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Transformative
Women Leaders
in Myanmar Society

TRANSFORMATIVE
Women Leaders in Myanmar Society

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SUPPORTED BY

GENDER EQUALITY NETWORK

CARE

LIVELIHOODS AND FOOD SECURITY

TRUST FUND

TROCARE

PRODUCED BY

MIZZIMA MEDIA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Despite the fact that women leaders in Myanmar Society have not been received proper recognition and acknowledgement over a long period of time, it has now been our honor to document the capacities and empowerment of women from a variety of professions in our society together with Mizzima Media. First of all, Gender Equality Network (GEN) would like to express our sincere gratitude to all women who graciously shared their stories for this book.

We do believe that learning their life experiences would grant us a chance to understand their abilities, attitudes, and endeavors more, that enlighten everyone with the importance and usefulness of women's roles and works in numerous sectors of the society such as politics, peace process, sports, economy, and health, leading not only to furnish women with opportunities to empower themselves and also to create an enabling environment to employ their full potential.

Hence, GEN would like to show our heartfelt thanks to all supporting partners, individuals and organizations who contribute a lot to publish this "Transformative Women Leaders in Myanmar Society" book.

Gender Equality Network (GEN)

FOREWORD

“**W**omen in Myanmar Society” is a weekly program produced by Mizzima Media and broadcast on Myanmar Radio & Television (MRTV). “Transformative Women Leaders in Myanmar Society” refers to Myanmar women from various fields, who have shown their great leadership and capacities in Myanmar society.

You can see that the women featured in this book have courageous character, leadership skills, great talent and international competence that arise out of the motherly attitude. You can also see their efforts for the development of the region, the country and the whole public.

There are still so many brave and outstanding Myanmar women with great leadership and capacity. However, only 20 women in diverse fields have been selected and mentioned proudly in this book.

Let us also express our words of thanks with regard to the book entitled “Transformative Women Leaders in Myanmar Society”. First and foremost, our sincere thanks go to the 20 women who have patiently shared their experiences in order to inspire other women. We could not make it without their participation. Next, our heartfelt thanks go to Gender Equality Network for their encouragement to make a book out of the programs broadcast on TV and other organizations for their support. Last, but not least, we would like to thank Kamayut Media for the kind help with their article “Woman Bodybuilder Nang Lao Kham” and all the colleagues for their efforts in the successful implementation of this book.

Mizzima

DR. LAE LAE MAW

Female Chief Minister of Tanintharyi Region

“*Democracy is negotiation. Whenever I have something on my mind, I discuss it with my colleagues. I follow the path of democracy. That’s because we have dreamt of democracy.*”

When the NLD came to power, they formed a government including only two women chief ministers, in Kayin State and Tanintharyi Region. As for Tanintharyi Region, it is one of the business centers of Myanmar. On the other hand, it has more challenges than some other regions. Daw Lae Lae Maw, a doctor turned politician and Tanintharyi Chief Minister, is dealing with those challenges of regional development with a brave heart. Each and every word she says is proof of that.





Photo: Aye Thet

Her appointment as Chief Minister

"I became a doctor at the age of 26. Honestly speaking, I am weak in public administration, as I have been familiar with the medical field only. As a politician, I have never learnt public administration before. I just took up politics as I was fond of democracy. In the past, I used to spend more time on charity. I went to the countryside and provided healthcare services free of charge. My family even stayed in those villages and undertook charitable work. Public administration seems like a new subject that I have just started to learn.

Actually, I had no wish to be selected in the election. I have a daughter in Grade 11. She needs my care. So, I had decided not to run in the election. I would do it four or five years later when my daughter would have completed her studies. I just decided to focus on philanthropy as my politics. But, the political party assigned me this responsibility. I came to realize that I must be a part in the reform of our country. So, I try my best. I did not believe that I would ever be a chief minister. I thought I would just be an ordinary MP or appointed to be a social minister, as I come from the medical field. But, when the party assigned the role to me, I decided to try my best.



There are so many challenges for a woman like me. As a medical officer, there were just a few staff in hospitals. Now, I have to deal with various departments including General Administration. So, I face much difficulty. When I started to carry out the tasks, I did not know anything. I have to try hard to understand them. And I have to re-read rules and regulations. Of course, I have encountered much difficulty since becoming a government official.”

Her first steps

“I have started to focus on 3 policies: proper road infrastructure in the region, cheap access to electricity and job opportunities for the local population. It can be said that roads are not in a very bad condition in Tanintharyi Region. As for electricity, the people here do not have access to the national grid.

Regarding employment, it is very important to have many job opportunities to promote regional development. And this has to do with electricity as well. Without electricity, the development of the region will be delayed. Again, relevant businesses have been established in Dawei, Myeik and Kaw Thauung Districts.

We have, to some extent, managed to make proper access to road infrastructure. Apart from very remote areas, I have traveled to all the places with road access. The roads have been widened to meet standard width and quality. Inspections have been made as well to confirm their strong foundation. With regard to electricity, it is still a challenging situation. The people here do not receive electricity for 50 kyats per unit as they do not have access to the national grid. Gas is produced here, but it is expensive.

High technology is needed to produce electricity out of gas. It costs 300 kyats per unit. Consequently, there is not much local and foreign investment here.”

Her family life

“My husband is a politician too. We have four children. Two of them are in Yangon. The first one is a medical doctor working for the Yangon Institute of Sports and Physical Education. Another one is a B.E degree holder who is running his own business. The third one is here with us. He is attending the University of Computer Studies. The youngest one is in grade 11.

I share some time with my family. My husband is not as healthy as I am. He had a tough life in his youth. He became an outlaw hiding in the forest when he was a student. He doesn't have a healthy heart. I spend some time for him. I cook fat-free meals for him as he suffers from Ischemic heart disease. I do my best to be a dutiful housewife. Being a politician, my husband gives me some political advice. As he is a prolific reader, he is much help to me in politics.

Well, being a politician requires lots of mental effort. If my children are willing to pursue politics, I am ready to nurture them. My sons do not seem very interested in it, whereas my daughter asks me some questions like ‘What's politics, Mum?’ and ‘Is democracy like this?’ My husband is happy to hear her questions as our only daughter seems interested in politics. But, we can't take for granted what her life will look like in the future.”

Her attitudes as a leader

“I have never been down-hearted since my youth. I have encountered much difficulty in my family life as a wife of a politician. My husband is a university graduate. But, he had to struggle hard running here and there to avoid imprisonment. I had to take

care of our children. I have experienced bitter sufferings in life. Democracy is negotiation. Whenever I have something on my mind, I discuss it with my colleagues. I follow the path of democracy. That's because we have dreamt of democracy. I am afraid that we could deviate from the democratic path. Some ministers say that I focus too much on negotiation in some cases in which I can make my own decision. But, democracy is discussing over and over again till we reach an agreement.

When the EU comes to our region, I always request them to provide vocational and awareness-raising trainings on democracy and federalism so that the women in our region can understand them. I cannot organize those trainings on my own.

Fear is something we should have in some parts, but not in every part of life. I say this whenever I pay a visit to colleges or whenever I have a chance. A government by the people does not rule a country with fear, but with loving kindness. Yet, there are some people who do not keep up with our leadership. Of course, all people can never be the same. Even our fingers are not equal in length. I always encourage the people to reduce their fear as much as they can and make their voices heard. I always urge them to open up their wishes when authorities come to meet them. I also empower them to attend trainings on politics and apply for scholarships in foreign countries. I do these things so that the young can become less fearful.”

