

**MYANMAR WOMEN IN THE TRADITIONAL SOCIETY
(1752-1885)**

University of Mandalay

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(1752-1885)**

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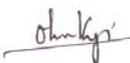
MYANMAR WOMEN IN THE TRADITIONAL SOCIETY (1752-1885)

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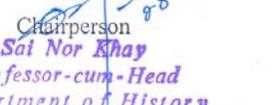

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ABSTRACT

Outwardly, Myanmar women have seemed to be the underprivileged in Myanmar history. However, the laws that prohibited women from doing something or from participating in something were very rare. There even was a female monarch like Shin Sawpu. There also were a class of domestic slaves. How there were women belonging to different strata of society is discussed in this dissertation. The dissertation is arranged in four chapters. The socio-economic conditions of women between Bagan and Nyang Yan periods are discussed in Chapter I “Introduction”. This chapter also deals with the queens of the Bagan period known as Hpwasaw, who were tender-hearted and peace-loving, Queen Shinbome of Inwa and her contemporary Shin Sawpu, a female monarch and famous authoress like Yazadatukalya of the Taungoo period. In Chapter II, how the ordinary women could participate in everyday matters for maintaining themselves, how they could acquire education to some extent, how there were women who married before they reached the age of fifteen, how there were women who were mortgaged or sold by their parents because they were in need of cash, how there were women bought by men as wives, and how women in Myanmar society enjoyed more rights than those in the neighboring countries are discussed. As to the lives of women in the palace, how the lives of palace ladies, which seemed to have been peaceful on the surface, were not all roses is discussed in Chapter III. Chapter IV’s Women and Politics is about the roles played by women in politics. The roles played by Queen Mothers and Chief Queens who had influence over the kings and those played by Queen Suhpayalat, Me Nu and Sinbyumashin whose actions had reverberations throughout the country are explained in this chapter.

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Mi Dwe and Mi Le, *pu* 1268

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- Mortgage of paddy land, *pu* 1046
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Nga Chit Hpwe, *pu* 1268

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Nga Hpo Htu, *pu* 1268

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Glossary

<i>achawdaw, ahteindaw</i>	nannies
<i>achidaw</i>	babysister
<i>achoattaw</i>	dressmakers or tailor
<i>amweya</i>	the property she inherited from her ancestors
<i>anaukhtaung</i>	prison of the Western Palace
<i>anauktan</i>	lock-up of the Western Palace
<i>Anauk-wun</i>	an officer in charge of the western part of the palace
<i>anheiktaw</i>	masseuses
<i>anyeindaw</i>	dancers
<i>apyaung maya</i>	with whom he cohabited openly though they were not recognized as his wives, ie concubines
<i>apyodaw</i>	lading-in-waiting
<i>asodaw</i>	vocalists
<i>athet dana su</i>	the right to spare the lives of prisoners in the death row
<i>athet dana</i>	donation of life
<i>athin:tau</i>	nannies
<i>athi-wun</i>	the officer in charge of the affairs concerning the <i>athi</i> or commoners
<i>Ayut wun</i>	officer to segregate lepers
<i>badeindaw</i>	goldsmiths
<i>bagyidaw</i>	painter

<i>baing gaung kyauk hpi</i>	a tidy cotton roll pressed under the weight of marbles (principled woman)
<i>bandazo</i>	treasurers
<i>bhikkhunis</i>	female member of the Buddhist Order
<i>Byedaik</i>	Privy Council
<i>eingyane meinma</i>	a wife who lived in a separate house
<i>einthigya naukhta thu maya</i>	another wife who was kept in a separate house
<i>gadaw neya ne</i>	official wife (<i>gadaw</i>) who occupied the <i>gadaw</i> seats
<i>hangyin</i>	classic choral song
<i>hkawadaw</i>	laundrywomen
<i>hkayaing-wuns</i>	provincial governors
<i>hledawhtan, yahtaswe</i>	for drawing vehicles
<i>Hluttaw</i>	Supreme Council
<i>hnaung maya ne thi</i>	had a later, ie another, wife
<i>htamein</i>	sarongs
<i>htanzindaw htan</i>	bearers of litters
<i>htidawmo</i>	umbrella bearers
<i>kakhresan</i>	dancers
<i>kalaps</i>	smalle salvers with a stem
<i>Khinma Min Wun</i>	the highest official for managing the Chief Queen's affairs
<i>kuntawset</i>	servers of betel
<i>kunyedaw</i>	servers of betel and water
<i>kyaw paing ze nin paing ze</i>	the right to tread on and step over
<i>lamaing asuthas</i>	crown cultivators
<i>lethtetpwa or auk oatsa</i>	the property the deceased person and his or her spouse accumulated after their marriage

<i>letsonpyaing mayange</i>	a lesser wife who had the right to dine with the husband
<i>linhmyawte</i>	songs for beguiling a prospective husband
<i>maung to htan me ta ywet</i>	Husband carries a load on his shoulder, wife carries one on her head / shouldering equal responsibility among husband and wife
<i>pyi kankywe or pyi daza</i>	prostitutes
<i>mayagyi</i>	the principle wife, ie the first legitimate wife
<i>mayahkohmu</i>	Adultery case
<i>meinmazo</i>	eunuchs
<i>Mihpaya Bandazo</i>	Queens' Treasurer
<i>Mihpaya Bbanda Saye</i>	clerks to the <i>Mihpaya Bandazo</i>
<i>Mihpaya wuns</i>	the highest officials for managing the affairs of the queens other than the Chief Queen
<i>mingalars</i>	auspicious ceremonies/rites
<i>minthami naukne gadaw maya</i>	ladies who are given seats immediately behind the princesses
<i>mrui'-sukri:</i>	head of a town
<i>muchuiwma</i>	widow
<i>myedaingma</i>	female <i>myedaing</i> – officer in-charge of land tracts
<i>myedaings</i>	male <i>myedaing</i> -officer in-charge of land tract
<i>Myinzugyi wun</i>	the officer in charge of the cavalry
<i>myothagyi</i>	town headman
<i>myozas</i>	the persons who held towns in fief
<i>Nanmadaw Bandazo</i>	Chief Queen's Treasurer
<i>Nanmadaw Saye</i>	clerks to the <i>Nanmadaw Wun</i>
<i>Nanmadaw Sayegyi</i>	<i>Nanmadaw Wun's</i> secretary

<i>nanzin</i>	the property she acquired by virtue of accession to the throne
<i>nauk maya</i>	lesser wife
<i>nauk ne maya</i>	later wife
<i>naukthwe neya ne</i>	ladies who had seats in the second row
<i>naukthwe neya ne</i>	ladies who had the <i>Pwedet neya</i> or seats in the third row
<i>ne myo wuns</i>	township officers
<i>ngwegunhmu</i>	chief of a silver-bearing village
<i>nobo</i>	gratuities of nursing women
<i>nui'thin:</i>	wet nurses
<i>pandawset</i>	flower gatherers
<i>pantya</i>	musicians
<i>patpyos</i>	Myanmar classical songs set to the cadence of the drum circle
<i>payin or ahtet oatsa</i>	the property the deceased person owned before his or her marriage
<i>pe maya</i>	spelt <i>pay maya</i>
<i>pe mihpaya</i>	spelt <i>pay miphura</i>
<i>pwedawchet</i>	cooks
<i>pwedawpo</i>	waiters
<i>pyin eindaw san minthami</i>	princesses residing outside the palace
<i>sadawhpat</i>	readers of literary texts
<i>sandawshin</i>	hairdressers
<i>satawhpat</i>	reader
<i>sattadaw</i>	beauticians
<i>sawbwas</i>	Shan Chiefs
<i>se-eingaungs</i>	head of ten households
<i>seleittaw</i>	servers of cheroots

<i>shethwe neya ne</i>	ladies who had seats in the first row
<i>shwebazunsi</i>	clothe interwoven with gold threads
<i>Shwedaik</i>	Royal Treasury
Shwenanyo Lamaing Wun	officer in charge of royal farm servants
Sinbyumashin Mihpaya	The Queen who was the Mistress of a White Female Elephant
Sinbyushin	Mistress of the White Elephant
<i>sukrway</i>	wealthy person
<i>sukrwayma</i>	female <i>sukrway</i>
<i>thagy</i>	hereditary chiefs of towns and villages
<i>thagyima</i>	female <i>thagyi</i> or head of a village
<i>thamadaw</i>	folk healers
<i>thanahka</i>	bark of <i>Limonia acidissima</i>
the <i>yekyiwun</i>	the <i>wun</i> for clean water supply to the palace
<i>thetkayits</i>	deeds of conveyance of human labour and land through sale or mortgage
<i>thinthi</i>	the property she accumulated before she became the Chief Queen
<i>ton miphura: khon</i>	the Chief Queen who was the Queen of the Southern Palace
<i>tuik-sukri:</i>	head of a district
<i>wawdawhtan</i>	bearers of <i>waw</i> litters
<i>wun saye</i>	clerks of the officer responsible for managing the queen's property
<i>wundauk maya</i>	<i>wundauk's</i> wife
<i>wundauks</i>	assistants to the <i>wungyis</i>
<i>wungyis</i>	ministers who were officers of the highest rank

<i>yaukkyā hpaungsi, meinma mine</i>	Escorting along with a raft of logs for a man, as well as delivery of a baby for a woman
<i>yaung nauk zaton pa</i>	the hairdo follows the topknot
<i>yunbaung pa</i>	possessions other than land
<i>yunbaung parabaik</i>	folded book with lacquered coating
<i>yunbaungpa mye</i>	land registered in the <i>Yun-baung</i> register
<i>yaukkyale mya sa ma tat ka akan</i>	illiterate boy boys are like blind persons,
<i>hnint tu thi, meinkale mya yethan</i>	while girls who could not weave are like
<i>ma tat ka akyo hnint tu thi</i>	cripples

PREFACE

A thesis entitled “A Critical Study on the Reconstruction of Atumashi Monastery” has been submitted for my M. Res. Degree to the Department of History, Mandalay University. While working on that thesis, I came across a number of records on the Chief Queen of King Mindon and his daughter, the Salin Princess, that have inspired me to write a dissertation on the roles played by women in Myanmar society if I would have the chance to study for a Ph.D. degree. Therefore, I have this dissertation, entitled “Myanmar Women in Traditional Society (1752-1885)” is the outcome of my interest and decision. Although the dissertation is on the women of the Konbaung period, I have discussed the lives of women belonging to the Bagan to Nyaung Yan period in brief in the introduction. Hpwasaw, Shinbome, and Datukalya, an authoress of the Taungoo period, were famous palace ladies. There were very few ordinary women who became well known. There only was epigraphic evidence for the periods before the Nyaung Yan period. As the records belonging to the Nyaung Yan period were destroyed, there are very few documents for this period. Therefore, I have to rely heavily on the inscriptions in writing about women between Bagan and Nyaung Yan periods. Hence, I cannot say much about them. As to Chapter II “Women in Konbaung Period Myanmar Society,” there are many palm-leaf and *purabaik* manuscripts belonging to the Konbaung period, and hence I can rely on them. The thetkayits of the mortgages of land and human labour reveals the socio-economic conditions of ordinary women. As there were many donors of pagodas and monasteries, it is clear that there were some women who were respected in the society. On the other hand, there were women who were mortgaged or sold into servitude by their

parents who were poor. There were women who got married before they reached the age of fifteen in the Konbaung period. As to Chapter III, the royal orders, chronicles and *thetkayits* of the mortgages of land and human labour reveal the lives of queens and princesses. Most of the women presented to a king as queens were not happy because they married the king more because they were afraid of him rather than because they loved him. The persons who held towns and villages in fief and the sawbwas normally presented their daughters to the kings. When a sawbwa rebelled, his daughter would have to take the rap. In the time of the king Thibaw, the sawbwa of Mone rebelled, and his sister Mone Queen fled. She was caught and punished. In Chapter VI “Women and Politics,” how the chief queen and princesses played important roles in selecting a new king, how Me Nu, Sinbyumashin and Suhpayalat, the women who caused instability in the kingdom, emerged, and how women could involve in the administration of towns and villages are discussed. Women of the Konbaung period were not prohibited from taking part in politics. If they were able, they could engage in administration depending on their lineages.

For writing this dissertation, I could only cite 91 palm-leaf and *purabaik* manuscripts even though I had read altogether 200 palm-leaf and *purabaik* manuscripts. I also had to read 100 books. For writing this dissertation, I got permission to study and copy the primary sources – inscriptions and *puabaik* manuscripts as well as books – from Mandalay University Library, Ludu Library, Mandalay, Meiktila University Library and Universities’ Central Library, National Library and Department of Historical Research Library in Yangon. Moreover, Daw Ohn Kyi, Retired Professor, History Department, Yangon University, Member, Myanmar Historical Commission, Dr. Toe Hla, Director-General (Retired), Department of Universities’ Historical Research, and Dr. Ba Maung, Director-General, Department of Universities’ Historical Research permitted me to use the palm-leaf and *purabaik* manuscripts which records the thetkayit deeds

of mortgages, which were primary sources, in their collections. I was able to complete this dissertation only because of the advice and guidance given by my *sayagyis* and *sayamagyis*. As there is no work dealing with Myanmar women in history, this paper is written to fill that gap. As I have to write this dissertation within four years, I admit that there would be more facts to fill.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The inscriptions belonging to the Bagan period reveal the roles played by women in Bagan period Myanmar society. The words used for referring to a queen in the Bagan period inscriptions are *pe maya*,¹ *pe mihpaya*,² *amihpaya*,³ *ami phurha*⁴ or *ami phura*⁵ and *mihpaya*.⁶ The compound words with Nan (palace) – such as Ton Nan: Miphura:, Mrok Nan: Miphura, etc. were not used in the Bagan period, when queens were referred to as *ton phlan san* queen, *mlac phlan san* queen, etc.⁷ Titles were conferred on queens in the Bagan period. How the *Dewi* titles were granted to queens can be learnt from the titles Trilawka Watamsaka Dewi mentioned in Myazedi Inscription which was inscribed in AD 1112 (474 ME)⁸ and Trilawka Candra Nama Maha Dewi referred in the inscription of Princess Aco Krwan: dated AD 1248 (610 ME).⁹ Some queens and princesses assumed *Saw* titles in the Bagan period. *Saw* was spelt *Caw*, *Acaw*, *Ajaw*, *Jaw*, etc. in the Bagan period. The Queens and Princesses who received *Saw* titles in

¹U Nyein Maung, *Shehaung Myanmar Kyauksa Mya*, (Ancient Myanmar Inscriptions), vol. I, Rangoon, Department of Archaeology, 1972, p. 4 (Henceforth: Nyein Maung, 1972)

U Nyein Maung, *Shehaung Myanmar Kyauksa Mya*, (Ancient Myanmar Inscriptions), vol. II, Rangoon, Department of Archaeology, 1982, p. 99 (Henceforth: Nyein Maung, 1982)

²Nyein Maung, 1972, 357

³Nyein Maung, 1972, 94

⁴Nyein Maung, 1982, 58

⁵Nyein Maung, 1972, 273

⁶Nyein Maung, 1972, 127

⁷Nyein Maung, 1972, 94

Nyein Maung, 1982, 58, 99

⁸Nyein Maung, 1972, 4

⁹Nyein Maung, 1982, 99

the Bagan period were:

1. Co Lat, daughter of King Alaungsithu,
2. Co Mrakansaṅ, queen of King Narapatisithu (1174-1211),
3. Co Alhwam, Queen of King Narapatisithu,
4. Caw Man Hla, daughter of Jeyyasûra and Caw Mrakansaṅ,
5. Queen Co, queen of Narasingha Uccanã (1230-1235),
6. Caw Pulaymay, Queen of King Kyacwã,
7. Co Man Hla, queen of King Kyacwa,
8. Caw Lat, daughter of King Narasingha Uccana (1230-1235),
9. Ari: Co, elder sister of King Ujjana,
10. Aco Nalom, daughter of King Ujjana and Queen Sumlula,
11. Aco Krwam,
12. Co Pulay, queen of King Tarut Pre,
13. Co U, daughter of King Tarut Pre: and Queen Co Pulay, and
14. Co Na Cwat, younger sister of Queen Co Pulay.¹⁰

It seems that the kings granted villages to queens as appanages in the Bagan period too. It is recorded in the Myazedi inscription that King Htilaing Min granted three

¹⁰Bo Hmu Ba Shin, "Bagan Hkit Hpwa Saw Mya," (Hpwa Saws of the Bagan Period), *Ngwe Yatu Thabin Ahtein Ahmat Ponhneikpyi Sadanzu* (Collected articles published in the Silver Jubilee Publication), Rangoon, National Historical Research Department, 1982, pp. 22-25 (Henceforth: Ba Shin, 1982)

villages to his queen.¹¹ Apart from *miphura*, there were *kuiw lup*¹² and *mon ma*,¹³ both meaning “concubine,” in the Bagan period. The word *mon:ma* was used more frequently than *kuiw lup*. Moreover, the princesses of the Bagan period included *man samu*,¹⁴ *man smi*,¹⁵ both meaning “king’s daughter,” and *man nhama* “king’s younger sister.”¹⁶ The *apyuitaus*, who existed among the palace ladies in the later periods, are not mentioned in Bagan period inscriptions. Queens and princesses are referred to as land owners in Bagan period agriculture.¹⁷ There were *athin:tau* and *nui'thin:* in the palace. It is recorded in an inscription dated AD 1267 (629 ME) that Man Yan (1256) gave 1000 (*pay of*) land, 1000 slaves and 1000 cows to Iponsan, his nanny, and that Cañsu IV (1256-1287), also referred to as Tarut Pre:, confirmed the transfer of 1000 (*pay of*) land, 1000 slaves and 1000 cows given by Man Yan to Iponsan as *nui'phui* “the value of the milk” he had sucked.¹⁸ Therefore, it is learnt that the people in the Bagan-period society tried to repay their wet nurses, even though they were not their mothers, for their kindness.

The best known queen of the Bagan period was Queen Co. Although she was referred to as Queen Co, there were four queens who received the Co titles. They were:

1. Queen Co, a principal queen of King Narasingha Ujjana (1230-1235),

¹¹Nyein Maung, 1972, 4

¹²Than Tun, *Hkit-haung Myanmar Yazawin* (Ancient History of Myanmar), Rangoon, Maha Dagon Publication, 1969, p. 187 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1969)

Aung Win, “Bagan Hkit Sibwaye Hnint Luhmuye Thamaing,” (A history of economy and social life in the Bagan period), M.A. thesis, Mandalay University, 1974, p. 97 (Henceforth: Aung Win, 1974)

¹³Nyein Maung, 1972, 273

Nyein Maung, 1982, 212

U Nyein Maung, *Shehaung Myanmar Kyauksa Mya*, (Ancient Myanmar Inscriptions), vol. III, Rangoon, Department of Archaeology, 1983, pp. 29, 70, 168 (Henceforth: Nyein Maung, 1983a)

¹⁴Nyein Maung, 1972, 152

¹⁵Nyein Maung, 1972, 53

¹⁶Nyein Maung, 1972, 152

¹⁷Aung Win, 1974, 98

¹⁸Nyein Maung, 1983, 36

2. Phwa: Co of Man Wuin:, another principal queen of King Narasingha Ujjana,
3. Queen Co of Co Lha Wan:, a principal queen of King Narasihapate', also referred to as Tarut Pre: Man: (1256-87), and
4. Phwa: Co of Sacmathi:, a principal queen of Kyaucwa, aka Rhwenan:rhan (1288-89).¹⁹

Of these four queens, the first queen was not referred to as first Phwa: Co, but only as Miphura: Co. The second Phwa: Co was the person who set up an inscription in which she referred to three Bagan kings as “The great king who was my husband,” “the great king who was my son,” and “The great king who was my grandson.” Her consort was King Narasingha Ujjana, and her son and grandson were King Ujjana and Tarut Pre: Min, respectively. She lived during the reigns of six kings: her father-in-law King Natonmya (1211- ? 1231), consort Narasingha Ujjana (? 1231-1235), brother-in-law Kyacwa (1235-1249), son Ujjana (? 1249-1256), grandson Man Yan (? 1256) and grandson Narasihapate (1256-1287). All these kings except Man Yan respected and ensured that she was well provided for. In the reign of King Natonmya who was her father-in-law, Phwa: Co received a garden and twenty *pay* of land. Her brother in law King Kyacwa gave her a hundred and fifty-nine slaves and 150 *pay* of land. When the wife of Singhapikram who was involved in a rebellion in AD 1236, during King Kyawcwa's reign, presented her slaves, paddy fields and gardens to the king, seeking permission to let her husband to come and live in Bagan, the king gave them to Phwa: Co. In 1242, he granted a hundred and ninety-three slaves and 170 *pay* of land to her. Phwa: Co also received land and slaves in 1252, in the reign of King Ujjana, who was her son. The king gave her large tracts of land in 1253 and 1254 to enable her to make donations. In the reign of King Narasihapate, who was

¹⁹Ba Shin, 1982, 29-30.

her grandson, the king gave a hundred and forty eight slaves and 3598 *pay* of land to Phwa: Co. Phwa: Co donated to the Religion the land and slaves she acquired during these successive kings in 1265 and 1271.²⁰

The third Phwa: Co was the granddaughter of King Kyacwa (1235-1249). She is referred to in the inscriptions as Racasu Phwa: Co as she was the mother of Racasu or Co Lha Wan: Phwa: Co as she had made donations in Co Lha Wan: King Kyacwa gave her land and slaves. This third Phwa: Co was the Phwa: Co mentioned in Myanmar chronicles as the queen who had advised the king on the affairs of the kingdom,²¹ who had exhorted the king,²² who, conferring with ministers, had placed Kyawcwa on the throne,²³ who colluded with the three Shan brothers and dethroned King Kyawcwa,²⁴ whom King Sihasu, one of the three Shan brothers, himself had to go on foot to welcome when he had to invite her because he did not know the customs concerning the founding of a new town when he founded the capital of Pinya.²⁵

The fourth Phwa: Co was a younger sister of the third Phwa: Co. She was King Kyawcwa's queen who was normally referred to as Sacmathi: Phwa: Co. She took the place of her sister, the third Phwa: Co, after the latter's death and inherited 7563 *pay* of land and a hundred slaves owned by her sister. In 1334, she constructed a temple and donated her slaves to it.²⁶ Therefore, it is learnt that there were women referred to as Phwa: Co whom the successive kings of Bagan had to respect and favour.

²⁰Ba Shin, 1982, 34-35

²¹*Hmannan Mahayazawindawgyi* (Glass Palace Chronicle), vol. I, Yangon, Ministry of Information, 2003, p. 340 (Henceforth: *Hmannan, 2003a*)

²²*Hmannan, 2003a*, 343, 346, 356

²³*Hmannan, 2003a*, 359

²⁴*Hmannan, 2003a*, 362

²⁵*Hmannan, 2003a*, 370

²⁶Ba Shin, 1982, 41-45

The kingship terms concerning women in the Bagan-period society are given in the following table:

Table (I) The kingship terms concerning women

Modern Words	Bagan-Period Words	Meaning	Date
ahpwa	aphiy	grandmother	1179
mihkan	ami	mother	1150
maya	Amiy, miya	wife	1112, 1151
To be continued			
meinma	mima	wife, women	1112
thami	asami, sami	daughter	1112
nyima	anima, nima	younger sister (of a women)	1112, 1223
hnama	hnama	younger sister (of a man)	1223
chwema	khruyma	daughter-in-law	1181
moatsoma	kamay, muchuiwma	widow	1165, 1240

Source: Nyein Maung, 1972, 8, 25, 27, 29, 44, 92, 152; Nyein Maung, 1982, 18

The widows were generally referred to as *kamay*, a Mon word.²⁷ The word *muchuiwma* (widow), however, occurs in an inscription belonging to AD 1240 (602 ME).²⁸ In the Bagan period, women's names were prefixed with the honorific *Uiw-*, *Uin-*,²⁹ *In-*,³⁰ *Uiw-*,³¹ *I*,³² or *Ui*.³³ There was a social class of

²⁷Pe Maung Tin, "Women in the Inscriptions of Bagan," *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, XXXV, iii, 1935, pp. 149-59 (Henceforth: Pe Maung Tin, 1935)

Than Tun, 1969, 187.

²⁸Nyein Maung, 1982, 18

²⁹Nyein Maung, 1972, 22

³⁰Nyein Maung, 1972, 20

³¹Nyein Maung, 1972, 24

³²Nyein Maung, 1972, 29

wealthy persons. As men could become *sukrway*,³⁴ women also could be become *sukrwayma*.³⁵ These women were entitled to acquire property and explore and own land independently of their husbands and had the rights of inheritance.³⁶ That the property of a man passed to his wife after his death in the Bagan period can be learnt from an inscription dated AD 1228 in which a woman inherited the slaves and land owned by her husband following the latter's death.³⁷ Women did not form a depressed class in the Bagan-period society. Local administrative officers were referred to as *tuik-sukri*., *mrui'-sukri*., etc., and the reference to *Uin Kulasan Tuik* in an inscription dated AD 1328 (690 ME)³⁸ suggests that there was a female officer who had to rule a village.³⁹ Moreover, the words *San*, *Sankri* and *Sanlyan* were sometimes prefixed to the names of persons in the Bagan period, and the word *Sankri* sometimes was prefixed to the names of women as in *Sankri Ui Chum San*, *Sankri Ui Sisan*, etc.⁴⁰ Although the word *sankri* in the Myazedi inscription means "an elder of a company of monks," *sankri* also could mean an elder of a company of lay people. *Sanlyan* ranked next below a *sankri*, and there were female *sanlyans*.⁴¹ In the Bagan period, *kalan* was a village headman, while *sambyan* was an officer who had to administer more than a single village. Some *kalans* were women.⁴² There also were women judges. Additionally, there are references to female *kyisan* granary officer' *kisan ui cway san* in the Bagan period

³³Nyein Maung, 1972, 27

³⁴Nyein Maung, 1983a, 204

³⁵Nyein Maung, 1972, 63

Nyein Maung, 1982, 76, 92, 186, 225

Nyein Maung, 1983a, 33, 79, 114, 204, 251

³⁶Than Tun, *Nehle Yazawin* (Itinerant History), 3 vol., Yangon, Pyizon Publishing House, 2004, p. 175 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 2004)

³⁷Than Tun, 1969, 168

³⁸Nyein Maung, 1983a, 317

³⁹Nwe Ni Hlaing, "Indians of Bagan (1044-1287)," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Mandalay, 2006, p. 42 (Henceforth: New Ni Hlaing, 2006)

⁴⁰Nyein Maung, 1972, 119, 167

⁴¹Pe Maung Tin, 1935, 153

⁴²Pe Maung Tin, 1935, 151

inscriptions.⁴³ There were women *pantya* (dancers) in the Bagan period.⁴⁴ There were *kyaukpyan* (flat stones for grinding *thanathka*), *naton:* (ear-studs), *pati:* (beads), *pulai* (pearls), *puwa* (scarfs), *pattamya:* (rubies), *lakwat* (rings), *santa* (coral) and *kye:mon* (mirrors) to beautify women in the Bagan period.⁴⁵ Although monogamy was prevalent in the Bagan period, the words *mayakri:* (principal wife) and *mayane* (lesser wife) suggest that polygamy was also practiced.⁴⁶ In redeeming a slave, the value of a man was fixed at two slaves, while that of a woman was fixed at 100 (*kyat* of) silver.⁴⁷ There is no evidence that the female slaves in Bagan period could be taken by their owners as their wives.⁴⁸

There were women who were literate in the Bagan Period. It is learnt from the inscriptions – one belonging to AD 1190 (552 ME) and another dated AD 1193 (555 ME) – that there were women scribes.⁴⁹ Moreover, an inscription dated AD 1243 (605 ME) refers to a female *catauchi* (royal scribe).⁵⁰ Furthermore, of seventy eight persons mentioned in an inscription dated AD 1227, nine men and four men were literates. Eight men out of the 116 persons mentioned in another inscription, which belonged to AD 1235, were literates. Of a hundred and forty persons mentioned in an inscription dated 1249, eleven men and four women were literate. Therefore, the literacy rate would have been about 10%, and roughly 25%

⁴³Nyein Maung, 1972, 104

Than Tun, 1969, 144

⁴⁴Nyein Maung, 1972, 50, 91, 112, 318, 368

Nyein Maung, 1982, 24

⁴⁵Aung Win, 1974, 203

⁴⁶Aung Win, 1974, 19

Than Tun, 1969, 194

⁴⁷Aung Win, 1974, 65

⁴⁸Than Tun, 1969, 194

⁴⁹Nyein Maung, 1972, 53, 56

⁵⁰Nyein Maung, 1982, 61

of literate persons were women.⁵¹ The Sambyan Princess, a daughter of King Kyacwa, was famous as a person who could teach the monks.⁵²

A striking feature of Bagan period religion is the existence of *bhikkhunis*. Although women were prohibited from becoming *bhikkhunis* in the post-Bagan periods, they could become *bhikkhunis* in the Bagan period. In the inscription of Acolat and husband which belonged to AD 1261 (623 ME), the construction of a temple is recorded. Among the eight members of the Sangha who were present as witnesses when the temple was formally donated to the Religion, was a woman named Ui' Chito, who recited the *parittas* to with monks.⁵³ Another inscription, belonging to AD 1281 (643 ME) mentions *Ui Chito klon* ("Ui Chito's monastery").⁵⁴ Moreover, the word *bhikkhuni* occurs in an inscription belonging to AD 1236 (598 ME).⁵⁵ The *bhikkhunis* mentioned in Bagan period inscriptions are:

Phunmrato Uim Chito,⁵⁶

Phunsañkri: Ui Nusan,⁵⁷

Phunsañ Ui Mratsan,⁵⁸

Skhin Iw Krampansan,

Sankadhi Iw' Kramsansan,

Uin Chi-upni,

Skhin Brahmacari,

Phunmlatso Ih Tañsan, and skhin Iw Pam.⁵⁹

⁵¹Than Tun, 1969, 194

⁵²Shwebo Mi Mi Gyi, "Shwe Minthami Mya Ei Aloatchein" (Regular working hours of the princesses), *Lonmale Magazine*, July 1985, pp. 163-65 (Henceforth: Mi Mi Gyi, 1985)

⁵³Nyein Maung, 1983a, 62

⁵⁴Nyein Maung, 1983a, 137

⁵⁵Nyein Maung, 1972, 282

⁵⁶Nyein Maung, 1972, 81

Nyein Maung, 1983a, 62, 137

⁵⁷Nyein Maung, 1972, 44

⁵⁸Nyein Maung, 1972, 89

⁵⁹Than Tun, 1969, 215

It seems that the *bhikkhunis* established their own monasteries and dwelt there as abbesses.⁶⁰ In addition, the *bhikkhunis* could also serve as witnesses when the people made donations to the Religion like their male counterparts.⁶¹ Therefore, it is learnt that women enjoyed the same rights enjoyed by men in the Bagan period. Women in the Bagan period could accumulate property independently of their husbands and had property rights, and could become *sukrwayma*. A women could inherit her husband's estate following his death. There were women officers, and women had the rights to education like men. They could even become *bhikkhunis*. Hence, it is clear that women did not belong to a depressed class in the Bagan period.

