CHAPTER 3

POLITICS OF MODERNIZING EDUCATION: GENDERED NOTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE, POWER AND AUTHORITY

Women and Modern Educational Institutions

The first few decades of the twentieth-century saw the extraordinary rise in female literacy, education, employment and student and political activism in colonial Burma. Prior to the early twentieth-century, Burmese society regarded female formal education as unimportant or, at best, as secondary to male education. Except for women's prominent presence in the economic sphere, male dominance and leadership otherwise characterized the political, religious and cultural spheres of pre-1920s' Burma. In a customary practice comparable to the colonial administration's disqualification of women from civil service posts, commanding public figures such as the monks, village headmen, and court officials were principally men.[104] While Burma was once ruled by a queen, Queen Shinsaw Pu, she was a rare, famous, female, public figure and an exception that proved the norm.[105] The exclusion of women from the *sangha* since the thirteenth century[106] prohibited women from partaking in monastic events except as audience members and donors. Women's ability to author and transmit knowledge was severely limited by the fact that the *sangha* functioned as the primary producer and provider of knowledge in pre-colonial Burma: the *sangha*

[104] Village headmanships as well as chieftainships in the Shan hill states have been known to descend in the female line, though infrequently.
[105] Queen Shinsaw Pu, the daughter of King Razadarit (1385 – 1423), held the throne based in Pegu from 1453 to 1472. Incidentally, the throne passed to Shinsaw Pu upon her father's death because, owing to palace massacres undertaken to purge any rivals to the throne, no male descendant of Razadarit was left alive (Harvey, *History of Burma: From the Earliest Times to 10 March, 1824, the Beginning of the English Conquest*, 117). She is the only female ruler of a major state in Burma.
[106] The Burmese *sangha* ceased to ordain women in the thirteenth century.

represented the only educational institution in pre-colonial Burma, and literati, artists, and experts on medicine, arithmetic and astrology all belonged to the *sangha*.[107]

In addition, public functions and communal events—namely, the alms giving ceremonies (*ahlu*) and festivals (*pwe*)—were conducted by monks and in monasteries, and such performances as dramas, dances, puppet plays that took place outside of the immediate domain of the *sangha* nonetheless revolved around Buddhist texts and were performed and disseminated by men; women participated as viewers, spectators, and consumers.[108] As the Burmese phrase for Buddhist nuns (*thila-shin* or "keeper of the precepts") aptly suggests, Burmese women contributed to the *sangha* primarily as followers and patrons of Buddhism. Although *thila-shins* abided by monastic rules and lived as renunciants, they led their religious lives as subsidiaries to the male *sangha*, supporting them in their daily activities (by cleaning the grounds of the monastery or cooking for the monks, for instance) and receiving donations from the general public. This is not to say that the female population in Burma was sequestered behind closed doors and away from the public gaze, but rather that prevailing gender norms in Burma thus deterred a woman from seeking professional expertise and becoming a political, religious, social and cultural authority. The notion of female leadership, guidance, administration and authorship appears to have held little or no social currency.[109]

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[107] Hiroko Kawanami, *Worldly Renunciation: The World of Burmese Buddhist Nuns*, 268-69, 81-82; U Thant Tut, မြန်မာနိုင်ငံဘုန်းတော်ကြီးကျောင်းပညာရေးသမိုင်း (Yangon: Oung Pin Poun Hneik Taik, 1980), 100-37. For a succinct discussion in English of the *sangha*'s role in creating, transmitting and preserving knowledge and culture in Theravadin societies, see Yoneo Ishii, *Sangha, State, and Society: Thai Buddhism in History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 24-27.
[108] Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma*, 150-57.
[109] The mainstream scholarship on Burma argues that female economic agents defied these norms. I would argue, given the dearth of substantial scholarship on gender relations in pre-colonial Burma, that no conclusive claims can be made on whether the restrictive views on female leadership and authority applied to female agents in the market or in the economic sphere in pre-colonial Burma.

Between 1910 and 1930, however, the population of literate female and of female students in educational institutions expanded at a phenomenal rate. The appointment and employment of Burmese women in the medical, legal, bureaucratic, educational, and journalist professions followed the rapid rise in the number of educated Burmese women. The nascent group of educated and professional Burmese women participated in politics as students and political activists for the first time in Burmese history. What were the conditions that normalized and widely advocated the idea of female literacy, education, professionalization and activism in Burma? Who advocated the changes and for what reasons?

The chapter addresses these questions by examining in particular the development of modern educational institutions. I examine not only the institutional framework within which transformations in female education took place but also the emergence of new gender sensibilities which were fundamental to the transformations. I argue that the educational reforms that the British administration undertook in order to modernize Burma's education system provided, among other things, the necessary institutional structure for the expansion of female education which, in turn, was crucial to the growth of Burmese women cultural intermediaries. Interestingly, Furnivall asserts that modern schools and universities offered Burmese students little by way of modern education. He claims that modern educational institutions failed to pass on knowledge about the modern world to Burmese students and that they represented "nothing but factories for the mass production of cheap clerks."[110] The chapter reveals, in contrast, that modern education in colonial Burma triggered the most radical transformation in the history of female education and professional specialization in Burma.

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[110] Furnivall, *An Introduction to the Political Economy of Burma*, xv.

This is not to recycle an oversimplified meta-narratives of modernization wherein modern (i.e., secular) education, which includes women, replaces the predominantly monastic (i.e., religious) education system, which excludes women. The chapter shows, rather, that scholars of Burmese history have uncritically adopted the colonial administration's problematic categorization of the predominantly monastic pre-colonial system of education in Burma as religious education, which is then counterposed against modern or secular education. My descriptive analysis of the role that modern educational institutions played in transforming the nature of women's relationship to the production of knowledge, intellectual and popular alike, thus makes two contributions: it illustrates that the equation of "modern education" to "secular education" is a misleading conflation and it begins to account for the gender-specific ways that processes of colonialism and modernization affected the men and women in Burma.

Education in Pre-colonial Burma

Prior to the early twentieth-century, Burma's education system had been administered exclusively through Buddhist monastic schools until the British administration's introduction of governmentally and privately supported lay and mission schools—vernacular, Anglo-vernacular and English education offered outside of monasteries by lay people, or what was referred to as "modern education" by the Burmese.[111] In 1887, there were 3,975 monastic schools in Lower Burma.[112] In his study on monastic education Burma from the seventeenth century to the present, Khammai Dhammasami also notes that even in early twentieth century Burma, when monastic schools survived only in towns, many village monasteries still retained

[111] See Khammai Dhammasami, "Between Idealism and Pragmatism: A Study of Monastic Education in Burma and Thailand from the Seventeenth Century to the Present" (Ph. D. Dissertation, St. Anne's College, Oxford University, 2004), 4; U, *The Making of Modern Burma*, 241-44.
[112] Tut, မြန်မာနိုင်ငံဘုန်းတော်ကြီးကျောင်းပညာရေးသမိုင်း, 153.

learned monks who served as essential vehicles of primary and secondary vernacular education.[113] The principal goal of Buddhist monastic schools, at least in theory, was to encourage students to study the Buddhist texts thoroughly for their moral and spiritual development and to prepare them for their ordination. In actual practice, however, the majority of students intended to return to lay life after their study at the monasteries which represented the only place where education was available. Monasteries therefore offered a general course of study catered to such students that nonetheless required the study of Buddhist scriptures but included subjects such as literature, arithmetic, medicine and astrology.[114] Monasteries offered the general course of study at primary and secondary levels of education, at the end of which the students decided whether to pursue higher monastic education—i.e., a specialized curriculum devoted to the study of the "the great texts" or the *Pali-nikaya*—available mainly in royal monasteries based in the capital or in large cities.[115] There were no formal examinations until the late nineteenth century,[116] no fees for education and monastic schools exercised extensive freedom in designing their own syllabi and in assessing the needs and desires of the students. As Dhammasami aptly points out, monastic education "served the educational needs of society as well as those of the [monastic] Order."[117]

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[113] Dhammasami, "Between Idealism and Pragmatism," 5.

[114] Buddhist monastic education in Burma was by no means a "religious" education, despite the fact that it is often counterposed against "secular," anglo-vernacular education. See below for a detailed discussion about the problems of identifying education in pre-colonial Burma as "religious." For a description of traditional monastic education in Burma and the impact of colonial administrative policies on it, see Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma*, 150-61.

[115] Dhammasami, "Between Idealism and Pragmatism," 5.

[116] Centralized government tests of monastic education through formal examinations (*Pathamapyan* examinations), which involved the assessment of organizational skill and bureaucratic procedures, came into existence in the seventeenth century. But it was not until the nineteenth century, under King Mindon (1853-1878) that both the monarch and the monastic order (*sangha*) accepted formal monastic examinations. From the seventeenth century up to the mid-nineteenth century, the *sangha* vehemently resisted the formal examination system, favored by the monarch. Dhammasami attributes the *sangha*'s resistance to formal examinations to its resentment of the monarch's interference in ecclesiastical scholarship (Ibid., 11).

[117] Ibid., 4-5.

Female education, however, was not considered a need of Burmese society or of the *sangha* in pre-colonial Burma. While records of Buddhist nuns (*thila-shin*) in Burma date back to as early as the seventh century, the Buddhist monastic order in Burma (*sangha*) has represented an exclusively male domain since the thirteenth century.[118] Monastic education was thus given almost exclusively by male monks to predominantly male pupils.[119] The following description by Hiroko Kawanami of the difficulty that nuns experienced in attaining education prior to the twentieth century illustrates the nature of female education in general in pre-colonial Burma:

> From the earliest days, however, the pursuit of higher education presented a major struggle and hardship for the nuns. There was social prejudice and general hostility, and traditional norms disadvantaged women in many subtle ways. Teachers and masters of the scriptures were predominantly monks, and not many of them in those days were open-minded enough to accept the notion of providing women with advanced scriptural education. Even if they agreed to teach, the male dominated environment was said to have been intimidating and made the nuns' life unnecessarily difficult. They had to find ways of making themselves invisible by staying at the far end or back of the lecture hall, or at times hide on the other side of a curtain so that they would not meet the eyes of the monks. There were neither toilet facilities nor accommodation for women, and they had no lay assistants who would cook or help them during the period of intensive revision before the exams.[120]

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[118] *Thila-shins* exist in Burma to this day but they have not been recognized as part of the official religious community that is the *sangha* since the thirteenth century. See the chapter entitled "Scholastic Lineage and Education of Nuns" in Kawanami's forthcoming book (Kawanami, *Worldly Renunciation: The World of Burmese Buddhist Nuns*, 267-318).

[119] See Tut, မြန်မာနိုင်ငံဘုန်းတော်ကြီးကျောင်းပညာရေးသမိုင်း.

[120] Kawanami, *Worldly Renunciation: The World of Burmese Buddhist Nuns*, 281. As Kawanami points out, historical records indicate that *thila-shins* did in fact play an important role in the education of female members of royal families who were not allowed to have any contact with men outside the family. It seems women of the court often asked for advice of these nuns concerning Buddhist ceremonies, religious activities, donations and social etiquette. Nunneries located near Sagaing in Upper Burma, furthermore, have served as centers of female education where nuns taught Burmese language, Pali grammar and texts from the Buddhist literary cannon to girls from nearby villages. Some of these nunneries allegedly comprised of more than three hundred nun students in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Kawanami's study makes apparent, however, that these educational centers for girls were by and large confined to Upper Burma in the early twentieth century and by no means served as educational institutions for the majority of women in Burma (Kawanami, *Worldly Renunciation: The World of Burmese Buddhist Nuns*, 271-76).

Monastic education in pre-colonial Burma in other words espoused a flexible curriculum open to students of diverse interests and backgrounds except in so far as women were concerned. Female education was given low priority by Burmese society as a whole.

Administrative records from the 1910s suggest that the low regard for the education of women prevailed in turn-of-the-century Burma. Take, for instance, the opinions of the Deputy Commissioner of Bassein, G. F. Arnold, on the matter of female education. In June 1916, the Secretary to the Government of Burma requested Commissioner Arnold to present his opinions on the best methods of expanding and improving primary, secondary, and higher female education in Burma.[121] Arnold's resoundingly negative response, detailed in a nine-page letter, claimed that there was little, if any, need, desire, purpose or resources for reforming female education in Burma at the time. While Arnold concurred with the view of the Government of India that "it is inadvisable to place restrictions on any kind of useful education for girls," he vehemently opposed reforming female education in Burma.[122] According to Arnold, people in Burma were unwilling to finance the expansion of female education. He "cites" the inferiority of women to men in both Burmese and Buddhist societies—noting in particular the *sangha*'s hostile stance towards female education—as though these perceptions were established facts, and claims that there was no local interest in or support for female education, except amongst Burmese Christians. He explains:

> The [Burmese] desires his sons to be educated to get appointments as I have said above. I do not think that he even desires these for his daughters nor do I think that many Burmese girls want them… Indeed it is difficult to say what should be regarded as the ideal in female

[121] G. F. Arnold, 9 July 1916, "Letter from the Deputy Commissioner of Bassein to the Secretary to the Government of Burma (Rangoon)", NAD 1/15 (E) Acc # 4033, . Arnold indicates that the letter was written in response to a letter, dated 12 June 1916, from the Secretary to the Government of Burma mentioned above.
[122] Ibid., 7.

> education for the Burmese. The ordinary Burmese girls seem intent on selling in the bazaar, flirtation, wearing jewels and visiting *pwes*[123] and occasionally the pagodas… I doubt if hygiene as an ideal would attract any of them, even though made to include nursing. Possibly coeducation might have some advantage in giving more scope for flirtation… The fact seems to be that most Burmese girls do not aim at anything which the usual education given in school is likely to get for them.[124]

He finds the idea of female education so contrary to Burmese notions of propriety and gender hierarchy as to conjecture that "if any Burmese women become sufficiently educated to desire to push female education I think it most probable that such persons would be out of touch with their own people."[125] He adds that even if more Burmese women were to receive education, there is no prospect of such educated women, unlike educated Burmese men, finding employment.

Ironically, Deputy Commissioner Arnold's assertion about the irrelevance of female education to people in Burma was followed almost immediately by the most transformative two decades in the history of female education in Burma, during which period female education expanded at a phenomenal rate.

Modern and Co-Educational Public Instruction in Colonial Burma

The British colonization of Lower Burma signaled the end of exclusively monastic and male education and the establishment of educational institutions that admitted female students. Beginning in 1868, the colonial administration introduced a co-educational system of public instruction that provided primary and secondary education[126] through two main types of schools, each distinguished by the language of

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[123] As explained in the introduction, *pwe* means variously public function, communal event, mass celebration, festival, fair, public entertainment, or a show open to all.
[124] Arnold, "Letter from the Deputy Commissioner of Bassein to the Secretary to the Government of Burma (Rangoon)", 6-7.
[125] Ibid., 5.
[126] Secondary and primary education comprised of nine standards: the first two were lower primary, the next two upper primary; the fifth, sixth and seventh formed the middle school (or lower secondary) and the last two were upper secondary. A school was considered "public" under any of the following

instruction and examination: Anglo-vernacular (i.e., English and Burmese) and vernacular.[127] While girls' schools also existed, co-education was by and large the norm in Anglo-vernacular and vernacular schools: ninety-five percent of the female student population attended co-ed vernacular schools, and there were three times as many female students in co-ed institutions as in girls' schools.[128] Female students took the same courses as their male counterpart.[129] In 1870, there were only 22 lay schools officially recognized by the government in Burma but by 1890 the number had increased to 704 and then to 2,653 by 1910. Out of the 1,400 public secondary schools in Burma in 1913, thirty-three were European, 142 Anglo-vernacular, and 1,225 vernacular. Most of the 7,725 public primary schools were vernacular, with the

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conditions: the course of study corresponds to the standards prescribed by the Government of Burma or the University of Calcutta; it is inspected by the Education Department; it presents pupils at the public examinations held by the Education Department, by Calcutta University, or by the Education Syndicate of Lower Burma (James George Scott, *Burma: A Handbook of Practical Information*, Rev. ed. (London: A. Morning, 1911), 164. The schools classified as "private schools" included Pali schools, unregistered monasteries, schools teaching the Koran, schools for girls, Tamils, and the Chinese (Government of Burma, *Fifth Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma for the Years 1912-13 to 1916-17* (Rangoon: Superintendent Government Printing and Stationery, 1917), 30).

[127] The administration also recognized the following types of public schools: "European" or English schools, girls' schools, Muslim schools, training schools and technical institutions. Europeans schools, while they were recognized as public schools, were not open to the general public. The percentage of non-European students admissible was fifteen until 1913 when it was reduced to ten. At the same time however these schools admitted, without regard to the ten percent limit, Jewish, Armenian and Parsee children "whose parents were certified to have adopted European modes of life" (Burma, *Fifth Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma*, 24). The reason for this tenuous policy apparently had to do with the colonial administration's growing fear that "the dilution of the European element by too large an admixture of children whose vernacular is not English would tend to lower the standard of English, already none too high, in the European schools" (Burma, *Fifth Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma*, 24). The schools classified as "private schools" included Pali schools, unregistered monasteries, schools teaching the Koran, schools for girls, Tamils, and the Chinese (Burma, *Fifth Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma*, 30).

