

SOCIAL ROLES & GENDER STEREOTYPES

In Myanmar society, traditions and customs not only expect a woman to bear and care for the children but she is responsible for its general well being, keeps order and discipline, provides love and sympathy, and makes sure that each member of the family is healthy, happy and if possible wise. [sic]¹

- **“Presentation by U Win Mra”**

Husband is god, son is master.

- **Traditional Burmese saying**

The hen's crow will never bring the dawn.

- **Traditional Burmese saying**

...(M)en have been noted as saying that they want to get married so they can give most of their day to day concerns to their wife, enabling them to focus on a few things.²

- **Head of an international NGO in Burma, describing his organization's research findings**

OVERVIEW

The roles that women play in their societies, arising out of custom and tradition, provide the bases from which women's rights are upheld or abused. Legislation, affirmative action programs, and other measure to enhance women's status often fail because they are not supported by popular conceptions of what women should or can do. Women's equality ultimately starts in homes and communities, with the values that are transmitted to children by their parents, teachers and community leaders, and perpetuated by prevailing social and cultural systems.

Many commentaries have favourably compared women's status in Burma to that of women in neighbouring countries. Some women within Burma today still vaunt their high status and the recognition they enjoy within society. At the same time, boasts of Burmese women's advancement largely reflect the experiences of educated middle and upper class urban elites and are often derived from rather conservative male attitudes of what constitutes status. Women may indeed enjoy status and recognition, but within the parameters of the roles mapped out for them by their cultures, religions and the government.

Given the vast economic, social and ethnic diversity that exists in Burma, analyzing gender stereotypes throughout the country is a hazardous task, and any

generalizations are bound to be countered by exceptions. In the present context, the lengthy and detailed investigation required to truly do justice to the differences that exist is not possible. That said, there is a remarkable similarity in the statements that women from different ethnic, religious and socio-economic groups, and from all areas of the country, have made about the roles ascribed to them.

In fact, as the following chapters show, gender roles arising out of cultural and religious stereotypes continue to underpin laws and practices that prevent women from enjoying their full rights to personal safety, health, education, employment, freedom of movement, and participation in leadership, recreation and community activities. The combination of government restrictions, religious demands and society's preconditions serve to ensure women face restrictions in every sphere. Any attempts to promote women's equality must work to change conceptions of women's capabilities and the strictures on their activities. Because of the importance of social concepts to achieving women's equality, they also figure in each of the later sections of this report dealing with specific areas of women's rights.

Though Buddhism is only one of Burma's religions, ideas ascribed to “Burmese Buddhism” often have influence even in Christian and Animist communities. Frequent references made to Burmese Buddhist tradition in the media, public documents and

everyday expression illuminate the way women are viewed generally and help to cement women's subordinate position to men. Special emphasis is placed on women as the protectors of traditional culture. High value is placed on women's virginity at marriage, however fear of attacks on women's "modesty" is expressed mostly through various forms of "protection" that restrict women's and girls' freedom of movement and choice. In most of Burma's traditional cultures, sons are favoured over daughters for a variety of reasons. Traditional sayings, practices, and understandings of gender roles reinforce women's secondary positions as mothers, wives and daughters, and function to keep them in the home. It is essential that these gender stereotypes be acknowledged and addressed in order to eliminate discrimination against women, as they form the foundation on which discrimination is built.

RELIGION & GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Most religious teachings contain specific prescriptions and proscriptions for their congregations that

typically differentiate between men and women. Because the issue of religion and social roles was not discussed with all the women we interviewed, the comments that follow are not conclusive; however they give some insight into the expectations and constraints that various religions place on women.

Burmese Buddhism & Tradition

A male dog is higher in status than a woman.

- Traditional Burmese saying

Religious world-views significantly condition women's and men's interpretations of their societal roles. While many members of the country's non-Burman ethnic groups are not Buddhist, including many Karen, most Kachin, Chin, Karenni, and Naga people, Rohingyas, "Burmese" Muslims (of Indian descent), Hindus, Parsis, and others, the majority of Burma's population (usually estimated at 80-90%) is Buddhist. Buddhist thought is as constant a presence in the lives of Burmese people as the famed Buddhist temples that figure in the

SOCIAL STATUS

Gender is certainly not the only attribute that confers or reduces status in Burma and may be overridden by other virtues, traits, qualities, and characteristics.

One of the weightiest conditions conveying social power in Burma is spiritual distinction. Monks, in particular, who have renounced the world and are practicing to become Buddhas are revered.

Traditionally, age and the wisdom that is supposed to accompany it are culturally valued, and thus convey great social status. Many customs and practices in Burma's diverse cultures arise out of reverence for age, such as lowering one's body before one's seniors and always listening to the advice or teachings of elders.

Education is prestigious in Burma, and highly educated persons such as professors, doctors, and teachers of all kinds are highly respected and always addressed as "teacher."

Rigid conformity with social behavioural standards of good manners also commands respect.

Until recently, wealth was not a very important part of the Burmese system of social registers. However, in the new Burma, where money can buy a university degree or a position that once would have been attained through merit, having money has become a distinction to be respected.

Another new condition determining social standing is association with secular power structures, though it remains unclear how much military personnel are genuinely respected and how much of this apparent respect is simply prudence related to fear or benefit. Connections with those in positions of power in the military government are very important in today's Burma, since they greatly affect one's real life opportunities.

country's landscape. Facets of Buddhist teaching restrict women's participation not only in their religious practice, but also in many aspects of their daily lives. Where discrimination is apparent, some women we spoke with expressed the opinion that it is not the fundamental principles of Buddhism that are discriminatory, but the way in which they are interpreted by men.

Buddhism is a flexible religion, it coexists with other beliefs such as in *nats* [spirits]. Buddha in his teachings did not make a distinction between men and women, both are made of the same materials, mind and matter. But many people believe that male superiority is related to the religion. I don't believe this, I think that what people think the religion to be can lead to discrimination. Some Buddhist teachings have been written by men, monks, have been handed down from the past, but perhaps they are a reflection of the opinion of those men instead of Buddha's teachings. I don't believe that the idea that men are more divine than women and have more power to do things comes from Buddha's teachings. People have confused notions of what Buddhism really is. Most women I know cannot accept that men would be superior to women, but perhaps that is because one tends to associate with like-minded people. CINT 253

Texts published by the government often refer to tenets, folk-tales and customs derived from Buddhist teaching. Burmese Buddhism puts great weight on men's possession of *pon* (phonetically transcribed as "*hpoun:*") which the Ministry of Education Myanmar-English dictionary describes as:

1. glory, power, influence. 2. the cumulative result of past meritorious deeds.³

Monks are *pon gyi*, beings who possess great power and influence as a result of their accrued merit.⁴ Men and boys can become monks, a path that can lead ultimately to spiritual enlightenment or Buddhahood. Women cannot. While they can become nuns, *thilashin*, their relative spiritual position is lower than that of monks. All women must be reincarnated as men before they are eligible to become Buddhas. Buddhist practice also restricts women from participating in some ceremonies and entering certain parts of temples. They cannot apply gold leaf to Buddha statues or perform a number of other common offerings, and signs in temples throughout Burma demarcate areas where women are not allowed to enter.

Women can be ordained as nuns, but I have never seen a

nun become an abbot. There would be no audience if a nun were to give Dharma lectures.... We have a pagoda at Kyaikami Island with separate areas for men and women to pray. If a woman enters the men's area, there will be thunder and lightning to punish her. Some people say it will happen even if a female dog enters that area. We accept this as the way things are. Sometimes we tried questioning others about it, but we never got answers. So we just accept it. CINT 223

Burmese historian and legal expert U Maung Maung claims,

...(I)n important matters — such as money — women enjoy equal rights with men, and their only disadvantage seems to be that they cannot from womanhood rise direct to Buddhahood, but nobody wants to become a Buddha anyway, except in stereotyped prayers.⁵

While it may be true that embarking on the path to spiritual enlightenment is not among the most common popular aspirations, in fact the differential status of women in Burmese Buddhism does have ramifications for women's status and rights in their communities.

I am not opposing our religion [Buddhism], but I feel that some of the teachings restrict the rights of women.... Some of these restrictions are obvious, some are not. For example, when we are offering something to the monks, they will ask, "Where is your husband?" They want to accept the donation from the husbands as the procedure is supposed to be undertaken by the head of the house. We also can't light candles before a Buddha image as people think this is a man's duty... I think those superstitions are followed blindly by local people, but are not the real teachings of the religion.... Even between nuns and monks there is gender discrimination. A nun cannot sit at the same level as a monk. In my opinion both nuns and monks are following the ascetic life and they renounce their lives in the same way. As far as I know the Buddha never taught such discriminations between men and women. I think that people themselves have modified the religion. I accept the ethical teaching of the Buddha such as the five precepts. What I am opposing is discrimination in every social sphere by people. CINT 276

Although women and men are equal in Myanmar and enjoy equal rights, men are a little superior. This is due to our religion and the influence of Hinduism on Buddhism. Men can become monks but women can't. They may become nuns, but the rules for nuns are a lot less strict and their status is by far not as high as monks' status. Perhaps that is

TRADITIONAL SAYINGS

Notions of women and their traditional gender roles in society are commonly expressed in traditional sayings in Burma. The following sayings come from a traditional text of verses called the *Lawkaniti*, thought to be of similar provenance to the *Dhammathats* of customary law, but predating them. These selections were published, with many others, in a day diary printed by the Union Solidarity and Development Association, which the SPDC refers to as an NGO, but which is usually described by others as a government-supported organization established with the ultimate aim of promoting the military's political aims.⁶ USDA central organizers are members of the Women's Affairs Committees at the national, state/division, district and township levels.

