

Myanmar Literature Project

မြန်မာစာပေစီမံကိန်း

Hans-Bernd Zöllner (ed.)

Working Paper No. 10:18

Two Books on Sex and Gender

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Gender Democracy?, co-edited with Claudia Derichs and Cecilia Ng, in: Gender, Technology and Development (Sage) Autumn/2010; Afghanistan's *Parliament in the Making. Gendered Understandings and Practices of Politics in a Transitional Country*, Heinrich-Böll-Foundation / UNIFEM, Berlin 2009; *The Gender Face of Asian Politics*, co-editor with Aazar Ayaz, Oxford University Press: Karachi / Oxford 2009; *Goddesses, Heroes, Sacrifices. Female Political Power in Asia*, co-edited with Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam, LIT Verlag: Zürich / Münster 2008.

Ma Thanegi was born in Myanmar and educated at the Methodist English High School, the Yangon State School of Fine Arts, the Institute of Economics and the Institute of Foreign Languages (German and French). She is a painter who has exhibited with group shows since 1967 as well as in seven solo exhibitions. She is a contributing editor at The Myanmar Times, an English language weekly and was editor of Enchanting Myanmar a quarterly travel magazine that ran for seven years. She has written many articles and numerous books on Things Myanmar. She lives in Yangon.

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Shwe Pyi Soe was born in 1964, Kheck Saie Township, Mandalay division. He got his Master degree of art, *Myanmarsar* (Myanmar language/literature) in 1991. He started his career as the tutor and continued his study. He got a Ph.D degree of *Myanmarsar* in 2003. He is now at the post of Associate Professor in Foreign Language University, Mandalay

I. Introduction (Hans-Bernd Zöllner)

Connecting Burma to modernity – and vice versa

The two books introduced in this Working Paper highlight Nagani's attempt to modernise Burma in a comprehensive way by addressing the timeless issue of the two sexes' relationship in a timely way. Hla Shwe's book "Husband and Wife – For all the Time" (ဇနီးမောင်နှံရာသက်ဝန်) can be regarded as the first one published in Burma disseminating results of the young scientific discipline of sexology which originated in Germany in the late 19th century and was popularised by books as Hendrik van de Velde's bestseller "Ideal Marriage: Its Physiology and Technique" first published in 1926 in the Netherlands and translated into many languages.¹ It was widely regarded as pornographic and put on the index of prohibited book by the Catholic Church.

The model of Hla Shwe's book was first published in the States in 1935 and one year later by Victor Gollancz in England, Hannah and Abraham Stone's "A Marriage Manual. A Practical Guidebook to Sex and Marriage". It was listed under the category "sex" in the catalogue of books kept by the British administration. This category was used only once in the whole catalogue.²

Other books giving advice to couples and dealing with contemporary "modern" social issues³ were published in the pre-war period in Burma as well. "Husband and Wife" however stands out as a direct "import" of a Western book being translated into Burmese. Its relevance is underlined by the many reprints in independent Burma⁴ and the assessment of Dr. Maung Maung Nyo who wrote a book on a similar matter in 1970.⁵

Mya Sein's book "Women" (မိန်းမ) is notable for different reasons. As Chie Ikeya has shown, the special status of Burmese women was a topos used by the British colonialists as well as by Burmese nationalists.⁶ Already before the First World War a series of interviews was among Burmese and Westerners summarised that

[t]he women of Burma are said to enjoy already many of the privileges for which their Western sisters are clamouring It is probably true to say that whilst the position assigned

¹ The German translation of the book reached its 42th printing in 1932.

² Together with the Nagani book another book was listed, the third edition of U Maung Maung Gyi's *A book for newly married couples*.

³ In August 1939 a booklet came out entitled „Debate on Nudism“.

⁴ The copy used for the book review was the 10th printing.

⁵ See below II.4.

⁶ Chie Ikeya 2005/2006 The 'Traditional' High Status of Women in Burma. A Historical Reconsideration. *The Journal of Burma Studies* 10: 51-82.

to women in Buddhism is low, yet in practice the women in Burma have made a place for themselves which is certainly unique in the East; and in some ways in advance of that in the West – if not actually, at least relatively, to the position of men.¹

In terms of the status of Burmese women, Burma did not need to be connected to the world. The world could learn from the Burmese “traditional modernity” regarding the women’s social standing. Mya Sein, the author of the book published by Tun Aye’s book club can be regarded as the personification of the Burmese women’s role model vis à vis the East and the West. She was one of the few Burmese women who spoke for her country through her writings and her public appearances. She represented Burma’s modernity as Hla Shwe did, but in a different way.

The Personal and the Political

“The Personal is Political” was a slogan coined in the course of the feminist movements which sprang up in the United States and Europe in the late 1960s.² The close relationship between the two spheres is older and a global phenomenon. Nagani books tried both to liberate the whole country and individuals and the books under review here were part of this project. However, the relationship of the personal and the political was defined differently by the books’ authors and their private and political activities differ as well as an outline of the two authors show

Mya Sein

She was born 1904 as the daughter of one of the most prominent anglophile Burmese public figures at the beginning of the 20th century, May Aung (1880-1926). He stemmed from a well-to-do family in Mawlamyine (Moulmein) and received his training as a lawyer in England. He was a co-founder of the Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA) in 1907 which started the nationalist movement in Burma and of the Burma Research Society together with J.S. Furnivall. After World War I, he became a judge in the High Court established by the British and Home Minister in 1924 under the Diarchy System.

After his early death, the daughter followed her father’s footsteps. She received her M.A. in Oxford in 1927 and after her return to Burma became a headmistress after gaining a diploma in education in 1930. At the beginning of her career she was referred to as “Miss May Aung”. She engaged herself in Burma’s women’s movement and was selected to represent the country at the Burma Round Table Conference in 1931 after the newly founded National Council of Women of Burma had

¹ Ibid.: 61.

² See <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PersonalisPol.pdf> [29.12.2010].

pressured the government to include a woman in the delegation.¹ In 1939, she took part in a journey to China as deputy leader of the delegation.² One year before, she had published a book on the administration of Burma in which

She left Burma with the British for India in course of the Japanese conquest of Burma. After the war she continued working as a public servant at the University, served as president and member in many associations and travelled. She had divorced her husband and was mother of two children.

In 1958, Mya Sein wrote an article on “The women of Burma” she elaborates about the reasons for the “apparent paradox” of Burmese women acting as independent members of the society equal to men whereas on some occasions in family life and in politics they seem to take a lower position.

In politics we have never had much of a feminist movement because in our society the problem of equal rights had never arisen. However, under British rule Burma was considered part of India and we were governed according to the same constitution. In 1927, therefore, we did have a little bit of a feminist movement to abolish the clause which provided that women could not stand for election to the Legislative Council. We Burmese women took it for granted that this disqualification clause should be deleted, so we thought we would have a token demonstration. About ten of us sent out an appeal to the women of Rangoon to join in showing our support for a resolution introduced in the Legislative Council for the deletion of the sex-disqualification clause. [...]

We were amazed to discover that the British officials were not very keen about women getting into the Legislature. [...]

I think that ours was one of the first political demonstrations in Burma, and although we were not immediately successful, our feminist feeling lasted only two years. In 1929 a woman was elected for the first time to the Legislature. Since then we have had no trouble, and at the present moment we have six women members in parliament. [...]

Altogether, in our social life as well as in our public life, we feel that we, as Burmese women, occupy a privileged and independent position. It is a position for which we are trained - almost imperceptibly, and with love and security - from childhood. It is a position which is not limited either by marriage or by motherhood, and which allows us, eventually, to fit ourselves into the life, the work, and all the rewards that our country has to offer equally with our men.³

Obviously, Mya Sein saw no reason to enlarge the “privileged and independent” position of Burmese women inherited from tradition. The short period of “feminist” activity was caused by the necessity to defend this status against the British. As a person she enjoyed her privileges as a member of the Burmese elite and her Western education. The book on the administration implemented by the British in Burma which contributed to her reputation as a scholar was a study in

¹ Earlier that year she had attended a meeting of the League of Nations as one of two female delegates from Asia.

² See Working Paper 6 of this series.

³ <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1969/12/the-women-of-burma/6822/> [29.12.2010].

the spirit of Western academic tradition eschewing direct political involvement. The status of Burmese women was regarded as unique and reflected Mya Sein's personal status as a role model of Burmese women. Both stood above politics.

Hla Shwe

He was some ten years younger than Mya Sein and born in Pyinmana, Central Burma. His older brother was Hla Pe who became famous as one of the 30 comrades under the name of Bo Let Ya.¹ The brother participated in the 1936 student strike and joined the *Dobama Asiayone* in 1938 together with Aung San. The younger brother studying medicine got involved in students politics, too. He was elected secretary of the Rangoon Students Union in 1937 (RUSU) and one year later Vice Chairman of the RUSU and the All Burma Students Union (ABSDF).² He retained the post after Aung San left the union on 1.12.1938 and Ba Hein took over the presidency³ but acted as head of the union after Ba Hein and Ba Swe were arrested on December 13.⁴ He was thus the leader of the students that culminated in the death of Aung Gyaw on December 27, 1938⁵ and was referred to as *Arnashin* (dictator) Hla Shwe since then.⁶

One month after the end of the student strike on March 8, 1939⁷ which had begun two months earlier in response to the arrest of Ba Hein and Ba Swe, a booklet written by Hla Shwe entitled "Capitalism" was published by Nagani.⁸ It came out shortly after Ba Hein's pamphlet "Students' Revolution".⁹ Obviously, Nagani tried to make use of the popularity the student leaders had gained. The book described the worldwide exploitation of workers by the capitalists and predicted an overthrow of the system because the workers' numeral superiority which would destroy the

¹ For details see Working Paper 13 of this series. Hla Pe contributed

² For details see (U) Maung Maung 1980 *From Sangha to Laity. Nationalist Movements of Burma, 1920-1940*. New Delhi, Manohar: 143-210.

³ According to Maung Maung 1980: his mother had threatened to stop financing his studies.

⁴ For details see Working Paper 11 of this series.

⁵ At the funeral he was reported to have said: "While lying beside each other, our heads inflicted with injuries, on the top floor of the Sun Newspaper (Thuriya Newspaper) he said 'We will die for our fellow-nationals. Don't let them touch the Chairman.' And when I went to visit him at the hospital he said] almost deliriously: 'Ko Hla Shwe we will march forward.' And when we first opposed the authorities, he said 'Let me die holding the flag in the front.' I can still hear and see him. Ko Aung Gyaw, Comrade, your wish has been fulfilled to be recorded in history."
(<http://abfsu.net/category/documents/archive/> [29.12.2010])

⁶ For this title see Hans-Bernd Zöllner 2000 *Birma zwischen „Unabhängigkeit Zuerst – Unabhängigkeit Zuletzt“. Die irmanischen Unabhängigkeitsbewegungen und ihre Sicht der zeitgenössischen Welt am Beispiel der deutsch-birmanischen Beziehungen zwischen 1920 und 1948*. Münster, Lit: 433-437.

⁷ Hla Shwe's role in the end of the strike is disputed. Khin Yi 1988 *The Dobama Movement in Burma (1930-1938)*. Ithaca NY, Cornell University: 131 strongly criticises his behaviour because he "seems to have been carried away by his popularity", According to Maung Maung, blames Than Tin, chairman of RUSU, for his imprudent actions (Maung Maung 1980: 188-190).

⁸ See Working Paper 3 of this series.

⁹ See Working Paper 11 of this series.

capitalist system if the workers would act in unity. – The book did not elaborate on the issue of women under the capitalist system as Soe had done in his book “Socialism” published in mid 1938. It can be assumed that Hla Shwe shared Soe’s ideas:

He wrote on “marriage and economy”:

Socialists have considered marriage under capitalism as a form of personal prostitution. A prostitute has sex with any person, provided she is paid money. If she has free sex with someone she loves, she is scolded or beaten by the pimp because she has breached discipline.

Basically, marriage is an institution where by a man and a woman can live together, bound together by mutual love. They are partners. In a capitalist society, love alone does not make the marriage. Marriage is determined by social class and wealth. A girl, or a boy simply cannot freely choose her or his partner.¹

As for the “family in the socialist age”:

Some people mistakenly believe that when the socialist age arrives, women will become common property. Actually, this is true under capitalism; prostitution is widespread because of economic hardships. Countless young women are at the mercy of the wealthy people. Is it not true to say that under the present situation women are the "common property of the wealthy class." Their liberation will come only with socialism.

In the socialist age, there will be equality for all people. There is no sex discrimination; and the exploitation of class by class, and women by men will disappear. Because men and women have equal economic advantage, there will be no more prostitution; and polygamy will become extinct. Certainly marriage and family life will no longer be dependent upon economic status.²

In this context, the relationship of the two sexes has to be liberated together with the political and economic conditions of mankind. Other than Soe who was regarded as a womanizer³ Hla Shwe in his private life seems to have followed this path. He married and had two children. Further, he pursued his profession as a physician dying in a plane crash on his way to receiving advanced medical training abroad. Maybe, his “revolutionary period” was just as transitory as that of Hla Pe, his brother, who quit politics and the military in 1948 to become a businessman and Mya Sein’s short “feminist” activities in the 1920s.

Conclusion

These observations can be summarized in the thesis that the relationship between the personal and the political for both authors was characterised by a dominance of the personal over the political.

¹ Working Paper 10 of this series: 43.

² Working Paper 10 of this series: 67

³ (Dr.) Maung Maung 1969 *Burma and General Ne Win*. Rangoon, Religious Affairs Department: 131. Nu in his play “The People Win Through” gave portrayed a communist leader who used his revolutionary teachings as a pretext for sexual relationship with his female students.

The individual perception of man's and woman's role in society prevailed. Any ideology being it socialist or feminist was embedded in the personal attitude and could change or not change in the course of the respective person's phases of life.

Facts before fantasy

A short look into the genesis of sexology reveals two basic approaches to understand human sexuality. One is connected to the name of Sigmund Freud and his theory of the development of the child's psyche from an autoerotic primitive phase to object-orientated love. Its starting point is the psychic development of the individual and aims at understanding and healing aberrations resulting in neuroses and psychoses by psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. The second line of investigation started with the analysis of alleged socially deviant sexual behaviour like homosexuality and developed into an empirically based interdisciplinary science the results of which could be applied for different purposes one of them being birth control and marriage counselling. The model for Hla Shwe's book was a result of the latter school of thought aiming at clean, healthy and socially conformed sexual behaviour.

Interestingly, both books written by Hla Shwe concentrated on facts. His book on capitalism like most other writings in Burma about socialism and communism stressed the inescapability of a classless society and the scientific qualities of socialist thought compatible to Buddhist philosophy.¹ In his book on the relationship of married couples the information about sexual matters prevailed. This information was "neutral" and could be integrated in any social context. Sexuality was regarded as something that had to be channelled not liberated.²

This idea matches Mya Sein's depiction of Burmese women. They are already liberated because of the tradition they inherited. The manifold information about the role of women in different societies and ages confirms this statement. However, Burmese women have to make something out of this tradition. They have to be "modern", not indulging in luxury and a pleasant life relying on the fortunes inherited or earned by their husbands but working together with her male partners.

Mya Sein advocated Burmese women to be independent persons in an independent country and thus propagated herself as a role model, well educated and socially engaged. The end of the book in

¹ See Aung San's unfinished essay „Many Kinds of Politics“ in: Mya Han (compiler) The Writings of Aung San. Yangon Universities Historical Research Centre: 50-61.

² The revolutionary consequences of Freud's findings as brought forward by Wilhem Reich who combined sexual and political revolution was apparently not taken up in Burma.

which the heroine teaches her teachers about Burmese the status of Burmese women underlines this image.

Khin Myo Chit's (1915-1999) argumentation in her essay on the problems of Burmese women published in an anthology is similar but leads to a different consequence. She stresses the political unawareness of Burmese women and calls for their participation in the independence movement. Again, she served as a model of what she called for. Khin Myo Chit took part in the anti-government strikes of 1938 and later toured the delta region with Nu, making pro-independence speeches.¹ After the war, she used her literary talents to support herself and her country by informing foreigners about Burma's characteristic features.²

New and old ways of educating people

In the biographical notes published in 1961, Mya Sein is referred to as an "educationist". The composition of her book tells of her attempt to educate people in an entertaining way. The information brought forward is integrated in the story of the young woman Khin Su who is looking for advice on how to live a meaningful life. The romantic setting is however just a means to the insertion of a lot of lectures which take most of the book's content. Here, the traditional mode of instruction in Burmese schools and university is reproduced.

Hla Shwe holds on to tradition in another manner. He simply copies the question and answer method of the Stones' marriage manual. In his short introduction to the book he states:

About this volume

The space taken by material on the two books mirrors the amount of information available on the topics covered by them. Much is available on the women's issue, almost nothing on sexual education. Maung Maung Nyo's information about Hla Shwe, his own book on the subject, and Aung Min Htut's instructive comparison of the English model, Hla Shwe's translation, and Maung Maung Nyo's contributions hint on the reasons. The public discourse on sexual issued is still a taboo theme in Burma/Myanmar. Here, more contributions to be included in a later version of the Working Paper are particularly welcome.

¹ For a short biography of Khin Myo Chit see Anna Allott's obituary published by *The Independent* (<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-khin-myo-chit-1069676.html> [31.12.2010]).

² See „Colourful Burma“ (2 volumes) informing about Burmese culture and the historical novel „Anawratha of Burma“ published in 1970 which highlighted the „spirit“ and the problems of Burmese politics.

The information about Mya Sein's book including a translation of Be Choe's foreword and two book reviews is complemented by some writings which might be useful for discussing the "women's issue" in a broader context. The discussion about the clothing of Burmese ladies in pre-war times and the "Bhikkhuni controversy" shed some light on the tensions arising from the traditional interpretation of the Buddha's teaching about women and their right to have the same status as nuns as the monks. The biography of Ashin Addicavamsa (Ardessa Wuntha) informs about one of the many Burmese monks propagating unconventional ideas. The issue of women ordination is still unresolved not just in Myanmar¹ as is the investigation into the discussion of this and other controversial topics in the "wild 30s" in Burma.

Finally, four essays take different looks at the overall picture of 'Burmese women'. Besides Khin Myo Chit's pre-war essay already mentioned, three recent assessments are reproduced which put the issue in different contexts both historical and contemporary. It is hoped that his collection might stimulate both discussion and further research.

Hamburg, July 2011

¹ For Thailand, see Martin Seeger 2010 Theravada Buddhism and Human Rights. Perspectives from Thai Buddhism. Carmen Meinert and Hans-Bernd Zöllner (eds.) *Buddhist Approaches to Human Rights. Dissonances and Resonances*. Bielefeld, Transcript: 63-92.

II Material on Hla Shwe, *Husband and Wife to the End*

1. Kyaw Hoe, Bibliographical Information¹

Translation : Gunnar Peters

39) Hla Shwe, Dr.: *Husband and Wife for Life*. Yangon, Nagani, 1940. 340 p.

A special publication by Nagani which has been repeatedly republished. It was the most comprehensive book on medical and sexual education of its time. It is divided into 9 chapters on marriage life, sex and medical education. With an explanation of terms and illustrations.

The author writes: „This book has been translated with the aim that Burmese boys and girls having read the book will be able to fulfill the duties of nature, and by that may become good spouses.“

Dated June 6, 1939. 5000 copies. Published by Nagani on January 16, 1940. Price 1 Rupee 4 Anna.

¹ From Kyaw Hoe's Nagani Bibliography (see vol. 1 of this series pp.77-84), p. 61.

2. Hla Shwe's introduction of Husband and wife

Translation: Phone Kyaw Myat

This book has been translated in the hope that the Burmese boys and girls reading it would fulfil their duties in life as noble married couples.

3. Thwe Thwe Nwe, Book Review: Dr. Hla Shwe, *Husband and Wife to the End* Translated by Thiri Than Win¹

The author's name is Hla Shwe. In the prologue, it is mentioned that this is a translation, but the title of the original book is not revealed. The book titled 'Husband and wife to the end' was intended to give comprehensive information about sex to Burmese men and women who were setting up a household, and to help them to stay married till death parted them.

Summary of contents

This book has nine chapters. The author writes about the ideal married life and reproduction using a question-and-answer format to give detailed information on sexual matters from a medical point of view: what one should know, what one should refrain from, and what one should do. As these educational points are ones that every married person should always be aware of, and should always follow, they were put in an easy-to-understand question and answer format. A summary of the contents of each chapter follows:

Chapter 1

In this chapter, a couple who intend to start a family discuss with a physician whether or not they should get married. Whether they should get married depends on their family health history, present health, and past health. The points are that both partners should be completely like-minded, have mutual sexual attraction, both should have good health, and be free from inherited diseases, and so on. Additional discussion includes that in order to have healthy children both marriage partners should have no pathological conditions, and should be fertile.

In the discussion of whether those who have had sexually transmitted diseases should marry or not, the sexually transmitted diseases gonorrhoea and syphilis come up. The fact that these two diseases can range from being quickly and easily cured, to being difficult to treat. While gonorrhoea is not genetically transmitted to one's children, it can damage parts of sexual organs and urinary Organs. As a child being born can get infected from the sexual organs, when a child is born, a 1% Silver Nitrate Solution² is put in the baby's eyes. Although syphilis is transmitted by blood to other parts of the body, where it can cause various other diseases, with systematic treatment before the disease spreads, 85 out of 100 people will be completely cured. That is why those with the disease should get urgent or gradual treatment depending on their immunity and the state of the disease. [The

¹ Translator's note: Dr Hla Shwe's book was republished in the tenth edition in August 1970 by Ta Thet Ta Press. This edition has been used for references and clarification.

² [Translator's note: in the 1970 edition of the book, this reads 17 Silver Nitrate Solution.]

physician] discussed that only after treatment and cure of the disease should one get married, to avoid transmitting it to one's partner and children.

As for pulmonary diseases, although they cannot be transmitted during pregnancy, it can be transmitted through close contact with the parents. If the parents have a contagious pulmonary disease, they should practice contraception. Only when the disease is not acute, or when it has been brought under control by treatment should one get married. However, if the couple to be married both have much lung disease in their families, it may not be good for them to get married, as **it** will be easy for them to get infected

Because cancer genes can be transmitted to the foetus during pregnancy, one should avoid marrying those with this disease. Those who are related, with similar susceptibilities should avoid getting married; those who are not related, with different susceptibilities, should marry, the discussion carried on, among other subjects.

Chapter 2

In this chapter, it is explained that all who intend to marry should not only know their own bodies, including parts and structure, but also that of their marriage partners. The structure of men's sexual organs and their importance in the body, semen, 'sperm'¹ known as '*s-pan:*', sex glands 'sex glands', kidneys, and bladder, hormones 'hormones' and the great importance of hormones in reproduction are explained, among other things

The writing explains the stimulation of hormones, which make all parts of the body function properly in their proper place; the serial communication between the various kinds of glands which produce the various hormones of the human body; and the hormone produced by the 'testes', men's sexual gland, which further differentiates men from women which the men come of age.

In hormonal castration,² castration of animals and of humans is explained. If a boy is castrated, there are changes in his body. His voice is high, the Adam's apple does not become prominent, whiskers do not appear, the body becomes smoother, temperament changes, and he becomes more feminine in every way. He will not have the sexual drive that always comes with puberty. If a man is castrated after reaching maturity, the changes are not noticeable. The development of the body and the changes in the mind, the sexual drive and arousal stop. Some even lose their sexual desire

¹ [Translator's note: words within 'inverted commas' are in English in the original; terms in italics are their rough transcriptions into Myanmar.]

² In the 1970 edition, 'castration' is mentioned without the qualifying 'hormonal'.

entirely, and in some countries there is a custom of castration for religion. Besides this, substitution of glands, transplantation and the parts of the male sexual organs are explained for general knowledge, with illustrations.

Chapter 3

In this chapter Dr Hla Shwe writes about the woman's sexual organs and their parts. Men's sexual organs are outside of the body. In women, however, the ovaries in which ova develop, the Fallopian tubes which carry the ova to the uterus, the parts which carry nourishment to the pregnancy, and allow it to develop are all inside the body; other sexual organs and their parts can be seen exterior to the body. Besides this, there are explanations with illustrations of menstruation, ova being produced by the ovary, uterus and Fallopian tubes, the Vagina and its labia majora and minora, hymen, breasts, hormones of the uterus, and so on.

Every woman's body has 'ovaries', as the two glands containing ova are called. They are very small, about one inch in length, and are the shape of Indian almonds. These glands are in the lower abdomen, at the sides of the pelvic region. Although there are many hundreds of thousands of ova which could be the basis of a pregnancy, only about three or four hundred will develop into eggs.

At a woman's puberty, these ova begin to mature, controlled by the pituitary gland, which is located in the brain. As these ova mature, they gradually enlarge, and one egg comes out of the ovary in a process called ovulation. Ovulation occurs about 14 days before the onset of monthly menstruation, in other words, approximately the 13th day of the menstrual cycle is the day of ovulation. The ovum is very small and delicate, and can be damaged easily. It is spherical, and normally about $\frac{1}{200}$ th of an inch in size. When an ovum comes out of the ovary it enters into the Fallopian tube, which carry it. It is fertilised by sperm, and this embryo is carried to the uterus. At this time, the glands of the uterus produce a hormonal substance called 'corpus luteum', which regulates the changes in the uterus to be able to receive the embryo and to nourish through during its development through the natural growth of blood vessels. However, in mature women, if after this monthly ovulation, the ovum does not encounter sperm in the Fallopian tubes or in the uterus, the preparation for pregnancy in the uterus is stopped, and the ovum is shed with the menstrual blood. In this way, the method of conception and its disruption are clearly explained.