[128] In government reports on public instruction, the majority of schools are labeled as "schools for boys." As the 1912-1917 quinquennial report indicates, however, this classification is highly misleading because there was no clear distinction between boys' schools and girls' schools: "The majority of vernacular schools are mixed schools and they are classified as schools for boys or schools for girls according as boys or girls happen to be in the majority"(Burma, *Fifth Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma*, 8). It furthermore notes that "large numbers of boys are found in girls' schools and very much larger numbers of girls in boys' schools" (Burma, *Fifth Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma*, 22).

[129] In Anglo-Vernacular middle schools, however, girls were required to take domestic economy and needlework in lieu of geometry unless they were in boys' schools or were preparing for college entrance examinations (Burma, *Fifth Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma*, 23). I will discuss this issue in more detail below.

exception of sixteen Anglo-vernacular schools and two European schools.[130] The number of monastic schools remained more or less between 2,300 and 2,500 from 1880 until the 1920s when it began a steady descent. In 1934, the number of monastic schools in Burma had decreased drastically to 928.[131] The *sangha* thus lost its prerogative as the sole provider of education in Burma.

The earliest administrative records available pertaining to female education in Burma indicate that the phenomenal impact of the development of Anglo-vernacular and vernacular education on Burmese women became evident at least by the 1910s. The 1917 quinquennial government report on public instruction, for instance, notes the impressive increase in the number of Burmese girls in attendance at public institutions and adds: "While the actual increase is greatest in the [primary schools], the rapid rate of increase in the higher stages indicates a greater demand for a more advanced education of girls."[132] The population of female students in educational institutions private and public alike rose astoundingly between 1910 and 1930: the number increased by 45,697 or sixty-one percent during 1911 and 1921, and by 99,260 or eight-two percent during 1921 and 1931. The majority of the female student population in Burma, furthermore, was Buddhist and thus presumably predominantly Burmese: A government report on public instruction in Burma published in 1923[133] indicates that Buddhist girls represented seventy-six percent of the female population of secondary school students and eighty-seven percent of primary school students [See Tables !2 & 13].[134] As the 1931 Census Report indicates, this enormous increase in

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[130] Ibid., 8-9, 13, 56-58.
[131] Tut, မြန်မာနိုင်ငံဘုန်းတော်ကြီးကျောင်းပညာရေးသမိုင်း, 180-81.
[132] Burma, *Fifth Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma*, 4.
[133] I refer to this report rather than the 1921 or the 1931 census reports because they do not provide the religion or ethnicity of the female student population in Burma. See Government of Burma, *Sixth Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma for the Years 1917-18 to 1921-22* (Rangoon: Superintendent Government Printing and Stationery, 1923).
[134] For reasons I have been unable to determine, the government reports on public instruction use "race and creed" as analytical categories and the census reports use "religion." Unlike census reports that

the size of Buddhist female student population matched the increase in Buddhist female literacy figures; the proportion of literate females aged five years and over increased by sixty-percent between 1911 and 1921, and by forty-seven percent between 1921 and 1931.[135] The census report of Burma for 1921 explained the phenomenal increase in the literacy rate of Buddhist women in the decade 1911-1920 as "the passing away by death of the older less literate generations, and their replacement by more literate successors at every year of age."[136] By the mid-1930s, there was an unmistakable literacy and education gap between the generation of females under thirty years of age and the older generation of women in Burma.

Table 12: Number of Female Students in Burma on March 31 1922 Classified According to "Race" or "Creed"

	European & Anglo-Indian	Indian Christian	Hindu	Muslim	Buddhist	Others
Secondary Education						
High School	1,849	1260	183	96	1,623	103
Middle School						
1. English & Anglo-Vernacular	732	1569	269	72	1,274	86
2. Vernacular	38	2,491	235	1,087	29,211	1
Primary Education	165	6,035	466	2,868	63,913	8
TOTAL	2,784	11,355	1,153	4,123	96,021	198

Source: Government of Burma, *Sixth Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma For the Years 1917-18 to 1921-22* (1923), 104-105.

record a literacy rate for each religious group (e.g. Buddhist, Animist, Christian, etc.), reports on public instruction use such categories as "Europeans and Anglo-Indians" and "Indian Christians."

[135] The number of literate females aged five years and over (for every one thousand literate persons) increased from seventy in 1911 to 112 in 1921, then to 165 in 1931 (India, *Census of India, 1931: Part One*, vol. XI (Burma) (Rangoon: Office of the Superintendent Government Printing and Stationery, 1933), 170). Even the Hindu and Muslim females in Burma, who did not approach the Buddhist females in literacy, were increasingly literate. For instance, eight-three percent and sixty-three percent of literate Hindu and Muslim females born in Burma, respectively, were aged thirty or younger.

[136] India, *Census of India, 1921*, 176. That the rise in female literacy had slowed down by 1931, despite a considerable thirty percent increase, supports the explanation in 1921.

Table 13: Number of Schools & Pupils According to the Returns of the Education and Survey Departments (1900 – 1931)

Class of Schools	1930 - 1931			1920-1921			1910-1911			1900-1901	
	# of Schools	Male Pupils	Female Pupils	# of Schools	Male Pupils	Female Pupils	# of Schools	Male Pupils	Female Pupils	# of Schools	Pupils
Grand Total	25,524	518,540	219,727	25,806	437,112	120,467	23,080	355,543	74,770	17,620	307,614
Public Institutions	7,567	331,963	213,438	7,824	240,049	116,329	6,581	188,450	71,032	4,502	159,932
University & Collegiate Education	3	1,414	178	2	283	48	2	261	17	2	140
Secondary	1,464	146,647	74,849	1,440	89,703	40,106	876	61,003	17,280	329	30,000
• Anglo-Vernacular	273	52,202	17,040	187	22,978	7,876	134	21,679	4,309	-	-
• Vernacular	1,191	94,445	57,809	1,253	66,725	32,230	742	39,324	12,971	-	-
Primary	4,995	165,649	136,550	5,752	139,776	75,461	5,448	124,377	53,291	4,091	127,638
Training	94	1,376	968	13	43	149	12	236	139	-	-
Pali	966	13,427	625	586	9,114	386	217	2,009	120	80	2,154
Reformatory	1	92	-	1	112	-	1	105	-	-	-
Others*	44	3,358	268	30	818	179	25	459	185	21	538
Private Institutions	17,957	186,577	6,289	17,982	197,063	4,138	16,499	167,093	3,738	13,118	147,682
Advanced	319	2,973	275	75	1,547	-	-	-	-	-	-
Elementary	17,400	175,506	3,356	17,715	185,361	2,154	16,479	166,299	3,649	-	-
Others**	238	8,098	2,658	192	10,155	1,684	20	794	89	-	-

Source: Compiled from the *Census of India* (1921), 188; *Census of India* (1931), 171

* E.g., Law, Medical, Forest, Veterinary, Technical, Engineering, Industrial

** Schools not conforming to departmental standards

Women also participated notably in the nascent but rapidly growing college education in Burma. In 1911, the combined population of students at the two colleges in Burma—Baptist College (otherwise known as Judson College) and the Government College, both located in Rangoon—totaled only 279, out of which seventeen were female [Table 13].[137] The number of male college students had doubled (581) by 1922, but far more impressive was the number of female college students, which had more than tripled to fifty-six.[138] Although female university students still comprised merely twelve percent of the total university student population in 1931, the number of women university students had nonetheless increased by ten-fold over the first few decades of the twentieth-century [Table 13]. The population of Burmese women among college students paralleled the rapid expansion of female education at large. Only six of the fifty-six female students in 1922 were Buddhist (compared to twenty-two Europeans and Anglo-Indians and twenty-five Indian Christians), and in 1924, only one Burmese woman had received a Bachelor's degree.[139] But by 1928, the number of Buddhist women in college exceeded any other ethnic group: there were sixty-three Buddhist women versus thirty-three European and Anglo-Indian and fifty-four Indian Christian.[140]

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[137] The Judson College was founded as the Rangoon Baptist College, a branch of Calcutta University, in 1894 and operated at an intermediate or Junior College status until 1909 when it became a full-fledged degree institution. The Government College was likewise established as an affiliate of the University of Calcutta in 1876. The two colleges became constituent institutions of Rangoon University, established in 1920. Beginning in 1920, students of both colleges were subject to examinations set by Rangoon University rather than by the Calcutta University (Myat Khaing, "American Baptist Missionaries' Activities in the Delta in the Thirties" (M. A. Thesis, Yangon University, 1971), 28-29.

[138] Burma, *Sixth Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma*, 18, 54.

[139] Mu, "မြန်မာ.လွတ်လပ်ရေးကြိုးပမ်မှု တွင်ပါဝင်သော အမျိုးသမီးများ၏တက္ကာ," 20; Khaing, *The World of Burmese Women*, 154; Saw Moun Nyin, ဗမာအမျိုးသမီး [Burmese Women] (Yangon: Thiha Poun Hneik Htaik, 1976), 78.

[140] Government of Burma, *Annual Report on Public Instruction in Burma for the Year 1927 - 28* (Yangon: Office of the Superintendent Government Printing and Stationery, 1929), xix.

To be sure, the increase in the matriculation of Buddhist (i.e. Burmese) female college students is miniscule compared to the population of Burmese girls in primary and secondary schools which were considerably higher. But in order to fully appreciate the significance of the "minority" of Burmese female students in 1920s' Burma, one needs to consider the various challenges that a Burmese woman faced in pursuing college education. The cost of college education itself posed a major problem. In 1922, the average annual college fee per student was ninety-six and a half rupees, which constituted roughly fourteen percent or one seventh of the average annual income of a Burmese family (702 rupees). The average fee for sending a child to a middle school, in contrast, cost less than two rupees for vernacular schools and twenty-six rupees for English and Anglo-vernacular schools.[141] In addition, beginning in 1920, every matriculated college student was required to reside in a university hall of residence unless she lived with her parents. In order to send a child to a college, the parents therefore had to reside in Rangoon or be able to afford the child's expenditure of living in Rangoon.[142] It is not hard to imagine that this requirement presented not only a financial constraint but also a cultural dilemma for the Burmese parents who did not reside in Rangoon: their daughter was effectively to be uprooted from her familial environment and moved to a place where they would no longer be able to keep watch over her even as she commingled with a community of similarly unfettered young men and women. The growth of a community of Burmese female college students, despite its modest size, was hardly a trivial development.

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[141] Burma, *Sixth Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma*, 104, 13; Government of India, *Cost of Living, Rangoon* (Calcutta, India: Government Printing Press, 1921), 106-10.

[142] Upon consolidation of the Judson College and the Rangoon College into Rangoon University in 1920, Rangoon University became a residential university and required every matriculated student to reside in a University hall of residence unless she lived with her parents (Burma, *Sixth Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma*, 20-21). The university reforms that took place in 1920 will be detailed below in a discussion of student boycotts that were concerned precisely with the decision to residentialize Rangoon University.

It seems Deputy Commissioner Arnold, rather than the advocates of female education, was out of touch with ordinary Burmese people, male and female alike. Contrary to his claims about the futility, incompatibility, and improbability of educating Burmese women, female education had clearly mustered enough interest and support to expand rapidly and enormously (the possible reasons behind the support and interest are explored in the latter half of the chapter). Arnold furthermore miscalculated the benefits that co-education offered to Burmese women. This is the subject of the next section in which outlines what Burmese women did with their education.

The Appearance of Women Cultural Intermediaries

The rise in the population of educated Burmese women signified the beginning of the appointment and employment of women in the medical, legal, and educational professions.[143] The 1920s generated the first female doctors, barristers-at-law, school principals and educational administrators in Burma. Census records from 1921 and 1931 show that the population of women employed in the professions of public administration, law, medicine, education, and journalism increased by thirty-three percent during the decade. Especially notable was the ninety-six percent and sixty-four percent increases in the field of medicine and education, respectively.[144] Another remarkable development during this period concerned Daw Mya Sein who in 1931, at the time a superintendent of a national girls' high school, was appointed as one of the

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[143] The first woman doctor in Burma was Daw Saw Sa who received her Medical Service Diploma in 1911. Daw Pwa Hmi and Daw May May Khin, the first Burmese women barristers-at-law were appointed in 1927. The year 1924 marked the year when Daw Mya Shwe and Daw Mya Yin became the first women educational administrators in Burma, followed by the first Burmese woman vice principal, Daw Hmi, in 1927. See Nyin, ဗမာအမျိုးသမီး, 70 - 81, 88-95, 221-38.

[144] In 1921, there were 17,760 women in the professions listed above as opposed to 23,588 in 1931. In medicine and education, in particular, the numbers rose from 3,332 to 6,540 and 2,955 and 4,857 respectively. See India, *Census of India, 1921*, 246-55; India, *Census of India, 1931: Part One*, 145.

only two female delegates to the League of Nations and at the same time as the only woman member of the delegation to the Burma Round Table Conference[145] held in London.[146] In general, however, there were relatively few women working in public administration: only 388 out of 44,867 workers in public administration in 1931 were women.[147] Yet the paucity of women stemmed not from a shortage of female applicants for posts in public administration but from the reluctance of the colonial administration to employ women. The colonial government was inclined to appoint men rather than women in administrative posts and maintained that "the employment of married women should be resorted to as little as possible."[148] Government records from the early 1930s indicate that despite this unsympathetic view held by the government, applications for administrative and clerical posts by Burmese women kept mounting and forced colonial officials to reconsider their position on the appointment of women in government offices.[149]

In addition to lawyers, doctors, administrators, and educational instructors, the 1920s and 1930s produced women editors and writers who, for the first time in Burmese history, joined men in the ranks of the most prominent and widely read

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[145] The chief concern of the 1931 Burma Round Table Conference was the question of whether or not to extend the Minto-Morley reforms, granted to India in 1910, to Burma. The Minto-Morley reforms were formulated between 1905 and 1910 when the Indian administration was directed by John Morley, the Secretary of State for India, and Lord Minto, the Viceroy. The reforms, if applied to Burma, would have led to the admission of more Burmese to a larger and more direct share in the government of their country and in all the affairs of their country. For more information on the Minto-Morley reforms, see M. N. Das, *India under Morley and Minto: Politics Behind Revolution, Repression and Reforms* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1964), 7, 261-63.

[146] Josef Silverstein, "Introduction," in *The Administration of Burma* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), ix.

[147] India, *Census of India, 1931: Part One*, 145.

[148] Secretary to the Government of Burma, 16 February 1932, "Question Regarding the Appointment of Women to Clerical Posts under Government", NAD 1/15 (D) 2916, . The subject of colonial policies concerning the employment of women in civil service will be discussed in detail below.

[149] Commissioner of Mandalay Division, 27 October 1931, "Letter to the Chief Secretary of Burma, Home and Political Department", NAD 1/15 (D) 2916, . In the letter, the commissioner suggests that the government needs to consider not only the increasing demand from educated Burmese women for appointment in government offices but also the increasingly favorable view of clerks in his office towards the employment of women in clerical posts.

authors. Take, for instance, the most distinguished woman writer and editor in Burma, Daw Amar, who rose to fame in the mid-1930s. Daw Amar, known as Luthu Daw Amar,[150] began her career as a writer as a student at Rangoon University when she wrote for such popular periodicals as *Kyi Pwa Yei Magazin*, *Bama Gyanay*, *Tekkhato Magazin, Oway Magazin,* and *Ngan Hta Lawka* under various pseudonyms of Khin Hla Win, Mya Ma Nu and Amar. Her breakthrough in the literary world came in 1935 when she wrote about Nehru in *Kyi Pwa Yei.* Equally important to her career was the publication of her translation of Maurice Collis' *Trials in Burma* in 1938 in a leading newspaper *Thuriya*. She married Luthu U Hla, the owner of *Kyi Pwa Yei*, in 1939 and wrote for the magazine until the start of the Japanese occupation of Burma in 1942. Daw Amar founded the *Luthu* newspaper and journal with her husband in 1945 and 1946 respectively and worked as the editor for the journal for over twenty years during which period she wrote her critically acclaimed social critiques under the pseudonym "Father Aung Naing." [151]

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[150] The prefixing of the title of newspapers and periodicals to the names of editors and columnists is a practice that remains common to this day. The practice appears to have derived from the fact that there are no family names or last names in Burma. In order to distinguish famous or public figures, who often possess matching names, an identifier of some sort would be prefixed to their names. All eminent monks (*sayadaw*, usually translated as "abbot"), for instance, were distinguished by the name of the town or village in which respective sayadaw's monastery was based. The first portion of the names of the following monks thus refers to the geographical location of the monastery of which the sayadaw was in charge: Ledi Sayadaw, Insein Sayadaw, Sitagu Sayadaw, Thamanya Sayadaw, etc. Similarly, famous writers in Burma are set apart by the newspapers and periodicals for which they write or, if they do not write for newspapers or periodicals, by their literary masterpieces.