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

DAW OMMA RANG MI

**The first ever female Police
Colonel in Myanmar**

“ There was a political change in accordance with democracy and human rights. There became a way and place for women. Those who had been trying to and acquiring knowledge got such a chance and I was fit for this position. ”

Daw Omma Rangmi made history when she became the first female Police Colonel in Myanmar. She is the Director of the Research, Planning and Administration Department, charged with tackling transnational crime. The position is the highest position for a woman in the history of the Myanmar police forces. As police work deals with weapons, female police officers are not normally favored for advancement. Female police officers have to show that they can compete like men and that they have the capacity to go further to the next stage of leadership. Police Colonel Daw Omma Rammi showed such a characteristic from the beginning.



Photo: Aung Kyaw Latt

Experiences at the Myanmar Police Force

"I entered the police force in 1979. It was my childhood dream, as I always liked the police uniform with its stars. At that time, people called us a serving military member. My first department was the Narcotics Investigation Special Forces. Then, I was in the Anti- Human Trafficking Police Force.

Since then, I have been serving in the Department of Transnational Crime. In the Narcotics Investigation Special Forces, I was assigned to Taunggyi City. We were working undercover at the time. To be frank, I was scared of undercover operations. It is true. The area was a brown area. Bags with weapons were frequently found. It was very high risk. I served in that drug unit for 23 years. But, women in high positions in that era were rare. Nevertheless, I wanted my example to be recognized. Because of globalization, reform efforts have grown in Myanmar. Developed countries began, fortunately for me, to offer to work with the Myanmar Police Force on anti-human trafficking issues. With the Australian government's support, I became responsible for an anti-human trafficking cooperation project which included Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and



Cambodia and was promoted to take on that responsible. I served in that capacity for 8 years. I returned here in 2015 and will retire soon.”

Unforgettable milestones

“I have more than 34 years of work experiences. I have had some remarkable high points. In 1983, I joined the police second lieutenant training course, which led to my joining the Narcotics Investigation Special Forces at Taunggyi.

Narcotics Investigation Special Forces at that time were only formed in five places across the country, including Taunggyi. At that time, we needed to recruit informers to get news. And in black areas, we could not pursue suspects, though we could in brown areas. My colleagues and I were very active and took risks. Because of this, we were able to seize shipments of heroin, despite feeling frightened. In the Anti-Human Trafficking Police Force, my responsibility was to protect women and children who were victimized a totally different charge for me than before. At first, I had mixed and ambiguous feelings about this change. It seemed wrong to transfer me from the Narcotics Investigation Special Forces, as everything is totally different. But, my attitude soon changed. A majority of trafficked women were sex workers. And when I investigated those who tried to make these women sex workers, I sympathized with the victims and became committed to their needs.

I later worked a human trafficking case from Kawthaung to Ranong in 2008. More than 100 people died in a sealed container en route to Ranong, including women and children. I worked together with my seniors for more than three months on this case to get compensation for the victims and to catch the responsible traffickers from both the Myanmar and Thai side. It is an experience I will never forget.”

A passion seeded since childhood

“My father was a military person, so we followed wherever he went. Some of my brothers were former selected football players at the state and division level. I myself was the only one who followed in my father’s footsteps and came to wear the service uniform in my family. I am completely different from everyone else in my family. I followed the example set by my father and followed my father’s passion. I was the only one who wore my father’s military hat. I was the only one who hung his pistol on my waist and took a photo.

I repaired my father’s bag for him. Whenever father went to the frontline, I made the necessary preparations by checking his bag. I checked whether there was a noose or not. Once, when we were in a military compound, a film tour from the Information Department came to our compound to show us a film about the battlefield. After watching that, it made me worry about my father. So, I also began to check his battlefield equipment. At that time, I was just at the age of 9. That is how my passion began.”



The nation's first female Police Colonel

"This position is the result of a change, one can say. This change happened as the world was changing and there was a transition in Myanmar as well. There was a political change in accordance with democracy and human rights. There became a way and place for women.

Those who had been trying to and acquiring knowledge got such a chance and I was fit for this position. Later, women will get positions which I never got. As our teacher said, 'There is always a place for those who try. Work and learn and learn and work, and you have to keep trying'."

The spirit of a leader

"All have to cooperate to move things. As far as the police force, it has to work in accordance with procedures and laws. Only a good discipline and mindset will make people accepting of our service with understanding and sympathy. Only if people cooperate, can a good result be realized."

Translated by Ko Ko Aung

DAW THAN MYINT AUNG

A writer who has changed herself to be a part of the country's transformation process

“
There is only one difference between men and women, in terms of physical strength. Everyone has their own determination, qualification and capability. If you are a woman, you must do all you can as a woman.”

Writer Daw Than Myint Aung, a philanthropist who had never before been a civil servant, is now working in the civil service for the development of Yangon city. She is carrying out her duty to the best of her ability to make Yangon a beautiful and pleasant city with well-disciplined people and which also makes good use of waste material. Let's take a look into her first experience as a civil servant.





Photo: Hong Sar

Accepting the task assigned by the government

“I had never thought of being a member of the City Development Committee. And I have never been a civil servant before. A civil servant, it should be noted, has to retire from work at the age of 60. But now, the government has assigned this duty to me at the age of 63. So, this is unexpected work for me. I couldn't refuse it though, as it's a government assignment.

Before I became a member of the Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC), I established the Aung Foundation Social Environment and Philanthropy Training School. There, I have been teaching organizational management skills to young people who want to be charity workers. They have to learn the attitudes, disciplines and goodwill that they must have to carry out philanthropy work. They also learn what to do regarding education, environmental conservation, food and consumer goods security, consumer protection, consumer rights, financial loans, poverty reduction and many other important areas in charity work. I have been teaching these things at the training school since I became a philanthropist.

‘No change will happen in the country if you just sit and talk about it. If you want a change, you yourself must get involved in that change.’ I used to say this in every literary talk. Now, I have been caught in my own words.”

Leadership skills of a woman

“The historic Government Technical Institute (GTI) in Myanmar had been under the YCDC since 2007. But, we managed to transfer it back to the Department of Education. That's a milestone of the new government.

As a member of YCDC, I went to Australia. There, I met with the mayors and observed their systematic garbage disposal. I have carefully learnt how they generate energy out of garbage and produce natural fertilizer from waste material.

Actually, Yangon is a city with modern buildings and hotels among garbage piles. It seems as if we are living in a massive garbage pile. As for YCDC, they will clean the streets and roads. They will trim and cut trees where necessary. And they will also take care of the parks. As for the public, they will be most responsible for the back lanes of their residence, I think.

I am not saying that YCDC is not responsible for that at all. As a government department, they are responsible to some extent. But, the residents are more responsible as they are the ones who have to suffer the disadvantages directly. It was quite frightening when we started to clean the back lanes. They all were messy and dirty with filthy waste. People throw their garbage onto the back lanes. But, it will make its way up to the buildings in the form of mice, mosquitoes and flies. In such cases, the elderly, the children



and the public suffer from diseases. Some people don't notice that. Some tasks can be done in a short period of time, but some cannot. It takes only 20 days to clean the back lanes in a township. But, tasks like squatter-related projects, proper sewage systems and roadside shops are long-term endeavors. But, even though we cannot do them overnight, I hope that we will complete them within a period of time. We are trying our best to make it happen within the 5-year term of this government, even though it can't be fully perfect."

Attitudes as a leader

"It doesn't matter what you are. There is only one difference between men and women, in terms of physical strength. Everyone has their own determination, qualification and capability. If you are a woman, you must do all you can as a woman. If you are a man, you must do all you can as a man.

Our State Counsellor Daw Aung San Su Kyi is still working actively even at an age of over 70. She is an inspiration to me. So, I dare not complain. I am carrying out my duty to the best of my



ability. Myanmar and the Myanmar people must not be for me. Rather, I am trying my best so that I myself can be for my country and its people.”

