed the Khmer Republic in October 1970, it continued to be ruled by the Monarchical Constitution and Ordinances until May 1972 when the Republican Constitution came into effect.\(^1^0^1\) On the economic front the policies and emphasis on state enterprise and nationalization of import and export trades were renounced.\(^1^0^2\) Freedom in expression and participation


\(^1^0^0\). Abdulgaffar, n.86, p.21.

\(^1^0^1\). ibid., p.20.

\(^1^0^2\). Osborne, n.99, p.58.
was also assured.

The changelessness in the internal politics was in sharp contrast to the external developments which took place. The most significant change was that from the military point of view, the war in Indochina grew out of proportions. The extension and intensification of the Vietnam war was to have long term implications within Cambodia. Though Vietnam was the natural epicenter of the conflict, the major contestants treated all three countries as a single strategic unit. The Americans in their bid to fight the Vietnamese started to bomb regions of Cambodia where they suspected the presence of guerilla forces. The decision to bomb Cambodia 'had been on the principle that communist violations of Cambodia's neutrality justified aggressive reciprocal action.'

The collective operation for the Cambodian bombing was called the 'Menu' while the individual sorties were known as Breakfast, Lunch, Snack, Dinner, Dessert and Supper. Though the bombings attempted to target the Vietcong


105. ibid., p.28.
sanctuaries and their supply routes, a large portion of Cambodian population also came under attack. The unscrupulous and indiscriminate bombings caused the migration of the rural population to the cities where overcrowding led to shortages of food, medicines and so on. The population of Phnom Penh, alone, is estimated to have gone up from 600,000 to 1,800,000.106

The effect of the war on the economy was absolutely devastating. The extensive damage due to the bombing, coupled with the diversion of finances to meet the military needs, resulted in a gross deterioration of economic conditions. Production of main crops declined. Most of the livestock was destroyed and only a quarter of the original number is said to have survived the war. With its economy in such a quandary, the republican government was dependent on economic and military assistance. Had it not been for the assistance given by the US and the South Vietnamese army, the Republican regime may not have survived.107

Thus the policies of the Republican government proved to be self-destructive. The excessive bombing caused untold

106. Caldwell and Tan, n.49, p.354.
misery to the population. Chomsky states that, according to Pentagon sources, aerial bombardment of Indochina, reached 4.5 million tonnes, nine times the total tonnage in the entire Pacific theatre in Second World War.\textsuperscript{108} The general belief was that such bombings would not have been possible without the support extended to the United States by the government in power. About 500,000 tonnes were dropped on Cambodia alone.\textsuperscript{109}

Prince Sihanouk, who was in exile began to support the communist resistance forces against the Lon Nol government. The resistance movement along with the supporters of Sihanouk joined hands and formed an alliance called the National United Front of Cambodia (FUNK). The FUNK proved to be the real directing force of the Royal Government of Khmer National Union (GRUNK) which was led by Sihanouk and Penn Nouthin Peking.\textsuperscript{110} Despite the cohesive character which was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{108} Noam Chomsky, \textit{At war with Asia} (New York, 1970), p.149.
\item \textsuperscript{109} According to Turley the US dropped seven to eight million tonnes of bombs on an area one third larger than France. Even France had not been subjected to such an extent of bombing during the entire Second World War. See Turley, n.103, p.89.
\item \textsuperscript{110} Kattenburg, Paul, M., "DRV External Relations in the New Revolutionary Phase", in Joseph J. Zasloff and Mac Alister Brown, (ed.), \textit{Communism in Indochina} (Lexington, 1975), p.120.
\end{itemize}
presented by the FUNK, there were differences between Prince Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge over the approach to a solution. The Khmer Rouge and their North Vietnamese mentors were unenthusiastic about any settlement which would give Sihanouk the lead role. For his part, Sihanouk also demonstrated his discontent. The Khmer Rouge gradually gained the upper hand. The situation within Cambodia was such that even the neutral elements started sympathising with the aspirations of the resistance. What is amazing is that despite its inferiority in terms of its fighting capacity vis-a-vis the US, the Vietcong, the Khmer Rouge and the Pathet Lao managed to liberate and establish communist regimes in all of Indochina. It seems as though the American war efforts in Indochina only succeeded in contributing to the unification of the various revolutionary forces of the old colonial Indochina.