[151] Her mother, Daw Su, was a member of the Burmese Women's Association. Daw Amar grew up in Mandalay, where she went to the American Baptist Mission school from the third to the ninth grade, and then completed her tenth grade at the national secondary school. She moved to Rangoon in 1935 to begin her college education at Rangoon University, which was abruptly cut short by her participation in the 1936 University Student Strike as a result of which she was expelled. Though translation projects from English to Burmese have been Daw Amar's forte, she is a prolific and versatile writer who has published articles, short stories, and novels both in Burmese and in English. Her most famous works include *Socialist Thaing Pyi Mya Tho* (1963) and *A Nyein*, Vol. I & II (1973), for which she was awarded a prestigious Burmese literary prize. She has also published several biographical books, the most well-known of which is the biography of Thakin Kodaw Hmaing (1976). Kyan, "အမျိုးသမီးများနျင့်စာနယ်ဇင်းလောက," in စာနယ်ဇင်းသမိုင်းစာတန်းများ (Yangon: Sabei Bei Hman, 1978), 306-08; Nyin, ဗမာအမျိုးသမီး, 286-94; Yin Yin Sein, "လူထုဒေါ်အမာစာစုစာရင်း" (M.A. Thesis, Yangon University, 1978).

Many women in colonial Burma, like Daw Amar, not only wrote for some of the most popular newspapers and periodicals but also owned and edited their own papers. The first female-owned newspaper in Burma, *Tharrawaddy*, was published under the management of Daw Pwa Shin, the newspaper's proprietor and chief editor, in 1919. The first "women's magazine," *Kyidawset,* was published in 1922 by Dagon Khin Khin Lay, who not only edited but also wrote the entire magazine herself.[152] Shortly after *Tharrawady* and *Kyidawset* were launched, a more popular weekly newspaper, *Independent*, was founded and published in 1925 by Independent Daw San. Prior to establishing the *Independent*, Daw San was a teacher at a national school in Upper Burma and wrote political articles for another magazine, *Pyinya Alin*. Upon the British government's issuing of a decree that all school teachers must apply for permission from the commissioner of education to write in newspapers and magazines, she resigned from her teaching position and set up the *Independent*. Much like its contemporary counterparts, the assorted contents of *Independent* included news, articles on politics in Burma, serialized fiction, poetry, astrology, gossip, and other items of interest. But the *Independent* was one of the first periodicals in Burma to publish a "Ladies'" column.[153]

Last but not least, modern education served as a vehicle through which Burmese women began to participate in the incipient culture of student activism. Two particular events have marked the history of student activism in colonial Burma: the two university strikes of 1920 and 1936, known as "University Boycotts."[154] The first

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[152] For information on Daw Pwa Shin, Daw San and Daw Khin Khin Lay, see Nyin, ဗမာအမျိုးသမီး, 260-67, 310-12.

[153] Maw, "The Role of Myanmar Women in the Nationalist Movement, 1906 - 1942", 54.

[154] The two university boycotts have received considerable scholarly attention from historians who have traced the beginning of Burmese nationalist consciousness back to the first student boycott in 1920. For historical accounts that characterize the boycotts as watersheds in the history of nationalism in Burma, see Steinberg, *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History*, 286; Mu, "မြန်မာ့လွတ်လပ်ရေးကြိုးပမ်းမှုတွင်ပါဝင်သော အမျိုးသမီးများ၏တကျွာ"; Khin Win Kyi, " 1939-1942 အတွင်းမြန်မာနိုင်ငံထုတ်စာနယ်ဇင်းများမှရရှိသောသမိုင်းဆိုင်ရာများ" (MA thesis, Yangon University, 1983); Khaing, *The World*

University Boycott began on 5 December 1920 in protest of the *University of Rangoon Act, 1920* (hereafter "the University Act") which came into effect on 1 December 1920.[155] The University Act, whose stated object was "the establishment and incorporation of a centralized teaching and residential University at Rangoon,"[156] entailed three basic measures: it unified the existing Rangoon and Judson Colleges, required every matriculated undergraduate student of a constituent college, unless she lives with her parents, to reside in a university hall, and implemented a mandatory one-year preliminary course for students who had not shown proficiency in English in their School Final Examination.[157]

Four days after the University Act came into effect, approximately 500 students who resided at the residence halls of Rangoon and Judson Colleges left their dorms to undertake a university strike. An additional number of students (estimated at about 100) who lived outside of the residence halls joined the boycotters the following morning by refusing to attend classes.[158] Altogether, between sixty and seventy-five percent of college students in Burma participated in the strike.[159] The main objection of the boycotters to the University Act, according to the "Boycotter's Memorial"

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of Burmese Women, 154-58; Burma Socialist Program Party, မြန်မာနိုင်ငံအမျိုးသမီးများ၏ နိုင်ငရေးလှုပ်ရှားမှု.

[155] *The University of Rangoon Act*.

[156] Ibid.

[157] "Extract from the Abstract of the Proceedings of Council Relating to the University of Rangoon Bill," 12 July 1920, IOR L/PJ/6/1662, 8-9. By retaining two separate colleges under one umbrella university system, the organization of the Rangoon University was to consist of three parts: the residential halls attached to the constituent colleges, the constituent colleges, and the administrative and academic bodies which govern and control the University as a whole and which supervise all University activities.

[158] The 7 December 1920 issue of *Rangoon Gazette* indicates that there were 500 students who participated in the strike ("New University Boycotted: University and Judson College Students on Strike," *Rangoon Gazette*, 7 December 1920). According to documents published by the union of student boycotters (University Boycotters' Union), however, the number of striking students came to 600 altogether (University Boycotters' Union, *The Voice of Young Burma: The Reproduction of the Articles Published by the Publicity Bureau of the University Boycotters* (Rangoon: New Burma Press, 1922), 183-84). It appears that there were roughly 100 day students who partook of the strike.

[159] Burma, *Sixth Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma*, 18.

submitted to the Chancellors of Rangoon University on 19 December 1920,[160] was that higher education would become prohibitive for the college students whose parents or guardians were not sufficiently well-to-do to afford the luxury of residing in Rangoon.[161] In addition, the boycotters argued that the introduction of a year-long "preliminary course" for students who failed to show proficiency in their School Final Examination added to the length and therefore the cost of a Burmese student's college education.[162] The boycotters did express concern over the undeniable fact that many Burmese college students were unable to follow the lectures on account of insufficient proficiency in English (as a result of which they failed examinations); but they argued that the solution to the deficiency in English proficiency lay in the employment of more capable faculty and staff and the adoption of better methods of teaching.[163]

The government refused to change or modify the University Act and the boycott rapidly spread to all government and even missionary schools in what the boycotters referred to as the "National Education Movement."[164] Burmese female students were very much a part of this movement. Of the forty-eight female college students enrolled at Rangoon University in 1920, eight Burmese students participated in the boycott.[165] Students in girls' schools such as St. Mary's and the American Baptist Mission's (ABM) Girl's School in Rangoon joined the strike, as a result of which the schools were forced to close temporarily beginning on 6 December 1920.[166]

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[160] Union, *The Voice of Young Burma*, 15.
[161] Ibid., 16-17.
[162] Ibid., 17. The Director of Public Instruction in Burma Mark Hunter explains that even if the preliminary course did add to the length and cost of college education for individual students, it would nonetheless be justified: "for the deliberate admission of students to courses of study for which they are by capacity and attainment unqualified is capable of no defense, while to adjust matters the other way, and to adapt the courses to the capacity of the unfit student would be to surrender standards and abandon the hope of establishing a University worthy of the name"("Extract from the Abstract of the Proceedings of Council Relating to the University of Rangoon Bill," 13).
[163] Union, *The Voice of Young Burma*, 17.
[164] Ibid., 171 - 86.
[165] Party, *The Political Movements of Women in Myanmar*, 38-39.
[166] Ibid., 37-38.

The government schools worst hit by the boycott were the Anglo-vernacular schools, where female students formed between twenty-five and thirty-six percent of the total student population in the late 1910s and early 1920s.[167]

The student boycott yielded one important outcome, which was the setting up of private schools (National Schools) managed by Burmese instructors that offered modern education outside of the state's control and competed against the schools run by the colonial government. By 1922, there were ninety-two National Schools—eight two Anglo-vernacular and ten vernacular—that provided English as part of their curriculum unlike public vernacular schools.[168] The University Act itself, however, remained in force in its original form and the National Education movement went into a period of hibernation until the second University Boycott in 1936.

The University Boycott of 1936 bore a striking resemblance to the boycott in 1920. On 25 February 1936, day students and resident students from the two colleges numbering between 600 and 800 began a university strike during the last week of the term when university examinations were taking place. The immediate cause of the strike concerned the expulsion of the President of the Students' Union Nu and the suspension of the Editor of the Union Magazine Aung San.[169] Yet the objections

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[167] Burma, *Sixth Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma*, 5-7, 104; Burma, *Fifth Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma*, 46. That Anglo-vernacular schools were most adversely affected by the boycott was a result, in all likelihood, of the decision by the University Boycotters' Union to target Anglo-vernacular schools. Take, for instance, the following passage from an article published by the Union: "It cannot be doubted that education and of the right sort only, profusely imparted to the wealthy and the poor alike, is the only means of lifting the nation out of the mire into which it has fallen through willful and intentional neglect of the authorities concerned… What knowledge we could gain from what is called the government system of Anglo-Vernacular education in Burma is just enough for us to be their slaves or those of the rich" (Union, *The Voice of Young Burma*, 171-72).

[168] Steinberg, *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History*, 286; Burma, *Sixth Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma*, 79-80.

[169] In 1936, Nu and Aung San were leaders of a growing student nationalist movement that encompassed labor union protests and espoused leftist political ideology. The two student leaders, who later came to be known as Thakin Nu and Thakin Aung San, spearheaded the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) which emerged from the Second World War and the Japanese Occupation at the forefront of the nationalist and pro-independence movement in Burma. The British government recognized the AFPFL as the most popular political party in post-WWII Burma and eventually entered

raised by the boycotters harkened back unmistakably to the boycott in 1920: boycotters denounced what they believed to be a continued non-Burmese control of higher education that financially and systematically prohibited Burmese students from gaining access to modern education.[170] The boycotters objected mainly to the following: the compulsory attendance (in Judson College) at bible, social ethics and assembly classes, the cost of tuition, board and lodging, the examination fees, and the prohibition of students not enrolled in Rangoon University from appearing for university examinations. The boycotters also demanded that the Student Union be given the right to make representations on behalf of individuals or groups of students to the constituent colleges or to the University. Colonial officials viewed the boycott in 1936 as a revival of the student movement that had been set in motion since the University Act came into force.[171]

One marked difference between the two University Boycotts was the public appearance of female boycotters. The female boycotters in the first strike participated through their absence from schools. In the second boycott, thirty -six Burmese female college students publicly protested on the slopes of the Shwedagon Pagoda[172] in

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into negotiations with the AFPFL, namely Aung San, to draft a constitution for an independent Burma. The assassination of Aung San on 19 July 1947 turned Aung San into a nationalist martyr and placed Thakin Nu, the vice-president of AFPFL, in a position to become the first democratically elected prime minister of Burma. See Richard Butwell, *U Nu of Burma* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969); Maung Maung, *Aung San of Burma with Introduction by Harry J. Benda.* (The Hague,: Published for Yale University Southeast Asia Studies by M. Nijhoff, 1962); Robert Taylor, "Burma in the Anti-Fascist War," in *Southeast Asia under Japanese Occupation*, ed. Alfred McCoy (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1985), 132-57; Khin Yi, *The Dobama Movement in Burma, 1930-1938* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Cornell University, 1988).

[170] Enquiry Sub-Committee, 1936, "Report of the Enquiry Sub-Committee Appointed by His Excellency the Chancellor," IOR M/1/147, 5-11.

[171] "Extracts from Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of February, 1936," IOR M/1/147, 2; Sub-Committee, "Report of the Enquiry Sub-Committee Appointed by His Excellency the Chancellor," 2; H. Stephenson, 1 March 1936, "Letter to Commander Cochrane," IOR M/1/147, 1-3.

[172] The Shwedagon Pagoda, meaning the golden pagoda at the city of Dagon (Rangoon), is often compared to the Boro Budur of Indonesia for its size, grandeur and spectatorship. The 326-feet gilded pagoda, where sacred relics of the Buddha are said to be enshrined, has long represented the most sacred and awe-inspiring monument and site in Rangoon and still attracts Buddhists from across Asia today. During the colonial period, however, the Shwedagon functioned as a primary site from which Burmese people contested colonial rule. That anti-colonial and anti-Indian protests by the Burmese, if

downtown Rangoon where they camped along with over 450 male resident students from the two colleges who had left the university hostels.[173] Burmese women likewise picketed the University premises in a non-violent protest by lying down on every entrance to the examinations halls and inviting bystanders to tread on them.[174] One government communiqué reporting the effects of the boycott to the Governor of Burma remarked that the strategy of peaceful picketing proved to be extremely successful in disabling University officials from carrying out examinations and effectively rendered the University inoperative:

> [The boycotters] have got the University beat unless they use force; the only possible remedy is to call in the police… Calling in the police would mean inevitably an immediate clash with the students, would empty the University at once and would mobilize public opinion against Government. The political repercussions might be very serious indeed. Amongst other things we should have to use Indian police and that might quite likely lead to racial riots.[175]

The female boycotters indeed found the strategy of non-violence or *ahimsa* inspired by Gandhi[176] particularly efficacious and in February 1939, four Burmese women

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held in Rangoon, always began or ended at the Shwedagon is an interesting historical fact that historians have yet to explore in their analyses of the relationship between Buddhism and nationalism in Burma. See Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution*; Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma*, 173-235; Maung, *From Sangha to Laity* .

[173] Sub-Committee, "Report of the Enquiry Sub-Committee Appointed by His Excellency the Chancellor," 2; Party, *The Political Movements of Women in Myanmar*, 97 - 101.

[174] "Extracts from Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of February, 1936," 2.

[175] H. Stephenson, "Letter to Commander Cochrane," 3.

[176] That the boycotters' strategy of non-violent picketing drew on Gandhi's ahimsa movement in British India can be discerned from articles published by the Boycotters' Union during the first University Boycott. Take, for instance, the following passage in a 28 January 1921 article entitled "To Emulate Bengal's Example," in which the Union suggests that boycotters in Burma should emulate the peaceful method of picketing exemplified by the fellow colonized people of Bengal: "The boycotters in Bengal have introduced a novel method of picketing, the very quality of which must appeal to all the generous instincts of a man. By sinking all feelings of pride and malice, they have shown a profound humility and intensive devotion to their cause which has led them to lie flat and allow themselves to be trampled... We are firmly convinced that the success of the boycott movement in Bengal is due to this spiritual stimulus which has also infused into the movement a stability which must endure. We should allow ourselves to be trampled, insulted, molested, imprisoned rather than that our way-ward friends should, by their fatal weakness, seriously jeopardize the destinies of twelve millions of [Burmese]" (Union, *The Voice of Young Burma*, 95-97). The following passage from a 4 February 1921 article entitled "From Boycott to Non-Cooperation" by the Boycotters' Union illustrates even more powerfully that the Gandhian movement of non-violence was rapidly gaining adherents in Burma: "India itself is in

university students undertook a hunger strike in protest of the imprisonment by the colonial government of fellow college students who were actively organizing labor union protests throughout Burma.[177]

Educated Burmese women also took their activism outside the sphere of student life. On the morning of 3 February 1927, Independent Daw San and Daw Mya Sein (mentioned above) led a demonstration on the premises of the Rangoon Municipal Hall and the Supreme Legislative Council (*Hluttaw*) to show support for a legislative proposal—scheduled to be debated in the *Hluttaw* the same morning—to abolish the law that prohibited women from taking part in parliamentary election. Over 100 members of the leading women's organization Burmese Women's Association (BWA),[178] which served as a hub for Burmese women intellectuals and political activists, gathered at the Municipal Hall and shouted out the following slogan:

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the throes of a great struggle and Burma hears reports of the founding of arbitration courts, national schools and colleges, and the gradual loss of faith in British democracy, submerged by the tide of Non-Cooperation which should consummate the Mahatma's dream of 'Swaraj' within one year. The reverberating cries of 'Mahatma ki jai' find an echo in the heart of the [Burmese,] who uneasily finds himself at a standstill… Can the [Burmese] remain silent spectators, while signs of ceaseless activity and huge upheavals face them everywhere?" (Union, *The Voice of Young Burma*, 99).

[177] For details of the eleven-months workers' strike of various British companies in Burma—namely the Burma Oil Company, Burma Railways, Burma Electronic Tramway and Bus Service—in which student activists played central roles, see Party, *The Political Movements of Women in Myanmar*, 101-23; Maung, *From Sangha to Laity*, 171-94.

[178] The BWA was an offshoot of the first Burmese women's nationalist organization called *Wunthanu Konmaryi Athin* (hereafter referred to as *Konmaryi*) which represented a subsidiary branch of the General Council of Burmese Associations (GCBA), an umbrella organization composed of lay Buddhist associations. The GCBA may have formed primarily as religious associations but became actively involved in anti-colonial politics. Most well-known among the GCBA associations is the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA), founded in 1906 (*Mendelson, Sangha and State in Burma, 196-235*; Maung, *From Sangha to Laity*, 19-21). When the *Konmaryi* was founded on 16 November 1919, it was an elite women's organization with approximately 300 members led by an Executive Committee of officials' wives and prosperous women entrepreneurs, chiefly bazaar traders, whose chief commitment was to support the nationalist efforts of Burmese men (the activities by the *Konmaryi* will be discussed in Chapter Four). But the GCBA splintered into competing factions in the late 1920s, as a result of which the *Konmaryi* also disintegrated into disparate women's associations, the largest of which was the Burmese Women's Association (known as Burmese Women's National Council after 1931). See Nyin, ဗမာအမျိုးသမီး, 17-21; Mu, "မြန်မာ.လွတ်လပ်ရေးကြိုးပမ်မှု တွင်ပါဝင်သော အမျိုးသမီးများ၏ တကျွာ," 7-30; Maw, "The Role of Myanmar Women in the Nationalist Movement, 1906 - 1942", 51-55).

