

'The Political Scenario In The Red Scarf Girl'

Posted on October 23, 2019

The 'Red Scarf Girl' is a memoir by Ji Li, a successful author who is now living in America. The novel itself explains the political and social situations that Ji Li and her family went through during that time. The story of the novel revolves around an average teenage girl who has common dreams and tiny clues about the harsh realities of the world. Ji Li faces various situations where she has to choose between living a better life at the expense of losing her family. The novel describes the struggle of Ji Li in that time of history when she faced all the atrocities and still maintained her head high while looking after her family. The struggles faced by Ji Li were the real repercussions of the infamous Chinese 'Cultural Revolution' (Jiang, 2001).

The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) may still be an open wound as children were the ones most affected by this political movement. Officially declared a 'catastrophe' by the Communist Party, the instigator of that horror does not have the slightest interest in reviewing an era and calling into question its legitimacy to continue governing. The spirit of Mao is still one of the great pillars on which the regime is based. The Chinese president himself, Xi Jinping, one of the educated young people who grew up in internal exile, seems to have adopted some practices inherited from the Great Helmsman: a campaign against corruption that has served to rid him of possible rivals, tight control of civil society (Xu, 2015).

Armed with the Red Book of Mao and fighting against the '4 antiques' -the thought, the culture, the education, and the traditional customs- they destroyed thousand-year-old works of incalculable value. The professors, the intellectuals, and the figures of authority were the most punished, subjected to endless sessions of self-criticism, torture, beatings, and assassinations. The writer Lao She, perhaps the best Chinese theatrical author of his generation, committed suicide in a lake near his home after being subjected to one of those sessions. The brutality spread throughout the country (Robinson, 1971).

All were accomplices and all suspects. The father of the children and the brothers to each other were potential criminals. Everything could be a reason for the accusation. Having ever talked to someone who has fallen into disgrace was enough to be punished. The emphasis was on fighting those in positions of authority that took the capitalist path. When this goal was set, people quickly thought of their superiors. The collective madness began to lose steam three years later. Mao's apparent heir, Lin Biao, died along with his wife and son in a mysterious plane crash when flying from Mongolia to Russia, ostensibly to escape accusations of treason.

In these conditions, the feelings of Ji Li are genuine: *"Until now I had never doubted that I could achieve anything I wanted. The future had been full of infinite possibilities. Now I was no longer sure that was true."*(p.18). At that young age, she had no clue how the political leaders had been dismantling their belief systems, and the children were not even able to comprehend the situation, let

alone try to evade it. In such conditions, where everyone was a potential enemy, and a spy who could bring havoc to Ji Li or her family was a constant dread for her to bear. The fight she had to fight to survive in the most difficult of conditions was almost comparable to the life of prisoners in their homes and country (Jiang, 1999).

The government was looking for people to imprison and torture, and this was when the government played various roles regarding education, livelihood, cultural beliefs, and many professional practices. In this national revolution, Ji Li's education was restricted as she was a bright student and was still not allowed to study, for she did not testify against her father. The situation when a child has to choose between herself and her father is a situation she was not aware enough to encounter. This limited the opportunities she had. When she refused to testify, she was punished by being from school and doing her work on the farms, all under the command of the government. In this context, the livelihood of the people was also limited, and there were incidents where the people were becoming cannibals only to survive and live a day longer.

The Cultural Revolution took away the freedom of people; this is perhaps the most inhumane punishment given to any other human being. If this was not enough, the executioners were the same countrymen; the same person who lived together and died together was an even more fearful situation. In this context, the government had supreme authority to kill or subjugate any person of the state who was or was not committing a crime. Ji Li was always under this pressure. She was forced to work on the farm and later was forced to clean the streets, and there was nothing that could be done. The soldiers would feel no shame in physically abusing her grandmother. These situations are explained in the novel from start to finish.

Work Cited

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