In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge had initially remained a fragmented force. In fact the growth and development of the Khmer Rouge could not have occurred without any external


112. ibid.

113. Lacouture, n.78, p.628.
help since the group was too scattered and lacked cohesiveness to offer any strong resistance. This was provided by the Vietnamese communists who acted like an 'iron curtain' behind which the Khmer Rouge was nurtured to become a force that could undermine the American efforts and eventually fill the political vacuum which existed within Cambodia.

Internal Conditions of the Democratic Kampuchea Regime

The literature available on the internal conditions of the Democratic Kampuchea regime is quite limited and has been based mainly on the reports of refugees who fled from the country in the post-1975 period. In this regard, Cambodia differs from Vietnam and Laos. In the case of Vietnam, the western media tried to sustain an image of a country under communist tyranny while Laos went unnoticed. But in Cambodia, there is no difficulty in documenting major atrocities and oppression, primarily from the refugee reports, since Cambodia has been almost entirely closed to

the West since the war's end. 115

The inhuman living conditions in Kampuchea during the period when the Khmer Rouge was in power clearly indicate that it was an era of barbarism. In an attempt at national rehabilitation and progressive socialism, the regime carried out several atrocities which stand proof of its commitment to inhumane principles. It carried out a near total evacuation of the cities, a process of collectivization of lands and rigid control of human factors, both at the physical and psychological levels. In the words of Senator MacGovern, "the Khmer Rouge made the Nazis look very tame by comparison." 116

In order to facilitate administration, the whole region was divided into seven zones. The divisions were done on the basis of geographical compass directions. North, Northeast, East, Southwest, West, Northwest and Centre. There were also special regions such as the Kratie special region number 505 and the Siem Reap special region number


104. The zones were subdivided into regions or dambans. All of these subdivisions, or nearly all of them crossed old administrative boundaries and were universally known by numbers.\textsuperscript{117} The regions were further categorized as a collection of districts or 'sruk', followed by subdistricts or 'khum' and finally the village or 'phum'. One of the distinct features of the administrative hierarchy was the cooperative or 'sahakar' which was generally an equivalent of the khum and comprised of several 'phums'. Prior to 1975, the West and Southwest zones had formed a single large unit called the 'Southwest' and there was a special zone comprising of dambans, 21, 25 and 33.\textsuperscript{118}

The administration at each level consisted of a triumvirate of officials called the Committee and were individually known as the secretary, the deputy-secretary and the member. At the village level there was a chief or a protean generally chosen from among the poor peasantry, who also had connections with the Communist Party of Kampuchea


\textsuperscript{118} Heder, Stephan, "From Pol Pot to Pen Sovan to the Villages", \textit{International Conference on Indochina and the Problems of Security and Stability in Southeast Asia}, (Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 19-21, June 1980), p.12.
(CPK). In some areas, consisting entirely of new villages, that is, exiled urbanites, new people were appointed as 'me-phum' (village chief) often with results unsatisfactory both for themselves and the CPK authorities.¹¹⁹

Before dealing with the actual changes and policies which the Khmer Rouge leadership initiated, it would be prudent to view the exact nature of this political authority in Cambodia. In 1954, after the Geneva Accord, the original movement had broken up and the leaders retreated into isolation. When the armed struggle began in the 1960's each area become a political entity on its own under different leaders and their troops.¹²⁰ This was probably the basis of the decentralization and autonomy which later carried on under the Khmer Rouge. Political coordination among these groups was very loose. By April 1975, the zonal and regional leaders were the ones who controlled the armed forces and