A woman who is disputatious, envious, covetous of whatever she sees, greedy of food and who eats before her husband or loves staying in others' houses: such a woman should be abandoned by her husband even if she bore him a hundred sons.

(Lawkaniti 105, November 20-26 page)

A monk who is not content is ruined;
A king who is content is ruined;
A harlot who is bashful is ruined;
A girl of good birth who is not bashful is ruined.

(Lawkaniti 117, March 20 - 26 page)

A harper is ruined when separated from his harp for five days;
An archer is ruined when separated from the bow for seven days;
A student is ruined when separated from the teacher for a month;
A wife is ruined when separated from her husband for a month.

(Lawkaniti 97, October 9-15 page)

A woman who has changed two or three husbands;
A monk who has changed two or three monasteries;
A bird that has escaped two or three snares;
They are full of deceit.

(Lawkaniti 100, October 30 - November 5 page)

One should praise food after it has been digested;
One should praise his wife after she has passed her prime;
One should praise a warrior after he has returned home victorious;
One should praise his own corn after it has reached the barn.

(Lawkaniti 99, October 23 - 29 page)

why so few women become nuns. If a woman does good deeds in her life, she may be reborn as a man in her next life. However, if a man is cunning or mean, he may be reborn as a woman. These aspects of our religion have a great influence on daily life and I think they cannot be changed. Women don't resist this, but accept it as their fate, just like they accept having daughters as their fate. CINT 248

To be considered a "good woman," women must abide by behavioural restrictions that cut across the religious and cultural boundaries separating Burma's ethnic communities. *Pon* has become a part of Burmese culture, and customary beliefs incorporating the notion of *pon* are often practiced equally by non-Buddhist, non-Burman ethnic communities. Social behaviour contains many day-to-day proscriptions to prevent women from polluting or diminishing men's *pon*. For example, a woman cannot dry the garments she wears on the lower part of her body near walkways where men are likely to pass or on lines above their heads. Women also should not do roofing or other construction work that place the lower parts of their bodies above men. Women are not supposed to sleep on their husbands' right sides (where *pon* resides), or with their heads higher than their husbands, because this also is said to reduce a man's *pon*. These ideas stem from the notion that the parts of the bodies of socially inferior people should never be above their correlative parts of their superiors.' In particular, ideas regarding women's *tameins* (sarongs) and their power to diminish *pon* are widespread, and observed, for example, by many Christian Karens, Kachins and others.

Many women today do not agree with these beliefs, even though they may follow them so as not to incur the condemnation of their communities or families.

Women have to wash men and women's clothing separately. Men's clothes must be washed first and then hung out to dry. The men's clothes must be hung at a higher height than the women's. Every night women are meant to pay respect to their husbands by *shikoing* (bowing) to them. I don't do this because I don't like to. I should treat him the same as I would the village head, but I don't want to because he is not my father, he is only my husband. CINT 16

In Burma women's clothes cannot be dried above men's clothes, and women's underwear cannot be hung outside to dry. In my opinion, a piece of cloth is just a piece of cloth. We should not differentiate between men's and women's clothes. Women's clothes are considered dirty just because

we menstruate. This is a kind of superstition and a social disease -- we have to reform these kinds of customs that give us an inferior status. CINT 276

Men lead the family, but we want to have the same level. We must pay respect to our husbands: when we eat, we cannot eat before our husbands. If women eat before men, their power will decrease. Even if they are out, we have to wait for them to return to eat! Why can't we put our clothes together on the line? We are told that if men cross under the laundry line, their power will decrease. We want to change these things. These are small changes that need to be made, but we need to change big things too. We need to learn and get skills and self-confidence. CINT 127

Other Religions

The practice of Islam described by Muslim women in Burma varies considerably in different communities. However, it can be said generally that the women's role is in the home surrounded by her family. In some communities, for example among Rohingyas, women are actively discouraged from leaving the house. In other communities, women are allowed to work outside the house, vending snacks or doing paid employment, but their behaviour is carefully scrutinized, since it is believed that women are liable to fall prey to indiscretions, their own and others'.

The wife's responsibility is the house and the husband's is to earn for the family. The wife waits for the husband to bring her the food. The wife stays inside the house, even very poor people. For example the rickshaw driver will work very hard in the morning, then around noon he will buy food in the market with the money he has earned that day and bring it to his wife so she can make the lunch. CINT 177

Under Muslim religious rule, the women should be married when they are 16 years old. They should not live alone until they are old. If the women are not married they will live in sin. CINT 67

As with Buddhism (see later in this section), ambitions for sons and daughters differ. It is accepted that Muslim women will not progress to the same levels as men, and that women cannot hold any kind of position in the community or in politics.

Women have no important roles in our community. We do not have basic rights. Women live with their male relatives and must obey them. Some men are struggling for the rights

of the Rohingya people here. But women are not involved at all.... Women and girls do not have any education.⁷

I wish my son to graduate and become a religious teacher. My daughter should become like me some day. I hope she will have a little knowledge and become a good woman. She has no chance to become a leader but if she graduates, she can become the supervisor of the women's group. She can gather the women in her house instead of going to the mosque.... We believe in Muslim religious rule that women should not hold power over men, because men naturally have more power than women. Woman can rule over women but she can't rule over men. CINT 67

The idea that women are unclean and a threat to male chastity and will-power is also prevalent in Muslim culture in Burma. It is women's responsibility to avoid putting men in situations where they might be tempted.

Muslim can touch or hold the Koran when they are clean, that is, when they don't have period. Even though they can read the Koran, they should not rest it on their thigh or let it touch their sarong.

Women can't enter the area of a grave. If they want to see the grave, they should stay outside the fence and look. If a woman enters the graveyard to see a burial when she has her period, the dead person may meet evil.

I don't mind that we can't enter the mosque, because we have always known that the mosque is the domain of men only. Women can do anything in their own houses, but they should not show themselves to the people. If we go to the Mosque, many men would see our beauty. When a man covets the beauty of any woman who is worshiping, she can encounter evil. Therefore women should worship in their own houses and cover themselves with clothes properly before going out. CINT 67 (1st woman)

However, in some Muslim communities, for example in Karen State, where Muslim women work in tea-shops and other businesses, and have participated in such community activities as voting, there is recognition that the culture is changing, and acceptance of religious provisions is not as widespread as it used to be.

If we look at the situation now, there are very few women who practice according to the religious rules. God commands the Muslim women to wear clothes that cover all of their bodies. The women must wear a shirt with long sleeves and must wear a sarong that covers their ankles. Most of

the women now are wearing the modern clothes and cutting their hair as they like. CINT 67 (2nd woman)

Muslim women stated that they believe access to education will help remove some of the traditional barriers to their independence. Those who are able to get an education are not bound to the same degree by restrictions on their independent movement, perhaps because they are seen to be less vulnerable.

Some young Muslim women can attend university before they marry, because they have knowledge and they can protect themselves from sex. The children who have not studied have no knowledge and cannot protect themselves from sex. But their parents have responsibility to remind their daughters to get married. The men can stay alone as they want. CINT 67 (2nd woman)

Most of the women we spoke with from Christian communities did not voice specific complaints about the social restrictions they face because of their religion, though this should not be taken as evidence that they do not exist. At the same time, women in Christian churches in Burma usually do not occupy positions at levels equal to those of men. While some women do become pastors, notably in Chin State, it is a relatively rare occurrence. Additionally, sometimes decisions among women's church groups are made or influenced by male rectors or pastors.

We don't have women pastors. But we have some women leaders who don't do activities that men do. CINT 96

The women are told that the head of a woman is a man and the head of the man is God. So whatever it is, we have to respect our husbands. That's our Christian belief. But there's no discrimination. CINT 97

We don't have women pastors. I was really surprised to see a woman pastor in America. That was the first time. But we do have deaconesses, and next to the pastor, they do play high roles. For example, when you have a church service, they are the ones who make the announcements and read the Bible. CINT 99

There are also differences in the ways that men and women practice Animism, although relatively few of the women we spoke with described themselves as Animists, in part because Christianity or Buddhism is now practiced in many formerly Animist communities.

[In the Animist community] there are some kinds of prohibitions for women. For example, in our tradition, we do a kind of ceremony for the spirits with chicken bones to predict things. Women can't lead this ceremony. We use chicken bones to predict almost as we read the Bible. Only men can do this. CINT 233

PRESERVERS OF CULTURE

[At the Second Myanmar Women's Conference in January 2000 Lieutenant-General Khin Nyunt, First Secretary of the SPDC] warned against infiltration of alien culture, emphasizing the need to be more serious in nurturing the mass of Myanmar women to cherish and preserve their culture and tradition, promote cultural heritage, strengthen nationalism and patriotism, and safeguard their originality with national awareness.⁸

Technology is rapidly changing the world and has also affected developing countries. It is essential that women not only benefit from technology, but also participate in the process from the design to the application, monitoring and evaluation stages.

- Beijing Platform for Action, Paragraphs 264 & 265

In Burma, women are seen as the protectors of culture. In many nations and societies, women are entrusted with preserving traditional culture, and because of this, are thus not permitted to change and develop in the same ways that men are. Prohibitions on women's behaviour may involve their dress and public deportment, their opportunities to participate in physical education and sporting or other leisure activities, their vocational choices, or their access to technical knowledge or scientific fields of study. These restrictions can ultimately affect women's capacities to access positions of power and decision-making in all fields, to use communication systems, and to participate in media programming and creation of appropriate technologies aimed at improving the quality of their lives. Excluding women from these arenas reinforces the limitations placed on them by traditional roles.