Although the principal queens were referred to as *tonpyansan*, *myokpyansan*, etc. in the Bagan period, the words *ton miphura*: *myok miphura*:, etc. were used in the post-Bagan periods.⁶² The earliest inscription in which the words *ton miphura*: and *myok miphura*: are mentioned, belonged to AD 1363 (725 ME). The *Shwenanthon Wawhara Abhidan* defines the word *myoksatau* as the spouses of the sons, daughters, grandchildren, nephews, younger brothers and nieces, and states that they were so called because they had to live in a house built in a compound to the north of the palace.⁶³ However, in the inscriptions dated AD 1352 (714 ME), AD 1355 (717 ME), 1364 (726 ME), 1367 (729 ME), 1377 (739 ME) and 1430 (792 ME), the word *myoksatau* occurs together with *ton miphura*: and *myok miphura*:.⁶⁴ This suggests that the word *myoksatau* was used in the Pinya, Sagaing and Inwa periods to mean the consort of a king. In AD 1444 (806 ME)

⁶⁰Nyein Maung, 1983a, 137

⁶¹Nyein Maung, 1972, 81, 89

⁶²U Nyein Maung, *Shehaung Myanmar Kyauksa Mya* (Ancient Myanmar Inscriptions), vol. IV, Rangoon, Department of Archaeology, 1998, pp. 132, 208, 210, 223, 230, 232 (Henceforth: Nyein Maung, 1998)

⁶³Maung Maung Tin, *Shwenanthon Wawhara Abhidan* (A dictionary of palace jargon), Yangon, Yabye Press, 2005, pp. 311-312 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Tin, 2005)

⁶⁴Nyein Maung, 1998, 89, 99, 144, 252, 168, 255, 252

and 1457 (819 ME), the *ton miphura:* was referred to as *ton miphura: khon*.⁶⁵ The inscriptions continued to refer to the concubines of a king as *monma misan* in the post Bagan periods.⁶⁶ How the Dewi titles were granted to queens in the Inwa period can be learnt from contemporary inscriptions.⁶⁷ The inscriptions refer to women who received *Sukrway* titles only till AD 1340 (702 ME).⁶⁸ However, women could still become donors of religious buildings in the Inwa period like men.⁶⁹ The witnesses to the donations made in the Inwa period included not only men but also women. Women witnesses were mentioned side by side with men witnesses in the record of the donation of slaves to a pagoda in AD 1591 (881 ME).⁷⁰ Moreover, there were female *pantya* (musicians), *kakhresan* (dancers), *amaisan* and *kwamsan* in the Inwa period.⁷¹ It can be assumed that palace ladies would wear ruby rings, silver rings, gold ear-studs, gold bracelets, and ruby earrings.⁷² The honorific prefix *Ui-* which was affixed to the names of women was still in the Inwa period.⁷³

Well-known women of the Inwa period are mentioned in Myanmar chronicles. There were two famous ladies in the Inwa period. They were Queen Shin Bo Me and Shin Saw Pu. Queen Shin Bo Me was elevated to queenship by five kings:

⁶⁵U Nyein Maung, *Shehaung Myanmar Kyauksa Mya* (Ancient Myanmar Inscriptions), vol. V, Rangoon, Department of Archaeology, 1983, pp. 31, 40, 42 (Henceforth: Nyein Maung, 1983b)

⁶⁶Nyein Maung, 1998, 8, 177, 244

Nyein Maung, 1983b, 51

⁶⁷Nyein Maung, 1983b, 8, 40, 42, 47

⁶⁸Nyein Maung, 1998, 20

⁶⁹Nyein Maung, 1998, 111, 118

⁷⁰Nyein Maung, 1983b, 111

⁷¹Nyein Maung, 1998, 91, 175, 188, 190

Nyein Maung, 1983b, 43, 77

⁷²Nyein Maung, 1998, 10, 116, 209, 210, 224

⁷³Nyein Maung, 1983b, 128

Mingaung (1400-1423),⁷⁴ Sihasu (1423-1426),⁷⁵ Minhlang, Kale Kyetaungnyo,⁷⁶ and King Mohnyin Thado (1426-1439).⁷⁷ She was a woman who changed the destiny of the kingdom. As King Sihasu (1423-1426), only favoured Queen Shin Sawpu, who was presented to him by Hanthawady, Queen Shin Bo Me harboured a grudge against him. She invited Onpaungle Thanbwa to fight Siasu, who was killed in the battle. When Min Hla Nge, a son of King Sihasu and Queen Saw Min Hla, was placed on the throne, Shin Bo Me poisoned and killed him. After Min Hla Nge's death, Shin Bo Me enthroned Kale Kyetaungnyo.⁷⁸ Thus, Shin Bo Me had caused political instability and was involved in palace intrigues; and she was responsible for the change of three kings.

Another famous person who was a contemporary of Shin Bo Me was Queen Shin Sawpu, the only female monarch in Myanmar history. She was the daughter of King Yazadirit of Hanthawady and Queen Suddha Maya and a younger sister of Banyayan. She got married to a nephew of King Yazadirit, and bore two sons and a daughter. Her husband died at the age of twenty five. When King Sihasu (1423-1426) of Inwa marched to Hanthawady with his army and navy, King Banyayan of Hanthawady presented his sister Shin Sawpu to King Sihasu with the title Thiri Tribawanaditya pawara Atula Aggamaha Dhammayazadhiraza Maha Dewi and with the royal insignia of a principal queen. Even though Sihasu had raised her to the status of a principal queen, when Mohnyin Mintaya attacked the kingdom in the reign of Kale Kyetaungnyo, Kale Kyetaungnyo, gave her to Pahkan Tarahpya to make him defend Inwa.⁷⁹ Thus, she became a pawn in the king's political move and became the consort of a governor. In the reign of King Mohnyin Mintaya, however, she was reinstated as a queen. In his reign, she fled to Hanthawady with the help of Dhammanyana and Dhammadhara, two monks who were studying at

⁷⁴*Hmannan, 2003a*, 439

⁷⁵*Hmannan Mahayazawindawgyi* (Glass Palace Chronicle), vol. II, Yangon, Ministry of Information, 2003, p. 53 (Henceforth: *Hmannan, 2003b*)

⁷⁶*Hmannan, 2003b*, 56-61

⁷⁷*Hmannan, 2003b*, 62-64

⁷⁸*Hmannan, 2003b*, 57-58

⁷⁹*Hmannan, 2003b*, 56-59

Inwa.⁸⁰ In 1452 (814 ME), when she reached the age of fifty nine, Shin Sawpu ascended to the throne with the title Banyahdaw. She reigned for nineteen years,⁸¹ and was able to bring peace and stability to the kingdom. She renovated the Shwedagon pagoda.⁸² Before her death, instead of choosing a person of royal blood, she nominated an able common citizen as her successor, and made the people accept him as their new king. The stability and prosperity of the country under her successor King Dhammazedī show that her choice was a sagacious one.⁸³

Inwa and Hanthawady periods were the two periods in Myanmar history when many wars were fought. Hence, the kings usually employed brave warriors who would bring them success. Therefore, to win the wars, to award the warriors for their valour, to conclude the wars and to form alliances with other countries, the kings usually offered their daughters and relatives in marriage.⁸⁴ Thus, Banya Oo (1353-1385) of Hanthawady presented his daughter Talame Thiri to the king of Chiangmai;⁸⁵ King Yazadirit (1385-1423) of Hanthawady gave his queen Tala Suddhamaya to the warrior Lagun Ein as an award;⁸⁶ King Mingaung of Inwa offered the hand of his daughter Sawpye Chantha to King Anawrahta of Rakhine;⁸⁷ King Banyayan of Hanthawady gave King Sihu of Inwa his sister Shin Sawpu in marriage;⁸⁸ King Mingaung of Inwa presented his sister Thupaba Dewi to King Yazadirit;⁸⁹ and King Mingaung gave his niece to the sawbwa of

⁸⁰Hmannan, 2003b, 68

⁸¹Hmannan, 2003b, 92

Zambudipa Usaung Kyan (Jambu Island in a nutshell), ed. by Than Tun, Yangon, Universities' Press, 2005, p. 9 (Henceforth: *Zambudipa*, 2005)

⁸²*Zambudipa*, 2005, 8-9

⁸³Daw Khin Khin Ma, "Myanmar Queens in Historical and Literary Texts," *Selected Writing of Daw Khin Khin Ma*, Myanmar Historical Commission of Yangon, 2004, pp. 10-18 (Henceforth: Khin Khin Ma, 2004)

⁸⁴Khin Khin Ma, 2004, 10

⁸⁵Tin Than Yu, *Myanmar Thamaing Hma Mahetthi, Dewi, Ekari Mya* (Queens in Myanmar history), Yangon, Kaung Than Press, 2004, p. 85 (Henceforth: Tin Than Yu, 2004)

⁸⁶Tin Than Yu, 2004, 94

⁸⁷Hmannan, 2003a, 444

⁸⁸Hmannan, 2003b, 56-57

⁸⁹Hmannan, 2003a, 468

Onbaung⁹⁰ and presented to youngest daughter to the Htawhmainggyi of Nyaungshwe⁹¹ to make them loyal to him. Thus, women were treated like objects to be given as presents for political gains.

As there were women who were given to rulers to form matrimonial alliances or because of loosing the wars and given to warriors as awards, there were queens who were captured in battles. In the wars between Inwa and Hanthawady, the kings were generally accompanied by their queens when they went to battle, either because they were worried about the security of their courts or because they did not trust their queens. There were some queens who fell from elephant backs while the battles were fought. Once, when King Mingaung of Inwa retreated from a battle in a war between Inwa and Hanthawady, Queen Shin Bo Me fell from the back of his elephant. Then, a mahout found her and returned her to King Mingaung. Mingaung, being suspicious that the mahout had an affair with the queen, executed him. If a queen left behind in the battlefield was found by the enemy king would normally marry her. For example, when Shin Minauk, a queen of King Mingaung, was left behind in a battle, King Yazadirit of Hanthawady found her and married her.⁹² When Maharat, a son-in-law of Yazadirit, made a hasty retreat as his army was routed at Hkaunglaungkya, the Myanmar forces presented his consort Talamekyo who was Yazadirit's daughter to King Mingaung of Inwa.⁹³ As they had to witness scenes of dreadful carnage in battles which were not suitable for women, as they were left behind by their consorts while the army was in disorder, and as they would be taken by the enemy king as wives if they were left behind in the battlefields, the lives of the captive queens would have been terrible.

⁹⁰*Hmannan, 2003a, 445*

⁹¹*Hmannan, 2003a, 456*

⁹²*Hmannan, 2003a, 485*

⁹³*Hmannan, 2003a, 455*

Offering one's daughter to another ruler was a normal arrangement made for political gains in the feudal period.⁹⁴ However, there were instances in which a ruler refused to offer his daughter in marriage to another king. For instance when King Sane Min (1698-1714) asked the Sitsanhpi, the sawbwa of Kyaington, for his daughter's hand in marriage, the *sawbwa* declined. Hence the Myanmar army marched to Kyaington in October 1708 and killed Sitsamhpi.⁹⁵ There also were changes of kings because of the daughters presented to them. A rebellion erupted during the reign of Saw Monset, the sawbwa of Kyaington (1620-1637), and the forces from Mone and Manlon attacked Kyaington in 1621. As the Myanmar king sent his forces to assist the *sawbwa* of Kyaington, the latter presented his daughter Hnin Hkanpaw to King Anaukpetlun (1605-1628) in 1622. Then, Minyedeikba, a son of King Anaukpetlun, fell in love with this princess, assassinated his father, and assumed kingship.⁹⁶ Sometimes, wars broke out because of the daughters presented to a king. In the Taungngu period in 1582, when King Maha Upayaza pushed his queen Natshin Medaw, her head was knocked against a couch and blood oozed out of her wound. She wiped her wound with a cloth, and sent the bloodstained cloth to her father, King Thadominsaw of Inwa. This ignited a war between this king and Ngazudayaka.⁹⁷ Thus, although the princesses could not engage in politics, sometimes they became the causes of war, peace or changes of kings. Although there were women like Queens Shin Sawpu and Shin Bo Me, who played leading roles in politics, their number, compared to that of queens, was smattering. Thus, women were mostly used as political pawns by the kings.

The mention in an inscription belonging to 1636 (998 ME) that “the Chief Queen was consecrated and named Atula Maha Nanda Dewi” indicates that like kings, queens were consecrated in the Nyaung Yan period.⁹⁸ Ear-piercing ceremonies for

⁹⁴Than Tun, 2004, 27

⁹⁵*Hmannan Mahayazawindawgyi* (Glass Palace Chronicle), vol. III, Yangon, Ministry of Information, 2003, pp. 347-49 (Henceforth: *Hmannan*, 2003c)

⁹⁶Than Tun, 2004, 27, 43

Hmannan, 2003c, 187

⁹⁷*Hmannan*, 2003c, 75-77

⁹⁸Nyein Maung, 1983b, 151-52

the daughters of kings were held pompously in the Nyaung Yan period, and presents were given to the princesses in these ceremonies.⁹⁹ The *Anauk-wun* was the only officer who was responsible to arrange matters concerning palace ladies in the Nyaung Yan period.¹⁰⁰ There were forty service groups under his control, and prostitutes were also under him.¹⁰¹ Thus, prostitution was legal in the Nyaung Yan period, and the prostitutes were grouped into an *asu*. Stringent rules were laid down for the queens, princesses, concubines and ladies-in-waiting as well as their servants. The king ordered on 22 November 1637 (the 2nd day of the waning moon of Nadaw, 999 ME) that the queens, princesses, concubines, ladies-in-waiting and their servants were not to go to the eastern part of the palace, but were to stay in their own apartments while he went on military expeditions.¹⁰² In the Nyaung Yan period, there were *yeponhkat meinma* (women for carrying water), *ahmwedawset meinma* (women for presenting perfumes), *ahteindaw meinma* (nannies), *achidaw meinma* (nannies), *teso meinma* (vocalists), *mhethnachikyeit meinma* (women for preparing cosmetics), *wutledawthein meinma* (women for folding clothes) and *letpaze meinma* in the palace circle.¹⁰³ As it was during the feudal period, the people had to follow strict rules concerning dress, personal utensils and ornaments depending on their ranks. According to a royal order promulgated on 19 May 1678 (the 10 day of the waxing moon of Nayon, 1040 ME), common citizens were prohibited from wearing gold anklets, gold ear studs or ivory earrings; only the daughters of ministers could wear them.¹⁰⁴ There were thirty-seven ways of wearing one's hair for palace ladies in the Nyaung Yan period. Ordinary women had to wear their hair in chignons. The convicts, however, had to tie their hair into four knots. It is learnt from mural paintings that

⁹⁹Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885, Part One, AD 1598-1648*, Kyoto, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1983, pp. 168, 170 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1983)

¹⁰⁰Than Tun, 1983, 457-58

¹⁰¹Than Tun, 1983, 232

¹⁰²Than Tun, 1983, 336

¹⁰³Than Tun, 1983, 175

Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885, Part Two, AD 1649-1750*, Kyoto, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1985, p. 344 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1985a)

¹⁰⁴Than Tun, 1985, 170

women did not wear slippers in those days. They used powdered dried jasmine, roses and orchids as cosmetics. They mixed the same powder with wax or oil and used the mixture as hair cream.¹⁰⁵

The people of the Nyaung Yan period, when they were cash-strapped, sold or mortgaged human labour. There was a royal order prohibiting the sale or mortgage of sons. A king issued an edict on 11 June 1664 (the 13th day of the waning moon of Nayon, 1026 ME) that the members of the elephantry must not sell or mortgage their son those they sell or mortgage their daughters.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, the king ordered on 7 July 1673 (the 5th day of the waxing moon of Wagaung, 1035 ME) that sons were not to be sold when the parents got into debt, and that for selling or mortgaging a son, the parents would be punished by “tying her hair in four knots,” and the parents would be taken around the city with officers publicizing their offence by striking a gong.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, it seems that the people gave preference to sons in the Nyaung Yan period. This order probably was issued to prevent the decrease of men in the service group concerned. The values of slaves in the Nyaung Yan period were as follows: three kyats for a newly-born male and two kyats for a newly-born female of the same age, ten kyats for a male who began wearing clothes and when speech began to develop and seven kyats for a female of the same age, thirty kyats for an adult male and twenty kyats for an adult female.¹⁰⁸ The word *we maya* suggests that one could buy a wife if one had the wherewithal in the Nyaung Yan period. It is recorded in a royal order issued on 27 October 1679 (the 4th day of the waxing moon of Dazaungmon, 1141 ME) that Nga Sangyi’s principal wife Mi Hpwa divorced him because he cohabited with a female slave Mi Hpondawng.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, it can be learnt that there were some men who cohabited with female slaves in the Nyaung Yan period, that

¹⁰⁵Thein Hlaing, “Nyaungyan Hkit Luhmuye” (Social Life in the Nyaungyan period), *Tekkatho Pyinnya Padetha Sazaung*, VIII, ii, June 1973, pp. 99-112 (Henceforth: Thein Hlaing, 1973)

¹⁰⁶Than Tun, 1985, 148

¹⁰⁷Than Tun, 1985, 164

¹⁰⁸Thein Hlaing, 1973, 102

¹⁰⁹Than Tun, 1985, 232-33

polygamy was allowed, and that a woman could divorce her husband if he took another wife. It is learnt from the royal order dated 8 September 1644 (the 4th day of the waxing moon Thadingyut, 1002 ME) that a daughter could succeed to the hereditary office of her mother and could inherit the hereditary office of her father if he did not have a son.¹¹⁰ As to female administrative officers of towns and villages, a female *ngwegunhmu*,¹¹¹ a *thagyima*,¹¹² and a *myedaingma*¹¹³ are mentioned. That a woman had the right of inheritance in the property of her husband following his death can be learnt from a royal order dated 26 February 1679 (the 13th day of the waning moon of Dabaung, 1040 ME), which states: “if the husband dies, his wife inherits his property,” “if the wife dies, her husband inherits her property.”¹¹⁴ The honorific *Mi-* was normally prefixed to the names of women in the Nyaung Yan period.¹¹⁵ As the women in the Nyaung Yan period society could engage in the administration of towns and villages, as they could inherit the property of their husbands after their death, and as they could inherit the property of their husbands after their death, and as they could divorce their husbands, their status in the society was not very low. However, as a royal order prescribed to sell or mortgage only women if one was in straitened circumstances, women became the victims of poverty.

As various authors appeared in every period, authoresses also emerged. It is learnt that the authoresses emerged in the successive periods were women from the palace circle. This certainly was because the women in the palace circle had better opportunity to receive education. There were criticisms against the works of the authoress in various periods. However, as their works were of artistic value, they had enriched Myanmar literature. Their works reflect the situation of the country

¹¹⁰Than Tun, 1985, 424

¹¹¹Than Tun, 1983, 328

¹¹²Than Tun, 1983, 425

¹¹³Than Tun, 1985, 314

Zambudipa, 2005, 16, 19, 72, 132, 138, 139, 141, 146

¹¹⁴Than Tun, 1985, 174

¹¹⁵Than Tun, 1983, 328

Than Tun, 1985, 232-33, 306, 314

Zambudipa, 2005, 16, 19, 49, 50, 54, 62, 72, 73, 130, 132, 138, 139, 141, 146

in those days. The names of the authoresses in different periods are given in the following table:

Table (II). Authoresses

No	Name	Period
1	Shwepye Shin Me, King Sihasu's daughter	Inwa period
2	Khin Htwa	Inwa period
3	The Princess of Linzin	Inwa period
4	A woman of upper Myanmar who composed Ainggyin poems	Inwa period
5	Mi Nyo, a palace lady	Inwa period
6	Mi Hpyu, a palace lady	Inwa period
7	The Bago Queen, the Chief Queen of Ngazudayaka	Taungngu period
8	Yazadatukalya	Taungngu period
9	The Zinme Queen	Taungngu period
10	Htwe Hla, a concubine of King Bayinnaung	Taungngu period
11	Khin Ma Htwe, a concubine of King Bayinnaung	Taungngu period
12	Saw Min Hnit	Taungngu period
13	The wife of Thayesithu of Sagaing	Taungngu period
14	The Dazaung Queen	Taungngu period
15	The Pyay Queen	Taungngu period
16	The Shwesindu Princess	Nyaung Yan period

Source: Dagon Khin Khin Le, *Amyothami Anupyinnyashin Mya* (Women artists), Rangoon, Zwe Press, 1967, pp. 5-82.

To sum up, women in Myanmar society never formed a depressed class. Women enjoyed certain rights in the Bagan period as they could become *sukrwaymas*, could inherit their husbands' estates following their death, could serve as local administrative officials like men, and could receive education. Most significantly,

they could even become *bhikkhunis* in the Bagan period. In the post-Bagan periods, however women were prohibited from becoming *bhikkhunis*. Therefore, as regards the freedom of faith, women enjoyed more privileges in the Bagan period than in later periods. There were no instances of women becoming *sukrwayms* after 1340. In the Inwa period, the women, like men, could become donors. In the Nyaung Yan period, queens also could be consecrated, and ear-piercing ceremonies for princesses were held with pomp and ceremony. As a woman had the right to divorce her husband if she was dissatisfied with him, as she had the right of inheritance in her husband's property after the latter's death, and as she could be engaged in the administration of a town or a village, the social status of a woman was not very low in the Nyaung Yan period. However, a king had ordered that only women were to be sold or mortgaged when a person became impoverished. Thus, laws and customs gave more privileges to men. Although there were women who played leading roles in the affairs of the kingdom and politics in the successive periods, their number was low compared to that of queens. The majority of women just became the victims of the king's political ruses. The kings presented their daughters or the daughters of their relatives to other kings as gestures of goodwill, or gave them as awards to their warriors. It can therefore be concluded that although the status of women in Myanmar society was not very low, they mostly were exploited for political gains and could not play leading roles in politics.

CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN IN MYANMAR TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

Concerning the people's attitudes towards women in Myanmar society, their attitudes towards the birth of girls should be studied first. The custom of not wanting or welcoming the birth of a female was not practiced in Myanmar society. Although the cultures and social customs in Southeast Asian countries including Myanmar are influenced by those of India, the Myanmar do not adopt all the Indian cultures and customs. In the Hindu society, when a girl is born the midwife would place her on the ground, and when a boy is born he would be lifted up.¹ No similar custom is found in the Myanmar society. According to the custom in Chinese society only sons can carry on the family line. As the offspring of a daughter would have to take their father's name, a daughter cannot carry on the family name. Therefore, the birth of female child is disliked in the Chinese society because only a son can carry on the family name and can perform ritual obligations of ancestor worship, and only the birth of a son would dignify the family.² In some families, female infants are killed.³ As to the female infanticides in other countries, it is stated: "As in the West, in hard times female infants were sometimes killed at or soon after birth so that the rest of the family could survive."⁴ As in China, in India too, only the sons can perform rituals of worship

¹A.S. Altekar, *Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, Delhi, Motil Banarsidass, 1973, p.7 (Henceforth: Altekar, 1973)

²Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Chinese: Their History and Culture*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1946, p.670 (Henceforth: Latourette, 1946)

³³Latourette, 1946, 679

⁴Rhoads Murphey, *A History of Asia*, New York, Longman, 2000, p. 51 (Henceforth: Murphey, 2000)

on behalf of their ancestors.⁵ The custom that only the sons can perform ritual obligations of ancestor worship and female infanticide; are not found in Myanmar society. There are twelve *mingalars* customarily observed by a Myanmar in the different stages of his/her life:

1. birth
2. presenting a child to the three gems and to his/her ancestors
3. tonsure
4. placing a child in a cradle for the first time
5. the feeding of the first betel
6. presenting a child to the sun and the moon
7. naming a child
8. the feeding of the rice for the first time
9. hairdressing
10. ear-boring
11. novitiation, and
12. wedding.⁶

Of these, ten ceremonies are for both sexes. Of the remaining two, the novitiation ceremony is for boys and ear-boring ceremony is for girls. That these two ceremonies have to be observed by males and females separately is not due to discrimination on the basis of sex. Boys had to observe the novitiation ceremony because they are required to enter the Buddhist Order temporarily as Buddhist novices, while girls had to perform the ceremony of ear-boring. In the feudal period, how an ear-boring ceremony was held depended on the social status of the

⁵Murphey, 2000, 47

⁶Chaung Oo Maung Sanda, *Monywe Sayadaw* (The Abbot of Monywa), Rangoon, Pinyinabeikman, 1979, p. 34 (Henceforth: Chaung Oo Maung Sanda, 1979)

girls.⁷ It is learnt that the donors spent 3952 kyat at the ear-boring ceremony of Me Khin Gyi and Me Khin Lat, held in AD 1865 (on the 3rd day of the waning moon of Tabodwe, 1227 Me).⁸ As the price of gold in King Mindon's reign was around twenty four kyats per one tical,⁹ the donors spent about the value of one viss and sixty four ticals of gold for this ceremony. Therefore, the custom of holding separate ceremonies for males and females was not practiced in the Myanmar society. It is also learnt that the donors, depending on their social status, spent lavishly for ear-boring ceremony which was a religious ceremony.

In the Myanmar society, females were categorized into nine age-groups: *gawri*

Table (III). Categorization of Females (by age)

No	Category	Age
1.	Gawri	8
2.	Konmari	10
3.	Hkawyo kanya	12
4.	Mahallaka	14
5.	sanda kanya	16
6.	asanda kanya	18
7.	thaditha kanya	20
8.	athaditha kanya	22
9.	Virgin	60

Source: Yandameit Kyaw Htin, *Yezagyo Hkondaw Hpyathton* (Rulings of the judge of Yezagyo), Rangoon, Hanthawady Press, 1927, p. 66

⁷“A list of things to be made ready before the auspicious time for boring the princess' ears,” *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1339 (Henceforth: the princesses, *pu* 1339)

“Expenses of the ear-boring ceremony of Me Khin Gyi and Me Khin Lat,” *Purabaik* MS, Universities' Central Library Collection, *pu* 10235 (Henceforth: Me Khin Gyi, Me Khin Lat, *pu* 10235)

⁸Me Khin Gyi, Me Khin Lat, *pu* 10235

⁹Maung Maung Tin, “Minhkin Minthami Lethpwe,” (Presents given to the princess of Minhkin), *Shumawa Magazine*, XXXVII, no. 444, May 1984, pp.165-67 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Tin, 1984)

(eight years old), *konmari* (ten years old), *hkawyo kanya* (twelve years old), *mahallaka* (fourteen years old), *sanda kanya* (sixteen years old), *asandakanya* (eighteen years old), *thaditha kanya* (twenty years old), *athadi kanya* (twenty two years old), and a sixty years old virgin.

The *dhammathats* prescribed that parents should marry off their daughter when the latter was fifteen or sixteen years old, although women over twenty years old were allowed to marry without the consent of their parents or guardians.¹⁰ Therefore, the marriageable age of females according to the *dhammathats* was fifteen or sixteen; and parents generally married their daughters off when the latter were fifteen or sixteen years old as it was their duty. Although the marriageable age for girls according to the *dhammathats* was fifteen or sixteen, there were marriages of girls under fifteen. It is learnt that there were women who married before they reached the age of fifteen in Salingyi in 1782.

Table (IV). Females from Salingyi who married before the age of fifteen

N0	Mother's name	Mother's age	Son's age	Mother's age when she got married
1.	Mi Kwe	15	6	9
2.	Mi Kywe	35	23	12
3.	Mi Hkwe Hpyu	16	3	13
4.	Mi Zanbi	28	14	14
5.	Mi Ni (1)	28	18	10
6.	Mi Ni (2)	25	15	10
7.	Mi Hnin Ngon	26	14	12

To be continued

¹⁰U Gaung, *A Digest of the Burmese Buddhist Law Concerning Inheritance and Mariage; Being a Collection of Texts from Thirty Six Dhamathas, Vol. II, Marriage*, Rangoon, the Superintendent, Government Printing, Burma, 1899, pp. 43-44 (Henceforth: U Gaung, 1899)

8.	Mi Baw	40	32	8
9.	Mi Me	33	19	14
10.	Mi Myat Tha	43	30	13
11.	Mi Hmon	32	19	13
12.	Mi La	28	20	8
13.	Mi Tha	27	14	13

Source: Dr Toe Hla, *Konbaunghkit Kyelet Luhmusibwa Bawa (1752-1885)* (Socioeconomic life in the Konbaung period rural society), Myanmar Historical Commission, Yangon, pp. 82-83.

The list of households and population of Thabutaw and Taungtha Ywama villages also include the names of women who got married while they were underage. These women were:

Table (V). Women from Thabutaw and Taungtha villages who married before the age of fifteen

N0	Mother's name	Mother's age	Son's age	Mother's age when she got married
1.	Mi Nyein Me	40	28	12
2.	Mi La Hpyu	42	30	12
3.	Mi Win	35	21	14
4.	Mi Kaung Kywe	15	2	13
5.	Mi Hom Ya	30	17	13
6.	Mi Myat Tha	41	28	13
7.	Mi Tha	25	15	10
8.	Mi Myo Ya	28	20	8

To be continued

9.	Mi Shwe Hpyu	25	15	10
10.	Mi Zin Pon	30	20	10
11.	Mi Hla Wa	37	27	10

Source: “The list of households and population of Thabutaw and Taungtha Ywama Village (1783),” *Purabaik* MS, Sagaing, Buddhist Cultural Museum Collection, *pu-4*.

Similarly, there were women who married while they were underage in Mawteik Hkayaing village in 1870. They were as follows:

Table (VI). Women from Mawteik Hkayaing village who married before the age of fifteen (1870)

N0	Mother's name	Mother's age	Son's age	Mother's age when she got married
1.	Mi Kwe	26	18	8
2.	Mi Ywe	17	4	13
3.	Mi Be	32	25	7
4.	Mi Po Si	21	13	8
5.	Mi Aye	25	13	12
6.	Mi Le	25	17	8

Source: “The list of households and population in Mawteik Hkayaing village (1232 ME),” *Purabaik* MS, Universities' Historical Research Department's Collection, *pu-4*

The marriages of females (by age group) from the available evidence are given in the following table.

Table (VII). Married women (by the age when they got married)

NO	The ages when they got married	Thabutaw and Taungtha Ywama	Sitottara	Myedu	Mawteik Hkayaing
1.	5-10 years	5	-	-	4
2.	11-15 years	6	1	2	13
3.	16-20 years	14	4	14	28
4.	21-25 years	20	2	19	41
5.	26-30 years	11	5	8	16
6.	31-35 years	14	3	2	10
7.	36-40 years	11	2	3	4
8.	41-45 years	7	-	3	-
9.	46-50 years	2	1	-	-
10.	51-55 years	-	1	1	1
11.	56-60 years	1	-	-	-

Source: “The list of households and population in Thabutaw and Taungtha Ywama Villages (1783),” *Purabaik* MS, Sagaing, Buddhist Cultural Museum Collection, *pu-4*; “The list of households in Sitottara in 1145 ME (AD 1783),” *Purabaik* MS, Ludu Library Collection, *pu 0094*; “The list of households in the villages in Myedu township,” *Purabaik* MS, Universities’ Historical Research Department’s Collection, *pu 216*; “The list of households and population in Mawteik Hkayaing village tract on the 2nd day of the waning moon of Tabaung, 1232 ME,” *Purabaik* MS, Universities’ Historical Research Department’s Collection, *pu 177*.

According these documents, it can be learnt that although there were instances in which underage females married, women generally married between the ages of

twenty one and twenty five. There also was a woman who gave birth to a child at the age of fifty eight. There were child marriages not only among the common citizens, but also among the members of the cavalry.¹¹ Of the nineteen married females in the list of Sitottara, a fourteen-year old girl was the only girl who got married before the age of fifteen.¹² Among 116 married women in the tract of Mawteik Hkayaing village, six got married before they reached the age of fifteen.¹³ Moreover, out of fifty-two married women in Myedu township, only one got married before she was fifteen years old.¹⁴ Of ninety-one married women in Thabutaw and Taungtha Ywama villages, eleven married before they were fifteen.¹⁵ Therefore, although there were marriages of girl who were under the age of legal maturity in the Konbaung period, the percentage was very low, and there were no child widows. The age of marrying was higher among the males than the females. Child marriages were not uncommon; they also existed in India. There were child marriages in India from AD 100 onwards, and also in 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Child marriages were discouraged in India in the 19th century and early 20th century; and social conferences were encouraging the people to get married only when they came of age.¹⁶ In addition, there were child marriages among the members of high social classes in ancient Roman Empire and in England under the rules of the Tudors. From 1850 onwards, however, females married only when they came of age.¹⁷ The undesirable consequences of child marriages were the

¹¹Moe Moe Oo, "Myanmar Cavalry (1752-1885)," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Mandalay, 2003, pp. 32-36 (Henceforth: Moe Moe Oo, 2003)

¹²"The list of households in Sitottara in 1145 ME (AD 1783)", *Purabaik* MS, Ludu Library Collection, *pu* 0094 (Henceforth: Sitottara, *pu* 0094)

¹³"The list of households and population in Mawteik Hkayaing village, the 2nd day of the waning moon, 1232 ME", *Purabaik* MS, Universities' Historical Research Department's Collection, *pu* 177 (Henceforth: Mawteik, *pu* 177)

¹⁴"The list of households in the villages in Myedu township", *Purabaik* MS, Universities' Historical Research Department's Collection, *pu* 216 (Henceforth: Myedu, *pu* 216)

¹⁵"The list of households and population of Thabutaw and Taungtha Ywama Village (1783)", *Purabaik* MS, Sagaing, Buddhist Cultural Museum Collection, *pu*-4 (Henceforth: Thabutaw, *pu* 4)

¹⁶Altekar, 1973, 61

¹⁷Altekar, 1973, 64-65

girls' inability to manage household affairs, and the increase in the number of child widows.