¹²⁰. As stated earlier, the role played by the Cambodian communists in the independence movement was little and their cohesiveness fell apart. The movement remained isolated and gathered strength with the victory of each group in the countryside prior to 1975. Interview with Prof. Khien Theeravit, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok on 14 September, 1994 at Bangkok.
thereby had the jump on political power.121

The leadership at the initial stages following the revolutionary victory was in the hands of a mixed group which comprised of members from the CPK, the ICP, Issaraks and Pracheachon groups.122 In the period following 1976, the Khmer Rouge, in a bid to consolidate its power, carried out purges within the leadership. There was a great deal of autonomy in the administrative set up. It has been stated by Vickery, that no two regions were alike with respect to the conditions of life. The amount of 'food, its distribution, work discipline, and general hardships, number of executions and execution policies, differed among zones and regions; while execution policy and food distribution sometimes differed even among contiguous villages'.123

One of the immediate measures of the regime was the near total evacuation of the cities and the transfer of the

121. Vickery, n.117, p.69.
122. The concept of leadership during the initial stages is not very clear or coherent. From refugee accounts it becomes evident that the population only knew of an authority called the 'Angka' which was the name of the Khmer Rouge ruling organization. But as regards to the personalities involved, there was no definite identity. For details see, Ngor, Hiang, A Cambodian Odyssey (New York, 1987), pp.92-93.
123. Vickery, n.117, p.68.
population to the rural areas which was supervised by the military and was carried out in three stages. First, the evacuation of Phnom Penh was effected. People were moved to regions which geographically corresponded to the position of the zones in the city. The movement was done in an indiscriminate fashion, regardless of health, age or sex. Neither the very old nor the very young were exempted; even the 20,000 sick and wounded in the hospitals were forced to go, many of them on crutches or pushed along in their beds.124

The second major transfer took place towards the end of 1975 or early 1976, when people from the south and southwest zones were moved to regions of the northwest. The objective of this transfer seems to have been the easing of population pressure in the southern zones. To quote Vickery,

"this exercise termed variously, second migration, second deportation or second exodus; in what has been written to date mainly concerned the people leaving the crowded southwest for more open spaces of the northeast and also a smaller number who were moved out to the east."125

The final transfer took place in 1978, and was in response to a coup in the Eastern zone led by So Phim which

125. Vickery, n.117, p.82.
was ruthlessly put down.

Evidently, the evacuation of the population had deeper implications than just the physical transfer of the people. The first and most crucial consideration was its own security. The Khmer Rouge, despite its victory, was relatively weak and inexperienced in ruling a large population. Especially so in Phnom Penh where the population had increased heavily due to the migration from rural areas. Moreover, it feared opposition from the Sihanouk and Lon Nol factions which still existed in Kampuchea. Attempting to consolidate its internal strength and gain absolute control, it resorted to scattering the population in the rural areas. These regions were controlled by the youth loyal to the Khmer Rouge who effectively crushed any support that existed for the old government.

Second, the question of scarcity of food was a very severe problem in the immediate aftermath of the war. This fear was the greatest irony for a country that had never known a famine and had been to a large extent "a granary of all Indochina." 126 Actively the food crisis had developed as

early as 1974 and had been confined to the rural areas. The government sectors did not face this problem since they received aid from the Americans. By 1975, towards the end of the war, the situation had deteriorated considerably. There is probably an amount of truth in the Democratic Kampuchea contention that only evacuation would save the city population from worse starvation than it had already known.\textsuperscript{127} However, this does not mitigate the fact that the transfer was carried out in a ruthless and indiscriminate manner.

Third, the entire population of Phnom Penh was transferred. Though the forced evacuation has been viewed by some as an attempt to destroy a class based society, this is a fallacy in essence, since the transfer of the population led to a new kind of class structure. The population was divided into three categories of which the first consisted of people living in the revolutionary areas. The second category comprised of people living in the newly liberated zones. The third group were 'members of the Lon Nol troops, dependents of puppet government officials, Buddhist monks, nuns and Catholic priests.' Secondary school pupils, college

\textsuperscript{127} Vickery, n.117, p.79.
students and intellectuals fell into this group. The population of Phnom Penh belonged to this group and were considered "citizens deprived of all rights". Treated as 'war prisoners' they were called 'new inhabitants' or 'parasites'.

