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Khmer Rouge children’s songs

Thun Theara

Abstract

During the Khmer Rouge years (1975–9), children were taught to sing songs which indoctrinated and inculcated them to serve the revolutionary glory. At the same time, children were made to toil very hard for long hours every day with empty stomachs. The content of the songs was intended to inspire children to work for the Khmer Rouge in building a new society. These songs linger in the memory of the present-living “children.”

Introduction

Song is an art which has been popular in Cambodia for a long time. The purposes of using songs differ according to the time period and the context of each society. Generally, songs are used for many purposes. They are applied to explain love affairs, the beauty of girls, views of attractive places, or to give advice or explain concepts. In the Khmer Rouge period, which Cambodian people call “the Pol Pot regime,” several methods were used to ideologically educate children, including revolutionary songs. Proper indoctrination of children with Khmer Rouge ideals made education extremely important. They used many revolutionary songs in an attempt to indoctrinate children with their messages. Songs were spread by the Khmer Rouge troops that liberated areas from Lon Nol’s government after 1970. After parts of the country came under Khmer Rouge control, authorities made it a priority to create schools in the villages. At the end of each class, children were made to sing revolutionary songs that were enjoyable even without recognition of their meanings. Songs were also broadcast publicly while children performed forced labor in the fields. Some people

who lived during the Khmer Rouge period believe that these songs were played as a way for them to release the stress that resulted from their intense labor.

Children were regarded as a base of strength to which the Khmer Rouge paid careful attention. They were used to serve the revolution, because they were young and lacked the conditioning that living in society would have given them. The Khmer Rouge tried to brainwash children in order to create the type of people who could serve their policies without question. So children had the important role of implementing their policies, and they were an effective means. They were used as brave soldiers to fight against or kill anyone who betrayed Angkar, or, those whom Angkar regarded as enemies. They were given many dangerous tasks such as transporting weapons, engaging in battles, and delivering supplies.

On the ideology of the Khmer Rouge, Alexander Laban said, “They used the ideology to inflame the feeling of resentment even further; trying to make its followers ‘burn with rage’ and be ‘seized by painful anger’ (chheu chap), feelings that would motivate them to seek revenge and destroy their class enemies.” So children were the first kind of people who were focused on, and their indoctrination through songs was an important strategy.

**Everyday life of children under the Khmer Rouge regime**

During the Khmer Rouge period, many heavy human rights violations were committed, especially on children. Children were used as the backbone of the revolution, because they were considered pure, honest, and blank, and would easily follow what the Angkar taught and ordered them to do. Parents, normally, have the duty of caring for their children, but in this regime, they were not allowed to do so. Only Angkar deserved to be me puk (mother father), so children were forced to live separately from their own parents. Most of them were forced to live in children’s camps where they faced many difficulties such as poor nutrition, hard work, threats, and punishments. During that time, conditions were extremely difficult and dangerous. As one woman complained, “Every morning you were grateful to have survived another night, and on the way to work you stole glances at the other work teams
to see if your children were still alive."²

When the Khmer Rouge seized power, all relationships as well as the living conditions of children were completely changed. The former forms of behavior with parents, siblings, or neighbors were given up; children and parents had to treat each other as strangers. As Shun Nari mentioned, “Before she called parents pa, mak³ (father, mother), and grandmother ma,⁴ but during the Khmer Rouge, was required to call parents pok, me, and grandmother yeay."⁵ All jewelry and any decorations—even hair-styles—were forbidden. “You would be the real revolutionists if your hair was cut to be short, and must be bad-looking. Otherwise if someone who had shiny or nice hair styles, they would be accused and forced to cut it immediately. The Khmer Rouge authorities thought that someone who wanted to own jewelry and decorate themselves might still like the former leadership, the Lon Nol regime."⁶