In its report to the CEDAW Committee and in its presentation at the ESCAP Regional High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the SPDC reiterated that in addition to the five areas of national concentration chosen from the Beijing Platform for Action (education, health, the economy, violence against women, and the girl-child), it had added a

sixth of its own: culture. Its report further described that the government aims to “uplift women’s experience” by holding annual meetings on culture at basic and higher educational levels, recognizing the need to preserve culture and women’s dignity. To this end, it has also printed and distributed a range of publications about women and traditional culture. Actions on culture proposed in the National Action Plan⁹ include encouraging women to wear traditional dress. In addition, the government organizes performing arts competitions involving music, dance, singing, and verse, holds traditional festivals, and publishes information on the national races.

The government has laid down political, economic and social objectives to accomplish peace, tranquility, national consolidation, and stability of the State.

D1. To uplift dynamism of patriotic spirit, national prestige and integrity.

D2. To preserve the cultural heritage.

D3. To preserve and safeguard Myanmar culture and tradition.

- brochure by The Union of Myanmar, Myanmar National Women’s Affairs Committee, 1998

It is ironic that the SPDC has chosen to take a public stance in support of traditional culture, given its concerted efforts to prevent the teaching and use of ethnic languages, the practice of religions other than Buddhism, and the celebration of traditional ethnic ceremonies. The military regime’s human rights abuses in the context of its efforts to eradicate the traditional expressions of ethnic cultures are well-documented by regional and international human rights monitors. In December 1999, the US State Department imposed sanctions on Burma as one of the world’s five worst countries for religious persecution, reiterating its complaints in its 2000 report on religious discrimination.¹⁰

At the same time, many of the women we spoke with accused the government of hastening the erosion of the very customs, beliefs and practices it claims to defend through tacit support of the growing sex trade in Rangoon and other cities.

[The generals] don’t understand there is anything wrong when, for example, they force pregnant women to do forced labour, and they harass women, and set up nightclubs and persuade women to work there, leading them to prostitution. CINT 91

Women have twice as much pressure on them from the military government. For example, even in Burma women have to wear short skirts when they work in restaurants and nightclubs. Most of the people who are sons and daughters, the relatives, of the heroin dealers, or related to high ranking leaders in the military government, are getting rich, while ordinary people can’t use money like them, they can’t go to nightclubs, because their own survival is so difficult. Why do these girls come to work at places like this? Really, I don’t think any woman wants to do this kind of work, because in our traditional culture, our community thinks this kind of work is bad. They have to work in nightclubs because of the economy. When they work in nightclubs, it’s not just for entertainment. The men pay them a lot to go outside to do what they want with them. So these women’s lives are being destroyed. CINT 90

Now many young girls are working in nightclubs and karaoke bars. It’s not a good situation at all. It’s not our Burmese culture... These girls must depend on this kind of thing for their income, there is nothing they can do. Often it is actually Burmese men who help others to find these girls, but this is not Burmese custom. It is because of the way our economy and society are changing. CINT 161

Like all cultures, Burma’s various cultures are not static. For better or worse, elements of commercial “Western” culture are inescapably filtering into Burma as they are other countries in the region, often combining with existing practices and fashions to produce new metamorphoses. Many of the women we spoke to attempted to distinguish between preserving the unique elements of their traditional cultures, especially ethnic cultures that are under threat, and eliminating the practices and beliefs that keep women in subordinate positions. Opinions often vary greatly. While some women are adamantly opposed to what they see as harmful foreign influences, others are eager to adopt novel and what they consider to be positive practices. For example, some women feel strongly about wearing traditional dress; others are quite comfortable in jeans and t-shirts and see no reason why women should not wear them as men do. Some women believe that women should be allowed to engage in all the same recreational activities that men undertake. Others feel it is inappropriate for women to partake in some, such as consuming alcohol, and that a certain amount of differentiation in sex roles does not detract from their enjoyment of equal rights.

If men can enjoy recreational activities like drinking or smoking, then women should be allowed to do the same. CINT 01

The social attitude in Burma towards women who drink and go out is not good. Actually you are considered to be not of good character or not morally sound. But I didn't care. When I was in university for four years, I did what I liked. In university we had a group of friends, five or six girls all of the same character, and we used to sit in the tea shops and listen to music and maybe even smoke, openly. So the students thought we were so "bad." We were very free, not like women in typical Burmese society. We were really independent. We even smoked cheroots or cigarettes in the tea shop in front of the other male students. Sometimes we used marijuana. So those people who knew that thought we were bad, even though we were smart and we worked hard, we worked and we could do many things. Of course, boys were doing exactly the same thing! Among the male Burmese students and their society, many used cough syrup [containing codeine and other opiate-derivatives] and other medicines. But for boys it's no problem. CINT 94

In my eyes, it's not appropriate for a woman to drink. I would allow a man to drink a bit. Even though we say that women should be equal to men, there are many places they cannot be equal. Since the time God created us, he created women to be tender. It's not possible for us to be rough like men. So in my view it's not appropriate for women to be drinking. CINT 97

The Buddhist culture has a great influence on our society. So drinking and smoking for women are alien behaviours. We don't need to discard old cultural heritages that are still useful in modern days. Some radical people think that all ancient cultural heritages must be abolished in order to modernize the society. This is a wrong notion. We should respect our own culture and also should understand our different cultures too. Sometimes people are sandwiched between different cultures, and they are facing a social crisis between two different traditions. Even if we, women, achieve our basic rights we should keep good sight of our old traditions. People understand the fact that Western women drink, but Burmese women don't. In this situation people need to differentiate the cultural background. My opinion is that drinking will create more problems, and its consequences will spoil the reputation of women. So we'd better not drink according to our traditions. CINT 276

External media and advertising are also having a great impact on Burma's cultures, especially as populations become more mobile, with women and men moving in search of work. Foreign investment and increased foreign trade throughout the 1990s brought a greater

number of consumer goods and an ever-increasing number of pirated videos into the country. In urban and border areas, particularly, products and influences from neighbouring countries have great impact on youth culture. Female beauty has always been prized in Burma. Now urban centers host a growing number of beauty pageants, and affluent young women seek careers in modeling at the many schools in the capital, where they are taught to use Western cosmetics and wear non-traditional fashions. Education has also contributed to changes in young women's social attitudes, however this is more true for the urban middle- and upper-class, who have been able to afford to attend schools, including private vocational schools when the universities were closed.

One of the most significant changes for women in recent years is the change in dress; many young women wear pants and even mini-skirts now. Another change in recent years is that poverty is chasing women and also children onto the streets to find work, and women have more responsibilities these days. CINT 259

Amongst young people, there is a growing openness between the sexes. It is easier for girls to have intimate relationships with boys now. This is probably due to increased media exposure: more videos, which we didn't have in the past. Because of that the present generation is less inhibited.



ited than the previous generation. Girls and women also have more self-confidence than before, clearer ideas of what they want and they pursue them more than before. This is probably due to economic necessity.... But girls also have more confidence because they have a higher education level than before. They know that they must work for what they want because life is a little harder for girls than boys. Boys still have more privileges like freedom. CINT 253

With the advent of the open government market system, we now get all the beauty products - all the European and Japanese brands like Lancome and Shisedo, which cost 100 times the average monthly earnings. You can get them there in the shops and markets, and high-fashion shoes too. If a young woman wants to be "fully dressed" at this standard, they couldn't have that kind of money for 10 years working as a clerk - but they want these things very much. The media image of women as sex objects is still very evident, despite the fact that the government has condemned the influence of Western culture. I can't understand why this government is on the one hand encouraging religious instruction and yet they can't put a stop to all this media advertising. CINT 126

Burman and non-Burman ethnic women throughout the country often take pride in expressing the various aspects of their distinct traditional cultures. Many are also concerned about the effects of encroaching consumerist culture and the paradigms it

presents regarding women's appearance and sexuality. Calls to safeguard tradition against these influences are frequent. However, emphasis continues to be given to *women's* preservation of tradition and culture, in the ruling regime's rhetoric and among those opposed to it, and is not matched equally by exhortations for men to participate in the preservation of culture. As yet, it does not appear that women and men are encouraged to bear equal responsibility for maintaining their cultural heritage.

This bias reduces the number of choices women can make in their personal lives, and puts women at risk of being excluded from enjoying access to, among other things, leisure pursuits and knowledge and training in technological and scientific fields. Additionally, preserving tradition sometimes entails maintaining community structures that exclude women from public activities, for example, political decision-making. Despite the varying opinions women expressed about traditional cultural practices and beliefs, they were universal in their support for greater educational opportunities for women, and for women's increased participation in leadership and decision-making, to ensure women's perspectives are included in these processes. (*See Education for Women & Girls and Women's Participation in Politics.*)

FAMILY ROLES

Inequality in the public arena can often start with discriminatory attitudes and practices and unequal power relations between women and men within the family.... The unequal division of labour and responsibilities within households based on unequal power relations also limits women's potential to find the time and develop the skills required for participation in decision-making in wider public forums. A more equal sharing of those responsibilities between women and men not only provides a better quality of life for women and their daughters but also enhances their opportunities to shape and design public policy, practice and expenditure so that their interests may be recognized and addressed.

- **Beijing Platform for Action, Paragraph 185**

Daughters & Sons

A daughter in the family is the best slave.