As women mature, their mammary glands are transformed by hormones, becoming particularly large. While the most important role of the mammary glands is the nourishment of the baby, as exterior sexual organs, they also play a role in arousing sexual desire.

In the subject hormones, there are many female sex hormones, and they are complex. The most important of the hormones leads to the development of the parts of the woman's body, as well as at puberty, causing changes in the body and mind. There are menstrual hormones, important hormones of pregnancy, hormones relating to the milk production which nourishes babies, and many more. Removal of the ovaries can cause changes similar to those arising in castration in men. When women have their ovaries removed because of disease or other reason, they can become more youthful again through replacement. This is what is written about women's bodies and their sexual Organs.

Chapter 4

This chapter covers birth without sexual intercourse, birth through sexual intercourse, the way that sperm arrives in the uterus of the woman through the vagina, fertilisation of ovum by the sperm, conception, nourishment of the embryo and foetus, placenta, umbilical cord, the signs and symptoms of pregnancy, childbirth, painless childbirth, Caesarean section, Fallopian pregnancy, outside of the uterus, multiple births, and deciding the sex of a baby.

The occurrence of signs and symptoms in a pregnant woman is explained completely, including the cessation of menstruation after conception, the relationship between cessation of menstruation and pregnancy, nausea, increase in size of the breasts, and cravings as a sign of pregnancy. In addition, the psychological changes during pregnancy are touched on. The average time from onset of labour pains until delivery of the baby is also given, along with notable stages of delivery and birth.

Chapter 5

In this chapter, contraception and health, birth spacing, abstinence, times when one cannot get pregnant, sterilisation with x-rays,¹ abortion by surgical intervention, surgical sterilisation, and contraceptive devices

Although contraception is opposed by some for religious or nationalistic reasons, it may be necessary to prevent pregnancy for the health of the mother. Also, the deterioration of the health of the mother or child can lead to the impoverishment of the household and decline in its resiliency, the happiness of the family can be destroyed. Each family should decide on the number of children to have, depending on its health, resources, social beliefs and obligations, and its ability to meet

¹ [Translator's note: in the 1970 edition of the book, sterilisation with laser, not x-rays are mentioned. However, lasers were invented only in 1960. In this later edition, X-rays are mentioned only in the context of being able to detect pregnancy after three months.]

them. The book advises to space births two or three years apart, in order to allow for the earlier child to get enough mother's milk, and to allow for the mother to care for each child sufficiently

Women with heart disease, high blood pressure, lung disease, kidney disease, diabetes, urinary and urinary tract infections, anaemia, and mental handicaps related to glandular disturbances need contraception Mothers and fathers with inheritable diseases need contraception The author advises knowing in advance about low-risk contraception at the time of marriage.

In the explanation of contraceptive methods, he explains oral contraceptives, injectible contraceptives, intrauterine devices, the rhythm method of timed abstinence, male condom, cervical capping, and other methods and their issues are explained suitably

Chapter 6

This chapter is about reproduction, or population growth. Fertility {Translators note: the author has created a Burmese-Pah hybrid term for this concept, and explained that **it** means 'the ease and rapidity of conception and pregnancy'. At the time this book was published, the general concept of politicians was strongly for population growth. A large population was thought necessary to become a great nation.], influence of fertility on men and women. The time in which women can have children, age and fertility, causes of sterility and its medical treatment, the causes and prevention of miscarriage; the dangers of abortion. He also explains interestingly about the legalisation of abortion in Soviet-governed Russia.

He explains that there are many factors in fertility. Among them, the most decisive factor is nationality. The basic natures of nations are different. Even within the same nationality, the nature of individuals varies. The environment of weather and food, and the basic health are also important factors in pregnancy. The probability of conception is different according to age. As explained above, men and women have very different rates of conception

More is explained about fertility and age. Generally it can be said that women can conceive from the time they reach maturity at the age of about 15, to about the age of 45. After about the age of 30, the ability to conceive gradually declines. When a woman is over 40 and goes through menopause, she cannot conceive any longer. As every woman is different, it is impossible to give an exact age of menopause. While men's fertility also declines after their prime, we find that some men can still impregnate a woman after about the age of 60.

If a couple who is not using any contraception does not have a child within three years, we can say they are infertile. First there is the quality of the sperm and ovum. The sperm fertilises the ovum; once they have been united, the embryo is implanted in a place in the uterus. These are the three important points in conception and pregnancy. If one of these goes wrong, the pregnancy will not happen. This can be because of either the man or the women. That is why a husband and wife can have children only when both have good fertility.

The causes of male infertility are a low sperm-count in the semen, weak sperm, and inability of the healthy sperm to reach the cervix, the entrance from the Vagina to the uterus. Additionally, there can be semen which does not contain any sperm (*Azoospermia*). This condition can be caused by swelling of the testes, hereditary disease, blocking of the vas deferens, and testes failure to drop into the scrotum, severe mumps during childhood, history of gonorrhoea, inferior food, and hormonal deficiency

In women, infertility caused by failure of the ovaries to produce an ovum, failure to produce a viable ovum, failure of the embryo to implant in the uterus can be the result of insufficiency of thyroid or pituitary glands, ovarian disease, inferior nutrition, or suffering of chronic disease.

Besides this, inflammation of the uterus, wrong position of the uterus, sores in the uterus, inflammation of the Fallopian tubes, sores in the Fallopian tubes, tumour in the Fallopian tubes, leading from the ovaries to the uterus, and parts of the sexual organs being in the wrong position, or being defective can also be causes of infertility.

Failure to conceive can be because of either the husband or the wife, but according to the defect there may be ways to compensate or make replacements in order to have successful conception and pregnancy. In addition, marriage partners who have hereditary communicable diseases, lung disease, heart disease, kidney disease, diabetes, and so on should not have children. If they should get pregnant, they should give birth by Caesarean section, and should have their Fallopian tubes tied off to prevent further pregnancies, i.e., to be sterilised. Similarly, a man can have a vasectomy, that is the vas deferens tubes which carry the sperm can be tied off to prevent conception.

In this part he also tells us to keep in mind the possible causes of miscarriage, so that knowing them, miscarriages can be prevented. When miscarriage happens within the first 28 weeks of pregnancy, the pregnancy is interrupted and the embryo's passing out of the uterus is called

spontaneous abortion or miscarriage. This can happen because of some defect in the foetus. Causes of early-pregnancy abortion can be because of the foetus itself, because of an imperfectly formed amniotic membrane. Miscarriage can also happen because of a defect in the genes of the father or mother, or if the embryo is not properly implanted in the uterine wall, or because of imperfectly formed membrane around the foetus. Damage to the membrane can be caused by an infection in the mother, or cancer treatment. In addition, miscarriage can happen because the foetus is deprived of oxygen and nutrition by certain conditions of the mother, including kidney disease, diabetes, sexually transmitted diseases, high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease, and pernicious anaemia. If the uterus is malformed, this can also cause miscarriage. Accidental injury can also cause miscarriage, so one must be careful to avoid injury to the uterus, foetus, or placenta. Therefore, pregnant women should restrain their movements and living conditions, and pay special attention to a personal hygiene regime.

When a pregnant woman is about to miscarry, there will be some bleeding. With medicine in time, and rest, the pregnancy can be stabilised again. However, if a woman goes on to continue to experience pain in the bladder region, backache, or pains, there is a greater probability of miscarriage, and she should seek the treatment of a skilled medical professional.

When, as happens sometimes, pregnancy can endanger the life of the woman, an abortion may be induced. If the woman has a serious disease such as heart disease, kidney disease, or lung disease, the baby's health can not be ensured, and therefore, it is not appropriate to take the risk to bear the child, and the pregnancy should be aborted. However, as abortion is not legal, normally doctors will not perform an abortion, but will observe the condition, and will decide to perform an abortion only if it becomes critical. Abortion can also be dangerous to the life of the mother. As tetanus can be transmitted through abortion, the mother can lose her life, and therefore abortions should not be performed, the author warns.

In this part, it is explained that abortion was legalised in Soviet Russia in 1921. The intention of the Soviet government was to provide health care to the citizens, and prevention and health care to women who wished to abort their foetus. As illegal abortion caused many deaths and injuries, legalised abortion is intended to protect the health. The writer explains about the ways the Soviet government educated people about the danger of abortion, through talks and other means to promote the use of contraceptives instead of abortion.

Chapter 7

This chapter gives explanations of sexual relations, which are an important part of marriage. Attitudes toward sex, sexual techniques, first sexual intercourse and art of sex,¹ arousal of the libido, sexual embrace,² sexual arousal in the body or mind, and about climax or orgasm in both men and women, and he tells what should be done during and after sexual intercourse.

Chapter 8

This chapter has explanations of difficulties experienced in sexual intercourse, and frigidity,³ the wrinkling of the vaginal tract, painful intercourse, impotence,⁴ premature ejaculation, failure to reach orgasm, mismatched size of sexual Organs, attitude of sexual attraction between people of the same sex (homosexuality), and in addition, he explains the method of satisfying sexual excitation (jacking off)⁵ (masturbation), its contradiction to nature, the consequences of its practice. As some people find this practice of masturbation uncivilised, they will feel they have committed a great offence, and later will be ashamed. However, the author discusses that in the medical view it cannot be called an offence, and in fact it can be beneficial to reduce sexual tension in this way, by doing it just about once or twice a week.

Chapter 9

This chapter is about a married couple's health, and related sexual issues. Estimating the time of the first pregnancy, age of the mother at the first pregnancy, population of a family, methods of contraceptive use, fear of pregnancy, contraceptives and infertility, contraception and health, the limits to the frequency of relations in marriage,⁶ relations during menstruation, and relations after birth, the effect of ageing on sexual desire and potency, avoiding pre-marital relations, and ideal marriage

The author writes that a couple should not have children in the first or second year of marriage. They should start a pregnancy only in the second or third year. The reason is that as the couple has not previously been close, the couple needs to take time to harmonise their perspectives on various social topics, such as money matters and marital relations, so that everything will go smoothly later

¹ 'Art of sex' is the translation given in the glossary of the book. A literal translation would be more like 'skill' or 'expertise' in sex.

² 'Sexual embrace' is also the term from the glossary. The term literally means 'sexual teasing'.

³ The author uses a simple phrase, 'dislike of sexual intercourse' which is evidently a translation of this term, which is not included in the glossary

⁴ A phrase in the text: men's low sexual energy.

⁵ Here the author gives a slang term for men.

⁶ Here the author discusses that couples usually should limit themselves to having sex once or twice per week.

on. Until everything has been worked out, it is not the right time to have a pregnancy. The author also mentions that the first child should be born before the mother is 30 years old.

The author advises on the necessity of getting medical examinations and medically sound advice, and following it when contraception is needed, both at the beginning of marriage, and during birth spacing. As some medicines used as contraceptives can have side effects, they should be discussed with a medical professional.

The author discusses how a woman has more blood in the lining of her uterus and in the vaginal passage during menstruation, and that therefore she could have a haemorrhage if she has sexual relations during this time. In addition, injuries mean that bad germs can thrive and causes diseases, and existing diseases can become worse during menstruation. If at times like this a man does not use a condom, his organ may become itchy and swollen. That is why he advises that it is best to avoid sexual relations during menstruation. Also, during pregnancy and after a woman gives birth it is good to avoid sexual relations and give her uterus a rest for a certain time.

Thinking about this book

According to this book what we call marriage is really the basis of reproduction. The author covers habits, considerations, reactions and the way that a couple who has never been close before must take time to harmonise their attitudes on everything when they come together. Men and women marry with the intention of loving, but it is not easy. The couple must first consider whether each can adjust to the needs of the other, ignore the faults of the other, and whether they can help each other. That is why he advises one should take time before marriage to enquire and consider before taking a decision.

The author wrote the book with the intention of informing young people who were about to get married about the sexual problems that they might encounter in marriage. Knowing and thinking about these problems in advance, young people could avoid the

His first point is that for a marriage to be successful all around it is important for both partners to be willing to come to terms with the other's outlook. The second point is that for partners live together intimately, they need to know about matters relating to sex before they marry. The marriage can be successful and both partners can have a good understanding only if they first know about such matters as relations directly related to marriage, menstruation, care from conception to childbirth, and menopause as they grow older. The book contributes to the spread of knowledge, not only to

people about to get married, newlyweds, expectant mothers and fathers, but also to health workers. It is easy for the reader to understand, as it is written in question-and-answer format in some places.

This book was published in about 1939 or 1940, when the Burmese thought it was improper for people to discuss matter relating to sex frankly in public or in the family. At that time there was also little knowledge about the medical point of view. I think that the Nagani Book Club arranged for the translation and publication of this type of book to enlighten and educate, because of this lack of health knowledge. Through this, in the present most know and understand that there is a need for communication to increase the health knowledge of the public about birth spacing, provision for public communication on what should be avoided for prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.

3. Dagon Tayar, Dr Hla Shwe¹

Translation: Phone Kyaw Myat

He wore his copper colour or blue-black colour nether garment rather short, exposing his calves. And his jacket was made of coarsely woven fawn coloured cotton from upcountry. Below the natural, curled up hair that was closely-cropped, were the horn-rimmed glasses like a sign of learning. He would laugh heartily after pleasantly saying something humorous. His laughter, rhyming like the sound of water flowing in a spring-fed stream, was musical. His eyes sparkled with tears as he laughed.

That's the image of him left fresh in my memory.

1937.

It happened on the vessel bound for Pyapon (town). A student who stayed at the same hostel as I and was to disembark/ get off at Twante, had bought a first class ticket and had a game of poker going in the first class cabin to relieve the boredom and (to)while away the time.

We had tickets to travel on the deck of the vessel but had been playing at the table in the first class cabin as his guests. There was clamour and laughter. As was the habit of students, the chairs were in disarray, litter like the shells of peanuts and wrappers was everywhere like a swarm of locusts. It was chaotic.

The moment the vessel left the Rangoon jetty, the game of poker started. We were telling jokes and laughing loudly when a tall, well endowed, trendy woman of about twenty years of age came to stand near us with arms akimbo and said, 'Please leave (here). I have a first class ticket.'

Her voice was full of conceit and she was stern. The proud face was sullen. I only had a deck ticket and was speechless. The other students just stood there, dumbfounded.

'Won't you leave? I have brought the purser. Purser, please make them leave the cabin.'

The purser looked embarrassed and just stood there saying nothing. Just at that moment Ko Hla Shwe appeared out of nowhere and had an altercation with the conceited young woman.

Actually Ko Hla Shwe was just getting himself involved because he couldn't stand her.

¹ From Dagon Tayar 1963 (2nd ed.) *Portraits*. Yangon, Pugun Press (Publisher: Ko Oo)

Ko Hla Shwe and I had not acquainted with one another yet. I had sometimes seen him on the vessel bound for Pyapon on my way home from school and just took him for a young college student and an aspiring young Thakin (a member of the Dobama Asiayone). I didn't know more than that. He probably regarded us as young students.

The young woman had been to a convent school and was a college student and a fiery person but she had to give in when she met Ko Hla Shwe. Ko Hla Shwe could speak calmly and firmly and soon dispelled her anger.

I had the emphatic opinion that he was passionate and wouldn't suffer unjust treatment.

When I think of Ko Hla shwe, images of the 1938 student's uprising flicked over one after another.

It was the evening of 15 December.

The students in Rangoon marched in procession to demonstrate civil disobedience. The appointed place to meet was the Myoma school compound.

Ko Hla Shwe told the mass of students the rules and principles of civil disobedience. Suddenly, at that moment, the remains of the monsoon rained down. The sky, previously golden, was now occupied by dark clouds.

The leader Ko Hla Shwe's voice pierced through the wind and rain.

The group/ mass of students marched along Montgomery Street in the rain. The people watching from the side of the street shouted loudly, ' May the uprising succeed!' The (military) vehicle full of military police with bayonets attached to rifles followed a little farther back.

The day was 20 December.

Ko Hla Shwe, like an officer commanding a military unit, was going about the gates of the Secretariat which had been barricaded by the students and speaking words of encouragement to the students. His brown complexion and the nether garment worn short were conspicuous among the group of students. It was after 12 o'clock when they had bread and tinned fish given to them by "Sun Café".

Soon the huge mass of students withdrew, turning back along Street. The mounted police attacked them with batons at the end of Spark Street.

"Rebel! Rebel!Do it! Do it! "

"We are of Thakin class! ... We, Bamar! "

The sounds reverberated. The students at the very front were in disarray; those at the back knew absolutely nothing about this and marched on. The mounted police came again. Ko Hla Shwe was smeared with dust and lay on the pavement/ platform.

There were spots of blood in front of the Secretariat. Spots of blood (there were).

In a room at the back of the University hospital, Ko Aung Kyaw was tossing and rolling in bed and vomiting copious amounts of blood. He was regaining consciousness one moment and losing it the next. Ko Hla Shwe sat gazing at the bedside.

Oh!

The street from Kamaryut to Hanthawaddy Street was packed with the mass of people and the noise could be taken for the waves of the sea. At the front was the body of Bo Aung Kyaw covered with (funeral) wreaths; even though his body had already reached the entrance to Kyandaw cemetery, the rear of the mass of people were still jostling in front of the police station at Kamaryut.

Soon there was the voice over the microphone from the rest-house in the cemetery, 'My little son carried no weapons, not even a needle, and the expansionist government killed him cruelly. Is that good?'

The mass of people were emotionally choked on hearing the trembling, cracked voice of the elderly mother of Bo Aung Kyaw. Her sobs lingered in the ears of the people.

The words, 'Oh, the government of Ba Maw!' from Ko Hla Shwe's speech captivated the people.

The words were sharp and captured the hearts and minds of the people. The people who had been pining for Bo aung Kyaw now clenched their fists and their jaws/teeth.

At that moment the people would obey to Ko Hla Shwe's commands; they would die if he asked them to. Ko Hla Shwe's voice could really mesmerize many people. A lecturer of English Literature remarked that Ko Hla Shwe's speech at the cemetery was like the world famous speech spoken beside the body of the Roman Emperor Julius Caesar and could change many people.

Ko Hla Shwe made speeches in succession. In one night he would rush from one place to another in a car to deliver speeches.

But when the boycott ended, 'Ye Ye Tauk (Daring) 'Than Tin formed a group that didn't want to end the boycott and the students split into two groups. Some newspapers that had once praised him (calling him the one who has authority/ dictator) now ridiculed him (calling him the one who has

hoof disease/ a diseased animal). One night, while travelling in a car to Sanchaung, someone threw a bottle at Ko Hla Shwe.

I remembered the meeting of students held at the university union building to discuss whether or not to end the boycott. Than Tin and his followers spoke to the national delegates of the students urging them to continue the boycott. Then Ko Hla Shwe spoke, dealing in detail and clarifying the facts.

The student delegates came to realize the facts and when they were asked to vote, Ko Hla Shwe's side won decisively.

The next year, Ko Hla Shwe became the president of the National Students Union of Burma and the University Union.

After the student uprising, Ko Hla Shwe married. When people are disappointed, or when their hopes have been shattered, they tend to marry to have someone to share their troubles and unhappiness.

Ko Hla Shwe, too, married 'Ye', while he was still attending medical school.

One night, after a Union meeting, it was raining and I saw him holding an umbrella over his dear wife, escorting her to the car.

During 1938-39, when he was the president of the University union, I was an executive member of the union (patron of the social committee) and got to see him closely.

One night, at the union building, there was a meeting to discuss about celebrating Martyr's day. Delegates from various groups, including Dobama Asiayone, attended the meeting. It was organized by the National Students Union of Burma and Ko Hla Shwe acted as the chairman and Thakin Ba hein acted as the secretary.

To my recollection, Thakin Ba Sein, U Ba Hnin (Nurse), Myoma Saya Hein, Thakin Kyaw Sein, Thakin Lay Maung and Thakin Tin Maung (now deceased) spoke eagerly at the meeting.

At last, they were choosing the day to be designated as Martyr's day. Two small groups with opposing views emerged from the discussion.

One side proposed to designate the day they defied the authorities and on which Bo Aung Kyaw was hit as Martyr's day. The other side said at length that the 1938 student uprising in which Bo Aung Kyaw died had originated from the oilfield workers strike and therefore the day related with the workers should be designated as Martyr's day.

While they were saying so, the discussion deviated to whether it was the workers or the students who led the uprising and the attacks became personal.

It was said with ferocity. The sides became abusive to one another. Thakin Ba Hein just smiled and listened. I had to restrain Thakin Tin Maung who was raising his fist in anger. He was exceedingly wrathful. Their faces had become scarlet.

Some had rolled up their sleeves and moved forward. I thought it inevitable that they would come to blows. A Thakin swore at the students and made derogatory remarks.

Despite shouts calling them to stop talking and to sit down, Thakin Lay Maung continued talking. There was uproar in the room.

A Thakin had taken an umbrella in his hand and had run towards the other side.

From amid this storm Ko Hla Shwe stood up and said, 'Stop it Thakin Lay Maung. Stop it!'

Thakin Lay Maung's voice continued to be heard.

'Please be quiet. I am the chairman of this meeting and you have to listen to me. All of you, quiet down!' His full and awesome voice filled the room. The uproar died down as if water had put the fire out. I saw at that place, exactly what was meant when people say 'as if water had put the fire out'.

I was very grateful to Ko Hla Shwe. If he hadn't been able to bring the meeting under control, there certainly would have been bloodshed. The fight between the leaders of the Dobama Asiayone which the country held in high esteem and the students would have been shameful and notorious.

As a leader of the students, Ko Hla Shwe was strict.

He directed his attention towards the welfare of the poor, like workers and paddy farmers. He was courageous and followed the course that he had laid down without going astray. In the year when he was president of the union, the vice –president of the union, Ko Kyaw Myint (now a member of the socialist party) tabled a motion at one of the union meetings to invite Dr Ba Maw to deliver a political speech; Ko Hla Shwe bitterly refused.

'I will not have Dr Ba Maw on the podium of the union during my term of office as president,' he said.

They had recently toppled Dr Ba Maw's government and he didn't want to join hands just then.

Dr Ba Maw didn't get onto the podium of the union while he was president of the union. Ko Hla Shwe kept his course and didn't deviate.

His education suffered very much because of his devotion to the student's affairs.

He had been at the university for a very long time. His M.B.; B.S. course normally takes 7 years, but because of the boycott and union affairs, he frequently missed his examinations. Unlike the B.A. and M.A. courses which you can study and pass the examination without regularly attending classes, the medical course requires that you mustn't fail to attend practical classes and study diligently just to do fairly well. In such an environment, he had totally occupied himself with union affairs and missed his examinations and hence, his years at the university were long.

From 1939 onwards, he pursued his lessons. From that year, at the end of his term as president of the union, he was able to study and obtain the M.B.; B.S. degree and become a doctor. I heard that the rector of the medical college asked him at the viva voce in the final M.B.; B. S. examination whether it was right to have staged the student uprising of 1938. Ko Hla Shwe boldly stated facts in favour of staging the uprising. At that time the expansionist system was still firmly in place.

Had he left school and pursued a political career, it was possible that his fame would have fetched him quite an important position by now.

But after he had left the union he lived peacefully. He was eager to learn medicine. A senior doctor praised him as having very good surgical skills despite his young age.

During the time of the B.I.A., in the early part of the Japanese occupation, I went to Kyaiklat Town to do some administrative affairs for the Dobama government and saw him at his house. He was the administrator there.

He said/grumbled, 'I'm doing this because I couldn't help it.' During the Japanese occupation he did surgical operations at the civil hospital. Later he moved to Maubin (Town) as the district medical officer.

As a man Ko Hla Shwe was very warm and friendly. He was good natured. He would tell a joke and laugh heartily. His laughter was like the sound of water flowing from a spring in the forest, the rhyming and timing was good. He had a sense of humour and it was never dull speaking with him.

When I went and gave him the "Tara (Constellation)" magazine, he would give his criticism that began from the cover of the magazine. He could be keenly critical. Regarding the poem, "Ngwe

Hlay Paw Ga Anan (literally = Kiss on the Silver Boat), he said, laughing ' You are just dreaming what you wanted and didn't get.'

"Keep your course, don't stray and always preserve its value,' he would always say.

He promised to write articles (? relating to life/ nature) for the "Tara" magazine but wasn't free to do so.

He didn't ignore the opinions of the times nor literature and other things; his book, " Husband and wife for life" was a good one; it was clear, concise and didn't withhold facts. It was full of medical knowledge and the most reliable of the modern treatises on sex.

Friends and colleagues found him reliable as a doctor. During the Japanese occupation, Thakin Ba Hein had jaundice and Ko Hla Shwe went very early in the morning to give him injections. Ko Ba Hein got up late from bed and Ko Hla Shwe had to wait to give him the injections.

Even as a student Ko Hla Shwe had given injections to Ko Ba Hein. While Ko Hla Shwe was preparing the syringe to give the injection, Thakin Ba Hein rubbed his arm, smiled and said,' Are you sure about this? I might kick the bucket if you give me the wrong medicine.'

Ko Hla Shwe just laughed heartily and said,' You are saying so because this is free. You think it's good only when you have to pay for it. Oh! I have to coax you to take the injection!'