According to available evidence, the level of total fertility rate (TFR) in the Konbaung period was between one to six children per woman.¹⁸ In general, however, the number of offspring a woman had was between one and three.¹⁹ Therefore, it can be assumed that the birth rate was low. This either was due to low fertility rate or to high infant mortality rate. The reason probably was the mothers' ignorance of the principles of hygiene. Concerning childbirths, Sangermano, an Italian priest, stated that the Myanmar women aged after childbirths because the foods they ate after childbirths were not nutritious and because they had to undergo heat treatment for ten to fifteen days at home; he observed that as the women had to take heat treatment, their skins became dark.²⁰ There were too many, do's and don'ts for women after childbirth, and some of those rules probably were injurious to their health. This probably caused high infant mortality rate. The Myanmar saying *yaukkya hpaungsi, meinma mine* highlights the difficulty of childbirth for Myanmar women. A woman who died in childbirth would be buried immediately.²¹ In a suit involving verbal abuse in 5 April 1795, the defendant was said to have accused the complainant as having "had an abortion" (*tha thade hpyet thi*).²² This suggests that some women underwent voluntary abortion in the Konbaung period.

¹⁸Mawteit, *pu* 177

¹⁹Sitottara, *pu* 0094

Myedu, *pu* 216

Thabuttaw, *pu* 4

²⁰Sangermano, *A Description of the Burmese Empire, Rangoon*, Government Press, 1962, p. 133 (Henceforth: Sangermano, 1962)

²¹Sangermano, 1962, 142

²²Yandameit Kyaw Htin, *Yezagyō Hkondaw Hpyathton* (Rulings of the Judge of Yezagyō), Rangoon, Hanthawady Press, 1965, p. 10 (Henceforth: Yandameit Kyaw Htin, 1965)

It is also necessary to study under whose protective supervision and guardianship the women were in the Myanmar society. Young ladies were expected to obey their parents or guardians and to behave with proper decorum as the Myanmar saying goes: *baing gaung kyauk hpi*. For this reason, women were classed into eight categories depending on who their guardians were:

1. those under the care of their mothers,
2. those under the care of their fathers,
3. those under the care of their parents,
4. those under the care of their brothers,
5. those under the care of their sisters,
6. those under the care of their families,
7. those under the care of their relatives, and
8. those under the care of their companions.²³

With the exception of those over twenty years old, the marriage of Myanmar women would normally be arranged by their parents or guardians.²⁴ According to the *dhammathats*, even the divorced women and widows could not remarry without the consent of their parents or guardians.²⁵ However, the rules were not as strict as in other Asian countries. With regard to how women committed suicide because they were married off against their will, a scholar noted as follows: “More so than in the West, Asian girls could be married against their wishes and had little or on right of refusal-except by committing suicide.”²⁶ In the Myanmar society, a mother could not marry off a daughter without the father’s consent.²⁷ Only if a woman was fatherless, her mother or guardians-grandparents, uncles or aunts-

²³“Mahayazathat Htwetsochet (Statements in the Mahayazathat)”, *Purabaik* MS, Department of Old Myanmar Literature, Botahtaung, Yangon, *pu* 340 (Henceforth: Mahayazathat, *pu* 340)

²⁴U Gaung, 1899, 58-59

²⁵Yandameit Kyaw Htin, 1965, 18

²⁶Murphey, 2000, 47

²⁷U Gaung, 1899, 116

could arrange her marriage; and she was not allowed to marry without their consent.²⁸ In the Hindu society, however, if a woman was fatherless, her grandfather, elder brothers or uncles had to arrange her marriage. Only if a woman had no father grandfather, elder brothers or uncles, her mother could marry her off.²⁹

Marriage portion would be betel, pickled tea, gold and silver jewellery, clothes that they could afford. The bride's parents could demand marriage portion at the engagement, not after the marriage. If they married their daughter off to someone else after accepting the marriage portion or bride price from someone, they must return it to him. The bride's parents were also required to tell the bridegroom of the bride's defects-that she was infected with leprosy, that she had a broken limb, that she was deaf and dumb, that she was insane, etc. If they failed to do so, the groom could refuse to marry the bride when he found out her defects. In such case, the bride's parents would have to give him double the marriage portion his parents had given to them. If there were more than one person who wanted to marry a woman, her parents could accept the bride prices put up by the parents of all those persons with the agreement that they would marry their daughter off to the person of her choice. In such case, the parents of the remaining persons could not reclaim what they had put up to the bride's parents as bride prices.³⁰ The dowry system, by which the bride's parents had to put up property or money to the prospective groom's parents as practiced by the Hindus was unknown in the Myanmar society.³¹ Apart from giving presents, the parents of bridegroom sometimes sent their son to work as a servant in the bride's home. In some

²⁸U Gaung, 1899, 119

²⁹Altekar, 1973, 69

³⁰Maung Maung Theik, "Konbaung Hkit Luhmuye Ache-ane" (Social conditions in the Konbaung period), *Pyidaungzu Myanmar Nainggan Sarpe Hnint Luhmuyetheikpan Jane*, vol. II, no. i, 1969, pp. 45-76 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Theik, 1969)

³¹Altekar, 1973, 70-71

instances, the parents of a woman would demand a man to serve them as a servant with the agreement that they would marry their daughter off to him.³²

As the saying *yaung nauk zadon pa* suggests, a wife normally would move to her husband's house. Occasionally, however, they would enter into an agreement that the bridegroom would stay at the bride's house after marriage. A legal suit involving such an agreement, which was heard and decided by the *myowun* (governor) of Ratanatheinga in 21 December 1789, may be cited here. In this case, Nandakyawthu demanded his wife Mi Hpyu to move to his house. Yekyawwera, Mi Hpyu's father, stated that he married his daughter off to Nandakyawthu so that she could care for them, that is, her parents, Nandakyawthu wanted her to stay at his parents' home after about five or six months; therefore, he insisted that she should not accompany her husband. As the *dhammathats* stipulated that a daughter was not free to leave her parent's home for three years and as a man could not leave his parents-in-law within three years after marriage without their consent if they had married their daughter off to him to look after them according to local custom, the governor decided that Nandakyawthu and Mi Hpyu were to continue to live with Mi Hpyu's parents.³³ In the Myanmar society, women need not take their husband's names after their marriage. They were not required to wear anything to show that they were married either.

In China, the feet of women were bound to constrict their normal growth, and this practice known as foot binding mutilated women's feet.³⁴ No similar practice existed in the Myanmar society. Thus, the women in the Myanmar society had more rights than those in the neighbouring countries.

³²Maung Maung Theik, 1969, 56

³³“Seba Mingyi Kauktaumugyet Hpaya,” *Purabaik* MS, Universities Historical Research Department's Collection, *pu* 74 (Henceforth: Seba Mingyi, *pu* 74)
Yandameit Kyaw Htin, 1965, 9-11

³⁴Murphey, 2000, 5
Latourette, 1946, 5

The phrases *nauk maya*,³⁵ *einthigya naukhta thu maya*, *hnaung maya ne thi*,³⁶ *nauk ne maya*³⁷ and *eingyane meinma*³⁸ indicate that polygamy was practiced by common citizens. In addition to a *mayagyi*, a man could have *letsonpyaing mayange* and up to six *apyaung maya* as his wives,³⁹ ie concubines.⁴⁰ The six *apyaung mayas* mentioned in a legal document were:

1. an *apyaung maya* who came along with the wife,
2. an *apyaung maya* who came along with the husband,
3. an *apyaung maya* bought by a married couple,
4. an *apyaung maya* given by the husband's parents after he got married,
5. a *kyunpyaungma* (female slave who was to be treated as a concubine) given by the wife's parents,
6. a concubine to whom one did not give one's money and with whom one did not eat together.⁴¹

Thus, it is learnt that the people cohabited with female slaves in the Konbaung period. A creditor not only could treat a female slave as a servant, but also could take her as a wife. Although polygamy was permitted, a man could not take a

³⁵“*Thetkayit* dated the 8th day of the waning of First Wazo, 1217 ME (6 July 1855), Mortgage of paddy land,” *Purabaik MS*, the collection of U Thila (Yezon village), *pu* 14047, Manuscript collection of Maung Lin, Tutor, Department of History, Meiktila University (Henceforth: Mortgage of paddy land, *pu* 14047)

³⁶“Judgement made by Maha Minkyaw Sithu, judge, Myinmu, on the 2nd day of the waxing moon, 1235 ME,” *Purabaik MS*, collection of Kyaw San Htun, Tutor, Department of History, Myingyan University (Henceforth: Minkyaw Sithu's judgement, *pu*)

³⁷“*Thetkayit*, Mortgage of human labour by Nga Yauk and wife Mi Chein”, *Purabaik MS*, National University Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Nga Yauk, *pu* 1268)

³⁸Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885 Part Five, A.D. 1788-1806*, Kyoto, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1986, p. 812 (Henceforth: Than Tun, *1986b*)

³⁹U Gaung, *A Digest of the Burmese Buddhist Law Concerning Inheritance and Marriage: being a Collection of Texts from Thirty-Six Dhammathats, vol. I, Inheritance*, Rangoon, The Superintendent, Government Printing, 1898, p. 36 (Henceforth: U Gaung, *1898*)

⁴⁰Manung Maung Thaik, 1969, 56

⁴¹Maha Yazathat, *pu* 340
U Gaung, *1898*, 595

lesser wife if he could not afford to provide food and shelter for and look after her.⁴² Even though no woman would like their husband extramarital affairs, the women of the Konbaung period had to put up with their husband's love affairs. A woman could not sue another for committing adultery with one's husband, although there were many instances in which a man sued another man for *mayahkohmu* because the latter was having an adulterous relationship with his wife.

As to inheritance, however, women had the same rights enjoyed by men. According to a royal order issued by King Badon on 3 March 1782 (the fifth day of the waning moon of Tabaung, 1143 ME), if a married couple had no descendants, one of them had the right to inherit the property of his or her spouse after the latter's death.⁴³ In the Hindu society, in contrast, a "could not inherit the property of her husband after his death; it passed on to her sons."⁴⁴ Inheritance was categorized into *payin* or *ahtet oatsa* and *lehtetpwa* or *auk oatsa*. According to an edict of King Badon issued on 24 May 1809, the *ahtet oatsa* passed on to the descendants of the deceased person's principal wife, while the *auk oatsa* went to those of his lesser wife or wives.⁴⁵ Therefore, both the principal wife and lesser wife or wives of a person and their descendants were entitled to the right of inheritance in the property of their deceased husband or father. In some cases, the son of a deceased person's lesser wife even had the right to inherit his father's hereditary office. For instance, in an inheritance suit, Maha Minkyawsitu, the judge of Myinmu, decided that the son of Mi Shwe Mi, the Lesser wife of a

⁴²Maha Minkyaw Sithu's Judgement, *pu Yandameit Kyaw Htin, 1965*, 4

⁴³Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885 Part Four, A.D. 1782-1787*, Kyoto, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1986, p. 231 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1986a)

⁴⁴Altekar, 1973, 101

⁴⁵Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885 Part Six, A.D. 1807-1810*, Kyoto, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1987, p. 631 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1987)

myothagyi (town headman) of Salin, was to assume the office of his deceased father, who had no offspring with his principal wife Mi Chan.⁴⁶ According to an edict issued on 23 May 1810 (the 6th day of the waning moon, Nayon, 1172 ME), the son of the principal wife of an hereditary officer was deprived of his right to inherit his father's office because his mother's name was not mentioned in the list submitted to the crown; the son of the officer's lesser wife inherit his father's office and became *myedaing*-a hereditary officer who had to record and take a commission on sales of immovable property. Nga Taung, the *myedaing thagyi*, after having a son, Nga Cho Aye, with his first wife Mi Win Nyo, divorced her. Later he remarried Mi Win San, Nga Shwin's mother, and when he had to submit a list to the crown in 1783 (1145 ME), he mentioned MiWin San instead of Mi Win Nyo as his wife. Therefore, his office passed on to Nga Shwin, the son of Mi Win San whose name was mentioned in the list.⁴⁷ Therefore, even though a man was allowed to marry more than one wife, none of the wives lost their rights. Not only the principal wife and her descendants, but also the lesser wife and her descendants had the right of inheritance. A man had to support his wife by providing food and clothing even if he had married a woman who was insane or crippled. A man had to care for his wife if the latter was pregnant. If he could not look after her himself, he was required to hire a female servant to look after her. If one's wife died because of her pregnancy, he had to perform funeral rights over her; if someone else buried her, he was required to pay the cost.⁴⁸

It is also learnt that there was sexual equality concerning divorce. According to the *dhammathats*, women had the same rights as their husbands when they get divorced. It is prescribed in the *Kaingza Manuyaza Dhammathat* that if a man wanted to divorce his wife even though the latter had committed no wrong, he

⁴⁶Maha Minkyaw Sithu's judgement, *pu*

⁴⁷Than Tun, 1987, 752

⁴⁸Kaingza Manuyaza Dhammathat (Kaingza Manuyaza's dhammathat), n.p., n.d., pp. 46-47 (Henceforth: *Kaingza*)

would have to settle all the debts and turn over the entire family estate-both animate and inanimate property to her, and was to leave the house with the clothes he was wearing.⁴⁹ On 28 January 1795 (the 9th day of the waxing moon, Tabodwe, 1156 ME), King Badon issued a royal order that anybody who sought a no-fault divorce was to be caned although the marriage was to be dissolved as usual.⁵⁰ Thus, sex was not taken into account concerning a divorce; what really counted was the couple's behaviour. The law was also equitable concerning property rights upon the termination of marriage. Each spouse was to take the property he/she owned before his/her marriage, and was to receive half the property he/she and his/her spouse accumulated while they were married; the husband and the wife were to share the debts and the legal expenses equally; and the children could choose with whom they would live.⁵¹ In a divorce case Nga Aung Min, the Myowan of Saka and Mi Hnin which was decided on 16 July 1809 (the 5th day of the waning moon, Wazo, 1171 ME), the judgement was that all the couple's possessions were to be given to the wife Mi Hnin and the husband was to leave their home with the clothes he had on as he sought a no-fault divorce.⁵² Thus, the women enjoyed equal rights; the law prescribed that the spouse who sought a no-fault marriage was to be caned; in a divorce by mutual consent, both the husband and the wife had to share the family property as well as their debts equally; in a no-fault divorce, the spouse who sought the divorce had no property right, but had to leave the family with a single set of clothes he/she was wearing. Even a slave whom a man had taken as wife had such rights according to the *dhammathats*. If the owner of a female slave ate together with the latter, she was recognized as his legitimate wife from that day on. If a man showed that he loved a female slave by dining with her, she became his legitimate wife and mistress of the house. If the

⁴⁹Kaingza, 42

⁵⁰Than Tun, 1986b, 470

⁵¹U Thaung, "Padetharit Hkiy Hma Kyeywa Tayayon Mya" (Village courts in the feudal period), *Working People's Daily*, 4 May 1970, vol. VII, no. 204, p. 6 (Henceforth: U Thaung, 1970)

⁵²Yandameit Kyaw Htin, 1965, 44-45

man wanted to divorce her and remarry another woman, she had the right of winning everything they acquired from the day they became man and wife. The man was also responsible to pay off the debts they had incurred since their day of marriage. However, he would get everything he owned before that date and the value of a female slave. If a man battered a female slave he had taken as wife as if she had committed any wrong although she did not because he wanted the family property, he would get the value of the female slave and the property he owned before their marriage, and was responsible to settle the debts he had incurred before their marriage. The husband and his slave wife had to share the property-both animate and inanimate-they obtained while they were married equally, and they had the same responsibility to settle the debt they incurred while they were married.⁵³ If the wife could prove that the husband had battered her by showing the injuries she had sustained, the husband had to turn over the family property to her and would also be responsible to settle the debts they had run up while they were married; their marriage would be annulled, and the husband would have to leave their home with the clothes he was wearing.⁵⁴ Thus, the *dhammathats* protected women from being battered by their husbands, and also ensured that they would be supported by their husbands. In 1879 (1241 ME), a certain Mi Shwe Pu filed a petition for divorce Mi Shwe Pu and Nga San Paw, claiming that Nga San Paw failed to fulfill his duty as a husband as he did not provide her with food and did not come near her till she was pregnant. In this case, the judge decided that Nga San Paw was to give 30 one-kyat coins to Mi Shwe Pu in compensation, that the child was to be cared for by the mother, and that when the child came of age Nga San Paw was to take him or her by paying *nobo* to the child's mother, and the divorce was granted.⁵⁵ This court decision shows that a woman could divorce

⁵³*Kaingza*, 37-38

⁵⁴*Kaingza*, 42

⁵⁵“Court decision in a divorce case (Mi Shwepu and Nga San Paw), the 3rd day of the waxing moon, 1241 ME”, *Purabaik* MS, Mandalay University Library Collection, *pu* 37 (Henceforth: divorce case, *pu* 37)

her husband if he was not dutiful, and that the husband was also responsible to pay maintenance for his children. Thus, the husband and wife had the same rights concerning divorce either according to the *dhammathats* or according to the legal cases. In the Chinese society, a divorced woman was shunned by the society.⁵⁶ In the Konbaung period Myanmar society, however, a divorced woman was not disregarded or shunned by the society.

Seducing a maiden who was under the care of her parents or of a guardian was a punishable offence.⁵⁷ The *dhammathats* list twenty one types of women with whom a man should not have an affair with as follows:

1. an old woman
2. an insane woman
3. a leper
4. a pregnant woman
5. a young girl
6. a woman who came from another locality
7. a woman whom one had confined as security for the repayment of a loan
8. a woman under the care of her father
9. a woman under the care of her mother
10. a woman under the care of her grandmother
11. a woman under the care of her grandfather
12. a woman under the care of her elder sister
13. a woman under the care of her younger sister
14. a woman under the care of her younger brother
15. a woman under the care of her elder brother

⁵⁶Walter M. Gallichan, *Women Under Polygamy*, London, Holden Hardingham, 1914, p. 274 (Henceforth: Gallichan, 1914)

⁵⁷Than Tun, 1986b, 468

16. a woman under the care of her mother's elder sister
17. a woman under the care of her mother's younger sister
18. a woman under the care of her father's elder brother or the husband of her mother's elder sister
19. a woman under the care of her father's younger brother or the husband of her mother's younger sister
20. a woman under the care of her paternal uncle's wife
21. a woman under the care of her mother's elder brother.⁵⁸

The punishment, however, depended on the social status of the woman with whom a person had a sexual relationship.

1. If a man, whatever his social class was, seduced a daughter or wife of a courtier of the first or second rank, he was to be sentenced to death.
2. If a man had an illicit love affair with a daughter or wife of a courtier of the other three ranks, both the man and woman were to be exposed to public derision, and pilloried at the city gate from which corpses were taken out and to be flogged; their property, both animate and inanimate, was to be confiscated; and the children and wife of the offender were to be reduced to slavery.
3. If a man had a sexual relationship with the daughter or wife of an officer who was not one of the five ranks, both the man and the woman were to be exposed to public derision and to be pilloried and given fifty lashes, and were to be sent to a labour group for gathering food for elephants and horses. No compensatory damages were to be awarded.
4. If a man had a sexual relationship with the daughter or wife of a

⁵⁸*Manugye Dhammathat* (Manu's comprehensive dhammathat), Rangoon, Hanthawaddy News Printing, 1903, pp. 162-63 (Henceforth: *Manugye; 1903*)

commoner, he was to be required to pay a slave to her parents of husband in compensation.⁵⁹

With regard to adultery, in a court decision made on 28 January 1795 (the 9th day of the waxing moon, Tabodwe, 1156 ME), the punishment for a married woman who committed adultery was the lash, whereas that for the man who had adulterous relationship with her was the lash with proclamation (*maungkyaw*). According to a royal order, a man who was guilty of “wife-stealing” was to be among the six types of persons taken out of the palace by the gate which was reserved for talking out corpses; and a minister who had an illicit love affair within the palace compound was to be banished from the kingdom. Thus, the punishments for illicit sex differed depending on the severity of the offence and the rank of the offenders.⁶⁰ In another case, a royal order was issued on 12 September 1787 (the 1st day of the waxing moon, Thadingyut, 1149 ME) that Nga Talok, who committed adultery Thayewun Minhlakyawswa’s wife, and Mi Naw, Nga Talok’s wife were to be confined in pillories at the open hall at the cemetery naked to be exposed to public derision.⁶¹ On 13 September 1787 (the 21st day of the waxing moon, Thadingyut, 1149 ME), Mi Naw was ordered to served in the Rice Milling Service, and Nga Talok was made to join the group responsible for gathering elephant food; additionally, the phrase *luzomyo* (relative of a criminal) was tattooed on the chest of Nga Talok’s father.⁶² Thus, not only the offender Nga Talok, but also his father and wife were punished. All the family members of the offender were punished seemingly so that other people would not dare to have illicit sex. Thus, there were laws to protect the interests of the woman. The punishments, however, differed according to the social status of the persons involved.

⁵⁹Than Tun, *1986b*, 447

⁶⁰Than Tun, *1986b*, 467-68

⁶¹Than Tun, *1986a*, 594

⁶²Than Tun, *1986a*, 595

There is no evidence that widows were shunned by the community in the Konbaung period. The Hindu practice of *sati*, whereby a widow had to immolate herself on her husband's funeral pyre, was not found in Myanmar. In 1881, there were 839 widows who immolated themselves in Bengal.⁶³ In the Hindu society, a widow would be shunned by the society; she would have to shave her head to show that she was a widow, and would not be allowed to attend ceremonies.⁶⁴ In the Myanmar society, on the other hand, widows were not required to have any mark on their bodies to show that they were widows. Moreover, in the Hindu society and in most of the Asian countries, widows were not allowed to remarry.⁶⁵ In the Myanmar society, in contrast, widows were not prohibited from remarrying.

In making donations, women in the Myanmar society could, like men, become donors of monasteries,⁶⁶ open halls,⁶⁷ pagodas,⁶⁸ scripture boxes,⁶⁹ golden finials,⁷⁰ of ordination halls,⁷¹ etc. In the *thetkayits*, both women and men are

⁶³Altekar, 1973, 139

⁶⁴Altekar, 1973, 164

⁶⁵Gallichan, 1914, 112

Murphey, 2000, 50

⁶⁶“*Thetkayit* dated the 5th day of the waxing moon, Nayon, 1169 ME (10 May 1807), Mortgage of Mi Aye as a domestic slave”, *Lezin Purabaik*, Dr. Toe Hla's manuscript, Department of History, Mandalay University Collection ([Henceforth: Mi Aye, Lezin pu](#))

⁶⁷“Land dispute, the 15th day of the waxing moon, Dabodwe, 1211 ME”, *Lezin Purabaik*, Dr. Toe Hla's manuscript, Department of History, Mandalay University Collection ([Henceforth: Land dispute, Lezin pu](#))

⁶⁸“*Thetkayit* dated the 8th day of the waxing moon, Tabaung, 1181 ME (20 March 1870), Mortgage of Mi Hla”, *Lezin palm-leaf* manuscript, Toe Hla Collection (Henceforth: Mi Hla, *Lezin pu*)

⁶⁹“*Thetkayit* dated the 14th day of the waxing moon, Tabaung, 1220 ME (17 March 1859), Mortgage of paddy land by U Sein and his son-in-law Maung Shwe Ge”, *Wambye Purabaik*, Toe Hla Collection ([Henceforth: U Sein, Wambye pu](#))

⁷⁰“*Thetkayit* dated the 1st day of the waxing moon, Dagu, 1222 (11 March 1861), Mortgage of paddy land”, *Wambye Purabaik*, Toe Hla, Collection (Henceforth: Mortgage of paddy land, *Wambye pu*)

⁷¹Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885, Part Nine*, A.D. 1853-1885, Kyoto, The Center For Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1989, p. 622 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1989)

mentioned as witnesses.⁷² In the Konbaung period, the title *Mi, Me or Ma* was usually prefixed to the name of females. Women wore long cotton or silk *htamein* (sarongs) tucked under the armpit. As a *htamein* was just a strip of cloth for wrapping around the lower part of the body, it revealed part of a thigh when a woman walked. When they traveled from one place to another or went to pagodas and monasteries, they wore upper garments slightly shorter than those worn by men with a stole around the shoulders. Both men and women wore leather slippers. The women in rural areas normally wore *htameins* interwoven with

⁷² “*Thetkayit*, Loans taken out by Ma O”, *Purabaik* MS, National University Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Ma O, *pu* 1268)

“*Thetkayit*, Mortgage of human labour by a family-Nga Te, Junior, wife Ma Sa Oo, son Nga Kyin, and sister Mi Thin”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Nga Te, *pu* 1268)

“*Thetkayit*, Mortgage of human labour by Mi Cho”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Mi Cho, *pu* 1268)

“*Thetkayit*, Mortgage of human labour by Nga Thaw Kaw and wife Mi Waing”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Nga Thaw Kaw, *pu* 1268)

“*Thetkayit*, Mortgage of human labour by U Pye and wife Me Min”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: U Pye, *pu* 1268)

“*Thetkayit*, Loan taken out by Mi Son, son Nga Hpo Myit and wife Mi Shwe Mi”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Mi Son, *pu* 1268)

“*Thetkayit*, Loan taken out by Maung Hpo Myit and wife Mi Shwe Mi”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Maung Hpo Myit, *pu* 1268)

“*Thetkayit*, Mortgage of human labour by Nga Yauk and wife Mi Chein”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Nga Yauk, *pu* 1268)

“*Thetkayit*, Mortgage of human labour by Nga Chit Hpwe and wife Mi Le”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Nga Chit Hpwe, *pu* 1268)

“*Thetkayit*, Loan taken out by Ma Hko”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Ma Hko, *pu* 1268)

“*Thetkayit*, Mortgage of human labour by Nga Te, senior, wife Mi Ngwe, daughter Mi Nu, and son-in-law Nga Hkaw”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Mi Ngwe, *pu* 1268)

“*Thetkayit*, Mortgage of human labour by Nga Hpo Htu, junior, wife Mi The The, and son Nga Tun Aung”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Nga Hpo Htu, *pu* 1268)

“*Thetkayit*, Mortgage of human labour by Mi Pa Choat and daughter Mi Mogaung”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Mi Pa Choat and Mi Mogaung, *pu* 1268)

“*Thetkayit*, Mortgage of human labour by Nga Hpo Tu, senior, wife Mi The The and son Nga Tun Aung”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Mi The The, *pu* 1268)

“*Thetkayit*, Loan taken out by Me Kala and daughter Ma Pyawge”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Me Kala, *pu* 1268)

green and black cotton threads with a red band of cloth stitched on to the upper hem. As they had to work as agriculturists, they usually wore their *htameins* short.⁷³ Both Myanmar men and women had their hair well cared for. They usually had long hair, and applied sesamum oil at least once a day as hair lotion so that their hair would be glossy black. Women wore their hair in chignons at the nape of the neck, and sometimes wore red turbans wound around their heads with the ends placed at back.⁷⁴ Myanmar women usually had their ears pierced in ear-boring ceremonies. The hole in a pierced ear lobe at first would be too narrow; however, it would be made wider by inserting a gold ear plug about one inch long through it and twirling it.⁷⁵ How the common citizens used rolled palm leaves as ear studs is mentioned in the *hangyin* (classic choral song) sang by farmers when they were transplanting paddy seedlings.⁷⁶ It is learnt from the Mudu Lethkana Pyui, Mwenan Yakan and U Ponnya's songs dedicated to women that Myanmar women chewed betel.⁷⁷ Myanmar women used *thanahka* and other aromatic herbs for cosmetic purposes.⁷⁸ As to Myanmar women's costumes, a western scholar writes:

The Burman women pay great attention to the adornment of their persons. Their hairs is tied in a bunch at the back of the back of the head; and as a quantity of it is considered a great beauty, false tails, sometimes two or three in number, are ingeniously mixed with the real hair, so as to form a large knot, which is further adorned with flowers. In the ears, instead of rings, they were rolls of gold about half an inch in diameter; and around the

⁷³Hla Aung, "Konbaung Hkit Lungyin Kabya mya hma Myanma Kyelet Htontam Dale mya" (Myanmar customs reflected in the Konbaung-period sentimental poems), Ph.D. dissertation, Mandalay University, 2003, p. 59 (Henceforth: Hla Aung, 2003)

⁷⁴Maung Maung Theik, 1969, 63

⁷⁵Sangermano, 1962, 127-28

⁷⁶Kaung Myint, "Natha Mingalar" (Ear-piercing ceremony), *Ngwetayi Magazine*, No. 157, July 1973, pp. 33-35 (Henceforth: Kaung Myint, 1973)

⁷⁷Saw Mon Hnyin, *Myanmar Amyothami Sinyin Htonhpwe Hmu* (Myanmar women's costumes), Rangoon, Sarpebeikman, 1985, p. 75 (Henceforth: Saw Mon Hnyin, 1985)

⁷⁸Saw Mon Hnyin, 1985, 55

neck gold chains, differing in make and value according to the wealth of the owner.⁷⁹

How Myanmar women used *thanahka*, how their lips were red because of chewing betek, and how they smoke are recorded as follows:

In order to improve their appearance, they rub the face, hands, and bosom with powder of sandal wood, and tinge the tips of their nails with red; they, however, considerably diminish their pretensions to beauty by constantly chewing the betl nut and paun leaf, which blacken the teeth and give the inside of the lips and the tongue a disgusting look; added to which, the cheroot, made of chopped tobacco, wrapped up in a teak leaf, is never out of their mouths.⁸⁰

Education in the Konbaung period was carried on by Buddhist monks, and girls could not study in the monasteries like boys. This, however, was not because girls were deprived of the right to education, nor because of the problems in teaching girls. It was only because of Myanmar culture and religion. In large towns and villages, however, there were private schools offering education to girls.⁸¹ Lay schools were the only centres of learning for girls. Lay schools, under the charge of men or women, were originally meant for girls' education.⁸² It is noteworthy that although monasteries became centres of learning for boys, nunneries did not become those for girls. With regard to Konbaung period education, it seems that the number of literate women was lower than that of literate men. The Myanmar

⁷⁹John Murray, *Two Years in Ava, From May 1824 to May 1826*, London, William Clowes, 1827, p. 211 (Henceforth: Murray, 1827)

⁸⁰Murray, 1827, 212

⁸¹U Kaung, "Education In Burma Before And After The British Conquest", *Journal of Burma Research Society*, XLVI, ii, December 1963, pp. 9-128 (Henceforth: U Kaung, 1963)

⁸²Khin Zaw Win, "Myanmar Nainggan Pyinnyaye Thamaing 1870-1920" (History of education in Myanmar, 1870-1920), M.A. thesis, Mandalay University, 1968, pp. 167-68 (Henceforth: Khin Zaw Win, 1968)

saying *yaukkyale mya sa ma tat ka akan hnint tu thi, meinkale mya yethan ma tat ka akyo hnint tu thi* suggests that almost all the women knew the art of weaving. How the women of the Konbaung period engaged, apart from weaving and agriculture, in commerce can be learnt from the mention of “Ma Dwe Hla, who operated merchant ship,⁸³ “Mi Myaing, a merchant”,⁸⁴ etc. The saying *maung to htan me ta ywet* highlighted how a Myanmar woman shares the responsibilities equally with her husband. In the Konbaung period Myanmar society, there were some women who earned their livelihood lowly as prostitutes (*pyi kankywe or pyi daza*). Prostitutes were categorized into those who work as prostitutes openly and lived in the area officially allotted to prostitutes and those who worked secretly in towns and villages.⁸⁵ On 28 January 1795, the king issued an order that a woman could become a prostitute only with the permission of the crown, to make a list of prostitutes, to suggest, if the lists were destroyed or if the number of prostitutes dwindled, who should become prostitutes, and if a female slave was sold by her owner as a prostitute, to release her if the seller paid back the amount he had taken for her.⁸⁶ Thus, prostitution was legal in the Konbaung period. A royal order was issued on 27 July 1783 (the 14th day of the waning moon, Second Wazo, 1145 ME) as follows: “Move all prostitutes to a place on the west of Zagyin Wa. Move the houses from the place now given to prostitutes to any suitable site within the city.”⁸⁷ When the royal seat was moved to Mandalay in King Mindon’s reign,

⁸³Ludu U Hla, *Thadinza Mya Thi Thamaing Ko Pyawnekyathi* (Newspapers reveal history), Mandalay, Kyibwaye Press, 1963, p. 330 (Henceforth: Ludu U Hla, 1963)

⁸⁴“1187 Kachonlaka Sa Ywe Thonthi Ayatyat Ngwesayin (General expenses: from Kason (1825 April, 1187 onwards)”, *Purabaik* MS, Meiktila University Library Collection, *pu* 1582 (Henceforth: Ayatyat Ngwesayin, *pu* 1582)

⁸⁵U Tin, *Myanmar Min Oatchoatpon Satam Hnint Bodawhpaya I Yazathat Hkawthaw Ameindawtamgyi* (Administrative system under the Myanmar kings and Bodawhpaya’s royal order known as Yazathat), vol. IV, Rangoon, Department of Cultural Institute, 1976, p.30 (Henceforth: U Tin, 1976)

⁸⁶Than Tun, 1986b, 469

⁸⁷Than Tun, 1986a, 269

prostitutes were placed in a separate quarter referred to as Pyikyí Pyawbwe.⁸⁸ Married women who committed adultery were also turned into prostitutes. According to a royal order issued on 10 July 1806 (the 11th day of the waning moon, Wazo, 1168 ME), Nga Shwe Po who had an adulterous relationship with a married woman named Mi Kya was to be sent to a forest after marking his face with tattoos, and Mi Kya was to be tattooed on the face and to be made to live in the area fixed for prostitutes near the western gate of the city.⁸⁹ The *dhammathats* prescribed that a person who was guilty of “wife-stealing” was to be made to pay 30 *kyats* to her husband as compensation; and if he was convicted four times, he was to be made to pay the cost for using the service of a prostitute.⁹⁰

In the Konbaung period, there were domestic slaves who formed a distinct social class. However, their masters could not kill them as in Europe. If a person had no personal possession to mortgage, he/she normally mortgaged or sold human labour; women also were sold into slavery. Among the common citizens, daughters were supernumeraries. The reason why daughters were mortgaged probably was due to a law that prohibited the mortgage of sons. It is ordered in an edict issued on 7 July 1673 (the fifth day of the waxing moon of Wagaung, 1035 ME) as follows:

Selling sons to settle debts is not to be allowed. For violating this rule, a man is to be punished by tying his hair in four knots and a woman is to be punished by tying her hair in three knots in accordance with custom. They are to be taken around the city with the offices publicizing their offences by striking a gong.