- **Traditional Burmese saying**

Some families prefer daughters since daughters take on more responsibilities than sons.¹²

- **"Initial report of States parties: Myanmar"**

TRADITIONAL ARTS

Devoting time to traditional arts such as weaving and dancing are ways for women in refugee camps to maintain their self-esteem and fight the lassitude of being a refugee. Handicrafts are also a means of generating income. Women, and men, believe that it is important that these aspects of their cultures do not die out and become lost to future generations. To these ends, a variety of projects and organizations assist refugee women, especially in Karen and Karenni camps, engaged in weaving and sewing to teach others and to market their products. In the Karenni camps, where new refugees must usually wear donated clothing because the materials with which to weave their traditional dress are not available, projects have been undertaken to provide thread to allow the women to produce the clothes they prefer to wear. (CINT 233)

Our births were a waste of time for our parents. Our brothers went to school. We were still loved though. CINT 01

Many women we spoke with believed that sons are valued over daughters, sometimes, though not always, as a result of Buddhist practice. Customary law, which is based on Burmese Buddhist culture, gives grounds for divorce to a man whose wife bears him no sons, although it is unknown whether this would be accepted in practice today. Most Buddhist parents take great joy in their sons' ordination as monks, often during the traditional New Year (*Thingyan*). While many of these young novices leave the monastery after only a few days or weeks, their act of renunciation carries both social pride and the belief that merit also accrues to the parents.

Most people prefer boys, even in our pro-democratic forces. Men want to have boy children, baby boys. They are so proud when they have a son, and then if they have two, oh only sons. Women also have this kind of attitude, because you know if you have a baby boy, he can go through *shinpyu* [Buddhist ordination] and they can feel proud, but if you don't have boys, you can't do this. CINT 94

Daughters are excluded from this spiritual practice, and perhaps as a result, are expected to perform more mundane services on behalf of their parents. "Sacrifice," a documentary film about trafficking of young women and girls from Burma into sex work in Thailand, narrates,

Sons provide for the life beyond; daughters provide for this life.¹³

Son preference is also common in some of the ethnic groups that maintain social systems based on clan kinship, and where sons are seen to carry on the family name and bloodlines, including among the Kachin, Chin, and Naga.

In our Kachin society, men have to look after the family. Women we give to another family.... Women's responsibilities are less than men, in preserving the family line. For example, if the man is from the Maran clan and woman the Inko clan, their child will be Maran not Inko. That's why we give more priority to boys. CINT 109

In Chin society, girls are for others. CINT 169

Sons, especially in adolescence, sometimes get better food than daughters, and are granted more leisure time and freedom in their recreational activi-

SPORTS

Although the Myanmar Women's Sports Federation (MWSF) was founded in 1991 to "promote the participation of women in sports as well as the development of women physically, mentally and morally,"¹¹ sports are traditionally a male domain. There have been a few regionally-known Burmese female athletes, but young girls on the whole are not encouraged to participate in sports. Those who are very serious and talented may compete in sporting events, but it is uncommon for women to engage in sports just for recreation, because "Being athletic is not considered feminine." (CINT 99) This paradigm is changing, for example in refugee camps, where both men and women have few recreational activities. The Karen Women's Affairs Committee in Mae La camp, with a population of over 30,000, has organized women's teams throughout the camp to play volleyball and football (known as soccer in North America).

ties, as they are not expected to perform household tasks as their sisters are.

The boys will rarely be home if they're around sixteen. Even after school you hardly see them. But if a girl was rarely home after school, it wouldn't be tolerated. Girls always have to be home. It's a cultural thing. Even if you're 23, 24, and you're working, you can't spend much time with your boyfriend away from home. You have to be home. CINT 99

Under the prevailing concepts of family responsibility, daughters by extension are expected to take their mothers' roles as they grow older. Another Burmese saying is *Ama kyi ame a yar*: "If an elder sister is old enough, she takes the place of the mother." Taking care of children and the household chores starts early for young women, and prevents them from partaking in other activities that their freer brothers enjoy.

To be an ideal woman, you have to stay at home with your parents, and work, cook, wash the clothes, do all the household work. And you have to wear your *longyi* very long, past mid-calf, near your ankles. You cannot quarrel with your elders. You should be very good-mannered and never talk back. You should speak in very low tones and never laugh



loudly. It's not good to laugh a lot if you're a woman! And you should always speak in a soft voice. And you should not go out at night. That's how to be perfect, how to be a good woman. CINT 94

To conform to the feminine ideal, you must walk slowly, speak softly, and act very calmly at all times. You're not supposed to laugh out loud. If you do, you're a loose person. You should wear traditional dress, not very revealing, and your *tamein* should come to just above your ankles.... And you should have long hair, worn up if you want to be respectable. CINT 99

A "glorious woman" must have certain characteristics or attributes that we call the five "glories": she keeps her hair long, is simple and polite in front of men or their parents, avoids going out and lives at home and does the household work, doesn't speak too much, and if boys come to her, she must look shy whether she really is or not.... In fact, these kind of concepts, which women want to conform to so they can be praised, help to keep them oppressed. CINT 279

As girls become women, the responsibilities they are expected to assume expand to include care for aging parents and other relatives. While sons may bear the financial responsibilities for supporting their elders, often daughters are the main care-givers. It is not uncommon for parents to continue to live with their daughters until their deaths, particularly in traditionally matrilineal Burmese Buddhist families.

To look after old parents or children, mostly women are re-

sponsible. Men are responsible for earning money, so mostly daughters take care of their relatives, rarely sons. CINT 127

Daughters also often serve their fathers and brothers, for example at meals or when guests visit. As a sign of respect, elders and men are usually served first. At parties or social events, women are sometimes expected to eat before or after the guests arrive so that they can be free to serve throughout the event. Even at daily meals, women often eat last, particularly when food is scarce, so that their

husbands and children can eat the tastiest, most nutritious parts of whatever is being offered.

Burmese women are really attached to their sons and husbands, and respect them a lot. For instance, if they cook a meat curry, they reserve the best part of the meat for their husbands and sons, then their daughters, and finally they eat only the left-over sauce. This is the tradition and many women do this. Sometimes the men think that their wives have also eaten as well as they have. But some husbands just say, "My wife can eat as she wants." They don't care about it if the woman doesn't eat well. CINT 84

I always serve my father first, because my father is the head of the family. Nothing bad would happen if I served my mother first, but it is our custom, our Kachin culture. CINT 78

I agree with serving food to our parents and teachers first as a sign of respect to them, according to our traditions, but I do not agree that we women should serve our husbands and brothers first just because they are male. CINT 276

Traditional stereotypes of family roles learned in early childhood, encouraging women to be meek and cooperative, are difficult to change. Women who have been brought up to follow these behavioural models often lack the self confidence or the courage to act differently or put forward their own views, even when they feel strongly about them. More equitable treatment of daughters and sons would assure girls that they are both equally valuable and equally valued.

Mothers & Fathers, Wives & Husbands

The head of the household is the father, but it is the mother who plays a major role in rearing children.... In Myanmar society, traditions and customs expect a woman to control the purse, to prepare food, make clothing and look after the children.¹⁴

- Union of Myanmar, "Report on the CEDAW"

In Myanmar society, the husband is the nominal head of the family and this is generally not disputed by the wife. However, he does not interfere with the day-to-day running of the household and gives her a free hand to attend to such matters. She, on her part, not only refrains from questioning his authority in front of the children, but also takes pains to compel obedience and deference to it.¹⁵

- Sein Tu, Myanmar Perspectives

In a workshop with teenagers, some young women said they are not happy to be women, they would rather be born as men, because women must assume certain roles. They resent the expectations society has of them as women. When we asked them about the advantages and disadvantages of being a man or a woman, the men could mention mostly only advantages, while the women mentioned mostly disadvantages. Gender discrimination begins at home, when girls are made to wash their own plates while boys can just leave them; girls have to do household tasks but boys don't. CINT 254

Women's fundamental roles in Burmese society are as mothers, wives, nurturers, and managers of household affairs. Nonetheless, fathers and husbands are ordinarily considered to be household heads, the ones to whom all other family members must defer. Men are expected to provide the bulk of the household income, and to function as the primary decision-makers and disciplinarians. Buddhism, Christianity and Islam as they are practiced in Burma all accept men as the heads of households. Government publications also affirm men's positions as the domestic leaders, and admit and accept that women occupy subordinate roles, justifying this on the basis of culture and women's *own* choices to maintain their positions. Women's lack of participation in public spheres of life, including politics, is often defended with assertions that women "control the household finances" -- and that this is all they desire to control.

The *Dhammathats* (customary law) — written by monks and men — sometimes describe the husband as the lord and

master of the home, and the Burmese wife quietly keeps him thinking so, for it makes him feel happy and it renders it easier for her to run the home.¹⁶

Without exception, the women we spoke with affirmed that in Burma men are seen to be the household heads, but not all of them found this situation agreeable. The role of women as wives and mothers is also clearly socially defined across different ethnic cultures. Women are expected to take responsibility for child-rearing and most of the household work. Women said this remained true regardless of whether or not they also worked outside the house, as an increasing number of women in Burma do. The fact that under prevailing conditions, situations sometimes differ greatly from the purported norms, and that women may be the family's primary or sole breadwinners, does not seem to have affected popular perception of who is "in charge" in the home. The supremacy of men is taken to be a kind of a natural order, and also extends outside the family. Women who are active in business or the community are not always respected. Unless they have wealth, connections or education to give them status, they may be seen as busy-bodies and trouble-makers.