We just laughed at Ko Ba Hein who took the injection with a grimace. Ko Hla Shwe finished the injection, laughed and said,' It's a delight to give the injection with a big needle.'

In the early part of 1946 I had dysentery and had to take about 60 injections given by Ko Hla Shwe.

When he was about to give the injection I would roll up my sleeve and say,' Please be gentle about it.'

He would say,' I have to use a large needle this time,' and give me the injection. When I went to his house to get the injections I would meet people like Tet Hponegyi Thein Pe and Thakin Ba Tin. I would also meet Ko Htun Ohn who was also getting injections. On the days that Ko Hla Shwe was to give injections, his wife "Yi" would have the syringes and needles immersed in an antiseptic solution. She would dispense medicines prescribed by Ko Hla Shwe. Ko Hla Shwe seemed to love his wife very much.

One evening, I was waiting for Ko Hla Shwe at his house in the hospital compound to get an injection. A monk said he wanted to see Dr Maung Hla Shwe and came into the drawing-room.

Before long, Ko Hla Shwe came (back) from the hospital. The monk said his legs were numb and aching and that he wanted to be admitted to the hospital. Ko Hla Shwe arranged for the monk to come to the out-patient department the next day. But the monk asked about the hospital for quite a long time. Ko Hla Shwe patiently explained to the monk. I, who only had to listen, got impatient.

When Ko Hla Shwe went inside for a moment, the monk asked me, among other things, 'How much does Maung Hla Shwe, the one who had authority, get a month. Is it over a thousand?' The monk still regarded Ko Hla Shwe as a student leader.

When I met him a little more than a month before he was to go to America, he said he was going to America by sea. Later I learnt that he was going by air.

He was going as a state scholar to Minnesota University to study surgery. He was interested in medical science.

'We need to be fully up-to-date in modern sciences; we have much to study and learn,' he said to me.

It was said that he was to attend the (same) university that Htin Gyi had been attending and I went to see him so that I might be able to send copies of "Tara" magazine that Htin Gyi had been repeatedly asking for, with him. I didn't see him because he went to Insein that day. I learnt that his luggage had already reached the limit allowed by the airline and so sent the magazines with Jimmy Htun Tin, the manager of "Sun Café."

I was terrified when I heard the news of the plane crash in the Arabian Gulf. In a single year, friends and colleagues, especially the presidents of the union had passed away. The first was the communist leader, Thakin Ba Hein; then it was the chairman of A.F.P.L. Thakin Aung San; and finally, the leader of the 1938 student uprising, Ko Hla Shwe.

October, 1947

4. Maung Maung Nyo, Dictator Dr Hla Shwe¹

dear stan,

many burmese in the present day Burma generally thought that i was the first burman to write about sex education in burmese. sayagyi dr u ba than writes in his preface to my book "Theik-pan Nee-kye Ein-htaung-the-bawa" that i was the first burman to do so and therefore so courageous to write the taboo subject my book came out in 1970. since then, many editions have been published. the late writer yangon ba swe commended that my book filled the need of the burmans in sex education and should be read by all and that it had been published 4 times within a year with a circulation of over 10,000 or so. as a matter of fact, i was not the first burman to write about sex education in burma. dr hla shwe, the younger brother of bo let ya, the senior member of the famed "Thirty Comrades for Independence" and sometime the deputy prime minister and defence minister in u nu's government, was the first to write and publish a comprehensive book on sex education in burmese. his book was entitled "Husband and Wife Wedded Forever (Za-nee Maung-hnan Yathek-pan). I first read it when i was at the University of Rangoon in 1955. it was so unusual for a burmese book to discuss openly about the anatomy and physiology of reproductive organs, their parts in love-making and marriage. it was written in question and answer format and it was very concise and clear. dr hla shwe acknowledged in the book that his book was based on the "A Marriage Manual" written by dr abraham stone and his wife. then in 1959, dr myint soe, head of the preventive and social medicine department at IM1 taught us about the problems of marriage, childhood and juvenile delinquency. he prescribed dr stones' book as a reference. i bought dr stones' book and also found dr hla shwe's burmese adaptation. i liked both books and i used to present the burmese book to all my burmese friends who were getting married. they told me the book was informative, but a bit difficult to understand. so, after studying in london, uk, for about three and half years during which i have read alot about sex education including the famous book " The Human Sexual Response" by masters and johnson, i ventured to write my first sex education book to make the subject more understandable and up to date not to supplant dr hla shwe's but to complement it. however, people preferred my book as it contained illustrations and it was written in pure, plain burmese used by the nayathas and it was prefaced by sayagyi u ba than and dr shwe tin,

¹ The article is part of a series of portraits of Burmese physicians published on the internet [http://sites.google.com/site/alumnimedicinemyanmar/dictatordrHla Shwe](http://sites.google.com/site/alumnimedicinemyanmar/dictatordrHlaShwe) [28.12.2010].

professor of obstetrics and gynaecology at IM2. dr hla shwe's children, dr tha hla shwe and dr mi hla shwe (is her name right?) revised their father's book later, but the classicness of the book was thereby destroyed.

dr hla shwe was a unique person. he came from a well-to-do family in pyapon, had politically active brothers and was himself the president of the rangoon university student union and also of the all burma federation of the student unions. he went to magwe to support the oil workers strike against the BOC. he proclaimed, "if the british colonialists used the mounted police against the workers' strike and students we'll burn down all the colonial establishments." his speeches were full of zest, patriotism and authority. no wonder his commands were followed to the letter by the people, hence he was known as the "Dictator (arnashin) hla shwe."

he was at that time a medical student. he was liked by many students, workers and the people. after the BOC workers' strike, he was again requested to lead the student unions, but he refused due to his heavy demands for study. brigadier maung maung wrote that dr hla shwe's place was taken over by thakhin ba hein, the second most important leader in the Communist Party of Burma, a colleague of general aung san and thakhin than tun. he later died at mandalay general hospital just after the WW II, in 1946 or 1947. dr hla shwe graduated MBBS a few years before the japanese occupation and worked under sayagyi u ba than at the rangoon general hospital. he was clandestinely involved with the anti-japanese resistance during the japanese occupation. general ne win publicly acknowledged in the late 1980s that dr hla shwe hid the anti-japanese burmese troops at RGH and was a leader in the anti-japanese movement. he wrote the "Marriage Manual" in burmese in those hectic days!

dr hla shwe was married to daw khin yi, a teacher training college student from sandoway (Than-Dwe) before the second world war and they had three children. i know their eldest son, dr tha hla shwe intimately. he worked with me at IM 2 for a long time and we were together in london for some time. we also lived in the same student hostel as honorary warden and executive warden respectively. i met daw khin yi at dr tha hla shwe 's house when she visited her son after the WW II. yes, dr hla shwe died in a plane crash on his way to london, uk, for further study to become a FRCS after the WW II. dr tha hla shwe and his younger sister became medical doctors. the youngest son was active in politics like his father and frequently questioned by the police. he lived in bogale, pyapon district. but dr tha hla shwe is completely apolitical and a completely quiet man. his uncle u mya hlaing, chief editor of the now defunct magazine "Pay_Phoo_Hlwa (The Scrool)" complained that his nephew was not taking the family tradition. any way, i always pay tribute to "Dictator" hla

shwe for writing such a needed book on sex education so early in his career and so early in the modern burmese era.

may he live in a thu-ga-ti bon, a higher plane of existence.

Dr Maung Maung Nyo

MBBS March 1961 UOR

5. Aung Min Htut, A Commentary on Dr. Hla Shwe's Myanmar Translation of Drs Hannah and Abraham Stone's "A Marriage Manual" and Prof. Mg Mg Nyo's Book on the Same Subject and His letter posted on 17.6.2006

The Stones' book, 'A Marriage Manual', a practical book on sex and marriage, was published in 1935 and Dr. Hla Shwe translated it into Myanmar in 1939. Those were pre-war days and Myanmar, then known as Burma, was still a British colony and annexed to the British Indian Empire. It's been now more than 70 years since the publication of both books; many words, phrases, spellings and usages are now found to be quaint, old-fashioned and out-dated in both the languages. Professor MaungMaungNyo's book was published 30 years after Dr. Hla Shwe's.

Myanmar words and spellings were officially standardized when it regained its independence in 1948 after the British left the country. At that time, the parliamentary government took the initiative, laying down rules and regulations with help from scholars and intellectuals. In the late sixties and seventies, the military government revised the whole process, with the intellectuals now taking the backseat. Under the present regime, drastic changes have been made in Myanmar names, words, spellings and writing, redefining the whole system and discarding many old names, words, usages and spellings. Some of the main casualties were millennial old words 'Burmese', 'Burman' and 'Burma' disappearing completely from dictionaries and replaced by the literary word 'Myanmar'.

The medical texts on western medicine have never been translated into Myanmar officially. Medical education in the country has always been in English with smatterings of Myanmar words thrown about in lectures and discourses. Some professors have tried to render some texts translated into Myanmar, but have been unsuccessful due to little support and funding from authorities and constant bickerings among themselves. The Myanmar words now being used in universities vary from one medical school to another and among the professors and lecturers. Most words being taught in the higher institutes are commonly used words of Myanmar and Pali derivatives understood by the lay people.

There are a lot of words used by Dr. Hla Shwe which are now dated, obsolete or ambiguous. A few are downright ancient or rarely used Pali words; not even most medical lecturers have come across them in their careers. For example, he kept using the Pali word 'barwa' for sex throughout the book. This nowadays means 'nature', 'genitals' or 'emotion'. The original meaning in Pali is 'nature' and 'barwa' as sex is no longer used nor understood by almost all medical practitioners and medical students, let alone the lay people. The usual word now used is လိင်ဆူ ကာမ(sex).

Dr. Hla Shwe's translation of the title of the book can be read as 'Spouses for Life' or in the words of Prof. Mg MgNyo- "Husband and Wife Wedded Forever".

In his translation, Dr. Hla Shwe completed it chapter by chapter (nine chapters in all), but in each chapter, he was liberal in abridging many paragraphs, and, more importantly, he inserted some of his own conclusions and remarks in regard to Myanmar traditions, practices and culture. Overall, he translated about 80% of the book directly. He himself acknowledged that his book was based on the Stones' book but not in a strictly translated version.

Some words he coined anew, but mostly, he resurrected many old words, Myanmar and Pali, some no longer in use, to convey his meaning. With regard to Myanmar sensitivities and customs of those pre-war days, he wasn't as explicit as the Stones, but for an average Burman, his use of tabu words was revolutionary indeed. Then, it was colonial times and hectic days just before WW II. An uproar would have occurred if the book had been known to the general population as it would have happened if published in postwar independent Myanmar.

A review of some significant portions of Dr. Hla Shwe's passages and choice of words follows:

- At the very start of the book, immediately before Chapter I, he inserted 3 small graphs with explanations. This did not appear in the Stones' book. The heading stated "The differences in the Sexes Regarding Sexual Desire, Arousal and Response". The 3 graphs are comparisons between situations regarding sexual intercourse, male ejaculation and fulfillment of sexual desire. Graph A depicts a woman, sexually experienced, with no prior precoital foreplay. The graphs are meant to show males' sexual desire and gratification which are shorter in duration than in women. In other words, a woman takes longer to satisfy her sexual appeasement..Graph C depicts to show a woman, who has never experienced sex before, unable to fully feel the sexual gratification at the end of intercourse. His explanations were vague and somewhat confusing but he asserted that the readers would fully understand after reading the later chapters.
- Some Myanmar words that Dr, Hla Shwe used are no longer in fashion or are obsolete;-

The English word	Myanmar as used by Dr. HS	The modern word
Sex	ဘာဝ	လိင်၊ ကာမ

Reproduction	အမျိုးပြန့်ပွားရေး	မျိုးဆက်ပွားခြင်း
Testes	ယောက်ျားဘာဝအင်္ဂါ	ဝှေးစေ့
Ovary	မိန်းမ ဘာဝအင်္ဂါ	သားဥအိမ်
Hymen	အမွှေး	အမွှေးပါး
Hereditary disease	သဏ္ဌေတည်ကတည်းကပါသောရောဂါ	မွေးရာပါရောဂါ
Cancer	အနာပဆုတ်ရောဂါ	ကင်ဆာ
Cells	အခန်းကလေးများ	ဆဲလ်
Gonorrhoea	ညောင်းရောဂါ	ဆီးပူညောင်းကျရောဂါ
Hormone	သတိထူး	ဟော်မုန်း
Nutrition	အဟာရ	အာဟာရ
Menstruation	ရာသီပန်း	ရာသီလာခြင်း
Urethral opening	ကျင်ပေါက်ကြိုင်ပေါက်	ကျင်ချောင်းအဝ
Lips	နုခမ်း	နှုတ်ခမ်း
Fertility	သဏ္ဌေပေးနိုင်သောဩဇာ	ခလေးရနိုင်သောစွမ်းရည်

- Although the Stones elaborated quite some time on Mendellian Laws, Dr. Hla Shwe spoke just a few words on them, most probably thinking correctly that the general population might not comprehend the rendition and their significance.
- In explaining hereditary laws, Dr. Hla Shwe reflects the understanding and beliefs of his era where many diseases and medical conditions were sometimes suspected or blamed on heredity and genetic dispositions.

- In talking about circumcisions, he explained that it was beneficial to health and that most Indians practiced it. Most Indians are Hindu's (more than 80%) and do not condone circumcision. He was confusing Hindu's with Muslims.
- He stated that precise determination of the sex of the fetus was not possible, but nowadays, ultra sonogram can do so in 97% of cases in experienced hands. He mentioned some dubious methods of sex determination of his time. Sex chromosomes were then a murky issue and not mentioned at all in the book.
- Dr. Hla Shwe cautioned that breastfeeding the child up to 1 to 2 years might be injurious to both mother and child, but this was not stated in the original. At present, UNICEF urges mothers to breastfeed their children up to two years for fuller mental and physical development of the children.
- The book states that menstruation reappears within 3-4 months in breastfeeding mothers and within 8 weeks in non-nursing mothers. The conventional wisdom now is a prolonged lactating amenorrhea in breast feeders.
- Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) per thousand - Dr, Hla Shwe stated that in women who spaced births for three years between pregnancies, the IMR was 86.5. The figure was 48 which was falsified blatantly in the socialist state but now is 78, also a figure tempered with.
- Methods of Contraception - many were mentioned in the book but some have become outdated or impractical. A few are absolutely baloney. Other unreliable methods were mentioned, e.g. coitus interrupts, coitus reservists, douching of the womb after intercourse, and injections of sperms! He did not recommend intrauterine devices. Contraceptive pills and injections have not been invented yet. Dr. Hla Shwe's choice of an ideal contraceptive was using a vaginal diaphragm with an application of jelly. Marie-Stopes' clinics for contraception were mentioned by Dr. Hla Shwe but not by the Stones.
- There was a diatribe by Dr. Hla Shwe on greedy high profit seeking drug companies and their unethical advertisements. (Not found in the Stones' book)
- Artificial Insemination - Dr. Hla Shwe asserted that union of egg and sperm in a test tube inside a laboratory was not possible.
- To attain permanent sterility, Dr. Hla Shwe suggested ligation of the fallopian tubes in women. This is against the law in Myanmar now as the government is of the opinion that the population

density is very low. Tubal ligation can be dispensed only after a woman and her physician have applied to the sterilization board and have been granted permission to undergo the operation. The board allows the procedure on women with severe debilitating diseases, heart diseases, epilepsies, severe mental conditions, etc. Normal women are given permission only after they have attained 30 years of age with at least three children. (But, if you have the right connections and some money to spare, these restrictions are surmountable.)

- Male vasectomy is against the law also but not during the British Raj administration. This is not strictly enforced. Most cases are seen when medical doctors who do not toe the political line are prosecuted with this injunction. This forced male vasectomy was the main cause in the downfall of Mrs. Indira Gandhi after her first election in India. The idea that vasectomy should be practiced on hardened criminals and mental defectives might have been popular in the days of National Socialism in his era, but this is now no longer the rule.
- Medically induced abortions are strictly prohibited in Myanmar and practiced only in obstetrical and gynecological hospitals, under strictest supervision, in cases with impeccable indications.
- Sexual techniques and positions practiced in sexual intercourse-- Although the original authors wrote about them in some detail, Dr. Hla Shwe mentioned them very briefly (and not all). It was most probably due to sensitivity issues regarding sex in Myanmar circles in his time.
- Drs. Stones and Dr. Hla Shwe recommended 3 children to a family, normally.
- The authors suggested, as one way of avoiding sexual repression in young adults, a junior marriage or companion marriage as a temporary measure. To this day, this proves to be an impractical or an unethical task.
- Dr. Hla Shwe proposed intelligent sex education during youth and adolescence, but this is still not implemented due to other pressing social issues, poverty, underdevelopment and short sightedness of the government in Myanmar.
- Then, as now, for most people in the country, poverty and financial insecurity are the main reasons for deference of early marriage and having children earlier.
- The law in Myanmar stipulates that a girl must be at least 16 years of age to be eligible for marriage, but this law is completely ignored even by people in government circles. The translator queried whether the government was too lazy or too naïve to observe and enforce that law.

- Although the authors spoke little on ‘arranged marriages’ with few comments, Dr. Hla Shwe spoke at length on the apathy towards this kind of marriage arranged by parents.

Dr. Hla Shwe came from a family of high achievers with ultra nationalist tendencies. In his book, there were many instances where his anti-British, anti-colonialist feelings surfaced. Like many young men of his time, he had strong leanings on socialism, especially of the Soviet kind. He was also known as ‘the dictator’ in his college days because of his expressions of nationalism and xenophobia.

He lamented the fact that knowledge of sex was relatively lacking in Myanmar women because of absence of sex education in the country. But, even if this were constituted in schools and colleges, there could be a serious outcry from parents in this conservatively Buddhist majority country.

The Myanmar people are so fastidious and reserved that sex education is still not included in the general curricula in schools despite urgings by UNICEF and other international NGOs. Sex education is now taught in selected schools in borderland townships where there is high incidence of HIV/AIDS. This is still a pilot project and now seems to have stalled. UNICEF has initiated a program, together with the health department, known as SHAPE (School HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care) and has produced a curriculum for high school students to be used in those selected schools. Even in that text book, the word ‘condom’ is not permitted to be mentioned in the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. Students in Yangon area have never been exposed to such kind of sex education.

On Professor Maung Maung Nyo’s letter: He acknowledged that his book was not a pioneer book on sex education in Myanmar but that Dr. Hla Shwe’s book certainly was. There is a latent period of at least 30 years between the publications of the two books. During this time, a new generation has been born, raised and matured into adulthood. Meanwhile, great advances have been made in the medical field and people all over the world have become more educated, more knowledgeable and more open to such kind of sex education. Prof. Maung Maung Nyo liked both the original book by the Drs. Stones as well as the one by Dr. Hla Shwe. He recommended Dr. Hla Shwe’s book to many of his acquaintances who were getting married, many of whom expressed certain difficulties in comprehending some of the words and phrases. This propelled Prof. Mg Mg Nyo to write his book, not as a supplant but as a complement to Dr. Hla Shwe’s book. Prof. Mg Mg Nyo claimed that his book was preferred to that of Dr. Hla Shwe’s because it was illustrated and

written in plain Burmese. Prof. Mg Mg Nyo's book was prefaced by no less a personality than that of Dr. Ba Than, the father of modern Burmese medicine as well as the father-in-law of the despot General Ne Win. Dr. Ba Than himself was very arrogant, dictatorial and a tyrant on his own merits. He was much feared and very influential in Burmese health circles. On his recommendation alone, Prof. Mg Mg Nyo's book would have sold a lot. (Dr. Hla Shwe himself spent part of his internship under Dr. Ba Than). Mg Mg Nyo's book was also given a favorable comment by the then professor of obstetrics and gynecology.

Dr. Hla Shwe's book was revised by his two surviving physician children, Dr. Thar Hla Shwe (who is now the president of Myanmar Red Cross Society) and his daughter Dr. Mi Hla Shwe, but Prof. Maung Maung Nyo opined that the classiness of the book was destroyed in the process.

In conclusion, Dr. Hla Shwe's translation was a trail-blazing pioneering work in then Burma, under colonial rule; the Burmese people deeply Buddhist and devout, backward and showing anathema to such an immoral subject as sex in their perceived opinions. Now, looking back after 70 years, many words, phrases and spellings used by Dr. Hla Shwe have become old fashioned and quaint. Some of the medical techniques mentioned in the book have now been abandoned. Contraceptive pills and injections are now in widespread use but still undiscovered in his time. Dr. Hla Shwe's personality and feelings can be glimpsed from time to time throughout the book especially when he commented on social issues, governance, backwardness of the country, the British colonialism, and imposing Myanmar culture, customs, traditions and beliefs. Overall, his book has its due place in the annals of medical education in Myanmar as well as in the literature on sex and marriage for lay persons. If Dr. Hla Shwe's book were to be reprinted once again, a major reediting would have to be carried out, with drastic changes in spelling, dropping out dated Myanmar and Pali words and phrases, abandonment of obsolete medical procedures, and insertion of footnotes mentioning the most common method of modern contraception – the pill.

III Material on Mya Sein, *Women*

1. Kyaw Hoe, Bibliographical Information¹

Translation : Gunnar Peters

98) Mya Sein, Daw: A Woman. Yangon, Burma Publishing, 1941.136 p.

Published January 21, 1941. 1500 copies. Price 8 Anna. The author is the daughter of former Home Minister U May Aung, the first Burmese woman in a leading position in the Rangoon municipal administration, and also the most internationally traveled woman of Burma, Daw Mya Sein, MA. The plot is centred around the characters of Khin Khin Su and Maung Maung Than. It is a novel about woman from all over the world, such as from Borneo, Sumatra, Sweden Egypt, Babylon, Greece, Rome, Germany, America, England, Japan, China and India, and is based on knowledge and experiences from many places the author has been.

With a foreword by Deedok U Ba Cho, and mentioning „Written with the special help of Ma Khin Phyu.“ As expressed in the foreword: „Because only women can really know about women, the present publication by Daw Mya Sein of her book titled 'A Woman' will certainly be an important contribution to the advancement of Burmese woman“, this is a fine book on issues of woman in Burma and the world. The aim of the book was not only to modernise Burmese women, but also to influence men towards not having a low opinion of women. - A novel in 7 chapters.

¹ From Kyaw Hoe's Nagani Bibliography (see vol. 1 of this series pp.77-84), pp. 122-123.



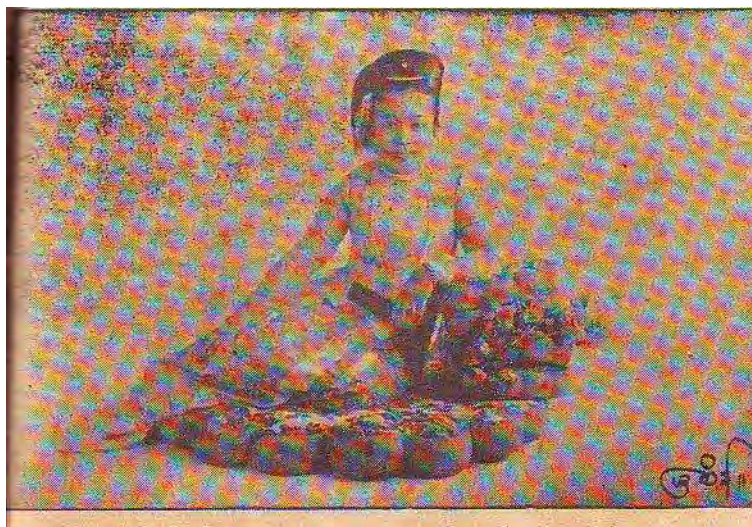
Mya Sein¹

¹ Irrawaddy Magazine October, 2007 – Vol. 15 no.10.

Mya Sein, Photo Gallery¹



Mya Sein at 14



Young Mya Sein in formal dress and pose

¹ The pictures are from Shumawa Magazine, February 1955 and illustrated the life story of Daw Mya Sein.