Every morning, all children had to get up early in order to complete many kinds of tasks which the Angkar gave, such as carrying water, collecting animal excrement, and cleaning up stables for oxen or cattle. Although they tried to get up early and tried to complete their work, this intense labor was never reduced. They worked hard and there was no breakfast. The food which they received daily was very inadequate. It was only one can of tasteless gruel mixed with the skins of vegetable or salt. After the lunch break, at 1:30.pm, they continued their work in the hot sun or in the rain until the evening without any more breaks, sometimes continuing until midnight. The work was as hard as Sarom Prak claimed, “All of us were coerced to labor without stopping in the rain and under the hot sun. During this time there were many kinds of work, including digging trenches and canals, making dams, and so on. We were Cambodian slave labor.”⁷ When someone got sick, the group leaders did not send them to hospital; in contrast, their food was reduced, or they were sometimes killed. As the slogan said, “No gain in keeping, and no loss in weeding out.”⁸ The children’s work was not just what Sarom Prak mentioned, but there were many kinds of heavy work that they were required to perform such as planting rice seeds, building riverbanks, breaking rocks, and so on. These were different according to the place. They were not suitable tasks for children. Seng C. Treary described her work in
Chensea village (northwest of the provincial capital) as follows: “My chores included taking care of the village garden, transporting water from one field to another and working on whatever miscellaneous projects the authorities delegated.” When anyone did not complete his or her own work or committed any mistake during work time, he or she would face punishment which might be reduced rations, violence, or death. Ratha Phen, 40 years old, described the reason why she became blind. “During the Pol Pot regime, I was ordered to carry water and collect pig excrement. One day, I was so tired that I fell down and spilled the dung, so the unit chief whipped me with a lash, which flew into my eyes. From day to day, my eyes became painful and I became blind as a result.”

Children’s sleeping conditions were often extremely uncomfortable. They slept in lines under a house roofed by leaves or tiles. In some houses, the roofs were broken, so when it rained they could not sleep for the entire night. In other places, they did not like the sleeping quarters. Roeun Sam said, “At night, I went to sleep where the children lay on the ground. We didn’t have a roof, wall, or bed. We slept on the ground.” Moreover, because they had insufficient food during the day, at night they could not manage to sleep because they were too hungry. As Sopheak K. Hang said, “Every night seemed to last forever. It was hard to fall asleep with an empty stomach. Sometimes, I filled my stomach with water in order to sleep easily. As it turned out, I had to get up more frequently to relieve myself. I remembered that other boys and I extended a long tube from the floor to the nearest outside bush to relieve ourselves during the night.”

Most children came from poor families and were illiterate. They were young and lacked the conditions that living in society would have given them. They were ordered to do some dangerous activities that affected other people and also their parents, while they themselves did not recognize the nature of those activities. François Ponchaud recorded one story which was told by a Cham man named Mat Sleman who had lived in the village of Trea (north of Kampong Cham province) and who escaped to Thailand in June 1976:

At Chrauchmar there was a Cham who had two sons. Both joined the army of liberation. One night the sons came home to visit
and relate their exploits—how they had killed Khmers, eaten pork, liberated the country, ‘and followed the revolution.’ The old man didn’t say a word but went out of the house; he came back armed with a cleaver and killed both his sons. He covered their bodies with a big cloth and then went to tell his neighbors: ‘Come and see the two enemies I’ve killed! When he pulled back the cover his friends said, ‘But those are your sons!’ ‘No, they’re not,’ he retorted, ‘they are enemies to our people and our religion and I killed them.’

In some places, children were encouraged to observe each other all the time. Some seemed to be happy to observe and report the mistakes of people who were living around them and it was something that they became used to. One main reason for this behavior was explained as follows. “You must watch each other in order that you may detect them, to help us to purify you and support to Revolution.... The children did not understand what was involved. Many denounced their parents, simply in order to purify them, believing that they were acting for the good of their parents and for the good of Angkar. Adults became wary of talking freely in the presence of children.”

Additionally, young children were indoctrinated to kill people who were the enemies of Angkar, although they had been their own parents. As Ung Leong asserted, “All children were indoctrinated to follow Angkar without hesitation. They could shoot or kill all the people who betrayed Angkar even if they were their parents.” Moreover, besides what the Khmer Rouge authorities taught them they also put ideological ideas into songs which made Treng Banhcharon’s feel strange and surprised when he heard them:

They were ordered to sing and dance with a new style that I had never met before. Their shows (singing and dancing) were focused on the activities of the Khmer soldiers who defeated the Lon Nol’s people, the prosperous children living under Democratic Kampuchea, and the patriotism of the Khmer soldiers in liberating the country. For young children and some adults who did not consider deeply on those untruthful shows they misunderstood, but for someone who could pay much focus on them they did not believe at all.