> မိန်းမများ မကြောက်ပါနှင့်၊
> အတွင်းဝန်ရုံးသို့ မိန်းမများမဝင်ရဟု အမိန့်ထုတ်ထားသည်၊
> စောင့်ကြည့်ကြပါ၊
> မြန်မာအမျိုးသမီးများ နိုးကြားကြပါ၊
> ဗြိတိသျှပါလီမန်တွင် မိန်းမများ အမတ်ဖြစ်နေပြီ[179]
>
> Burmese women, don't be afraid
> Wait and see what will become of the Act
> Banning us women from ministerial positions
> Burmese women, be watchful and active
> In Britain, women have attained seats in the parliament

As the slogan suggests, what prompted this demonstration for women's right to be elected in the *Hluttaw* were the concurrent struggles in England and India by women trying to attain posts in respective Supreme Legislative Bodies. They strove in cadence with metropolitan feminist associations, such as the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship or the British Commonwealth League, that urged the British government "on behalf of the women of the Empire" to grant to Burmese women the right to run in elections for the Legislative Council.[180]

Many Burmese women in 1920s' and 1930s' Burma thus partook actively and visibly of modern developments occasioned by colonial rule. They pursued higher education alongside men and likewise participated in student protests and anti-government rallies with their male counterpart. Burmese women fought for the right to run for legislative positions, formed women's branches of political organizations and supported labor union strikes. Appropriating both distinctly modern cultural institutions and such long-standing local symbols of sacral authority as the Shwedagon, these women contested patterns of male dominance and leadership in the field of knowledge production and in decision-making processes.

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[179] Party, *The Political Movements of Women in Myanmar*, 71.
[180] *Ibid., 70-73*; *Rangoon Times*, 3 February 1927, Secretary of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, 4 February 1927, "Letter to the under-Secretary of State, India Office", IOR L/PJ/6/1877 File 1913, .

Education and Literacy as Colonial Legacy

Burma historians have tended to credit the growth of educated, professional and activist women to secular education. They identify modern education with secular education and imply that secularization eradicated the gender discrimination of Buddhist monastic education, thus, democratizing education and reducing the vast gender disparity in literacy and education in twentieth-century Burma. [181] A close reading of period sources, however, shows the equation of "modern education" to "secular education" to be a misleading conflation.

First of all, Buddhist monastic schools, where the majority of people in Burma received education prior to the introduction of modern education, taught both religious and secular or "lay" subjects. As explained above, a monastic education encompassed the teaching of diverse subjects ranging from quintessentially Buddhist texts such as the *Tipitaka* and Brahmanical texts to arts and poetry, astrology, medicine, law and history, all within a Buddhist framework. Pali was taught together with literary Burmese, and the less essentially Buddhist subjects were taught in Burma from at least the Pagan period (1244 – 1287) onward.[182] In other words, the dichotomous categories of religious (Buddhist) and lay—categories that developed during the

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[181] See Dhammasami, "Between Idealism and Pragmatism," 10. Dhammasami applies Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeysekere's study of the transformations in Sinhala (Theravada) Buddhism in late nineteenth century Sri Lanka and argues that since the late nineteenth century, Burma witnessed a secularization of monastic education. While Gombrich and Obeysekere's vast study examines far-reaching influences of "modern" values of the British colonialists, especially Protestant Christianity, on Sinhala Buddhism (Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeysekere, *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), Dhammasami focuses on the assumption by modern secular institutions of functions that the *sangha* used to perform. For other works that identify modern education in Burma as a displacement of Buddhist monastic education by secular education, see U, *The Making of Modern Burma*, 240-41; Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma*; Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*.

[182] A typical "curriculum" at a monastic school involved studying strictly Buddhist texts and precepts (e. g., the Jatakas and praises to the Buddha, Dhamma or law, Sangha), as well as subjects that did not pertain to "orthodox" Buddhism (e.g., an understanding of lucky and unlucky days, astrology, cosmology, medicine, plays, poetry), and "lay" subjects (e.g., addition, subtraction, and the multiplication table). See Mendelson's description of traditional monastic education for more detail (Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma*, 150-57).

colonial period—represent anachronistic classifications that do not apply to pre-colonial Burma.

Secondly, although the colonial government established the first lay schools in 1868, its general policy towards education at least until 1924 was to regulate, inspect, and supplement the existing curriculum with certain "secular subjects" (e.g., arithmetic). Schools continued to be maintained voluntarily by monks, laymen, municipalities and other associations rather than be supplanted by new secular schools. This policy aimed at sidestepping an expensive duplication of schools throughout Burma.[183] Accordingly, annual government examinations were instituted in 1880 and the Educational Syndicate was founded in 1881 to manage all provincial school examinations.[184] The colonial government increasingly promoted lay schools beginning in 1924, but by the end of the 1920s, the government expressed a concern over the failure of lay schools to provide adequate education in Buddhism, i.e., moral instruction. Consequently, in 1928, the colonial government formed a committee to consider and report on Buddhist religious instruction for Buddhist pupils in vernacular lay schools under Buddhist management. The committee concluded that Buddhist instructions in both Anglo-vernacular and vernacular lay schools required strengthening. It submitted various recommendations including the following: that Buddhist teachers while under training in elementary classes and in normal schools should receive instruction in Buddhism; that orders should be issued to Deputy Inspectors of schools, heads of Anglo-vernacular schools and district school boards to cooperate with one another in enforcing the teaching of religious instruction in Anglo-

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[183] Ibid., 160.

[184] Earlier attempts to "secularize" indigenous schools, both monastic and lay, were made by adding the study of geography, surveying, arithmetic, anatomy, ancient history, geometry and astronomy to the curriculum at indigenous schools. These attempts, however, were deemed a failure, leading to the establishment of lay schools in 1868. See Mya Sein, *The Administration of Burma* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 91-92, 138.

vernacular and vernacular schools; that more Burmese Buddhists be appointed as Deputy Inspectors of Schools; that arrangement or provision should be made for religious instruction in both lay and monastic schools everyday according to the time table; that once a week lay school teachers should take their pupils to monastic schools for service or instruction, or monks should be invited to lay schools for this purpose; and that religious instruction should be tested as a class subject.[185]

The report prepared by the committee vividly informs its readers of the ethical nature of the modern education that the colonial government had envisioned for the Burmese. Referring to the Buddhist instruction offered in lay schools, the report states:

> So far as the Committee is aware no training whatever is given on Buddhist Religion in the training classes and Normal Schools. There is a little memorizing of prayers and precepts in a few training classes under the Buddhist management. But this is not sufficient… Religious instruction at schools must impart [to] school boys refining qualities, such as sobriety, honesty, industry, truthfulness, fidelity to duty, unselfishness, obedience and respect to superiors.[186]

In addition, although the committee's concern was, in theory, confined to Buddhist religious instruction given in vernacular lay schools only, it nevertheless expressed grave concerns over Buddhist religious instruction in Anglo-vernacular schools: "No one will deny the value of the Educational work now being done by Christian Missionaries, but one must doubt the efficacy of moral instruction based on a creed which the child has not accepted and will not accept."[187] The colonial government clearly intended for modern education to provide moral instruction, and moral instruction evidently derived from a religious, not secular, education.

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[185] Government of Burma, *Report of the Committee to Consider and Report Upon Buddhist Religious Instruction for Buddhist Pupils in Vernacular Lay Schools under Buddhist Management, 1928-29* (Rangoon: Office of the Superintendent Government Printing and Stationery, 1931), 10.
[186] Ibid., 5.
[187] Ibid.

The extensive involvement of Christian missionaries and missionary schools in the implementation of modern education in Burma similarly attests to the tenuous commitment of the colonial government to secular education. Lay schools were established in Burma in 1868 alongside schools founded by Christian missionaries who were supported partly by grants of yearly allowances from the colonial government. All the secondary schools registered in 1891 were under missionary management (while most of the primary schools were under "indigenous management").[188] In fact, the first girls' school in Burma was established by missionaries in 1827.[189] The missionaries who pioneered "secular" female education in Burma, moreover, saw it as a vehicle of cultural re-education through which they instilled Eurocentric and Christian conceptions of femininity, morality and domesticity in Burmese women.[190] According to the *Seventh Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma (For the Years 1922-23 to 1926 – 27)*, "hygiene," "domestic economy," and "needlework" had become compulsory subjects of middle school examinations for girls whereas English as a second language had been made an optional subject.[191] As Tinzar Lwyn points out in her analysis of Christian missionary discourse on Burmese women, missionary educators "attempted to shape 'home care' and women as 'good housewives' according to their notions of 'civilized' Christian living."[192]

Take, for example, a 1914 survey of thirty correspondents involved in education, mainly Christian missionaries, conducted on the impact of modern conditions on the state of Buddhism in contemporary Burma. The surveyed people

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[188] Sein, *The Administration of Burma*, 92, 138.
[189] Lwyn, "Stories of Gender and Ethnicity," 68.
[190] Ibid., 64-68.
[191] Government of Burma, *Seventh Quinquennial Report on Public Instruction in Burma, for the Years 1922-23 to 1926 - 27* (Rangoon: Office of the Superintendent Government Printing and Stationery, 1928), 28.
[192] Lwyn, "Stories of Gender and Ethnicity," 66.

generally held the view that while the position assigned to women in the Theravada Buddhist tradition is inferior to that of the men, the women in Burma were relatively independent, free, and equal to men *except in the area of education*. Women in Burma were portrayed, in comparison to men in Burma, as "more ignorant" and "less well educated," and that they knew "nothing else but Buddhism."[193] The respondents also agreed that modern education, i.e. Anglo-Christian education, was the key solution to the problem of "uneducated" women in Burma. [194] Illustrative of what "education" signified to these missionaries is the following collective response, given to the questions, "In what manner has modern education affected the status and position of women in Burma? How has Christianity affected their condition?": "Modern education has raised the status of Burmese women. Christianity has a tendency to raise it higher. Owing to Christian influences polygamy, with its manifold evil and suffering, is fast disappearing in both Lower and Upper Burma."[195] One reverend's response was that women had become "better home-keepers, more intelligent wives and mothers," and another replied that "they make ideal Christian wives, but as mothers are still lacking in firmness."[196]

Missionaries were not alone in construing female education as a potential vehicle of the civilizing mission. Tinzar Lwyn aptly extends her insight into the missionary emphasis on "civilizing" indigenous women to the colonial government's attitude towards public instruction of women in Burma.[197] The colonial government, on the one hand, expressed amazement at the progressiveness of women in Burma, for

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[193] The Rev. W. C. B. Purser and K. J. Saunder, ed., *Modern Buddhism in Burma: Being an Epitome of Information Received from Missionaries, Officials, and Others* (The Christian Literature Society: Burma Branch, 1914), 62.
[194] Ibid., 65-66.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid., 66.
[197] Lwyn, "Stories of Gender and Ethnicity," 68. For a detailed analysis of the ways in which missionary and colonial administration's discourses about gender and ethnicity shaped ideas of a Burmese woman's place in society in a mutually reinforcing relationship, see 60-85.

example, by remarking in the 1872 Census Report that women's education "was a fact in Burma before Oxford was founded."[198] On the other hand, the colonial government regarded certain customary practices such as divorce by women in Burma as objectionable and a direct result of Burmese women's unfettered freedom. The 1931 Census Report, for instance, reminds the reader of "the ease with which Burmese women switch over from one husband to another."[199]

One might argue that the colonial government displayed dissatisfaction in general with Burmese women's domestic sensibilities. This is particularly evident in the administration's concern with high incidences of infant mortality in Burma. In 1913, according to the Society for the Prevention of Infant Mortality in Mandalay, of the approximately 5,000 children born every year in Mandalay, about 2,000 died before they were twelve months, and 1,000 more before they reached the age of ten. There were nine towns in Burma with infant mortality rate of over forty percent.[200] Again, in the 1920 report by the Public Health Administration of Burma, the Lieutenant-Governor remarked on the "deplorable" infant mortality and emphasized the dire need for serious efforts to instruct people in Burma on sanitary midwifery, child-bearing, and child-rearing methods.[201] In response to the 1920 report, Milicent Smart published a handbook especially for the instruction of "Burmese Mothers," which contained instructions on first aid for mothers during child-birth and on the rearing of infants from the time of birth. In the handbook, Smart asks Burmese women to read through the handbook "with the country's welfare at heart, and in view of the appalling loss of life," and "to at least make a study of European methods of

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[198] Ibid, 65.
[199] India, *Census of India, 1931: Part One*, 93.
[200] "Introduction" in Millicent B. Smart, *Burman Woman's House Doctor* (Rangoon: British Burma Press, 1913).
[201] Government of Burma, *Report on the Sanitary Administration of Burma for the Year 1920* (Rangoon: Office of the Superintendent Government Printing and Stationery, 1921), 5.

treating confinement cases and of rearing infants from birth, and give them a fair trial in their homes and surroundings."[202] In the following year, in a book titled *The Citizen of Burma*, a Burmese official in the Judicial Service likewise traced the problem of high infant mortality to Burmese women's lack of child-rearing skills:

> A woman's sphere of activity is her home. It will be well for the [Burmese] race if she is better educated and taught to take better care of her children; for then we have some hope that there will be a material reduction in the death rate of infants in Burma, which at present is too horrible to contemplate. With the advance of education she will undoubtedly become *more womanly* [my emphasis].[203]

Modern education, in other words, did not simply represent a vehicle for secularizing education or for empowering women in Burma. As Furnivall points out, the colonial advocates of women's education stressed its "cultural values in domestic life," and sought to make women in Burma "more womanly."[204] Through modern education, colonialists intended to "civilize" and "feminize" the indigenous female population, rather than grant them an education equivalent to that provided to Burmese men.

The complex relationship of the colonial government to issues of women's empowerment is discernible in its adverse reactions to the legislative proposal to remove the disqualification of women from civil service or from entering a university on the grounds of sex or marital status. The *Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act*, otherwise referred to by the colonial government as the *Women's Emancipation Bill*, put forward for consideration by the government in 1919, sought to amend the law which disqualified a woman, especially a married woman, from being appointed to or holding any civil or judicial office, post, or profession.[205] Upon the bill's passing of

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[202] Ibid.
[203] Po Ka, *The Citizen of Burma* (Rangoon: British Burma Press, 1914), 73.
[204] Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, 128.
[205] The proposal to amend the law of disqualification on grounds of sex is outlined as follows in the Act: "A person shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage from the exercise of any public function, or from being appointed to or holding any civil or judicial office or post, or from entering or assuming or carrying on any civil profession or vocation, or for admission to any incorporated society (whether

the "Second Reading," the Chancellor of Treasury sent a confidential letter along with a memorandum by civil service commissioners and the Treasury to the War Cabinet and the Home Affairs Committee urging that the bill and the memorandum be reviewed at once "as it raises such grave issues—unforeseen, I think, and certainly unprovided for by the promoters [of the bill]…"[206] The memorandum defended the general rule of the civil service at the time that a woman who holds any established post therein must terminate her employment on marriage, arguing that the employment of women as civil servants conflicted with the normal duties of a married woman:

> Women Civil Servants if married either must deliberately endeavor to remain childless or will be forced to neglect either their children or their duties to the Service or both. Either neglect, it is submitted, is contrary to public policy. The social effects will obviously be undesirable.[207]

The civil service commissioners also challenged the bill on the grounds that the demand for "equal pay for equal work" between the sexes was not justifiable, explaining that they did not consider it proved yet "that women in general could do work, [for example,] in Civil Service, equal in value to that of men."[208] "This doubt," they added, "would be much greater in the case of married women, at any rate such as were not deliberately sterile."[209] In a meeting of the Committee of Home Affairs, held on 16 May 1919, the civil service commissioners objected to the bill, claiming it would have the effect of "allowing women to compete in the open examination for the Civil Service both [in England] and in India, on the same terms as men."[210] The bill,

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incorporated by Royal Charter or otherwise), and a person shall not be exempted by sex or marriage from the liability to serve as a juror." See *Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, 1919*

[206]Chancellor of the Exchequer, 8 May 1919, "Secret Letter to the War Cabinet on the Women's Emancipation Bill," IOR L/PJ/6/1642 (File 8115).

[207] Civil Service Commissioners and Treasury, "Memorandum by the on the Bill to Remove Certain Restraints and Disabilities Imposed Upon Women," IOR L/PJ/6/1642 (File 8115), 1.

[208] Ibid., 3

[209] Ibid., 4.

[210] "Extract from the Minutes of a Meeting of the Committee of Home Affairs, Held on 16 May 1919," 16 May 1919, IOR L/PJ/6/1642 (File 8115).

in other words, would have blurred the divide that existed in the minds of male colonial administrators between the masculine public sphere of governance and civil service, and the feminine private sphere of home, family, and domesticity. It might also have made the colony appear more progressive than the metropole.