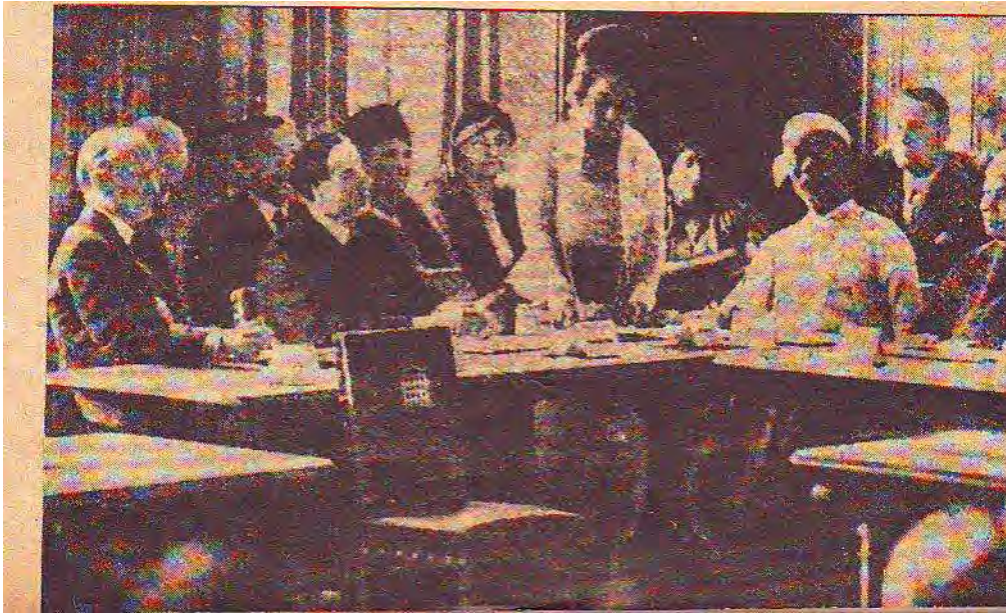
Sex and Gender



Mya Sein at 17



Mya Sein at 26

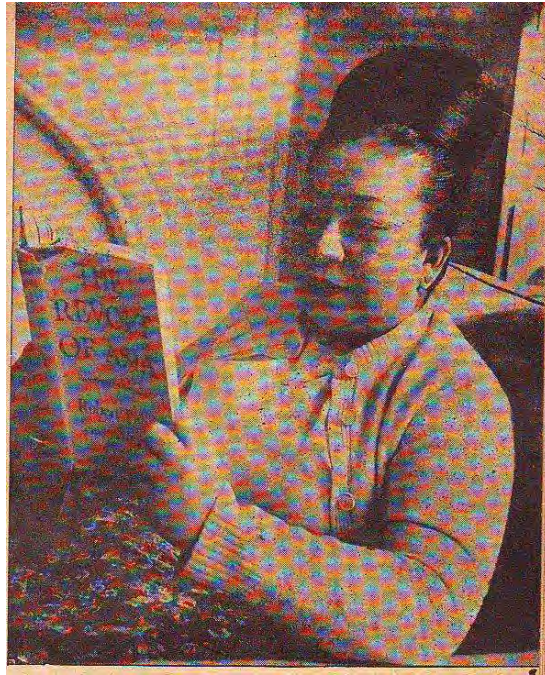


At a meeting in Burma (1931)

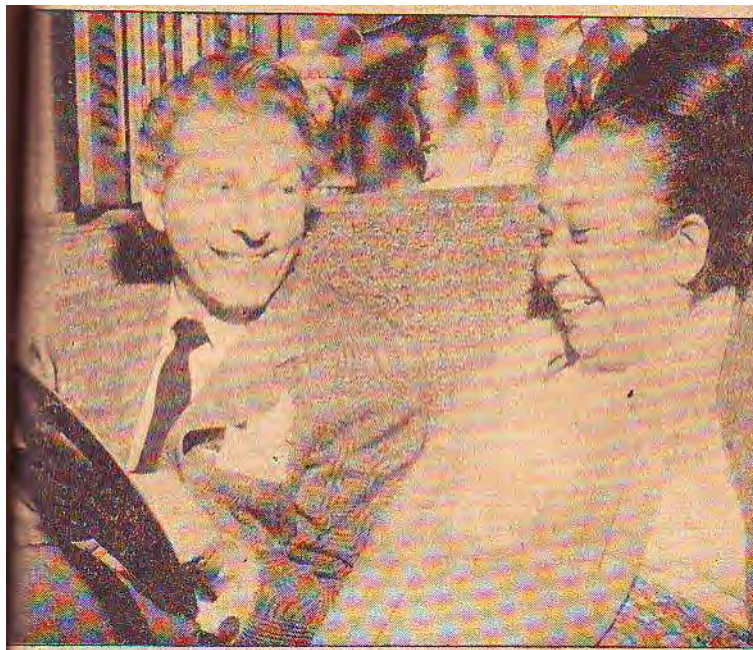


With Dr. William Summerskill¹

¹ Dr William Summerskill (1866–1947) was a medical doctor who held left-wing political views and was a strong supporter of [women's suffrage](#).



In London (1949)¹



With American actor Danny Kaye in Hollywood

¹ She is holding the book „The Revolt of Asia“ by U first published in 1947.

2. Advertisement in Book No. 96 (“Sinn Fein”)

Woman

It is the love story of Khin Khin Su and Maung Maung Than (a University lecturer in History).

You will be able to read about the people of the various countries of the world; Borneo Island, Sumatra Island, Sweden, Egypt, Babylon, Carthage, Rome, Italy, Germany, America, England, Japan, China, not leaving out India; it is complete, authoritative, full of knowledge and law references.

It is about the countries that they had visited and about the little Chinese girls that they had seen on a recent visit they had taken at the invitation of Marshall and Madame Chan Kai Sheik; it won't be boring and the plot about Khin Khin Su and Maung Maung Than is to the liking of the people of the times; the pen is wielded so that it's realistic and extraordinary; you won't be able to put the book down.

The author is the most well-informed among Burmese women, the daughter of the former interior minister U May Aung, Daw Mya Sein, M.A., B. Litt.

Coming out soon!

3. U Ba Choe, Foreword

Mehn Lel Sayadawhpaya had a verse written, asking, for the record, whether a woman or a man appeared first on earth and sent it to Mingun Sayadaw. Mingun Sayadaw answered with a verse stating that it was a woman who first appeared on earth.

The answer above was given after referring to the Maha Hansa life story of the Buddha. Classical Buddhist literature has it that some Brahma (celestial beings) when they departed from their life, came to earth as the earliest humans; they retained their original forms and their radiance. As they gradually consumed earthly products their radiance disappeared and their form changed.

No man could fully understand the nature of women. What men actually know about women is that they are very extraordinary beings. This is evident from a paragraph of the Maga Deva verse written by Mehn Lel Sayadaw which said it is bad if there's no woman and bad if there is; and that it's difficult to, and also not to, associate with them.

Now that Daw Mya Sein has written the book 'Woman', and since only women would know about women, it is hoped that it would be an important book which would raise the standard of Burmese women. As the book was written by a 'woman' who knows the chemistry of 'women', and written not as a dictator/ a person of authority or a teacher ordering them to make changes but as an interesting story, it is worthy of praise. Such a book has never appeared in Burma before. This book was written with the intention not only of raising the standard of women and making progressive changes but also that men may not look down on them.

Ba Cho (Dee Doke/ brown fish-owl)

13.1.41

4. Min Maw Thant, Review of Women by *Daw Mya Sein* Translation: Ma Thida

Brief Biography of Author

Daw Mya Sein (M.A, B.Lit) wrote **Women** and in 1941 it was published by Burma Distribution House. The author is daughter of former Home Affairs minister U May Aung and the first Burmese woman of Rangoon Municipal Council. Among Burmese women she also had international experience. She wrote this book with the assistance of Ma Khin Phyu.

Brief Summary of Women

Khin Khin Su's Problem

Khin Khin Su was planning to apply for a job without her mother's agreement after her father passed away. Then she used to look into the newspapers for a job opportunity. She now was annoyed by reading a newspaper feature. It said that men were chosen when women and men applied for a job. But her mother explained that Burmese women of lawyers, members of parliament, doctors and academics got the same opportunities as men did. So she couldn't argue and was silent. On that night her friends told her to listen at University Union Building to a talk about International Women by Daw Mya Sein.

Lecture 1: Women in World History

That talk made her thinking a lot about women's rights. In her talk, Daw Mya Sein explained many examples from all over the about women's issues.

In Europe, America and Russia, women got same opportunities in terms of education, job and social fun as men did. After First World War, because of economic depression, women had to get earning and consequently job opportunity like men. However in Germany and Italy women were limited to get job. Women also noticed that whether the government did well or not. Then they wanted to participate in community activities rather than their usual house-work and demanded to get women's rights by organizing women associations.

Men thought that women were inferior because of the task of getting pregnant and delivering babies. Some Burmese proverbs told that women could destroy the country and encouraging women could make you silly. But in history as men went out for fighting others and hunting in the forest, women became expert in planting rice and crops.

Once in Sumatra, it was thought that more rice was gained when women with long hair planted it. It was also accepted in Mexico. In olden days' China, the king dressed like a peasant and his wife as a paddy planter on special occasion of rice harrowing day. Moreover in Sweden, Egypt, Babylon and Myanmar some believed that women would be chosen to marry a spiritual god and then she could tell about future with the aid of her spiritual partner.

In Babylon and Egypt, there were some rules about women's standard and role. Those rules were established 2500 years ago and are still used in some countries. According to those rules women could take part independently in wedding, religion, trading and law. If a wife was ill and had no children, the husband could marry again but he had to take care of her. And she could inherit even when he died. Or he had to take responsibility for her debt.

In Egypt, women got superior positions as there was a tradition of accepting a woman as Queen. But prosperous women thought they didn't need to work and became showcase dolls for men and inferior at national affairs. In Sparta, women were trained to get physical strength for military, encouraged to become musicians and got freedom in dealing with men. But women had to spend money to get married men. Most women had to rely just on her husband whether he is good or not and spent their time with their children at home.

In Rome, father influenced more on children than mother did. Women used to obey rules but they were against law in which women were inhibited to wear more than one oz of gold. There were some famous women in those days. When Christianity was introduced in Rome with establishing equality in men and women without discrimination among rich and poor, more people became Christians.

A Marriage Proposal

Khin Khin Su slept only at next early morning since she reconsidered about Daw Mya Sein's talk. That day was a day after full moon day and Maung Maung Than visited her. He was a history lecturer at Rangoon Art and Science University. He proposed her but she didn't yet accept it. She explained that if she got married, she might not be fully free and should spend her time with housework until she became a granny, if her husband was bad, she would get suffering and be oppressed. Maung Maung Than then told her some examples of career women like Daw Ma Ma Khin, a member of parliament, and other headmistresses, doctors who worked as men do. She liked him to continue his explanation.

Lecture 2: Female – male relations

Even though there was no rule that women should follow men, women had to consider family finance with their instinct judgment. In Hinduism, women got equal chances like men. Married women could talk publicly about religious matters. This opportunity was utmost and similar to that of queens in Egypt. In Indian folktales husband and wife had no superior and inferior rights. Women could choose her husband as she liked but she had to pay respect to him. In Manu judiciary law, women had to take her father's name as her surname and change her surname according to her husband's name after she got married. But women were not allowed to become spinsters. And women should be educated just for supporting their husbands and they should not read Hindu's judiciary laws.

During 500 to 1200 AD in many countries including India women had kill themselves by jumping into a fire, which was for burning the dead body of her husband. When women could use money more freely and build social dealing more strongly. Once women were protected from environmental and human dangers and after some time they were treated like detainees. Women used to get married at an early age and when their husbands died, they became widows and felt inferior. Though widows could get remarried, they had to be very modest at home and became nurses and teachers to get outlook.

Hitariya, a Greece academic, suggested that only flap women were educated. But intelligent Hindu women could compete with Christian women. In the Arab world, before women got married they had to obey their fathers. When they got married, their husbands treated them as one of their own properties. Mohammad said that women should be respected, their standard should be promoted, they should not marry many husbands, they should be treated kindly and they could own the property. But they couldn't divorce their husbands as the law said. However there were many world-famous women in Muslim history.

In Christianity, Jesus gave equal chances for men and women though many followers condemned it. After some time he tried to oppress women but failed. But extremists never recognized equal standards for women. Though there were many women who talked about the teaching of Christ, they were never recognized as priests. Women could learn at the universities but were still inferior at social occasions.

In England at the era of King Henry VIII, the power of convents was decreased since he destroyed some churches. Women couldn't teach at Oxford University which was founded also by some women.

After Maung Maung Than had explained about the state of women around the world, Khin Khin Su paid respect to him. He suggested her that if she was still interested in that, he could ask one of his women friends who recently was back from England to explain more. She had some doubt about the relationship between him and his woman friend. So she denied to response his proposal. He left her silently and sorrowfully.

Khin Khin Su in Love

However, she felt sorry to lose him. She was told that he and his friend went out together and having fun. She got sick since she missed him. Then her mother noticed her love to him and arranged for him to visit while she was sick. He explained that his woman friend was a married woman and she could explain more about women's issues. Then she realized and accepted his proposal.

Lecture 3: Developments in England

His woman friend was called Ma Than Nu. She started telling about British women. In England in 18th century, the standard of women had changed by three things: a) developing of no-career upper class women, b) changing in the hand craft business, c) the influence of the French revolution.

a) In those days women in England were responsible only for housework. Elite women spent their time with social work and recreation and asked housemaids to do housework. They were also proud of having more free time by sending their children to boarding schools.

b) When the rule about making fences for farmland came out, some farmers gave up their formal career and started new jobs of home hand craft industries. Then they became factory-workers. Then the standard between poor working class women and elite not-working upper class women became remarkably different. But every income or property of women were belonged to men.

c) In the French revolution the concept of Freedom, Equality and Friendship was popularized. So women in the western world requested more freedom. Women from factories and industries secretly held meetings for their freedom since they were more poorly treated. After some time, they got the chance to vote. But in 1905 women were denounced for violent revolution since opportunity to vote and get freedom had been delayed. In 1918, women beyond 30 years of age got the chance to vote.

In 1928 they got the chance as men did. But there were some problems about discrimination between men and women. According to an act of infectious disease, prostitutes couldn't practice without a license. According to an act of belonging women's property, real estates and honoring credits were inherited by the eldest son.

Khin Khin Su's reaction

Khin Khin Su loved to hear that facts from Ma Than Nu. So she invited her to travel with her family to Set Se, a beach town in southern Burma. On their way on train, Ma Than Nu explained about women in China.

Lecture 4: Women in China

Since China was the most populous country, every town's features and attitude were different. Some city was modern but some was outdated. In Nankin University, women were learning but in some towns women were oppressed. In olden days, women were treated respectfully in social dealing. Women also had to take responsibility for agriculture sector. In some Chinese tribes women and men were separated in order to fair communication. Every Chinese concerned to live together among all relatives and siblings of their ethnics. But men were more valuable than women since they could inherit parents. Men were taught administrative ideology at schools and women were taught basic knowledge at home by mothers. Some elite families were proud of having educated daughters by teaching them at home with private tutors. Seniors and both parents used to arrange everything for the wedding and bride and bridegroom were allowed to do nothing. Men could divorce with any reason but women didn't. Divorced women were also blamed.

If widowed women remarried, they were recognized as social rebels. So they didn't remarry and found some social associations. But men who got good income used to have more than one wife. In 1916-17, a law prohibiting remarriage of women and some social ethics had been eliminated legally and a new law recognized that having second wife was not appropriate. Now both son and daughter could inherit parents' properties. From 1919, at Beijing University women could study together with men. Women also took part in the 1919 student's strike and 1926-27 national revolution. Then women could be employed at state's departments and even in military.

Lecture 5: Women in Japan

After arriving in Moulmein by train, they took car to go to Set Se. On their way, Ma Than Nu explained about women in Japan.

In olden days in Japan, women got equal chance as men did in studying and social dealing. So there were many queens, educated women and women generals. When Japan prioritized military, women lost their chances. Married women had to follow traditional regulations of husband's family and relatives and if not, husband could divorce her. Women who didn't deliver son could also be divorced. The eldest son could inherit the parent's properties.

Married women had to do housework, to be responsible for children's education and for being good mother. Single women should pay respect to parents and married to husbands. Then men thought women as their own property. After 1868 social changes were occurred and women got a bit high standard. If women educated, living standard would be improved. Because of that concept, 5 Japanese women were sent to USA to learn about American women and their deeds. In 1978 report, women could follow their husbands to foreign countries.

When Russia-Japan war finished, men couldn't easily get job and kept single. So women worked as men did. But there were very few women at high schools and universities and women couldn't study together with men. After 1923 earthquake, women were noticed as alternative labor force for reconstructions. In 1928 women got chance to vote over the country. When civil law was changed, women got more chances.

Lecture 6: Women in India

After Thingyan festival in Set Se, they visited Kyikekhamee. There they met a mayor, Maung Maung Than's friend. He was an Indian who was born in Burma and so he could speak Burmese very well. He talked about women in India.

India has more than thousand tribes and every tribe believes different religion. Women were forced to marry before age of 15. In olden days women were freely living as men were. In Indian folktales women could marry their lovers and married women could not be accepted as men's own property. But in King Manu's law, women were restricted in many ways. They should have well behaved everywhere in order to keep the dignity of husband or father or brother. Any woman couldn't learn Astrology and refuse to be married at the court. In one traditional talk that the most suitable age when a woman should marry was 8 years old and some women had to marry at that age and got problems.

In Hinduism married women couldn't divorce. In olden days wife had to sacrifice her life (kill herself) when her husband died but now that tradition was no more popular. In 1700 King Akbar terminated that law and let widowed women to get second marriage. But Members of Parliament

kept that law. British Government had influenced to stop that law a lot and made an amendment of terminating that law in 1829.

When Islam came into Indian society, women had to be isolated at home. That concept was popular only among middle class people and not applied in poor community. When India had changed into an industrialized country like Britain, women became unemployed. But women took part more in agriculture and selling & buying. Some wanted to help women but women were prohibited to take part in mining and business trading. In 1917, when Indian Women Association requested for women's freedom, some districts decided that men and women were equal.

After that, Khin Khin Su and group went back to Set Se and spent about a month there. Then they traveled back to Moulmein and then to Yangon.

Khin Khin Su's Own Investigation: Women in Burma

Khin Khin Su was not satisfied with knowledge about women told by Maung Maung Than, Ma Than Nu and others. She wanted to know about Burmese women indeed and to talk back to them about it. She learned a lot by herself. Then she invited Maung Maung Than and Ma Than Nu and explained about Burmese women in detail.

Burmese women were never restricted in religion, public dealing and financing. Though Manu civic law, which was famous in India had come into Burma, no one followed this here. According to Buddhism, women were never prohibited from learning and getting good education. Wife had to be kind and loyal to husband but Buddhism never stop women to divorce their husbands. Though Buddha gave equal opportunity for both men and women, men were recognized as one who could be the potential Buddha, and women was relatively recognized inferior to men. So in some religious occasions and buildings, women were prohibited to participate or enter those areas.

In the British days, rich women didn't have to work and acted as dolls. That was the same here as in Egypt, Greece, Rome and England. Khin Khin Su concluded her talk that now as in those countries, standard of Burmese women were not very good and so Burmese women had to work together with men to have better Burma and show the world about their current status. Visitors applauded at the end of her talk. After a month, she married Maung Maung Than.

Comments

This book could be relied on since it was written by a Burmese academic woman. It showed detail of lives and standards of women around the world. It also included how women were first

oppressed in religious, political and social arena and then they worked hard to get equal opportunity like men. This book seemed to encourage women under British colony to take part in the independent movement as men do. In those days, most women were not graduated and even educated. So this book seemed to aim for supporting country's standard by promoting women's education.

In the forward by Deedoke U Ba Cho, a national martyr, said that he believed this book will help for promoting women's standard since only woman could know about women. So this book fulfilled the demand of the time it was published. And author seemed to notice that readers would be bored if it was in non-fiction style. So she used fiction style to grab audience's attention. And also she used many characters to tell about different women's lives. So she is a creative writer. Her book did not also neglect love story to tell more knowledge.

So this book was published in order to cope with the need of that era.

5. Andrea Fleschenberg, Book Comment on the Book Report by U Min Maw Thant on “Women” by Daw Mva Sein (translated by Dr Ma Thida)

The book report, although one can see the commitment of the author to redraw the general lines of this fiction, does not qualify as a book review ("Rezension") in its classical sense. The book report has severe linguistic insufficiencies such as the level of English in which it is written / translated: incomplete sentences, grammar mistakes, and problematic / simplified mode of expression. At times, it is difficult to grasp the ideas transmitted in the book report – but I cannot assess if it is due to the book report in Burmese or, partially, also due to the translation.

The report is structured into a summary of the book (5 pages) and a very short comment (less than half a page) which I consider inadequate. In particular for younger generations and the outside reader, it would have been interesting to learn from the author of the book report

- a comparative reflection on women in Burmese society at the writing of the book in the 1940s and today, e.g. with reference to similar, more current publications on women's role after half a century of post-colonial independence;
 - how the book narrative would translate into Burmese society at the turn of the 21st century or if it is still interesting reading to which contemporary readers, especially young women, can relate to.
- Furthermore, it would have been interesting to reflect on the topic of the book with regard to the author herself - Daw Mya Sein, an educationist and – not only for her time – exceptional woman politician who served Burma as first female member of the Rangoon Municipal Council and as delegate to important conferences and meetings such as to the League of Nations (predecessor of the UN), the Round Table Conference in London, the UNESCO - apart from her career in the national and international academia. Why did she write this story? What was her overall goal and how did she realise it in her book and with regard to the general reader and his/her receptiveness to these, for many, new ideas about women's empowerment? It is also not explained who is Ma Khin Phyu, the co-author, and what is her impact on the book.

The brief summary is not organised to facilitate understanding and is not a **review** of the book content, e.g. it lacks a small summary of the plot as introduction for the reader. Instead, the book report starts straight with the narrative as such without even introducing and explaining the major characters, the general topic and narrative lines as well as the structure of the book. It would be easier reading if the book report would follow a chapter-wise or narrative lines-wise approach and include some connector sentences between the different information given, e.g. between examples

of women's role indicated according to different countries' traditions and religions and narrative of Khin Khin Su's story.

Example: Some reflections on women in Burmese society

(...) When one travels through Burma, women's overall presence in public life, especially in the economic sector of everyday commodities, is striking in a country where society's life and fate remains exclusively dominated by male decision-makers.

"Traditionally political power was a male preserve and membership of the Buddhist monkhood an exclusively male privilege. Cultural concepts ensured official power gravitated to the male while Buddhist ideologies reaffirmed men's superior status in the hierarchy of rebirth. Despite this, women played critical roles in society, the economy and the household and in many areas enjoyed equality with men."¹

What gendered picture can we paint of Burma's current socio-political environment in quantitative terms (regardless of missing GDI and GEM indicators)? As official statistics are biased, contradictory or key data is missing – hence reliable data is scarce -, only trends of female participation and leadership posts can be outlined. Women participate in high numbers in different parts of the economy, with a female economic activity rate in the year 2002 of 65.8 per cent, although no specific sub-data of employment sectors and income ratio are on hand.² Women received the active voting right under British colonial rule in 1935, and the passive one in 1946, shortly before the country's independence, with women being elected straight into Burma's first democratic parliament in 1947.³

"Treat your son as a master and your husband as a god", a Burmese saying, points to the concept of male dominance which is embedded in two concepts: first, *hpon*, which refers to a man's superior status in Buddhist religion, hence is "enshrined in him, in his attaining the peak of being born as a human and male"⁴. Due to the religious concept that only men can become a Buddha, "a lot of men consider themselves of higher value and do not consider it necessary, to behave properly".⁵ Second, "the exercise of authority *awza* is a male prerogative, so that any social status endowed with authority is, by cultural ascription, a male monopoly".⁶ This monopoly goes down to the grass roots of societal

¹ Mills, Jane, Militarism, civil war and women's status: a Burma case study, in: Edwards and Roces (Eds.), *Women in Asia. Tradition, modernity, and globalisation*, Ann Arbor, pp. 265-290, p. 265.

² <http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/cty/>.

³ <http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/cty/>.

⁴ Mi Mi Khaing, *The world of Burmese women*, London 1984, p. 16.

⁵ Interview with a woman writer and journalist, conducted in Rangoon, March 2004.

⁶ Janell Mills, op. cit., p. 269.

⁷ Interview with a businessman, conducted in Rangoon, March 2004.

organisation, where the traditionally held position of village elders – an important post in a predominantly agrarian society, even under a firm military regime –, who are chosen by the community according to their wisdom, can only be occupied by men.⁷ (...) (AF)

Dr. Andrea Fleschenberg, Duisburg/Germany, 19th September 200

6. Ma Thanegi, "Woman" by Daw Mya Sein

The author Daw Mya Sein was a highly educated woman born into a wealthy and prestigious family of Mawlamyaing (Moulmein). Her father was Barrister U May Oung a Cambridge man, and both her elder brothers had won prestigious education awards. In her turn, Daw Mya Sein received a Masters Honours from Oxford in 1927.

After her return to Yangon, she was prominently active in women's issues and rights and was soon delegated to represent Myanmar Women at international conferences.

In "Woman" published in 1941, the opening scene of her main character Su Su seeking a job halfway through her college studies after her father passed away, in spite of her mother being independently wealthy, set the stage for the message she wanted to convey. This point was furthermore stressed on the second-last page of the novel, page 134, in this sentence: "The reason that others say that Myanmar women may seem to enjoy freedoms but actually do not, is because of the lifestyles of such women."

"Such women" are the high society butterflies belonging, if not to Daw Mya Sein's inner circle, at least to her class and society. Daw Mya Sein without doubt knew that Myanmar women had been active in trade all along, even taking administrative roles in the ancient kingdom of Bagan. However, as she noted on page 132, during the time of monarchy the daughters and wives of the wealthy or the nobility (at least those living in the royal capital) had to fulfil services at court. They were hired as tutors to the young princesses, as ladies in waiting, as handmaidens, or at least as traders to make regular visits to the queens with the latest materials or shawls for sale.

Although she did not comment on the increasingly westernised lifestyles during the time of writing this book, she disdained the leisurely life of the daughters of the wealthy upper class who did nothing but made themselves pretty, dressed well, played cards, dabbled in charitable religious works, visited each other and hoped for a good marriage. Arrangements of such unions were in the hands of mothers and aunts with discreet go-betweens from their own class, who usually angled to get an ICS son-in-law. The Indian Civil Service (ICS) was the elite cadre of top civil servants during the colonial period and few Burmese had an opportunity to sit for the ICS entrance examination. It is notable that the main character Su Su in "Woman" married someone who was only a tutor at college and who rode the bus.