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

DAW MON MON AUNG

**The first female administrator in
the history of the quarter**

“ *Including public administration,
there is nothing that Myanmar
women cannot do. We can even do
more than men.* ”

Daw Mon Mon Aung is the administrator of North OkkalapaE Quarter, a densely populated zone in Yangon. In 2015, she was elected as the administrator by the people in that quarter, becoming the first woman administrator in the administration history of E Quarter in North Okkalapa Township. Through her words, we learn of her many challenges, having to try harder so that the people in the quarter trust the capabilities of a woman.





Photo: Khin Su Kyi

The responsibility assigned by the people

“Actually, I had no intention. I never thought of being an administrator. But, I decided to do as much as I could for a change. Besides, the people in the quarter requested me to carry out this responsibility. So, I took part in the election and became the administrator.

I was the subject of harsh criticism when I competed in the election, particularly as I have no husband. They said that the team mostly consists of men when going for vehicle or guest inspections. Wherever I go as the administrator, most male staff from the office go along with me. The responsible staff in the administration office are all men. Being a woman administrator, I get criticized when I have to go along with policemen to catch criminals.

Another thing is that I come from Pyin Oo Lwin. I have been here for only 10 or 11 years. And there has never been a woman administrator in the administration history of this quarter. So, some people didn't want to accept me as their administrator. They just want male administrators to rule over them. They find the leadership of a woman offensive.”

Administration with a motherly attitude

“In the past, this quarter used to be notorious for many bad guys. But, I don't rule them with authority. I just teach them like a mother, not like a father.

When I see young men drinking alcohol and playing the guitar loudly, I usually say to them, “My sons, there are elderly persons in this neighbourhood like your own grandparents. Some people are meditating now and some counting beats. People are



taking a rest right now after working hard all day long. If you act like this, you will be a disturbance to their peace.” I speak to them like that with a motherly attitude. At such times, they humbly reply, “Pardon me, aunty. Let me just sing one more song.” I let them do that and I myself listen to their last song. If I stop them by force, they will get angry and aggressive. As I talk to them gently, they gradually listen to me obediently. When they see me later, they even go past me with great respect. They no longer behave badly like before.

Sometimes, depending on the number of problems, I go round the quarter twice a week. There are two rounds of night patrol, the early one and the midnight one. The midnight round is after 1:00 am. Mostly, I go on the midnight patrol because there tend to be more problems at that time, including cases of drunkenness and illegal drugs. The police alone won’t be enough for that round. So, I have to go along with them.

People come to our office as they rely upon us. So, I always help them as much as I can. Consequently, they rely more and more upon me. An administrator is responsible for everyone in the quarter from their birth to their death. Keeping that in mind, I always do my best for them.”

Her family life

As a mother of three daughters with no husband, she has been not only a dutiful mother but also a dutiful father to them. Now, she has even got a grandchild. And while she is a dutiful administrator for the quarter, she's also a dutiful daughter to her mother and a dutiful mother to her daughters. As for her daughters, they grew angry with her when she abandoned her successful beauty salon business, instead choosing to serve the quarter on a salary of only 70,000 kyats.

But, it can now be said that the hands of a beautician have become the reliable hands that can beautify the quarter with peace. She has regained the understanding and support of her family. And she has already thought for whom she will spend her time after retiring from these responsibilities.

"I'll establish a building for orphans. I'll teach them how to cut hair. I'll request tailors to teach them sewing. And I'll bring embroidery specialists from Pyin Oo Lwin, who will teach the orphans embroidery. That's for their livelihood. I'll also guide them to be knowledgeable. I want to implement this plan by gathering like-minded friends."



Her attitude as a leader

At the moment, she is the administrator of only one quarter, E Quarter in North Okkalapa Township. But, she is actively working in areas of women's affairs like rape cases, factory labour and domestic violence in any of the 19 quarters in the township.

In recognition of her brave heart and emotional investment, she has been honoured by the Nay Pyi Taw Police Force, Yangon Region Police Force and Yangon Chief Minister.

"Including public administration, there is nothing that Myanmar women cannot do. We can even do more than men. So, there is no need to fear. We women can stand shoulder to shoulder with men. There is absolutely nothing to be afraid of."

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

MI SUE PWINT

Revolutionary and peacemaker

“ *We are armed insurgents. But, we have done that in order to reach a political solution. We didn't do it as an aimless rebellion. Our aim is to meet and discuss.* ”

Mi Sue Pwint is a woman of the pen. She doesn't like injustice. She doesn't like it either when the strong bully the weak. She started to write under the penname 'Mi Sue Pwint' in times of anger over oppressions. After she witnessed the brutalities of the 1988 uprising and heard the chairman of the Myanmar Socialist Programme Party, U Ne Win, say, 'The gun is not used to shoot upward at the sky', the writer Mi Sue Pwint took up weapons. From some of her life sketches, you will come to realize that she is someone who has been leading her life from two opposite sides: looking for a way to peace while taking up arms as a revolutionary.





Photo: Aung Kyaw Latt

The life of a revolutionary

"I was born in Loikaw in Kayah State. I finished my high school education there. I arrived at the Yangon University Hlaing Campus in 1985. The universities closed in 1988 due to the public movement for democracy. So, I didn't complete my studies at university. Instead, I entered the armed insurgency. My parents didn't want their daughter to be like this because I was a university student who was about to be a graduate. They were worried about me. Finally, they unwillingly let me go.



I served as a member of ABSDF for more than 20 years. I gathered the women members of the ABSDF in 1995 and founded the Burmese Women's Union. I tried hard so that women could get involved in political life. I was selected as one of the Executive Committee members of the ABSDF at a 2014 conference."

Jungle revolutionary or school teacher



"I was first posted in the jungle to a Red Kayin armed insurgency group. When I arrived there, the school could teach the students only up to 7th standard. They didn't teach Myanmar at all. So, I met

with the responsible personnel for education and urged them to teach Myanmar in addition to their own language and literature. I told them that the students might face difficulty in the future if they didn't learn Myanmar. Finally, they permitted the teaching of Myanmar at their school. Next year, we established a high school by gathering university graduates and university students who were



about to be graduates. I focused on the education of the children. And I also served as the editor of the ABSDF newsletter 'Dawn-Oh-Way' or 'Peacock's call'.

I got married in 1994-1995. My husband is a former student exile from Myeik and Dawei. We were from different camps. We met when we were transferred to carry out our duties at the central office. He was in charge of the army office while I was responsible for information. We met each other there and got married. We have one daughter. I gave birth to my daughter in the jungle. I was 30 years old at that time. Some former comrades from the country told me to give birth in town.

They said that they would support me. But, I was a Central Committee member at that time. There were many other pregnant women in our camp. It was not possible for me to give birth alone in town. But, unfortunately, the responsible medical assistant who helped me during delivery was inexperienced. And it was a difficult delivery as well. By the time other medical assistants arrived to help us, too much time had passed. The baby got infected when her umbilical cord was cut. Two or three days later, she suffered from jaundice and a traumatic brain injury. She never became a normal child. Now, she can neither speak nor hear."

Her attitudes as a leader

“What I've done is not wrong. To lead my life as an armed insurgent has been one of the biggest decisions in my life. There are so many younger comrades in our group. There are new ones as well. Some people in the refugee camps have to suffer more than I do. There are many people who are more unfortunate than my daughter. I feel that I am responsible for them. In this way, I have to motivate myself.”