A woman has to follow the man whether it's concerned with family matters or business matters. If a woman is the leader, the neighbors will talk. They won't like it. It's similar in business affairs as well. A man's leadership is given more importance. CINT 93

...The mother's role is secondary. The father is first, both in any kind of administration and in business, and in terms of supporting the family. But under the present circumstances, in some families, it is actually women who are in the primary position in terms of their children's education and family finances, because of the political conditions. CINT 109

In the house, many men only give money for food, they go to work and earn money. The wife must take care of the house and do everything. Men think that women are weak and should stay at home. Sometimes if the woman works, the husband may help, but only a little. Now many women are working, but men are lazier than women, and so the women have to work *and* take care of the house. CINT 18

Think about what happens when a couple marries. The man's parents have always told him, "My son, you must raise someone else's daughter, so you must have an adequate education." And the woman has always been told, "You will

be fed by another man's labours." This is a form of indoctrination to women and an encouragement to men. So men sometimes say to their wives, "You had to live in poverty in your community before, but after you married me, you got nice clothing and a better life because of my efforts. So don't try to oppose me anymore." CINT 279

As a result of these roles in the home, women are socialized to believe that men are born leaders and bread-winners, and that women are followers and dependents, their positions necessarily secondary, including in more public arenas.

Nonetheless, women today are not always feel satisfied with these restrictions limiting their spheres of influence, and some believe that it is both possible and necessary to change conventions.

When you are married, as a woman you have babies and you work outside the home these days, so women have more responsibilities than in previous generations. Men are not much inclined to share household tasks or childcare; they take care of children, but less than women. Women must speak up for themselves in order to change this. They must make men understand about being equal partners and having equal responsibilities. But at the moment, men have more privileges than women, so it's not easy for them to give up these privileges. CINT 253

We want to push for greater dialogue between husband and wife. Both should talk together about decision making and discuss their problems. We have ideas because we have experienced problems and learned from them. As women, it is time to think about our experiences in Burma, and develop steps towards a solution. CINT 01

Many people say that women are in charge of the household, but this is not always true. I think the way husbands listen to and value their wives' opinions will depend on the education, experience, and position of the woman. Now women are much more educated than in the past, so they are more able to take on decision making, and if they speak, I think it is more likely now that their husbands will listen to them. CINT 161

Achieving greater opportunities for women in education, employment and political participation will require first revising the stereotypes regarding the positions that both men and women occupy in the home, to provide for more equitable sharing of responsibilities and opportunities. Ultimately, this will undoubtedly necessitate men giving up some of

the privileges they currently enjoy so that women may have a more equal role. However, changing roles and responsibilities in family and social life may also liberate men from the constraints that prevent them from engaging in activities traditionally considered part of the "female domain," such as caring for children.

Childcare is perceived as a woman's role, while men are breadwinners providing money for food and medicine, and taking care of discipline. Women, mothers and grandmothers, perform the more nurturing roles. The traditional gender roles are a stumbling block for women, who don't perceive themselves as leaders and thus don't come forward to participate in community committees or meetings. But in our early childhood care and development activities we see that men are indeed interested in childcare, once they understand that they can also have a nurturing role. CINT 258

SOCIAL RELATIONS & BEHAVIOURAL NORMS

As in all countries, communities in Burma uphold certain standards for behaviour based on gender that define what is considered normal. Customary and social traditions dictate what women should or should not do. Many of these are founded on the ideas that women are not independent actors, and that they must rely on men in their day-to-day lives. In a variety of situations, women's identities are secondary to men's, particularly to their husbands.'

Marriage, for example, is considered the normal state for women in Burma, and young women often face great pressure from their families to marry.

You should marry when you're between 21 and 25. After that, you're on the shelf and you should be in a museum! My family didn't pressure me, but my neighbours worried about me. "What if she marries someone younger?!" they said. A woman shouldn't marry a man who is younger than her, but for a man it's quite normal. We have a saying: you divide the age of the guy by two and add four and that's the perfect age for his wife. So if the guy is 40, she should be 24. CINT 99

For women who don't marry at all, the villagers will probably suspect them of something, think that there is something wrong with them. In Kachin culture, they think that maybe there is an evil spirit in her or something.... For a man, the society doesn't look down on him. They would just think he is not financially ready, or he is too picky -- but no evil spirits. CINT 109

ARRANGED MARRIAGES

Even today, if the father and mother do not like someone but the daughter loves the man, she cannot marry him. If the father and mother like the man, then the daughter has to marry. CINT 09

I married when I was 16 years old. My husband was 22. My parents asked me to marry him, because I am the eldest daughter in the family, and they needed someone to work for and help support the family. CINT 104

In Burma, if people have problems in their marriages, it is often because the marriage has been arranged by the parents, and the young people haven't had time to get to know each other before they are suddenly together. Some children are very obedient and will submit to this, even when they really don't want to marry the other person. I really hate this system. Also the husband's family always ask the girl's qualities, like "Can she cook, can she clean?" This is ridiculous! It's really bad. Men should be looking for life-partners not maids! They should choose their wives out of love not because they need someone to work for them. CINT 161

I didn't love my husband before we married, but now we have a baby, so I will have to love him. I was too young and I didn't want to get married, but my parents forced me. I cried the whole night, because my mother brought me to his house and wouldn't let me get away. The next day she said, "You've already slept at a man's house, so now you must marry him." CINT 165

I was not interested in getting married as I was too young. It was forcibly arranged by my relatives and my elder brother. I didn't love my husband. My brother worried that I would elope with another man, so he arranged for his friend and me to marry. I was 16, but he was 26. I fled to Rangoon on the first night of marriage. I stayed with my friends for two months. After that the relatives came and consoled me, and asked me to come back home. He also came along and said if I didn't want him, I could choose my own path with my boyfriend. I had a boyfriend at the time, but his parents did not agree to him marrying me. My boyfriend did not accept me [after that] because I was married and everyone knew it. So I went home with them and lived with my husband. CINT 41

Parents decide when a woman gets married. If someone likes her, the parents decide whether she can marry him. In my case, I had to marry a man who was 50 years old when I was 13. CINT 235

Our parents arranged our marriage. My husband proposed to my parents. I had to follow my parents' idea. I couldn't refuse. The only way was for me to try to deal with my grief by myself. Later I became accustomed to it and it was okay. Many Muslim women are forced to marry by their parents. We cannot refuse our parents. I have 11 brothers and sisters in my family, but only one was married by her choice. All the rest were arranged by my parents. CINT 49

My parents and the village leaders arranged our marriage. I couldn't refuse my parents. Most people in our village get married this way. It's traditional. They must agree with their parents and make them happy, whether they like the arrangements or not. CINT 51

I married at 12. I married very young because my parents were afraid that NaSaKa [Regional Command forces] would pick me up. CINT 185

To this end, arranged or coerced marriages continue, in both rural and urban areas, though they are far less prevalent now than they were two or three decades ago. The issue of arranged marriages can be a subject of considerable controversy, given that different societies often have very different views regarding the function of marriage. The majority of women we spoke with strongly condemned arranged marriage for reducing their life choices and forcing them into situations that were often unhappy and abusive, in which they had very little power to negotiate with their spouses.

I have one friend who had no choice but to get married. She was only 21 when she was married off to this guy. At first I really don't think she thought she'd be marrying this man, but if you're 21, marriageable age, people are approaching your parents. So this guy came, and she used to make fun of this guy, he was Chinese and she really didn't like him, then one day her parents told her she was going to marry him. And she did. That's one incident. And another friend was dating this soldier, or army officer, but then she met this other guy, and I think she was in love with the second man, and didn't want to marry the first one. Since she's been seen with the first guy, her mother forced her to marry him, even though she didn't love him any more. Just because you've been seen with somebody, you have to marry them. And one of my friends, after she got married to this guy, he used to do things like call her from next door when he came home, just to serve his lunch and sit with him while he ate. I felt really sorry for her. Now my cousin has been

the man. Thus women may marry because they feel they or their families will be able to benefit in some way from the union, even though they may not know their partners very well before making this commitment. This can have profound effects on women's (and men's) experiences of marriage.

On the other hand, even when an emotional bond exists, women may be prevented from pursuing it if the partners they desire are not "appropriate." No matter how strong the attraction or commitment, it is difficult for a woman to marry a man whose status is seen in any way to be lower than hers. Women should be the inferiors in the relationship, whether the difference is in terms of age or other determinants such as educational or professional qualifications. Women are also restricted in their control over their relationships with men. For example, women

THU ZA, 39

I met my husband near the port of Sittwe. He was a shipworker. At that time I was jobless and I decided to marry him. My life was very difficult. I lived with my mother but we were so poor. I could not get any income. I was not really in love with him. Because of my age it was appropriate that I get married, and he wanted to marry me. According to our Rakhine tradition, men must be in love and then women follow. One day he came to me to propose marriage. I also made the decision to get married to end my difficulties.

My mother worried about the gossip about us. In Arakan, when two people are in love, everybody gossips about them and it is not good to stay single. My mother was very concerned about the gossip and pushed me, saying, "If you love him, then marry him quickly!". She was very afraid of what other people would say. My husband and myself went to the authorities with other people and signed. I got married at the police station in Sittwe. Then we had a traditional wedding. Our parents and friends were there too.

First I thought that my life was improving, but then little by little I became unhappy. At that time, I didn't know much about my husband. We were not friends. After getting married, I did not like my husband's behaviour. My husband started drinking more and more, and he was gambling. Even when I was pregnant, my husband used to come to me to sleep with me. Can you imagine he wanted to make love to me even when I was pregnant? Once I pushed him away so violently that he fell down. My dreams were destroyed. After I had our first child, my husband's behaviour started changing. I believe it is because we were not really in love with each other, even before our marriage.

