

II. The story of one who survived

The following is reprinted from the Indian weekly New Wave, Sept. 9.

This is the horrifying experience of Yasuko Naito, a Japanese married to a Cambodian diplomat, as told by herself before the Peoples' Tribunal constituted to hear of the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique's atrocities.

Yasuko Naito was born in 1932 in Tokyo, Japan, and was married to Ung Ieung, who was killed in the genocide. Her two children, Thomory and Thonony, born in 1958 and 1960, were also murdered.

I am Naito Yasuko, 47, of Japanese nationality and was born in Tokyo. My husband was Sothanlan, a diplomat working in the Ministry of External Affairs under Lon Nol.

On the night of April 17, 1975, many rockets were fired onto the city and nobody could sleep. At about 5 a.m., there was a lull in the shelling and we took our breakfast. Nothing was heard over the radio; we thought the radio station was attacked that night.

In the morning Pol Pot's tanks flying white flags rumbled into the city. The people lined up along the streets to clap their hands in welcome. We told one another, "At last, the war is over." My maid told me that a loaf of bread now costs 500 riels instead of 100 riels, and that shops were closing down. She suggested we should buy some and keep in store. I told her to buy eight loaves.

Looking through the window, I saw some Pol Pot soldiers, holding loaves of bread in their arms, and all looking very hungry. The radio then began to announce: "The Lon Nol government has been overthrown. The Khmer Rouge have taken over the city." This statement was made by Khieu Samphan. We were moved to tears spontaneously at this historic moment. We cooked our meal early and our lunch was over by 11 a.m.

'Run, hell is waiting'

Pol Pot's soldiers, using loud speakers, ordered people to get out, and fired at the houses having closed doors. For three consecutive days, the people had to register their names at Pepour and were told to leave the city immediately. The people brought with them only a few clothes as they thought they would return soon.

The soldiers urged us to hurry up. They said the

enemy was going to bomb the city. At that moment, in front of a goldsmith's shop opposite my house, I saw a man tied up to a big iron gate. He was screaming desperately. In reply to my question, he said he had refused to go because he wanted to wait for the return of his wife and the soldiers put him in chains so that he could stay there for good.

At the house of my acquaintance nearby, I heard the soldiers threatening people that they would seize everybody and throw them into the lorries if they did not obey the orders. Then we came near our house. Thomy, my second son, said he wanted to drop in to see what had happened. Earlier, on April 15, our nephew had suggested that we go to stay at their house, so we did not take lots of things with us.

Thomy, on returning said nothing had gone wrong at our house and some neighbors still remained there. We all stayed overnight at the place to see how things turn out. But my brother-in-law was worried, as he thought he might be driven out of the town with his little children in the night. So, we decided to dine early and went by car to Pephu before dusk. We brought rice, salt and kitchen utensils with us when we reached Pephu, a fish-breeding center. It was still early. On the following day, we caught some fish and salted them. There were so many mosquitoes that we had to buy three more mosquito nets, each at the price of 3,000 riels, some edible oil at 2,500 riels and six mats.

Leaving Pephu, we went along Highway 7. On our way, we met many patients who were driven out from the Calmette and other hospitals. There were patients who had been operated on only a few hours before whose cuts were still bleeding with swarms of flies around them. This sight made me think of a picture of hell I had seen somewhere. On the way, at one corner we saw a naked body of a man nailed on a door, with his chest inscription reading "enemy." Pol Pot soldiers standing nearby laughed and told passers-by to have a good look at the victim. We felt anxious about our future.

After spending a night outdoors, we were urged to walk. We came to a brick kiln, and there was a terrible stench. The next morning, some people found a number of corpses in the kiln.

The dead bodies had uniforms of the Lon Nol regime. Rumors were spreading that those families whose members had soldiers in the old regime were

killed by the Pol Pot soldiers. My eldest immediately burned his new khaki trousers.