Revolutionary and peacemaker

“The government has decided to go for a change. They have decided to work for peace as well. They started to approach ethnic groups. They invited our ABSDF to hold discussions with them. At the same time, there were discussions within our group. We are armed insurgents. But, we have done that in order to reach a



political solution. We didn't do it as an aimless rebellion. Our aim is to meet and discuss. So, we have participated in the peace process. We are getting deeply involved in the process, starting from the ceasefire to the path of political dialogue. We are trying our best."

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

MAI CHIN CHIN

**A woman whose life is
dedicated to peace**

*“In my opinion, although
they open the door for
women, the space they have
given women is still small.”*

“I returned to Flam, my hometown in the mountain region of Chin State, to begin a march to a federal system. All comrades marching for a federal system may endure mental pain, distress and doubt along the difficult road. But, anyway, let's face the obstacles and march until we reach our destination, which is a federal system...”

The above is the hope of a peace activist who wants to see Myanmar as a federal democratic union. She is Mai Chin Chin, a Chin ethnic woman. She has not only taken part in several peace talks throughout the Myanmar peace process but has also attended conferences of ethnic armed groups. When we met with her, we learned about the challenges encountered by a resolute peace activist from Chin State, where development is very low.



A teacher and social activist



“I was born in Falam, Chin State. I attended primary school and middle school in Falam. But, as for my high school education, I attended Latha High School No.2 in Yangon. Then I worked as a teacher in Falam.

While I was working as a teacher, I also did social work. It wasn't until the year 2007 when my social work activities became my regular occupation. That year, like-minded women formed a group called 'Dine Thin Par' to improve the lives of Chin women.

We helped provide financial support to some outstanding students who could otherwise not afford to continue their education. And we helped widows and divorced women to earn their livelihoods by finding jobs for them or by making other arrangements for them.”

Peace broker

“The reason why I started participating in the peace process is because the director of the Nyein Foundation came to Falam. When he was in Falam, we had talks. I knew about the director before we met. And I like peace activities very much.

So, I gave up all other things, came to Yangon, and started working at Nyein Foundation. At that time, there were many challenges. At one time, we planned to hold a meeting in a border area, but at the last minute we had to change the location of the meeting.

At night, we had to urgently arrange for a car to go to the area where the meeting was to be held. We also had experiences of making trips in forests. A difficulty for me was that all other members of the peace group were male. All delegates from the armed Chin National Front were male too. And all delegates from the North-Western Military Command were male. The only woman was me. So, I encountered difficulties.

At that time, even many religious leaders dared not take on the job I had signed up for. But, I was very keen to make peace. I also understood the feelings of women. I was always in touch with the feelings of the mothers and sisters of the rebels, so I was full of enthusiasm for peace. So, I dedicated myself to that job with great enthusiasm. Maybe due to that reason, at that time, I did not have any female friends. I think they were afraid of me. Even now, I have just a few female friends. That is also a difficult for me.”



Director of the Nationalities Brotherhood Federation

“In 2010, we formed the Chin National Party. Many ethnic parties had emerged. So, we held discussions with them. We discussed that all ethnic parties should be united, so the Nationalities Brotherhood Federation was formed and I joined. The member parties of the federation also have women. But the number of women is small. I’m not content with the number of women participating in peace activities and political activities. Unlike other people, I do not hope to have a ‘30 percent participation of women’. Nevertheless, the level of participation of women should be at least 25 percent. Nowadays, men say they invite women to participate in more political and peace activities. But, in my opinion, although they open the door for women, the space they have given women is still small. If they give women wider space, the participation of women will increase, or at least I hope it will.”

The hope of a peace activist



“If we really aim to build our country as a federal democratic union, I would like to urge all sides to give up their grudges and to forgive each other for past wrongs and to build mutual trust for the sake of the country, the citizens and the future of all the people living in the country. And I would like to urge them to solve political problems by political means.”

Translated by Kaung Kin Ko

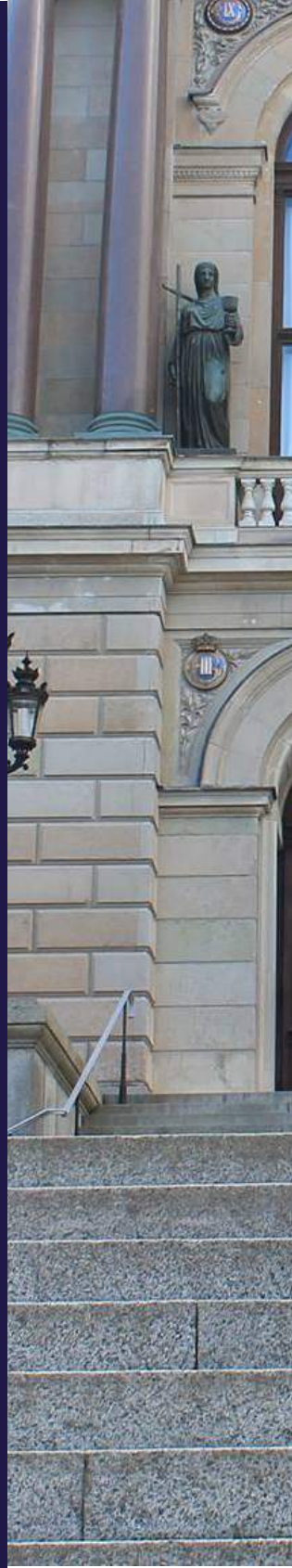
MA PHWAY YU MON

**A young activist raising
her voice for peace**

“ Actually, men are the ones who create wars. There are no women who cause wars by attacking with weapons. But, women have to suffer in wars more than men do. ”

Ma Phway Yu Mon is the organizer of the ASEAN Youth Forum in Myanmar. She is also a young activist in the peace movement.

Being the daughter of a former political prisoner, she has been familiar with politics since her childhood. She has worked hard so that young people in Myanmar can get involved in the peace sector. At celebrations for the 70th Union Day, she joined State Counselor Daw Aung San Su Kyi at the peace roundtable talk. As a young woman who is always active in the peace movement, we can get to know through her words what a hard time she had in the past as the daughter of a former political prisoner.





Days without a guiding star

“When I was a child, I had to go to the prison to meet my father. We had to struggle hard at that time. As the family members of a prisoner, we felt inferior among relatives and neighbors. People did not know why my father was in prison. And as he had to spend much of his time in prison, he could not see how his children were brought up. So, he didn’t know his children’s attitudes well. At the same time, was very difficult for us to know what he wanted. We were more familiar with our aunts. There were too many family problems.

Life was too bitter for me during the four years at university after passing my matriculation examination. I was mentally burnt out as I had to stay in somebody else’s house. Another thing is that I had too many aspirations as a young person. But, at the same time I felt as if I had been lost and trapped in prison. I didn’t know what was happening. I couldn’t see my future at all. I had no guiding star.



My family asked me if I wanted to come back home. But, I thought that I would never take a step back. I would move on till I completed my studies at university. So, I tried my best. Friends are the greatest blessing for me in life. I have hated so-called politics since I was a child. I do not want any more pains in my future family life.

I looked for a job after I passed my matriculation exam. I worked as a reporter for a while. Then, I worked as a translator. I was not very good at English. But, I gave it a try. I got in touch with international news. But again, I didn't feel fulfilled. The life I wanted was not like this.

I wanted something else. At that time, I got an opportunity to visit a conflict zone on the Thai-Cambodian border. It can be said to be a turning point in my life. I had to learn much about the rights of the youth. I also learnt how the youth themselves would ask for their rights. After that, I came back to Myanmar and dedicated myself to the youth. Actually, I didn't know how to represent the youth. Anyway, I gave it a try. And some adults supported me. In this way, I managed to organize the first Myanmar Youth Forums."