The endeavor by the colonial officials to uplift the indigenous female population from a condition of "ignorance" they considered objectionable was not a simple raison d'etre of the civilizing mission and colonial rule. It was at the same time an attempt to feminize the women according to Eurocentric, Christian, and bourgeois ideals of femininity.[211] That is not to deny the fact that considerably more women attained education as a result of education reforms under the colonial administration. The point of import here is that the colonial approach towards female education hardly represented an emancipatory gesture: the colonialist mentalité and the "white man's burden" to propagate civilization deeply infused the colonialist undertaking of education reforms in Burma. At the same time that colonial educators—missionaries, nurses, and state officials alike—sought to liberate the Burmese female from the confines of the indigenous culture of education, they attempted to harness, domesticate, and thus civilize the Burmese female according to their imperialist, Eurocentric, Christian, and bourgeois sensibilities.

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[211] The study of the British colonial state's obsessive documentation of and intervention in "native" practices that victimized women is today a firmly established aspect of postcolonial studies. In British India, for instance, this was manifest in the prevalent concern with issues of *sati* and the oppression of widows whose sufferings testified to the "primitive" and "barbaric" nature of the colonized. The colonial records pertaining to Burma from the first few decades of the twentieth-century indeed indicate that the question of liberating or protecting women in Burma from such "uncivilized" indigenous norms and customs as human sacrificing was a recurrent topic. In Burma, like in India, interests in sacrificial practices echoed the colonial interventions through which women in the colonies were "freed" and the colonial rule legitimized.

Producing Female Nationalists Through Education

While the colonial promoters of female education conceptualized their project as a way of domesticating women, others in Burma viewed it as a way to enable Burmese women to participate in the public sphere other than as agents of the market. Nationalists in particular espoused women's modernization as one of the most crucial ways for women to serve communal interests. In fact, the emergence of Burmese women onto the political sphere has been widely attributed to the mounting nationalist efforts in the 1920s that pushed for the political inclusion of Burmese men as well as women.[212] As Daw Khin Myo Chit explains, it was with the growth of nationalist movements in the 1920s "that women were encouraged to come out from the narrow precincts of their homes and contribute towards the national cause."[213]

Education ranked as the most crucial of the numerous different ways for women to "contribute to the national cause" according to the Burmese nationalist discourse. As in the case of contemporary Siam, the popular press frequently argued that in order for the country to progress and join the community of modern nations women needed to be afforded the same educational opportunities as men.[214] There are obvious reasons for this. British colonial rule centralized government administration and ruled through bureaucracy; education was the key to gaining access to and mobility within this government system wherein "modern" or Anglo-vernacular, institutionalized education determined entrance into the civil and military bureaucracies. In reference to education in missionary schools, a Buddhist parent declared in a newspaper in September 1919: "If we wanted our children to become *pongyis* [monks], we should send them to the monastery; but we want them to be men

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[212] Khaing, *The World of Burmese Women*, 154.
[213] Chit, *Colorful Burma*, 193.
[214] Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok*, 4-5.

of the world and we send them to your schools."[215] Modern education—with its standards and tests that purportedly rendered the knowledge it imparted scientific and rational—endowed the student with the knowledge of the modern world and, hence, qualified either a male or a female individual to become a member of the ruling elite. "If at first a modern education was only a means to elite status, it gradually also became part of the meaning of being elite."[216] Modern education embodied the power to govern and the access to the ruling elite.

Given the fact that education served as a primary vehicle for socio-economic advancement under colonial rule, it is hardly surprising that in an article titled "Enfranchisement of Burmese Women," published in the *Sun* on 8 November 1919, the male author claimed that educated Burmese women "should make every endeavor to occupy the various positions now held exclusively by our men." "In fact," he added, "Burmese women (who, presumably, were better educated than the village headmen) would be more suitable for elections as members of the Legislative Assembly than the village headmen."[217] Nonetheless, as Deputy Commissioner Arnold claimed, men, rather than women, were encouraged to seek education for the purpose of attaining government posts. In 1932, the Commissioner of Mandalay ordered the following circular, concerning the appointment of women to government clerical posts, to be sent to all commissioners and heads of departments in Burma:

> The Local Government has given the matter its careful consideration and is of the opinion that while such appointment should not be discouraged, care should be taken when making the appointment, that in view of general unemployment, the claims of qualified men, if available, are not overlooked, and that on grounds of economy, the

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[215] The quote, taken from a September 14th, 1919 issue of *Burma Critic*, is cited in *Saunder, ed., Modern Buddhism in Burma: Being an Epitome of Information Received from Missionaries, Officials, and Others, 90*.
[216] O'Connor, *A Theory of Indigenous Southeast Asian Urbanism*, 99-102.
[217] Tun Shein, "Enfranchisement of Burmese Women," *Thuriya*, 8 November 1919.

> employment of married women should be resorted to as little as possible.[218]

In addition, Burmese parents with adequate means sent their sons rather than their daughters to Anglo-vernacular schools in order that they may join the bureaucracy and further their career.[219] Why, despite the bias against women in Burmese society with regard to positions of governance, was it important to the nationalists that Burmese women were given the same education as their male counterpart?

One compelling incentive derived from the fact that education was a requisite to enfranchisement. The British government clearly stipulated that to be able to vote, an individual had to be educated. Illustrative of this proviso is the defeat by the government, in 1927, of a resolution moved in the Legislative Council of Burma to remove sex disqualification and to allow women to vote. A member of the Home Affairs, quoted in *Rangoon Times* (3 February 1927), clarified the government's position as follows:

> He was sorry to say Government had to oppose the resolution which they considered premature. He would be a rash man to say that the Burmese woman had progressed as far as her sister from the West both politically and in education as to take her place in representative institutions.[220]

Another revealing example appears in the 1930 *Report of the Royal Empire Society's India Committee*,[221] which outlined the British government's response to growing

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[218] The Secretary to the Government of Burma (Judicial Department), 16 February 1932, "General Department Letter to All Commissioners of Divisions (except Mandalay) and Heads of Departments," NAD 1/15 (D) 2916.
[219] Chit, Colorful Burma, 195-96; Ka, *The Citizen of Burma*, 12.
[220] Aung-Thwin, "Genealogy of a Rebellion Narrative."
[221] The Royal Empire Society's India Committee was set up to examine a report by the Statutory Commission (otherwise referred to as the Simon Commission, after Sir John Simon who headed the Commission) on a survey undertaken by the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship prepared by several contributors under the editorship of Miss A. R. Caton and published by the Oxford University Press. The report posited that one of the immediate questions on constitutional reform is that of the extent to which the vote can be given to women in larger measure than was given at the time. At the time, the proportion of enfranchised men to enfranchised women in British India (excluding Burma)

demand for women's suffrage by women's associations in British India as well as in the metropole and other British colonies.[222] The report, while recognizing "the growing influence in India of educated women," rejected the proposal to modify existing constitutional regulations to qualify more female voters:

> Though there are hopeful signs that the number of educated women in the middle and upper classes is likely to increase more rapidly in the future than it has done in the past, the committee can see no object, as matters stand, in enfranchising several million women who have received no education of any kind, and who cannot be expected to have the slightest grasp of the political problems with which the country is likely to be faced during the next generation. The committee believes that these women would either not use their votes at all or would use them at the bidding of the men to whose influence they are subject.[223]

Education entitled a Burmese woman to be recognized as a political agent. The nationalist promotion of female education, then, served as an instrument of electoral politics.

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was twenty-five to one. See "India: Enfranchisement of Women (in Times Educational Supplement)"8 November 1930, IOR L/I/1/171.

[222] The report by the Statutory Commission is concerned primarily with the development of women's movements in contemporary India and describes the "rapid awakening of Indian womanhood" (Ibid.). The intensification and growth of women's movements was hardly unique to India, however, and comprised a transnational phenomenon that encompassed at least representatives from throughout the British Empire. In July 1925, for example, representatives of the following societies were present at a Conference of the British Commonwealth League held to consider the citizenship rights of women within the British Empire: The Women's Indian Association, The Australian Federation of Women's Societies for Equal Citizenship, The Victorian Women's Citizens Association, The Women's League for New South Wales, The Women's Enfranchisement League of South Africa, Women's Enfranchisement Association of Cape Town, The Franchise Committee of the Canadian Woman's Christian Temperance Union, The League of Women Voters (Toronto, Canada), The Bermuda Women's Suffrage Society, National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, St. Joan's Social and Political Alliance, Women's Freedom League, The Council for the Representations of Women on the League of Nations, The League of the Church Militant, The National Union of Women Teachers, The Federation of Women Civil Servants, The Women's International League, The Association of Social and Moral Hygiene, Women's National Liberal Association, The Rotherhithe Women's Guild, The Conservative Women's Reform Association, and The Six Point Group. The resolution passed at the conference called upon the British government "to amend the Government of India Act (1919) in such a way that women may be made eligible for election or nomination as members of the Indian Legislature or Provincial Councils…" (British Commonwealth League, 14 September 1925, "Letter to the Secretary of State for India," IOR L/PJ/6/1878).

[223] "India: Enfranchisement of Women (in Times Educational Supplement)."

British colonizers may have romanticized their intervention in female education as a part of civilizing mission through which the colonizer freed the female colonized from oppressive measures supported by the Burmese society. Yet the colonizers who provided the institutional framework for the expansion of female education intended education as a means of domesticating, not empowering, women in Burma according to Christian, Eurocentric, and bourgeois ideals of femininity. While their educational reforms effectively extended greater opportunities for education to Burmese women, colonizers expected female "public instruction" to modernize and civilize Burmese women's domestic responsibilities in keeping with their own preconceived notions of gender roles and hierarchy. Ironically, the most profound and tangible benefits of the colonial educational reforms surfaced in educated Burmese women's increasing prominence as cultural intermediaries.

If the colonial educational reforms introduced an avenue through which Burmese women were enabled to operate as cultural intermediaries, nationalists supplied the ideological support and impetus. According to a prominent Burmese woman writer, Khin Myo Chit, female education in the early colonial period was not taken seriously and parents prioritized their sons' education over their daughters':

> Whatever opportunities the education system in the colonial days had to offer, sending girls to school to get 'modern education' was popularly considered a part of the grooming to be wife and mother. It was a final polish for potential husband-catcher.[224]

The development of nationalist movements in colonial Burma, however, challenged prevailing norms and values pertaining to female education, employment and activism. In other words, a greater portion of the female population in Burma attained education and public professions beginning in the twentieth century not only because of institutional reforms but also because of ideological changes.

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[224] Chit, *Colorful Burma*, 196.

Paradoxical Narratives of Modernization in Burma: Falling Men, Rising Women

In the new preface to the third edition of *An Introduction to the Political Economy of Burma*, Furnivall states:

> In all that was distinctively modern in the [colonial] life of Burma, [the Burmese] had no part... Burma was thrown open to the world, but the world was not opened up to [the Burmese], and the faster that development proceeded the further [the Burmese] lagged behind, for which a younger generation devised the catchword *auk-kya*, *nauk-kya*.[225]

The catchword *auk-kya*, *nauk-kya*, meaning "fall behind, fall below," captures Furnivall's depiction of colonial Burmese society in which Burmese people fell behind and below Europeans, Indians, and Chinese. Historians of Burma have reinforced Furnivall's overarching argument that modernization in Burma signified a "lop-sided" development in which the country modernized politically and economically while the Burmese people themselves were shut off from the new political and economic system. Adas, while noting that modern educational and legal institutions were shared by Burmese people and foreigners alike, nonetheless insists that the process of "Westernization" or modernization had little to do with Burmese people below the level of the English-educated modern elite: "The great majority of the cultural groups which made up the plural society in Burma adhered to their traditional institutions and participated only marginally, if at all, in Western institutions beyond those in the economic sphere."[226]

The developments described in this chapter—i.e. the rise in female education, employment and activism in the 1920s and the 1930s—have complicated the account of "lopsided" modernization and thickened historical narratives of colonial Burma. It

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[225] Furnivall, *An Introduction to the Political Economy of Burma*, j.
[226] Adas, *The Burma Delta*, 107.

has shown that the local population did in fact obtain access to instruments of modernization that offered alternatives (to young urban women) to falling behind and below their male counterpart. The following chapter adds yet another layer of historical sediment by focusing on popular representations of Burmese women from the 1920s and 1930s that belie claims about the disenfranchisement of people in Burma under modern colonial rule. Burmese editors and journalists writing in the 1920s and 1930s asserted not that Burmese women at large were *auk-kya*, *nauk-kya* but *toe-tet* or "advancing and rising." The next chapter accounts for the historical discrepancy created by the seemingly paradoxical representations. My investigation into representations of advancing and rising modern Burmese women continues to build on this chapter's findings concerning the institutional and ideological underpinnings of transformations in women's relationship to knowledge and authority. What can new images of women tell us about why female education, employment and activism shifted from proscriptive to normative in the early decades of the twentieth century? What changes in understandings and practices of gendered relations of power were embedded in or triggered by the advancing and rising Burmese female? The following chapter turns attention to the central role that these representations played in transforming gendered notions of knowledge, power and authority in Burma.

CHAPTER 4

GENDERED NOTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE, POWER AND AUTHORITY

The Place of Women and Gender in Buddhist Societies

Observers of Burmese society ranging from colonial administrators and Christian missionaries to contemporary scholars of Southeast Asia have identified gender equality and the autonomy of Burmese women as resilient underlying social structures of Burma. In a travel account of her journey through Burma in the late nineteenth century, Gwendolen Gascoigne remarks on what she perceived as an exceptional liberty of Burmese women: "Utterly unlike their miserable Mohammedan and Hindu sisters, [Burmese women] enjoy absolute liberty—a liberty of which, if rumor prove true, they make ample use."[227] Similarly, in an article written for *Times India*, Sir Harcourt Butler—who served as the Governor of Burma from 1923 until 1927—points out that what distinguishes Burma from India and makes Burma "one of the fairest countries of the British Empire" is that the Burmese women do not wear "purdah."[228] Colonial officials and Orientalist historians cite egalitarian Buddhist codes of conduct pertaining to property and inheritance and claim that Burmese society—because it has been overwhelmingly Buddhist rather than Muslim or Hindu—is free of customs oppressive to women.[229]

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[227] Gwendolen Gascoigne, *Among Pagodas and Fair Ladies: An Account of a Tour through Burma* (London: A. D. Innes & Co., 1896), 43.

[228] Sir Harcourt Butler, "Burma and the Burmans," *Times India*, 18 February 1930. *Purdah*, meaning "screen" or "veil," refers to the practice by a woman of concealing her body from head to toe. The practice also includes the seclusion of women from public observation by the use of high walls, curtains, and screens erected within the home. The limits imposed by this practice vary according to different countries and class levels.

[229] For a useful review of nineteenth-century and turn-of-the-century Orientalist literature on Buddhism, see Wilson, *Charming Cadavers*, 5-7.

This perspective, however, disregards the fact that a thorough historical examination of the place of women and gender in the Buddhist region of Southeast Asia—i.e. mainland Southeast Asia and neighboring Sri Lanka—is yet to be done. Representations of women and gender in inscriptional records and preaching texts which appeared to have dominated the region at the turn of the century still need to be investigated in order for us to begin to understand which images of women and gender most consistently entered popular Buddhist discourses within or beyond the sphere of monastic training and practice.[230] What little scholars do know about the history of gender relations in Buddhist Southeast Asia indicates that "anti-sexist" practices have existed side-by-side with sexist and even misogynistic ideas and customs concerning women that have led Mi Mi Khaing, the female author of *The World of Burmese Women*[231] recognized unanimously by Burma historians as the foundational scholarly work on Burmese women, to assert that women were believed to be spiritually inferior to men despite the high status that Burmese women allegedly enjoyed: "There is no doubt in our minds. Spiritually, a man is higher than a woman. This is just not an abstract idea belonging to religious philosophy. Conviction of it enter[s] our very bones."[232]

As in other pre-modern Southeast Asian societies, women's influential role in the worldly sphere of commerce, profit-seeking and monetary affairs was deemed polluting and it subordinated women to men religiously, politically, ritualistically and ceremonially.[233] Additional regulations that apply to female members of Theravadin

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[230] For a succinct and useful review of the state of Buddhist Studies in Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka, see the introductory chapter in Blackburn, *Buddhist Learning and Textual Practice in Eighteenth-Century Lankan Monastic Culture*, 3-22.
[231] Khaing, *The World of Burmese Women*.
[232] Ibid.
[233] Melford E. Spiro, *Gender Ideology and Psychological Reality: An Essay on Cultural Reproduction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 19-28, 136; Atkinson and Errington, *Power and Difference* . As I noted in the introductory chapter, there exists no historical analysis of the prohibition against the involvement of women in public affairs in pre-modern or modern Burma per se. But there exist serious scholarly discussions about what academics and non-academics perceive as the androcentrism and

Buddhist societies—such as the exclusion of women from the *sangha* and, therefore, from the attainment of *nibbana* (release from the cycle of suffering and rebirth)—and the shorter and less powerful history of Buddhist nuns have contributed to perceptions of women as occupying a secondary position to men. Narrative depictions of women in Buddhist literature have delivered both positive and negative portrayals of women. If women have figured in Buddhist literature as devoted followers of the Buddha, donors, renunciants and teachers who played a significant role in the development and spread of Buddhism, Buddhist hagiographies have also cast the women in the role of impure temptresses charged with keeping men from attaining *nibbana*.[234] Stories from the *Tipitaka* of beautiful maidens who "devour the virtue of many [men] with manifold wiles" and of weak, age-weary and unsightly women who elicit strenuous contemplation on the part of the observer have long represented common parables in Burma as have stories extolling the virtues of Princess Yasodhara (historical Buddha's wife) and Queen Mahapajapati (the sister of the Buddha's mother who became his step-mother at the death of his birth mother).[235] As Tessa Bartholomeusz points out in her study of Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka, "some Buddhist texts suggest that women are equal to men in their abilities to progress along the Buddhist path to enlightenment" while others "imply that women are incapable of doing little else except tempting men away from that very path."[236]

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misogyny of Buddhist, especially Theravada Buddhist, traditions. This scholarship indicates that based on a well-known conversation on the nature of women ascribed to the Buddha and his disciple Ananda, Buddhist traditions have associated women with "attachment and becoming" and men with "detachment and release," as a result of which women have been prohibited from playing any active role, other than as economic agents, in public affairs of the society. See Chatsumarn, *Thai Women in Buddhism*; Tsomo, *Buddhist Women across Cultures: Realizations*; Wilson, *Charming Cadavers*; Kapur-Fic, *Thailand*; Cabezon, *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*; Gyatso, "One Plus One Makes Three."