⁸⁸Maung Maung Tin, “Mandalay Yatkwet Thamaing” (History of Mandalay Living Quarters), *Journal of Historical Research No. 2*, Rangoon, Burma Historical Research, 1978, pp. 81-121 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Tin, 1978)

⁸⁹Than Tun, 1986b, 921

⁹⁰Mahayazathat, *pu* 340

They are not to be put in Indian or Chinese stokes, but the normal Myanmar stocks are to be used.⁹¹

Although the kings thus prohibited the sale of sons into slavery, the number of human mortgage *thetkayits* of males exceeds that of females among the *thetkayits* that have been found. Of the 119 agreements of the mortgage of human labour, fifty-four record the mortgage of males, forty-one that of females, and twenty-four that of entire families. This probably was because creditors preferred men, who were stronger and who could work harder than woman. In mortgaging women as domestic slaves, the mortgagors mentioned the reason for taking loans as “to settle a debt,”⁹² “strapped for cash,”⁹³ “to pay what they owed in buying sarongs and blanks for clothing and paddy for food,”⁹⁴ “for the legal expenses in a robbery,”⁹⁵

⁹¹Than Tun, *The Royal Orders Of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885 Part Two, A.D. 1649-1750*, Kyoto, The Center For Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1985, p. 164 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1985a)

⁹²“*Thetkayit* dated the 4th day of the waxing moon, Tabaung, 1222 ME (12 February 1860), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Dwe and daughter Mi Le”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Mi Dwe and Mi Le, *pu* 1268)

Mi Cho, *pu* 1268

“*Thetkayit* dated the 4th day of the waxing moon, Second Wazo, 1236 ME (17 July 1774) Mortgage of humar labour”, *Purabaik* MS, Daw Ohn Kyi’s Collection, *pu* Salin Thagaung 175 (Henceforth: Mortgage of humar labour, *pu* 175)

⁹³Mi Pachoat and Mi Mogaung, *pu* 1268

“*Thetkayit* dated the 10th day of the waning moon, Nadaw, 1234 ME (25 December 1872), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Hnaung Htew”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 12188 (Henceforth: Mi Hnaung Htwe, *pu* 12188)

“*Thetkayit* dated the 11th day of the waxing moon, Tabaung, 1228 ME (15 March 1866), hereafter Mortgage of human labour by Mi Pein”, *Purabaik* MS, Daw Ohn Kyi’s Collection, *pu* Salin Thagaung 175 (Henceforth: Mi Pein, *pu* Salin 175)

⁹⁴“*Thetkayit* dated the 2nd day of the waning moon, Thadingyit, 1209 ME (2 September 1847), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Tun Aung”, *Purabaik* MS, Daw Ohn Kyi’s Collection, *pu* Salin Thagaung 10/B (Henceforth: Mi Tun Aung, *pu* 10/B)

⁹⁵“*Thetkayit* dated the 7th day of the waxing moon, Tawthalin, 1227 ME (27 August 1865), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Nge”, *Purabaik* MS, Daw Ohn Kyi’s Collection, *pu* Salin Thagaung 10/B (Henceforth: Mi Nge, *pu* 10/B)

“in need of money to buy paddy,”⁹⁶ “to use in a litigation one was involved,”⁹⁷ “to pay the funeral expenses,”⁹⁸ and “to pay for the cost of a musket.”⁹⁹ The conditions included in the *thetkayit* of mortgaging a woman were: “lash or cane her to discipline her and order her to do,”¹⁰⁰ “sent her to a place beyond the rivers and streams overnight to work even at the risk of her life,”¹⁰¹ “make her climb short and tall trees,”¹⁰² “discipline her and teach her if she does not know or is not well-discipline,”¹⁰³ “let her wash diapers and clothes,” and “hit and punish her if she does not come when you call or if she does not do what you ask.”¹⁰⁴ The slaves, in return, were not to be held responsible for breaking or losing trays, bowls, etc.¹⁰⁵ In some *thetkayits*, however, the agreement was made that the

⁹⁶ “*Thetkayit* dated the 6th day of the waxing moon, Tagu, 1221 ME (8 April 1859), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Ba Kwe”, *Purabaik* MS, Daw Ohn Kyi’s Collection, *pu* Salin Thagaung 325 (Henceforth: Mi Ba Kwe, *pu* 325)

⁹⁷ “*Thetkayit* dated the 14th day of the waxing moon, Nayon, 1221 ME (4 June 1819), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Hmat Htaw”, *Lezin Purabaik* MS, Dr. Toe Hla’s manuscript, Department of History, Mandalay University Collection (Henceforth: Mi Hmat Htaw, *Lezin pu*)

⁹⁸ “*Thetkayit* dated the 12th day of the waning moon, Tabodwe, 1216 ME (13 February 1855), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Kwet Htaw and daughter Mi Yet”, *Lezin Purabaik* MS, Dr. Toe Hla’s manuscript, Department of History, Mandalay University Collection (Henceforth: Mi Kwet Htaw, *Lezin pu*)

⁹⁹ “Mortgage dated the 13th day of the waxing moon, Tawthalin, 1206 ME (25 August 1844), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Oza”, *Purabaik* MS, U Tun Yi’s Collection (Henceforth: Mi Oza, *pu*)

¹⁰⁰ Mi Hnaung, *pu* 12188

¹⁰¹ “*Thetkayit* dated the 9th day of the waning moon, Tabaung, 1168 ME (1 March 1807), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Hmwe Oo and daughter Mi Hke”, *Lezin Purabaik* MS, Dr. Toe Hla’s manuscript, Department of History, Mandalay University Collection (Henceforth: Mi Hmwe Oo, *Lezin pu*)

¹⁰² Mi Hmat Htaw, *Lezin pu*

¹⁰³ “*Thetkayit* dated the 6th day of the waning moon, Tabodwe, 1212 ME (21 February 1851), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Hla Min”, *Wambye Purabaik* MS, Dr. Toe Hla’s manuscript, Department of History, Mandalay University Collection (Henceforth: Mi Hla Min, *Wambye pu*)

¹⁰⁴ “*Thetkayit* dated the 14th day of the waning moon, Tagu, 1171 ME (2 April 1810), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Mya”, *Purabaik* MS, U Tun Yi’s Collection (Henceforth: Mi Mya, *pu*)

“*Thetkayit* dated the 4th day of the waning moon, Thadingyit, 1175 ME (13 October 1813), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Me Hla”, *Purabaik* MS, U Tun Yi’s Collection (Henceforth: Mi Me Hla, *pu*)

¹⁰⁵ Mi Hmwe O, *Lezin pu*

Mi Me Hla, *pu*

mortgaged person would unhusk 15 baskets of paddy per month.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, there were some *thetkayits* in which the mortgagee could treat a mortgaged female not only as a slave or but also as a concubine.¹⁰⁷ In such agreements, it is normally stated to the following effect:

If the mortgaged person refuses to let the mortgagee to treat her as a concubine, to tread on or step over her, and absconds, if she is taken by the king or if her ex-husband or ex-son makes trouble, the amount of loan as well as all the expenses would be repay in one lump sum. With such a pledge made, the mortgagee purchases, orders her to work for him, treads on or goes over her, and takes her as a concubine.¹⁰⁸

Thus, some women not only became domestic slaves, but even slaves to be treated as sex objects. Sometimes, a daughter was mortgaged to provide sexual

¹⁰⁶ “*Thetkayit* dated the 14th day of the waning moon, Pyatho, 1229 ME (22 January 1868), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Pyaw”, *Purabaik* MS, U Tun Yi’s Collection (Henceforth: Mi Pyaw, *pu*)

¹⁰⁷ Mi Dwe and Mi Le, *pu* 1268

“*Thetkayit* dated the 14th day of the waxing moon, Nayon, 1223 ME (22 May 1861), Mortgage of human labour by Nga Te, wife Mi Ngwe and daughter Mi Suka”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Mi Suka, *pu* 1268)

Mi Pachoat and Mi Mogaung, *pu* 1268

“*Thetkayit* dated the 10th day of the waning moon, Nayon, 1225 ME (10 June 1863), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Nyo, daughter Mi Ein, sisters Mi Nyein and Mi Oza”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Mi Nyo, *pu* 1268)

Mi Cho, *pu* 1268

“*Thetkayit* dated the 15th day of the waxing moon, Nayon, 1226 ME (19 May 1864), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Shwe Mi”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Mi Shwe Mi, *pu* 1268)

“*Thetkayit* dated the 7th day of the waning moon, Thadingyit, 1225 ME (3 October 1863), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Thit and Mi Hnit”, Wambye *Purabaik* MS, Dr. Toe Hla’s manuscript, Department of History, Mandalay University Collection (Henceforth: Mi Thit and Mi Hnit, Wambye *pu*)

Mi Hla Min, Wambye *pu*

“*Thetkayit* dated the 2th day of the waxing moon, Kason, 1213 ME (1 May 1851), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Yit”, Wambye *Purabaik* MS, Dr. Toe Hla’s manuscript, Department of History, Mandalay University Collection (Henceforth: Mi Yit, Wambye *pu*)

¹⁰⁸ Mi Dwe, Mi Le, *pu* 1268

gratification to the owner while the mother herself became a domestic servant,¹⁰⁹ or *vice versa*.¹¹⁰ It is learnt that those who exploited female slaves as sex objects were officials. In six out of the nine *thetkayits* of the mortgage of women slaves as concubines that have been found so far, Maha Minhtin Yaza, the Shwenanyo Lamaing Wun and Royal Herald, the uncle of Princess Pinhteik Hkaungtin, King Mindon's daughter, was the mortgagee.¹¹¹ Min Sithu Shwetaung Anawrahta, the clerk of the treasurer, was the creditor in two of them,¹¹² and in the remaining one, Minkyaw Min Htin, the clerk was the mortgagee.¹¹³ The localities mentioned in these *thetkayits* of the mortgage of female slaves who could be required by the owners to become their sexual partners were:

Thayemye Talainggon ward, western part of the Golden City of Yadana (Mandalay),¹¹⁴

Gondan ward, western part of the city,¹¹⁵

the compound of Minye Yazakyaw, the kyi-oat (granary manager), western part of the Golden City,¹¹⁶

Yekan ward, Taung Myint Myindaing village, western part of Amarapura,¹¹⁷

Shwegezu village in the western suburb of Amarapura,¹¹⁸

¹⁰⁹Mi Nyo, *pu* 1268

¹¹⁰Mi Shwe Mi, *pu* 1268

¹¹¹Mi Dwe, Mi Le, *pu* 1268

Mi Suka, *pu* 1268

Mi Pachoat, Mi Mogaung, *pu* 1268

Mi Nyo, *pu* 1268

Mi Cho, *pu* 1268

Mi Shwe Mi, *pu* 1268

¹¹²Mi Hla Min, Wambye *pu*

Mi Yit, Wambye *pu*

¹¹³Mi Thit, Mi Hnit, Wambye *pu*

¹¹⁴Mi Dwe, Mi Le, *pu* 1268

¹¹⁵Mi Suka, *pu* 1268

¹¹⁶Mi Pachoat, Mi Mogaung, *pu* 1268

¹¹⁷Mi Cho, *pu* 1268

¹¹⁸Mi Shwe Mi, *pu* 1268

Palwedan ward, Golden City,¹¹⁹
 Nyaungbinze ward, Golden City,¹²⁰ and
 Htanaungbinhla village, Minde.¹²¹

The majority of these documents were from the Royal City and environs. It is mentioned in one of these *thetkayit* that the mortgage person escaped.¹²² In some of these *thetkayits*, the condition that the mortgage could tread on or step over the mortgaged slave (*kyaw paing ze, nin paing ze*) is included.¹²³ In one such *thetkayit* the agreement was made as follows:

Buy Mi Ru for 100 silver coins by entering into a *thetkayit* with the *kyaw paing ze nin paing ze* (ie the right to tread on and step over) and order her to work for you. I will redeem Mi Ru only after five months.¹²⁴

In two of the three *thetkayits* with *kyaw paing ze nin paing ze* condition that have been discovered, Minhla Minhtin Kyaw, the clerk of treasurer, was the

¹¹⁹Mi Thit, Mi Hnit, Wambye *pu*

¹²⁰Mi Hla Min, Wambye *pu*

¹²¹Mi Yit, Wambye *pu*

¹²²“*Thetkayit* dated the 5th day of the waxing moon, Nayon, 1225 ME (21 May 1863), Mortgage of human labour by Nga Te and wife Mi Ngwe and others”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Mi Ngwe and others, *pu* 1268)

¹²³“*Thetkayit* dated the 4th day of the waning moon, Pyatho, 1242 ME (18 January 1881), Mortgage of human labour by Nga Maung Gyi”, Taunggwin *Purabaik* MS, Dr. Toe Hla’s manuscript, Department of History, Mandalay University Collection (Henceforth: Nga Maung, Taunggwin *pu*)

“*Thetkayit* dated the 2nd day of the waning moon, Tagu, 1227 ME (12 April 1865), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Tu”, *Purabaik* MS, University’s Central Library Collection, *pu* 11930 (Henceforth: Mi Tu, *pu* 11930)

“*Thetkayit* dated the 2nd day of the waxing moon, Tawthlin, 1225 ME (14 August 1863), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Rein”, *Purabaik* MS, University’s Central Library Collection, *pu* 11930 (Henceforth: Mi Rein, *pu* 11930)

¹²⁴Nga Maung, Taunggwin *pu*

mortgagee.¹²⁵ The mortgagees in such *thetkayits*¹²⁶ also are officials. Therefore, it is found that only the officials lent money by taking female slaves as pledges with the right to make time with them and to tread on them. Some female slaves mortgaged were too young. How the mother had to do the work of her daughter who was mortgaged because the latter was too young is recorded in a *thetkayit*: “As Mi Pein is too young, Shin Hkaing, her mother, must do all the work Mi Pein is asked to do.”¹²⁷ In mortgaging female domestic slaves, some women escaped. Some were on the run for almost ten years.¹²⁸ The people borrowed money in the Konbaung period because they fell on hard times, by entering into an agreement that the mortgaged person would act as a wet nurse. For instance, Maung Htwe, a broker, and his wife Mi The Oo of Kyedaing ward, being cash-strapped, borrowed money from the clerk of the treasurer and sent their daughter Shin Hnit to the creditor to act as a wet nurse.¹²⁹ Thus, some women became the victims of poverty in the Konbaung period.

In the Myanmar society, a man sometimes treated his wife like a chattel. A man

¹²⁵Mi Tu, *pu* 11930

Mi Rein, *pu* 11930

¹²⁶Mi Dwe, Mi Le, *pu* 1268

Mi Suka, *pu* 1268

Mi Pachoat, Mi Mogaung, *pu* 1268

Mi Cho, *pu* 1268

Mi Shwe Mi, *pu* 1268

¹²⁷Mi Pein, Salin Thagaung, *pu* 175

¹²⁸“*Thetkayit* dated the 7th day of the waning moon, Tabodwe, 1235 ME (8 February 1873), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Ywe and daughter Mi Sa”, *Purabaik* MS, Universities’ Central Library Collection, *pu* 11930 (Henceforth: Mi Ywe, *pu* 11930)

¹²⁹“*Thetkayit* dated the 13th day of the waxing moon, Wagaung, 1210 ME (12 August 1848), Loan taken out by Mi Htwe and Mi The Oo”, *Purabaik* MS, Universities’ Central Library Collection, *pu* 11930 (Henceforth: Mi The Oo, *pu* 11930)

sometimes sold or mortgaged his wife.¹³⁰ The reason for doing so is mentioned in the agreements as “to pay the cost of paddy and maize borrowed because there was no food,”¹³¹ “because one was unable to pay the cost of paddy,”¹³² “to settle a debt,”¹³³ “because one was strapped for cash,”¹³⁴ or “to repay a loan taken to buy food.”¹³⁵ Therefore, it seems that a man mortgaged his wife because he was poverty-stricken, because he could not provide her with food, or because he could get a lot of money by doing so. There is an instance in which the wife sought divorce when her husband mortgaged her because he lost so much gambling.¹³⁶ In another legal case that arose in 16 May 1809, Mi Hla, Thiri Kyawthu, committed adultery with Nga Thu. Thiri Kyawthu took the matter to court, and was awarded compensatory damages; then he sold Mi Hla on the reason that she was an adulteress. Then, Mi Hla took the matter to court, and the judge decided that Mi Hla was not to be sold, and that she was to pay her value to Thiri Kyawthu.¹³⁷ Therefore, it is learnt that although there were instances in which men sold their wives, the wives had rights to seek divorce or refuse to be sold.

¹³⁰Nga Maung Gyi, Taunggwain *pu*

“Agreement dated the 1st day of the waxing moon, Pyatho, 1215 ME (31 December 1853), Mortgage of Mi Ngwe as a domestic slave”, Taunggwain *Purabaik*, Dr. Toe Hla’s manuscript, Department of History, Mandalay University Collection (Henceforth: Mi Ngwe, Taunggwain *pu*)

“*Thetkayit* dated the 11th day of the waning moon, Tagu, 123 ME (16 April 1841), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Hmo Oo”, *Purabaik* MS, U Tun Yi’s Collection (Henceforth: Mi Hmo Oo, *pu*)

“*Thetkayit* dated the 2nd day of the waxing moon, Tabodwe, 1193 ME (3 February 1832), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Hnin”, *Purabaik* MS, U Tun Yi’s Collection (Henceforth: Mi Hnin, *pu*)

“*Thetkayit* dated the 12th day of the waning moon, Kason, 1195 ME (15 May 1833), Mortgage of human labour by Mi Oo”, *Purabaik* MS, U Tun Yi’s Collection (Henceforth: Mi Oo, *pu*)

¹³¹Mi Hmo Oo, *pu*

¹³²Mi Hnin, *pu*

¹³³Mi Oo, *pu*

¹³⁴Nga Maung Gyi, Taunggwain, *pu*

¹³⁵Mi Ngwe, Taunggwain *pu*

¹³⁶Dr Toe Hla, *Konbaung Hkit Myanma Luhmu Ahpweasi Hnint Tayahmugin Mya* (Myanmar society of the Konbaung period and legal cases), Yangon, Universities Historical Research Department, 2004, pp. 2-3 (Henceforth: Toe Hla, 2004)

¹³⁷Yandameit Kyaw Htin, 1965, 9

In sum, although Southeast Asian countries including Myanmar were influenced by Indian culture, the Myanmar did not absorb all the Indian customs. In the Myanmar society, the birth of a daughter was not unwelcome as in the Hindu society. Also, the dowry system or the practice of *sati* never existed in Myanmar. In accordance with the saying *baing gaung kyauk hpi*, women were classed into eight categories depending on who their guardians were so that they would obey their parents or guardians and behave with proper decorum. They again were grouped into ten age groups. They needed their parents' or guardian's consent to get married. Parents, as they were responsible for the marriage of their daughters, normally arranged their marriage. Although the marriageable age according to the *dhamathats* was fifteen or sixteen, there were marriages of girls under fifteen. However, the number of child marriages was very low. There were too many rules about what a pregnant woman should or should not do, and some of these rules probably were bad for the health of both mother and child. This probably was the reason why the infant mortality rate was high. The Konbaung period women's lack of health education also could have been a reason. The saying *yaung nauk zadon pa* indicates that a woman normally accompany her husband to his parents' house after marriage. However, the husband moved to the wife's house occasionally due to the agreement they had made before their marriage. There were legal cases involving such agreements. Polygamy was practiced in the Konbaung period. Although no woman would want her husband having other sexual partners, they had to live with the situation. There were no instances in which a woman sued someone for husband stealing. However, if a woman desired to get a divorce, she could seek it according to customs. The women had the same rights their husbands enjoyed as to divorce and inheritance. Although there were laws to protect the interests of women, there was social discrimination in the feudal period. Some women in the Myanmar society donated monasteries, pagodas, etc. to gain the people's respect as donors of monasteries, pagodas, etc. With regard to education, however, literacy rate was lower among women than

among men. The Myanmar saying *yaukkyale mya sa ma tat ka akan hnint tu thi, meinkale mya yetkan mat tat ka akyo hnint tu thi* suggests that women were encouraged to learn domestic chores. It is noteworthy that prostitution was legal in the Konbaung period Myanmar society. Adulteresses were usually placed in the quarter where the prostitutes lived after tattooing words on their foreheads. The most underprivileged women who formed the lowest social strata were domestic slaves. In the Konbaung period, people mortgaged their daughters and wives when they were in straightened circumstances. Some mortgaged women could be trodden on by the mortgagees. With the exception of the class of domestic slaves, the social conditions of the Konbaung period women were not too bad. However, it can be concluded that many laws and customs gave more privileges to men than to women.

CHAPTER THREE

PALACE LADIES

Among the Konbaung period women, the queen was at the apex. The word *A*mihpaya (“queen”) is defined in the Mahabodhi inscription belonging to AD 1879 (1241 ME) as follows: *Thiripawara Maharazeinda Yadanadewi dazeit naman hkan taw mu thaw pyigy mi* “The mother of the kingdom who assumed the title *Thiripawara Maharazeinda Yadanadewi*”.¹ Therefore, queen means the mother of the kingdom or of the citizens. Different grades of queens were categorized as follows in the Konbaung period:

1. Queen of the Southern Palace who was the Chief Queen
2. Queen of the Northern Palace
3. Queen of the Central Palace
4. Queen of the Western Palace
5. Queen of the Taungzaungdaw
6. Queen of the Myauksaungdaw
7. Queen of the Taung Shweyezaung
8. Queen of the Northern Shweyezaung
9. Minor queens, and
10. Concubines (*koloattaw and maungma*).

¹*Mahabodhi inscription at the royal of Yadanabon*, dated the 13th day of the waxing moon, Tawthalin, 1241 ME, two faces, at the eastern entrance to the Bodigon pagada, obverse, line 49 (Henceforth: *Mahabodhi inscription*).

The Queen of the Southern Palace, who also was the Chief Queen, was the highest in rank. A queen of the Western Palace first appeared in King Singu's reign (1776-1782), and the number of principal queens (*mihpayaghi*) became four. King Singu's Queen of the Western Palace was Thirisandayadanadewi.² Each of the four principal queens-the queens of the Southern Palace, Northern Palace, Central Palace and Western Palace-was referred to as a *nanya mihpaya*, a queen who had a palace of her own. The Taungzaungdaw and Myaukzaungdaw queens were additions made in the reign of King Thayarwady (1837-1846). King Thayarwady's Taungzaungdaw Queen was Thirithusanda Mallowadi, who held Padetha Taik in the Thayarwady district in fief, and his Myauksaungdaw Queen was Thirithunanda Mallamahe, who held Hinthada as an appanage.³ The queens of the Taung and Myauk Shweyezaungs came into being only in King Badon's Reign (1782-1819).⁴ King Badon's Taung Shweyezaung Queen was Thirimahamingalardewi who held Danubyu and Sale in fief, and Myauk Shweyezaung Queen was Thiri Maha Thudhammadewi who held Yindaik village, Hlaingtet, Amyit and Kama towns in fief.⁵ Each of the Tungzaungdaw, Myaunksaungdaw, Taung Shweyezaung and Myauk Shweyezaung Queens was referred to as an *ahsaungya mihpaya*, "a queen who had an apartment of her own."⁶ How a Myanmar king had four principal queens and four lesser queens in

²Sayadawgyi U Yagyaw, *Myanmar Mingala Mingandaw* (Myanmar royal regalia), ed. by Nan Nyunt Swe, Rangoon, Ponnya Press, 1968, p. 220 (Henceforth: Yagyaw, 1968)

³Yagyaw, 1968, 254-55

⁴Daw Yi Yi, "Life at the Burmese Court Under the Konbaung King," *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, XLIV, i, June 1961, pp. 85-129 (Henceforth: Yi Yi, 1961)

⁵Yagyaw, 1968, 227-28

⁶U Tin, *Myanmar Min Oatchoatpon Sadan Hnint Bodawhpaya I Yazathat Hkawthaw Ameindawtamgyi* (Administration under the Myanmar kings and King Bodawhpaya's edict called yazathat), vol. IV, Rangoon, Department of Cultural Institute, Ministry of Culture, 1976, p. 91 (Henceforth: U Tin, 1976)

accordance with Myanmar cosmology is discussed by Roert Heine Geldern as follows:

There, the king was supposed to have four principal queens and four queens of secondary rank whose title, “Northern Queen of the Palace,” “Queen of the West,” “Queen of the Southern Apartment,” “etc. show that they originally corresponded to the four cardinal points and the four intermediary directions.⁷

However, the Myanmar kings from the Bagan period until King Singu’s reign in the early Konbaung period normally had only one to three principal queens. It was only in the reign of King Singu that the number of principal queens increased to four, and it was only in King Thayarwady’s reign that the king had four principal queens and four junior queens. Therefore, having four principal and four junior queens in conformity with Myanmar cosmic belief was not practiced by all Myanmar kings. If the Myanmar kings had eight queens according to Myanmar cosmology, it seems that this custom was practiced only by King Thayarwady and his successors.

Queens normally received titles in the Konbaung period. There were two sets of titles conferred on queens. The first set included:

1. Dewi
2. Mahe
3. Wati
4. Thiri
5. Thu

⁷Robert Heine-Geldern, “Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia,” *Far Eastern Quarterly*, vol. II, November 1942, pp. 1-30 (Henceforth: Robert Heine-Geldern, 1942)

6. Min⁸

The second set consisted of

1. Dewi
2. Wati
3. Ruza
4. Paba
5. Ketha
6. Sanda
7. Mala, and
8. Mutta.⁹

The titles of the chief queens of the Konbaung period were as follows:

Table (VIII). Titles of the Konbaung period Chief Queens

NO	King	Title of Chief Queen
1	Alaungmintaya	Mahamingalar Yadanadipati Thiriyaza Sandadewi
2	Dipeyin	Mahamingalar Yadanadewi
3	Myedu	Thiri Atula Maharadana Padumadewi
4	Singu	Maharatana Sandadewi
5	Badon	Thiripawara Maharazeinda Mingalar Yadanadewi
6	Bagyidaw	Thiripawara Tilawka Maharazeinda Yadanadewi
7	Thayarwady	Thiripawara Tilawka Maharadana Padumadewi
8	Bagan	Thiri Tilawka Mahayadanadewi

To be continued

⁸U Maung Maung Tin, *Shwenanthon Wohara Abhidan* (A dictionary of Palace usages), Yangon, Yabye Press, 2005, p. 113 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Tin, 2005)

⁹Maung Maung Tin, 2005, 233

9	Mindon	Thiripawara Atula Tilawka Maharazeindadipati Yedanadewi
10	Thibaw	Thiripawara Tilawka Maharazeindadipati Paduma Yadanadewi

Source: *Konbaungzet*, 1989, 314, 340, 502, 525; *Konbaungzet*, 2004a, 367, 517; *Konbaungzet*, 2004b, 54, 306

Of the titles of the Konbaung period queens, those of King Mindon and Thibaw's queens were the longest. The titles awarded to other queens in the Konbaung period were as follows:

Table (IX) Titles awarded to queens in the Konbaung period

No	King	Dewi	Mahe	Wati	Thiri	Thu	Min	The Queens who did not receive titles
1	Alaungmintaya	2	4					
2	Dipeyin	7						
3	Myedu	2	3	3	3			
4	Singu	3	1					
5	Badon	14	10	3	13	5	5	4
6	Bagyidaw	3	4	14	26			
7	Thayarwady	4	5	1				
8	Bagan	3	8	2				
9	Mindon	14	8	2				
10	Thibaw	1						

Source: Khin Mar Tin, "A Study of Titles And Ranks During the Reign of Alaungmintaya", M.A. thesis, Mandalay University, 1998, pp. 30-31; Thant Zaw Htwe, "A Study of Titles and Ranks During the Reign of Di-Pe-Yin and Myei-Du-Min (1760-1775)", M.A. thesis, Mandalay University, 2000, pp. 24-25, 43-44; Than Than Aye, "A Study of Titles and Ranks During the Reign of King Badon (1782-1819)", M.A. thesis, Mandalay University, 2000, pp 40-46; Myo Myo Tun, "A Study of Titles and Ranks During the Reign of King Sagaing Min (1819-1837)", M.A. thesis, Mandalay University, 2000, pp. 40-46; Thi Thi Swe, "Myanmar Titles and Ranks with Special Reference to King Mindon's Reign (1852-1878)", M.A. thesis, Mandalay University, 2000, pp. 15-16; *Konbaungzet*, 1989, 314-15, 340-41, 502-03, 525; *Konbaungzet*, 2004a, 157-60, 367; *Konbaungzet*, 2004b, 54-55, 306-09

Thus, only the titles with *Dewi* and *Mahe* were conferred on queens in the reign of King Alaungmintaya (1752-1760). The titles with *Wati* and *Thiri* were introduced only in King Myedu's reign (1763-1776), and those with *Thu* and *Min* were added in King Badon's reign (1782-1819). Among the titles awarded to queens, those with *Dewi* were the highest. In general, the *Dewi* titles were conferred only on chief queens; in the reigns of King Badon and Mindon, however, these titles were also conferred on the queens who were not *nanya* queens. It is learnt that there were four queens in King Badon's reign who did not receive titles. There were also instances in which the titles that had been conferred on queens were revoked. For instance, on 26 June 1795 (the 11th day of the waxing moon, Wazo, 1157 ME), King Badon issued an order revoking the titles Rurawati and Nandathiri conferred on Teinkaw and Mi Ywe respectively.¹⁰ Like queens, princesses also received titles.