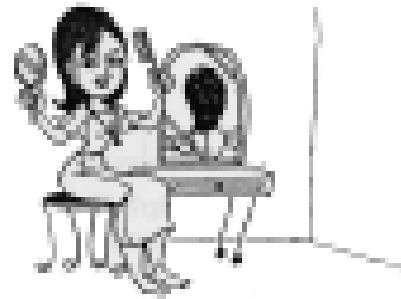
We quarrel a lot, but he doesn't usually beat me. We shout at each other. I have to stay patient with him, because of what the people around us would say. If I could always manage to be patient, they would be no quarrels. Sometimes I shout, but sometimes my husband doesn't shout but insults me in a low voice. Then I cannot stay quiet. Now everybody gossips that I am always shouting! Sometimes I hear people saying about us: "How did those two get married?"

Sometimes I do think about this, and tell my husband: "Divorce me and go back!" But then I think that if my husband divorces me, I will face so many problems with the children. That is the reason why I stay patient, and that is why our family is still together. I will never believe in him. I have already seen so much of his bad behaviour! I cannot count all the days I have cried! CINT 176

Needs

1. What is the need?

Example: A girl needs to have a good hair style.



2. How important is your need? If it is very important to you, then you will try hard to get it.



Example: The girl sees other girls are very pretty with a good hair style and she has heard some boys saying they like to talk to girls with nice hair styles. To her, it will be very exciting and she will be very proud if many boys look at her.

This illustration comes from a trainers' manual on HIV/AIDS for use with women and youth in community awareness-raising in Burma. (UNICEF, "Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS Myanmar Training Manual," Yangon, Myanmar, 1995, p. 7.)

dating some guy only for four months, and people are saying, "You've been seeing somebody, well you have to marry him. Why don't you marry him now, it's not nice to be seen quite often together." And she's not ready, she's just met him. It's been only four months. CINT 99

While Burma has a long literary tradition of romance and matches for love, in reality, practical concerns govern to a large extent the choice of a marital partner. Often, a woman will agree to a relationship because it offers the best opportunities for her future, even though she may not feel deeply emotionally tied to

cannot initiate romantic liaisons, but must wait to be chosen.

Men do not women who have more ability than them because they are afraid their wives will control them and they will lose their status as men.... Most men want to marry a woman who is inferior to them. This is a centuries-old idea and probably comes from Buddhism. CINT 276

If a girl falls in love with a boy, she is very afraid to talk openly to him. She cannot talk about her feelings of love. The community will not allow it. A girl cannot approach a boy first. Everybody will gossip. She must wait until the boy approaches her. She can only try to attract his attention secretly. CINT 106

In Karen culture, if a woman told a man she loved him, everyone would look down on her. That is embarrassing for women. Men can ask women to love them, but women can't ask men. I think very few women have ever done that. CINT 75

At the same time, men and women often look for very different things from their relationships. Beauty is an important quality for women to possess in the marriage market, while men are more likely to be sought for their reliability and wage-earning capabilities.

In our workshops with young people, the different perspectives of girls and boys were very clear. When asked what kind of a partner they would want to marry, boys mentioned mostly physical characteristics, while girls were more practically-oriented. Boys said they wanted partners who are beautiful, feminine, have long hair, girls who are decent. Girls spoke about things such as his ability to provide an income to the family, that he should be nice, affectionate, understanding and honest. Both groups thought the partner's loyalty was very important. CINT 253

Women who remain single are usually referred to as "spinsters" in Burma, and may be pitied or scorned in some communities. Even for an unmarried woman, it is not customary to live alone, and thus very few women do. In addition to the safety risks, women who live alone are liable to be gossiped about. Those who live without the leadership of a man in the household are considered not only unstable, but sometimes also unmanageable and prone to socially unacceptable excesses.

In Burma, it is really difficult to live by yourself! Either you

stay with your parents or your husband, but it's very, very rare for a woman to live alone. There are a few rare people who do this. CINT 94

There is a saying about women, a woman who doesn't have a husband is like a country without a leader. You are not fit for society. It means that if you are woman, you need to get married, and if you are not married then there is something wrong with you. They make jokes about spinsters, they say they are fussy and that they are spinsters because they don't get what they want. Sometimes, you are human, you are emotional, but if you want to get angry, they say it is because you are not married. Society is very cruel. CINT 29

Burmese society does have an archetype of the single woman who sacrifices her personal life in order to provide for and assist her family, usually living at her parents' house for the rest of her life. Women who follow this path are not subject to ridicule or disapproval, but rather lauded for their selflessness. These women are often the oldest girl-children in the family.

There are some situations where a woman will remain single because she has to take care of all the siblings, and she feels responsible for their education, so she can't really have her own life. I don't think it works that way for men. CINT 99

Once a woman is married, she is expected to have children. Married women who do not wish to have children are considered abnormal by their communities, unless they have clear reasons for postponing motherhood, since motherhood is perceived as one of a woman's primary functions in life. Having a career is not always a socially acceptable reason for delaying becoming a parent. Rather, it is the norm that women who do paid work still perform the other tasks demanded of them as wives and mothers, including taking primary responsibility for home and child-care.

There's a lot of pressure on a woman to have children. It's strange if you don't. You will be called *amyo* which means sterile. It's a word they use for animals that can't reproduce, chickens, like that. And they also say you should have children when you are younger. It's believed if you don't have your first child by the age of 30, you'll have a lot of problems. CINT 94

Women are also held responsible for ensuring that a marriage is successful, and their domestic duties are seen to override other concerns they might have. This necessarily limits women's activities outside of care

FOCUS DISCUSSION GROUP WITH KAREN REFUGEES ON GENDER ROLES

Women's physical strength relative to men's has long been used as a rationale for preventing women from engaging in strenuous activities, on the grounds that women must be shielded from potential dangers or injuries. The following is part of a discussion among refugees about physical work and gender roles in the camp.

1st woman: One thing we should discuss is security. We want to organize a women's security group, but men don't want to give us 100% support. Women can't walk or go around at night, and men oppress us because we can't organize our own security.

man: We don't mean to oppress women. Women have to work hard day and night – you have more duties. We are being kind so you don't have to do that [provide security].

1st woman: The leaders take responsibility for food distribution and security. They say they don't want to give women responsibility because women can't carry heavy rice sacks. But men don't give the opportunity to women.

man: We are kind. Rice is very heavy and women can't carry it.

2nd woman: I think the responsibility to distribute food should be shared. Say for example, there is a woman who has no husband, or she is a widow, or her husband is sick or something. By the time she is able to go collect her food, the distribution is finished. If women were helping with the distribution, they would know about these problems, because women can understand each other's situations and we could help. Right now, it's all men.

1st woman: Also, that's why women should participate in security. If a woman has a problem, and a man asks her about it, she will be shy and not tell him. Women are shy and would be afraid to ask for help. If there is a woman security available to talk to, she will be able to explain her problems.

man: Let me say why we don't agree to women's security. When we take the responsibility for security, we have to go around night and day. We have to work together with the Thai authorities at night. If women were there, maybe the Thai authorities would do something to them. But if we ever come across a woman with a problem, we let Women's Affairs know to help solve the problem. We don't want to do everything above women. We have started working together now and we need to work together in the future.

CINT 235

for their households and families, sometimes precluding their access to paid work, formal and non-formal education, and participation in community affairs.

People believe that a woman is the most important person in a marriage. Only when a woman manages well, the marriage will be a pleasant one. People always see marriages and women together. And so women cannot go out and work as much as they want to. It's not a problem for single women. But for married women, they are bound by the marriage. Since her marriage controls her, she can't do as much as she'd like to. CINT 93

Because of the emphasis on women's roles in the home, if marriages do dissolve, women are often

seen to be accountable. Despite the oft-repeated claims that Burmese divorce law is among the fairest in the world (*See Women & the Law*), in social terms, divorce is considered unnatural, to the point that many women we spoke with claimed it almost never occurred in Burma. Divorced women are often viewed with suspicion rather than sympathy by their communities, regardless of how they came to marry or the conditions under which they lived during marriage. This is often true even if women were battered or otherwise abused by their spouses. The apparent disapprobation divorced women face implies a belief that women must always defer to their husbands, and that their relations must be curtailed through their union with a man in marriage.

A divorced woman, while she is free of the restrictions regarding chaperonage and freedom of movement applied to spinsters, is nevertheless informally watched as to her relations with members of the opposite sex.

- Sein Tu, Myanmar Perspectives, April 1998

If a woman divorces her husband, people will look down on her, even if her husband was a drunkard. Every man will despise her, absolutely. CINT 57

In Burmese society, if you are a divorced woman, you will be looked down upon. We call it *ta ku lat*, if you are divorced two times, *nit ku lat* (meaning literally, "one gap, two gaps"). Morally it's considered not right for a woman to divorce, and no one will dare to marry her again.... Before I divorced, my mother heard in Rangoon. I got a letter from her. She was so worried! She wrote, "In our society, our family and our relatives, we have always had only one husband, one wife, this system. You don't respect this. Be patient, you are a woman, a girl. You can't just do whatever you like. Stay in harmony with your husband. If your husband doesn't like something, don't do it. If you are a girl, you should just stay quietly and don't create a problem. You have to keep together as a family. Don't divorce." CINT 94

If a woman is divorced and she acts carefully, she will not be looked down upon. But if she does something bad, yes, she will be looked down upon. For a man, whether good or bad, the community does not care so much. Only if a woman makes a small mistake, she will be seen as a bad woman. Women must always live very carefully for their reputation. CINT 106

Women who are widowed, rather than receiving support from their communities, may also face condemnation simply because they are alone, even though a high proportion of them are widowed, often at a young age, by war, poverty, disease, drug addiction and AIDS.