Movement for the youth

"Youth are a majority, but, they are always left behind. Their rights are being violated. The countries are using the strength of the youth. But at the same time, they are forgetting to fulfill the needs of the youth. We must raise our voice about that. And every youth must know that. No matter what a young person is, a trishaw driver or a sex worker, he/she has his/her own rights. And he/she can ask for those rights. Keeping that in mind, I cooperate with others in the youth movement.

At the same time, I work for the peace movement. When many civil wars again broke out, youth movements became

stronger. With the strength of their unity, they raised their voice to stop wars. I could not do it alone. We, all the youth, did it hand in hand.

Even though we are living in cities, we have to see, feel and experience injustices. The victims of the wars have to flee from their own homes. They have to face such bitter sufferings. I don't want wars anymore. That's why I have been working hard for peace, which is the key to an equal society for all.

Actually, men are the ones who create wars. There are no women who cause wars by attacking with weapons. But, women have to suffer in wars more than men do. It can be said that wars have a direct impact on women. So, there will be no solution to this problem if only men get involved in peace discussions in the peace process."



The peace dream of a young woman

“Now, the youth are actively participating in the peace movements. I am very pleased to see that. These youth movements will go on in the future. I have brightened my own corner. The other young people will move on in their own ways. I admire them and appreciate their actions.

Another thing is peace. The civil wars haven’t come to an end yet. I do feel upset about that. Sometimes, I feel depressed as there has not been any significant achievement yet, even though we have given much of our time for that. On the other hand, for example,



there are now many annual celebrations of International Peace Day, including government-level ones. We could not celebrate like that in the past. Officials would even arrest organizers of such events in the past. But now, they themselves celebrate it. So, I feel pleased to see that what we’ve done has to some extent been a helping hand in raising the voice of peace.”

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

DR. NAW MAR THEY

Setting milestones in Myanmar medical history

“I want all Myanmar women to be educated. I want them to learn. And I also want them to apply what they have learnt appropriately.”

Surgeon and Professor Dr. Naw Mar They, a Kayin ethnic woman with the lovely nickname of 'Anaw', conducted a surgery which would become a milestone in Myanmar medical history at the 1,000-bed hospital in Nay Pyi Taw on 19 December 2016. It was an operation in which she successfully removed three fetuses from inside the abdomen of a three-month old baby. Such a condition is said to occur in 1 out of 500,000 births and, according to records, there have been only 700 cases worldwide. And so far, Dr. Naw Mar They has successfully performed an operation to remove fetuses from inside the abdomen of not only one baby, but two. As a female surgeon who has to apply both practical knowledge and physical strength, she has certainly faced her share of challenges.

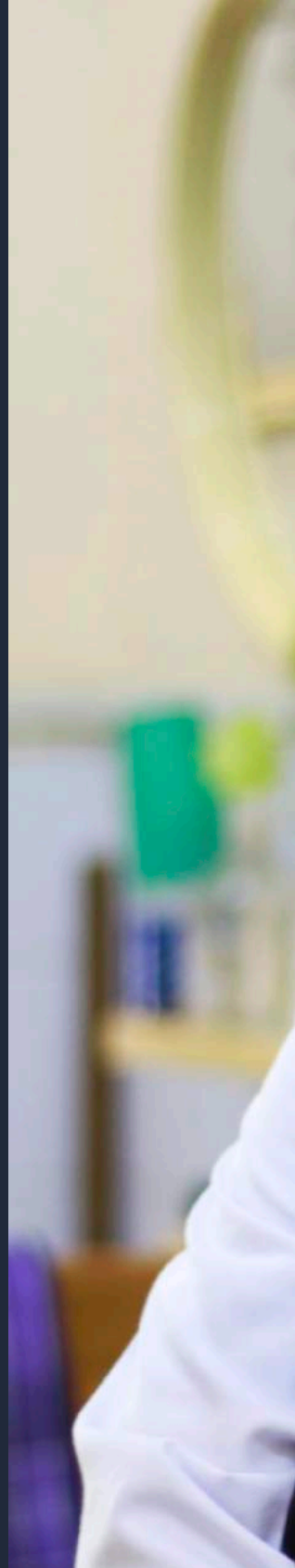




Photo: Aung Kyaw Latt

Dr. Naw Mar They as an Assistant Surgeon

“Some young doctors tend to complain when they have to serve their duty at faraway or remote places. I, too, was sent to such places when I was young. So, I always say that mother was once a daughter. When I was an Assistant Surgeon, I was transferred to hard-to-reach places. I was in Yangon only once when I was studying for my Master’s degree. The most difficult place for me was Palaw, though today it has access to very good transportation and can be reached by car.

Before I went to Palaw, I had to look it up on the map and found it in the Myeik Archipelago. I was a little afraid, as it was a voyage. I couldn’t swim and I was afraid that I would fall into the water with a mighty splash.

But, when I reported this to officials, they told me that it was a must for me to go there as the order had already been issued. There was no motorway to that place at that time. So, I had to fly to Myeik first. From Myeik, I proceeded to Palaw by water. In those days, there were armed forces like the ABSDF and Kayin armed forces active in the area. They used to fire along the waterway from time to time. I myself faced such firings twice. Of course, I was afraid. What’s more, the body of the motorboat was made of wood. Looking at the water splashing against that wooden part, I just thought that I would die right away if I fell into the water because I couldn’t swim.

I served my duties in Palaw, Tanintharyi Region, for two-and-a-half years. Another difficulty at the time was that there was no accommodation for me. I had to give medical care to mothers-to-be at the maternal and child welfare center in the daytime, and at night I just made my bed there by joining the benches on which those pregnant women had sat. Anyway, I lived like a tumbling Kelly no matter where I was.



During my stay there, I faced fire from rocket launchers on four or five occasions. They even fell close to where I lived. Luckily, I didn't get hurt. In those days, there was the delivery of parcel bombs as well. What's more, there were events organized to denounce the rebels. Being government staff, I had to give speeches or something like that at such assemblies. I had to worry about something regarding that. The Kayin armed forces could harm me as I had to denounce them despite the fact that I myself am a Kayin ethnic woman. But, they were my patients who came to me and received my medical treatment. I told them in advance when I had to give a speech at an assembly like that and requested them not to harm me. They said that they wouldn't do anything to me. Under those circumstances, I tried my best for my post-graduate exam. I couldn't take any tuition for it."

Dr. Naw Mar They as Surgeon

"With regards to surgery, it is very important to make the right decision whether the patient really needs it or not. The Nay Pyi Taw 1,000-bed hospital originated from a 300-bed one. I have been a Surgeon here since its establishment as a 300-bed hospital. When

I started to move here in 2006, I faced much difficulty in obtaining daily basic needs, transportation and communication with my family. I even had to bring rice and oil from my home for four years. Anyway, I managed to overcome those obstacles thanks to the blessing of God and the guidance of my parents and teachers.

Before we could carry mobile phones, in times of the poor telecom system, I kept waiting near the telephone to get ready for any emergency call. I always care about all my patients regardless of their relationship with me.

Most of the surgeons are men. However, now, the number of women surgeons is on the rise locally and internationally. Surgeons have to apply not only practical knowledge but also physical strength. We also have to work and study to keep abreast of the latest findings and teachings. Frankly speaking, we don't have much personal time."

Her Family Life

"I have two children. As for my husband, he gives a lot of support to me. That's why I can focus on my work without having to take much responsibility as a woman. Actually, it is one of the challenges a woman surgeon has to face. It's not possible to overcome those challenges on our own. We do need much help from our family. Even for a single woman surgeon, she will need support from her parents and relatives. As for a married one, she needs help from her husband and family members. Some women doctors have to take a step back from pursuing their dreams. Some of them resign from work after their marriage and others are not able to travel to places where they are assigned even though they have managed to complete their Master's degree.