From the available evidence, the titles conferred on the princesses were as follows:

Table (X) Titles conferred on the princesses in the Konbaung period

No	King	De wi	Mahe	Wati	Min	Patha	Ke tha	San da	Ruza	Malla	Motta
1	Alaungmintaya	4			2						
2	Myedu				9						
3	Badon	14		9		1	1	1	2	1	1
4	Bagyidaw	1									
5	Thayarwady	5		2							
6	Mindon	13	1	16							

Source: *Konbaungzet*, 1989, 315-525; *Konbaungzet*, 2004a, 157-367; *Konbaungzet*, 2004b, 54-309

¹⁰Than Tun, *The Royal Orders Of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885, Part Five, A.D. 1788-1806*, Kyoto, The Center For Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1986, p. 559 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1986 b)

There is no evidence that princesses received titles in the reigns of King Dapeyin and Singu. King Pagan did not have any children. In the reign of King Alaungmintaya, the *Dewi* titles were granted to three daughters of the Chief Queen and the daughter of a concubine.¹¹ In King Mindon's reign, three of the four daughters of the second Myauksaugdaw Queen received *Dewi* titles, while the remaining one got *Wati* title, and three of the four daughters of Laungshe Queen received *Dewi* titles, where as the other daughter received the *Dewi* title.¹² Thus, the titles received by the daughters of the same queen differed. Therefore, it seems that the titles to be conferred on queens and princesses depended on the king's favour rather than on their ranks. Although titles were conferred on queens and princesses, they were usually referred to by the towns or villages they held in fief: as *Myitkwe Myoza mihpaya*, the queen who held Myitkwe town in fief, *Myitkwe Myoza minthami*, the princess who held Myitkwe in fief, etc.

Apart from these ordinary titles, there was a special title received by a queen in the Konbaung period. This title was Sinbyushin. Thus, surprisingly, apart from the kings, the two persons who assumed Sinbyushin titles were women. On 22 January 1789 (the 5th day of the waning moon, Pyatho, 1151 ME), King Badon gave the title Sinbyushin Medaw to the daughter of his son Prince Pyi and daughter Queen Pyi.¹³ On 25 November 1877 (the 6th day of the waning moon, Dazaungmon, 1239 ME), King Mindon gave a white elephant named Thirimaha Thubatta presented to him by the lord of Dawe, Duraka, to the Queen of the

¹¹*Konbaungzet Mahayazawindawgyi* (The great chronicle of the Konbaung dynasty), ed. by U Maung Maung Tin, vol. I, Yangon, Aung Mithazu Press, 1989, p. 315 (Henceforth: *Konbaungzet*, 1989)

¹²*Konbaungzet Mahayazawindawgyi* (The great chronicle of the Konbaung dynasty), ed. by U Maung Maung Tin, vol. III, Yangon, Yabye Press, 2004, pp. 306-07 (Henceforth: *Konbaungzet*, 2004b)

¹³*Konbaungzet Mahayazawindawgyi* (The great chronicle of the Konbaung dynasty), ed. by U Maung Maung Tin, vol. II, Yangon, Yabye Press, 2004, p. 58 (Henceforth: *Konbaungzet*, 2004a)

Central Palace, and awarded the title Sinbyumashin Mihpaya to her.¹⁴ When the Chief Queen of King Mindon passed away, rivalry among the queens probably arose; especially, the Queen of the Central Palace desired to become Chief Queen, to marry off her daughter to a prince of her choice and to enthrone him. Realizing this, King Mindon did not make her his chief queen; instead, he gave her the title Sinbyumashin.¹⁵ Moreover, the only two persons whom the king permitted to redeem the convicts who were under sentence of death were women. On 18 February 1788 (the 13th day of waxing moon, Dabaung, 1149 ME), King Badon granted *athet dana su* to the first consort of the Heir-Apparent, ordering: “If the consort of the Heir Apparent redeemed those who were taken out for execution because they were guilty of a crime, their lives are to be spared.”¹⁶ Similarly on 15 March 1788 (the 9th day of the waxing moon, Hnaung Dagu, 1149 ME), he ordered: “The daughter of the Crown Prince may summon the *Ayut wun*, who is to redeem the convicts who are to be punished for their crimes by death.”¹⁷ Furthermore, King Thayarwady granted *athet dana su* to his daughter born of the Chief Queen on 19 May 1833 (the 1st day of the waxing moon, Nayon, 1195 ME):

My daughter may grant *athet dana* donation of life to the criminals who have been sentenced to death because of their crimes either in the golden city or in other towns and villages in the kingdom. If she absolved them, their lives are to be spared.¹⁸

¹⁴*Konbaungzet, 2004b, 292*

Than Tun, *The Royal Orders Of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885, Part Nine, A.D. 1853-1885*, Kyoto, The Center For Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1989, p. 893 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1989)

¹⁵Myo Myint, “The Politics Of Survival In Burma: Diplomacy And Statecraft In The Reign Of King Mindon, 1853-1878,” Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1987, p. 71 (Henceforth: Myo Myint, 1987)

¹⁶Than Tun, 1986, 378

¹⁷Than Tun, 1986, 406

¹⁸Than Tun, *The Royal Orders Of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885, Part Eight, A.D. 1819-1853*, Kyoto, The Center For Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1988, p. 575 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1988b)

However, there were no instances in which these princesses spared the lives of death-row convicts. Therefore, the consequences of the kings' granting *athet dana su* to their daughters are not known. In addition, there were other women who could spare the lives of convicts even though they did not receive *athet dana su*. They were Sinbyushinme and the Princess of Padaung, the granddaughters of King Badon. King Badon ordered on 13 October 1807 (the 11th day of the waxing moon, Dazaungmon, 1169 ME) as follows: "I pardoned Nga Bekale and Nga Po at the request of my granddaughter Shibyushinme. Go and take them out as they have been sent to the forest."¹⁹ Similarly, on 16 October 1807 (the 14th day of the waxing moon, Dazaungmon, 1169 ME), the king ordered: "I will pardon the person who held Saw in fief at the request of my daughter Sinbyushinme. Release him from prison."²⁰ When King Badon sentenced Nga Ye to death for killing his wife during a fight, the Princess of Padaung requested the king to spare his life.²¹ Thus, princess could request the king to spare the lives of convicts who were sentenced to death even though the king had not granted them *athet dana su*. It seems that King Badon gave them special rights because of his love for them. Both the Sinbyushinme and the Princess of Padaung later married the Crown Prince, who later became king referred to as Bagyidaw.²²

Terms of address to the queens and princesses differed according to their ranks. For giving birth to a child, the phrase *mishu myin daw mu thi* was used for the Chief Queen, whereas the phrases *tha daw hpwa thi* or *thami daw hpwa thi* was used for other queens. A son of the Chief Queen would be addressed as Shwekodawgyi Hpaya, while that of another queen would be referred to as

¹⁹Than Tun, *The Royal Orders Of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885, Part Six, A.D. 1807-1810*, Kyoto, The Center For Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1987, p. 501 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1987)

²⁰Than Tun, 1987, 504

²¹Than Tun, *The Royal Orders Of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885, Part Seven, A.D. 1811-1819*, Kyoto, The Center For Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1988, p. 466 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1988a)

²²*Konbaungzet, 2004b*, 104

Kodawmyat Hpaya. The daughter of the Chief Queen would be referred to as Suhpaya. Even a princess whose mother was not of royal blood had to be addressed as Suhpaya if the king ordered to do so. The King's daughters, would be addressed as *Hteithkaungtin*, *Hlaing Hteithkaungtin*, *Kutywa Hteithkaungtin*, etc. before they got married, and as *Hteithta-Einshe Hteithta*, *Pandein Hteithta*, etc.-after their marriage. Among the daughters of the Crown Prince, everyone except those the king ordered to address as *Hteithkaungtin*, the granddaughters and great granddaughters of the king, and the daughters of other princess-the king's sons as well as brothers-were addressed as *Hteittin*. The daughters of ministers were referred to as *Khin Khin*.²³

The six qualifications of the queens including the Chief Queen were as follows.

1. rising like a flame at the sight of the king
2. when the king sit, sitting only after fanning, etc. the king
3. asking what the king wanted her to do
4. behaving lovingly towards the king
5. speaking lovingly to the king
6. having no inclination, even in her thoughts, towards a man other than the king.²⁴

Although the queen was referred to as *pyigy mi* "mother of the kingdom,"²⁵ or as *pyihthaungbet mihpaya* "the queen with whom (the king) founded the kingdom together,"²⁶ the queens did not have any duty concerning the State. Their duties only concerned the king. The king took four meals a day, and queens and

²³Maung Maung, 2005, 310-315

²⁴U Tin, *Myanmar Min Oatchoatpon Sadan Hnint Bodawhpaya I Yazathat Hkawthaw Ameindawtamgyi* (Administration under the Myanmar kings and King Bodawhpaya's edict called yazathat), vol. I, Yangon, Department of Archaeology and Culture, 1963, p. 167-68 (Henceforth: U Tin, 1963)

²⁵*Mahabodhi*, obverse, line 49

²⁶Than Tun, 1989, 893

Konbaungzet, 2004b, 292

princesses had to lay the table. Only the Chief Queen and the king's favourite queen(s) could offer food to the king. Other queens and princesses only had to fan the king or to give water for the king to wash his hands. After the king had finished eating, the queens and princesses who were on duty had to eat the leftovers. The queens had to assist the king when he changed his clothes, washed his face, combed his hair, or had a bath. In King Mindon's reign, only the Chief Queen was allowed to comb the king's hair. After her demise, King Mindon combed his hair himself; he did not let any other queen to comb it.²⁷ The queens and princesses except the four principal queens had to follow wherever the king went. The four principal queens could see the king any time. The other queens were divided into left and right groups, and had to take turns to attend the king day and night. The left group was organized by the Queen of the Northern Palace, while the right group was supervised by the Queen of the Western Palace. The princesses, however, need not take turns. They could appear before the king two or three times a day and performed the duties assigned to them.²⁸

There also was princess royal, the princess who had her own mansion in the palace in the Myanmar palace circle. According to custom, she was not to get married during her father's reign, but was to become the Chief Queen of her father's successor.²⁹ In King Mindon's reign, the king did not nominate one of the three daughters of the Queen of the Central Palace as Princess Royal; instead, he chose Salin Suhpaya, the daughter of the queen who held Linban Taik in fief as Princess Royal.³⁰ However, King Thibaw did not elevate Salin Suhpaya to the status of

²⁷Myo Myint, 1987, 82

²⁸J. George Scott, *Gazetteer Of Upper Burma And The Shan States*, II, i, Rangoon, The Superintendent, Government Printing, 1900, pp. 94-97 (Henceforth: Scott, 1900)

²⁹Yadanabon Hpo Hmatsu, *Mandalay*, Mandalay, Kyibwaye Press, 1960, p. 66 (Henceforth: Yadanabon Hpo Hmatsu, *Mandalay*)

³⁰Myaketu, *Thilashin Hteikhta*, (A nun of royal blood), Rangoon, Bagan Publishing House, 1979, p. 44 (Henceforth: Myaketu, 1979)

Chief Queen, but chose the two daughters of the Queen of the Central Palace as his Chief Queens.

There also were *apyodaws* or ladies-in-waiting. Pretty girls among the daughters of high-ranking royal officials, the royal relatives, and of the *sawbwas* (Shan Chiefs) and *myozas* would be listed as ladies-in-waiting of Glass Palace. They also were grouped into two groups: the left and the right, and had to take turns to go to the Glass Palace. As these Glass Palace ladies-in-waiting were future queens, they had to sleep in black couches. A queens' bed, however, were gilded.³¹ The daughters of the *sawbwas* and Glass Palace ladies-in-waiting had their own rooms. The ladies who had to attend the four principal queens, the Salin Suhpaya, Suhpayagyi, Suhpayalat and Suhpayakale had to lodge in a hall to the west of the Palace, between the drainage canal and the inner enclosure of the palace. They also were referred to as *apyodaw*. The servants of other queens and princesses, however, were called *apyo*, and did not receive a place to stay. The ladies-in-waiting had to take turns to perform their duties. At evening, the *apyodaws* who were literate had to take turns to read out literary texts outside the king's bedroom, and they were referred to *satawhpat* ("readers").³² There also were *anyein apyodaws*, i.e. the *apyodaws* who had to entertain the king with songs and music. All the *anyein apyodaws* were women; and only the two leaders of these *apyodaws* had to attend the king at the Glass Palace.³³ In King Thibaw's reign, there were altogether forty one Glass Palace *apyodaws*-eleven led by Ma Hkin, seven led by Ma Ohn, nine led by Ma Thet and fourteen led by Ma Myit, twenty three *apyodaws* of Queen Sinpyumashin, fifteen *apyodaws* of King Thibaw's mother, seventy two *apyodaws* of the two principal queens, seventeen *apyodaws* of Hteitsu Hpaya, thirty two *apyodaws* of the Pahkangyi Suhpaya and

³¹Maung Maung Tin, 2005, 111

³²Scott, 1900, 95-97

Than Tun, 2004, 281-83

³³Maung Maung Tin, 2005, 111-112

thirty five apyodaws of the Meiktila Suhpaya, and thirty one *anyein apyodaws*.³⁴ In the reign of King Thibaw, Chief Queen Suhpayalat was also attended by French, British and Armenian ladies-in-waiting.³⁵

The trappings and insignia of the queens, princesses and *apyodaws* differed according to their ranks. The Queen of the Southern Palace was referred to as *mihpayagaunggyi*,³⁶ *hkinmamin*, *nanmadaw mihpayagaunggyi*,³⁷ or *taung nanmadaw mihpayagi*.³⁸ She was the only queen who could sit on the throne together with the king and use the white umbrella. The other three principal queens-Queens of the Northern Palace, of the Central Palace and of the Western Palace-could only use golden umbrella made of *shwebazunsi*.³⁹ Apart from the four principal queens, nobody was allowed to wear footwear around the king. In the reign of King Mindon, the daughters of the Central Queen also enjoyed this privilege. The four principal queens had a bedroom near the king's bedchamber in the Glass Palace. No other queen could sleep in the Glass Palace. Everybody had to pay respect to the king before giving anything to him, and had to pay respect to the king before taking anything from him. Everything used by the king had to be referred to with the use of the suffix-taw, and one must pay respect to these objects before touching them. They had to bow down three times whenever they were approaching or leaving the king. The Chief Queen was the only one who could remain folding her arms without bowing down at the end of each sentence while speaking with the king. When the king and the chief queen came out, the other queens, princesses and the ladies-in-waiting had to go down on their knees to pay respect. The principal queens and the princesses had to be on their knees while

³⁴*Konbaungzet, 2004b, 329*

³⁵Shwebo Mi Mi Gyi, "Shweminthami Mya Ei Aloatchain," (Regular working hours of the princesses), *Lonmale Magazine*, July 1985, pp. 163-65 (Henceforth: Shwebo Mi Mi Gyi, 1985)

³⁶*Konbaungzet, 2004b, 256*

³⁷*Konbaungzet, 2004b, 254*

³⁸*Konbaungzet, 2004b, 257*

³⁹Scott, 1900, 89

they were speaking to one another, and had to use the word *hpaya*. They could take meals prepared by their ladies-in-waiting in their own apartments.⁴⁰ Junior queens and princesses could have their slippers on till they reached the entrance to the Glass Palace, where they had to leave their umbrellas, slippers and attendants, and had to carry their betel and tea boxes, spittoons, documents, etc. themselves. The ladies-in-waiting were allowed to have their slippers on till they reached the door to the building in which their attendance was required.⁴¹

Queens, princesses and concubines normally received towns or villages in fief.⁴² Each fief-holder received half of the tithe collected from bazaars, watch-posts, and ferries and of the judicial fees collected in the town or village he/she held in fief.⁴³ Concerning how they received the taxes collected at the watch-posts, ferries and fisheries, it is stated in a royal order issued on 20 February 1806 (the 4th day of the waxing moon, Dabaung, 1167 ME) as follows:

Apropos of the request made by the princess who holds Kutywa village in fief, Minkyawshwedaung Dawebo and party are not to be allowed to take control of the watch-posts, ferries, fisheries and alluvial land; the princess who held Kutywa is to enjoy the proceeds as before; Minkyawshwedaung Dawebo and party are to return everything they have appropriated (to the princess).⁴⁴

It is learnt that they also received the tolls collected at ports. In King Bagyidaw's reign, the king granted his daughter, the Princess who held Taungdwingyi in fief,

⁴⁰Scott, 1900, 96
Than Tun, 2004, 282

⁴¹Scott, 1900, 98
Than Tun, 2004, 282

⁴²*Konbaungzet*, 2004a, 406

⁴³Maung Maung Tin, *Myanmar Min Lethetaw Sadan Mya* (Papers concerning the reigns of Myanmar kings), Rangoon, Bagan Publishing House, 1967, p. 42 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Tin, 1967)

⁴⁴Than Tun, 1986, 805

Man Aung in Rakhine as an appanage together with the right to enjoy the custom duties collected at the ports there.⁴⁵ The king even granted a village to a *cuisiniere* who cooked meals for him.⁴⁶ Ladies-in-waiting also received towns and villages in fief.⁴⁷ Additionally, the kings generally granted towns and villages to princesses as presents at the ceremony of placing a child in the cradle for the first time,⁴⁸ and at the ear-piercing ceremonies.⁴⁹ The towns granted by King Bagyidaw to his daughter in fief at the ceremony of piercing her ears in 1834 (1195 ME) included Sagaing, Dapeyin, Momyiet, Pakkangyi, Nga Singu, Ingapu, Myede, Badaung and Kyangin.⁵⁰

Apart from granting towns and villages in fief, the kings also gave land to the queens and princesses. The lands owned by the Chief Queen were called *yunbaungpa mye* as her possessions were recorded in a *yunbaung parabaik*. There also were *yunbaung pa* possessions other than land. There were three types of *yunbaung pa* property: *nanzin*, *thinthi*, and *amweya*.⁵¹ There were lands including paddy fields, farmlands and gardens owned by the Chief Queen. The tax those working on the Chief Queen's land had to pay was much lower than that paid by those cultivating the land owned by others. Even if a plot of land should yield about three or four thousand kyats in revenue, the Chief Queen sometimes exempted the workers from paying land rent if they gave her something she likes as a present. Of a hundred and twelve gardens owned by Chief Queen, the queen

⁴⁵*Konbaungzet, 2004a*, 169

⁴⁶Than Tun, 1987, 516

⁴⁷*Konbaungzet, 2004b*, 325, 413

⁴⁸“Royal order, dated the 8th day of the waxing moon Tabodwe, 1240 ME (25 January 1878), granting towns and villages to thirty one ladies-in-waiting”, *Purabaik MS*, Ludu Library Collection, *pu* 0122 (Henceforth: Royal order, *pu* 0122)

⁴⁹*Konbaungzet, 2004b*, 217

⁴⁹*Konbaungzet, 2004b*, 329

⁵⁰*Konbaungzet, 2004a*, 329

⁵¹U Tin, *Myanmar Min Oatchoatpon Sadan Hnint Bodawhpaya I Yazathat Hkawthaw Ameindawtamgyi* (Administration under the Myanmar kings and King Bodawhpaya's edict called *yazathat*), vol. v, Rangoon, Department of Cultural Institute, Ministry of Culture, 1983, p. 22 (Henceforth: U Tin, 1983)

received land rent from sixty five of them, and took only the fruits and flowers she wanted from the remaining sixty five.⁵² In the reign of King Thibaw, the Chief Queen Suhpayalat had about 6, 128 *pay* of garden land, which produced about 57, 870 baskets of various agricultural products,⁵³ and the Chief Queen received about Ks. 90,000 per annum according to the account for the governments' annual income and expenditure.⁵⁴ Therefore, she earned about Ks. 7,500 per month. As the price of gold in the later Konbaung period was twenty four kyats per tical,⁵⁵ the Chief Queen's monthly income from her land equates to about three viss twelve ticals of gold. The lands owned by queens and princess were situated in Myittha,⁵⁶ in the areas irrigated by Kinda, Nga Naingthin, Pyaungpya, Twante, Tamoke, Minye, Nwedet and Thindwe dams in the southern nine *hkayaings* (districes),⁵⁷ in the Bon-o, Letpansi and Thabyeot village tracts, in the southern village tract of Abant Hin, Bayegyun, the Taungthaman village tract, and in Tetthein within the township of Amarapura,⁵⁸ the area irrigated by the Nanda Tank and that to the south, the area irrigated by Aungpinle tank and that to the south, and the area irrigated by the Tamoatso tank.⁵⁹ Thus, queens and princesses mostly received fertile lands in irrigated tracts. In addition to the land they held in fief,

⁵²U Tin, 1983, 22-23

⁵³Ba Oo, *Myanma Oatchoatye Pyinnya* (Administration of Myanmar), Mandalay, Bahosi News Printing, 1942, p. 147 (Henceforth: Ba Oo, 1942)

⁵⁴Ba Oo, 1942, 115

⁵⁵Maung Maung Tin, "Minhkin Minthami Lethpwe," (Presents given to the Princess who held Minhkin in fief), *Shumawa Magazine*, XXXVII, no. 444, May 1984, pp. 165-67 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Tin, 1984)

⁵⁶"A list of the irrigation tax, area of land, and number of agriculturists from the land irrigated by Pyaungpya dam in 1234", *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1394 (Henceforth: Pyaungpya dam, *pu* 1394)

⁵⁷"Irrigation tax collected in the southern nine *hkayaings*, and irrigated area in 1233", *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1410 (Henceforth: nine *hkayaings*, *pu*, 1410)

⁵⁸"List of land and their acreages within Amarapura township", *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1215 (Henceforth: Amarapura, *pu* 1215)

⁵⁹"A list of Kaukkyi paddy land, Nanda, Aungpinle and Tamoatso", *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1219 (Henceforth: Nanda, Aungpinle and Tamoatso, *pu* 1219)

"A list of land irrigated Nanda and Aungpinle and that to south", *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1219 (Henceforth: Nanda and Aungpinle and that to south, *pu* 1219)

queens also purchased land. It is recorded that a queen bought a 100 *pe* of land in the area to the west of Shwelaung canal in 1806.⁶⁰ There also were land disputes involving the land granted to princesses in fief. For instance, there was a land dispute involving the land granted to the Princess who held Kyaukmaw in fief and that granted to the Saddan elephant. This dispute was settled on 14 March 1810 (the day of the waxing moon, Hnaung Dagu, 1171 ME), and the boundaries of their land had to be re-delineated.⁶¹

The kings normally gave the property of the persons who died heirless to the queens and daughters. For instance, when Yazakyawthu, the Royal Herald, and his wife Mi Min passed away on 21 February 1806 (the 5th day of the waxing moon, Dabaung, 1167 ME), without leaving an heir, their entire estate, including both animate and inanimate things, were given to Princess Thinza.⁶² How the property of a deceased who died without leaving an heir was given to a queen on 12 September 1806 (the 10th day of the waxing moon, Thadingyut, 1168 ME) is recorded as follows:

Kadu's wife Mi Yun San who lived in Hpayabyan village in the northern cavalry tract passed away; the queen is to give her a proper burial. Mi Yun San did not have a descendant who would inherit her property. All the possessions of Mi Yun San, both animate and inanimate, are given to the queen. Let her take them. Let the *wun saye* submit a list of what they get.⁶³

The kings also gave war captives to princesses as slaves. There are references to the *kathes*, who were confiscated from Mi Min Hla and the Kathes and Rakhine cultivators, given to the Hinthada Princess on 27 October 1808 (the 1st day of the

⁶⁰Than Tun, 1986 b, 431

⁶¹Than Tun, 1987, 689-90

⁶²Than Tun, 1986 b, 807

⁶³Than Tun, 1986 b, 982

waxing moon, Nadaw, 1170 ME),⁶⁴ fifty slaves for cultivation who were confiscated from Nga Kyu and his father, given to the Meiktila Princess on 7 November 1808 (the 12th day of the waxing moon, Nadaw, 1170 ME),⁶⁵ etc. in the royal orders. Moreover, the kings also gave female war captives to princesses. For example, of the five women captured by Nemyo Kamani Thingyan's company while marching to Kyaington and submitted to the crown by the Mone regiment on 28 April 1810 (the 11th day of the waning moon, 1172 ME), two each were given to Meiktila Princess and Kyaukmaw princess, while the king's granddaughter Shwenanmyint received the remaining one.⁶⁶ In addition to the slaves given by the king, princesses also had the slaves they acquired through purchase. The royal order issued on 21 October 1808 (the 10th day of the waning moon, Dazaungmon, 1170 ME) refers to thirteen Kathe Indian slaves bought by the Northern Queen and eleven slaves bought by Kyaukmaw Princess,⁶⁷ and an edict dated 23 October 1808 (the 12th day of the waning moon, Dazaungmon, 1170 ME) mentions "twenty two households who were bought by Tagaung Princess and who settled in the tract of Kutywa village."⁶⁸ The *thetkayits* in which the queens were mentioned as mortgagees of slaves also have been discovered.⁶⁹ As to how the queens and princesses made their slaves work for them in their lands, it is

⁶⁴Than Tun, 1987, 618

⁶⁵Than Tun, 1987, 627

⁶⁶Than Tun, 1987, 730

⁶⁷Than Tun, 1987, 609

⁶⁸Than Tun, 1987, 612

⁶⁹"Thetkayit dated the 7th day of the waxing moon, Tawthalin, 1221 ME (3 September 1859), loan taken out by Maung Hpo Myit and wife Mi Shwe Mi", *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Maung Hpo Myit, *pu* 1268)

"Thetkayit dated the 3rd day of the waning moon, Kason, 1223 ME (26 April 1861), first mortgage of human labour by Nga Te, wife Mi Ngwe, daughter Mi Nu and son-in-law Nga Hke", *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Mi Ngwe, *pu* 1268)

"Thetkayit dated the 3rd day of the waning moon, Kason, 1233 ME (6 May 1871), second mortgage of human labour by Nga Te, wife Mi Ngwe, daughter Mi Nu and son-in-law Nga Hke", *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Nga Te, *pu* 1268)

"Thetkayit dated the 13th day of the waxing moon, Dabodwe, 1222 ME (23 January 1860), first mortgage of human labour by Nga Hpo Htu, wife Mi The and son Nga Tun Aung", *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Nga Hpo Htu, *pu* 1268)

recorded in a royal order issued on 28 May 1806 (the 12th day of the waxing moon, Nayon, 1168 ME) as follows:

Princess Tagaung petitioned that she would be given forest lands in Taung Bon Gyi township which are on the west of lands given to Princess Kut Ywa and Princess Kyan Hnyat; and on the east and on the west of lands given to service men at Kethu, Shwe Pauk Pin, Tu Myaung, Taya Tway and Myin Tain in the tracts under Mi Kyan, Myay Taing Ma-Lady Head of Land Tracts. Princess Tagaung is given the land she asked in the tracts under Mi Kyan. Myay Taing Amat-Officer of Land Survey, shall measure the land to be given to Princess Tagaung. Kyi Wun-Officer of Granaries, and Dawe Bo-Chief of Tavoy Forces, shall not work in the lands marked for Princess Tagaung.⁷⁰

There are also records indicating that some queens lent money on interest and sometimes took land as collateral.⁷¹ The following queens and princesses are

⁷⁰Than Tun, 1986, 885

⁷¹“Thetkayit dated 1228 ME (1866), Wife Mi Min”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Mi Min, *pu* 1268)

“Thetkayit dated 11 November 1860 (the 3rd day of the waning moon, Nadaw, 1222 ME), thet kayit involving the conveyance of land at Htipaungka, Tetthe In”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1046 (Henceforth: Tetthe In, *pu* 1046)

“Thetkayit dated the 1st day of the waning moon, Kason, 1227 ME (10 May 1865), conveyance of various paddy fields through purchase and mortgage”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1046 (Henceforth: paddy fields through purchase and mortgage, *pu* 1046)

“Thetkayit dated the 4th day of the waxing moon, First Wazo, 1228 ME (15 June 1866), mortgage of paddy land”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1046 (Henceforth: mortgage of paddy land, *pu* 1046)

“Thetkayit dated the 14th day of the waning moon, Thadingyut, 1237 ME (28 October 1875), mortgage of paddy land referred to as Kanaya Kyawswa Nan in the jurisdictions of Nga Singu township”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1411 (Henceforth: mortgage of paddy land, *pu* 1411)

“Thetkayit dated the 10th day of the waxing moon, Dagu, 1238 ME (23 March 1873), mortgaging and purchasing gardens in Thayezu village in the jurisdiction of Madaya town”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1411 (Henceforth: Thayezu village, *pu* 1411)

“Thetkayit dated the 2nd day of the waxing moon, Wagaung, 1216 ME (26 July 1854), purchase of paddy land at Mangyipinsauktaw”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1046 (Henceforth: Mangyipinsauktaw, *pu* 1046)

recorded as creditors lending money and taking human labour or land as collateral:

Zabwedaung Queen

Ywathit Queen

Seywa Queen

Pinhteithkaungtin, King Mindon's daughter

Mainglon Suhpaya, Pinhteithkaungtin's sister

Taungdwingyaung Suhpaya, and

Momeit Suhpaya.

As the queens not only received the revenues for the towns and villages they held in fief and the land given to them by the king, but also made money by lending money on interest by sometimes taking human labour or land as collateral, their incomes could not have been low. In King Mindon's reign, all the queens except the four principal queens received salaries.⁷²

There were offices responsible to manage the affairs of the queens. The officers to work for the Chief Queen or Nanmadaw Queen were:

Nanmadaw Wun, also referred to as *Khinma Min Wun*

Nanmadaw Sayegy

Nanmadaw Bandazo

Nanmadaw Saye, and

the Royal Fifty.

The other officials who were responsible for the affairs of the queens were:

Mihpaya wuns

Mihpaya Bandazo, and

Mihpaya Bbanda Saye.⁷³

⁷²Scott, 1900, 483

⁷³U Tin, 1983, 35

The *Nanmadaw Wun* or *Khinma Min Wun* was responsible for managing the affairs concerning the towns and villages held by the Chief Queen in fief and for supervising other equeries to Chief Queen.⁷⁴ How the *mihpaya wuns* had to manage the land owned by the queen can be learnt from the royal order dated 13 January 1788 (the 6th day of the waxing moon, Dabodwe, 1149 ME), which runs: “The *mihpaya wuns* were to supervise the *lamaing asuthas* (crown cultivators) given to the Chief Queen and to make arrangement to collect and store the paddy produced by them as usual.”⁷⁵ There were other service men who had to work for the queens: *htanzindaw htan* (bearers of *htanzin* litters), *hledawhtan*, *yahtaswe* (for drawing vehicles), *wawdawhtan* (bearers of *waw* litters), *yindawhtan*, *pwedawchet* (cooks), *pwedawpo* (waiters), *kuntawset* (servers of betel), *pandawset* (flower gatherers), *anheiktaw* (masseuses), *sattadaw* (beauticians), *hkawadaw* (laundrywomen), *achoattaw* (dressmakers), *thamadaw* (folk healers), *bagyidaw* (artists), *badeindaw* (goldsmiths), *sadawhpat* (readers of literary texts), *apyodaw* (lading-in-waiting), *achidaw* (nursemaids), *achawdaw*, *ahteindaw* (nannies), *asodaw* (vocalists), *anyeindaw* (dancers), *kunyedaw* (servers of betel and water), *seleittaw* (servers of cheroots), *htidawmo* (umbrella bearers), *sandawshin* (hairdressers), *bandazo* (treasurers), *kadaw wun*, *kadaw saye*, and *meinmazo* (eunuchs). The queens had to pay the salaries of their employees.⁷⁶

The affairs of the queens and palace ladies were managed by the Western Court (*Naukyon*).⁷⁷ The officers of the *Anaukyon* normally were four *anaukwuns*, four *anaukwun sayes*, four *kadaw sayes*, and four *naukyon sayes*. However, the kings sometimes appointed more or less. The clerks and treasures of the Chief Queens

⁷⁴Maung Maung Tin, 2005, 65

⁷⁵Than Tun, 1986 b, 341

⁷⁶Maung Maung Tin, 1967, 164

⁷⁷There were five offices of the *Hluttaw*: (1) the *Hluttaw* or Supreme Council, (2) the *Byedaik* or Privy Council, (3) the *Sheyon* or Eastern Court (which served as Criminal Court), (4) the *Naukyon* or Western Court, and (5) the *Tayayon* or Civil Court.