My husband is dead already because he smoked too much opium. It is very different now that he is dead. When my husband was alive, everyone spoke good about us even though he just smoked and drank, and I had to do everything, but now they speak badly about me because I have no husband. CINT 31

Before my husband died, he drank a lot and we fought a lot, but at least every one treated us okay. Now that he is dead, I am a lot happier, but people talk bad about me because I don't have a husband. But I feel more happy and safe. I don't have to say "Stop drinking!" and he doesn't hit me anymore. CINT 38

At the same time, women who remarry, whether for love and companionship or because they need a source of income to support their children, may encounter criticism. The expectation appears to be that once a woman has committed herself to a conjugal union, she will continue to observe her vows for the balance of her life, regardless of the circumstances surrounding its end. Accordingly, divorced or widowed women who have the opportunity to remarry may also face pressure from their families not to do so.

If a woman gets another husband, people will gossip about her. Even when she is already divorced. Of course some people might agree, but others won't. For a man, it is different. If his wife died or left, he has no problem to remarry. No one will gossip about him. A lot of men do not have a "recognized marriage." People can see that, but they do not gossip much about men. They always put a lot more pressure on the women. CINT 175

It is uncommon for a woman to remarry after a divorce or becoming a widow. This is seen as "changing your face," which is something most women don't want to do. CINT 251

My oldest son doesn't want other men to see me. He could never accept another man in my life, besides his father, even though he doesn't like his father. CINT 83

These situations indicate that a woman's identity is very closely tied to her husband's, even if under *de jure* law she is guaranteed personal autonomy. Social norms require that women must have men in their households to safeguard their personal reputations, and sometimes to guarantee their safety as well. As a result, women often occupy dependent positions in relation to male family members, and even as adults, are often prevented from exercising free will regarding decisions that concern them.

RESTRICTIONS

Women in Burma have neither education nor opportunities. When they want to do something they must first ask their husbands and if their husbands don't allow it then they can do nothing except think about it. Thai women have knowledge and education and can do what they want. They don't have to ask anyone first because they are independent. CINT 150

For most families and communities, they believe the protection a woman needs is the kind she can get from a man.

If she has a man, she has all the protection she needs. That is a common assumption. CINT 99

In a recent workshop with urban youth, the young people told us there are different sets of values for boys and girls. Girls are less free, more restricted in their movements and behaviour. Teenage boys can go out at night and come home whenever they want. Double standards exist: girls must be virgins; boys and men attach a lot of value to virginity at marriage and girls must behave properly. For boys, their own virginity is not an issue. CINT 253

I would worry more if I had a daughter. There are so many dangers for a girl. A girl is like dry leaf that can be ruptured whenever it falls onto a thorn or a thorn drops onto it. Girls can always lose and never profit. CINT 272

Sexuality

Many of the stereotypes that restrict women in Burmese society stem from concepts about women's sexuality. Most cultures in Burma are sexually very conservative and place a premium on monogamous union for both sexes; however the penalties for women transgressing social boundaries are much more severe than those for men. In fact, women are often blamed for contravening social norms when sex occurs outside the bonds of marriage, even if it is against their will or in circumstances beyond their influence. Women are expected to be virgins at marriage, and many young women take pride in being able to claim this status. Men's chastity is a matter of less concern, as evidenced by the number of men whose first sexual experience is with a sex worker, as has been maintained by a number of INGOs working on HIV/AIDS and reproductive health programs.

If a girl has sex with a man before she is married, she will definitely be condemned, very badly. But the man involved has nothing to lose. The girl will lose everything, whether it happened through her consent or by force. CINT 223

If you have sex before marriage and your family finds out, they will force you to get married. CINT 18

Many women from Burma marry the first man they ever become involved with. In fact, they take pride in it. CINT 99

I don't have a boyfriend. I can't have one. If my father knew I had a boyfriend, he would be very angry and he would hurt me and he would make me stop school. So I don't want a boyfriend. CINT 36

Even if a girl has had two or three boyfriends in her life, people want to condemn her as a libertine. If a girl has a boyfriend for two or three years and another friend has four or five boyfriends in the same period, her parents will tell her, "Be careful and avoid your friend, otherwise you will be identified as being like her." But for boys it doesn't matter. If a boy has many girlfriends, his community will praise him as a hero and a popular guy. CINT 279

Mostly, if a girl has a boyfriend and then separates from him, it will be difficult for her to have another, because the neighbours will say things about her, that she was not able to keep her boyfriend. But the boy can easily get a new girlfriend.... People expect that women cannot change and be modern. [Single] women cannot go and stay in a room with a man or go anywhere with a man alone. People will talk about you. All men want to marry virgins, even though they are not virgins. Women who aren't virgins can't expect to get what they want, which is family life. Men want women who are simple and promise them everything. CINT 25

A variety of euphemisms are used in Burmese to describe loss of virginity. A woman who loses her virginity outside of wedlock, or who engages in sexual activities that are seen as inappropriate, or does sex work, is described as *pyetseedeh*: spoiled, ruined, damaged. This term is not applied to men, nor is there any equivalent term.

Curiosity about sex among unmarried people is considered improper, but in actual practice, young men have much more access to information about sex and sexuality, as well as much more opportunity for experience, than women do. The paucity of information for young women increases their health risks, particularly with regard to unwanted pregnancy and abortion. (*See Women's Health.*)

Ideas about appropriate social behaviour also help to create a mentality that blames the victim for what she suffers in the case of sexual harassment and abuse, contributing greatly to the shame that accompanies rape, and increasing women's fear of reporting sexual violence.

If my daughter has some "bad stories" in her background and other people know that, it may cause her trouble when she marries. So [women] conceal all the things [that are potentially embarrassing]. Women have to suffer by themselves and refrain from saying anything. That's why I think men have become more daring to insult women. I assume that it's the fact that the men know that women are always ashamed that

allows men the advantage to continue this. CINT 84

As in many cultures, the idea that survivors of sexual violence in the community “must have done something to invite it” is strong. One woman we interviewed described what happened after her sister’s friend was kidnapped by Mon rebels during a temple festival. In this case the girl was held hostage but not sexually assaulted.

Some people from the kidnapped girl’s village condemned that girl a lot, and even her boyfriend did not support her because she had been in the kidnappers’ place. Even though she had not stayed there overnight and she was released the same day, because her friend’s parents paid the ransom at once, her boyfriend ended his relationship with her. After, she was afraid of the people in her village and she dared not go back there.... Even though she was not kidnapped, my parents beat and scolded my sister as well, because she didn’t get permission to visit [her friend]. Later [her friend] became really embarrassed and she dropped out of school because many people talked widely about the incident. No one was sympathetic; the people only condemned her. CINT 282

In addition to dissuading women from reporting sexual harassment and violence, these concepts regarding women’s reputations as they relate to sexuality and chastity also encourage the practice of forced marriages between women to the men who have raped them. (See *Violence Against Women*.)

Travel (See also *Women & the Law and Migration & Trafficking of Women & Girls*)

On a day-to-day level, community concerns for women’s security often take the form of over-protectiveness. While men in Burma travel widely, play sports, and in every part of the country sit in tea-shops discussing the day’s news, women and girls in Burma, particularly teenage girls, are often kept in the home or close by it outside of work and school hours, unless they are chaperoned. Women also rarely drive motor vehicles in Burma.

For instance, if a boy wants to go to the cinema he is allowed to go alone anytime. If a girl wants to go to the cinema she cannot go unless one of her sisters or aunts or brothers or her mother goes with her. If we say that is discrimination against us, in fact our relatives will say that it is out of their love and great concern for us that they are always worrying and looking out for us. On the one

hand, we are happy that they appreciate us, but on the other hand, the problem is we have no chance to experience new things, and the more we stay inside, the less we know! After a while, we lose our self-confidence and don’t dare to go anywhere without someone else. People may say, “Look! This girl always stays at home and she never goes out, how clever this girl is! She always listens to her parents, just look.” Whereas if a girl has the self-confidence to go out, people may say “Look! Whose daughter is this? Whose daughter is rambling around on the street?” CINT 274

[My parents] always accompanied me to the township capital, Matupi. For the boys, no, and they can even go out at night by themselves. CINT 169

At the same time, women affirm that many of the fears that are expressed for their safety are real. They do often face sexual harassment, which may take the form of verbal abuse and unwanted attention, or physical assault, including rape. Rather than taking measures to address and eliminate rape and sexual violence within society however, most communities place the burden on women, who are expected to accommodate their own behaviour. Women are told not to go out unaccompanied after dark, and real and perceived risks of sexual abuse greatly reduce women’s and girls’ opportunities for short and long distance travel. Even professional women, whose jobs require them to travel, are often frustrated by the social limitations they face.

How can I say this? I don’t think women have any rights at all in my country. Men can do whatever they want -- they can travel, they can work, they can go anywhere by themselves. A woman cannot even travel safely by herself after dark -- women can’t go anywhere by themselves! And if you do, people will look down on you and assume you’re a bad woman, even if the reason you’re travelling at night is because you have to work to feed your family. What kind of country is that? Especially at my age [38], what I would like is just the basic freedom to go around by myself. CINT 218

Up country, if you go alone at night, you feel a little scared because it is not the right time to go out. But if you are with a friend, then okay but not after 9 o’clock. People will look at you and think, “What is a woman doing out at night?” In Rangoon, we travel around at night and it is all right. If you go alone, then the bus is OK but the taxi isn’t good. Men might be curious what kind of woman you are in a taxi. If you can drive in your car, then that’s all right, because no one will see you. CINT 10

TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS & WOMEN IN THE EXILED POLITICAL MOVEMENT

In the exiled political movement, restrictions on women's travel combined with other beliefs hindering participation in public life for many years made women conspicuously absent from the meetings, seminars and workshops conducted on the border and in neighbouring countries such as Thailand. Until very recently, relatively few women worked in the urban offices of exiled groups, not only among political organizations, but also educational and medical programs. The most regularly voiced reason for this was the belief that it was not safe for women to travel alone, and that it would not be appropriate for them to live together with male colleagues in shared housing space or to live alone. Repeated requests from women in refugee camps and women's organizations to include them in skills and knowledge trainings, combined with funding organizations' demands for greater parity in opportunities for men and women, have helped to overcome these obstacles and ensure that a growing number of women are now working and learning alongside men.