[234] See Blackstone, *Women in the Footsteps of the Buddha*; Thera Dharmasena, *Jewels of the Doctrine Stories of the Saddharma Ratnavaliya* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Bartholomeusz, *Women under the Bo Tree*; Wilson, *Charming Cadavers*.

[235] Khin Myo Chit, "Women in Buddhism," *The Guardian* 1974, 8, 12.

[236] Bartholomeusz, *Women under the Bo Tree*, 4.

Gendered practices and representations both favorable and unfavorable to women have mediated the position of women in Burmese society; it is not the misogynistic or the anti-sexist current in Burmese society per se but the tension between the two that has informed the place of women and men in Burmese society and delineated the boundaries of femininity and masculinity. The question therefore is: why do more or less favorable conceptualizations of women become pronounced at particular moments in history?

This chapter investigates the appearance in the 1920s and the early 1930s of representations of Burmese women who were referred to variously as *khit thet* ("new age"), *toe tet* ("advanced"), or *khit kala* ("contemporary") by the educated elite and intellectuals at the time. These representations characterized Burmese women as progressive based on two criteria: that they were no less learned, independent and authoritative than Burmese men and more so than the women in other parts of the world. The progressive Burmese female appeared in newspapers and periodicals in the guises of writer, student, career-woman, housewife, and mother. She served as a prominent icon of modernization. The nascent yet ever-more expanding popular print culture disseminated representations of the educated, professional and activist female and firmly established female authorship, readership and perspective as vital elements of public discourse. The chapter sheds light on the fortuitous intersection of representations of progressive Burmese women with institutional and ideological developments that reconfigured the way Burmese people understood women and their relationship to knowledge and power.

These representations of Burmese women that were advocated by male and female politicians, intellectuals, administrators, writers, journalist-editors and other cultural intermediaries in Burma were by no means symptomatic of a homogeneous and unitary anti-sexist or a feminist movement, a movement that did

not exist in colonial Burma. Nor were they necessarily inspired by concerns with gender equality. I argue, instead, that they were informed by such varied interests as nationalism, commercialism, and Buddhism and espoused by various members of the Burmese literary public as an indispensable strategy of mobilizing women. A key component of this chapter is to scrutinize the disparate purposes that depictions of modern Burmese women served and to unpack the complex politics of representing Burmese women in colonial Burma.

Modernizing Women In the Name of the Nation

One of the most compelling popular representations of Burmese women that appeared in the 1920s and early 1930s—and certainly the most enduring—drew directly from the colonial and Orientalist portrayal of the "liberated" Burmese women. This particular representation ironically served as an essential political strategy of nationalist movements in not only Burma but in British India as well. The image of the exceptionally liberated Burmese women, always positioned in contrast to the traditionally repressed women in India, was repeatedly cited as evidence of the country's legitimate demand for administrative reforms. Exemplary of this nationalist maneuver, the Secretary of the Burmese Women's Association, Daw Mya Sein, put forward the case for extending the reforms granted to India in 1910 but denied to Burma as follows at the Burma Round Table Conference in 1931:

> The women of Burma occupy a position of freedom and independence not attained in other provinces. Socially there is practical equality between the sexes. Purdha is unknown; women take their full share with men in the economic life of their country and the percentage of literates among women is far higher than elsewhere.[237]

[237] This quote, from minutes of proceedings at the Round Table Conference which Daw Mya Sein attended as the only female member of the Burma delegation, is cited in Khaing, *The World of Burmese Women*, 156.

Given the cultural and political economy in colonial Burma, which required that a subject be worthy of rights—and rights were not inherent but acquired through the verification of civilizedness and progress—it is no surprise that nationalists highlighted the egalitarian nature of gender relations in Burma.

The "high status" of the Burmese female likewise played a role in the political maneuvers of nationalists in India, not only in Burma. One of the pioneering leaders of nationalism, democracy, and non-violent political resistance in India, Lokamanya Tilak,[238] for instance, referred in speeches he gave in India after his visit to Burma in 1899 to the British refusal to grant political reform to Burma in spite of the socially advanced status of the Burmese female:

> All the reforms like absence of caste division, freedom of religion, education of women, late marriages, widow remarriage, system of divorce, on which some good people of India are in the habit of harping *ad nauseam* as constituting a condition precedent to the introduction of political reforms in India, had already been in actual practice in the province of Burma… It is borne in upon us by the situation of the Sinhalese and the Burmese that the opinion of some wise person about the indispensability of social reform for national or industrial advancement of our country is entirely wrong… Some European writers have sought to advise us to bring about social reform as a preparation for political reform. But it is human nature that this piece of precept should stand suspect till we see with our own eyes what kind of political reform is given to Burma which is socially in a position to deserve it.[239]

In India, then, nationalists saw the British colonization of Burma, *despite* the high status of women in Burmese society, as proof that British colonial rule merely deployed the "oppressive" treatment of women in India as a justification for refusing to grant India political reforms.

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[238] For information on Lokamanya B. G. Tilak, see Ram Gopal, *Lokamanya Tilak: A Biography* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1956) and Ashok Chousalkar, *Indian Idea of Political Resistance: Aurobindo, Tilak, Gandhi and Ambedkar* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1990).
[239] Chousalkar, *Indian Idea of Political Resistance*, 214.

The high status of the Burmese female attested to the worthiness of the proposed Burmese nation-state and simultaneously to the illegitimacy of British colonial rule. By "citing" the high status of the Burmese female as evidence of the country's legitimate demand for sovereignty, nationalists reinforced their claim to self-rule and/or independence. In so far as the "traditional" high status of women in Burma symbolized the nationalists' rightful claim to decolonization, the maintenance of this symbolic tradition figured as an imperative element of the anti-colonial struggle in Burma. An editorial in the 1936 New Year's Edition of *New Light of Myanmar* titled "Some of Burma's Problems," thus, urged women in Burma to pursue professional careers for the sake of their "traditional" high status. In the editorial, the editor calls on Burmese women to not fall behind women in other countries—namely the West, China, Japan, Turkey, Persia, and Egypt and other "uncolonized" countries presumably on the fast track to modernization—who were joining the armed and police forces, taking up professions as mechanics, journalists, doctors and nurses, teachers, lawyers, and judges. "Burmese women," he says, "are you going to let your time-honored reputation as exceptionally liberated women of the East be ruined?"[240]

As I explained above, the reputation of the traditionally liberated Burmese women was at least initially constructed at the hands of "outsiders." It derived from the missionaries' and colonial officials' comparative perception of predominantly Buddhist women in Burma to predominantly Hindu, Muslim, and Christian women in Britain and in British India. Based on the comparison, which hinged on Eurocentric and Judeo-Christian notions of enfranchisement and citizenship based in turn on property rights, colonizers determined that Burmese women possessed remarkable freedom, independence, and equality with men. Thus, when international women's associations pressed the British government to enfranchise women in Burma, they

[240] *Myanmar Alin* (*New Year's Edition*), 5 April 1936, 9.

justified their demand on the basis that women in Burma had property rights. For instance, a letter from the Equal Citizenship and the British Commonwealth League—an association whose professed goals were to secure equality of liberties and opportunities between men and women in the British Commonwealth nations—to the Secretary of State for India, India Office, dated 20 December 1933, reads:

> On behalf of the women of the Empire, we urge you to forward the views of the women of Burma, and extend the franchise to the wives of men qualified as property owners in the same way that wives in this country are qualified. This is essentially just in regard to Burmese women, since, according to Burmese law and custom, wives are in fact joint owners of the property. To distinguish between the joint holders by enfranchising one only is an obvious injustice.[241]

Moreover, as mentioned above, British Indian subjects who traveled to Burma reinforced the view that women in Burma occupied a higher social position than that of their fellow Indian women. The Burmese tradition of gender equality was thus constructed through the country's incorporation into the British empire which privileged the view of Burmese society and culture through the lens of the British empire instead of through the lens of other Buddhist or neighboring Southeast Asian societies where women possessed comparable property rights.

By the 1930s however this "invented tradition" had become firmly established as a resilient Burmese national tradition and, when put into public circulation, signified Burma's modernity and the excess of the British colonial project. Besides serving a nationalistic purpose, moreover, the high status of Burmese women challenged the superior status of Western women as in the following statement by Daw Khin Myint in a talk titled "Englishmen as Seen by Burmese Women":

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[241] British Commonwealth League, 20 December 1933, "Letter to the Secretary of State for India, India Office," IOR L/ P&J (B) 512. The International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (Alliance Internationale Pour Le Suffrage et L'Action Civique et Politique des Femmes) similarly wrote to the Secretary of India urging that "the franchise to be exercised by owners of property should be on the basis of the vote of both husband and wife as we understand that in Burmese law they are joint owners" (Ibid.).

> Englishmen respect their women, but he will not entrust his pay envelope wholly or solely to her charge. Not so in Burma. The Burmese woman knows how to make money and how to keep it. She sees to it that she is appointed "Chancellor of her husband's exchequer" and keeper of the "Family Purse."[242]

Daw Khin Myint co-opted a "Burmese tradition," as a strategic move in the politics of representation: the struggle between different groups—imperialists and nationalists, the colonizer and the colonized, the male and the female—with differential power to make their representations central and defining.

The Burmese struggle to influence British representations of Burmese society and the Burmese nation by highlighting the Burmese female's ostensible high status embodied an attempt to negotiate prevailing unequal relations of power. In this struggle, female education, literacy, and professionalism—those things that were the focus of Chapter Three—took on particular significance because the lack thereof represented "uncivilized" and "backward" aspects of the otherwise progressive and empowered Burmese female. They therefore had an impact on the legitimacy of both British colonial rule and Burmese nationalists' efforts to establish Burma as a modern, civilized, nation.

Empowering Women In the Name of the Buddha

Popular representations of educated, professional and publicly influential modern Burmese women came from yet another source: serialized *Yuwadi*[243] or "Young Ladies'" columns in many prominent Burmese newspapers and periodicals. The *Yuwadi* columns first appeared in the popular press as a literary innovation by Ledi Pandita U Maung Gyi, the author of *Dagon Magazine*'s feature column entitled

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[242] The talk, given at a meeting of the Rotary Club of Rangoon, was printed the Ngan Hta Lawka magazine (Khin Myint, "Englishmen as Seen by Burmese Women," *Ngan Hta Lawka*, January 1937, 542).

[243] The word *yuwadi* is the feminine form of the Pali word *yuvan* or "youth."

Yuwadi Sekku or "Young Ladies' Papers" (hereafter "Yuwadi Sekku").[244] The column, published intermittently after *Dagon* started publication in 1920, was comprised of correspondence between two women: a woman from Rangoon (Yangon Khin Swe) would write a letter to a woman in Mandalay (Mandalay Khin Toke), who would provide a reply in the following issue. The letters were by no means confined to what might be called "women's issues,"[245] and discussed myriad subjects ranging from gossip, arts and letters, and local histories of her supposed home town, to commentaries on Burma's current political, economic, and social affairs.

What distinguished the Yuwadi Sekku from other contemporary editorials and columns was that it featured female writers exclusively. The fact that U Maung Gyi wrote the letters entirely by himself, using the two female pseudonyms, was undisclosed to the readers. Instead, the "letters" were published along with pictures of the invented female authors [see Figures 8 and 9] in an effort to convince the readers that the Yuwadi Sekku was indeed written by women.

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[244] U Maung Gyi received the prefix "Ledi Pandita" after he became an editor for a newspaper entitled *Ledi Tayar*, published from 1926 (Kha, မြန်မာနိုင်ငံစာနယ်ဇင်းမှတ်စုများ, 63-64). U Maung Gyi may also have been behind Dagon's publication of biographies of such famous Burmese women historical figures as Queen Shinsawpu (1453-1472) and Queen Supayalat (1859-1925) in the mid-1920s. For more information on U Maung Gyi, see Paragu, လယ်တီပဏ္ဍိတ ဆရာဦးမောင်ကြ (Yangon: Lawka Sabei, 1995).

[245] This is a point worth clarifying because, as Daw Kyan points out in her outstanding article on women and the world of journalism, a reader may confuse the term "Ladies' Column" with a column devoted to topics exclusively concerning women (Kyan, "အမျိုးသမီးများနျင့်စာနယ်ဇင်းလောက," 279 - 312).

Figure 8: Yangon Khin Swe

Source: *Dagon* (March 1927), 231.

Figure 9: Mandalay Khin Toke

Source: *Dagon* (December 1926), 203.

Why did U Maung Gyi have to pretend to be a female writer? There are at least a few possible interpretations of this decision by U Maung Gyi (and by numerous male writers who subsequently wrote in female pseudonyms), all of which suggests the uneasy relationship between the female gender and authorship. It implies that women were not (and would not be) writing, at least for commercial purposes; perhaps it was against the norm for men to write for female readers or female readership did not exist and therefore there was no demand for female writers. It is also possible that men did not want to be associated with supporting female authorship. One things is for certain, in writing under a female name, U Maung Gyi encouraged women's interest in what were formerly considered to be masculine pursuits and professions. He thus attempted a historic intervention in Burmese literature: the creation of female authorship. Although female writers have been known in Burma since at least the middle of the fourteenth century, female creators of public discourse or popular literature simply did not exist prior to the introduction of the Yuwadi Sekku.[246]

Take, for instance, a letter from Khin Toke to Khin Swe in the December 1926 issue of *Dagon*.[247] Referring to the letter Khin Swe published in the previous issue (November 1926), Khin Toke opens her letter by praising Khin Swe for her bold and brilliant criticism of the *sangha*'s transgression: the "transgression" she speaks of, it

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[246] Nan Hninn Yu Yu, "မြန်မာအမျိုးသမီးစာရေးဆရာများ (1044 - 1939)" (MA thesis, Yangon University, 1995), 24. Burma's foremost literary historian, U Pe Maung Tin, dates the emergence of women writers back to the beginning of the nineteenth-century, namely to Ma Mya Gale. Like most of the pre-twentieth century female authors discussed by Nann Hnin Yu Yu, however, Ma Mya Gale was a queen consort of King Bagyidaw who wrote primarily for the king and for the royal/court audience (Pe Maung Tin, မြန်မာ စာပေသမိုင်း (Yangon: Thudhamawadi, 1956), 288-92). U Hla Pe, a Professor of Burmese at the School of Oriental and African Studies, dates the appearance of female writers even earlier to the fifteenth century. These female writers—whom he describes as "ladies of the court"—looked to the court for appreciation and patronage like most, if not every, author in Burma at the time (Pe, "The Rise of Popular Literature in Burma," 135). I hesitate to generalize about the nature of female authorship in pre-modern Burma due to the scarcity of scholarship on period female writers and literary works outside the realm of courtly life, but it seems relatively safe to say that there existed no "popular" female writers in Burma who were widely known to the commoners at the time nor was there a culture of female writers and readers.

[247] Mandalay Khin Toke, "Yuwadi Sekku," *Dagon*, December 1926, 202-16.

appears, is the increasing discord among the politically active members of the *sangha*, namely, between young monks (y*ahans*) and elder monks (*sayadaws*).[248] While the young monks continued to pursue a boycott movement against tax collection and against the Legislative Council (begun in 1920), the elder monks became involved in legislative politics, thus forsaking the boycott.[249] Khin Toke alludes to the fact that some unidentified newspapers have feverishly denounced Khin Swe's criticism of the *sangha* and the failure of the monks to unite in their anti-colonial effort, declaring that "those who pass judgment on the *sangha* are digging their own graves."[250] Some readers of such newspapers, Khin Toke adds, have mindlessly reiterated this view without any reflection upon the matter. Khin Toke, however, commends Khin Swe's forthright assessment of the *sangha*'s actions and her readiness to assert her own opinion. In so doing, Khin Toke cites a Buddhist proverb [or what is said to be a Buddhist proverb] in which a monk, speaking to the Buddha, conveys his view that one ought to criticize the *sangha*, as long as the criticism is legitimate.[251]

In the second half of her letter, Khin Toke responds to Khin Swe's statement in the previous issue of *Dagon*, that "the modern, Burmese, female youth ends up in offices because of her avant-garde ways."[252] Khin Toke explains that because the statement could be interpreted in many ways—for instance, that young women end up in a police office because of their unruly behavior—she would like to clarify her own interpretation. She first asks, "If the young women end up in such 'offices' as legislative, parliamentary, or press offices, because they have obtained B. A. or B. L.