It must have frustrated Daw Mya Sein deeply that her feminine peers although having the means and chances for higher education and independence, were only hoping for a good match: especially since she herself chose to remain single.

In this book she very briefly touched on the concept of Buddhism that only men can aspire to become a Buddha. As I understood it from another source of a religious nature, the reason was that to attain Enlightenment one would need to become a recluse for intensive bouts of meditation. The Buddha, it is said, realised the dangers a woman would face were she to live alone in a remote place and thus it came about to be accepted that only men could become Buddha.

Knowing that while talking about women's rights for equality she could not leave out the religious concepts, Daw Mya Sein commented upon this point with delicacy, saying that the concept was in place only so that men may strive harder to be more virtuous (Pg 130). She dealt in the same manner (i.e., to strive to be more virtuous) on the concept that women therefore must first be reborn as men to become Buddha. (Pg 131)

The rest of the 'novel' was about woman's issues all over the world. It was somewhat hard to keep track of which country she was talking about at times, she not being a professional writer, but on the whole it gave some good information, even if more positive than realistic, to the general reader. No doubt, the middle classed young women of the day who were increasingly becoming highly educated, would take heart from this book and be much influenced by its idea of independence. Many attended college to become famous writers, doctors, administrators and professors.

However, it is highly doubtful that the majority of society girls who seldom read anything more than romances and fashion magazines were even aware of this publication. Such young women continue to exist, although not in the numbers of the 1940s.

Things began to change in the post WWII years and even women with husbands earning well took up professions, if only for 'Gon' or prestige.

7. Mya Sein, Biographical Data¹

Daw Mya Sein; educationist. Born October 13, 1904 in Moulmein; daughter of U May Oung, M.A., LL.M. (Cantab), Barrister at Law and Daw Thein Mya, Diocesan Girls' High School and St. Mary's SPG High School, Rangoon; matriculated 1921; University of Rangoon B.A. (Hons.), 1925; St. Hugh's College, Oxford, M.A. (Hons.) 1927; Dip. Education, 1928; B.Litt., 1930; Superintendent, Daw Kyi Kyi National Girls' High School, 1930-31; Delegate to League of Nations, Switzerland 1931; Delegate to Round Table Conference London, 1931; Deputy Leader of Burma Goodwill Mission to China, 1940; Principal, Buddhist Girls' School, 1938 and 1946-48; elected Councillor, Rangoon Corporation and Chairman, Rangoon Education Board, 1940; Editor and Publisher of the World Pictorial, Burma; Director, Women's Civil Defence, 1940; Burmese Advisor, British Ministry of Information, New Delhi, 1942-45; Burma's delegate in the British Delegation to UNESCO 1946; Lecturer, Department of History, University of Rangoon, 1951-59; visited U.S.A., Smith-Mundt Leader Grant, 1954; History Teacher, Eothen School, Caterham, England, 1956; U Nu Lecturer in U.K. and U.S.A, 1956-58, retired from University service 1959, Visiting Professor of South East Asian Studies at Sweet Briar College, USA, 1960 Publication Administration of Burma Societies served as President, University Women's Association of Burma, also President of the Burma - America Association the Council of Women in Burma; University Teachers' Association; committee member, Rangoon Vigilance Society and International Buddhist Society; member, Burma Health Council, Burma Board of Film Censors, and member, Senate of the University of Rangoon. Married and divorced U Shwe Baw, L.C.S.; two children; one son and one daughter.

¹ *WHO'S WHO IN BURMA 1961*. Rangoon, People's Literature Committee and House:148-149

8. Speeches given by Mya Sein at the Burma Round Table Conference in London, November 1931-January 1932

The conference was to discuss a future constitution of Burma after the separation from British-India. The 24 participants from Burma represented the various ethnic groups living in the country. Mya Sein was included as the representative of the Burmese women. According to the proceedings of the conference, she spoke three times at the conference.

7.1 Speech on the first day of the conference, 27.11.1931¹

My Lord, on behalf of the women of Burma, whose representative I have the honour to be, I beg you to convey to His Gracious Majesty the King-Emperor our thanks for deputing His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, to pen the Burma Conference this day.²

His Royal Highness has already made, in some degree, the acquaintance of the people of Burma, and his visit to our country is a happy recollection. As has occurred everywhere on his extensive travels his personality there too dispelled doubts and inspired among all a confidence that they could look to the Crown for understanding and affection. Burma is far away, and has had little chance of frequent contact with the Royal Family but, by his speech to-day, His Royal Highness reassured us of his regard, and we can now enter upon the labours of this Conference with a sure hope that we are well started on the way towards that time, when Burma, mistress of her own affairs will look to the Crown as the direct link that binds her to the other members of the British Commonwealth.

That His Royal Highness has been gracious enough to find time among his pressing engagements to speak to us this morning, is deeply appreciated, and we would like to assure him that if he knew how much his coming has pleased us and our countrymen at home, he would not count his time ill-spent. I trust, my Lord, that you will lay these words before His Royal Highness.

7.2 Speech in the Plenary Session on December 2, 1931³

My Lord, as representative of the women of Burma, I desire to make a short statement about the position of Burmese women, mainly for the benefit of those members of the conference who have not been in Burma.

¹ Burma Round Table Conference, 27th November 1931 . 12th January 1932. Proceedings. Rangoon, Supdt., Govt. Printing and Stationary, Burma, p. 5. – Miss May Oung as she was called in the proceedings was the third speaker after the conference's chairman, Lord Peel and the Sawbwa of Hsipaw.

² The Prince of Wales had visited Burma in December 1921. The visit had been boycotted by the Burmese nationalists, but not by Mya Sein's father who was a member of the Governor's council.

³ Burma Round Table Conference. Proceedings: pp. 51-53

From times immemorial we women of Burma have held a high position in the social, economic and political life of our country. I do not desire to trace the cause of this that we hold in Burma, but I would like just to say that I think that we women in Burma enjoy this position, partly because we originally came from Tibet, where the matriarchal system exists, and because we in Burma, after leaving Tibet, have evolved a social life where the women do not rule entirely, but where we manage to have a perfect balance between the sexes.

In Burma we have always been treated as individuals, as members of the human race. We have our own rights and our own duties to perform. We contribute our own share to the general progress of the country. We do not desire to be made a special interest, nor do we wish to be classed with the children. In our social life we have perfect freedom, though it is not the same as the freedom enjoyed by the women in the West. We inherit equally with our brothers, and we have rights to our own property. Marriage in Burma is a civil contract, and I think that in no other country in the world do a man and his wife live [sic] in such equal partnership as in Burma. We work together, we hold property together, discuss every social interest together, as men and women. When the dissolution of marriage comes, again, we have the same conditions as in the dissolution of a contract.

History has shown us examples of women who have taken part as law-givers, as judges, as writers, as administrators, and as great philosophers. In the economic life of our country there is no sex discrimination. We take part in commercial and agricultural pursuits, and in the new professions that have been introduced after our contact with the West there is an open door for women. As we qualify ourselves so we are allowed to enter the professions.

In the political life we have both the active and the passive vote. We have the same suffrage as men, except in places where the suffrage is based on the capitation tax, which tax is paid by men only. We have co-operated with our men national movement, and we have suffered together with them. That is true of all the parties of Burma. We desire to have the same rights and to bear the same responsibilities as the men. Some of those rights already mentioned are given us by the Burman Buddhist law, and are enjoyed by the Burman Buddhist women. Since the contact with other countries we have had an influx of foreigners, consequently, as the Buddhist law offers no obstacle, we have numbers of mixed marriages. As a result of these, our women have lost their status as Burman Buddhist women, and have lost certain of their rights. We desire to have the rights of which I have spoken, not purely as Burman Buddhist women, but as women of Burma. We think we are entitled to the same rights as men, simply as women living in Burma, not as women who are

married to Burman Buddhists or are Burman Buddhists by birth, or with any such qualification.

Therefore to retain our self-respect, and the respect of other peoples, we wish to accept the same responsibilities and the same rights as the men, and the constitution that is to be framed will be acceptable to us only if it contains a clause giving equal rights to men and women.

7.3 Speech given on 8th January in the discussion on the report on a draft constitution¹

As representative of the women of Burma, my duty is to repeat again the women's demand to be recognised as individual members of the State and to be guaranteed that there shall be no discrimination against them. In days that have now gone by, whenever a woman rose to make any demand for her sex she usually caused merriment among the other sex. But, my Lord, I am very grateful to you and to the other members of this Conference for the way in which they have accepted the demand I put forward on behalf of the women of Burma. It has been agreed by the Committee that women shall have political rights, that is, they shall have the vote and be eligible for election in both Houses of the two Legislatures. But I think it is necessary to say that the suffrage alone cannot cure all evils. Women in many countries have discovered from experience that inequalities in other spheres are as unjust as dangerous to their self-expression and self-development as inequalities of the franchise. I would like to remind the members of the Conference that a nation of which a portion - may be a large portion - is denied equal treatment must necessarily be handicapped in its progress towards full development.

Men and women should meet on equal ground and rewards should be given by merit only, with no consideration of sex either way. The result aimed at should always be to get the best for the good of the country. Minorities and special interests have asked for equal rights and equal opportunities and it has been generally agreed that there should be no discrimination. We women claim that we are much more important than any minority. Whereas the minorities have to prove their existence and their claims, there can be no doubt that we women exist and that we are absolutely essential to the State. Unlike minorities again we do not desire special treatment. We want to accept the same responsibilities and to exercise the same rights as our men. The theory that women are incapable of taking their fair share of responsibility has, I think, long been proved erroneous. In Burma the women who have been given responsibilities in the home, in the wards, and in the villages, have justified their position and I desire to assert that the sense of responsibility does much to fit anyone for undertaking further responsibility.

¹ Ibid., pp. 204-206. - The draft had been worked out by a committee.

Another point to which I would like to refer is that the question of equal rights is a domestic affair. My Burmese brethren, I think, have agreed with me when I have stated that we women of Burma should have equal rights in all matters. Therefore I ask, again, that His Majesty's Government should be pleased to satisfy the women's demand and to insert in the Declaration of Rights in the Constituent Act a clause stating definitely that men and women shall have equal rights in Burma.

IV Additional Material

1. The “Upper Garments” Controversy

Translation: Ye Nyunt

Editor’s note: The following two texts were published in the Nagani News in October 1938. It is the only exchange of views of this kind found in all issues both in terms of content (a women’s issue) and form (letter to the editor and reply).

1.1 A Kyawt, The monks and the thin upper garments¹

Inya Hall

The University

Dear Akogyi Ko Htun Aye,

Why have you been so mute on the controversial subject of wearing thicker upper garments? Has Kogyi Nu been quiet because he thinks it is better to do so since he couldn't tell his wife Ma Ma Ye to wear thicker upper garments? And why hasn't the young author, Tet Phone Gyi, written about this? Is it because the young girl with the two-coil hairdo whom he has been wooing wears high heels and thin upper garments? Or has he been too busy trying to bring out a hundred thousand books about the Indo-Bamar conflict? Since you elder brothers have been keeping your views to yourselves, I, your younger sister Ma Kyawt, am frustrated. I had earlier had the mind to write what I thought of the matter but feared that I might be talking out of turn.

But now the young monks are trying to force women from wearing thin upper garments and the newspapers have been writing so and so about this that I can no longer hold myself back and have put my pen to paper.

Let me, Ma Kyawt, first say what the young monks have done. Members of the Buddhist Order, young or old, know very little of our mentality and nature. Whether it was the Taung Hpi Lar Sayadaw or the Mehn Lel Sayadaw who wrote them, the written articles on women were one-sided and belittled the womenfolk; there were very few correct statements. What's more, their intention was to instigate hatred towards women and therefore they wouldn't gather all the facts but would only take the worst and the most despicable samples out of the myriads of women that have existed in this world and write about these women, time and time again and in detail. It's like mud-slinging by politicians. Therefore it cannot be said that monks could correctly judge women; they would either look down too much (like the Mehn Lel Sayadaw and others) or did not get to meet many

¹ Nagani News vol. I, 7: pp.37-39.

women and think very highly of the few that they had met (just look at the poems about women written by monks).

What I want to say is that the monks have been telling the women to wear thick upper garments and to refrain from wearing thin ones, without knowing the nature of the women and that is really, really irrelevant.

Good looks are the assets of women just as knowledge and skills are the assets of men; this has been true from the very beginning of this world and is still true now. It will be true in the future too. Good looks are what every woman wants most. To be beautiful is the burning desire of all women. They want to be less ugly if they are ugly; they want not to be ugly if they are a little ugly; if they are not ugly they want to be beautiful; if they are quite beautiful, they want to be more beautiful; if they are more beautiful they want to be the most beautiful; this is the law of nature. They would think of various ways to be beautiful and wear all sorts of dresses to be beautiful. They wear thin upper garments because they think these make them beautiful; they feel at ease and are comfortable wearing them. They are not wearing them so that their breasts would be conspicuous and arouse the men as the monks say. If the women should want to show their breasts, why would we be binding them up so tightly?

It's so obvious that they want to be beautiful; you need only look at the way they buy chemises and bodices with floral designs and how they would have their dresses in a variety of colours. If they are beautiful in thick upper garments they will wear them. Don't you worry; just make the upper garments beautiful and the women will wear them. They are wearing upper garments made of fawn coloured cotton for no other reason than the fact that they are quite beautiful. The garments have become quite attractive. They think it is fashionable to wear fawn coloured cotton. Therefore, I, Ma Kyawt, will foretell this- so long as the fawn coloured cotton garments come out in beautiful new designs, women will wear them; otherwise they won't.

Therefore I want the elder brothers who are to build the nation to take note of the fact that if you want to make reforms you must consider what you want to do and who it would affect; it should be appropriate and relevant. The reform will succeed if it is appropriate and relevant. For instance, Akogyi (elder brother), if the poor do not have the nationalistic spirit, and are ignorant, and if you want them to have the nationalistic spirit, you have to tell them why they are poor, you have to tell them and let them know that if they have the nationalistic spirit it would be easier for them to become rich and they will have the nationalistic spirit.

There is another thing that journalists write. That it is licentious the way the garments are worn. It is very strong language because it's saying that the women are unrestrained and wanton. A woman who wants to be wild and wanton will do so whether she wears a thin upper garment or not. A purdah woman could be wanton, just as the woman wearing the dark brown colour clothes like the one who practises religious meditation, couldn't she? I beg you not to make pretentious remarks and persecute us.

And the point is not that of wearing thick upper garments. It should be the wearing of clothes made from locally produced textiles. At the moment it is only a stop-gap measure of making clothes from imported cloth and getting only the fees for services rendered. We should not forget that everything needs to be made locally (by Bamar).

Therefore, to summarize, A Kyawt would like to give the opinion:

(1)The upper garment, whether thick or thin, has to be made of locally produced textile.

(2)In order that the women should like and wear them in the long run, attempts should be made that the cloth is thin and beautiful. Only then would they endure like a coal fire and not the usual hay fire of the Wun Tha Nu.

I shall stop now. With this letter, I bid farewell to Akogyi Ko Aung San who left school.

A Kyawt

11.10.38

(I shall reply A Kyawt's letter at this place next month because it is late to do so this month. Please wait.

The Editor)

1.2 The monks and the thin upper garments (response)¹

To Amagyi Ma Ma Kyawt,

I respectfully write to you. I happened to read your article 'the monks and the thin upper garments'. The objective of the article would be summarized as: 'wearing thin upper garments should not be restrained'.

¹ Nagani News vol I, 8: pp 13. 22-23 (the numeration of pages in this issue is not quite clear).

When U Thein Pe wrote 'Tet Phone Gyi' he had no intention of wearing out the reputation of the monks; he only wanted their reputation to grow and be better. But the monks felt it unbearably painful and retaliated by writing the novel 'the monk's brother-in-law'.

When U Marga wrote the novel 'Sadaw Laung', they did not feel bad about it. It was because the admonition was written in a fair, balanced way. Both authors had good attitudes and they differed only in one being persuasive and the other being a little rigid.

The 'Master of Our Gratitude', Mehn Lel Sayadaw knew that lust was most important and bad and wanted to admonish young men; only if they hate women would they be free from that danger and so he wrote that women were bad. But then he had also written a little about the goodness of the women. The Sayadaw's objective was to have many good men, to be quickly emancipated from Samsara and to close the way to the four nether worlds. The intention was good but the women felt it unbearably painful.

When a poor man once saw an image of the Buddha in the sun, he donated an umbrella to lessen the heat of the sun. Another poor man who saw the image of the Buddha and the worn umbrella, he saw that it was improper and removed the umbrella. The attitudes of both men were good and both got merits for their acts. Similarly, Ma Ma Kyawt and the monks might have different objectives but the attitudes were good.

I understand that Ma Ma Kyawt in essence means that since good looks are assets of women there should be no objection to women wearing what is in keeping with the times. It is true that good looks are assets for women but then you know the saying that mentions good looks alone without merit is useless. How could a girl be good if she has good looks but no mettle? Therefore I would like to remind Ma Ma Kyawt that mettle is more important than good looks.

At this moment there is a profusion of literary works that encourage lust. There are many who only talk; it is the age with a lot of literature that is all talk; the age of lust arousal and the age of retrogression. During such a period I would like Ma Ma Kyawt to consider whether women wearing thin materials encourage the lust of men. Women want to be more beautiful than the other or want to be praised by men. It boils down to the fact that they want to look beautiful because they want to be courted by the men. From the very beginning of the existence of the earth, the two elements have been incompatible and I do not want to blame them. The attire should conform to the era, the time, the condition, the country and the race.

Ma Ma Kyawt will know that beauty is not without its faults. The exceptionally beautiful Ohmar Dante was guilty of making a fool of King Sivi. The beautiful one was guilty of being conceited and putting the one striving to attain Buddhahood in mental despair. Athinka, borne from a lotus bud, was guilty of letting Brahmadat neglect state affairs for three years. It was found that many beautiful people like Veluvadi, Saw Boh Mel, Yarza Datu Kahlyar, had brought much danger to many and were not guiltless. Lawka Niti Saya had said that a ripe fig is beautiful on the outside but full of maggots in the interior. You should take these into consideration and judge the value of beauty.

Those who made history as being beautiful during the time of our kings were not well known because they wore thin upper garments. I haven't read poets had composed that their beauty was due to the wearing of thin garments. So, I know that thin upper garments couldn't make one look beautiful. You will come to appreciate how attractive the fawn coloured cotton upper garment and Yaw nether garment can be if you wear them. Your article essentially stated that wearing thin upper garments could not make the morale of the men become abnormal. It may be true in Western countries but I cannot say so for the Orient. You should consider the instance where revealing the flesh (of the woman) had led to the loss of supernatural powers of the one striving to attain Buddhahood. Suppose wearing thin upper garments doesn't arouse lustful thoughts; won't journals of the times that encourage lust arouse the mind that has been calm?

Everyone is at liberty; but if that liberty were to annoy another it would become a license. Similarly, it's quite all right for one to wear thin garments if it doesn't affect another person; but it wouldn't be if it were to adversely affect the other. Since you, Ma Ma, are a scholar, I would like you to think about it.

Men do not hold the view that wearing thin upper garments is licentious; if women were to think so, one could only say that it was their conscience.

The task of the monks is to encourage the people to use domestic products. They don't want people using imported, thick textiles. Their main objective was for the people to rally around the nationals. It has nothing to do with the thin upper garments. The idea of boycotting the import of foreign textiles, especially thin ones, was to lessen the amount of money leaving the country. What I earnestly want to request isn't to refrain from wearing thin upper garments but to help fellow nationals. Whatever you do, it is your goodwill that is most important. Therefore I would like to ask

you not to look at what had been done, but, as The Virtuous Lord Buddha had taught us, at the good intention that lead to it.

Ma Ma wrote to U Htun Aye and the other patriots asking for an answer but I could not hold back from interrupting. I beg your pardon.

May Burma gain independence soon!

Sein Hlaing

17.10.38

(As soon as the article 'the monk and the thin upper garment' by the student A Kyawt of Inya Hall appeared in the October issue, there has been a lot of correspondence coming in to us. Out of the many that reached us, only the above one was printed. The others were not published from lack of space and for fear that it would be blown out of all proportion and would not end. We hope the readers who had sent in articles would not mind about it.

In future, articles relating to the matter of the thin upper garment will not be published; we are ready to publish any other unrelated article.

We had our intention in publishing this article. The article responding to the one by an educated lady student of Inya Hall was by a male student, Ko Sein Hlaing. The correspondence was between students and we wanted the patriots carrying out the tasks and those straining their ears to hear about this piece of news to (get to) know the opinions of the youth.

The article and the rebuttal were written by students. We hope the readers would thoroughly read them and correctly criticise them.

(The Editor)

2. Khin Myo Chit, The Burmese Women Problem

Editors's note: The following two texts are part of book reports on a collection of articles published in late 1940 by Nagani under the title "This and That". Khin Myo Chit (1915-1999) is a renowned Burmese writer who actively participated in the independence movement in the late 30s and early 40s.

2.1 Review of Maung Yoe (Translation: Ye Nyunt)

It was affected on the nation & Burma which was under imperial British rule and the country's situation under British boots. The title of the article spotlighted to the political system and the age at that time.

But Burmese Women were different from the women of the other world and were liberated before already.

Since the country had been under the British colonialism, most of the Burmese women were illiterate. They were uneducated women. And they had no up-dated views on politics. This was the obstacles of the independence struggling. Although the educated were credited certificate holders, they were weak in participating in their mother country's struggling for freedom.

So most of the Burmese women were jobless for their living. The minds of poor Burmese women as well as rich women were loosened because of the bad politics. They were spoilt for having money. Those who had no money were spoilt by the bad political ways. This was the great problem among the Burmese women. So this book show the real inside story of Burma that lost its sovereign power and gave some advice for the country.

3.2 Review of Shwe Pyi Soe (Translation: Aung Min Htut)

Khin Myo Chit's 'The Problems of the Women of Burma' had much effect on the nationals and the times and the system of Burma which had unavoidably fallen under unjust British rule. The style in which the heading was given highlighted the times and the system, and she persuaded the readers to strive for independence with a sense of nationalism.

In the essay it was stated that Burmese women did not have to particularly demand their rights like women in various other parts of the world because they were not being oppressed or suppressed in the first place. But it did mention that there were few educated women in Burma because the country was colonized. There were few women who had enlightened views and knowledge. That was one of the difficulties in the struggle for independence.

The minority of women had degrees, distinctions and high government appointments but few took part in the struggle for independence and this too was one of the difficulties. The majority of Burmese women had little knowledge and education and faced scarce employment opportunities. Evil legacy of colonialism ruined the moral character of the women. The ill effect involved not only the lower class poor women but also some from the upper class. Lack of money ruined some women; and money ruined some others. This problem could not be solved. That was the problem of the capitalist era in colonized Burma. The essay really had an effect on the times and system of Burma which had lost its independence and sovereignty.

3. The Bhikkhuni controversy

3.1 Reference to a book by Ashin Adiccavamsa¹

Translation: Ye Nyunt

The Bikkhuni Rebellion, Ashin Adiccavamsa

Price: 1 kyat 8 annas for Nagani book club members: 12 annas

Ashin Adiccavamsa is bound to make history; only posterity will decide whether or not to see him in a favourable light. He is known for his exceptional diligence. He is regarded to be a learned person with vast knowledge. He has become well known for writing a book on the principles and codes of conduct for Bhuddist nuns- 'the Bhikkhuni Sasana Padesa Kyan 'and wearing his heart on his sleeve.

We are not knowledgeable in religious matters and therefore dare not pass judgement as to whether Ashin Adiccavamsa is right or wrong but we do know that he is well-informed on many subjects and thoroughly knows Bhuddist literary works; and consequently we read with reverence his written opinions.

Those who would like to work for the good of the religion should read this book with reverence. The opinions and views from both sides are included and the readers have the opportunity to use their intellect and to ponder and have comprehensive discussions.

¹ Nagani News vol I, 7: p.11.

3.2 Shwe Oak Oar, Biography of Ashin Ardessa Wuntha aka U Aung Myat Htut¹

Translation: Aung Min Htut

The Myanmar composer scholar Ashin Ardessa Wuntha was born on the 11th waning month of Nayon, Myanmar era 1244, at dawn on a Sunday (4 years after King Thibaw ascended the throne). The father was the indigenous medicine practitioner U Lar and the mother was Daw Ok. He was the only son. His native birth place was Pinsu village, a furlong southeast of Myohla town, in Yamethin township.

The future monk first attended school at 5 years at the head monastery in Pinsu village. There were more than a hundred students. The head abbot was his very uncle, the venerable monk Ashin Wilatha, holder of the title, *Dhamma Rakhita Maha Wibingadara*, the combined head of the southern 3 sects of Yamethin town, Shwegu, Yan Aung and Zaung Chan. His deputy in teaching was Ashin Arsara and the presiding abbot for administration of the monastery was Ashin Sandawbartha, the brother of Ashin Arsara. Ashin Sandawbartha was the abbot venerated and patronized by King Thibaw's head queen. Ashin Arsara and Ashin Sandawbartha were nephews of the chief abbot, the administrator of the 3 sects.