At the age of 60, government staff must leave their respective jobs as they reach retirement age or become less capable. I,

too, have to retire from work very soon. I have to consider a way of making a living in the future. I can only give medical treatment to patients. As such, I have established a private hospital named 'The Mirror' in Dekkina Thiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw. And even after I do retire, I will keep passing my knowledge on to the younger generations."

Her attitude as a leader

"While serving the country, I couldn't live together with my parents. I couldn't be by my mother's side even when she was seriously ill. When I have to look after an elderly person in the morning, I wish that the reflection of my treatment can reach my mother.

In Christianity, there is a mission of Jesus Christ called 'CURE' which is to relieve the pains of others. I perceive giving medical treatment as carrying out one of His missions. As one of my mottos in treatment, I always say to doctors and nurses, 'Consider everybody as yourself. Treat others the way you want to be treated in times of sickness.' Another motto of mine is, 'Heard you took the big step, Get well soon! The difficulties you have faced will come to an end soon.' It has been my logo since I was a student. It is an inspiring quote for me as well as for my patients. I myself have encountered so many troubles. This quote has always given me courage.

I want all Myanmar women to be educated. I want them to learn. And I also want them to apply what they have learnt appropriately."

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

MA KHIN CHAN MYAE THU

**Youngest referee
in the International Judo Federation**

*“ If I am a National Selection,
I can get only one gold medal and wrap
the national flag on my back. But if
I am a trainer, I can help to
bring many gold medallists
in Judo for Myanmar. ”*

Ma Khin Chan Myae Thu has a natural talent for Judo, winning the gold medal at her very first competition. As such, her name began to be well known in Myaungmya District before even greater fame would find its way. She continuously won at the township level and started taking part in tournaments held in Yangon at the age of 11.

She won the gold medal in almost every competition, paving her way to be an honourable athlete for the Ministry of Agricultural, Livestock and Irrigation and a selected athlete for the country. She has excelled at Judo since the age of 9 and was selected as an international referee at 26, becoming the youngest international referee in the sport.





Photo: Thant Sin Tun

Early stages

"I started Judo at the age of 9. In the beginning, I found the Judo uniform difficult to hold firmly and tightly, so I practiced by holding a brick. I also fastened a bicycle tyre to a tree and pulled it as part of my early training. At that time I was still a small girl, and a bonny one at that. My weight was so little that I even struggled to hold the brick.

My teacher understood the situation and told me 'Hey, Chan Myae Thu! Hold the brick with two hands'. What my teacher meant is that if I hold it with my two hands at both ends of brick, it will be quite fitting for me. But, I wanted to hold one brick with one hand like the others, even if I had to do it 50 times. Because of this, I could not stretch out my hands and returned home with curvy hands.



I competed for the very first time at the weatherproof stadium in Myaungmya. To compete in this event I had to make a certain weight, but I was underweight. Because of being underweight, my teacher was not given permission for me to take part in the competition. It was difficult for me, as I wanted to know how my Judo tactics compared to others. I wanted to test my ability. That is why I importuned my teacher about the need to obey prescribed rules. I ended up wearing a lot of watches and long-sleeved shirts. For trousers, I wore wet water trousers inside to add weight. And then, I put weighted pieces inside my inner pockets and stitched them shut. I knew how much weight I needed. By doing so, I met the necessary weight to compete and ended up getting the gold medal.”

Representing her country

“After sitting for my matriculation examination, I got to Yangon and was given training for one month at Aung San Stadium. There, I got one small room. Only one. I had to run around Aung San Stadium ten times. I ran with a surge of emotion, as I was going to compete with the people from Yangon. To be frank, after running two or three times around the stadium I felt tired and out of breath.

I went to the Myanmar Judo Federation every evening. I told the trainer how I was training. Saya (trainer or teacher) welcomed me. As you know, Judo is a painful, sweaty and tiring sport. Maybe partly because of this, they warmly welcomed a girl from the countryside engrossed in her hobby. They trained me very well. Later on, there was a big competition at Aung San Stadium for selection to the Myanmar National Team. In this competition, I beat a two-time SEA Games gold medallist and became selected for the Myanmar National Team.”

Becoming an international referee

“Rather than training in a new technique, I prefer to correct the wrong technique. I am very interested to be a trainer. If I am a National Selection, I can get only one gold medal and wrap the national flag on my back. But if I am a trainer, I can help to bring many gold medallists in Judo for Myanmar.

I was chosen as a trainer in 2002. At the time, Judo masters came from five ASEAN countries to compete. I later received the IGS-level black belt, recognized worldwide, and became a female referee in 2003.

I received another black belt in 2010, becoming an internationally recognized referee of the International Judo Federation. They normally require you to be 30 years of age to receive a license. But for me, they took into consideration how long I had been involved in the sport in total, and awarded me a license at only the age of 26.”

Attitude of an instructor

“Sport is very fruitful if all become one in mind in a collaborative and concerted effort. We bow cordially for our national flag and heartily for our respective sport. So, young people have to put this concept in their heads, and only then with strength and practice can contribute to their country, representing it in foreign countries. I urge youth to take up this challenge and taste the sense of honour that can be achieved.”

Translated by Ko Ko Aung

NANG LAO KHAM

Champion female bodybuilder

“At that time, the National Flag of the winner’s country was hoisted. I was on cloud nine. Our national flag was hoisted abroad. It’s a pride for our country. ”

After taking many first prizes in local competitions, female bodybuilder Nang Lao Kham, an ethnic Shan woman from Mandalay, won the very first gold medal for Myanmar in the discipline at the 2015 Asian Bodybuilding and Fitness Competition. Despite her father objecting to her being a body fitness athlete, she went on to follow-up her gold medal performance with a sixth place in the World Bodybuilding Competition. Now, she is preparing her best for further international contests, and will continue to do so until her father again accepts her.



UTH



14th ASIAN BODYBUILDING & PHYSIQUE SPORTS CHAMPIONSHIP 2022



How did bodybuilder Nang Lao Kham come to bring pride to her country?

The Mandalay Moat, a square, is 8 miles long. Nang Lao Kham does her exercises along this 8-mile distance every day. If she fails to run beside the moat, she climbs up and down Mandalay Hill five times in a row.

“I participated in the Shwe Mhan Men’s and Women’s Bodybuilding Competitions in 2013 and 2014. After that, the States and Regions competition was held in Myit Kyi Nar in November of 2014. I was selected to take part in it. I was very happy. I got a chance to meet many mentors. I got lots of valuable experiences. The mentors gave guidance in everything, including how to eat and how to live. In this way, I got to deeply know about the field of



bodybuilding. Later, I took part in competitions at the state and division levels as well as national level. I won first prize in every competition.

So, I felt motivated. I participated in the Union Day Competition held in February 2015 and then in the Olympic Bodybuilding Competition. Only after that was I chosen to compete in an international event in Uzbekistan. I got my first prize there. In that epic moment, there were only three contestants left for the final decision on ranking, me from Myanmar, one from China and another from Kyrgyzstan. The Chinese contestant was declared to be the third prize winner. At that time, I thought that the one from Kyrgyzstan

would win the first prize as she's such an excellent competitor. It would not be too bad for me to win the second prize. Again, the one from Kyrgyzstan was declared. I was left alone. At that time, the National Flag of the winner's country was hoisted. I was on cloud nine. Our national flag was hoisted abroad. It's a pride for our country. I was on top of the world when the national flag was hoisted and the national anthem played."