Time moved very slowly, children responded more and more
heavily to their work, and their hunger also increased greatly. They were extremely thin because they were overworked and undernourished. Treng Banhcharon said, “Our arms and feet swelled up making us look inhuman. Our clothes were dyed black color and torn with holes. We all had many lice on the head. Our bodies were full of wounds and so itchy because we had not washed with soap for years.” Whenever they were free from the intensive labor, at night or during the day, they needed to find more food to fill their stomachs. They ate everything—even all kinds of small animals and leaves in the forest. As Sopheak K. Hanf said, “During the day I would hunt for food like snails or rats or anything that moved. This was allowed only during a short break after the long labor-intensive work.” Pi Chang Ang said, “Living in a society which focused only on surviving until tomorrow, children faced many other troubles that they would regret forever.” Relationships, fondness, and love affairs no longer existed. Treng Banhcharon expressed his regrets as follows.

During that time, we only thought about how to survive by ourselves. We forgot about taking care of other people although they were siblings, friends, or parents. Everyone tried individually their best to fill their stomachs even though they needed to steal or take something by force from someone. Everyone was changed by the glorious Angkar into a thief. Sometimes we committed ugly activities such as stealing food from relatives. Even now when we remember, we feel extreme regret.

Generally, the Khmer Rouge authorities did not provide the people with sufficient food, so they were living in starvation all the time. Most children decided to be thieves of hunters in order to find more food to fill their stomachs. They would be in trouble if the group leaders recognized their activities. According to Navy Luek,

I saw a girl and a boy who had stolen rice, salt, and vegetables, and a cadre caught them by surprise, and had them beaten until they bled. Another time, they stole salt to eat with guava; the chief tied their hands and feet and put them for around two hours in a place infested with tiny ants, until blood was pouring out. I saw it with my eyes because I’d gone to tend cows, and that was where they were punished.
Even small babies who were breast-feeding were also in disastrous conditions under the Democratic Cambodia government. It was so surprising when I found some troubling things that happened to babies. Because their mothers were away from them to tend the fields, the babies were no longer breast-fed enough anymore. They were put in small camps that contained two or three old base women taking care of them. "In each camp, there were more than fifty babies," according to Bunthy Nu. He continued, "Some days, mothers coming back from the fields saw their babies had passed away in the hammocks without any responsibilities from the women." I was also horrified by some of the ferocious activities of the Khmer Rouge soldiers such as the consumption of human meat. Young children were also used as their food. Those ferocious activities were asserted by Sarom Prak, "Some of the Khmer Rouge soldiers ate the livers of their victims. The young boys moaned and shouted out in pain. They disfigured the bodies and slashed the throats of young children and babies. The Khmer Rouge tore the babies into pieces." 

In summary, under the Khmer Rouge, all the children belonged to Angkar, and they were used for different purposes—as brave soldiers, food and weapons relievers, machines for killing people, and the core strength to re-build the country. They were the base strength to serve their revolution from the time that they were young until they became adults. They were not only much exploited, but their rights to food, family, education, and adequate living conditions were taken away. All freedoms were prevented during that time. This is how the children who lived in this period were abused by the Democratic Cambodian government.

**Khmer Rouge songs**

*Khmer Rouge singers*

I have interviewed two Khmer Rouge singers who now live in Khrouch Chhmar district, Kampong Cham province. They described what they had faced or seen concerning the revolutionary songs of the Pol Pot regime. They were two children among many others who lived under the control of the Khmer Rouge after 1970. They were taught how to sing the songs from the age of seven or
eight.

Sun Nary was a child who lived in a village in Khrouch Chhmar district. During her studies at a school which was under villager’s house, song was also part of the program. At the end of each class, all the students were ordered by the teacher to sing revolutionary songs. Because she had a nice voice, she became one among another eleven young women in the village who were selected to be Khmer Rouge singers. She was trained how to sing, dance, act correctly, and follow the lyrics by a few older people who were sent from another place. They taught them how to sing and gesture. She reported,

We did not have any proper materials such as media player or paper that contain lyrics. The teachers sang the song loudly while their bodies and hands were moving slowly following the meaning of the song. We watched them and started adapting their gestures. Normally, we spent nearly one day to learn how to sing and gesture for one song which was so difficult, but some other songs we could learn easily, it could be two or three hours. We rehearsed four to five songs for one occasion only. We also learned how to play some kind of Khmer traditional musical instruments, but we just learned not to implement at any occasion.