Ashin Ardessa Wuntha was personally taught the primary Myanmar alphabets with difficulty by the 3-sect administrator, the chief abbot himself, and he could read and recite the Myanmar primer in 12 days. The future Ashin Ardessa was not a brilliant student but he was very diligent. At the age of eleven, he had memorized *the Mingalar Sutta* with its Pali meanings, *the External Victory* and *the Internal Victory*, *Nametakara* and *Yadanar Shwe Chaink* with their Pali meanings and could recite 8 Pali-based grammar declensions and 9 compendia of the *Suttas*.

In addition, regarding the Myanmar language, he could recite from memory, the *belle letters* of U Ponnya, the *Wizaya play*, and 11 plays popular at that time. He also memorized the astrological curriculum and could make calculations on astrological charts. As knowledge, he had read *Okparthandi* with its Pali meanings, the ten *Jataka* stories, the *550 tales*, *Manikondala* and *Zinathapakartani*. From 11 to 14 years, he rapidly progressed in his studies and the 3-sect head abbot praised him and pronounced that he would one day become famous. At 14 years of age, he joined the monkhood as a novitiate and given the name 'Ardessa Wuntha' as he was Sunday born. Soon after his initiation, the 3-sect governing abbot expired.

After the expiry of the 3-sect head abbot, he accompanied his uncle the monk Ashin Kaweinda to Mandalay and spent 1 year at Peipin school in the Payagyi monastery. At 16 years of age, he learned mathematics at Htaukkyant Chin Monastery in Yamethin town. Then he learned the three repositories of Buddhist scriptures under the Waizayan abbot at Pyawbwe town. It was not up to his expectations and he learned with much difficulty *Dikarkyaw*, *Kinkhar*, *the 4 Minor Codes of Conduct* and *the dictionary* under Ashin Wilatha, the Laytar abbot, nephew of the Waizayan abbot.

In 1263, 13th waxing day of Natdaw, at nine hours, he entered monkhood surrounded by 50 monks under the guidance and mentorship of Waizayan abbot at the ordination hall of Oh Gone monastery in Pyawbwe. His title was the same 'Ashin Ardessa Wuntha' as it was in his novitiate days. The sponsors of his monkhood were dual, his parents, U lar the father and Daw Ok the mother, and the merchants U Kyar khine and Daw Pya. After two years of monkhood, he went up to Mandalay and roamed about the four quarters of Mandalay as well as the nearby environs, Amarapura, Shwe Kyetyet and Sagaing, wasting his time. Whenever this subject was mentioned, Ashin Ardessa himself would admonish his followers citing his useless wanderings as a lesson of life.

¹ Source: Shwe Oak Oar, *Myanma Sarsotomya* (Myanmar Authors). Sabie Oo Publishing House, December 2001.

At attainment of 3 years of monkhood, with the help from Ashin Withawda, the expounder abbot on the Buddha's discourses, he stayed about 8 months at Peibin monastery in Myinthe district in Ava prefecture and learnt the repositories of Buddhist scriptures. He could memorize, give meanings from Pali and recite the 8 grammar declensions, the 9 compendia, Pali verse, prosody, the lexicon, punctuation, grammar, the 40 methods, *Thanwunna Nar*, *BeidaSeintar*, *Kitsaryanathara*, tables of content, chemistry, and Buddhist miracles. These were the curricula from the *Thakya Thiha Association* of Mandalay. He was proficient in *Parazika Ahtakahtar*, *Ahtathalini Ahtakahtar*, *Thi letkhanahtha Ahtakahtar* and basic rites and was adept at the 5 codes of conduct. After studying at Ariyar Wuntha nook on the Sagaing hills for 3 months, he left for Pakokku to continue his studies. After enquiries were made about the teaching of Buddhist repositories at Pakokku Maha Withuta Yama monastery, he found it not to his liking and continued his journey to Nyaungdon.

At Shwe Hintha Tawya monastery at Nyaungdon, he studied for nearly one year Buddhist scriptures under Ashin Nyaneindartaba, the abbot who had written the treatise 'Dikarkyaw Yawzanar', and also a teacher of foreign languages, astrology, Sankrit, numerology and English. At that time, he was 24 years of age and 5 years in monkhood. Under that abbot, he learned about Buddhist scriptures and the Sankrit language. For sundry reasons, he did not learn English. At that time, English was regarded as a heretical subject. While studying Sankrit under Ashin Nyaneindartaba, at the same time, he was the abbot teaching Buddhist scriptures to the students.

At that time, at Shwe Hintha Tawya monastery, there were such other teaching abbots as Ashin Dhammaw Daya, the abbot of Nandawun Monastery in Yangon, MannOo abbot U Zawta from Shwe Kyin monastery of Bahan Kyaungtawyar, and Ashin Nyanneinda, the numerology professor abbot from Pantalé monastery in Pyuntaza. While he was teaching his students, Ashin Ardessa was writing articles on religion in the Hanthawaddy Daily newspaper.

The gifted writers at that time at the Hanthawaddy Daily were Education Inspector U Po Sa, U Tong Chun, Education administrator U Tun Linn, U Okkalapa, the *Nat Monk* and U Nat Tha. The articles they wrote are concerned with religion, with difficult issues from the *Ahta Kahtar Dikar*, their mode of writing being as discussions based on Dharma giving logical reasons as well as references from Pali texts. Their writings were aesthetic literature on dharma feelings on love and passion, humour and inspirational literature on heroism and were very popular at that time. The pseudonyms they used were as follows.

Ashin Ardessa Wuntha was Education Inspector U Po Sa,

The abbot Nyanneinda was U Tong Chun, and

MannOo Abbot U Zawta was Education administrator U Tun Linn. All three writers were from Shwe Hintha Tawya monastery. The others were-

U Okkalapa

Natyekan (Celestial Lake), and

U Nat Tha. These three were from Yangon. The writer U Nat Tha was the pseudonym of the abbot 'U Nat Tha', none other than the one who wrote the treatise '*Athithondara*' and who defended and wrote in favour of the Venerable Lédi Sayadaw's treatise '*Paramatha Dipanikargyi*'.

Ashin Ardessa attained 5 years of monkhood understudying at Ashin Nyaneindartaba's and produced the treatise '*Parda Theikkhar Nayu Padetha*'. It never materialized into a book. It was only printed after the Ashin Ardessa Wuntha monastery was built. It was used as the primary First Class prescribed book for teaching at that monastery.

Ashin Ardesa, together with Ashin Nyaneindartaba, traveled from Nyaungdon to Twanté and spent one Buddhist lentern year teaching at the New Monastery of Ashin Narga Mahté, the writer of the treatise ‘*Kitsaryana Thankhépa*’. While teaching there, he wrote in Pali ‘*Kitsaryana Thingaha*’. It was believed that he wrote it in emulation of the Twanté Sayadaw Ashin Narga Mahté’s ‘*Kitsaryana Thankhépa*’.

From Twanté, he traveled to Mawlamyine, at the behest and good offices of Ashin Kaythu, the Yadanar Bonpyan Sayadaw, the ‘*Agga Maha Pandita*’ award holder who was the first in the country to become ‘the first Pahtamakyaw’. At that monastery, he gave courses as lecturer of Buddhist scriptures as well as studied the disciplines. After spending one year there, he went to Taungngu to the *Pihta Kattayar Yama* monastery of the head abbot Ashin Kawthala Mahté and spent three months there studying the scriptures. He returned to his native place as his mother was unwell. While studying under his mentor the abbot in Pyawbwé, his mother the benefactress died. At that time, his monkhood was in his eighth year.

After his mother died, in order to search for a mentor teacher who would be suitable to his perceptions, he traveled by train from Pyawbwé to lower Myanmar. And again for the same reason, he traveled back to upper Myanmar to continue his search. At long last, at Katha district, at Manlé town, he came to study under the nationally renowned Venerable Manlé Sayadaw. Thence, he went to Mandalay, under the Head Abbot of Masoyein Monastery, the Agga Maha Pandita title holder, Ashin Thawmarbi Thiri Mahahté, and stayed there for 5 years from his ninth to the thirteenth lentern years and taught the three repositories on the Buddhist faith. Whilst there, he wrote in Pali ‘*Padat Thingaha Pat*’. About that treatise, the Venerable Lédi Sayadaw extolled:-

“I have read thoroughly, from start to finish, Ashin Ardesa’s treatise ‘*Pali Nayu Padetha*’ also known as ‘*Padat Thingaha Pat*’. The subject is well written and it can of invaluable service to our students. The techniques mentioned in the tome also conform exactly with the methods stipulated in our Lédi sect. This treatise *Padat Thingaha Pat* is meant for the Lédi sect.”

Thus, the Venerable Sayadaw admonished his followers and heaped praises on the book.

Ashin Adessa then traveled from Mandalay to Mawlamyine, and at the urging of Yadanar Bonpyan Sayadaw Ashin Kaytu and yielding to the appeals of his fellow monks, he wrote ‘*Mileinda Pinnyar Palidaw Shastra*’ at that monastery. He completed it in 1277, the 11th waning day of Pyartho, and the printing year was that year at 5th waning day of Tabaung. At that time, Ashin Ardesa Wuntha had achieved 14 years of monkhood. While in Mawlamyine, he wrote ‘*Pada Thingaha Pat*’, ‘*Mileinda Pinnyar Palidaw Shastra*’ and ‘*Pada Thingaha Shastra*’. He wrote *Pada Thingaha Shastra* in the year 1278 and published it as a book in 1279.

Ashin Ardesa Wuntha traveled from Mawlamyine to Yangon in 1279 in the month of Waso. As the Buddhist lent was very near and there were 50 monks following him, they had difficulty in obtaining lodgings. The abbot of Athiti monastery, Pazundaung, Ashin Paduma, invited them to spend the lent in his compound as a temporary measure. After staying there for a week, with the permission of Sir Po Thar, the brokers U Yay Htein and U Po Hlaing requested him to stay at the old Taung Lone Pyan cemetery. In 1279, they set up the ‘Shin Ardesa Wuntha Monastery’. After the establishment, they became renowned for their teaching of repositories of Buddhist scriptures. The number of students immediately increased. In the government instituted Pahtamar Pyan exams, they became famous for their high success rate. In 1280, a year after the establishment, the monk ‘Ashin Tayhtila’ captured the first prize at the Pahtamar Pyan exams. That monk is now the old and venerable Ashin Tayhtila, holder of the titles ‘*Agga Maha Pandita*’ and ‘*Abidaza*’.

Maha Rahta Guru ', Abidaza Agga Maha Thatdharma Zawtika, recipient of the International Buddhist Missionaries medal of honour.

In 1280, when he had attained 17 years of monkhood, Ashin Ardessa Wuntha left for India to study foreign languages like English. From there, he crossed over to Ceylon (Shri Lanka). Finding that it was not up to his expectations, he went back to India and continued his studies of foreign languages. During that time, he wrote the treatise 'Yadanar Kyaut Kyan'. While studying English, Hindi, Bengali and Urdu in India, he went to England according to instructions from his English teachers. He wrote the treatise 'The Mirror of Faith' on the boat to England. He wrote it in 10 days. He left India at 8 pm on December 28, 1928 and reached England on January 8, 1929. The trip took him 12 days.

While he was pursuing his studies in London, he wrote of his many difficulties in 'Ardessa Wuntha Htéyar Padan', his own autobiography. This book can be called the first and the most courageous literature on autobiographies by Myanmar nationals. He revised his knowledge of Sanskrit on his sojourns in India, Ceylon and England. He also learnt English, Hindi, Bengali, Urdu, Rukhumukhi and Japanese successfully. He stayed 9 years in India, Ceylon and England, diligently studying, through difficult circumstances, various foreign languages and general knowledge. In 1938, he left England for good, visited France and Italy, and returned to Yangon.

In the year 1293, he translated into Myanmar the stone inscriptions of Emperor Asoka and published it as 'Myanmar Translation of the Asoka Stone Inscriptions'. This landed him a prize of Kyats 1000 from the Crown Prince, the Prince of Wales awards, granted by the Rangoon University Senate.

In order to revive the mission of Beikhuni's (Buddhist nuns), Ashin Ardessa Wuntha, in 1295, produced the tome '*Beikhuni Sasanaw Padeta*' treatise and published it in 1296. There were many objections from monks as well as lay people. They especially objected to the words on pages 24 and 26. Ashin Ardessa Wuntha invited them to discuss the issue with him, but they refused and started proceedings of 'Pakar Thaniya Kan' (Sin of Ostentation) against him. As a result, he completed and distributed 'Treatise on the Beikhuni Campaign' within 90 hours in 1297. He also published 'The True five parts of Buddhist Sutta Pitaka'.

Proceedings against Ashin Ardessa Wuntha for the sin of ostentation/preensions in his treatise '*Beikhuni Sasanaw Padeta*' were instigated for the following words on page 24 –

“ Our Lord Buddha, who appeared in this world to benefit humankind definitely, was not able to do so for all mankind to the satisfaction of their well-being. He has castigated and denounced some, laden them with *adharma* (non-faith) and cast them into hell. He could only achieve to help some to be joyful and accept the lawful *Dharma* to their satisfaction and send them forwards to the abode of celestial beings and the *brahma*'s.”

In addition, on page 26 were –

“ However, some activities I am capable of – If a certain learned man can provide proof to us, in accordance with the *dharma*, his belief and faith, and extinguishing the faith we have in us, then I am ready to accept his true faith. At present, we cannot truly affirm Buddhism as the true faith; with doubts, we are still searching for the true faith, our minds in turmoil. In the same way, if we can study and research other faiths in this catastrophic world, but because we still cannot abolish Buddhism, we still persist in the devotion to its tenets. Regarding this fact, we are prepared to follow and become disciples to anyone who can demonstrate to us the true faith and *dharma*.”

In 1297, on the 12th waxing day of the month of Tawtalin, on a Sunday, Ashin Ardessa Wuntha was arraigned with the sin of ostentation and brazenness (*Pakar Thaniya Kan*) at Jubilee Hall (now Armed Forces War Museum) in Yangon. There were 18 to 24 learned head abbots from the monasteries, a half dozen of lay scholars and 23 patrons of the faith who had organized the occasion. About 5000 people attended and it shook the Buddhist world.

In organizing the *Pakar Thaniya Kan*, some denounced Ashin Ardessa Wuntha in articles and poems written to the daily newspapers. Some of those poems from the newspapers were –

“ Was he deliberately destroying (our faith) ?
We fear so that goose pimples appear
O! The English teacher ‘Ashin Ardess’¹
Aw! To summarize (his view)
The Buddhist faith, you can’t be definitely sure of!

Thus, four-stanzaed verses were written against him. Ashin Ardessa Wuntha the abbot countered by writing poems and sent them to the press. One person to whom he retorted was ‘Lédi U Kawida’. He was later to become known as ‘Popa U Kyaw Yin’. The two-stanzaed poem that Ashin Ardessa Wuntha sent was –

“The country renowned Léditaw ‘Ko Pundit’² and his colleagues I haven’t taken notice of.

‘Shin Kawwess’³, Anger of ignorance has entered his mind, ill-considered today’s words, with no reason at all ! ”.

Those were the kind of poems he countered back. There were many accusations flying back and forth, but I have written what I have remembered.

After Ashin Ardessa Wuntha Sayadaw wrote the great treatise *Milihta Pinnyar Palitaw Shastra*, he was awarded the title Agga Maha Pandita, once at his 14th monkhood year, and again in 1294, at his 30th monkhood year. He refused it both times. He did not desire to embellish himself with awards from the authorities or become friendly with them.

After writing more than 400 treatises in his life time, in 1304 at 5 pm on the 14th waning day of Wagaung, the Sayadaw Ashin Ardessa Wuntha gathered all his disciples and monks. Being wartime, only 32 monks could attend. The abbot spoke of things in the past and after admonishing them, said, “ I am now 60 years old. I am no longer happy within the bounds of the faith. I shall discard the garb of faith and become a lay person again. I shall relegate and transfer all my authorities to Sayadaw Eithariya as the Overall Head of all our monasteries and Sayadaw Ashin Pinnyar Zawta as the Deputy Head. ” He read out this statement and gave it to the responsible persons. Within 40 days, in 1314 on the 14th waning day of Wagaung, he discarded his monk robes and donned the clothes of a lay man and followed his patron to live at Bayathudi street in Kyauk Myaung ward. His undonning of his monk’s robes was a clean act without any blemish whatsoever on his name.

Ashin Ardessa Wuntha wrote many treatises. To list some which I can remember –

1. Mileinda Pinnyar Palitaw Shastra Treatise
2. Parda Theikkhar Nayu Padéta Treatise

¹ Monk’s name anglicized

² Mr. Learned

³ Monk’s name anglicized

3. Kitsayana Thankhépa Treatise
4. Kitsayana Thinga Pat (in Pali)
5. Pada Thingaha Pat (in Pali)
6. Pada Thingaha Shastra
7. The Mirror of Religion
8. Ardessa Wuntha Htayyar Padang
9. Myanmar Translation of the Asoka Stone Inscriptions
10. The Mirror of Poetry
11. Beikhuni Sasanaw Padéta Treatise
12. Treatise on the Beikhuni Campaign
13. Yadanar Kyaut Treatise

He wrote more than 400 treatises.

After he had become a lay person, the Venerable Abbot Ashin Ardessa Wuntha Maha Hte took up the pseudonym 'U Aung Myat' and gave discourses on literature. He was elected President of Myanmar Writers' Association. 9 to 10 years after leaving monkhood and donning the lay garb, in the year 1313, on the 14th waning day of Wagaung, the Christian era 1950, August 21st, he died of old age at 70 years of age.

References:

1. The Biography of Ashin Wuntha.
2. Extracts from Discourses of Ashin Thila Wuntha the Head Tutor and Abbot, the Intimate Disciple of the Venerable Abbot U Kaytu, Agga Maha Pandita, the First ever Winner of Pahtamar Kyaw Exams.

3.3 Saccavadi Bricker, Buddhist Discrimination against Women in Modern Burma¹

The article below entitled 'Buddhist Discrimination against Women in Modern Burma (Myanmar)' is one of the articles of the book titled 'A Journey of Buddhist Wisdom' written by Saccavadi Bricker, edited by Dipa Samaneri.

I present this information based on my experience while living as a female Burmese Buddhist mendicant (nun/silashin/thilashin) for twenty-two years from 1986 to 2008 in the Theravada tradition. I awoke from the darkness of delusion and ignorance after I was thrown into Insein prison in the capital city of Rangoon, Burma, having been arrested for being ordained as a female Buddhist monk. I ordained as a Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka in 2003. Upon my return to Burma in 2005 to visit my dying father I was detained in the prison for seventy-six days from May 27 to August 10. My release was based on my willingness to apologize for ordaining as a female monk. After my formal apology I was released from the prison and taken directly to Yangon airport and sent back to Sri Lanka.

It took me over two decades to realize the common sense called Buddhist wisdom. At the age of forty-three I now see and understand the world and nature, life and death, religion and politics. It took me a few more years to have the clarity to know that the information I present here, would be useful for a history of Buddhist female monks.

Even though going to prison was difficult, I knew Burmese Buddhists need to see female monks to realize that Buddhism is a religion which at least shows equal rights and equal opportunities. Coming out of prison it was a good feeling after all, religion doesn't bother me anymore. I realized religion is man-made, wise people make religion useful in life, but ignorant people make it dangerous. I shall not give anybody another chance to abuse me for the sake of religious beliefs. I shall enjoy my life appreciating the good qualities of every religion and die knowing no one has the right to abuse or punish anyone by making themselves the owner/judge of a religion.

I realize that Buddhism, a religion and practice of transforming oneself with love, compassion, and wisdom, and the Buddha, an ideal description of man enjoying life without harming oneself or others, could not help me with the people who had the authority to throw me into the prison. I came to learn that these monks also did not really believe Buddhism is all about the practice of love, compassion, and wisdom, even though they said so. Who were they? They were mainly the State executive Buddhist monks of the Union of Burma (Myanmar), who served in the year 2002 to 2005, the forty-seven senior monks selected from all the States and Divisions nation-wide.

I became a Buddhist nun at the age of twenty-one years old. I was living a pretty good life as a lay person with many opportunities before becoming a renunciant. I trusted Buddhist monks and I believed whatever they said was true because I grew up with honest people. I believed that there is rebirth after death and I thought that my mom who passed away a few years ago would benefit in her next rebirth if I become a nun. I felt guilty that I did not have much chance to take care of her when she was alive. And I believed that my future rebirths until I attain the ultimate peace and happiness (nibbana) would be good ones by my becoming a nun.

I did not know that Buddhist discrimination against women existed in Burma until I became a Buddhist mendicant. I started going to retreats when mom passed away. In the retreats I learned

¹ <http://ajourneyofbuddhistwisdom.blogspot.com/2009/12/buddhist-discrimination-against-women.html>; - <http://bhikkhuni.net/present/spring2010/present-burmadiscrimination-spring2010.pdf>;

many stories of ancient Buddhist saints, their practices, and how they dealt with negative forces to overcome them. The monk who gave talks at the retreats had a monastery named Duta and a nunnery named Mani. Mani was a little over a mile away from the monastery in the forest of southern Burma. The monk's name was Pannajota. In his talks, he emphasized the goodness of living in robes not only for oneself but also for others including deceased relatives. I was thrilled and I decided to renounce just like the Buddha and to live in robes. I continued school two more years to finish my studies for my B.A. degree. After the final exams, I took a train to get to Pannya's monastery. Pannya ordained me at his monastery with the help of his nuns. I did not think to ask him why we were not female monks just like the female monks of ancient Buddhist stories. I noticed that there was discrimination against women which was very strong and obvious within the Buddhist mendicants in Burma and I felt sad, but I wanted to ordain for my mom, for people, and for me!

After a few weeks, I joined three other new nuns to follow Pannya in his retreats around the small towns and villages near his native village in the Irrawaddy Delta. After we were in a couple of the retreats, he dropped us off at a nunnery named Dipa next to a small monastery, where the abbot resided who was about fifty years old. It was an ancient Buddhist ruin converted into a monastery. The nunnery was a line of wood huts with thatch roofs attached to the monastery. We were there to learn the texts for chanting the daily prayers. We nuns stayed together in one of the huts. We told Pannya that we did not want to learn any texts, but only wanted to spend more time in meditation. He replied saying to us that we would not enjoy meditating all the time and that there would come the time when we would get bored and the Pali texts would help to cheer us up again. So we all agreed to start studying the texts.

It was in December and the hut had gaps everywhere through which the cold would rush through. We got up at 4 a.m. every morning and walked across a small field to get to the room where we, the abbot and twelve nuns sat, prayed and meditated together. Based on the sun's arising earlier or later we had breakfast right after dawn around 5 a.m. We did our chores and went to the abbess nun to learn the text of the chants and pray. At about 10:30 a.m. we had lunch together in the dinning hall of an ancient brick building. With lunch we were finished with our meals for the day until dawn of the next morning. We would drink only water after midday. In the beginning when we first ordained we suffered from hunger in the evenings which made us feel sad with thoughts that we would feel this suffering for the rest of our lives. After about a month we all settled in and the hunger did not bother us anymore. I was amazed how my body could live with less amount of food. Meals for breakfast and lunch were very simple, such as rice, fish sauce, beans or veggies.

There was no electricity; we got water from the well for drinking, for cooking, and for the out-house. In the retreats we did not need to busy ourselves with cooking food. But in the nunnery we had to take care of many duties, including cooking full meals for about fifteen nuns. Our cooking duties included sorting small rocks from the raw rice, carrying the wood for cooking, fetching the water from the well, and building the fire for cooking. We cooked the rice in a big pot and took care to make sure it didn't burn on the bottom. We cut veggies, to prepare for making a curry, made a fish sauce, and would bring all the food to the dinning hall, and would serve it to all the nuns. Afterward we would wash all the dishes. Sometimes we had to chop wood for cooking and it was very hard.

We walked on alms-round altogether, with each nun carrying a big tray on her head, with a very small tray in it. The farmers gave us raw rice and money and we took it in a small tray to put it in the big tray. We, new nuns had no experience about carrying a tray on our heads. In the beginning of going on alms-round, the trays fell down from our heads and raw rice was scattered on the

ground. Then we were sad because we appreciated the hard-working farmers for sharing their rice with us. In the rainy season there were windy rainy days we got wet and everything collected on alms round was soaked.

We did not know why nuns of Theravada Buddhism should keep all the 8 precepts seriously, that is, (1) not killing, (2) not stealing, (3) not telling lies, (4) not having sex in any form, (5) not taking intoxicants, (6) not having meals after midday, (7) not dancing, not singing, not playing music, not watching entertainments, not using perfumes, cosmetics, lipsticks, not reciting idle charms and poems and (8) not sitting on luxurious seats, but we did it without knowing why. We prayed everyday for the villagers, everybody, every creature to be well and happy.

After about three months, we were back at the Mani nunnery. I lived there together with about fifty nuns for seven years until I got a Buddhist degree named dhamma-acariya/ teacher of dhamma. All the nuns were virgins and most were young within a range of thirteen to thirty-two. We lived together in a long hall with no privacy. Each nun had a space of about two feet along the walls of the hall to put her small box of robes and things. We stored our own books on the boxes and borrowed most of the text books from our small library. The space was both for sleeping and studying in during the three months of the rainy season. In summer and winter, most of the nuns studied outside the hall, abiding under the trees. We learned the Pali Canon and Buddhist literature from the monks at the monastery. There were about eighty resident monks and novices at the monastery. There was no electricity; we got water from the open well for drinking, cooking and other uses. Most of the nuns sat in the dark at night without kerosene lamps or candles, memorizing what they learned in the day time. Some recited by heart parts of the Pali Canon for sitting religious exams after the night prayer ended at 6 p.m.