Another distinction which existed was between the evacuees and the rural peasantry. The evacuees were called the 'new people' and the peasantry the 'old people' or 'base people.' An individual from a higher category could be demoted on account of his or her political behaviour or family ties. In the post-1975 period all those evacuated from the cities were placed in the Depositee category which was the lowest, and socially, most disadvantaged group. Thus, the poor peasants were de jure, as well as, de facto the privileged social class. Initially, the treatment between the groups varied but towards the end there was hardly any distinction.


130. Vickery, n.117, p.81.
Almost all the population lived in collectives where life was disciplined with hard labour, rigidity and severe restrictions.131 The activities of all the members within the collectives were completely controlled-both at the physical and psychological levels. The only form of education seems to have been indoctrination of the Khmer Rouge ideology-a form of political education which emphasized loyalty to the Angka (the KR ruling organizations), greater work potential and enhanced production.132 Education in the co-operatives was limited to the primary level where children studied for a few hours and learnt manual labour.

Socially, the DK system led to the collapse of the "family" which in the traditional Cambodian sense, was an extended one. The values that went with such a system like respect for elders, decisions based on consensus and so on, were also eroded. However, not all scholars view it as a destruction of the family. In fact Vickery states that,

131. Haing, n.122.

132. ibid., pp.190-202. The Angka which was the organization of the revolution, was considered to be omnipresent, with eyes and ears everywhere. It was the personification of terror. See People's Revolutionary Tribunal, n.129, p.III-106.
"the DK policy was immeasurably stricter than the pre-revolutionary norms it mimed, and it served to modify, not destroy, the family through transferring parental authority over adults to the state and breaking down the extended family into nuclear units." 133

The extended family, in the traditional sense was the smallest unit of the social structure in Cambodian society. The emergence of the nuclear family may not be viewed as an aberration, but those who lost relatives and members during the Khmer Rouge rule cannot tolerate the policies which they tried to initiate'. 134

With regard to religion, the constitution of Democratic Kampuchea had stated that 'reactionary religion was not allowed'. 135 In reality no religious activities were tolerated and traditional religion had been abolished. Strangely enough the relationship between the monks and communists had not been totally antagonistic. In fact, during various stages in Cambodia's political development monks had supported different groups. As such, monks in the communist zones during the Lon Nol period had supported the revolution. Though there were no mass executions of monks,

133. Vickery, n.117, p.175.

134. Interview with Ms Toulon Soumara, Deputy Governor of the Bank of Cambodia, 28 October, 1994 at Phnom Penh.

135. Vickery, n.117, p.179.
they had to give up their monastic life and work in the fields. Teaching and carrying out of religious activity was completely forbidden.\textsuperscript{136} The Pagodas which were once the cultural and social centres of the village become store houses for rice and the areas around them were converted into livestock pens.\textsuperscript{137} According to Ngor, the Khmer Rouge wanted to eliminate anything which was foreign. As such, Buddha was an outsider, from India, and so had to be abolished.\textsuperscript{138}

One of the most inhuman and barbaric acts of the regime was the policy of elimination and extermination of the population. There have been various estimates as to the number of people who were killed. While the validity of such reports must be questioned rationally, it is, nevertheless, obvious that the death toll was large. Taking into account the country's condition in April 1975, the toll from hunger and illness would definitely have been heavy. There are several discrepancies in statistical exactions. What is significant is that a massacre is a massacre and there is no

\textsuperscript{136} ibid., p.180.
\textsuperscript{137} Kampuchea Dossier-I, (Hanoi, 1979), pp.28-30.
\textsuperscript{138} Ngor, n.122, p.201.
point in squabbling over whether one million or half a million were killed. Due to lack of precision, it is impossible to arrive at an accurate estimation or apportion the number to various causes of death. However, in 1970 the population was approximately 7.2 million (plus or minus ten percent) while in 1983 it was estimated at roughly 4.8 million (plus or minus fifteen per cent). It is evident that during the Khmer Rouge years, at least a third of the Cambodian people perished as a result of war, disease, starvation and genocidal killings.