The rehearsal was conducted fifteen days before the occasion, which was generally in the *miting.* All the singers stood on the ground facing the audience and sang revolutionary songs while their bodies made gestures following the meaning of the songs. Those who had beautiful voices stood close to the single microphone which was hung from the roof. All the songs were revolutionary songs written by the Khmer Rouge. Sometimes those young singers sang in pairs. The songs were about the activities of soldiers fighting in the battle fields, gathering rice, the love of *Angkar* for their own children, and so on. Among more than a hundred Khmer Rouge songs, there were many that related to children. She always sang a song called “Children saying good-bye to mother in order to go to the battle.” Son Nary reported, “With this song we needed to act like the reality; children are talking to mother and asked permission for coming to fight in the fields in order to destroy the enemies.” All the singers wore black clothes, red pajamas tied around the
neck, and sometimes hats. The gestures needed to mimic reality. The miting was usually arranged in a pagoda. The songs were also sung during the break time after many hours of work. “When the guards or the local chief or the group leader thought we looked tired, they blew a whistle and than we could break. While we were on break, we singers started singing the song in order to be joyful after working hard with other people. These were the times that all the people, including children, joined to sing and dance with us happily. Some of them hit something like cans, or barrels, and the other clapped the hands, as the rhythm for singing and dancing.” They allowed villagers to take a break of only an hour and a half, and then they were put back to work as before. “They performed these events in an attempt to release their feelings after the intense working,” she confirmed.

Another Khmer Rouge singer named Doung Saran also remembered some titles of the songs involving children such as “Mother father, group of brave children, brigade.” She said, “We couldn’t sing other songs outside the revolutionary songs of Angkar. If anyone did not obey the rule, they would be punished.” She took us aback by saying that one time she was punished because of singing the song incorrectly. “That time I was sent to pick up rice into the granary. While I was working I sang, ‘The breeze Kadek makes our feet become cold, farmers in our village try to work so hard,’ while the original song was, ‘The breeze Kadek makes our hands become cold, all fields were full of la-ay (small deep basket, formerly used as a rice bowl) that filled up by rice.’ When my group leaders heard me they stopped me and punished me by making me work a full day without stopping.” Furthermore, she recalled a male classmate who was punished because of singing a song incorrectly.

While studying in class, under a villager’s house, this boy raised up his hand in order to show to the teacher he wanted to sing. The teacher allowed him to sing. He stood up quickly and sang, ‘A dove is flying across the lake, while a prostitute is getting drunk because of drinking white wine [Khmer traditional wine called sra-sa]. Mother please gives me money to buy underpants to block penis from getting angry.’ When the teacher just heard his song, she got angry immediately. The boy was insulted and hit.
Doung Saran had this opinion.

Though those songs were written in an attempt to use as indoctrination to convince them to believe in their revolution and follow the Angkar, during that time, they did not organize at all on those themes. Additionally, the activities of gesturing or dancing followed the meaning of those songs which frequently involved harsh, militaristic demeanor and violent imagery, which they had done; the Khmer Rouge singers also did not really understand the nature of those activities. They were arranged to act so.

In addition to the two Khmer Rouge singers above, Sophiline Cheam Shapiro, a Cambodian-American, was another child who was taught by the Khmer Rouge to sing revolutionary songs as a nine-year-old. She related:

I believed this was the truth. There was the truth. There was going to be a future, if not democratic (I don’t think I knew the meaning of that word) then one of tremendous prosperity.... Lyrics that promised us the riches of heaven were written by the engineers of our own public cell. I really hear the songs of the Khmer Rouge. I wonder why that is. I know all too well the horror their melodies recall, but I also know that these songs played as important a part in my life as any. The Khmer Rouge sang about the wonderful countryside, about the value of hard labor and the worthlessness of passion. All was for Angkar and the glorious revolution. They were pretty songs, with beautiful melodies and poetic lyrics. Their intention was to make us work hard and forget about the snakes that lurked in the rice field, the dangerous currents of river rapids, and the emptiness in our bellies. They reflected an experience unique to my generation of Cambodians, no matter to what corner of the world fate has brought them. The Khmer Rouge hoped to obliterate our history, and in doing so, their songs have forged a significant place in it. It is for this reason that I will never forget the songs my enemies taught me.28