Once a week early in the morning at 6 a.m. we would leave the nunnery and walk to the village for alms rounds. We walked in procession with each nun holding a deep bowl into which the villagers would place rice, money, onion, garlic, and small packs of indigenous herbs. Some boys and men, relatives of local nuns, helped us by carrying bags and big baskets. Strong religious belief in the goodness of living in mendicants' robes held by all the nuns meant that there was little or no complaint about food, shelter and medicine in such poor conditions. In the first few years of becoming a nun we all were very healthy but after about six years we all were very weak and sometimes sick. Once a week during the three months of the rainy season, the villagers cooked curries and gave it to all Buddhist mendicants in the village. We got plenty of it and used the rest for the next day. Repeatedly cooking the curries made us get stomachache sometimes. We all believed that we would be reborn in a heaven if we kept the precepts seriously, that was why we were happy to die in sickness taking strong medication with only water after midday. All in though, we had a good time in the forest nunnery.

The Mani nunnery was once an old monastery, Pannya got it from a monk who passed away and he converted it to a nunnery. Pannya was good at giving talks on Buddhist meditations and he wanted to fill up his new nunnery with young nuns from middle class families. He gave talks to big crowds at his retreats, with an emphasis on the goodness of the Buddha, and ancient male and female Buddhist monks. Eventually he got about fifty young ladies for his new nunnery. He ordained all of us not as female monks, bhikkhuni of ancient Buddhism, but as female mendicants of modern Burmese Buddhism. After the nunnery was filled with nuns, the emphasis of Pannya's talks changed from the benefits of ordaining to subjects like generosity and preserving the Buddha's teaching.

Every year after the rains retreat a big ceremony was held at Duta monastery. During this gathering all the monks in the province, came from neighboring villages to perform religious rites and rituals. The villagers came to the ceremony bringing offerings such as sandals, flowers, and robes. Two big

loud speakers were pointed toward the village. The villagers could hear the ceremony which included questions and answers from the monks. During this ceremony I heard these words, "Now is the time for all male monks to cleanse ones own misdeeds by performing this ceremony." He then went on to say, "female monks are not here, because they died out many centuries ago, they could never revive because women could not seriously keep the precepts." We, nuns brought flowers to the monastery, cleaning, sweeping, moping, and decorating the sima, the sacred building for performing the ceremony. We were shocked when we heard what the monks said about nuns. The villagers could hear it clearly also. I was surprised by what I heard and immediately knew something was terribly wrong with the ceremony because I knew we, nuns were as good as the monks in virtue.

Every year a small ceremony was held to give monks, novices, and nuns certificates for passing the Pali exams. We, nuns studied hard and passed the nation-wide exams at the top positions and our names were announced and broadcast on radio and on television. Pannya was very happy and said his decision to convert the monastery to a nunnery was the right one. During the small ceremony, the village men took care of giving the certificates first to the nuns in the hall. The hall had a stage only a little bit higher than the floor. The man giving out the certificates called the name of a nun to give her a certificate without telling her where to sit. When the nun was approaching the chair prepared on the stage, he suddenly removed the chair and dragged out a small torn dusty mat for the nun. Fortunately, each nun always kept a small square cloth for sitting on. The nun peacefully laid her cloth on the mat to receive a certificate for higher exams and the other nuns did the same thing. All the monks and novices were watching the poor nuns with compassionate eyes. After the nuns received their certificates the man brought the chair back out on the stage for the novices and monks. He called the name of a 10 year old novice who sat on the chair that was brought back onto the stage.

We heard stories about how Pannya had a hard time establishing the nunnery because the head villagers strongly opposed his idea and stopped giving him alms. Later, they apologized to him at the railway station of the village when they knew Pannya was about to leave all of them. Pannya was a monk who vowed to become one of the Buddhas in his future final rebirth. He thought all the monks, novices and nuns would become arahats, the Buddhist saints at the time of his Buddhahood. It was exciting for all of It was exciting for all of us.

In our nunnery, there were about five devout old nuns in the position of looking after the young nuns. There was a time when most of the old nuns were sick most of the time. They wanted to do more meditation than learning texts or sitting the exams. The young nuns continued studying and passed the exams every year and grew up. When we were only a few nuns and didn't know much about nuns' practices, there was no problem at the night-prayers. The young nuns bowed down to the older nuns three times and the older ones gave the younger ones blessings every night. There were about twenty-two nuns and the youngest one was to bow down sixty-three times. To make bowing shorter and easier when the nunnery was crowded with about fifty nuns they grouped nuns born in the same year together

The old nuns were told by the monks that no matter what the nuns' age they were to always bow down to any male monk even if he is a 7 year old novice. Also monks and novices must not bow down to nuns under any circumstance. The nuns were also told that nuns are not supposed to perform rites and rituals during the rains retreat. Following the advice of the monks, younger nuns were to bow down to older nuns even though the old nuns were ordained recently. Within the Mahayana tradition, lay people and monks pay respect to each other by holding their palms together at chest level and bowing slightly, anjali. Male monks of the Theravada tradition used to say 'lay

people and nuns should bow down to monks because they undertake more precepts about 227.’ The precepts of female monks mentioned in the later Buddhist Pali texts were about 311 and are higher in number than those of male monks. If the Vinaya, monastic discipline of the Pali Canon is an authentic one, those male monks were supposed to bow down to female monks for undertaking more precepts! Mahayana Buddhists got wisdom earlier on this point!

On the property of our nunnery there was a big pineapple field and many fruit trees whose fruit when sold helped to raise some money for renovating the old nunnery. While the recently ordained older nuns were increasing in our nunnery, the population of teacher monks was also increasing at the neighboring monastery. The monastery had about one hundred and twenty resident monks and about 7 teacher monks. Some of the older nuns who took the position to look after young nuns were very devoted to supporting the monks and novices. They asked young nuns to peel pineapples and cut them into small pieces which were to be given to the monastery. We peeled and cut them until our fingers were bleeding from the acid of the pineapple. We put the pineapples in a couple of huge metal pots, and carried them, walking a little more than a mile to the monastery. Afterward there was none left for the nuns. One of the older nuns said ‘When you give things to the monks, you must give away the whole thing without any attachment to it. Only that kind of generosity will bring you to heaven and finally to nibbana, ultimate peace and happiness after death. An old nun told us not to pick such and such fruits and wrote down her name on the leaves of pineapple - they were reserved for the monks. Some of the naughty young nuns picked them secretly at night and the old nun got mad the next morning, swearing ‘Whoever took the pineapples, reserved for the monks will go to a deep hell’.

In Burma, Buddhism has survived through generations of people who suffered from wars between ancient Burmese kings, ethnic war between various tribes and the world wars. After Burma's independence from the British, the Burmese government adopted laws in an effort to protect and sustain the Theravada Buddhist tradition. These laws helped protect the sincere monks and nuns rights to go on alms rounds and not to be arrested as beggars. These laws were meant to prevent corrupt monks and nuns from degrading the robes.

Deep poverty shaped Buddhism especially during the 1980's. Buddhism in Burma came to be a religion full of discrimination against women. The majority of monks gave dhamma talks in public saying that the female body is born due to the result of bad kamma, thought, speech and action, of past rebirths. The female period, being more emotional than men, being weak with a lot of corruptions, being unable to undertake female monks' precepts, bhikkhuni-vinaya were things that were said to describe females as less fit for monastic life than men. It was said that the female monks, bhikkhuni-sangha disappeared not too long after the Buddha's death, parinibbana because of “the problems of being women.” Some monks even added domestic stories in the talks in the public such as saying a lady asked him whether she might get pregnant after having sex with her dog, an old woman in her seventies tried to have sex with her own son, etc... etc. An old renowned monk of a big monastery who got a title from the government named ‘Aggamahapandhita/ the top of wisest monks’ said in his talks that ‘nuns/silashin/thilashin are no more than lay people’.

Around 1980 the government included the Department of Religious Affairs in The Ministry of Religious Affairs and a director general led the department forming a group of forty- seven monks, selected from across the nation, named the State Executive Buddhist Monks, and sub-groups of monks named State/ Province/Village Executive Monks, mainly to deal with disputes such as ownership of monasteries and interpretation of the Pali Canon. There were a few renowned monks who were arrested for having many wives, some for being drunk, some for gambling, and some for having sex. The practice of rites called ‘Repeated Ordinations’ were popular around 1994 and

renowned monks got ordained many times within a month whenever lay Buddhists were willing to sponsor the expense of the ordination. The ordinations were performed by about six monks or more and when the monks came out from the sacred building, sima, lay people standing in a line outside the sima, put money, packs of herbs, and stuff in the bowls of the monks with the belief that sima had cleansed the misdeeds of the monks and the monks were in the state of arahats, Buddhist saints. It is believed that giving to arahats is of great benefit to the one who is giving.

It is also important to note that there were some sincere monks that went as far as to refuse government support of things such as money, rice, oil, candles, robes, umbrellas, and sandals. They refused these supports because they knew that some Burmese Buddhists were involved with corruptions and they wanted no part of it. Many of the sincere monks who refused government support were arrested for causing disharmony between the Buddhist mendicants, and were sentenced to at least three years in remote prisons. One of them was a highly educated monk who got the highest Buddhist title named 'tipitakadharadhammabhaddhagarika, a monk who memorizes three Buddhist Pali Canons, and is a treasurer of house dhamma.' Some monks fled abroad and waited a few years until they could come back to Burma. All Buddhist mendicants and lay people were vulnerable and could not help each other.

A renowned monk of an ethnic people, Paohh tribe, named Samannya/ thamannya sayadaw lived in a cave and meditated seriously for many years. He once ordained about a hundred men at the same time, by reciting together 'I take refuge to the Buddha, his teachings, and his fellow friends of the same practice, buddham, dhammam, sangham saranam gacchami'. They were ordained only for a short period of time for about three days. When the State Executive monks heard about it, they requested that the director general of the Department of Religious Affairs send lay staff to the monk Samannya requesting that he not to do it again. He was pressed to sign a statement admitting that his ordination procedure was wrong. He signed it and did not do it again. The majority who stayed in the forest lodgings and did meditation seriously, believed in a simple way of Buddhist ordination. The procedure for ordaining a young man or a boy as a novice, samanera was (1) to shave the head, (2) to give the robes and a bowl and (3) teaching how and why he undertakes the 10 precepts. The procedure for full ordination of a monk for an adult man was similar, adding more precepts and procedures for the monks' affairs. There was a Buddhist custom that young and adult, men and women were ordained temporarily for a short period of time every summer. While many monks lived simple lives, having contentment and satisfaction with little, going on alms-round everyday, doing serious meditations, studying hard the Buddhist canon and texts, other monks were trying to get fame and gain, expanding their monasteries bigger and bigger and full of luxurious things. There was a big gap between rich and poor Buddhist monks and nuns.

A renowned abbess nun tried to be friendly with people in power in the government and told them the rebirth stories and that they were in their past rebirths kings and kings' people. She said that they supported Buddhism and because of that good kamma, they became people with power in the government in this life. The nun built a big pagoda, driving away poor neighbors from the land so that Buddhist people of future generations would talk about a pagoda of nuns and would appreciate them. There were 500,000 Buddhist monks and novices and about 45, 000 Buddhist nuns in Burma in 1993. Many lay Buddhists were very poor while some monks were individually wealthy living in luxurious monasteries.

The State Executive monks in 2005 were not rich, but did not know that there was a growing demand for change and that some Buddhists would prefer the simplicity of ancient Buddhist practice and ancient Buddhist ordinations for female monks. The lower status of Buddhist nuns had a harmful effect on lay women in Burma in general.

There was an attempt to revive the female monks of the Theravada tradition in the 1930's. The Buddhist monk Adiccavamsa wrote a book "Bhikkhuni Sasano Padesa, "Criteria of Ordaining Female Monks". This book shocked the Burmese Buddhists and it led to Adiccavamsa's being expelled. Adiccavamsa tried again writing "Bhikkhuni Ayeypun, Buddhist Problems in Reviving Female Monks" but he could not convince the Burmese Buddhists that this was not wrong view. Soon after, he disrobed. There was no more obvious attempt at reviving the female Buddhist monk until the year 2002.

I had been in Sri Lanka since the end of 1998. In 2001, I heard about an ordination for the first Thai female novice, samaneri of Theravada Buddhism ordained in Sri Lanka. In 2002 I heard about an ordination that would give me the chance to be ordained as the first Burmese female Buddhist monk of Theravada Buddhism. I consulted with older Burmese monks living in the Burmese monastery, Makutarama in Sri Lanka. These monks told me that "You are the enemy of Theravada Buddhism. You have wrong view. You won't be accepted as a female monk, you will only be a hermit of other religions because you have wrong view. It would be better if you got married and had five children rather than to ordain as a female monk." These monks went to the Burmese Embassy in Sri Lanka and tried to prevent the ordination from taking place. They sent a letter to the State Executive Monks of Burma via the embassy telling them of "my plans to ordain," instead of the fact that I only discussed with them what is happening in Sri Lanka with the ordinations. The consular of the embassy told me over the phone that he wanted to see me at the embassy. I was shocked when I realized the monks had informed the embassy officials and the State Executive Monks of Burma. Then I realized that I was in big trouble and would likely be sent back to Burma. Then I realized that to go ahead with the ordination I would be on my own with a little support from a few Burmese monks. I decided to be ordained as a samaneri which would be less threatening. I longed to wear the robe of the ancient Buddhist tradition. The robe of the Burmese female Buddhist mendicants, Silashin / Thilashin that I had been wearing for sixteen years made me feel less confident in the legitimacy of my former ordination. This was how my case opened with the State Executive monks in Burma in 2002. I then waited to hear the reaction of the State Executive Monks and didn't hear anything strongly opposing the samaneri ordination. This encouraged me to go ahead with full ordination as a female monk in 2003. I then heard the State Executive Monks were ready to have me arrested with police standing by in the airport. Fortunately I went to Malaysia instead of going back to Burma.

I heard the International Buddhist Conference would be held in Burma in the beginning of 2005. I talked to my father over the phone at the end of 2004 and he told me that he wanted to see me. I knew he was very sick and decided to go back to Burma. I thought this was the time to see my sick father when all the people of the Department of Religious Affairs were busy planning for the conference. I also hoped that this conference might help to open their hearts to the idea of female monks in Burma. So I bought a round trip ticket to Burma in Dec. 2004 and went back home. The further details about my arrest and time in prison please see the upcoming article "Living as a Buddhist Monk/Nun".

The government of Burma published two books on my case with the State Executive Monks decision that Female Burmese Buddhist Monks are illegal. These books will be translated into English and are listed below.

"Bhikkhuni Vinicchaya, Decision that Female Burmese Monks of Theravada Buddhism in Modern Burma are Illegal", first published in 2004, Publications of The Department of Religious Affairs, Kabha Aye Street, Yangon, Myanmar, by U Nyont Maung, Director of the Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Union of Myanmar and:

“Bhikkhuni bhava abhava vinicchaya, Decision that Female Burmese Monks of Theravada Buddhism in Modern Myanmar are Criminals”, first published in 2006, Publications of The Department of Religious Affairs, Kabha Aye Street, Yangon, Myanmar, by U Zar Ni Win, Director of the Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Union of Myanmar.

4. Than Than Nwe,¹ Gendered Spaces: Women in Burmese Society²

Abstract: In many ways, historically and today, women of Burma³ hold a unique and enviable position. At home and in business activities, women in Burmese society compared to women in its two historically powerful neighbours, India and China, have greater legal rights (traditionally, equal to that of men) and enjoy a high degree of tolerance and independence. Yet, on the other hand, there is strong evidence of gender-specific cultural practices that undermine this apparent equality. This is sanctioned by the Buddhist religion, of which the paper provides an insightful view of; of Theravada Buddhism's influence on gender divisions and how these divisions are expressed and the boundaries defined in private and public spaces.

Key terms: Juxtaposition of equity and inequity, Geographic space, Theravada Buddhist societies, concept of *hpon*, Spatial division, Spiritual hierarchy.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, has succeeded in no small way in drawing Burma into the limelight of world attention. Suu Kyi is the most prominent woman in Burmese society today and has become a symbol of strength and dignity. She acts as a world symbol for the Burmese democratic. Su Kyi's national role calls to mind the status and role of women in Burmese society. In many ways, Burmese women enjoy a unique position. In both the domestic and economic spheres, women in Burmese society compared to women in its two historically powerful neighbours, India and China, have greater legal rights (traditionally, equal to that of men) and less restrictive social practices. Yet, on the other hand, there is strong evidence of gender-specific cultural practices that undermine this apparent equality. Interestingly, some of these practices can be traced back to Buddhism which originated in India (Sardesai 1989), and to its cultural influences, which have exerted strong and powerful overlays and overshadowed native culture but have not extinguished it.

In this paper I would like to determine the extent of inequality, if any, in the Burmese context, and explore the myths and realities regarding Burmese women. The emphasis will be essentially on the Burmese Buddhist women. With around 90% of the total population being Buddhists and the pervasiveness of the religion in all spheres of society, the focus is not only relevant but is crucial to fully appreciate the significance of religion in the examination of gender relations in Burma. From a spatial perspective, I will look at the ways gender divisions are expressed in imagined and real space to argue that the boundaries of real space strengthen and reaffirm social and cultural distinctions, that the existing set of spatial relations maintains gender divisions and that rapid economic changes continue to produce 'difference' and 'otherness'. I will argue that the acceptance of existing socioreligious positions between males and females is reinforced by spatial divisions which are devised and retained to perpetuate male dominance. The spatial dimension of gender relations in Burmese society is deconstructed to give an added appreciation of gender inequality.

The significance of space

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³ Burma is now officially called Myanmar. However, Burma and Burmese continue to be used and are more familiar to people living outside Burma. This paper will use the word 'Burma' in referring to the country and 'Burmese' in referring to the people of Burma/Myanmar

The concentration on space and spatial relations pose a challenge to an area of study on which very little research has been undertaken. Studies on Burmese women are few and far between. Authors such as Shway Yoe (1963) in his delightful book *The Burman* wrote on ear-boring¹ and marriage.

Mi Mi Khaing's *Burmese Family* (1946) and the more recent *The World of Burmese Women* (1984) explore in much greater depth and detail women's roles and rights in Burmese society. My review of literature on Burmese women shows the number of works to be negligible. Penny Van Esterik (1996) maintains that women are not invisible in research on Southeast Asia and draws attention to a number of notable publications on Southeast Asian women. While Van Esterik's claim is not unfounded, there is also a need to recognise the paucity in writings and research on specific geographic areas of Southeast Asia including Burma, especially in meaningful explorations of the spatial dimension.

The interpretation and evaluation of 'what is given' or 'what is observed' against theoretical perspectives on space and identity is necessary to appreciate better the extent of gender divisions in Burma. Despite the Eurocentric bias of existing literature, they provide useful and highly important theoretical frameworks for existing social conditions, even in a non-Western context. The works of Harvey (1969, 1973, 1989, 1993) and Soja (1989, 1997), for example, emphasise critical interpretations of space in the light of the transition taking place from modernity to postmodernity in the contemporary world (Soja 1997, p. 236). Harvey writes that 'the dimensions of space and time matter and that there are real differences of social action, real as well as metaphorical territories and spaces of power that are the sites of numerous differences...' (Harvey 1993, p. 3).

Theoretical aspects of women's space

Evaluating and interpreting social relationships is a complex task for any society. My argument is that it becomes even more complex and difficult when theories currently in existence developed from within a Western viewpoint. The attempt is then made to apply them to a non-Western society in which the cultural background, the race, language, religion, the histories and geographies are profoundly different. The state of the economy, especially for a country such as Burma, is a further point of difference, as is colonial experience and demographic and cultural changes that took place as a result of that experience. Soja (1997, p. 238) noted the world as an 'increasingly postmodern world'. To me it is arguable whether Burma can even be referred to as 'modern', let alone 'postmodern' however the term is defined or whatever criteria is used to determine modernity. Nonetheless, while Burma's condition must remain at the bottom of the continuum in the social transformation that the countries of the developed world have experienced or are experiencing, the theoretical framework that is being applied is certainly postmodern. The landscape or geographic space is deconstructed with the focus on the 'many layers of meaning in and the multiple uses of cultural landscapes' (Winchester 1992, p.141). While Burmese society as it exists at present is pre-modern, pre-industrial and conservative, the approach draws upon existing discourses and 'ways of seeing' in the western world. Homi Bhabha (1994, p. 171) argues that 'postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of the Third World countries...within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South', that they 'intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples' and that they 'formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference'. My view is that existing theories and approaches are certainly 'translational' and 'transnational', to use Homi Bhabha's

¹ Ear-boring is piercing of the ears for young girls. This can often be performed in an elaborate ceremony with invitations sent out to friends and relatives. Shwe Yoe (1963, pp. 48-51) has devoted a chapter to ear-boring.

words, that they transgress the boundaries of different cultural realms and may be applied, while recognising their limitations, to different cultural situations.

The paper sets out by reviewing existing literature on Burmese women and examining evidences of equality and/or inequality from historical records and from personal observations and experience. Drawing on new approaches in cultural geography (see for example, Duncan 1992) my view is of culture as an active agent, constantly changing, shaping and re-shaping and in the process re-affirming, strengthening or weakening existing social relations. Culture is also seen as providing the means for control and as being used to deny equal access to shared symbols (Anderson & Gale 1992). Culture is also translated into geographic space. The visible imprint or the cultural landscape is clearly shown to represent contesting gender relations in both public and private space. In a spatial relationships the juxtaposition of equity and inequity in Burmese society is subsumed. They become more pronounced however, when boundaries in real space based on gender are drawn. Clearly, my approach is feminist and geographic. More specifically, I am addressing the subject of Burmese women from a cultural geography viewpoint.

Mainstream theories of social justice are concerned with egalitarianism and address problems of inequality while feminists are concerned 'with the different and unequal experiences of women, including the fact that women are treated unjustly by virtue of their gender' (Smith 1994, p.108). In the course of this paper, I will argue that the inequalities that exist are based on gender and reinforced by cultural beliefs and traditions, and that geographic space 'is deeply implicated in social exclusion' (Smith 1994, p.45). This is not to suggest that I agree with the view of geographers who argue in the early 1980s that 'space was a universal feature of all social relations' (Rose 1993, p.19). My contention is that the spatial component is an important part and should be included for a more meaningful interpretation and visual representation of social relationships. As Harvey (1993, p. 15) notes 'what goes on in a place cannot be understood outside of the space relations that support that place any more than the space relations can be understood independently of what goes on in particular places.'

Burmese women's status and role: an enviable record

Much work on women from a feminist viewpoint sees women as subordinate to men in varying degrees. Sexual inequities are found in diverse spheres ranging from economic activity to political participation to the domestic sphere. On the other hand there is much evidence of Burmese women in positions of egalitarianism that are clearly distinguishable in several major ways. The status of women throughout history has been high. Inscriptions in Bagan tell of women in high positions and women dedicating land and slaves to pagodas and monasteries, evidence that suggests women could own property and dispose of them as they wished (Khin Aye Win 1997). Burmese women's 'right to own property had never been challenged. In fact, they control the family finances' (Khin Myo Chit 1995, p.188). Edwards (2000, p.2) wrote:

women were the legal equals of their spouses and male dependents, enjoyed equal property rights, and had easy access to divorce. The breadth, depth and visibility of female activity and the style of female dress and deportment-split skirts, fat cheroots, quick wits and sharp tongues-elicited an often shocked response from British expeditionaries and missionaries.

There are several important indicators that testify to the special position that Burmese women enjoy in society. The very essence of a person's identity, the name, does not change when a Burmese woman marries. A Burmese woman's name is a cradle-to-grave name (see Shway Yoe 1963 for an explanation of Burmese names). A Burmese woman's name, as with all Burmese names is an individual name which neither takes the father's name, nor the mother's for that matter, nor the husband's at marriage. There is no surname to Burmese names, hence a name change at marriage is

not something that one even contemplates. There is no question at all as to whether a woman should change her name to her husband's, a consideration reserved for the modern woman in Western society. As the continued use of the maiden name signals to the modern woman in the West an assertion of her independence, so to the Burmese woman, her own individual name ensures her a continuity of place and status that she has known before marriage.

A second feature signalling equality concerns titles. *Ma* is used for young girls or woman. As a woman grows older or has assumed a position of respect, the title *daw* is used. The terms *Me`* and *Mi* and some of the other titles given in Shway Yoe (1963, p. 7) are no longer used in modern Burma. Both *ma* and *daw* closely approximate to the English equivalents 'Miss' and 'Ms'. There is no approximate word in the Burmese language for 'Mrs'. As it is not possible to tell from a man's title of 'Mr' his marital status, so it is not possible from a Burmese woman's title to tell whether she is married. Further, the woman wears no wedding ring to symbolise her union with a man. Thus the symbols of woman's subjugation and insubordination found in patriarchal and other male dominated societies are absent in Burma. The terminology used to describe relationships indicates significant gender roles.