Another reason for the deaths were the purges within the party. While the party leadership remained loosely knit, the rural areas were under the provincial leaders who had their own armed bands. These groups were slowly and effectively put down. According to Ponchoud, the purges were, "the translation into action of a particular vision of man." It was the outcome of a specific ideology and in this case 'Pol Pot's Socialism without a model' was a


141. Francois Ponchaud, n.126, p.69.
perverted kind of pragmatism. During the Khmer Rouge period, its leaders sought to bring about complete change in Cambodian society. In this attempt the worst of human sufferings were perpetrated on the people of Kampuchea. It is impossible to understand the abject misery and anguish of those who were subjected to the humiliations and atrocities of the Khmer Rouge.

External Policies of the Khmer Rouge

In its external policies, Democratic Kampuchea established relations with North Korea, China, Vietnam, and Laos. Foreign diplomatic missions within Kampuchea were limited to nine countries-China, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cuba, Albania, Yugoslavia and Egypt. It, however, enjoyed contacts with other countries such as Peru, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Mexico, Burma, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Great Britain, Finland, Japan, Greece and Australia. Its relationship with China was the closest. In August 1975, Khieu Samphan visited Peking and signed an agreement


with the PRC. Another visit took place in September-October, 1977 by Pol Pot and Ieng Sary.144 Despite attempts by the Soviet Union to forge closer relations, much could not arise out of it. Any request by the Soviet Union to open an Embassy at Phnom Penh was ignored by the Democratic Kampuchea regime.145

The most significant aspect of Democratic Kampuchea's foreign policy was its relations with its traditional enemy Vietnam. Prior to 1975, the Indochinese states had been engaged in a battle against a common enemy—the United States. With the end of the American involvement in Indochina, the differences among them reemerged and the traditional Cambodian-Vietnamese antagonism took precedence once again.

As the reality of the conflict between Phnom Penh and Hanoi became increasingly obvious, the view that the Khmer Rouge were Vietnamese puppets passed out of fashion. It was viewed by some commentators that the Khmer Rouges were Cambodian 'Patriots' struggling against Vietnamese attempts


to dominate Cambodia.\textsuperscript{146} In April 1975, the liberation of South Vietnam was followed by the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from within Kampuchea. Due to internal upheavals caused by the Phnom Penh government several people crossed the border into Vietnam and this led to clashes between the two sides.\textsuperscript{147}

Second, the question of withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops from Cambodia was not clear. It was believed that Vietnamese withdrawal from the 'Parrots Beak', which lies in the northeastern regions of Kampuchea, was slow and incomplete. Third, the issue over offshore islands further complicated the relations between the two. By late 1976, sporadic fighting had started and it continued till December 1977, when Vietnam launched a massive invasion. This ended the diplomatic relations between the two. The intensity of fighting continued during 1978 and finally on 25 December, 1978, Vietnam launched a full scale offensive and took Cambodia with the help of the anti-Pol Pot group, the Kampuchean National United Front for National Salvation (KNUFNS). Under the supervision of the Vietnamese, Heng

\textsuperscript{146} Evans and Rowley, n.142, p.84.
\textsuperscript{147} ibid., p.85.
Samrin was appointed as Head of State. The KNUFNS and the People's Revolutionary Council took charge of the affairs of the state and Democratic Kampuchea became the People's Republic of Kampuchea.

The Vietnamese overthrow of the Pol Pot regime was one of the immediate consequences. The presence of Vietnamese troops was to continue for eleven long years and it brought to the surface several security issues which threatened the stability of the region. However, the end of the Khmer Rouge was an important factor and 'for those who waited, as for almost everyone else, the Vietnamese invasion had been a true liberation.'