In answer to the question “Under the Khmer Rouge you and other children were taught songs, what do you remember about these songs? ” asked by Frontline/World,29 she responded,

Well, these songs gave me, as a child, a delusion...about having a prosperous Cambodia. And even though I was waking to work or
from work with an empty stomach and crying and hungry, I was singing that song. And the reason I sang was that I couldn't sing any other. That was the only song I was allowed to sing. Any other songs, including traditional and pop songs from before 1975, was not allowed. And so this was a moment that we were forced to forget the past. To disassociate ourselves from the past, from history, it was only about this new history, about everyday survival. Singing a song was something that gave me some kind of spiritual energy to keep going.

Daran Kravanth, who was from a family of musicians and also lived under the Khmer Rouge regime, reported, “It had the same effect on all people at that time. Though people were starving and might have used their time to go to took for a leaf to eat, we listened to music instead. Its sound recalled a happier time and memories of those happier times flooded back and sustained us for another day.”

Four songs about children

According to John Marton,

Khmer Rouge songs began to be broadcast from the liberated zones in the early 1970s. One couple I talked to conceptualized three stages of those songs. The earliest songs, from the pre-1975 period, were sentimental songs about hardships during the war and attacked the U.S. imperialism. They mentioned as an example of this a song about farmers working in a field around a bomb-crater. During most of the Democratic Kampuchea period, they said, the songs were concerned with topics such as the description of the nature in the countryside. Then, close to 1979, there was a shift to sentimental songs against the Vietnam.

This fits with the statement of Doung Saran, “The song called ‘The Group of Brave Children’ I had learned since in the early 1970s, and I sang this song very often during study in class.”

David Chandler said,

Some of the other use existing folk-tunes and traditional rhythms, but the main difference between them and the pre-revolutionary songs, aside from such obvious ones as the choice of subject matter, is that the songs are sung in unison rather than by an
individual—a trend reflected in the words as well, which praise collective efforts at the expense of individual ones. As far as I know none of the songs had been printed in the West, even though they—and hundred like them—were used intensively by the regime of Democratic Kampuchea, as part of it’s programmed of nation culture and as weapons in the revolution."

Below are four Khmer Rouge songs about children which were selected from among many others.

“Group of brave children”

1- Mother, father, we have seen you,
trying to work so hard to fight against
the enemies. Mother is growing rice
while father is fighting in the battlefield;
he unites the strength, in order to
destroy the enemies until they disappear.

2 – Mother, father, we are united. We
try to study everyday with other
children. We are brave group and are
united as movements to support the
powerful Revolution and try to work
hard without hesitation.

3 – We are united, and we try to do hard
work together, farming on the land as
mother and father do. We will try to
learn Khmer letters in order to be literate
rapidly.

4 – We stay at home to keep everything
in order and try our best to maintain our
hygiene, feed chickens and pigs, take care
of young children/babies, and cook rice.
We try our best to prevent from wasting
anything.
5 – Mother, father, please do not worry. We group with other children. We are united and we try to work hard. We try to study hard in order to be skillful to destroy enemies! We try to study hard in order to be skillful to destroy enemies!

"The beauty of Kampuchea"^35

1- Oh beautiful, beloved Kampuchea, our destiny has joined us together, uniting our forces so as not to disagree. Even young girls get up and join in the struggle.

2 – Pity our friends who shoulder arms. Thorns pierce their feet; they do not complain; this is an accomplishment of Khmer children struggling until the Lon Nol bandits are destroyed.

3 – They sacrifice themselves without regret, they chase the Lon Nol bandits, with swords and knives at them, killing them, until the Lon Nol bandits are destroyed.

"Rainfall in psakh (April-May)"^36

1 – The rain falls in pisakh. There’s a cool breeze. Dear friends, the rain falls now and then. We hear roosters crowing everywhere, and our brothers the peasants join together to increase production.
2 – This is the sowing season. We strive to work, so as to supply the army, holding on and struggling at the front.