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[248] I have been unable to find Khin Swe's letter to which Khin Toke refers and thus am unable identify with certainty the "transgression" under discussion. However, numerous historians of the *sangha* in Burma point out that various rivalries between monks and between monks and laymen that plagued the sangha from roughly 1924 until 1927 (Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma*, 205; Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution*, 132-33).
[249] Maung, *From Sangha to Laity*, 58-59.
[250] Ibid., 202.
[251] Ibid., 204. I have been unable to locate the source text.
[252] Ibid., 205.

degrees, isn't that an encouraging development?"[253] Khin Toke then claims that, "as Ma Khin Swe has already agreed," young women's place in society is not located solely in the home and women with professional careers should not be confined by marital, parental, or otherwise domestic duties.[254] After further elaborating on her interpretation, Khin Toke concludes her letter to Khin Swe with the following word of warning to young women in Burma:

> နေ့လယ်ခင်းမပျင်းလိုက်ပါနဲ့မခင်ဆွေ။
> ဟာ–ဟီဟီ–နာရီဖြုန်းလျှင်။ ရှုံးတတ်သလေ။
> မြင်အကြားကိုလ။ ခင်တပါးရအောင်ဖွေ။ စွေတေနေနဲ့။
> လူ့သမိုင်းငယ်နှင့်။ ရှုတိုင်းလိမ္မာဟန်နှင့်။
> ချိန်စာဉာဏ်ဆင့်ဆင့်တိုးအောင်။ ကြိုကုတ်ပါကွဲ့။[255]
>
> Don't waste your afternoons taking naps,
> Chitchatting and larking about just waste your time,
> Use your time to gain much knowledge of the present and of the past,
> So that you may perceive the world around you as informed, intelligent women.

That U Maung Gyi endeavored to bolster the status of female authors is made clear by the contents of this letter. Khin Toke endorses Khin Swe's decision to freely express her opinion, even against the *sangha*. Both Khin Toke and Khin Swe defend and promote multiple transformations in the lives of Burmese women. Khin Toke encourages the choice of young women in Burma to pursue careers that were hitherto the privileged professions of men, even if it entails their renunciation of conjugal duties—a radical suggestion for the times. She insists that women educate and inform themselves of what is happening in the world in which they live: a young woman must not waste her afternoons making conversation because she should be educating herself (and what better way to stay informed than to read the papers?). Although formal schooling constituted a fundamental part of the modern female's education, Khin Toke

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[253] Ibid., 206.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Ibid., 216.

advises women to pursue education not merely for the sake of degrees but for knowledge. She thus supports the attempts by women to defy social convention in pursuit of knowledge. By writing as women, then, U Maung Gyi sought to normalize female education, readership and authorship, an intention encapsulated succinctly and emphatically in the opening verse of the Yuwadi Sekku published in the September 1929 issue of *Dagon*:[256]

> တန်ခိုးပွင့်ပြန်ပေါ့။ အမျိုးတင့်စေတို့။ အကျိုးရှင့် ပေါ်လာပြီ...
> မိန်းမကိုညှာတာပေးပါလို့။ အသာကလေး ချေဌာတဲ့ အခွင့်ပေပေါ့။
> ရော့ပါ–ရော့ပါ–အင့်ရယ်လို့။ ပြုပြုဌါဌါကမ်းကြပေါ့။
> (ယုဝတီတို့ရယ်) ပြော့ခါ, ပြော့ခါ, နှင့်အမှုမပါစတမ်း။[257]

> Today, worthy and empowered women are on the rise... They are now being offered rights and opportunities they were previous denied. Young women, this is your time to come to the forefront, so take the offer with dignity, seize the moment without hesitation.

What is striking about U Maung Gyi's effort to legitimate his representations of Burmese women as educated, educating and articulate young women is his reference to Buddhist parables. The strategy of citing the Buddha, in fact, was U Maung Gyi's preferred writing style,[258] an illustrative example of which one finds in the March 1927 Yuwadi Sekku.[259] The subject that occupies Yangon Khin Swe's letter to Mandalay Khin Toke is the demonstration on 2 February 1927, discussed in Chapter Three, by members of the Burmese Women's Association over the law that prohibited women from taking part in parliamentary elections.[260] Khin Swe describes the prohibition as pure chauvinism: "Men chastise women. They try to intimidate

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[256] Yangon Khin Swe, "Yuwadi Sekku," *Dagon*, September 1929, 351 - 61.
[257] Ibid., 351.
[258] Saya Lun is known to have similarly espoused this strategy of citing canonical Buddhist texts (Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution*, 133).
[259] Yangon Khin Swe, "Yuwadi Sekku," *Dagon*, March 1927, 240 - 53.
[260][260] Mu, "မြန်မာ.လွတ်လပ်ရေးကြိုးပမ်မှု တွင်ပါဝင်သော အမျိုးသမီးများ၏တဏ္ဍ," 20; Khaing, *The World of Burmese Women*, 154; Maw, "The Role of Myanmar Women in the Nationalist Movement, 1906 - 1942," 55.

women... Men aspire to oppress women. Like vultures, they safeguard their parliamentary seats. They lock women in. They kick women out... so I write because I cannot bear to put up with their harassment."[261]

As one of her main arguments against the sexist ban on women from pursuing parliamentary posts, Khin Swe cites from the *Lomasakassapa Jataka*. "In the *jataka*, as you know," she writes to Khin Toke, "the Buddha himself lectured on the great strength and ability of women."[262] She then quotes the following passage from the *Lomasakassapa Jataka*:

ဗလံစန္ဒော ဗလံသူရိယော။
ဗလံသမဏဗြဟ္မဏာ။
ဗလံဝေလာသမုဒ္ဒသာ။
ဗသာတိဗလမိတ္ထိယော။[263]

The strength of the moon, the strength of the sun,
The strength of a [Buddhist] wandering ascetic,
The strength of a seashore,
The strength of a woman is stronger these.

Khin Swe translates the passage, cited in Pali, into Burmese in the style of a *nissaya*: a word-by-word translation of a Pali text often followed by glosses and a more elaborate interpretation of the Pali text by the translator.[264] Her interpretation of the passage is straightforward: the might of the moon and sun which bring light and darkness to the

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[261] Swe, "Yuwadi Sekku," 240.
[262] Ibid., 244.
[263] Ibid. For a brief description of the *Lomasakassapa Jataka* (433), see G. P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names* (London: Luzac, 1960), s.v.
[264] Nissayas are bilingual texts found throughout Theravadin Southeast Asia which contain a word or a phrase of Pali text followed by a vernacular gloss, in this case Burmese. Nissayas can be written in a great variety of styles and function more as commentarial texts rather than as simply translations of a Pali source text. According to Justin McDaniel, *nissayas* are rarely close or literal vernacular translations of the Pali source text, and their functions are better understood as "invocations" rather than translations (Justin Thomas McDaniel, "Invoking the Source: Nissaya Manuscripts, Pedagogy and Sermon-Making in Northern Thai and Lao Buddhism" (PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, 2003), 6. For information on nissayas in Burma see John Okell, "Nissaya Burmese," *Journal of Burma Research Society* L, no. 1 (1967) and William Pruitt, *Etude Linguistique De Nissaya Birmans : Traduction Commentâee De Textes Bouddhiques* (Paris: Presses de l'Ecole francaise d'Extreme-Orient, 1994).

human world is great; the power of the pious ascetic is also great; the force of the ocean's waves and tides are equally great; but the strength of the womenfolk—women who have been castigated, put down and harassed for rightfully demanding their right to run for parliamentary offices—is the greatest.[265]

U Maung Gyi thus tapped into what was certainly Burma's most widely shared discourse, i.e. Buddhist discourse, to encourage readers to broaden their outlook. He utilized Buddhist hagiographies as ideological support for his potentially controversial representations of Burmese women. Casting women in roles of *nissaya* authors, he furthermore used Buddhist texts as testament to his proposition that women were fully capable of serving as knowledgeable and authoritative figures [Figure 10 shows a portrait in Dagon that depicts a group of young women engrossed in translating texts].

In his detailed study of *nissaya* texts, Justin McDaniel points out that a *nissaya* author's mere knowledge of Pali terms and his/her ability to memorize, translate and explain Pali words gave the author great prestige. He elaborates:

> Moreover, despite the fact that *nissaya* authors believed they could directly translate Pali words without loss of meaning, some Pali terms were given much more than a direct gloss. The expanded glosses and comments edified the audience, displayed the skill of the author and provided a platform from which to offer a lecture on more general subjects.[266]

Modern Burmese women were "worthy and empowered" not only because they held university degrees but because they were knowledgeable, skilled and capable of interpreting, explaining and spreading the words of the Buddha—words which, incidentally, claimed that women were worthy and powerful. Reinforced by portraits of young female readers and writers placed purposefully in the magazine, U Maung

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[265] Swe, "Yuwadi Sekku," 240-41.
[266] McDaniel, "Invoking the Source", 7-8.

Gyi's Yuwadi Sekku aimed at promoting young women to imagine themselves as part of a growing feminine literary community.

Figure 10: Portrait of *Yuwadi* engrossed in "translating" texts

Source: *Dagon* (April 1927), 113.

The Burgeoning Literary Female: Women Writers, Readers and Perspectives

U Maung Gyi's effort to popularize female authorship met with immediate success and in 1925, it became a feature column in which many "young women" from other towns—whose letters were authored by some of Burma's most renowned male writers—joined in the correspondences.[267] In the same year, another widely read periodical *Deedoke* began publication of a *Yuwadi* column, entitled "Young Women's Mirror" (*Yuwadi Kye Hmoun*), which virtually replicated U Maung Gyi's Yuwadi Sekku. In all likelihood, the undisclosed author of the column was Saya Lun, who wrote for *Deedoke* but was also the editor of *Dagon* and had in fact invited U Maung Gyi to write for *Dagon*.[268] The author of *Deedoke*'s "Yuwadi Kye Hmoun" frequently opened her article with a passage from a Pali source text concerning women, as in the following passage which began the 7 November 1925 column:

သမုဒ္ဒ၁ဝရဏာဘ၀ိ။

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[267] U Maung Gyi wrote under more female pseudonyms such as Tharawaddy Tin Oung, Pyinmana Su Su, and Ketumadi (the classical name of Toungoo) Mya Mya as the column became popular. In addition to letters by these "ladies," which were authored by U Maung Gyi, "Yuwaddi Sekku" featured letters by "ladies" created by other male writers.

[268] Although literary historians often claim that U Maung Gyi came up with the idea of "Young Women's Papers," it is not certain if he was solely responsible for the creation of the column. U Maung Gyi became a writer for *Dagon*—and subsequently an editor for the magazine—at the invitation of the then editor of *Dagon*, Saya Lun (also known as Mr. Maung Hmaing and Thakin Kodaw Hmaing), who had himself begun publishing poems under female pseudonyms prior to the publication of the "Yuwadi Sekku." A young monk-turned-poet and writer, Saya Lun derived his penname, "Mr. Maung Hmaing" from a notorious and libertine lady-killer character in U Kyi's "Story of Maung Hmaing" (Kyi, "Story of Maung Hmaing, the Roselle Seller," (Yangon: Hanthawaddy Press, 1902). Together with the prefix "Mister," which was used to refer to Burmese people who adopted the prefix as an honorific to their names, the penname represented Saya Lun's attempt to ridicule Burmese anglophiles (for details on the "Story of Maung Hmaing," see Keiko Hotta, "Some Aspects of 'Modernization In "Story of Maung Hmaing, the Roselle Seller,"" in *Burma and Japan: Basic Studies on Their Cultural and Social Structure* (Toyo: The Burma Research Group, 1987), 102 - 16). He took on the name "Thakin Kodaw Hmaing" subsequently in the mid-1930s when he joined the *Dobama Asiayone* and its younger, "Thakin" nationalists. He is best known as a "patriot-writer" and playwright who ardently supported Burma's pro-Independence and nationalist movements through his writing (Pe, "The Rise of Popular Literature in Burma," 137; Kyi, "Socio-Political Currents in Burmese Literature, 1910 - 1940," 71). He is also known, however, for his introduction of female characters into Burmese prose through his *Tikas* ("Commentary"), derived from a genre of Pali commentarial texts, published in *Thuriya*. In his *Tikas*, Saya Lun portrayed female characters who played the role of the disciples of the wise and holy man, Saya Lun himself (Kha, မြန်မာနိုင်ငံစာနယ်ဇင်းမှတ်စုများ, 183-84). See Htway, "The Role of Literature in Nation Building: With Special Reference to Burma," 24-25.

> ပါကာရာဝရဏံယရံ။
> နရိန္ဒာဝရဏာဒေ သာ။
> စရိယာဝရဏာထိ ယော။[269]
>
> The earth is contained by the ocean,
> A house is enclosed by its walls,
> A country is run by her king,
> A woman is controlled only by her will.

Like U Maung Gyi, the author translates the passage into Burmese in the *nissaya*-style before providing an extended exposition of her interpretation. The remainder of the column critiques well-known texts that, according to the author, portray Burmese queens and historical figures negatively, such as the "Magghadeva Pyo," a nineteenth-century commentarial verse about the *Magghadeva Jataka*,[270] and repeats the cycle of cite-translate-explain-elaborate.[271] Through this repetitive strategy, the author endeavored to emulate the most common didactic method of *nissayas*. Repetition, McDaniel explains, was a well-known trait of Buddhist texts in general used "to emphasize a particular point, develop a convincing argument, establish the authenticity of a particular lineage, or for worship."[272] McDaniel furthermore indicates that the use of repetition served as a method to teach vocabulary and to express new ideas using traditional forms:

> Just as apocryphal Jatakas used translocal literary practices to express local values, beliefs and practices, *nissayas* introduce new ways of reading and teaching a classical Pali source text through the seemingly benign and non-creative practice of translation and repetition.[273]

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[269] This "Yuwadi Kye Hmoun" was published in two parts ("Yuwadi Kye Hmoun," *Deedoke*, 8 & 14 November 1925.
[270] For a brief description of the *Magghadeva* or *Makhadeva Jataka* (9), see Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, s.v.
[271] "Yuwadi Kye Hmoun," 5-6, 17-18. The author probably chose to cite from "Maghadeva Pyo" because it was written by Ashin Zawana Man-lay Sayadaw, a prominent nineteenth-century monk known for his often deprecating depictions of women. See Win Myint, *Manlay Sayadaw's Verses: Pyo, Kabya, Linka and Yadu* (Yangon: Paw Pyu La Sabei, 1972), 9-11.
[272] McDaniel, "Invoking the Source," 16.
[273] Ibid.

The *Yuwadi* columns clearly represented "traditional" instruments for inculcating readers with what the authors saw as "modern" gender sensibilities.

The strategy proved to be groundbreaking. In 1925 alone, two periodicals besides *Deedoke* that only recently began publishing, *Independent* and *Kawee Mye Hman*, serialized *Yuwadi* as copy cat columns.[274] The *Yuwadi* column had become a widespread phenomenon and a standard feature of the Burmese popular press by the end of the 1920s. By the mid-1930s, actual female writers (not only male writers who employed female pseudonyms) flourished in the Burmese press, and the majority of competitive newspapers and periodicals had prominent female editors on board.[275]

Although the Yuwadi column itself became less prevalent towards the late 1930s, columns devoted to the opinion of female writers remained popular. The January 1940 issue of Gyanaygyaw, for instance, published a letter from a female reader, Tin Tin from the town of Letpanthan, expressing her wish to have a column entitled "Auntie Says" ("Daw Daw Pyaw Me"). In the letter, Tin Tin suggests that *Gyanaygyaw* ought to augment its existing editorial column entitled "Uncle Says" ("U Lay Pyaw Me") with a feminine counterpart: "In my opinion, *Gyanaygyaw* would benefit from such a column as 'Auntie Says' that gives guidance to young women like myself."[276] Even newspapers and periodicals that did not have women editors routinely featured columns exclusively written by women writers, as in the case of *Myanmar Alin* (written by Ma Ma Lay), *Kyi Pwa Ye Magazine* (written by Daw

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[274] See Kyan, "အမျိုးသမီးများချင့်စာနယ်ဇင်းလောက," 279 - 312; Khin Maung Htun, *မြန်မာဂျာနယ်သမိုင်း 1919 - 1941* (Yangon: U Chit Aung, 1974), 60-62.

[275] The following list shows some of the prominent newspapers and magazines being published in the 1930s that had female editors (names of the editors are in brackets): *Independent Weekly* (Daw San), *Daung Weekly* (Daw Khin Khin), *Dagon* (Khin Khin Lay). This trend continued into the 1940s when such popular journals as *Luthu Gyanay* and *Gyanay Gyaw* had female editors.

[276] *Gyanaygyaw*, January 1940, 5.

Amar), and *Toetetyei Magazine* (written by Ma Khin May and Ma Mya Gale).[277] Rather than confine themselves to discussions of women in Burma, writers wrote about women abroad, particularly in other parts of Asia.

Figure 11: A Modern Chinese Woman Wearing A Bathing Suit

Source: *Thuriya* (January 7th, 1937), 51.