After winning the Asian competition, Nang Lao Kham got the opportunity to represent Myanmar at the world level competition. She finished sixth there, with her mentor claiming second prize. Then, the following year, Nang Lao Kham was again sent to the Asian Bodybuilding and Fitness Competition held in Bhutan in 2016. But, life is not filled with successes all the time.

"I tried my best, but I just got fourth place there. I felt very sorry. More than 30 countries took part in that competition. I thought that I would be in the top three. I had a superiority complex

at that time. Previously, in five other competitions, my name was announced for the top three every time. So, I took it for granted that I would be in the top three. But, I just finished fourth. I had no strength to smile at the time. But, I had to smile for my country while representing my country abroad. I just consoled myself, thinking, 'Thank goodness I didn't get fifth place. I tried my best.' I felt regretful for thinking too highly of myself."



To add insult to injury, her father got to know about her competitions after her trip to Bhutan. She and her mother had kept her competitions a secret as her father didn't accept the bodybuilding field.

"My father does not acknowledge bodybuilding at all. He thinks that a moral woman doesn't wear clothing like we have to in bodybuilding competitions. He doesn't see it from the athletic perspective. But, I kept rebelling against him, telling him that I would go on with competitions. He told me to leave home. I left home for



my mother's tailor shop. I just keep on practicing. My father didn't know anything about the Asian or World competition. He came to know everything only after my competition in Bhutan. He voiced negative criticisms about the competition. He did not approve of it at all. He told me to come back home only after I gave up bodybuilding. I just replied that I would go on with it."

Nang Lao Kham no longer lives at her home. She just stays at her mother's tailor shop and helps as much as she can.

On the other hand, she keeps practicing for what she loves. Her mother supports her in every possible way. Nang Lao Kham, who has lost her father's love for doing what she loves, is still hoping to gain his understanding. She realizes that she must try harder to be more successful in order to regain her father's acceptance, saying...

"I do not regret it at all. My father will accept me one day when I become successful. It's my responsibility to try my best for success."

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

Courtesy of Kamayut Media



DAW MYINT MYINT ZAW

**Singing poems and nurturing
the youth of Myanmar**

*“ These poems are about
Myanmar traditions and
custom. So, the children will
grow to love our traditions and
custom by learning them. ”*

Over a year ago, a video of a school teacher in a classroom reciting in a sweet and clear voice a Myanmar poem entitled “Female dove cooing at sunset” became popular on Facebook and other social media outlets. The female teacher has since become well-known for her skill in reciting poems. Hailing from Pauk Township, in the hot region in the middle of Myanmar, she is teacher Myint Myint Zaw.



Photo: Kaung Htet San

But why exactly has she become so famous? According to her, “Before posting on Facebook, I told my friends about this way of teaching Myanmar poems. The students find it more interesting to learn like this. And they also acquire a desire to recite poems.” She also explained how she became a school teacher 13 years ago. “At first, I taught just as a job. Later, I did it as my hobby.”

The upcountry region where she lives is a region with a high unemployment rate. Due to water scarcity, low agricultural productivity, poverty and the lack of local job opportunities, many upcountry people leave for various parts of Myanmar as well as other countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and China. There is not enough labor force left for traditional businesses and local businesses such as toddy palm work. This is the reality of the upcountry region. Thirteen years ago, there was a vacancy announcement for an education staff member who would be paid on a daily basis. So, she applied for the job.

She is not a graduate of the Educational College. As a teacher paid on a daily basis, she served at No. (3) Nant Lan post-primary school in Thi Paw Township, Southern Shan State, for 6 years. Then, she was transferred to Pauk Man Le village in Namhsam Township, Northern Shan State. She served there for 3 years. After that, she was transferred again to Pin Htaung village in Pauk Township. Finally, she arrived at Shwe Bon Thar village where she has been teaching for 3 years now.

“I have always enjoyed singing Myanmar traditional songs.”

These words serve as a starting point in explaining her skill in beautifully reciting poems like songs. When she had to attend training after being selected as a teacher, she took a liking to what she had to learn. Myanmar language trainers from the training seemed to polish her singing skills in Myanmar traditional music. When she was promoted to be a middle school teacher in 2010, she started teaching Myanmar language.

"I started to teach Myanmar when I became a middle school teacher. When teaching Myanmar poems at the middle school level, I noticed that I had often heard those verses in traditional songs. For example, in a poem from Grade 7 entitled "Byaw Than" or "Ceremonial song". We hear it in donation ceremonies. So, I had already heard of those songs, and my hobby is singing. In this way, I started to teach Myanmar poems like songs. The students find it more interesting. It makes it easier for them to memorize poems. So, I teach them poems by singing."

When teaching Myanmar poems in class, Daw Myint Myint Zaw first explains the meaning of the poem. She also tells the students general knowledge related to that poem. She then beautifully recites the poem rhythmically, like a song. After that, she makes the students repeat after her.

While living in Pya Ma village, she has to teach at the school in Shwe Bon Thar village. There is a stream named Kyaw Chaung between those villages. It takes more than an hour to walk to her school past the fields. And it's more difficult in the rainy season as the water level in the stream rises. At such times, people and motor-cycles can even be swept away by the rising water. So, she does not return home in the rainy season. For the whole rainy season, she just stays with her colleagues in a small thatched house with a zinc roof in the compound of the school. As she tells it, "It's not easy to go to school from home in the rainy season. So, I return home just once or twice a week."

Daw Myint Myint Zaw is very fond of Myanmar classical songs. She has so many fans on her Facebook page. Sometimes, even famous singers and poets comment on her posts. Once, noted singer Daw Mar Mar Aye wrote a comment that she could ask her if there's anything she wanted to know about singing techniques. Yet, although the teacher has become a so-called "Cele" on Facebook, she just leads a simple life. When speaking, she refers to herself as "Kyoon Daw", like men.



Before she became a school teacher, she used to work in fields, which she still does in her free time. She usually sings Myanmar classical songs and recites Myanmar poems while working in the fields. “These poems are about Myanmar traditions and custom. So, the children will grow to love our traditions and custom by learning them. And they will also enjoy Myanmar traditional music.”

The Myanmar Teachers Federation, Myanmar Literature Association and many others have awarded her for her talent in Myanmar poems and Myanmar traditional music. After watching her videos on the Internet, some people have commented that those videos should be used as teaching aids in classes. Local and international poets have contacted her as well. What’s more, some music productions have contacted her, as they admire her singing.

Some have even encouraged her to pursue singing Myanmar traditional songs.

But the humble Daw Myint Myint Zaw simply responds, "If I turn my attention to singing, I am afraid that I'll become less focused on teaching." Anyhow, teaching in class has become her favorite hobby.

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

MA AYE CHAN AUNG

**who overcame discrimination
through the light of education**

“
*In the past, I always had to ask
for money from mother. Now,
I can give her some money, even
though it's not much. So, I feel
confident to some extent.*”

When she was young, she had an ambition to become a doctor or a flight attendant. Now, she is an English-Myanmar bilingual translator who works with scripts, international news, reports, meeting minutes and articles. Before this, she passed her matriculation examination with three distinctions and got first prize in Arts in the whole country. In February 2017, she was selected as the 'Honorable Person of the Month' by the State Counselor. She is Ma Aye Chan Aung, who lost her vision in Grade 10.





Photo: Kaung Htet San

Passing the days of vision loss

“My right eye has been blind since birth. As for the left eye, I had to wear eyeglasses with the power of 1,600 until I was in Grade 6. I then suffered from Glaucoma and underwent many operations. In Grades 7 and 8, my blurred vision gradually deteriorated, until I became totally blind in Grade 10. As there were so many lessons to learn in Grade 11, I had to study them using various means such as recording and Braille. At home, I learnt them with the help of some study guides. At school, I had to try harder to keep up with others. For Grade 10 exams, a student would write down what I said. In this way, I took the matriculation examination.