My husband's brother wrapped up a nylon tent, a wool blanket and American tins and threw the package into the river. I turned my handkerchief into a small pocket, put my passport into it and hid it behind my back. From morning to night I had to push a cart carrying my husband and my child who was ill. After taking meal by the river side, I intended to get some water. Suddenly, people showed me dead bodies of soldiers floating in the river. Dozens of corpses were seen since daybreak.

“Hanoi ... squelched a fellow communist regime (Pol Pot) precisely for the sin of independence.”

***Henry Kissinger
Sept. 8, 1979***

Then we were transferred to Odong, allegedly to get some plots of land; a doctor, my acquaintance, who had secretly brought a syringe with him, gave my eldest son an injection. The doctor whispered into my ears, “I think he cannot make it.” About 3 p.m. on June 5, Thomory died of inflammation of the intestines. I buried him and carved his name on a tree trunk nearby.

We again left Odong, and came to a small village near Pepour as we had run out of food. We had to exchange everything for rice. A nice *saron* was exchanged for 25 tinfuls of rice. Soon, we had nothing more to exchange and became extremely anxious. Every day each family, big or small, was given three tinfuls of rice and a spoonful of salt. Here, we had to wake up at 4 a.m. and do all kinds of farm work, weeding, ploughing, transplanting...

On July 31, 1975, Thony, my second son, fell from a tree which he had climbed to pluck leaves for making a roof. I asked the village chairman to take him to the nearest hospital (as they did to a soldier 20 days before) but he refused. I went to get some herbal medicine and boiled it for him to take, but the herb was not effective. Two weeks later, my son died.

Then we went by buffalo carts to Tepentomo. Here we were given land and asked to set up our house on it. It was the second time we built our house. We had to ask other people to help as Thomy had gone and there were big trees to be cut down. My husband was made to transport trunks. Three days later, he returned with a long face. I was asked to do the job instead of him. Four days later the ulcer on my leg burst and I

experienced unbearable pain. Nevertheless I had to go on working until the wound on my foot festered. I got four months' leave.

Later, my husband was sick with malaria. He also suffered from diarrhea and malnutrition. His body swelled and he died on Dec. 19, 1975.

I became a widow. Six months later, I had to leave the place and my husband's grave for a new village called Mara. The villagers were very kind. They feared I could be killed for being a Japanese, they hid me in a Kampuchean family.

Here, I did farm work and served as a cook. The heaviest work was collecting animal dung. A group of ten women were required to clear two tons of dung every day. In early 1977, 160 people were given only 15 tinfuls of rice for each meal because of food shortage. Out of hunger, we had to eat green papaya fruit and all kinds of herbs.

On June 12, 1977, our village was cordoned off by about 100 Pol Pot soldiers and the villagers were told to stop working and not to move further than 50 meters from their houses. Five families whose members had once been to Vietnam to work, and another family, were called to prepare for a trip to Tomop.

They said goodbye to us and set off at 4 p.m. Half an hour later, the six buffalo carts which had carried them came back. The villagers were told that the six families were invited to get up and a truck was waiting for them at a place 300 meters from the village.

First massacre

On that day our village was plagued with the presence of blackclad men. We were followed everywhere we went, even when bathing. Everybody was in constant fear and the village was as silent as a church yard. There was a downpour at night and nobody could have a wink of sleep. Next morning, the Pol Pot soldiers came, returning hoes, spades and baskets they had borrowed from us. Traces of blood and human hair on these tools made us shudder.

During the next two months, there were three mass massacres of that kind. There were only 157 persons left including pregnant women or those having just given birth only two days ago. There were three graves. One for children, one for women, and another for men.

Those who were called on the second turn were people connected with the former regime: doctors, teachers, etc. Those who were summoned on the third turn were the people of over 30 years of age. I might be counted among those last ones and lived in constant fear.

On Jan. 17, 1979 I heard over the radio the liberation of Phnom Penh. All the village folk were elated. We would be able to return to our homes. We were freed from a hellish life and every body beamed with joy.