The 7 January 1937 issue of *Thuriya*, provides a captivating example of such articles [Figure 11 shows the article].[278] The article, entitled "Modern Women in China Take the Lead" ("Tayouq Pyi Hnaik Khit Kala Amyothamimya Gaung Saung Ne Pyi"), states that *khit kala* ("modern") women in China are empowering themselves, namely by paying increasing attention to education, higher paid employment (in hospitals or in bureaucratic positions), healthcare, and demands for

[277] Some of these female editors and writer-journalists will be discussed in detail below and in subsequent chapters, but for more information, see the following: Daw Kyan; Tin Kha, မြန်မာနိုင်ငံစာနယ်ဇင်းမှတ်စုများ.

[278] "တရုပ်ပြည်၌ ခေတ်ကာလအမျိုးသွီးများ ခေါင်းဆောင်နေပြီ"," *Thuriya*, 7 January 1937, 51.

the right to equal (i.e. equal to men) education and inheritance. As a testament to the modernization and empowerment of women in China, the article contains a photo of a woman, whom the caption describes as Chinese, walking on a beach in a bathing suit (which was considered to be revealing in 1930s China and Burma).

Female authorship and "perspective" had thus developed as key elements of Burma's popular press and indicated that editors and writers were increasingly aware of the importance of female readership to the success of their newspapers and periodicals. Acquiring mass readership meant meeting the needs and desires of hitherto untapped readers who would have to decide to buy and read the magazines. The initial strategy of appealing to female readers took the form of the Yuwadi columns which fashioned the feminine prototype of the modern, educated and literary youth. A subsequent technique for winning the support of female readers, noticeable from approximately the mid-1930s, tapped into the category of wives and mothers, for whom the popular press published articles that introduced useful information about home and family. This shift was most noticeable in the diminishing usage of the word *yuwadi* (young women) and the inverse increase in the appearance of the word *amyothami*, meaning "woman/women." The word *yuwadi* is the feminine form of the Pali word *yuvan* or "youth." The term *amyothami*, which is a compound of the word "kin" (*amyo*) and "daughter" (*thami*) refers both to an older female and to a kin-inflected conceptualization of the female person; the word thus locates the subject position of an *amyothami* in her familial relations.

"Women's" columns, in lieu of "Young Women's" columns, began appearing in the popular press. *Toetetyei Magazine*, for instance, regularly published articles entitled "Women's Development" ("Amyothami Tho I Toetetyei").[279] The articles,

[279] See *Toetetyei Magazine*, No. 1 – 5 (October 1933 - February 1934).

written by two female authors, Khin May or Mya Gale, gave instructions on child-rearing and featured recipes for Burmese dishes.[280] *Dagon*, likewise, published articles by Khin Myo Chit—a prolific woman writer and journalist—who detailed the duties of Burmese women as mothers responsible for the health and education of the future generation.[281] Khin Myo Chit was also known for her articles that gave advice to "young wives," such as her "The Mother-in-law" ("Yaukkama Gyi"), in which she counseled her reader on how to overcome ill-feelings or jealousies towards her mother-in-law.[282]

In addition, discussions of court decisions related to marital affairs began appearing in newspapers and magazines. The 9 March 1938 issue of *Ngan Hta Lawka*, for instance, printed a letter to the editor by a Ma Nyi Nyi, who expressed her disapproval of a court decision made by a Judicial Commissioner of Lower Burma, W.F. Meres. Commissioner Meres had handed a sentence of 15 days' "rigorous imprisonment" to a husband who struck his wife on the head with a club of iron wood, cutting open her scalp. The woman's offence was that she had failed to have a meal ready for her husband upon his return home. In her response to the magistrate's remark that "the chastisement of wives should be effected by means of a small cane or bamboo, but in the present instance the accused has transgressed the ordinary system of chastisement," Ma Nyi Nyi claimed: "[I]n my opinion husbands have no right whatever to chastise their wives, *even with small canes or bamboos*, and the Magistrate must be careful to disabuse his *own* mind of this most erroneous notion of a husband's privileges."[283]

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[280] Khin May, "အမျိုးသွီးတို့၏ တိုးတက်ရေး," *Deedoke*, November 1933, 113 - 15.
[281] See *Dagon* 19:227 (July 1939) – 20:235 (March 1940). Similar articles by Khin Myo Chit were also published in *Nagani*, December 1940, 10; *Nagani*, April 1941, 14.
[282] The article was first published in Burmese in *Myanmar Alin* (Vol. 2, No. 2) and then translated by Myint Tin into English and published in *Ngan Hta Lawka* (Khin Myo Chit, "The Mother-in-Law," *Ngan Hta Lawka*, September 1940).
[283] Nyi Nyi, *Ngan Hta Lawka*, March 1938, 56.

Alongside such material that offered advice from female authors or critics whose principal function was in the capacity of mentors, newspapers and periodicals also published numerous advertisements that might appeal to the mothers and wives among the readership. The first advertisements of such toiletries as soap and powder were supplemented by advertisements of feminine contraceptive pills, and by the late 1930s, every issue of *Thuriya* displayed advertisements of baby products such as milk powder and baby food, children's clothing, kitchen and other electrical products, and medicine [see Figures 12 to 14 for examples]. Presumably, these developments in content sought to augment circulation figures not only by publishing newspapers and periodicals that included a wide spectrum of views—that is, something for everyone—but also by keeping up with the community of female readers that was growing older. The various visual images of the Burmese female produced in the forms of not only advertisements but also portraits, furthermore, encouraged the readers to form new self-identities and to contemplate the meaning of "modern-day" [Figures 15 and 16 show examples of the increasingly common practice of featuring female portraits on covers of magazines]. Burmese newspapers and periodicals had thus extensively incorporated techniques to stimulate female readership by including *Yuwadi* columns, biographies of Burmese women intellectuals and historical figures, advertisements, and women's fashion. By catering to female readers as the subject of collective reception, popular print culture gave them public literary representation and irrevocably increased women's importance as readers and writers.

Figure 12: Advertisement of "Universal" Female [Contraceptive] Pills

Source: *Dagon* (May 1929), 376.

Figure 13: An advertisement of children's clothing

Source: *Thuriya* (January 23, 1937), 1.

Figure 14: An advertisement of Cough Medicine

Source: *Thuriya* (January 23, 1937), 30.

Figure 15: Cover of *Dagon*
Source: ***Dagon*,** (June 1929)

Figure 16: Cover of *Thet Khit*
Source: *Thet Khit* (Aug 1935)

Women in Burma: Progressive by Tradition

I began this chapter with a simple question: how do we explain the paradoxical representation of Burmese women "advancing" and "rising" from within a disenfranchising and emasculating colonial rule, and how is the phenomenon related to the rise in female education, employment and activism in colonial Burma? Historians have attributed this development largely to the intervention of a select group of modern(izing) and often nationalist literati and intelligentsias. For instance, Burmese literary critics and historians have unanimously characterized Saya Lun's creation of female fictional characters as a nationalist endeavor: they essentialize Saya Lun as a political writer and claim that he introduced female characters to Burmese literature in an attempt to urge women in Burma to become both more politically aware and more actively anti-colonial. They render the literary materialization and flourishing of the feminine synonymous with the elite activity of avant-garde intellectuals, namely, of imagining the nation, national identities and the national female.

Nationalism and Burmese nationalists undoubtedly played an important role in the discursive formulation of the progressive Burmese female, as this chapter has shown. The chapter has also suggested that historians have been correct to evaluate twentieth-century Burmese newspapers, journals, and periodicals as a major force in recruiting women into the nationalist movement. In concentrating on the role played by a small minority of young, educated, iconoclastic, mostly male intellectuals in experimenting with modern ideas and technologies, however, the historical scholarship on Burma has echoed studies of twentieth-century Asia that have failed to

move beyond a reductionist account of the processes that produced new concepts, values and hierarchies in colonial Burma.[284]

Most importantly, they have marginalized the fact that images of the progressive Burmese female were generated to a large extent by the public actions of actual women who gave agency to discursive representations of literate, educated, and professional women. Both this chapter and the previous chapter have revealed that Burmese women in the 1920s and the 1930s were not only represented; they sought public representation and endeavored to represent themselves. They pursued higher education alongside men and likewise participated in student protests and anti-government rallies with their male counterpart. Women editor-journalists wrote publicly for and on behalf of the female readers. They fought for the right to run for legislative positions, formed women's branches of political organizations, and supported factory workers' unions through hunger strikes. Through such unprecedented public activism, women in Burma brought life to representations of Burmese women.

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[284]The most famous example of such scholarship is Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. While acknowledging that Anderson's work has been fundamental to the scholarly discourse on nationalism, John Breuilly, in "Historians and the Nation," has rightly critiqued Anderson for overstressing the role played by the intelligentsias in the process of imagining a nation: **"**It is much easier to study the work of nationalist intelligentsias (and almost all the historical studies following Anderson equate the activity of imagining the nation with the published work of intellectuals) than, for example, to construct indices of national identity (such as language use, voting patterns, associational habits) and to correlate these with the spread of modern practices such as schooling, commercial employment, urban immigration and trade unionism. To some extent Anderson's work has created a new legitimacy for an older style of intellectual history" (John Breuilly, "Historians and the Nation," in *History and Historians in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter Burke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 80). Examples of "historical studies that equate the activity of imagining the nation with the published work of intellectuals," other than of the Philippines and Indonesia provided by Anderson, abound: for Malaya, see Anthony Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya: Contesting Nationalism and the Expansion of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); for Siam, see Scot Barmé, *Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai National Identity* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993); for Vietnam, see Shawn McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004); for China, see Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900 – 1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

This chapter's emphasis on a combined examination of colonial, official and nationalist discourses has also revealed that images of progressive Burmese women derived not only from nationalist movements but also from Buddhist and commercial discourses. They were inextricably intertwined with the development of an urban-centered, literary and journalistic culture, the popular press, which deprived the *sangha* of its privileged status as the principle vehicle through which knowledge was circulated and debated. Consequently, narrative and visual depictions of Burmese women relied increasingly upon the new popular print media for propagation. Innovative writing techniques used by columnists, emerging commercial sensibilities and sales strategies, and advertising all served as catalysts to the explosion of images of women. At the same time, new ideas dovetailed old parables and old representational practices disseminated through new media in the popular press, making it a fertile public forum for fashioning a wide array of images of modern Burmese women. It was from within thriving discourses about modern Burmese women in the popular press that the most persistent and firmly established Burmese "tradition" of egalitarian and progressive gender relations developed.

This is not to say that representations of women in the popular press or the writers, female or male, who wrote about women were necessarily and unanimously "anti-sexist." For instance, Ma Khin May who wrote regularly for *Toetetyei*'s column entitled "Women's Development" ("Amyothami Tho I Toetetyei") writes in her October 1933 editorial that a woman's beauty in fact lies not in her looks or in her character but in her loving treatment of her husband. She thus suggests that a woman cannot be beautiful independently and outside of her matrimonial relationship.[285] Other writers used misogynistic commentary as a way of gaining readership, and not

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[285] "အမျိုးသမီးတို့၏တိုးတက်ရေး" *Toetetyei Magazine*, October 1933, 29 - 30, 71 - 73. The column, featured in *Toetetyei Magazine*, is discussed more in detail below.

all portrayals of the female in the popular press were positive. *Deedoke*, for instance, while it possessed a *Yuwadi* column, also regularly published cartoons that scorned the behaviors of women in Burma.[286] Figure 16 shows one such example. The cartoon, entitled "The Loving Kindness of a Stepmother" ("Mee Dwe Myitta"), juxtaposes an image of a woman with her "real" or biological daughter (left) and an image of her with her step-daughter (right) [Figure 17].[287] With her own daughter, she is depicted as a loving mother who reads to her daughter. In contrast, she maltreats her step-daughter, putting her to work in the kitchen like a servant. The caption for the cartoon is a warning to widowed men: "Beware, widowers!"[288]

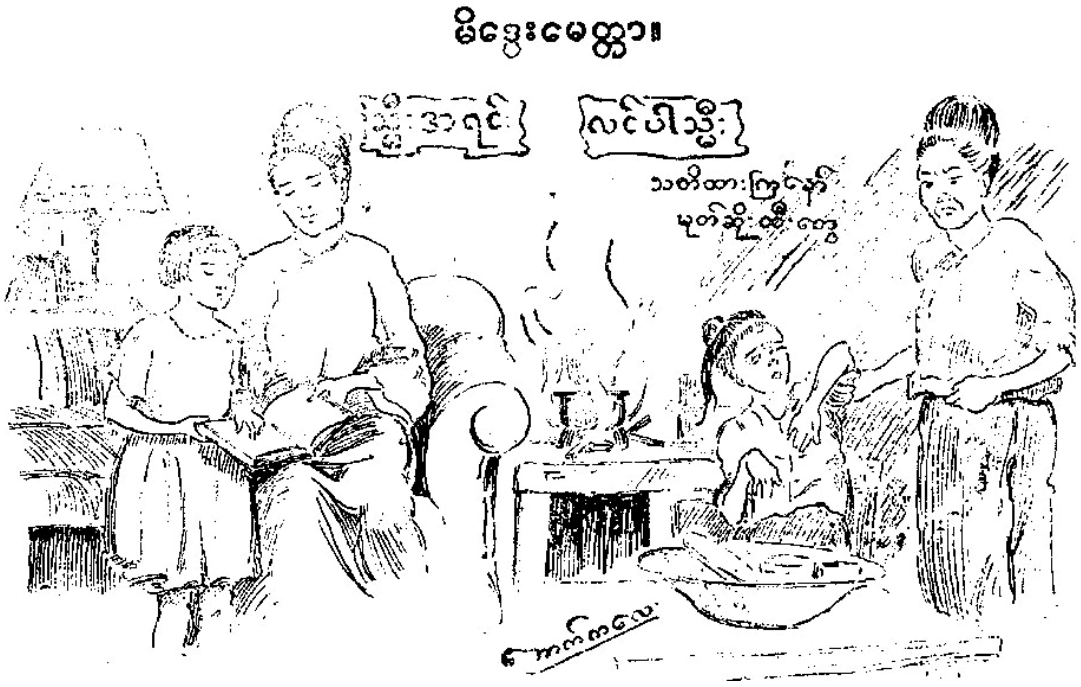

Figure 17: "The Loving Kindness of a Stepmother"

Source: *Deedoke* (March 26, 1927), 5.

[286] *Deedoke* frequently published such demeaning cartoons of women in Burma from 1925 until at least the early 1930s.
[287] Bauq Kale, "မိဘေးမေတ္တာ," *Deedoke*, March 26 1927, 5.
[288] Ibid.

Representations of progressive Burmese women in the popular press had the potential to be both emancipatory and stultifying, liberating and repressive to the female readership. They contained positive, negative and ambiguous depictions of diverse social groups and produced conflicting social meanings and hierarchies. It is misleading, therefore, to essentialize colonial Burma's popular print media as a vehicle of women's empowerment.

The chapter has come full circle: I noted in the introduction that gendered practices and representations both favorable and unfavorable to women have jointly—if not equally—influenced the place of women and men in Burmese society. I suggested that in fact anti-sexist depictions of women co-exist with misogynistic portrayals that cannot be profitably assessed in isolation from one another. The dissertation however has thus far focused on the ways that representational practices destabilized prevailing gender norms and relations of power. The following chapters reveal that representations of modern Burmese women served not only those with an interest in breaking cultural prescriptions but also those who sought to reinforce cultural norms. They attend to the appearance of misogynistic representations of Burmese women that negatively portrayed the various ways that modernization affected Burmese women. In contrast to the representations of Burmese women hitherto discussed, these representations of modern-day Burmese women accused them of undermining essential Burmese cultural boundaries in collaboration with the colonizers.

My overarching argument in the remaining part of this dissertation is as follows: censorious representations of Burmese women became sites of popular debates because contrary to Furnivallian scholars' claim that Burmese people played no part in processes of modernization or in a mestizo culture and population, they in fact actively partook of modernization and socio-cultural mixing in colonial Burma.

Cross-cultural and interethnic interactions stimulated changes in existing gendered relations of power in Burma, changes that the authors of modern misogynistic representations of Burmese women sought to contain and harness. The women represented served as proxies for new social hierarchies that were created by processes of colonialism and modernization. In these representations women functioned as objects of reflection The function of women who appear in Buddhist narratives, as Liz Wilson points out in her analysis of literary conventions used in Buddhist hagiographic literature, was often as objects of meditation that lead to the edification of the male subjects who observe the women:

> In a broad cross-section of hagiographic literature, male protagonists become Arahats, or "worthy ones," through viewing dead, dying, or disfigured female bodies. By viewing women as object lessons on the folly of desire, the men in these narratives thereby achieve the state of spiritual liberation that is characterized by the eradication of desire and thereby become worthy of veneration and emulation.[289]

In misogynistic representations of Burmese women in colonial Burma, male protagonists become nationalists or nationalist heroes through viewing women as object lessons on the folly of desire for the colonial, the foreign, the Western and the modern. The figure of the Westernized, miscegenating and mixed race Burmese female who flaunted her people by getting into bed (literally) with colonizers served to edify a singular conceptualization of the Burmese nation-state. The following chapters continue to interrogate the intricate web of interests and multifarious functions that discourses of women in colonial Burma served and what effects—often accidental and unforeseen—they had on the people who had become the subject of profuse debate and representation.

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[289] Wilson, *Charming Cadavers*, 3-4.