Between 6:00 and 7:00 it gets dark, by 5:30 it's already beginning to be dark. Our days end at 6:00.... It's very limiting! It limits us. I don't like it. I'd like to be able to go out when I want to go out. But now, if I want to go somewhere, and I have something to do, but it's going to be dark, I have to make sure there's always somebody with me, and it's a *pain*, because I might not always be able to find somebody who might want to accompany me. But I also don't like being subjected to harassment verbally or physically. CINT 99

Harassment becomes part of a vicious cycle. Women, particularly younger women, travelling alone over long distances are sometimes considered to be "of low character," so women rarely travel unescorted. Those who do are targeted. If something happens to them, they are ashamed to complain about it, since they have transgressed social norms by travelling alone.

It is very different for men and women. If you want to go somewhere alone, it can be dangerous, and people will look and say bad things. They will think you are a prostitute. So,

when I have to go somewhere, I take a male friend with me, a neighbour. But if a man goes out alone, there is no problem. CINT 11

It is the attitude of Burmese society that women are totally different from men and they should do things under the supervision of guardians. If a woman is travelling alone both women and men will look down on her, and will suspect she might be a prostitute or smuggler. I myself had to face this when I was travelling all over Burma. Even the people in government services would start asking many questions: How old are you?, Where are you from?, Are you single or married? It shows their prejudice and suspicion towards women who are alone. This attitude has been rooted in the minds of people.... CINT 276

However, like many other aspects of traditional life in Burma, the prohibition of women travelling alone may change as a matter of expedience, since the reality is that increasingly, women have little choice.

The community doesn't allow a woman to travel alone. But when you are very poor and there's no one else, who will feed you? So people have to travel. If the parents are old, who will feed them? They have to let the daughter travel. If they have a son, the son will travel. But if the sons are useless, there are families where only the daughters are working and feeding them. CINT 100

I'm not afraid to travel by myself. I think this is a problem created by men. Men are the ones who rape; they created this problem. In order to change this situation, both men and women have to be educated, about the real dangers and what to do to combat them. They should be made aware of the real situation. In India, it's also very dangerous for women to travel alone, but that is precisely because the society created this idea that women are weaker and need to be protected. It's because we are always told that we are vulnerable and can be attacked anywhere, especially by men. Both men and women are human beings, and we should be able to live together, and to travel wherever we want. CINT 94

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Under Articles 5 and 13 of the CEDAW, the government is committed to modifying social and cultural patterns that serve to subordinate women to men in society, in public and private life. Social roles, and the degree to which they confine women or enable them to make their own choices, underpin women's enjoyment of their rights in all other areas. Until they change, the achievement of concrete im-

provements in women's status will remain difficult.

Many of Burma's gender stereotypes originate in assertions repeated in the teachings of Buddhism and other religions that women are by nature different from and secondary to men. Distinction needs to be made between the aspects of religious practice deriving from historical and socio-cultural conditions, and the spiritual tenets, in order to advance more equitable role models for men and women. While altering the patriarchal structures common to most religions may be a formidable task, the considerable variations in religious practice that exist throughout the world, and the ground that women have achieved in reinterpreting their religious roles provide numerous examples from which to draw.

Preservation of culture is often used as an excuse for maintaining discriminatory and sometimes harmful practices, and accordingly is frequently the subject of comments by CEDAW Committee members during country reviews. The view that women in Burma should stand firm as the trustees of traditional culture while men explore the variety of novel experiences on offer denies women the opportunities currently open to men. It also betrays a very rigid understanding of what constitutes culture, which is in fact never static, but always developing. Women themselves should be the ones to decide how they wish to maintain or reform their cultural traditions, activities and social roles, and how they wish to benefit from technological advancements and foreign products and ideas.

Alongside the government's perpetual assertion that women in Burma have enjoyed equality with men since time immemorial lies their reiteration that women are valued primarily as mothers and belong in the home. Clearly much is required to foster understanding of the concept that family roles and social behaviours are learned rather than inherent. The message needs to be stressed that women and men, girl and boy children have the same innate value as human beings, and by virtue of this are entitled to the same educational, vocational and leisure opportunities. A greater understanding among male family members of the need to share common household responsibilities, including child-rearing, is necessary, in order to ensure that women can enjoy equal rights within the family, as well as opportunities for paid employment and participation in all aspects of cultural and public life.

Customs that dictate women must always be accompanied, whether by a chaperone or a husband, deprive adult women of their rights to self-determination. Underlying the protectionism that colours many of the social attitudes towards women is a belief that women are not capable of independent decision making. Protectionist attitudes also force women into often uncomfortable "choices" that imply no real choice at all -- for example, early and inappropriate marriages, from which they sometimes have no escape and which may destine them to lives of unhappiness. Restrictions on girls' travel and other opportunities not only serve to deny them the education they need, but also to make them more vulnerable by creating false dependencies and undermining their self-confidence. While some of the threats, including that of sexual violence, that women face are decidedly real, rather than curbing women and restricting their activities, the government and society have an obligation to eliminate the violence and harassment. Women's agency as adults capable of making their own life decisions must be recognized and respected.

A number of the limitations women encounter arise out of conceptions of women's sexuality and the value and control of their virginity. Women seeking to change attitudes towards women's sexuality are usually not interested in flouting norms, such as those regarding sexual fidelity. Rather, they wish to create a more equitable atmosphere, whereby women are given the same control as men over their bodies and their choice in relationships, and are able to act independently without always being subject to suspicion. They are also eager to see that women who endure harassment have the opportunity and confidence to charge their perpetrators, without having first to defend their own actions or having doubts cast upon their characters in the process. The double standard that currently exists between men and women regarding chastity stands in the way of this.

There is certainly a great need in Burma for public gender awareness-raising campaigns, and for the introduction of concepts regarding equality of the sexes in the school curriculum. It is not clear at this point who is best-placed to undertake such programs. Given the prevalence of video in even many remote areas of the country, and Burmese traditions of live entertainment at street festivals, in addition to formal programs to disseminate information on women's human rights, for example through poster

campaigns or workshops, there is ample room for the promotion of new gender paradigms and role models through media and the popular arts. International NGOs are already including such concepts in their curricula; women's groups in exile regularly address social issues in workshops, empowerment trainings, and meetings, and have begun to achieve progress in including men in these discussions. Many approaches are needed to ensure that men and women in various geographic areas and at all levels of the population are reached. Because work at the community level and in the home is vital, local women need support to mount their own campaigns using the means and issues they consider most appropriate. Without concerted efforts to change the minds of people about what women should and can do, legislation and affirmative action programs may meet with little success. However, men may also benefit from the modification of binding gender stereotypes, and if both men and women are engaged together in these actions, the possibilities of achieving progress are much greater.

NOTES

1. "Presentation by His Excellency U Win Mra, Permanent Representative of the Union of Myanmar to the United Nations and the Leader of the Myanmar Delegation to the Twenty-Second Session of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)," New York, 21 January 2000, p.2.
2. David A. Chandler, "Health in Myanmar: An Interpretive Review of Data Sources Collected with the Assistance of: Unicef-Myanmar, the Myanmar Ministry of Health, World Vision International-Myanmar and other organizations," a paper presented at an HIID conference, December 5 – 7, 1996 (Final Revision February 11, 1997), p. 38.
3. Department of Myanmar Language Commission, Ministry of Education, Union of Myanmar, Myanmar-English Dictionary (Yangon: Myanmar Literature Group, 1993), p. 328
4. It is sometimes said in secular social terms that women do possess *pon* (power or dignity) and that it resides in their hair. Another traditional saying, *Yaukchado pon letyone, maemado pon sedone*, translates roughly that men's dignity depends on their ability or strength, while women's depends on their beauty, traditionally symbolized by their elaborate hairstyles.
5. Maung Maung, Law and Custom in Burma and the Burmese Family (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), p. 49.
6. The USDA was accused of executing an attack on Aung San Suu Kyi's motorcade in November 1996.
7. Images Asia & Forum Asia, Arakan Project, Interview #19, November 1999, Karachi.
8. Xinhua, "Myanmar Holds Second Women's Conference," Yangon, January 26, 2001.
9. Myanmar National Working Committee for Women's Affairs, "Myanmar National Action Plan for the Advancement of Women," August 1997, p. 14.
10. Associated Press (Washington), "Measures Announced against Violators," 23 December 1999, and Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour, U.S. State Department, "International Religious Freedom Report," October 2001.
11. The Union of Myanmar, "Report on Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women," March 1999, p. 14.
12. United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. "Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women: Initial report of States parties: Myanmar," CEDAW/C/MMR/1, 25 June 1999, p. 9.
13. From "Sacrifice: The Story of Child Prostitutes in Burma," a documentary film written and produced by Ellen Bruno, (1998).
14. Union of Myanmar, "Report on Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women," Yangon, March 1999, p. 16.
15. Sein Tu, "Myanmar Family: Traditional Child-rearing and Socialization," Myanmar Perspectives, July 1998.
16. Maung Maung, Law and Custom in Burma, p. 48.