3 – The Khmer are happy now, no longer shoot out at the imperialists, the Americans, and their reaction luckiest, killing them until they disappear.

"Angkar dar goutdam" (The great Angkar) 37

1 – We children love Angkar limitlessly. Because of you we have better lives and live quite happily.

2 – Before the revolution, children were poor and lived like animals, we were cold and suffered, but the enemy didn’t care about us.

3 – Only skin covered our bones, so thin and we were worried. All night we slept on the ground, we begged and looked for food in trash cans during the day.

4 – Now Angkar brings us good health and strength. And now we live in the commune.

5 – There are enough food and clothes, so we do not live worthless lives and we are not cold anymore. The light of Revolution, equality and freedom, shines gloriously.

6 – Oh, Angkar, we deeply love you. We resolve to follow your red way.
7 – We study hard both numbers and alphabet to be good workers with good minds in order to extend the revolution.

**Literal meaning**

These songs were written in an attempt to indoctrinate children. They described brave children fighting in battles or their tactics to destroy enemies. They reflected the pluckiness and heroism of young soldiers while they were fighting against the Lon Nol’s soldiers and US imperialism. They also had some discussion about the activities of messengers or transporters (*nearsa*), young children who had to deliver food, messages, and weapons to the front lines of battle. In those songs it was assumed “they have to contribute their lives they need to struggle until the last breath attempting to reach their destinations and liberate the mother land.” Some songs described children fighting in battle. Though some of their friends were killed, they did not feel afraid or drop their weapons. They still fought until the enemies disappeared.

Numerous other songs reflected the glorification of *Angkar* as very honest and generous to children. *Angkar* saved children from suffering, starvation, and exploitation under the former regime. Under the shadow of the superior Red Flag, children were paid great attention. All children were living in prosperity, happiness, and harmony, growing up rapidly likes flower about to bloom. *Angkar* absolutely loved children.

These songs also expressed the determination of children. They would try to study arithmetic and literature in order to become literate rapidly and be skillful in order to build the glorious revolution. After class, all children must hurry and return home to help their parents or other villagers who were working at home or in the fields. They also mirrored the activities of children trying to feed chickens, pigs, or ducks, grow vegetables, and rebuild roads and railways. They especially tried their best to prevent from wasting anything, even a single rice grain.

Generally, songs should express feelings of loving, comforting, cheering, or encouraging someone. In contrast, the Khmer Rouge songs focused on the violence or anger, and used harsh words to reflect cruelty or limitless revenge. They used obscene words to
condemn Lon Nol’s people and US imperialism with language of fighting, killing, and many other violent words. Pol Pot as well as other Khmer Rouge leaders focused on children because they would be the next people to serve their Communist Party. The Khmer Rouge also indoctrinated children by using a number of phrases expressing their determination to support the revolution loyally and forever. So the Khmer Rouge used many expressions to reflect their revolutionary songs on children. But if we look deeply to the reality, those kinds of manners were non-existent. All their songs were used for indoctrination and propaganda.

**Symbolic meaning**

Many songs described the joyful life of children under the Great Angkar. The way of life portrayed in the songs was completely different from the real situations in the society during that time. Some songs portrayed the activities of young soldiers fighting in battles bravely as if they were doing something enjoyable. In fact, those children were forced to do dangerous jobs that they did not want to do at all. When they went to battle those children felt so scared and tried their best to escape death. According to Khang Thanh, “When I was fighting in the wars, without any training before, it was very dangerous, because there were many bullets which were flying over my head. I could not do anything except lie down and run. I saw many people were being killed or wounded, including many young children.” Many children were wounded and killed while they were forced to do the work that they did not want at all.