U Tin, 1976, 36

also were regarded as officers of the Western Court, even though they only had to manage the affairs concerning the Chief Queen.⁷⁸ The *anaukyon* officers also included the four *nanya* queens, four *asaungya* queens and a few other queens.⁷⁹ Of the *anaukyon* offices, the *anaukwun* was the only officer who received an appointment order (*pyandan*). The *anaukwun* was responsible for ensuring security and tidying the Western Palace. If there was a criminal case in the Western Palace, he had to arrest and interrogate the offender and submit a report to the *Hluttaw* (Supreme Council) and the *Byedaik* (Privy Council). If the crime was of a minor nature, he could detain the offender in the *anauktan*; however, he was not empowered to send an offender to *anaukhtaung*. The *anauktan* lock up and the *anaukhtaung* prisons were the places in which only the women and men of the Western Palace were detained or imprisoned. In general, women were detained in the *anaukhtaung*.⁸⁰ It is learnt that queens and princesses had to observe strict rules in the Western Palace. Men were not allowed to enter the Western Palace, although young boys who were not older than seven could enter it. Palace ladies including queens, princesses and ladies-in-waiting could not leave the palace without the king's approval. Even monks and ministers could not enter the Western Palace unaccompanied by the *anauwuns* or *anaukwun sayes*. When a queen or a princess fell ill, the *anaukwuns* had to accompany folk healers and masseurs. Men and women could not sit together at the ceremonies.⁸¹ However, some palace ladies had illicit love affairs. In the reign of King Thibaw, for instance, as the princess who formerly held Minhkin in fief had an affair with a certain Nga Tu, they were interrogated on 22 April 1883 (the 2nd day of the waning moon, Kason, 1245 ME). On 23 April 1883 (the 3rd day of the waning moon, Kason, 1245 ME), the ex-Magwe Queen, the mother of the princess, and her close relatives were donated to Man Aung Yadana pagoda as slaves. On 25

⁷⁸U Tin, 1976, 37

⁷⁹U Tin, 1976, 37

⁸⁰U Tin, 1976, 37-39

⁸¹U Tin, 1976, 42-43

April 1883 (the 2nd day of the waxing moon, Kason, 1246 ME), Nga Tu was executed.⁸² On the following day, the princess was executed in jail.⁸³ In King Mindon's reign, his daughter Chundaung Princess had an affair with Maung Kelatha, Hla Htwe Abbot's disciple. The Chundaung Princess placed Maung Kelatha, who was in the garb of a monk, with Mi Ngwe, wife of Nga Thaung, a cavalry officer. Mi Pyaung's husband caught Nga Thaung and his wife smuggling Maung Kelatha into and out of the palace, and reported the matter to the abbots of Hla Htwe and Pahkan. The abbots threw him out, and would not allow him to stay in Amarapura, Inwa or Sagaing, and he went to Taungdwin. Later, in the colonial period, however, he married the princess. In King Thibaw's reign, the Minlon Princess also had a love affair with a monk who had passed the *Pahtamabyan* examination, and was detained.⁸⁴ Thus, although there were strict rules, some queens and princesses had illicit sexual affairs, and were punished cruelly when and if they were caught. In King Mindon's reign, in contrast, the king divorced his queen who held Magwe in fief at her request, and allowed her to remarry Maung Hlaw.⁸⁵

The Chief Queen could deliver her children in the Nanmadaw (Central Palace),⁸⁶ while the other queens had to give birth to their children in the *wundaw eindan*, situated to the west of the western canal within the teak stockade.⁸⁷ The building to be used as a delivery room had a thatched roof and bamboo-matting doors hinged at the top.⁸⁸ An expectant queen had to move to this *eindan* a month before

⁸²*Konbaungzet, 2004b, 395-96*

⁸³*Konbaungzet, 2004b, 421*

⁸⁴Series 1/(A) Acc. No. 2496, National Archive

⁸⁵*Konbaungzet, 2004b, 395*

⁸⁶*The Mandalay Palace*, Rangoon, Ministry of Union Culture, Rangoon University Press, 1963, p. 33 (Henceforth: *Palace, 1963*)

⁸⁷Maung Maung Tin, *1967*, 164-65

⁸⁸Than Tun, *The Royal Orders Of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885, Part Four, A.D. 1782-1787*, Kyoto, The Center For Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1986, p. 522 (Henceforth: *Than Tun, 1986 a*)

Than Tun, *1986 a*, 431

her pregnancy went to term; and had to deliver her child on the bed prepared for delivering babies. The placenta was placed on a tray ornamented with gems, and the umbilical cord was cut with a knife studded with jewels. The midwife would be given clothes and a hundred kyats. A person for assisting a queen in childbirth, a person to take the placenta, one for cutting the umbilical cord, one to place the placenta in the tray, one for placing the knife to cut the umbilical on the *minekat* for ten seven days, one for burring the placenta, a wet nurse, a nursemaid, a babysitter and a women to rock the cradle had to be there. The wives of ministers had to give the queen clothes to be worn after her childbirth. A hairdresser-cum-manicurist and the wife of a *wundauk* for taking the strands of hair and the wife of an *anaukwun* for taking the trimmings from the manicurist, the wife of a *wungyi* for carrying the child, the wife of an *atwinwun* for rocking the cradle also had to wait in readiness.⁸⁹ A folk healer, an astrologer for examining the child's horoscope, a eunuch, and the *kadawwun*, *kadawsayes* and *thungedaw* had to wait outside the delivery room to provide whatever necessary. As soon as the queen delivered her child, the child would have to be examined by the *Brahmin* palmists, a messenger had to report their interpretations to the king right away. Certain persons would be sent to the queen three times a day to enquire after her health.⁹⁰ The officers of the *Shwedaik* had to supply gold *kalaps* and gold bowls for the queens to wash themselves, and the *yekyiwun* had to send pots filled up with drinking water with a gold lid. When the queen was in labour, the *anaukwun* and *anaukwun sayes* had to have a pot of clean water at the foot of the stairs at the west of the palace for the *kadaw mayas* to wash themselves.⁹¹ One mother after the delivery, the queen had to bath with perfumed water to re-enter the palace.⁹² The queen had to breastfeed her newly-born infant only for a week; after that the

⁸⁹“A list of the persons to be summoned for the childbirth of the Queen of the Central Palace”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1342 (Henceforth: List, childbirth of the queen, *pu* 1342)

⁹⁰Maung Maung Tin, 1967, 164-65

⁹¹List, childbirth of the queen, *pu* 1342

⁹²Maung Maung Tin, 1967, 164

wet nurse would have to breastfeed the baby. A lady who would not cause the baby's nose to be flattened or neck to be shortened, would not cause the baby to contract diseases or cause the baby's skin to be shrunken, would be chosen from among the royal relatives and wives of high-ranking royal officials to act as a wet nurse.⁹³ The number of the offspring of the queens who "died in infancy" (*ngekalun*) was high. The number of births and that of the deaths among the offspring of the kings of the Konbaung dynasty are given in the following table:

Table (XI). Births and Deaths among the offspring of the Konbaung Kings

No	King	Sons		Daughters		Total		(Infant) Mortality Rate
		Births	Deaths	Births	Deaths	Births	deaths	
1	Alaungmintaya	10	1	6		16	1	6.3
2	Dipeyin	5	3	2	1	7	4	57.1
3	Myedu	18	6	24	11	42	17	40.5
4	Singu	5		6	3	11	3	27.3
5	Badon	61	22	57	25	118	47	39.8
6	Bagyidaw	2	1	5	1	7	2	28.6
7	Tharyarwady	20	12	17	9	37	21	56.8
8	Mindon	50	19	56	15	106	34	32.1
9	Thibaw	1	1	6	1	7	2	28.6

Note. King Bagan did not have any offspring.

Source: *Konbaungzet*, 1989, 315, 340, 502-03, 525; *Konbaungzet*, 2004a, 157-62, 367; *Konbaungzet*, 2004b, 306-09, 477

This table indicates that infant mortality rate was high in the reigns of Kings Dipeyin, Myedu and Tharyarwady. This probably resulted from the lack of modern medicine for infantile diseases and especially from the lack of health education. Concerning childbirth in Myanmar, Westerners observed that as both antenatal care and postnatal care in Myanmar were very harmful, and as the mother had to receive heat treatment and had to take salts, causing her to become

⁹³Maung Maung Tin, 2005, 301

weak and unhealthy and to become infertile for about two to three years, Myanmar women could not get more than one or two offspring.⁹⁴

Konbaung period was a period in the history of Myanmar literature in which various literary forms appeared. In the Konbaung period, women also wrote poems, rhetorical compositions, songs, novels and plays. Most of those authoresses were from among the palace ladies. The authoresses of the Konbaung period were:

1. Shin Min, queen of King Singu
2. Me Loat
3. The lady of Pahkan who was the wife of Maung Lun, a musketeer
4. Me Hkwe, a dame d'honneur who was the daughter of the Sittaung Wun
5. Khinson, wife of a Mingyi
6. Consort of the Yanbye Min
7. Princess who held Kyanhnyat in fief
8. Ma Myakale, the Western Queen of King Tharyarwady
9. Lehkan, mother of King Tharyarwady
10. Princess of Myinsaing
11. Hlainghteithkaungtin
12. King Mindon's Chief Queen
13. King Mindon's queen of the Central Palace
14. Princess Salin Suhpaya, daughter of King Mindon and the queen who held Linban Taik in fief
15. Princess Suhpaya, Queen Sinpyumashin's eldest daughter
16. Princess Suhpaya of Myadaung, Queen Sinbyumashin's second daughter

⁹⁴Khin Zaw Win, "Myanmar Nainggan Pyinnyaye Thamaing 1870-1920," (A history of education in Myanmar, 1870-1920), M.A. thesis, Mandalay University, 1968, p. 47 (Henceforth: Khin Zaw Win, 1968)

17. Princess of Myingun, King Mindon's daughter
18. Princess of Kanni, King Mindon's daughter
19. Pyin Khin Saw, daughter of the Prince of Pyinsi
20. Khin Hpu, wife of the myoza of Pintha
21. Minghkaing Khin Le Gyi, reader who was the daughter of the atwinwun who held Mainghkaing town in fief and who was a librarian
22. Manle Khinsaw, daughter of the governor of Manle
23. Daing Khin Saw, daughter of the Daing Wun
24. Khin Le of Madaya
25. Khin Le who held Pahtanago town in fief
26. Khin Hnit, Salin Suhpaya's attendant who held Khaukka in fief
27. Khin Le of Tharyarwady
28. A dancer from Madaya
29. Khin Khin Gyi, a lyricist
30. U Kyaw's daughter
31. Me Kin, a nun
32. Ma Te, a songwriter who wrote *patpyos*.⁹⁵

Of them, Khin Son, wife of a *mingyi*, became famous in King Tharyarwady's reign for the poems, rhetorical compositions and songs she wrote, and the king granted her Kutywa village in fief. From then on, she came to be known as *Kutywaza Mingyi Kadaw Khin Son*-i.e. Khin Son who held Kutywa in fief and who was the wife of a *mingyi*. She could even rival Myawady Mingyi U Sa, a wellknown poet in the history of Myanmar literature.⁹⁶ The best-known authoresses were Ma Mya Le, King Tharyarwady's Western Queen and her daughter Hlainghteithkaungtin. Their poems, rhetorical compositions and songs

⁹⁵Dagon Khin Khin Le, *Amyothami Anupyinnyashin Mya* (Women artists), Rangoon, Zwe Press, 1967, pp. 88-134 (Henceforth: Dagon Khin Khin Le, 1967)

⁹⁶Dagon Khin Khin Le, 1967, 127

are still popular. They not only composed poems and songs, but even wrote court dramas.⁹⁷ The works written by authoresses were disparaged as *linhmyawte*. Nevertheless, their works were recorded as works of artistic merit in the history of Myanmar literature. Their *ahmyawseit* literature was a mile stone in the history of Myanmar literature. Their works reveal the evils of feudalism. They illustrated palace intrigues from the historians' point of view.⁹⁸ That most of these authoresses were from among the royalty suggests that there were more learned women in the royalty than among the commoners. In King Mindon's reign, there was a department in the Thiri Maha Manawrammam Garden which was responsible for buying and stocking up edible oil. Money from reselling oil and from selling ground sesame seeds had to be sent to the Princess of Myadaung. The money from selling rice after processing in the royal rice mill had to be submitted to the Salin Suhpaya daily.⁹⁹ Therefore, these princesses very likely had good skills in accounting and arithmetic. In the reign of King Mindon, two nuns, Me Kin and Me Natpe, were invited to Mandalay for teaching and disciplining queens and princesses and palace ladies; and they dwelt at the forest nunnery in the Northern Garden of the Palace.¹⁰⁰ When she became old, Me Kin sent her pupils to the palace to teach the queens and princesses. Therefore, each of her pupils, Daw Wanna, Daw Dhamma, Daw Wimala, Daw Gon, Sayahat, was invited to a palace building to teach the palace ladies.¹⁰¹ As all the teachers of the queens and princesses were nuns, as all the works presented to Queen Sinbyumashin

⁹⁷Dagon Khin Khin Le, 1967, 182, 216

⁹⁸Tin Tin New, "Konbaungkit Ei Ahmyawsaik Sarpe" (Ahmyawsaik literature of the Konbaung period), *Myawadi Magazine*, XXVII, no. 8, June 1979, pp. 52-55 (Henceforth: Tin Tin Nwe, 1979)

⁹⁹Than Tun, 2004, 297

Dagon Khin Khin Le, *Wetmasut Ahtoatpatti Hnint Sarpe Mya* (Biography and works of Wetmasut), Rangoon, Dagon Khin Khin Le Publishing House, 1979, p. 47 (Henceforth: Khin Khin Le, 1979)

¹⁰⁰Yawe Tun, *Bhikkhuni Thathana Hnint Thilashin Thamaing* (A history of Buddhist Nuns), Rangoon, Shweti, 1978, pp. 20-26 (Henceforth: Yawe Tun, 1978)

¹⁰¹Yawe Tun, 1978, 214

religious texts,¹⁰² and as a document recorded that thirty *parabaik* manuscripts inscribed with religious texts had to be sent to the palace for the *kadaw mayas* to study,¹⁰³ it is clear that, rather than secular subjects, religious texts were mainly taught in those days. There also were some women who studied Western subjects. How the chief queen of King Mindon learnt astronomy from Mr. Lane, a British merchant, how she could calculate when the solar or lunar eclipse would take place, how she could read English numerals, and how she could use nautical calendar are mentioned in a letter sent by Sir Arthur Phayre, a British Commissioner, to Lord Dalhousie on 26 April 1853.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, Prince Kanaung, entrusting four ladies to Rev. Bigandet's care, arranged so that they would study in the convent in Rangoon in 1863. Thus, they had to study under Christian nuns for five years like the Eurasian ladies of the same age. Prince Kanaung not only supported them for their keep while staying in the hostel, but also sent presents to them.¹⁰⁵ These ladies more than likely were from the palace. However, no other documents concerning these ladies have been discovered.

There were some ceremonies for queens and princesses. Ceremonies for princes and princesses were held depending on their age. The ceremony of placing a prince or princess into the cradle for the first time was normally held with pomp. In such ceremonies, princess received many presents. The presents given to a princess at the occasion of placing her in the cradle for the first time on the 6th day

¹⁰²“Religious texts sent to the queen”, *Purabaik* MS, Ludu Library Collection, *pu* 0061 (Henceforth: Religious texts, *pu* 0061)

¹⁰³“Buddhist texts for the *kadaw mayas* to study, the 12th of the waning moon, Dabodwe, 1234 ME”, *Purabaik* MS, Ludu Library Collection, *pu* 0027 (Henceforth: Buddhist texts, *pu* 0027)

¹⁰⁴*The Dalhousie-Phayre Correspondence 1852-1856*, ed. by D.G.E. Hall, London, Oxford University Press, 1932, p. 63 (Henceforth: *Correspondence*, 1932)

¹⁰⁵Khin Zaw Win, 1968, 73

of the waxing moon of Dagu 1215 ME (14 March 1853) were as follows:

Table (XII). Presents given to a princess at the occasion of placing her in the cradle for the first time

No	Presents	Quantity
1	Pearls	115
2	necklaces with diamonds, emeralds and rubies	7
3	necklaces decorated with diamonds and emeralds	2
4	pair of diamond earplug	1
5	a cluster of flowers decorated with diamonds	1
6	pair of bracelets decorated with diamonds and emeralds	5
7	pair of bracelets with 22 rubies	1
8	diamond, emerald and ruby rings	19
9	pairs of anklets shaped like a naya (mythical animal) decorated with diamonds, emeralds and rubies	1
10	a footwear decorated with 88 rubies	1
11	gold bowls for drinking water	7
12	gold-plated cups	4
13	gold covers	2
14	gold goglet with cover	1
15	gold bowls for washing hands	2
16	gold daungpaungs (salvers)	2
17	gold trays	3
18	gold bowls	17
19	gold rice pot	1
20	gold pots (for cooking)	1
21	gold ladles	2

To be continued

22	gold spoons	3
23	gold casket	4
24	gold spittoon	1
25	gold bowl	1
26	gold (to be used as money)	200
27	silver (to be used as money)	7140
28	clothing	646
29	paddy land in Puba village, in the district of Alon (for pocket money)	167
30	paddy land of Nwadein Thungedaw, Methkaya town (in <i>pe</i>)	180
31	buffaloes (in yokes)	10
32	cow (in yokes)	10
33	milch cows	10
34	young elephants	2
35	cow elephants	2
36	garden in Thonze town	1
37	shwehton boat	1
38	<i>ayadaw</i>	3
39	<i>ahteindaw</i> (nannies)	3
40	<i>achidaw</i> (nursemaids)	3
41	Daughters of ministers as the princess' playmates	24
42	Mogaung town (as fief)	1

Source: "Presents given at the occasion of placing the king's daughter into the cradle for the first time on the 6th day of the waxing moon of Dagu, 1210 ME (14 March 1853)", *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1462.

Apart from these presents, the princess also received 7, 140 kyats of silver. As a tical of gold in Mindon's time cost about twenty four kyats,¹⁰⁶ the presents were worth about two viss and ninety seven ticals of gold. Ear-piercing ceremonies were also held for princesses. The ear-piercing of a daughter of King Bagyidaw and his chief queen was held on 18 January 1834 (the 9th day of the waxing moon of Dabodwe, 1195 ME). First, the princess, flanked by the daughters of ministers sat on a couch in the Glass Palace. The ceremony began when the king and the queen were seated on the throne. At this ceremony, the king presented the princess with diamonds, emeralds, rubies, gold and silver jewellery, clothes, slaves, artisans, Sagaing, Dapayin, Moemeit, Pahkangyi, Nga Singu, Ingapu, Myede, Badaung and Kyangin towns in fief, cow elephants, cows, buffaloes, boats, paddy fields, farm lands, alluvial lands and gardens. The chief queen gave her daughter betel box decorated with diamonds, emeralds, rubies, a water server with cover and a tea server with cover. Queens, princes and ministers also gave gold and silver jewellery and cloths as presents. Presents were also given to queens, princes, ministers and wives of royal officials as well as to the citizens, and entertainments were organized for a week.¹⁰⁷ Thus, the king spent a fortune for holding the ceremonies of placing a princess in the cradle for the first time and ear-piercing ceremonies grandly. The princesses, however, did not have the right to arrange their own marriages. Only if they were married off by the king, they would be registered as "wives" and would have the right of inheritance. If a prince married someone on his own, the woman would not be regarded as his legitimate wife; she would not be listed among the wives of princes and would not be entitled to a right of inheritance.¹⁰⁸ After getting married, the princesses had to

¹⁰⁶Maung Maung Tin, *1984*, 167

¹⁰⁷*Konbaungzet, 2004a*, 329

¹⁰⁸Than Tun, *The Royal Orders Of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885, Part Three, A.D. 1751-1781*, Kyoto, The Center For Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1985, p. 130 (Henceforth: Than Tun, *1985b*)

move to their husbands homes outside the palace. They were referred to as *pyin eindaw san minthami*.¹⁰⁹

Consecration ceremonies for queens were also held. In October 1840 (Thadingyut 1202) King Tharyarwady consecrated the chief queen, the queens of the northern, central and western palaces, and the queens who held Mingin and Bamaw towns in fief.¹¹⁰ In King Thibaw's reign, two princesses who were the daughters of King Mindon and his central queen and who held Maingnaung, Bagan, Dabayin, Manle, and Myadaung if fief were consecrated on 30 October 1878 (the 6th day of the waxing moon of Dazaungmon, 1240 ME).¹¹¹ Thus, like the kings, the queens also were consecrated.

The chief queen was entitled to participate together with the king in the consecration of the king, at the occasion of opening the throne room for the first time, and at the ceremonies of paying homage to the king by his subjects three times a year. Additionally, the ceremonies of paying homage to the chief queen was held once a year-at end of Buddhist lent-like those for paying homage to the king. These ceremonies were held in the West Audience Hall immediately after those in the East Audience Hall ended. On these occasions, the king and the chief queen on his right, seated on the Lotus Throne in the Western *Samoat* would be paid homage by the princesses and wives of royal officials and royal relatives. The king and the chief queen would be accompanied by queens wearing formal clothes depending on their ranks. Princesses and wives, also wearing formal clothes, would follow the queens depending on their ranks. In the ceremonies in the East Audience Hall, which were attended by men, the officials of higher ranks would be seated on the left side of the king. In the West Audience Hall, however, as the ceremonies were attended by ladies, the right side of the chief queen was

¹⁰⁹Myaketu, 1979, 39

¹¹⁰U Tin, 1976, 94

¹¹¹*Konbaungzet*, 2004b, 323

more important. In these ceremonies the palace ladies would be seated in the following order:

Princesses residing outside the palace,

1. A “wife” (*gadaw*) who had to serve as respondent and other wives,
2. Wives of the *Shethwe* place,
3. Wives of the *Naukthwe* place,
4. Wives of the *Pwedet* place, and
5. Daughters of royal relatives and royal officials who had to take and list the presents.¹¹²

The respondent had to answer the questions: “Is the kingdom prosperous in all the four quarters?”, “Are the rains favourable, are rice and water abundant?”, and “Are the wives respectful to their husbands.” Although there were four respondents, only the respondent of the highest rank had to answer the questions. The four respondents in King Thibaw’s reign were (1) the wife of the minister who held Laungshe in fief, (2) that of the minister who held Legaing in fief, (3) that of the officer in charge of She Win, and (4) that of the official who held Myotha town in fief.¹¹³ Thus, queens and princesses were not looked down upon as women, but ceremonies were held grandly for them.

When the king passed away or was dethroned, his queens were referred to as ex-queens. Moreover, there were some ex-queens of the king who was still in power. In King Singu’s reign in 1777 (1139 ME), the king got enraged at Mahathithura, a minister, dethroned his daughter, the queen of the northern palace and executed

¹¹²See figure (1), (2)

¹¹³“The seating plan for the audience in the West Audience Hall, the 4th day of the waxing moon of Thadingyut, 1242 ME (7 October 1880)”, *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 606 (Henceforth: The seating plan, *pu* 606)

“The seating plan in the West Audience Hall copied from the collection of Wetmasut Wun Min”, Type Script, 1989, Universities’ Historical Research Department, R 7445 (Henceforth: The seating plan, 1989)

Maung Maung Tin, 2005, 16-18

her.¹¹⁴ In the reign of King Bagyidaw, the Pandaung Princess was relegated.¹¹⁵ When a king was dethroned, he and his queens would normally be executed. When King Badon usurped the throne, Hpaungkaza and his queens and King Singu and his queens were executed.¹¹⁶ King Tharyarwady, who rebelled against the king and ascended the throne, executed the chief queen of King Bagyidaw, her younger brother who held Salin in fief and their two daughters.¹¹⁷ Besides, the queen of the western palace was executed in King Tharyarwady's reign, because the king suspected her of involving in the rebellion staged by the prince who held Pyay in fief.¹¹⁸ Therefore, queenship depended on the king; if the king was dethroned or if the king lost faith in her, the queen could not only be relegated, but lose her life. Although they enjoyed certain privileges as queens, they could lose all their privileges and trappings as well as their lives easily. In the reign of King Mindon, however, the king spared the lives of his elder brother King Bagan and queens. Whenever a new king ascended the throne, the queens of his predecessor had to return their regalia to the reigning king. In the reign of King Thibaw, the king ordered the officers of the Byedaik, Shwedaik and Nauk-yon to demand to hand in the gold, silver and diamond jewellery regarded as part of their regalia as well as that not regarded as regalia. The officers had to submit a list of the jewellery and clothes that they had recovered to the king. Some queens, however, failed to hand in everything. For instance, King Mindon's queen who held Seindon in fief failed to hand in everything she should, the officers had to remind her to hand in the remaining things. As she failed to submit all the jewellery, she was detained on 17 October 1878 (the 7th day of the waning moon of Thadingyut, 1240 ME) to prevent her from leaving the palace.¹¹⁹ There were instances in which ex-queens get remarried. In Mindon's reign, for instance, the abbot of

¹¹⁴*Konbaungzet, 1989, 16-18*

¹¹⁵*Konbaungzet, 1989, 507*

¹¹⁶*Konbaungzet, 1989, 523*

¹¹⁷*Konbaungzet, 2004a, 402*

¹¹⁸*Konbaungzet, 2004b, 511*

¹¹⁹*Konbaungzet, 2004b, 320*

Pahkan was made to leave the Order to hold Pahnkangyi in fief and to serve the king as a minister; the king made him marry a former queen of King Tharyarwady who held Thanlyin in fief.¹²⁰ In the same reign, King Wun Mingyi married a lesser queen of King Pagan.¹²¹ Some ex-queens earned their livelihoods by lending money on interest by taking human labour¹²² or gardens¹²³ as collateral. Princesses, however, were never referred to as ex-princesses. They were only referred to as the princess who was the former fief-holder of Taungwin town,¹²⁴ etc.¹²⁵

The wife of a minister could enjoy the trappings and insignia and attend the ceremonies of paying homage held in the West Audience Hall only if the king granted her a place to sit in those ceremonies.¹²⁶ The wife of an official could not be referred to as *gadaw* ('wife') unless the king ordered to do so. If the wife of an officer did not have the right to use the title *gadaw*, she would be referred to as *maya: wundauk maya* (*wundauk's* wife). Only if she was recognized as a *gadaw*, she would be addressed as *wundauk gadaw*. Otherwise, only her name would be used.¹²⁷ The *gadaws* were categorized into *minthami naukne gadaw maya*, *gadaw neya ne*, *shethwe neya ne* and *naukthwe neya ne* and *naukthwe neya ne*, depending

¹²⁰Daw Kyan, "Mindon Min I Hmukyi Matkyi Mya," (King Mindon's Councillors), *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, XLIV, i, 1961, pp. 61-80 (Henceforth: Daw Kyan, 1961)

¹²¹Myo Myint, 1987, 130

¹²²"Thetkayit dated the 6th day of the waxing moon of Second Wazo, 1223 ME, mortgage of human labour by Nga Chit Hpwe and wife Mi Le", *Purabaik* MS, National Library Collection, *pu* 1268 (Henceforth: Nga Chit Hpwe, *pu* 1268)

¹²³Than Tun, 1989, 955

¹²⁴"Thetkayit dated the 8th day of the waxing moon of Tawthalin, 1216 ME, mortgage of paddy land", *Purabaik* MS, Universities' Central Library Collection, *pu* 140599 (Henceforth: mortgage of paddy land, *pu* 140599)

¹²⁵U Tin, 1976, 91

¹²⁶Maung Maung Tin, *Shwenanthon*, 92

¹²⁷U Tin, *Myanmar Min Octchoatpon Sadan Hnint Bodawhpaya Yazathat Akawthaw Ameindawtamgyi* (Administration under the Myanmar Kings and King Bodawhpaya's edit called *yazathat*), Vol. II, Rangoon, Baho Press, 1965, p. 172 (Henceforth: U Tin, 1965)

on their seats in the West Audience Hall.¹²⁸ The palace ladies who had *gadaw* seats were in King Tharyarwady's reign were:

1. wife of Mingyi Maha Minhtin Mingaung,
2. wife of Mingyi Maha Minhla Nawrahta,
3. wife of Mingyi Minhla Maha Minhtin,
4. wife of Mingyi Mingaung,
5. wife of Mingyi Thiri Mahananda Thingyan,
6. wife of Minhla Thinkkaya,
7. wife of Mingyi Maha Minhla Minhtin, and
8. wife of Maha Mingale.¹²⁹

Those who had seats in the Shethwe neya were:

1. wife of Mingyi Maha Yazathingyan,
2. wife of Maha Minhtin Sithu,
3. wife of Minhla Kyawswa,
4. wife of Maha Thihathu,
5. wife of Maha Minkyaw Thihathu,
6. wife of Maha Minhla Thinkkaya, and
7. wife of Maha Minhla Minhtin.¹³⁰

The *gadaws* of *Naukthwe neya* were:

1. wife of Maha Minhla Yaza,
2. wife of Maha Thura Thinkkaya,
3. wife of Minhla Kyawthu,
4. wife of Maha Minhla Nawrahta,
5. wife of Maha Minhla Kyawhtin,
6. wife of Minhla Thirikyawswa,
7. wife of Nemyo Minhtin Kyawswa,

¹²⁸Than Tun, *1988b*, 692-700

¹²⁹Than Tun, *1988b*, 693-94

¹³⁰Than Tun, *1988b*, 695-96

8. wife of Nemyo Sithu Shwedaung,
9. wife of Maha Minhtin,
10. wife of Minkyaw Thihathu,
11. wife of Maha Zeya Thinkkaya, and
12. wife of Thiri Yazakyaw.¹³¹

To sum up, queens of the Konbaung period can be categorized into four principal queens including the chief queen, four *asaungya* queens, junior queens and concubines (*koloat and maungma*). Although it is assumed that the Myanmar king took four principal queens and four lesser queens in accordance with the cosmology, it was only in King Tharyarwady's reign that the king had four principal queens and four lesser queens. Therefore, if the practice of taking four principal and four lesser queens in accordance with Myanmar cosmology was practiced, this practice most probably began only in the reign of Kings Tharyarwady, Bagan and Mindon. Titles were conferred on queens and princesses depending on the king's favour. Apart from the titles normally received by queens and princesses, there was an extraordinary title: the Sinbyushin. There were only two persons who were not kings to use the title Sinbyushin in the Konbaung, and both of them were women. Additionally there were two women whom the king had granted *athet dana su*. However, there were no instances in which these ladies spared the lives of convicts. Hence how the *athet dana su* affected the administration, politics or matters concerning the court is not known. Moreover, there were some ladies who could spare the lives of the convicts who were sentenced to death even though they did not have *athet dana su*. Thus, queens and princesses were not looked down upon as women. They received titles including the title Sinbyushin and *athet dana su* and grand ceremonies were held for them. Thus, they enjoyed a high standard of living and some social prestige and privilege. As it was in the feudal period, the terms of address used and the

¹³¹Than Tun, *1988b*, 700, 01

trappings and insignia differed according to the ranks of the queens, princesses and *gadaw maya*. Although the word *mihpaya* (queen) meant “mother of the citizens” or “the person who founded the kingdom together with the king,” they did not have any duty concerning the State. Their duties only concerned the king. The kings normally granted the queens, princesses and concubines towns and villages in fief. They enjoyed one-tenth of the revenues from the bazaars, toll stations and ferriages and in the towns they held in fief and one-tenth of the judicial fees. Moreover, they received towns and villages in fief in the ceremonies of placing them in their cradles for the first time or in their ear-piercing ceremonies. In addition to towns and villages, the kings also granted them land. Most of the land granted to queens and princesses were around the irrigated tracts. There were some land disputes involving the land held by queens and princesses. The queens had the slaves given to them by the king as well as the slaves they themselves had bought. They lend money on interest, sometimes taking paddy land as pledges. As the queens and princesses held towns and villages in fief, owned land and slaves, and lend money on interest by taking human labour or land as collateral, their income was not bad. The queens, princesses and ladies-in-waiting however had to follow strict rules in the Western Palace. Nevertheless, there were some who violated these rules by having secret love affairs. They were executed when caught. There were many authoresses in the Konbaung period. Although their works were disparaged as *linhmyawtes*, they are important in the history of Myanmar literature because of their artistic merit. Their works reflected the downside of feudalism. The literate level of the palace ladies was seen to be higher than that of other women. However, it seems that they mainly learnt religious literature. Queenship depended on the king. If the king did not trust her or was dethroned, his queen would be executed. Therefore, although the socio-economic conditions the queens and princesses enjoyed were not bad, they could lose their lives any time if there was a change of king.

CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN AND POLITICS

In the Myanmar society, women had too little chance to participate in politics and administration. However, the chief queen and the queen mother could meddle in politics and administration to some extent. In some instances, queens and princesses played a vital role in the nomination of a king. When a king passed away or was dying, his successor would be chosen if the king himself had not chosen his successor himself, if he had not announced his successor formally, or if the successor he had chosen was a reprobate. The chief queen, or the most powerful principal queen if there was no chief queen or a princess- a sister or daughter of the deceased king-would confer with ministers to choose the new king.¹ With regard to queens and princesses playing a part in enthroning a king

1. Poppa Saw Yahan was enthroned after the death of King Tungyit Min in 1173 (535 ME) by the latter's ministers and the chief queen in the Bagan period.²
2. When Thihathu passed away in 1286 (648 ME), Queen Saw and ministers enthroned Kyawswa who held Dala in fief.³
3. When King Maha Thihathura Dhammayaza of Inwa passed away, his

¹U Tin, *Myanmar Min Oatchoatpon Sadan Hnint Bodawhpaya I Yazathat Hkawthaw Ameindawtamgyi* (Administration under the Myanmar kings and King Bodawhpaya's edict called *yazathat*), vol. II, Rangoon, Baho, 1965, p. 213 (Henceforth: U Tin, 1965)

²*Hmannan Maha Yazawindawgyi* (The Glass Palace Chronicle), vol. I, Yangon, Ministry of Information, 2003, p. 223 (Henceforth: *Hmannan*, 2003a)

U Tin, 1965, 213

³*Hmannan*, 2003a, 395

U Tin, 1965, 213

sister Princess Rusipaba and ministers enthroned Myinye Kyawhtin.⁴

4. While King Mindon (1853-1878) was on his deathbed, Queen Sinbyumashin and ministers chose Thibaw as the new king in the Konbaung Period.⁵

Another way for a woman to play a part in politics and administration was to become a monarch herself. However, Shin Saw Pu was the only empress in the history of Myanmar. Nevertheless, there were some women who had to rule the kingdom in the absence of the king. Whenever, he went on military expeditions, King Alaungmintaya (1752-60) of the Konbaung Period delegated the administration of the kingdom to his chief queen, who was to order the crown prince as necessary. This is mentioned in a royal order issued on 1 January 1760 (the 14th day of the waxing moon of Pyatho, 1121 ME).

. . . Unlike any other woman, Alaungmintaya's Chief Queen could be extremely kind and generous. These are indeed the good qualities of a good administrator and she is expected to help her son in the government so that there could be nothing like an oppressive rule. The subject people should be safer from any kind of the oppression done inadvertently by the crown prince who is now ruling the kingdom during the absence of the king. A judgement should be made only after hearing what each of the condending parties has to say. Take care to prevent fire. As a young man, the crown prince might have some remissions in the discharge of his duties. Remind him often of the dangers of fire, etc. Give priority to construction of the moat though workers shall never be pressed to work too hard. Repair the

⁴U Tin, 1965, 213

⁵*Konbaungzet Maha Yazawindawgyi* (The great chronicle of the kings of the Konbaung dynasty), ed. by Maung Maung Tin, vol. III, Yangon, 2004, p. 294 (Henceforth: *Konbaungzet, 2004b*)

U Tin, 1965, 213

Royal Lake. It is only half a day's work to do. Dam the Mu but choose carefully the right place and time to do it.⁶

Later, on 6 March 1760 (the 5th day of the waning moon of Tabaung, 1121 ME), he issued another edict to the following effect:

The Queen and Thirithudhammaraja (the crown prince) are to take special precautions against theft and fire in the city, are to get the city moat and walls constructed expeditiously and properly. Thirithudhammaraja is to be made to inspect the administration of local chiefs-thagyis, kalans, asaws, akut, etc. . . . When the time comes, the Wetto dam was to be dammed up. After completing the construction of the moat before the month of Nayon, three fourth of the people are to be send back, and only one fourth of the workers are to be made to construct the city gates, walls, etc.⁷

Thus, the king handed over his duties for ruling the kingdom to the chief queen. It can therefore be learnt that there were women whom the king relied on by handing over his duties and who assisted the king in ruling his kingdom. Moreover, there were women who could give advice to the kings concerning the affairs of the kingdom. For instance, Princess Setkyadewi who held the title Thiripawara Tilawka Yadana Mingalar Dewi, who was a daughter of King Tharyarwady (1838-1846) and his chief queen and a sister of King Bagan, was the daughter on whom her father relied most. She was not only knowledgeable in Buddhist scriptures including the Tipitaka texts, but also knew Bengali language and Nagari script. Because of her expertise in astrology, her father conferred with her or asked her

⁶Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885, Part Three, A.D. 1751-1781*, Kyoto, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1985, p. 232 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1985b)

⁷Than Tun, 1985, 250

advice on important occasions.⁸ When King Tharyarwady wrested the throne from the previous king, she advised him on how he should be consecrated.⁹ Because of her judiciousness and far-sightedness, King Tharyarwady granted her *athet dana su*.¹⁰ After the death of King Tharyarwady, his son King Bagan ascended the throne. He was not liked by the people. Setkyadewi, a younger sister of King Bagan, desiring more for the welfare of the kingdom than for that of her brother, supported Mindon's palace coup. Thus, Setkyadewi, even though she was a woman, gave priority to the affairs of the kingdom. In King Mindon's reign, she became the chief queen, who had to give advice to the king on two important matters. First she assisted the king with her astrological knowledge when King Mindon seized the throne; later, she advised him to quell the rebels rather than abdicate the throne when Princes Myingun and Padein rebelled against him in 1866.¹¹

Apart from queens, there were women who assumed hereditary offices of *thagyi*, *myedaings*, *ngwegunhmus*, etc. The hereditary chiefs of districts (*taik*), towns (*myo*), villages (*ywa*) were the *taik-thagyi*, *myo-thagyi* and *ywa-thagyi*. In some areas, towns and villages were administered by *pyizos* instead of the *thagyis*. *Pyizo* probably was higher than the *thagyi* in rank.¹² Some towns and villages were ruled by *myedaings*, while there were *myedaings* under the *thagyis* in other villages.¹³ Most of the local administrative offices were hereditary. It can be

⁸Daw Khin Khin Ma, "Myanmar Queens in Historical and Literary Texts," *Selected Writings of Daw Khin Khin ma*, Yangon, Myanmar Historical Commission, 2004, pp. 10-18 (Henceforth: Khin Khin Ma, 2004)

⁹*Konbaungzet Maha Yazawindawgyi* (The great chronicle of the kings of the Konbaung dynasty), Maung Maung Tin, vol. II, Yangon, 2004, p. 294 (Henceforth: *Konbaungzet*, 2004a)

¹⁰*Konbaungzet*, 2004a, 377

Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885, Part Eight, A.D. 1819-1853*, Kyoto, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1988, p. 575 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1988b)

¹¹Myo Myint, "The Politics of Survival in Burma: Diplomacy and Statecraft in the Reign of King Mindon, 1853-1878," Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1987, p. 82 (Henceforth: Myo Myint, 1987)

¹²Yi Yi, "Konbaung Hkit-oo Myone *Oatchoatpon*," (Local administration in the early Konbaung Period," *Pyidaungzu Myanmar Nainggan Sarpe Hnint Luhmuye Theikpan Jane* (Journal of Literature and Science, Union of Myanmar), vol. I, no. ii, May 1968, pp. 343-395 (Henceforth: Yi Yi, 1968)

¹³Yi Yi, 1968, 344

learnt from the *sittans*¹⁴ and royal orders that the hereditary officers in some localities were women.¹⁵ It is mentioned in a *sittan* as follows: “Mi Nyein ruled Taungnauk village; when she was no more, Mi Nyein Ya ruled it; and when she was no more, Mi Ne had charge.”¹⁶ How the office of female *thagyi* in a village was passed onto her younger sisters in succession can be learnt from the following *sittan*:

The *thu-gyi-ma* (female *thagyi*) of Kyabei village, Mi Hpaw, born 1, had charge of this village, when she was no more, her younger sister Ma Nyein Tha had charge. When she was no more . . . Ma Hla Nyi had charge. As she is no more, I, her younger sister, have had charge from the year 1120 (1758) until now.¹⁷

Some other *sittans* reveal how a line of female *thagis* administered a village as follows:

Mi Ta, aged 31, *thagyi* of Debye village, when questioned, stated on the 5th day of the waning moon of Wagaung, 1127 ME (1765): My great grandmother Mi Pu had charge of this village. When she was no more, my grandmother Mi Pon had charge. When she was no more, my mother Mi Paung had charge. When she is no more, I have had charge from 1116 ME (AD 1754) until now.¹⁸

¹⁴A *sittan* is a report on interrogations made from time to time by a central administrative officer to a local headman on the current situation of his area

¹⁵Yi Yi, 1968, 345

¹⁶Frank N. Trager and William J. Koenig, *Burmese Sit-tans, 1764-1826: Records of Rural life and Administration*, Tucson, The University of Arizona Press, 1979, p. 286 (Henceforth: Trager and Koenig, 1979)

¹⁷Trager and Koenig, 1979, 256

U Tin, 1965, 178

¹⁸Trager and Koenig, 1979, 255

U Tin, 1965, 178

Mi Myat Htut, aged 22, *thagyi-ma* of Kakwe village, when questioned, stated on the 5th day of the waning moon of Wagaung, 1127 ME (1765): My great grandmother Mi Pu had charge of this village; when she was no more my grandmother Mi Lon Hpyu had charge; when she was no more my mother Mi Hmwe had charge. When she is no more, I have had charge of it since 1115 ME (AD 1753).¹⁹

On the 2nd day of the waning moon of Wagaung, 1127 ME (1765), the *thagyi* of Myege village, being examined, stated: My great grandmother Ma Nyein Tha had charge of this village. When she was no more, my grandmother Mi San had charge. When she was no more, my mother Mi Wei had charge. When she was no more, I have had charge since 1119 ME (AD 1757).²⁰

In some instances, the office changed from a line of males to that of females. For instance, it is recorded: “. . . Nga Nyo had charge. When he was no more his son Nga Kyaw Tun had charge. When he was no more, as he did not have a son, a woman had to take charge.”²¹ When a hereditary officer passed away without leaving a male heir, his daughter had to assume his office. A royal order was issued on 4 October 1807 ME as follows:

Mi Shwe Oo, the *thagyi-ma* of Kaukywa village, east tract of Hinthada town, (stated): When my father who was the *thagyi* passed away, Nga Shweko was given an appointment letter and made to rule Kaukywa village as *thagyi*. The *sittan* list and letters submitted by Mi Shwe Oo in 1145 and 1146 ME would be cancelled; and Nga Shweko would be made to submit the *sittan*

¹⁹Trager and Koenig, 1979, 256

U Tin, 1965, 1965, 178

²⁰Trager and Koenig, 1979, 214

U Tin, 1965, 179

²¹Yi Yi, “Konbaung Hkit Sittan Mya” (*Sittans of the Konbaung Period*), *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, IXL, i, June 1966, pp. 71-127 (Henceforth: Yi Yi, 1966)

list. According to the letter submitted, Mi Shwe Oo, the daughter of the *thagy* of Kaukywa, was appointed because the *thagy* had no son. Do not revoke the stamp of Mi Shwe Oo. Revoke the stamp given to Nga Shweko. . . .²²

Sometimes, however, the office of a deceased person was transferred to his son-in-law rather than to his daughter.

My father-in-law Nga Chantha Oo had charge of (this village). When he was decrepit, he transferred the office to me, and I had charge.²³

Occasionally, the officer changed from a female line to a line of males. How a son inherited the office ruled by a line of female *thagyis* is recorded as follows:

My grandmother Mi Sein had charge of Sakyu village. When she was no more, my mother Mi Aung had charge. When she was decrepit, I, Nga Chan, her eldest son, had charge.²⁴

How the office of female *thagyis* is transferred to a grandson is mentioned:

My grandmother Mi Twet and Mi Wet had charge of Taungbalu village. When they were no more, Mi Kaung Nyo and Mi Chan had charge. When they were no more, I Nga Pan had charge.²⁵

There were instances in which the office of a *thagy ma*, together with the stamp and appointment order, was conveyed to another person before her death.

²²Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885, Part Six, A.D. 1807-1810*, Kyoto, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1987, p. 495 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1987)

²³Trager and Koenig, 1979, 185

²⁴Trager and Koenig, 1979, 343

²⁵Trager and Koenig, 1979, 262

. . . When she was no more, her daughter Mi I had charge. Before she passed away, Mi I, conveyed the stamp and appointment order to me, and I had charge.²⁶

Therefore, hereditary officers in some localities were women. In some cases, as a *thagyi* had no son, his office which formerly was held by a line of male *thagyis*, was passed on to a daughter. Sometimes, however, the office was transferred to the deceased person's son-in-law. Sometimes, the office ruled by a line of female *thagyis* was transferred to a line of male *thagyis*. In a line of female *thagyis*, it is learnt that the office of a deceased *thagyi* passed on to her daughter or sister. Therefore, it is learnt that women had the same right as men in ruling towns and villages. Although there were towns and villages ruled by women, occasionally they administered the localities under them jointly with their husbands or sons. How a woman and her husband ruled a village can be learnt from the following *sittan*:

Nga Letpa, the great grandfather of my wife had charge. When he was no more, his son Nga Letpan had charge. When he was no more, his son, Nga Ti had charge. When he was no more, my wife who was Nga Ti's daughter and I had charge.²⁷

There are other *sittans* which mention “. . . when he was no more, his daughter Mi Nan and her husband Nga Pan Nyo had charge,”²⁸ “. . . Mi Chin, a female Pyizo and her husband Nga Kyan Paw.”²⁹ How a woman administered the village under her charge jointly with her son is recorded as follows:

²⁶Trager and Koenig, 1979, 286

²⁷Trager and Koenig, 1979, 93

²⁸Trager and Koenig, 1979, 282

²⁹Trager and Koenig, 1979, 175

When Nga Win was decrepit, the office was transferred to his daughter Mi Hlaing and Mi Hlaing's son Nga Myat Tha, who had charge.³⁰

As to female *ngwegunhms*, it is mentioned that “a line of males and a line of females succeeded the office of *ngwegunhms* in the village tracts of Myadaung.”³¹ There also were female *se-eingaungs* “head of ten households.”³² There also are some old poems which allude to female *se-eingaungs*.³³ Thus, women had the same chance as men in administering towns and villages as *myo-thagyi*, *ywa-thagyi*, *myedaings*, *ngwegunhms* and *se-eingaungs*. Sometimes, however, it seems that they had to cooperate with their husbands or sons in administering the localities under their charge to smooth out the administrative work.

As there were women who were involved in politics and administration, there also were women whose marriages were arranged for perpetuating the king's rule, for strengthening the king's position, or for ensuring the country's peace. Matrimonial alliances were important in feudal system. A king cemented his relations with other rulers by marrying off his daughters, sisters or relatives to them, and this strengthened his position. Thus, the kings contracted marriages for political gains. The reigning king married

1. the princesses of royal blood
2. the daughters of hereditary chiefs such as *sawbwaws*
3. the daughters of ministers and royal officials

³⁰Trager and Koenig, 1979, 150-51

³¹Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885, Part One, A.D. 1598-1648*, Kyoto, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1983, p. 328 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1983)

³²The person who had to administer between five and twenty houses was called *se-eingaung* U Tin, 1965, 149

³³Thidar Aung, “Konbaung Hkit Myanma Kyelet Lunehmu Sayaik Thayoathpaw Lungyin Kabya Mya Lelagyet,” (Myanmar Social Life Reflected in the Konbaung Period Poems), M.A. thesis, Mandalay University, 2000, p. 24 (Henceforth: Thidar Aung, 2000)

4. the daughters of the officials who were important in the administration of the kingdom, and
5. the queen of one's predecessor.

Myanmar kings, to elevate themselves to royalty and to distinguish themselves, married princesses of the blood royal. King Alaungmintaya, the founder of the Konbaung dynasty, needed to marry a person of royal lineage to make himself become a member of the royal family. Therefore, the early kings of the Konbaung dynasty-Kings Alaungmintaya and his sons, King Dipeyin and Myedu married the relatives of the previous kings. When the king of Hanthawady, losing the war, presented his daughter to King Alaungmintaya on 22 December 1756 (the 2nd day of the waxing moon of Paytho, 1118 ME), Alaungmintaya installed her as Bago Queen.³⁴ Furthermore, King Alaungmintaya married the daughter of Minye Thihayaz who held Thayet in fief and who was a son of King Taininganwe of the Nyaungyan dynasty in 1757 (the 14th day of the waxing moon of Wazo, 1119 ME), and named her Htutcha Dewi.³⁵ She also was a niece of Maha Dhammayazadipati.³⁶ Moreover, in the reign of his son King Dipeyin, Min Shwekya who held Hkepaung in fief, a niece of Maha Dhammayazadipati, who was taken to Hanthawady, was made Queen of Central Palace.³⁷ In King Myedu's reign, Htutcha Dewi, Maha Dhammayazadipati's niece, was installed as Queen of the Northern Palace, and Min Shwe Pwint and Min Hteit Pan, Maha

³⁴*Konbaungzet Maha Yazawindawgyi* (The great chronicle of the kings of the Konbaung dynasty), ed. by Maung Maung Tin, vol. I, Yangon, Aung Mithazu, 1989, p. 215 (Henceforth: *Konbaungzet, 1989*)

³⁵*A list of the queens, sons and daughters of Kings Alaungmintaya, his son who wa the king who founded Sagaing for the second time, his younger brother King Sinbyushin, his son Nga Singu, the fief-holder of Hpaungka, the founder of Amarapura ad his son the crown prince.* Type Script, Universities Historical Research Department Collection, Accession, No. R 17745, p. 9 (Henceforth: *List of Queens, Sons and Daughters*)

³⁶Tun Aung Chain, "Royal Marriage Arrangements in the Early Konbaung Period," *Myanmar Historical Research Journal*, Number 15, June 2005, pp. 1-29 (Henceforth: Tun Aung Chain, 2005)

³⁷*List of Queens, Sons and Daughters*, 5b
Tun Aung Chain, 2005, 8

Dhammayazadipati's daughters, were elevated to the position of queens.³⁸ Thus, King Alaungmintaya and his sons-Kings Dipeyin and Myedu married princesses of the blood royal to enter into the royal family. Besides, they behaved as if they were members of a royal family by intermarrying. For instance, King Myedy raised his sister/cousin Me Hla to the status of the Chief Queen. He also married the sister of the Chief Queen, Mi Shin who bore the title Thiri Maha Dewi and who held Taungdwingyi in fief.³⁹ In the reign of King Singu Shin Minpaung, the king's sister/cousin became the Queen of the Northern Palace.⁴⁰ As the kings of the Sakya clan intermarry to preserve their lineage of pure blue blood, intermarriages began in the Konbaung period in King Myedu's reign. There were intermarriages among the royal relatives in King Badon's reign too. How he arranged the marriage of his son, the crown prince, for preserving their lineage is mentioned as follows:

Arranging the marriage of brother and sister, Princess Thiri Maha Tilawka Yadanadewi who held Taungdwingyi in fief and who was the daughter of Thiri Pawara Maha Mingalar Yadandewi, the Chief Queen, and Prince Yadana Shwedaung, the eldest son born of Thiri Maha Sandadewi, Queen of the Northern Palace who had been consecrated with a view to preserving the royal lineage of the Sakyans . . .⁴¹

Moreover, how the marriage of the other sons and daughters were arranged for preserving the lineage can be learnt from the following royal order:

Following the custom of the Sakyans of Devadaha, Koliya and Kapilavatthu, the king's son Thado Min Ye Kyaw Gaung, Prince

³⁸*List of Queens, Sons and Daughters*, 9-12

Tun Aung Chain, 2005, 14

³⁹*List of Queens, Sons and Daughters*, 7, 11

Tun Aung Chain, 2005, 13

⁴⁰*List of Queens, Sons and Daughters*, 16

⁴¹*Konbaungzet*, 1989, 586

Pakhan, shall be married to (his half sister) the King's daughter
Princess Shwegu on 13 January 1798 . . .⁴²

Intermarriage had profound effect on the succession. A prince both of whose parents were of blue blood was more entitled to the throne than another prince. This became more important after the reign of King Badon.⁴³ Elevating Me Nu who was not of royal blood to Chief Queen by King Bagyidaw led to Tharyarwady's rebellion, which resulted in the deposition of King Bagyidaw. Therefore, King Bagyidaw's successors only installed princesses of the blood royal as chief queens. Especially, King Mindon made the sister of King Pagan who was the daughter of King Tharyarwady his chief queen rather than choosing Me The.

The daughters and relatives of *Sawbwas* and other hereditary chiefs also were involved in the marriages arranged for political purposes. The *Sawbwas* often offered the hands of their daughters to the Myanmar kings to gain Myanmar king's favours, to admit their inferiority to the Myanmar kings, and to express their loyalty, humbleness and friendliness towards the Myanmar kings.⁴⁴ Sometimes, the rulers presented their daughters to their rivals for averting war and for maintaining peace. This is mentioned in a document as follows:

There were many instances in which rivals became friends and relatives through matrimonial alliances . . . Hoping for prosperity and stability for the kingdom, I presented my daughter, the princess royal, whom I really love . . .⁴⁵

⁴²Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885, Part Five, A.D. 1788-1806*, Kyoto, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1986, p. 631 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1986 b)

⁴³William J. Koenig, *The Burmese Polity, 1752-1819*, Michigan, Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, 1990, p. 178 (Henceforth: Koenig, 1990)

⁴⁴Soe Soe Aung, "Konbaung Hkit Shan Pyine Oatchoatye Thamaing 1752-1885" (A history of administration in the Shan States in the Konbaung Period), M.A. thesis, Mandalay University, 1992, p. 38 (Henceforth: Soe Soe Aung, 1992)

⁴⁵*Konbaungzet, 1989*, 210

Moreover, how a ruler presented his daughter to another ruler as a token of his gratitude is recorded as follows:

Your Majesty! I, the former *sawbwa* of Maukme, may report respectfully. When your majesty learnt that the needy subjects inhabiting the towns and villages around Maukme were suffering great hardship and winding up homeless, you ensured that they would not suffer hardship. You elevated my son Nga Hkunlon and Nga Hkun Hmon to nobility by appointing them as *sawbwa* and *kyamaing* because you were a passionate king. As it is impossible for me to repay you for all your kindness even in thousands of aeons the present aeon or in my future lives, I presented the daughter I love more than any other son or daughter and an elephant . . .⁴⁶

The Myanmar kings also seem to have believed that they could prevent the *sawbwas* from rebelling against them by having their daughters at the royal capital.⁴⁷ To please the *sawbwas*, the Myanmar kings gave titles to their daughters.

Table (XIII). The daughters of sawbwas and the titles given to them

No	Kings	<i>Sawbwas</i> ' daughters	Titles
1	Myedu	Princess of Sandapuri Linzin	Pabawadi
2	Badon	Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Thibaw	Thiri Sanda Mahe
		Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Mogaung	Thiri Myatswa Mahe

To be continued

⁴⁶Taw Sein Ko, *Hluttaw Hmattan* (Proceedings of the *Hluttaw*-Supreme Council), Rangoon, Union of Burma Government Printing and Stationery, 1960, pp. 185-86 (Henceforth: Taw Sein Ko, 1960)

⁴⁷Soe Soe Aung, 1992, 39

	Takuwraw, the eldest daughter of the Chinese king	Thiri Maha Gandara Dewi
	Ekuraw, the second daughter of the Chinese king	Thiri Maha Pyinsala Dewi
	Thankuraw, the youngest daughter of the Chinese king	Thiri Maha Ganda Sanda Dewi
	Daughter of the ruler of Vesali	Thiri Maha Wimaladewi
	Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Theinni	Thiri Myatswa Maha
	Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Mone	Thiri Maha Malla Mahe
	Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Moemyeit	Thiri Wunna Mahe
	Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Mweyin	Thiri Ruza Mahe
3	Bagyidaw	Thiri Gandawati
	Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Tolya	Thiri Myatswa
	Granddaughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Maingmaw	Thiri Thuthama
	Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Etma	Thiri Mingalar
	Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Hninkaw	Thiri Dewitsara
	Daughter of the king of Vesali	Thiri Thusanda Dewi
	Daughter of the king of Zayanta	Thiri Thusanda Dewi
	Daughter of the king of Yani	Thiri Thamawati
4	Mindon	Thiri Thupaba Nanda Mahe
	Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Lecha	Thiri Thinka Mahe

To be continued

Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Thibaw	Thuthiri Ruza
Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Nyangshwe	Thuthiri Thama
The younger daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Nyaungshwe	Thuthiri Onma
Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Maukme	Thuthiri Onma
Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Hkanti	Thuthiri Atha
Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Hkanti	Thuthiri Ketha
Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Hkanti	Thuthiri Nanda
Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Hkanti	Thuthiri Seitta
Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Mone	Thiri Nanda Mahe
Daughter of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Lecha	Thiri Theinga Mahe
Daughter of the <i>sawbaw</i> of Kyaingtaung	Thuthiri Ruza

Source: *Konbaungzet*, 1989, 440, 585; *Konbaungzet*, 2004a, 64, 98, 159, 169; *Konbaungzet*, 2004b, 145, 308-309.

The kings also granted titles and towns in fief to the sons born of the daughters of the *sawbwas*: “The town of Thibaw is granted to Thado Minye Sithu, the Prince of Amyint, a son born of the daughter of the *sawbwa* of Thibaw.”⁴⁸ The king who received the daughter of a tributary ruler would be proud, comparing himself with Sakka (Indra). When Hanthawady was defeated by the Myanmar army in 1765, the king of Hanthawady presented his daughter to King Alaungmintaya, who accepted her “like Sakka accepted Princess Athura.”⁴⁹ A list of the rulers who

⁴⁸*Konbaungzet*, 2004a, 120

⁴⁹*Konbaungzet*, 1989, 219-20

presented their daughters to the Konbaung period kings is given below.

Table (XIV) Daughters (of tributary rulers) presented to the Konbaung period kings

No.	King	The ruler who presented his daughter	Number of daughters presented	Age of the daughter presented
1	Alaungmintaya	King of Hanthawady	1	
2	Myedu	Sandapuri, the ruler of Linzin	1	
		Sammaphathet	1	
		The ruler of Linzin	3	
3	Badon	The <i>sawbwa</i> of Maing Nyaung	1	
		King Uti of China	3	
		The ruler of Vesali	1	
		The <i>sawbwa</i> of Ngwetaung	1	
		The <i>sawbwa</i> of Maingthat	1	
		The ruler of Vesali	3	9, 10
		The <i>sawbwa</i> of Maingtein	1	
		Maharaja, the <i>sawbwa</i> of Manipur	1	13
		Zuparaza, younger brother of the <i>sawbwa</i> of Mainpur	1	8
		The <i>sawbwa</i> of Maingmaw	1	
		The <i>sawbwa</i> of Maingtin	1	
		The <i>sawbwa</i> of Maingbe	1	

To be continued

	The <i>sawbwa</i> of Etma	1	
	The <i>sawbwa</i> of Tolya	1	11
4	Bagyidaw	The <i>sawbwa</i> of Mone	1
		The <i>sawbaw</i> of Lonkyein and Loathkun	3
		The ruler of Zayanta	1 14
		The ruler of Vesali	1 12
		The ruler of Yani	1 13
		The ruler of Ekkabat	2
		The ruler of Assam	2
5	Tharyarwady	The <i>sawbwa</i> of Mone	1
		Kyethbogyi of Ngwedaung Karen	1
		The <i>sawbwa</i> of Thibaw	1
		The <i>sawbwa</i> of Lindaung	1
		The <i>sawbwa</i> of Mainglyet	1
		The <i>sawbwa</i> of Kyaington	1
		The <i>sawbwa</i> of Thibaw	1
		The <i>sawbwa</i> of Nyaungshwe	1
6	Bagan	The <i>sawbwa</i> of Nyaungshwe	1
		The <i>sawbwa</i> of Manlotaung	1
		The <i>sawbwa</i> of Lecha	1
7	Mindon	the fief-holder of Zaga	1 17
		The <i>sawbwa</i> of Nyaungshwe	1
		The <i>sawbwa</i> of Maukme	1
		The <i>sawbwa</i> of Theinni	1 12

To be continued

	The <i>sawbwa</i> of Mone	1	
	The <i>sawbwa</i> of Theinni	1	
8	Thibaw	The <i>sawbwa</i> of Maukme	1

Source: *Konbaungzet*, 1989, 215, 368, 440, 479, 532; *Konbaungzet*, 2004a, 62, 97, 102, 141, 146, 147, 193, 196, 244, 245, 389, 359; *Konbaungzet*, 2004b, 23, 37, 43, 66, 83, 123, 128, 130, 152, 200, 407.