Within the nuclear family, the importance of the mother's role and status is displayed in the terms used with the mother placed first in the term for family "*mi-tha-su*, meaning 'mother-offspring-group' or *tha-mi-tha-hpa*, meaning 'offspring-motheroffspring- father', and for the parents, *mi-hpa*, meaning 'mother-father' (Khaing, 1984, p.15). Khaing continues to define the husband and wife relationship as based on the 'perceived differences between the spiritual, physiological and psychological natures of the two sexes' and identifies the higher spiritual plane on which the man as *ain-oo-nat* or spirit of the house is placed (Khaing 1984, p. 16). Marriage also does not require a change of residence for the woman. The Burmese kinship system is completely bilateral – in terminology as in practice (Khaing 1984, p. 21). Depending on the circumstances of the parents, financial, family size, the number of siblings, and so on, or that of the newly weds, flexibility and fluidity of spatial relationships are the norm rather than the exception. It is equally acceptable for the newly weds to live with the bride's parents, the groom's parents or on their own. The horror attached to the bride being dislocated from the home she has lived in all her life to a life with her husband and his family, subjugated to a lowly position in the family hierarchy does not take place in Burma.

In both the domestic and in the economic sphere, women's status and role have been on par with men. Early European observers noted this (Khaing 1984, p. 13). Shway Yoe (1963, p. 53) writes:

It is greatly to their (women's) credit that they manage not only house affairs, but their husband's business into the bargain. A farmer's wife will carry out the sale of the whole rice crop to the agent of the English rice firm in her husband's absence, and generally strikes a better bargain than he would have made himself. If the village head constable is away, the wife will get together the policemen, stop a fight, arrest the offenders, and send them off on a lock-up all on her own responsibility.

The Burmese woman lives and works alongside her husband, and plays a leading role in many business activities. While Hindu and Mohamedan (Muslim) women are shut within their homes, Burmese women are active in the market, as customers and stallholders. The position of women in Southeast Asia is generally better than women in India or China. But Burmese women's status within Southeast Asia is noted to fare even better. Burmese women enjoy 'sexual egalitarianism in social and economic affairs that may be unique in the Southeast Asian region' (Muller 1994). The market place or *bazaar* is women's space in a way that it is men's space on the Indian Subcontinent. The higher status of Burmese women, by comparison with Indian and Chinese women, became

more apparent when vast numbers of Indian immigrants, and to a lesser extent Chinese immigrants, entered Burma under British rule. The freedom and equality that Burmese women have in the home, for example, and which is taken for granted, her legal status with regard to property, as well as control of financial matters equal inheritance rights with men, contrast sharply with that of Indian women. When a Burmese woman marries an Indian man, her position and status is changed. Eventually, conflicts arising from mixed marriages led to new laws being passed to protect the Burmese woman. The Special Marriage Acts of 1872 and 1923, the Buddhist Woman's Special Marriage and Succession Act of 1940 and its amendment in 1954 ensure for Buddhist Burmese women protection under the customary Burmese Buddhist Law (Khaing 1984; Kyaw 1988). According to Kyaw (1988, p.104), the Buddhist Women's Special marriage and Succession Act of 1954 is 'the only Special Act in Theravada Southeast Asia (which) provides the status of a Burmese woman with more rights than ever before when she has a matrimonial alliance with a non-Buddhist man'. Mueller (1994, p. 613) notes the significance of these laws as evidence of 'Burmese cultural resistance to the imposition of nonegalitarian gender practices'.

Gendered spaces: visions of inequality

Despite the favourable position that Burmese women generally enjoy in society, male chauvinism is the rule rather than the exception. Women are expected to do housework and in Khin Myo Chit's (1995) words 'wait hand and foot' on men. The argument used if objections are made is that 'Myanmar (Burmese) women are free...no purdah, no bound feet' (Khin Myo Chit 1995, p. 189). Central to the notion of male superiority is the concept of *hpon*. *Hpon* strengthens the spiritual elevation that men enjoy in Burmese society, which is essentially a Buddhist society. All males have *hpon*, an intrinsic quality that is accorded to few females, and even if it were, less than that accorded to a male. *Hpon* is hard to define. It is a highly abstract quality that has no practical relevance. It gives men the advantage of a special status, higher than that of women. Having *hpon* is having *hpon*, not much else. But losing *hpon* is wrought with unknown dangers. Thus, at the spiritual level, the position of Burmese women fares badly. The belief in the attainment of Buddhahood as possible only for a male and the pollutive effects of women on men's *hpon* is a subject on which little research has been undertaken, if at all.

The spatial connotations of spiritual inequality reinforce and determine women's position. This is maintained and enforced by society's traditions and religion which pervades life in Buddhist Burma. Representations of geographic space are often ignored by non-geographers and although representations of space are embedded in all social sciences they 'are intertwined in complex ways with representations of scale and culture' (Agnew 1993, p. 251). The meanings attached to place strengthened inequalities in gender relationships in an otherwise egalitarian society. This paper argues that spiritual hierarchy between men and women, sanctioned by the Buddhist religion is expressed in geographic space. The spatial division is a constant reminder of women's inferiority and a clear demarcation of what is not a woman's place.

Women's space within the home is clearly defined. The kitchen is primarily the woman's domain. Traditionally, and continuing to the present, women cook and sew, care for and nurture the family. The woman also looks after the family expenses and in most cases is the business partner to her husband. As the kitchen, or the back of the house, is women's space, certain parts of the house, the room or even wardrobe space are assigned according to sex. While the boundaries are neither formal nor fixed, there are general rules which are followed by most people. The woman's clothes, especially the *htamein* or *longyi* (skirt), are never placed on the upper shelves of the wardrobe, nor thrown carelessly about the house. Nor should they be in the front room where guests come. More particularly, they should never be near the Buddhist altar. On the other hand, it is acceptable for a

man's *longyi* to be anywhere. Similarly, the woman's skirt is not mixed with the men's clothes in a wash. The special clothesline for women's *htamein* or *longyi* (the skirt) is shunned by males, a *taboo* space. From a very young age males are told not to go under the *htamein* clothesline or their *hpon* will be lowered or diminished. By instilling fear in the abstract and unknown, the ideas and practices regarding male *hpon* are perpetuated. Women have no choice but to accept this although many writers, including women writers claim that it 'comes easily for women' (Khaing 1984, p.16) or that women accept their position with good humour and respect (Muller 1994). Burmese couple in traditional dress

Women's space then is imposed by society (male), but accepted by females without question. The separation of male and female spaces is linked to ideas of contamination and pollution. The supposedly polluting effects of women are observed and accepted in many other societies as well; for example, the belief can be found in many Pacific islands including Papua New Guinea. In Japan, the native Shinto religion emphasises purity and cleanliness, shuns death and defilement to the extent that people who work in such 'unclean' professions are often forced to live in separate communities. Kristeva (1982) notes the strong ritualisation of defilement within the castes of India which, according to Kristeva (1982, p. 79), is 'the most complex and striking instance of a social, moral and religious system based on pollution and purification, on the pure and impure.' Religious prohibitions are thus used to separate groups of people or to separate the sexes. Kristeva's (1982) concept of abjection attempts to provide a theoretical basis for this. Kristeva (1982, p.70) writes:

...ritualization of defilement is accompanied by a strong concern for separating the sexes, and this means giving men rights over women. The latter, apparently put in the power of passive objects, are none the less felt to be wily powers, "baleful schemer" from which rightful beneficiaries must protect themselves....It is as if, ... two powers attempted to share out society. One of them, the masculine, apparently victorious, confesses through its very relentlessness against the other, the feminine, that it is threatened by an asymmetrical, irrational, wily, uncontrollable power.

Throughout the essay, Kristeva (1982) raises interesting relationships between filth and defilement, of the horror within, of the border between the body's inside and outside. For her, 'polluting objects fall, schematically, into two types: excremental and menstrual' (Kristeva 1982, p. 71). The latter threatens the relationship between the sexes. Kristeva (1982, p. 68) sees abjection as a universal phenomenon, but which assumes specific shapes and different codings according to various symbolic systems.

Kristeva's ideas of religious taboo help towards explaining the separation of male/female spaces. However, defilement and pollution do not adequately account for other factors such as the deeply-ingrained cultural practices of respect for the Buddha, the *Sangha* (Buddhist monkhood), parents and teachers and all persons older than ego. These again are expressed in space in several ways. The Buddha must literally occupy the highest or tallest geographic position. As in a series of steps, others less worthy are delegated to lower and lower positions. This is not to deny the significance of gendered space, merely to point to the complexities and layers of meaning in the divisions that exist.

Thus in Theravada Buddhist societies, women are inferior to men in religious status. "Men, unlike women, are born with the karmic possibility of becoming members of the Sangha" (Keyes, 1995, p. 160). Burma, one of the Indianised States of Southeast Asia (Coedes 1968; Keyes 1995) has many cultural features that demonstrate Indian influence. While many of these have been modified and adapted, and a strong indigenous culture is retained resulting in a uniquely cultural entity, including the very significant gender equality present in Burmese society, the overwhelming embrace of

Buddhism has resulted in acceptance of female inferiority in religious matters. Only a man can become a monk, to which is attached a high merit value. All Buddhist males in Burma go through a period of monkhood in the monastery. A woman can never be a monk. The best she can hope for is to be reborn a male in her next life, and, in this life, the best she can do is to gain merit by consenting to her son's ordination as a novice monk.

The spatial division is observed in pagodas and monasteries which dot the Burmese landscape. There are tens of thousands of pagodas all over the country. In a deeply devout Buddhist society, pagodas are centres for prayers and festivities and for commercial activities at pagoda festivals. Constructing new pagodas and/or renovating existing ones earned for donors a great deal of merit. Gilding takes place on a continual basis especially in the more important and sacred pagodas. In all pagodas, women are generally not permitted to climb the higher platforms. As well, women cannot go to certain parts of the monastery, or to have physical contact with a monk, or sit on a monk's bed, even if the monk were the woman's son or husband.

These acts would be considered highly sacrilegious. On the other hand, this does not imply women are less involved in merit-making. What Kirsch (1996) has observed for Buddhist Thailand is true for Burma as well. It is not that 'men are more active in merit-making. Actually, women are consistently more diligent in performing routine merit-making' (Kirsch 1996, p. 21). Religion and religious institutions are inextricably linked to Burmese Buddhist life.

Burma is not a secular Buddhist society, but one in which religion is a part of daily life. Within the spatial realms of home and family among which the woman moves, her space is defined and delimited by her sex. This extends to outside the home, to religious buildings and in public gatherings. In public gatherings of a religious nature, there is again a gendered division of space. The boundaries cannot be transgressed, but remain to reaffirm woman's lower status level.

Conclusion

This paper began by outlining and presenting by way of examples the extent to which Burmese women hold equitable positions within the society. Burmese women exert considerable influence in domestic life and are legally and socially not restricted to participate as entrepreneurs and professionals and in the political arena. The bilateral kinship system, the right to own property, equal inheritance rights, the uniqueness of the naming system, absence of body ornaments to indicate marital status, flexible arrangements with regard to choice of residence upon marriage; all these show clearly the high degree of equality and independence that women enjoy.

A brief comparison was made with the position of women in India and China. The comparison is considered very relevant due to a number of reasons, including that of close geographic proximity to these two large neighbours, the cultural influence of India from the early centuries of the Christian era for over a thousand years, and the influx of large numbers of Indians and Chinese during the colonial period. Thus, there has been over a long period of time, a closer contact. Stemming from this, there has been a greater awareness of gender inequalities in these two societies when compared to that of Burmese society. Having established the very strong position of women, the paper next attempted to identify inequalities. Male chauvinism was found to exist and women had generally less choice in lifestyles, in dress, choice of careers and so on. Most importantly, however, the greatest inequality and one virtually impossible to surmount was in the area of Burmese Buddhist life. In religion, women had been and continue to be in a subordinate position. In the multiplicity of social spaces that women are identified with and which reflect existing social conditions, it is in the realm of religious space that women's subordination is magnified. One could

say such spaces are regulated and perpetuated by dominant discourses which favour men and over which women have little real power to effect change.

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5. Cheryll Barron, Burma: feminist utopia?

Decades of military dictatorship have taken their toll, but Burma's ancient commitment to sexual equality remains strong

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No one could have believed what lay in her future when I met Aung San Suu Kyi, the leading opponent of Burma's military junta, at a London wedding in the 1980s. "Fragile" and "exquisite" were the adjectives that came to mind—a tiny, straight-backed Asian Audrey Hepburn floating in a close-fitting costume of plain gold silk that began at her neck and skimmed her ankles.

But it is apt that the unofficial head of Burma's democratic movement should be a woman. Unlike Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, Suu Kyi's position is not quite as anomalous in contemporary Burma—even if the decades of dictatorship have been regressive for women's equality (a small, token number of Buddhist nuns were the only women to join the recent demonstrations).

Because Burma has mostly been ignored by western academics in its decades of seclusion, most western analysis of its core culture—an Indo-Chinese melting pot—is old. But since the country is scarcely modernised, that research still reliably represents basic attitudes. Traditional Burmese or "customary" law, which modern statutes reflect, treats men and women as equals in virtually every respect, even if it is ignored, when inconvenient, by Than Shwe, head of the military junta, and his henchman.

The 1959 Encyclopaedia Britannica says that, "Burmese women enjoy an amount of freedom unusual in non-European races." In fact, for centuries, they were actually more independent than western women—and even than women in other predominantly Buddhist Southeast Asian countries, who benefited indirectly from the Buddha's subversion of Hindu caste and other social strictures.

The position of women in Burmese society amazed 19th and early 20th-century European scholars and colonial administrators. The journal of John Crawfurd, a British envoy to the Burmese court of Ava, published in 1824, notes that, "to the Burmans... Women are more nearly upon an equality with the stronger sex than among any other Eastern people." In *Burma As I Saw It 1889-1917*, R Grant Brown, a magistrate and revenue officer during the country's six decades as a British colony, said that Burmese women's independence was "more surprising in view of the subjection and seclusion of wives and daughters in the neighbouring countries of India and China." George Scott, another colonial administrator, remarked: "The Japanese wife treats her husband as an idol, the Burmese as a comrade."

During the country's years under British rule (1886-1948), when it was treated as part of India, the viceroy's executive council panicked about the growing numbers of Raj officials acquiring Burmese mistresses and sometimes, wives. In *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj* (1980), Kenneth Ballhatchet quotes one council member's memo in 1894 attributing the trend to "the greater attractiveness and perfect freedom of Burmese women who do not regard such connexions as shameful liaisons."

Something very like streamlined "no-fault" divorce, which California pioneered in the US in 1969, was long ago part of Burmese tradition. A woman retained her property after she married and after a divorce, when she also took half of the property acquired by the couple during marriage. Women's inheritance rights were identical to those for men, and women neither changed their names nor started wearing any ornament indicating marital status. The one legal advantage granted to Burmese men capable of setting a western feminist's teeth on edge—the right to have more than one

spouse—was far less intolerable than in societies in which divorce was impossible or punitive for women.

The end of a marriage could reduce a man's standard of living far more than his ex-wife's, since it was common for women running market stalls to be the principal breadwinners for their families. In 1911, R Grant Brown, the magistrate mentioned earlier, reported that a typical Burmese wife "is usually a partner in her husband's business, and as such has just as much right to sign for the firm as he."

Harold Fielding Hall, who served as a top-ranking civil servant in Burma between 1887 and 1891, actually saw the equality of the sexes as proof that Burmese "civilisation is relatively a thousand years behind ours." In *A People At School*, he went on to say that Burmese men and women were "not sufficiently differentiated yet... [which] is the mark of a young race." His prescription for accelerating Burmese evolution was that "women must surrender their liberty in the interests of men."

If Burmese women have been relatively more stifled than men by the lack of democratic freedoms in recent years, their 46 per cent share of average earned (household) income in 1998, according to UN estimates, was still strikingly higher than in the US (40 per cent), France (39 per cent) or Switzerland (32 cent).

Still, connoisseurs of human quirks and inconsistency will hardly be surprised to learn that outside the law, in the social and family spheres, both sexes in Burma have traditionally accepted that men are "more equal" than women. The most important belief of a people for whom spiritual standing outranks every other kind, according to Mi Mi Khaing, author of *The World of Burmese Women*, is that, "Spiritually, a man is higher than a woman." Convention dictates that in a sort of rite of passage, all Buddhist men enter a monastery in the course of their lives for at least a few days. But no woman could ever be a monk or aspire to "Buddhahood", and the status of Buddhist nuns is far inferior to that of monks.

The key practical consequence of women's status as spiritual underdogs is that for most of Burma's history, they received at best a poor education. Historically, in this predominantly rural country, the village school was usually in the nearest monastery, and monks virtually owned all scholarship much as Jesuits, Talmudic scholars and Brahmins did elsewhere, at other times. Schooling for girls is still patchier than for boys, and in 2004, only 86 per cent of Burmese women were literate, against 94 per cent of men. If female students reportedly outnumber males at Burmese universities today, that is probably because so many young men are siphoned off into monasteries and academies.

If Aung San Suu Kyi—whose atypical and elite education befits a child of Burma's leading independence fighter—ever replaces the generals, she will have much to do to improve her countrywomen's lot. They have had virtually no power or influence under a military dictatorship that has barred them from enrolling in the Defence Services Academy, officers' training courses and officers' technical training. Official bodies that are supposed to expand women's career opportunities and investigate deficiencies in female healthcare and education effectively receive no government funds.

The steady deterioration of the Burmese economy, a victim of decades of abysmal mismanagement by the junta, has driven thousands of Burmese women into prostitution both at home and abroad—especially in Thailand, where over 30,000 of them have been estimated by Human Rights Watch to be working in brothels. The army is regularly accused by international humanitarian organisations of raping and sexually abusing its poorest and most vulnerable country women.

Yet Burmese women are not lilies that wilt easily. It is unlikely that Aung San Suu Kyi would see as unique the courage she has shown as a political prisoner for 12 of the last 18 years. “Although theoretically men are considered nobler,” she has written, “Burmese women have never really had an inferior status... Secure in the knowledge of her own worth, the Burmese woman does not mind giving men the kind of respectful treatment that makes them so happy.”

6. Chie Ikeya, The “Traditional” High Status of Women in Burma (Conclusion)¹

The "tradition" of gender equality and high status of women in Burma developed as a result of the multi-dimensional and multiply motivated representational practices by colonizing and colonized women and men who co-authored essentially and powerfully gendered and paddled discourses of colonialism, modernization, and nationalism. Christian missionaries and colonial officials cited the "traditional" freedom of women in Burma in their effort to justify colonialism. If in British India the oppression of women served as the justification for the colonizers' civilizing mission, the untamed and cultivated freedom of women in Burma legitimized colonial rule. Women's aspirations, both local and cosmopolitan, advocated for women's enfranchisement on the basis that women's courage was in keeping with Burmese "tradition." Nationalists and social critics in India drew attention to the British colonization of Burma, despite the high status of women in Burmese society, as proof that the "oppressive" treatment of women in India was a mere excuse for the continued colonization of India. Members of the Burmese political, intellectual, and social elite referenced the "high status" as a testament to their rightful claim to decolonization and self-rule. They like-wise flaunted the "high status" to contest the superiority of the colonizing solely, race, and culture.

My analysis of the political efficacy of the concept of Burmese women as having "high status" and its varied uses by everyone but Burmese women themselves has also shown that in colonial Burma, as in other European colonies, imperial authority and national identity were expressed not only in canalized but also gendered terms. "Burmese women" developed into a privileged idiom through which disparate social groups in colonial Burma interpreted, debated, appropriated, resisted, and otherwise engaged with new relations of power and social inequalities created by processes of colonialism and modernization. Both as a heuristic category and as actual historical agents, the "Burmese women" examined in this study, such as the traditionally progressive woman and the miscegenating woman, articulated and gave shape to emergent cosmopolitan ideas of social reform, race, and nation-state.

Finally, my examination of the construction of gendered discourses has allowed us to begin deconstructing gender-specific cultural stereotypes that have defined and constituted knowledge about Burma. A critical history of Burma, however, is in need of another kind of scholarly intervention: a candid documentation of gender-specific relations of power in Burma on the eve of colonialism, modernization, and nationalism. The relative paucity of studies on gender and more

¹ Journal of Burma Studies 10, 2005/2006: 75-77.

broadly "tradition" in pre-colonial Burma seriously undermines any attempt to evaluate the significance of colonial modernity or to assess processes of historical change. By interrogating the ideas, images, practices, and institutions that informed normative notions of femininity in colonial Burma, we will better positioned to question the ways that these gendered ideas have historically delineated the boundaries among women culture and "tradition" in Burma.

V APPENDICES

Appendix 1

SHORT INFORMATION on the MAKING of the BOOK REPORTS

CHOSEN BOOKS from the bibliography will be provided on a lending basis by the manager or for people in Myanmar through the Myanmar Book Centre in Yangon (55 Baho Road)

TWO REPORTS on each book by different persons are accepted.

LENGHT: 8,000 to 12,000 words (plus special space, if desired);

LANGUAGE of PUBLICATION: English; manuscripts in Myanmar language will be translated;

CRITERIA (must not slavishly be observed):

1. Biographical information about the author/translator, and other contributors;
2. Information about the non-Myanmar sources used in the book; (if the book is a translation, the original English version will be provided, too, if possible;)
3. Summary of the book's contents;
4. Information about the special aim and intended impact of the book at the time of publication;
5. How are foreign terms and concepts translated or transformed into the Myanmar language and the Myanmar context? (May be omitted!)
6. Personal assessment by the reviewer of the book, its impact on later times and its meaning for today

DEADLINE of DELIVERY of the REPORT: December 31, 2005 (the deadline can be extended);

DELIVERY of the REPORTS DRAFTED: Directly to the manager of the project by email or through the Myanmar Book Centre.

COMMENTS and EDITING: The reports will be commented upon by another person. The reviewer may react on the comments and answer the questions as he or she likes. The responsibility for the final editing of the reports is with the project manager.

REWARD: As a financial reward, each reviewer will receive 50 US \$ at the time of submitting the book report and 30 US \$ after the final editing.

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS like recollections of elder people, who remember the impact of Nagani on their life, and essays on subjects related to the club (Nagani Song, Nagani Magazine, the role of literature in disseminating knowledge in Myanmar, etc.) are very much appreciated.

Appendix 2

INFORMATION about COMMENTARIES on BOOK REPORTS

1. The commentaries asked for shall serve two aims

First (and most important): To start a dialogue on Myanmar's intellectual and literary heritage between interested people inside and outside of Myanmar.

Second (and important, too): To check the clarity of the report with regard to the intended publication.

Therefore, the commentator should be interested in Burma affairs and in the general topic of the respective book, but must not know anything about its specific content.

2. Length of each commentary: Must not exceed the space of this paper.
3. Some hints that may be useful to observe in writing a commentary:

Are there any questions that are brought up by reading the report?

If yes, what kind of questions do arise?

Are the criteria listed in the “Short information on the making of book reports” (see attachment) met by the book report?

What information on the book report do I find interesting/exciting or unnecessary/redundant?

Is there anything that I would recommend to the author of the report?

Delivery of the commentary: It would be appreciated if the commentaries could be sent by email to the above mentioned email address. If the author of the report chooses to react on the commentary, the commentator will be informed.

Affairs to come: All participants will be informed about the development of the publishing process of the reports and are invited to participate in future deliberations and activities. - Questions and recommendations are very much appreciated.

MYANMAR LITERATURE PROJECT



Starting with an investigation into the NAGANI BOOK CLUB

The project's
Working Papers
are published by
the **Department of Southeast Asian Studies of Passau University**

Already Published:

- No. 10:1, An Introduction into the Nagani Book Club
 - No. 10:1.1, Additional Material on Nagani
- No. 10:2, Thein Pe, *Saya Lun and Member of Parliament*
- No. 10:3, Ba Hein and Hla Shwe on Capitalism
- No. 10:4, Thein Pe, *Student Boycotters* (Two Volumes)
- No. 10:4.1, Additional Material on Students, Society and Politics
- No. 10:5, Ba Khaing, *Political History of Myanma*
- No. 10:6, Nu, *Gandalarit*
- No. 10:7, Mogyo, *José Rizal*
- No. 10:8, Three Books on World War and Burma
- No. 10:9, Two Works on the History of the Russian Revolution
- No. 10:10, Soe, *Socialism* and Chit Hlaing, *Memories*
- No. 10:11, Ba Hein, *Students' Revolution*
- No. 10:12, Thein Pe, *Indo-Burman Riot*
- No. 10:13, Two Political Dictionaries
- No. 10:14, Thandwe Maung, *Asoka* and Tun Shein, *First Hand Experience of India*
- No. 10:15, Four Books on Germany
- No. 10:15.1, Two Books of Khin Khin Lay on Germany
- No. 10:16, Four Books on Sun Yat Sen
- No. 10:17, Nu and Ba Thoung, *Plays*
- No. 10:100, Papers Presented at the Burma Studies Conference, Singapore 2006

Some Nagani Books
were scanned and are available on CD.

For details contact
habezett@t-online.de

All Working Papers published until now are available at
<http://www.zoellner-online.org/mlp.htm>
and at the Online Burma Library
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/show.php?cat=2083>

INVITATION

Readers are invited to participate in the project by

- writing **comments and criticisms** on the contents of this and other volumes of this series;
- contributing **essays** on Burmese/Myanmar literature as a medium between the international world and Burmese society;
- providing **material** that sheds more light on the Nagani Book Club, its context and impact on Burmese intellectual and literary life;
- offering **assistance** as translators and commentators of book reports.

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