Songs also claimed that Angkar liberated children from the former regime which had made children’s lives terrible. When they seized power they evacuated millions of people from the cities; during this time thousands of young children died. They started facing many difficulties that they had never met before—long work hours, starvation rations, lack of freedom, miserable living conditions, and killing. Their lives were unhappy and quite far from “flowers about to bloom.” As Someth May recalled, “We were hungry, too tired to wash or clean our clothes, just wanting to put something in our stomachs. We didn’t mind where we had a shit, or who saw us. Diseases spread through the village—cholera,
malaria, dysentery, diarrhea and skin infections." The songs encouraged children to work hard; unfortunately their products did not belong to them but to the collective farms. Loung Ung asserted, "I used to watch Keavuss Oer with her school uniform, pressing and repressing her blue pleated skirt and white shirts, so she looked as crisp and new as possible. Now the joy of beauty is gone from her life. With the red-and-white checked scarf covering her thinning oily black hair that peeks out beneath it, she looks more like ten years old than fourteen." So under the Great Angkar, children were living lives of pain and misery.

The songs also encouraged children to study hard to learn to read quickly and help Angkar build the country. The Khmer Rouge would say, "There are no more diplomas, only one can visualize." In reality, children were forced to work harder and longer rather than studying. They had classes which lasted about one or two hours only and the rest of the time was spent working in the fields. "The time for studying was always after the break time of lunch or dinner. We sat down on the bamboo floor, lit by the oil lamp, to study during the night after dinner. We had one book and one pencil only. That time I did not pay much attention to the study because the teacher was uneducated, and the time for studying was irregular. On some days, if the teacher felt lazy, there was no class." Although in the songs, children were encouraged to join classes prepared by the Khmer Rouge, in reality, the situation was quite different and they became illiterate after this regime.

Conclusion

Khmer Rouge songs were used for indoctrinating children with messages to convince them to follow the revolution without hesitation. Songs were broadcast from the early 1970s. While they were working in the fields, songs were also broadcast publicly to relieve the stress that resulted from intense labor. In each class, children were also required to sing revolutionary songs. Though those songs were sung for enjoyment, the children were not always aware of their meanings. They did, however, have some effect on some children who heard them day in and day out.

Songs were used to depict the wonderfulness of the countryside,
the activities of children in battle, the great Angkar, and the loyalty of children to the revolution. Most often what was written in the songs was quite different from reality. While children lived in fear, and starvation, the songs described their joy, happiness, and bravery with the simile of flowers about to bloom. This is one among many strategies that the Khmer Rouge used to indoctrinate children so that they would become revolutionaries.

Notes

3 This is what children of rich families, mostly living in cities, call their parents.
4 This is what children who have Chinese blood call their grandmother.
5 *Pok, me,* and *yeay,* are terms for parents used by children who live in poor or peasant families, mostly in the countryside.
6 Doung Saran, interviewed on 7 April 2008 in Kampong Cham province.
12 Sopheak K. Hang, ‘Memoir of a child’s nightmare,’ in Kim Depoul and Dith Pran, *Children of Cambodia’s Killing Fields,* p. 47.
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17 Sopheap K. Hanf, 'Memoir of a child’s nightmare,' p. 48.
18 Pil Chang Ang, a former KR teacher, interviewed on 1 April 2008, Kampong Cham province.
19 Treng Bancharon, Hellish Angkar, pp. 91, 106, 112.
20 Luek Navy interviewed on 27 December 2007, Phnom Penh.
23 Some people in this province were liberated early in the 1970s by Khmer Rouge soldiers.
24 The celebration for occasions such as closing a work site or construction site.
25 Son Nary, 45, interviewed on 31 March 2008, in Kampong Cham province.
26 Windy season in October and November.
27 Doung Saran, 45, interviewed on 7 April 2008 in Kampong Cham province.
28 www.pbs.org/fronlineworld/stories/cambodia/shapiro.html
29 www.pbs.org/fronlineworld/stories/cambodia/shapiro_interview.html
32 Doung Saran, 45, interviewed on 7 April 2008 in Kampong Cham province.
34 Information provided by Professor Henri Locard.
35 Kiernan and Chanthou Boua, Peasants and Kampuchea, p. 324
36 Kiernan and Chanthou Boua, Pesasants and Kampuchea, p. 328.
37 http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/cambodia/shapiro.html
38 Khang Thanh, interviewed on 1 January 2008, Phnom Penh.
39 Hinton: Why Did They Kill, p. 91.
40 Loung Ung: First They Killed My Father (New York: Harper Collins), p. 82.
41 Locard, Pol Pot's Little Red Book, p. 95.
42 Sok Phorn, 43, interviewed on 9 April 2008 in Krouch Chhmar district, Kampong Cham province.