King Badon (1782-1819) was the king who got most consorts presented by his subjects in the Konbaung period. Most of the daughters presented to the Myanmar kings aged between eight and fourteen. That the daughters presented to the Myanmar kings included very young girls can be learnt from a royal order issued on 6 September 1817 (the 12th day of the waxing moon of Thadingyut, 1179 ME) which mentions. “The ears of the Princess of Vesali, whom the king had received, have not been pierced because she was too young.”⁵⁰ The fact that young daughters were presented to the Myanmar kings shows that the tributary rulers did not care much about marriageable age, but presented their daughters to the Myanmar kings to form alliances with the Myanmar kings. In the reign of King Badon, Chinese merchants, the *sawbwa* of Bamaw, and officials from Yunnan and Beijing, purporting to be sent by the Chinese monarch to present his daughter to the Myanmar king, visited the Myanmar king with a view to obtaining special trading privileges.⁵¹ In King Mindon’s reign, the king adored the daughter of the *sawbwa* of Mone, and treated the *swabwa* of Mone like a prince, letting him sit nearest to himself on formal occasions. When the royal seat was moved to Mandalay, King Mindon allowed a hundred families from Mone to settle in the northern part of Mandalay.⁵² Therefore, the tributary rulers improved their

⁵⁰Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885, Part Seven, A.D. 1811-1819*, Kyoto, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1988, p. 424 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1988a)

⁵¹San Oo, “Badon Min Lethtet Einnigyin Nainggan Mya Hnint Setsanye (1782-1819)” (Myanmar’s relations with neighbouring countries in the reign of King Badon (1782-1819), M.A. thesis, Mandalay University, 1995, p. 8 (Henceforth: San Oo, 1995)

⁵²Khin Lay Yi, “Mone Under the Sawbaws in the Konbaung Period (1752-1819)”, M.A. thesis, Mandalay University, 1997, p. 27 (Henceforth: Khin Lay Yi, 1997)

relations with the Myanmar kings and tried to obtain special privileges by presenting their daughters to the Myanmar kings. However, there were instances in which a tributary ruler refused to present his daughter to the Myanmar king. When the Myanmar army marched to Rakhine in King Badon's reign, the crown prince and officials of Rakhine court, believing that they would not be able to repel the Myanmar forces, advised the king of Rakhine to present his daughter to the Myanmar king; but the Rakhine king left the city to avoid presenting his daughter to the Myanmar king.⁵³ Some rulers, however, after presenting their daughters to the Myanmar kings, rebelled against the latter. In the reign of King Thibaw, relations between Myanmar and Mone became tense, and Myanmar forces marched to Mone in February 1881. As the *sawbwa* of Mone, strengthening his following and procuring arms, attacked the towns near Mone-Kyaingtaung, Hopon, Maingpun and Maingpyin, the Hluttaw demanded his elder sister who was a former queen to call the sawbwa to the royal capital. The sawbwa of *Mone*, however, refused to come. Hence, the former queen of Mone fled the Myanmar capital, disguising herself as a pilgrim; she was caught in the Thindigon village near Kyaukse, and was imprisoned.⁵⁴ Therefore, although presenting one's daughter could improve one's relations with the Myanmar king, if one rebelled against the Myanmar king after presenting one's daughter to him, she would be held as a hostage. However, such incidents were rare. Hence, it seems that the tributary rulers achieve their aims in presenting their daughters to the Myanmar kings.

Another type of marriage relationships used for political purposes was the marriages between the king and daughters of his royal officials. As to installing the daughters of royal officials including ministers as queens, it is not known for certain whether the kings married the relatives of the officials after they had been

⁵³*Konbaungzet, 2004a, 24-26*

⁵⁴*Konbaungzet, 2004b, 375*

appointed to their posts or appointed the relatives of their queens as officials. Nevertheless, most of the royal officials were the king's relations by marriage.⁵⁵ Myanmar in the Konbaung period was a despotic monarchy. The kingdom was administered by central and local governments. The capital was administered by the five offices of the *Hlutyon* i.e., the *Hluttaw* or Supreme Council, the *Bye-daik* or Privy Council, the *Sheiyon* or Eastern Court serving as the Criminal Court, the *Nauk-yon* or Western Court serving as court of law for palace ladies, and the *Taya-yon* or Civil Court, while the provinces were governed by *hkayaing-wuns* (provincial governors), *ne myo wuns* (township officers) in cooperation with local hereditary chiefs. All the administrative officials with the exception of hereditary chiefs were appointed by the king. The officials normally appointed at the five offices of the *Hlutyon* were: four *wungyis* of the *Hluttaw*, the *Myinzugyi wun*, the *athi-wun*, four *wundauks* and their assistants. However, the number of the officials of these offices depended on the king's wishes.⁵⁶ The relatives of the queens among the officers of the five offices of the *Hlutyon* were as follows:

Table (XV) The relatives of queens among the officers of the five offices of the Hlutyon

No.	King	Wungyi	Myinzugyi wun	Athiwun	Wundauk	Shwemyo wun	Total
1	Alaungmintaty						
2	Dipeyin	1					1
3	Myedu						
4	Singu	1	1	1			3
5	Badon	1		1			2
6	Bagyidaw	2					2
7	Tharyarwady						

To be continued

⁵⁵Khin Maung Nyunt, "Konbaung Hkithnaung Myanmar Ayashi Lawka 1853-1885" (Myanmar officials of the later Konbaung period, 1853-1885), M.A. thesis, Mandalay University, 1991, p. 7 (Henceforth: Khin Maung Nyunt, 1991)

⁵⁶Khin Maung Nyunt, 1991, 8-9

8	Bagan				
9	Mindon	2	1	2	5
10	Thibaw				

Source: *List of Queens, Sons and Daughters*, 1-43; *Konbaungzet*, 1989, 340, 502, 507, 525; *Konbaungzet*, 2004a, 153, 365; *Konbaungzet*, 2004b, 50, 295.

The officers of the five offices of the *Hlutyon* who were related to the queens were: the Yindaw Wungyi in King Dipeyin's reign,⁵⁷ the minister Maha Thihathura in the reign of King Singu,⁵⁸ the minister Maha Zeyathura in King Badon's reign, the ministers Thado Minhla Nawrahta and Thado Thiri Uzana in King Bagyidaw's reign,⁵⁹ Thado Mingyi Maha Minhla Mingaung, the Yenangyaung Wungyi, Thado Mingyi Maha Sithu, the Laungshe Wungyi, Mingyi Maha Minhla Mingaung, the wundauk who held Myothit in fief, Mingyi Maha Mingaung, the mayor of Mandalay who held Yindaw in fief and Mingyi Maha Minhla Thiri, the mayor of Mandalay in King Mindon's reign.⁶⁰ The relations of the queens among the other officers are given in the following table.

Table (XVI) The relations of the queens among the other officers

No.	King	Wuns and Hmus	Governors of outstation towns	Total
1	Alaungmintaya	3		3
2	Dipeyin	3		3
3	Myedu	3	1	4
4	Singy	4		4
5	Badon	5	1	6
6	Bagyidaw	1		1

To be continued

⁵⁷*List of Queens, Sons and Daughters*, 5b

⁵⁸*Konbaungzet*, 1989, 507

⁵⁹Khin Maung Nyunt, 1991, 23-24

⁶⁰Khin Maung Nyunt, 1991, 7

7	Tharyarwady			
8	Bagan			
9	Mindon	3	4	7

Source: *List of Queens, Sons and Daughters*, 1-43; *Konbaungzet*, 1989, 340, 502, 507, 525; *Konbaungzet*, 2004a, 153, 365; *Konbaungzet*, 2004b, 50, 294.

This table indicates that the number of officers related to the queens increased in King Mindon's reign. As the kings married the relations of queens to consolidate their power, the officials became influential in the palace. Therefore, U Hpo Hlaing, the Yaw Atwin-wun criticised that the king favoured incompetent officers who had presented their sisters and daughters to him.⁶¹ Although the kings normally consulted the *Hluttaw* for appointing provincial governors (*awe hkayaing-wuns*), King Mindon fill a vacancy for *awe myowun* at the advise of his queens; hence the Pahkan Mingyi disregarded his order.⁶² In King Mindon's reign, Maung Toe, captain of the South Dawe Musketeers, who was a younger brother of the Hkunnit Ywa Queen, tried to be overbearing towards the ministers, the Pabe Mingyi had to "punish him by elbowing."⁶³ Therefore, it seems that the officers related to the queens increased in King Mindon's reign, and they became influential in the palace. However, as the kings installed the daughters and relatives of royal officials as queens because of their trust in them, they would be removed from their positions if the king did not trust them anymore. In King Singu's reign, the king had his Northern Queen executed and removed her father Minister Maha Thihathura from office because he did not trust them.⁶⁴

⁶¹Hpo Hlaing, *Yazadhamma Thingaha Kyan*, Rangoon, Htein Win Press, 1960, pp. 92-93 (Henceforth: Hpo Hlaing, 1960)

⁶²Mawpi Saya Theingyi, *Myanmar Wungyi Hmugyi Mya Athtoatpatti* (Biographies of Myanmar ministers and royal officials), Rangoon, Aye Aye Publishing House, 1967, p. 22 (Henceforth: Mawpi Saya Theingyi, 1967)

⁶³Mawpi Saya Theingyi, 1967, 53-54

⁶⁴*Konbaungzet*, 1989, 540

The kings also married the daughters and relatives of the persons who were important for politics and administration. By studying the genealogies of the chief queens of the Konbaung period, whom their ancestors were, why they became queens, etc. can be learnt. A study of the genealogies of principal queens indicates that the chief queens and the principal queens of the early kings of the Konbaung period were the relations of Min Thiri Yantaza, Commander of the 1000 Shields of Sipottara. The relationships between the queens of King Alaungmintaya to Badon and Min Thiri Yantaza were as follows:

Table (XVII) Relationships between Myanmar Kings (from Alaungmintaya to Badon) and Min Thiri Yantaza

No	King	Queen	Queen's parents	
			Father	Mother
1	Alaungmintaya	Chief Queen	Min Thiri Yantaza, Commander of the 1000 Shields of Sipottara	
		Queen of the Northern Palace	Sitha Mingyi	Me Kaung San, daughter of Min Thiri Yantaza, Commander of the 1000 Shields of Sipottara
2	Myedu	Chief Queen	Myowun (governor) of Yadanatheinga	Me Hnaing San, daughter of Min Thiri Yantaza, Commander of the 1000 Shields of Sipottara
		First Queen of the Central Palace	Sitha Mingyi	Me Kaung San, daughter of Min Thiri Yantaza, Commander of the 1000 Shields of Sipottara
		Queen Thiri Maha Dewi who held Taungdwingyi in fief	The myowun of Yadanatheinga	Me Hnaing San, daughter of Min Thiri Yantaza, Commander of the 1000 Shields of Sipottara

To be continued

3	Singu	First Queen of the Northern Palace	Athi-wun	Daughter of Me Hnaing San, daughter of Min Thiri Yantaza, Commander of the 1000 Shields of Sipottara
4	Badon	Chief Queen	Commander of Awa	Maha Atula Dewi, daughter of Min Thiri Yantaza, Commander of the 1000 Shields of Sipottara

Source: *List of Queens, Sons and Daughters*, 1-21.

According to this list, all the principal queens of Kings Alaungmintaya, Sinbyushin, Singu and Badon were close relatives of Min Thiri Yantaza, Commander of the 1000 Shields of Sipottara, the Sitha Mingyi and the *myowun* (governor) of Yadanatheinga. Min Thiri Yantaza probably was an influential person around Shwebo.⁶⁵ His son-in-law, the Sitha Mingyi had been a minister with the title Sithu Kyawhtin Mingyi Kyawswahtin in the reign of the king who was taken to Hanthawady.⁶⁶ The relationship between King Alaungmintaya and Sitha Mingyi can be learnt from the Konbaungzet Maha Yazawin. When Innwa fell, Sitha Mingyi fled to the Kwes. That King Alaungmintaya received the envoys sent by the Kwes because Sitha Mingyi was in their hands,⁶⁷ that Alaungmintaya placed Sitha Mingyi among his sixty-eight comrades,⁶⁸ and that he made his forces attack the Kwes only after the Kwes had sent Sitha Mingyi to Moatsobo⁶⁹ indicate how important the Sitha Mingyi was for Alaungmintaya. Therefore, the kings of the early Konbaung period installed the daughters of Min Thiri Yantaza, Commander of the 1000 Shields of Sipottara and of his sons-in-law the Sitha Mingyi and the *myowun* of Yadanatheinga who were influential local

⁶⁵Koenig, 1990, 190

⁶⁶Konbaungzet, 1989, 31

⁶⁷Konbaungzet, 1989, 22

⁶⁸Konbaungzet, 1989, 29

⁶⁹Konbaungzet, 1989, 31

administrative officials, as queens with a view to consolidating their hold on power and rehabilitating the kingdom. The descendents of Min Thiri Yantaza were installed as queens only till the reign of King Badon.

In addition, Myanmar kings often marry the consorts of their predecessors. How a reigning king married a queen of his predecessor is mentioned in the Glass Palace Chronicle as follows: “The queen who had been consecrated is never disparaged by later kings.”⁷⁰ A new king could secure his position by marrying a consort of his predecessor whose position had been secure, and could win over her friends and relatives to his side.⁷¹ In the Kongaung period, King Dipeyin installed the Queen of Minywa, one of King Alaungmintaya’s consorts, as Queen of Northern Palace;⁷² King Myedu made Htutchá Dewi, another queen of King Alaungmintaya, Queen of the Northern Palace;⁷³ and King Singu installed Shin Minhla, a concubine of King Sinbyushin, as the second Queen of the Northern Palace.⁷⁴ The Minywa Queen was a younger sister of Minhla Pyanchi, the Minywa Bo. When Minhla Pyanchi came to his side, King Alaungmintaya married his sister.⁷⁵ This Minywa Queen Sanda Mahe was the queen who was allowed to accompany King Alaungmintaya when he went on a military expedition to Hanthawady.⁷⁶ She probably became friendly with Alaungmintaya’s son Dipeyin and the Myanmar commanders on this trip.⁷⁷ It seems that King Dipeyin reinstalled her as Queen of the Northern Palace because she was an important queen in his father’s time. Htutchá Dewi, King Alaungmintaya’s consort was the niece of Maha Dhammayazadipati. She seemed to have accompanied King Alaungmintaya when he marched to Ayudhya. When

⁷⁰*Hmannan Maha Yazawindawgyi* (The Glass Palace Chronicle), vol. II, Yangon, Ministry of Information, 2003, p. 60-61 (Henceforth: *Hmannan, 2003b*)

⁷¹Khin Khin Ma, 2004, 13

⁷²*List of Queens, Sons and Daughters*, 5b

⁷³*List of Queens, Sons and Daughters*, 9

⁷⁴*List of Queens, Sons and Daughters*, 16

⁷⁵*Konbaungzet, 1989*, 81

⁷⁶*Konbaungzet, 1989*, 111

⁷⁷Tun Aung Chain, 1989, 111

Alaungmintaya passed away while laying siege to Ayudhya, Dipeyin and Htutcha Dewi seemed to have attempted to seize the throne. MINGAUNG Nawrahta reported to Dipeyin after Alaungmintaya's death that Htutcha Dewi and Myedu had been chatting.⁷⁸ Therefore, Htutcha Dewi seemed to have a relationship with Myedu for political gains when she accompanied King Alaungmintaya on his march to Ayudhya.⁷⁹ This probably was the reason for King Myedu to install her as Queen of the Northern Palace when he ascended the throne. The reason for King Singu to take the hands of Shin Minhla, King Myedu's concubine, however is not known. Thus, the Myanmar kings contracted marriages for consolidating their hold on power and administration and for the prevalence of peace and prosperity in the kingdom. Similarly, those who presented their daughters, sisters or relatives to the kings as if women were chattels, did so because they wanted to gain special privileges from the kings, because they were indebted to the kings, or because they wanted to express their loyalty to the kings. Therefore, although there were some women in Myanmar society who played a part in politics and administration, their number compared to that of the queens was too low, and women were mostly exploited for political gains. It seems that the kings used women mainly for securing their positions rather than for maintaining peace and stability. It can therefore be concluded that women had too little chance to become involved in politics.

The number of queens increased probably because the kings married women for

⁷⁸*Konbaungzet, 1989, 312*

⁷⁹Tun Aung Chain, 2005, 14

political gains. The number of queens each Konbaung period king had can be seen in the following table.

Table (XVIII) The number of Queens of the Konbaung period

No	King	Number of Queens
1	Alaungmintaya	7
2	Dipeyin	6
3	Myedu	14
4	Singu	11
5	Badon	57
6	Bagyidaw	10
7	Tharyarwady	18
8	Bagan	24
9	Mindon	50
10	Thibaw	3

Source; *List of Queens, Sons and Daughters*, 1-44; U Tin, 1976

Thus, the number of queens of each king had increased since King Badon's reign. The kings came to have more wives to secure their positions, which in turn brought about palace intrigues. As there were no rules for succession, the sons of all the queens had a right to inherit the throne, and this led to problems concerning succession. Queens became involved in palace intrigues, and influential queens and ministers tried to control the court. In the reign of King Mindon, as neither the Chief Queen nor any of the principal queens-the queens of the Northern Palace, the Central Palace, and of the Western Palace-had a son, the sons of all the other queens had their eyes on the throne, and their struggle for power brought about rebellions and massacres. When King Mindon named his brother Prince Kanaung Crown Prince, the relationship between his brother and sons probably deteriorated. Therefore, the king arranged the marriage of his son who was born

of the first queen of the Taung Shweye Zaung and who held Myingun town in fief and the Princess of Taung Nyo, Prince Kanaung's daughter. However, the tension never abated; and on 30 July 1866 (the 7th day of the waning moon of second Wazo, 1228 ME) Prince Myingun and Myingondaing rebelled against the king, and Prince Kanaung lost his life in this rebellion.⁸⁰ After the death of Prince Kanaung, King Mindon did not choose another successor; and it seems that his queens began to involve in the conspiracies. As there were no specific rules for succession and as there were many queens, their sons vied for power, which led to palace intrigues. That was why nineteen princes and princesses including the king's sons, daughters and grandchildren who were entitled to the throne were killed.

With regard to the parts played by women in power struggles, there were also some women who tried to wrest control of the kingdom. There were three women who were famous for trying to gain influence in politics, administration and palace affairs in the Konbaung period. They were Me Nu, King Bagyidaw's Chief Queen, Sinbyushin, Mindon's consort who was the Queen of the Central Palace, and Suhpayalat, the Chief Queen of King Thibaw. King Bagyidaw (1819-1838) installed Me Nu, an inhabitant of Hpalangon,⁸¹ as his chief queen with the title Thiri Pawara Maha Yazeinda Yadana Dewi.⁸² The king also conferred the title Thado Dhammayaza and Thiri Thumaha Dhammayaza on her younger brother,⁸³ and granted the town of Salin in fief. Taking advantage of King Bagyidaw's ill-health, Me Nu and her brother Princess Maung O meddled in the affairs of the kingdom, and this brought them into conflict with King Bagyidaw's younger brother, the Prince of Tharyarwady.⁸⁴ To defuse the tension, the Prince of

⁸⁰*Konbaungzet, 2004b*, 230

⁸¹P. R. Langham, Carter, "Queen Me Nu and Her Family at Palangon," *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, XIX, ii, 1929, pp. 31-35 (Henceforth: P. R. Langham, 1929)

⁸²*Konbaungzet, 2004a*, 168

⁸³*Konbaungzet, 2004a*, 219, 333

⁸⁴*Konbaungzet, 2004a*, 333

Tharyarwady asked his son to marry a daughter of Maung O; but Maung O refused to marry off his daughter to the prince. Then, Queen Me Nu increased her following heightened the tension. When Minister Maung Hkaing, who had good relationship with foreigners passed away on 13 August 1835, the Chief Queen and her brother appointed U Wa, who did not get on well with foreigners, as *wungyi* in Yangon, at the port of which he would have to deal with foreigners.⁸⁵ The problem came to a head when Maung O demanded Prince Tharyarwady to surrender Nga Ye, accusing that Nga Ye, the village headman of Nga Sinku Oan within the jurisdiction of Bagan, was associating with criminals and had been visiting Prince Tharyarwady's residence and that Prince Tharyarwady and his younger sister the Princess of Bagan had been colluding with their servants.⁸⁶ This triggered Prince Tharyarwady's rebellion. When Tharyarwady came to the throne, he had Maung O, the fief-holder of Salin, detained.⁸⁷ Me Nu was conspiring with her brother Maung O and former ministers who were in jail to strengthen their following and to stage a coup when King Tharyarwady went to Yangin Hill. However, their attempts failed, and were executed on 12 May 1840 (the 12th day of the waxing moon of Kason, 1202 ME).⁸⁸

Queen Sinbyushin was a daughter of King Bagyidaw and his Chief Queen Me Nu. She became Queen of the Central Palace with the title Thiri Tilawka Mahayadana Dewi when Mindon ascended the throne.⁸⁹ When King Mindon's Chief Queen passed away, the other queens probably competed with one another to take her place. Especially, Queen of the Central Palace was casting covetous eyes on the position of the Chief Queen to try to find a prince who would succeed Mindon and rule the country as her puppet. King Mindon did not raise her to the position of

⁸⁵W. S. Desai, *History of the British Residency in Burma, 1826-1840*, Rangoon, University of Rangoon, 1939, pp. 234-35 (Henceforth: W. S. Desai, 1939)

⁸⁶*Konbaungzet, 2004a*, 334

⁸⁷*Konbaungzet, 2004a*, 363

⁸⁸*Konbaungzet, 2004a*, 401-02

⁸⁹*Konbaungzet, 2004b*, 114

Chief Queen; instead, giving her a white elephant, he made her known as Sinbyushin.⁹⁰ When King Mindon was dying, Queen Sinbyushin collude with Kin Wun Mingyi to place Prince Thibaw on the throne⁹¹ and to make her eldest daughter Suhpayagyi his Chief Queen.⁹² When King Mindon passed away, they enthroned King Thibaw as they had planned, and Sinbyumashin tried to control him with the help of the ministers.

Sinbyumashin had three daughters, and her second daughter had a hunger for power and, like her mother, she tried to control the palace. On 30 October 1878 (the 6th day of the waxing moon of Dazaungmon, 1240 ME), King Thibaw installed Suhpayagyi and Suhpayalat-Sinbyumashin's daughters-as principal queens.⁹³ Suhpayalat strove to become the only chief queen and the power behind the throne. She tried to hamper the attempts of Sinbyumashin and ministers to control King Thibaw,⁹⁴ removing some royal officials from their positions and appointing new officials who would be loyal to her. Thus, U Hpo Hlaing, the Yaw Atwinwun, was removed from office, and Kin Wun Mingyi U Kaung was sidelined.⁹⁵ Taingda Wungyi, who was friendly with Queen Suhpayalat and whom the queen trusted, was installed as a minister. He was merely the Commander of the South Dawe Force in King Mindon's reign. He moved rapidly up the ladder of administrative machinery in King Thibaw's reign-first as a Thaye Wun, then a Privy Councillor and in charge of the industry, next the *Thamidaw Wun* and finally, Wungyi. Moreover, U Shwe Maung, *Atwin Wun* in charge of Boatmen's Units who was friendly with Suhpayalay and loyal to her, also got several promotions. He was only a *Hpaung Wun*, officer in charge of Royal Barges in the previous reign. In Thibaw's reign, he became *Shwemyodaw Wun*, Mayor of the

⁹⁰Konbaungzet, 2004b, 292

⁹¹Konbaungzet, 2004b, 294-95

⁹²Myo Myint, 1987, 71-72

⁹³Konbaungzet, 2004b, 323

⁹⁴Ni Ni Myint, "Queen Suhpayalay," *Selected Writing of Ni Ni Myint*, Myanmar Historical Commission, Yangon, 2004, pp. 80-96 (Henceforth: Ni Ni Myint, 2004)

⁹⁵Khin Maung Nyunt, 1991, 51

Royal Capital, *Hlethin Wun*, Officer in charge of Boatmen's Units, and *Atwin Wun* in charge of the navy.⁹⁶ On 23 May 1880 (the 1st day of the waning moon of Nayon, 1242 ME), King Thibaw with the title Thiri Pawaraditya Lawkadipati Pandita Maha Damayazadiyaza and Queen Suhpayalay with the title Thiri Pawara Maha Yazeindabi Thudamayadana Sandadewi were consecrated.⁹⁷ The coronation ceremony was held from 13 May 1881 (the 1st day of the waning moon of Kason, 1243 ME) to 19 May 1881 (the 7th day of the waning moon of Kason, 1243 ME), and King Thibaw and Queen Suhpayalay assumed the titles Thiri Pawara Wizayanandaya Thati Lawkadipati Pandita Mahadamayazadiyaza and Thiri Pawara Tilawka Maha Yazeindadipati Paduma Yadanadewi, respectively.⁹⁸ On 7 March 1882 (the 4th day of the waning moon of Dabaung, 1243 ME), the King and the queen took formal possession of the city.⁹⁹ These ceremonies were held to display the power of the king and the queen to the public, and they demonstrated a shift in the focus of power from Queen Sinbyumashin and her lackeys to King Thibaw and Queen Suhpayalat. At a council of war held in order to decide whether or not to wage war on the British, Sinbyumashin and Kin Wun Mingyi advised against taking military action. However, Suhpayalat, not realizing the military might of the British, decided to fight the war.¹⁰⁰ It is surprising to note that the three women who strove to gain political influence or, in other words, who changed the destiny of the kingdom were a chief queen, her daughter and granddaughter. Me Nu tried to control the court with the help of her brother; however, her attempts failed and both Me Nu and her brother were executed; she was disparaged as the person responsible for the outbreak of the First Anglo Myanmar War and the person who paved the way for British annexation of Upper Myanmar. Her daughter Sinbyumashin also tried to control the Myanmar court by placing her puppets on the throne. Her attempts also failed because her daughter

⁹⁶Khin Maung Nyunt, 1991, 47-48

⁹⁷*Konbaungzet*, 2004b, 355

⁹⁸*Konbaungzet*, 2004b, 366

⁹⁹*Konbaungzet*, 2004b, 378

¹⁰⁰Ni Ni Myint, 2004, 87-88

Suhpayalat thwarted them. Suhpayalat also was criticised as the person responsible for the outbreak of the Third Anglo-Myanmar War, responsible for facilitating the British annexation of Upper Myanmar, and for ordering the army to fight the British without realizing their military might.¹⁰¹ Thus, their destinies were the same: all three of them strove to gain political influence and all of them failed to achieve their objectives. Me Nu and Suhpayalat, in their pursuits of power, meddled in military matters without having military skill or experience. Although they sought power, it is learnt that they only wanted to control and influence the king. It seems that they did so to secure their positions because, unlike other queens, they were of humble origins who had risen to fame and power only after becoming chief queens.

In short, the part played by women in politics and administration in the Konbaung period Myanmar society was insignificant. The women who became chief queens or queens had some influence in politics and administration. However, there were times in which women played an important role in choosing a new king when a king had passed away or when the reigning king was dying. In such cases, the Chief Queen or the highest ranking queen, a sister or daughter of the king and ministers would decide who would succeed to the throne. In the later Konbaung period, Queen Sinbyushin enthroned Thibaw. Another way for women to play a leading role in politics was to take the throne themselves. However, Shin Sawpu was the only female monarch in Myanmar history. Even though they did not become monarchs, some women were involved in administration like men as hereditary officers: *myo-thagyis*, *ywa-thagyis*, *mye-daings*, *pyizos*, *ngwegunhmus*, *se-eingaungs*, etc. Sometimes, however, they had to perform their duties as hereditary officers jointly with their husbands or sons. Besides local administration, some women were involved in the central government. When King Alaungmintaya went on military expeditions, he handed over his duties to

¹⁰¹Khin Khin Ma, 2004, 17

administer the kingdom to his chief queen. Moreover, some women had to advise the king on the affairs of the kingdom. King Tharyawady granted his daughter *athet dana su* for advising him on the affairs of the state. As King Mindon installed her as his Chief Queen, she continued to give advice to Mindon. As there were women who were involved in the administration of the kingdom and the provinces, there were women who were pawns in the king's attempt to secure his position and to maintain peace. Marriages arranged for political gains can be divided into five categories. By offering their daughters, sisters and relatives to the reigning king, tributary rulers and royal officials tried to become members of the royal family. Thus, women became pawns in political movements. Moreover, women were installed as queens or removed from their positions as queens for political reasons. Due to such marriages of convenience, the number of queens increased, and palace intrigues ensued. Women tried to gain influence in the court. There were three women who strove to gain influence in politics, administration and palace affairs. However, their attempts were only to gain power and were not successful; they just achieved notoriety. The number of women who played a leading role in Konbaung period politics, compared to that of women who were exploited for political gains, was insignificant. Most of the women were just pawns in political movements. Thus, in the Konbaung period, women were just pawns in politics who became queens if they succeeded, though most of them were captured.

CONCLUSION

On the surface, women in Myanmar society formed a depressed class. However, it seems that women had some rights in the Bagan period society: they could become *thagywema* (affluent women), could inherit the possessions of their husbands after their death, and could become administrative officers like men, and had the right to education. Strikingly, they could even become *bhikkhunis* or female members of the Buddhist Order. Therefore, they did not lose any rights concerning religion. They could recite the *parittas* together with monks, and could serve as witnesses in the donations made to the Religion. Although women could become bhikkhunis in the Bagan period, they could not do so in the later periods. In the Inwa period, women, like men, could become donors of religious establishments. As women were included among the witnesses in the records of donations, it seems that women also were respected. In the Taungoo period, famous authoress like Yazadatukalya emerged. In the Nyaung Yan period, a wife could divorce her husband if she was dissatisfied with him, could inherit her husband's estate after his death and could engage in the administration of towns and villages. However, as the law prohibited the sale or mortgage of a son while allowing that of a daughter when the parents were having financial difficulty, women became the victims of economic hardship. Women enjoyed certain rights in the Konbaung period too. Compared to Myanmar's neighboring countries, women in Myanmar society enjoyed some privileges in the Konbaung period. There were instances in which girls got married before they reached the age of fifteen. The percentage of underage marriages, however, was very low. There were underage marriages till the British Colonial period. The undesirable consequences of child marriages were the girls' inability to manage household

affairs, and the increase in the number of child widows. Nowadays, the law prescribed the marriageable age of girls at eighteen. Unfortunately, there were no such law in the reigns of Myanmar kings. In the Konbaung period, birth rate was low and infant mortality rate was high. This probably was due to women's lack of knowledge in health matters. That there were no hospitals, doctors or midwives, and that no educative talks on childbirth were given probably also were the reasons. Polygamy was practiced in the Konbaung period. Although women disliked their husband's practicing polygamy they have to tolerate them.

Konbaung period women enjoyed the same rights with men concerning divorce and some property rights. Although there were laws for the protection of women's rights, classism was practiced as the country was under the feudal system. Concerning the women's rights to education in the Konbaung period, the literacy rate was lower among women than men. Women enjoyed better rights to receive education in the Colonial period. Many educated women were produced in the Colonial period, and women even studied vocational subjects. Although prostitution was legal in the Konbaung period, it has been prohibited by law since the colonial period. The women who were sold or mortgaged into servitudes formed the lowest and most oppressed social class. The people mortgaged their wives or daughters to solve their financial problems. According to the mortgage deeds, some female slaves could be treated as lesser wives by their owners. There, however, were no human mortgages in the Colonial period. Although there is no slave trade nowadays, there is human trafficking. Women's organizations have been formed, human trafficking is prohibited, and people are being educated.

Queens and princesses were at the apex of the palace ladies in the Konbaung period. In the Konbaung period, titles including the Sinbyushin title, and *athet dana su* were granted to queens and princesses, and ceremonies were held for queens and princesses. Therefore, the social status of palace ladies could not have

been low. Queens and princesses received towns and villages in fief, land, slaves, and presents given to them when they were placed in the cradle for the first time or when the ear-piercing ceremonies were held, and they also received the property of the deceased persons who died without leaving heirs. They also lent money on interest by taking land and human labour as collateral. Hence, they earned quite well. Although the socio-economic conditions of the palace ladies were not bad, they had no freedom; they had to follow stringent rules. They had to marry the persons chosen by the king. In the colonial period, however, queens and princesses got married with common citizens. Although they received pecuniary support from the government in the Colonial period, as they did not have enough money, they had to borrow money from other people, sometimes mortgaging their possessions.

The roles played by women in politics and administration were very limited. Queen Shin Sawpu, was famed as an able woman in administration. Although the roles played by women in politics and administration were very limited, a woman who was elevated to chief queen or queen could engage in administration and politics to some extent. Compared to the number of queens, however, the number of women who played leading roles in administration and politics was too low. Women did not have much chance to play a leading role in politics; they mostly were exploited by the kings for securing his position and consolidating his hold on power and for seeking peace by marrying them. There were three women who sought after power either to gain influence over the kings or the affairs of the state. However, as they did nothing for the country and the society, their attempts failed and they just achieved notoriety. In the colonial period, however, women could play better roles in politics, and were recorded as the women who strove for regaining independence. Although women enjoyed certain rights in the Konbaung period society, they did not have much chance to engage in politics.

To conclude, there were almost no law that were promulgated to persecute women. Women did not receive different treatment in social, economic, political and religious matters. Apart from military service, women could be engaged in every sector. The number of educated women in the colonial period was and also nowadays is higher, and women's involvement in various sectors has increased, and their importance has become greater. So it can also be concluded that it would be the same in the future.

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