When I was young, I was not quite aware of my visual impairment. I just passed the days doing my daily routine and playing. Sometimes, I didn't even notice that I was a blind person. But, I later felt upset when my blurred vision got worse and I could no longer see what I wanted to see or read what I wanted to read.

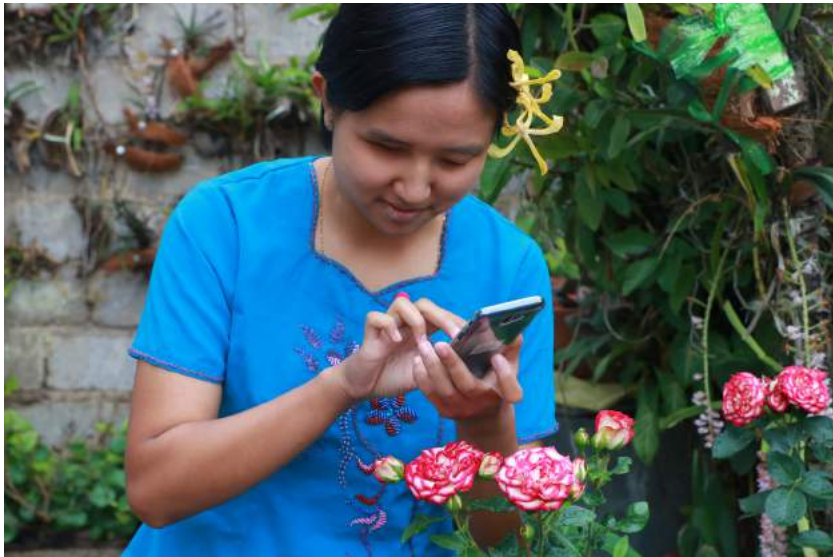
According to university entrance requirements, I was qualified to specialize in English at the University of Foreign Languages Mandalay. But when I went to enroll there, they found out that I was a blind girl. So, the head of the English Department sent me to the registrar. They told me it was not possible to accept me because of my blindness. I begged them not to take such a decision. After all, I had already received the official entrance letter. They finally told me to go back home for the day and that they would phone me the next day to let me know if I was accepted or not. The next day, they called me and said that I could enroll there.

When I went to register the next day, they told me that I must not disturb other fellow students. In saying this they meant that the precious time of other students would be wasted if the teachers had to give me more time in explaining the lessons. I must not bother them in such ways. But later, I got along with all the

fellow students in my class.”

Starting a translator’s life

“Looking at my mother and my aunt in my childhood, I wanted to be a doctor or a nurse. When I was a little older and watched some movies, I saw flight attendants in them. At that time, my ambition was to become a flight attendant. Now, I just want to be a good translator. It’s more relevant to my real life.



I started reading The Best English Magazine in 2009-2010 when I was about to complete my studies at university. I took part in translation contests organized by that magazine. At first, I didn’t win any prizes. Nevertheless, I kept on reading the magazine every month. I then participated in one of its programs which would select the outstanding youth in translation. I had to compete in their translation contests for two consecutive years for that program. Gradually, my translation skills got better and gained recognition from the teachers. I then started to win third prize, then second prize and finally first prize in the contests. I was also selected as one

of their outstanding youth in translation. Since then, I have paid more attention to translation.

I do translation tasks online. To do that, I first have to install screen reading software into my computer. It reads out everything on the screen in English. I have to be very familiar with the shortcut keys on the keyboard. In this way, I use the Internet, email and Facebook. Sometimes, I receive the text files in Myanmar. At such times, I ask for help from my mother to record them. Then, listening to those audio files, I translate the text and type on the computer myself. Mostly, I have to translate scripts for the film school. I also work on international news, meeting minutes, organizational documents and reports. I have been doing this for four years now, including two years as a volunteer translator. It's been only two years since I have started to receive a salary for my work."

Inspirations for the life journey ahead

"In the past, I always had to ask for money from mother. Now, I can give her some money, even though it's not much. So, I



feel confident to some extent. My mother is a strong-minded woman. She is an inspiration to me.

Mahatma Gandhi said, 'Be the change you wish to see in the world'. That's my favorite quotation."

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

MA PHYU EI THEIN

Female entrepreneur of Myanmar

“ We had a problem. It was a bit difficult to maintain the high quality of the clothes.”

Ma Phyu Ei Thein received the Accelerating Women Entrepreneurship Award on 19 November 2014. In garnering this recognition, she worked with local weavers to ensure that Myanmar’s high-quality cotton clothes could break into the Japanese market. As a result, many job opportunities for Myanmar women have arisen. It is worth knowing about the life of a woman entrepreneur who always thinks to promote the lives of women.





Photo: Aung Kyaw Latt

Art gallery manager

“My father is artist U Maung Maung Thein from Pathein. My sister Chaw Ei Thein is an artist, too. We have four siblings. I am the second eldest sister. I have two younger brothers. I also drew pictures when I was young and won some awards. But, I do not work as a professional artist, though my other siblings do. My father established ‘Sunflower Art Gallery and Art Classes’ in Windamiya as a business for our family. And I became responsible for the management of the business.

After I graduated from university, I continued my education. I studied Japanese at the Yangon University of Foreign Languages. After that, I became keen to go to Japan. In 2000, I left for Japan to continue studying Japanese language there. At that time, I thought that I would work in Japan after getting a degree in Japanese language.”

Introducing Myanmar traditional clothing to the Japanese market

“After observing Japanese fashion design and their artistic idea, I wanted to apply what I learned to my own ideas. At that time, a Japanese teacher, who is like a mother to me, and I visited Inle Lake in Myanmar. I saw many young and elderly female handloom weavers in Inle. I thought about what I could do to help them. I considered what I could do for them. Then, after I got my university degree in 2005, I began a business of exporting silk clothes produced in the Inle area to Japan.



I set up the 'Myanmar Clothes' company in Japan. I also created the 'Y&P' logo, with Y standing for 'Yumiko' and P for 'Phyu'. We sold Myanmar products at expositions held in Japan. We later got an opportunity to sell Myanmar clothes at 'Myanmar Week' organized by JETRO, which operates under Japan's Ministry of Economy. In this way, JETRO became aware of Myanmar products. They liked them. We do not use zips in our clothing. We create attractive floral designs and good buttons. They are genuine handmade Myanmar products. Anyway, the Japanese examined whether our products are genuine silk products or not. After they confirmed our clothes are real silk, we were permitted to sell our products in Japan. We are allowed to sell our products in 'One Village One Product' shops in airports. The shops are operated by JETRO and feature products from developing countries."

Challenges of penetrating foreign markets

"We had a problem. It was a bit difficult to maintain the high quality of the clothes. Then, I started thinking that the water of Inle Lake is poisoned whenever a loom workshop emerged, as they use chemical dyes. Maybe I was the only one who thought like that. In fact, natural dyes have also been used in Myanmar for a long time. So, we changed the system and started using only natural dyes. And the clothes are woven by hand.



In 2007, I contacted Zaungda Handloom School. They could not manufacture some of the products I proposed. Moreover, since I am not an expert in creating handloom wears by using natural dyes, I had to ponder how to avoid such

obstacles. After that, I told them about the designs I wanted. We took so much time to consistently get high-quality clothes.”

Promoting the lives of women

“I became friendly with those who completed their studies at the Zaungda Handloom School. I started thinking that they would not be able to concentrate on their work if they are poor. So, since June 2012, we provide basic salaries to them. After 2012, our business entered into partnership with other business persons and we established ‘Sunflowers Group’. We still use that name now.

Another thing is related to other handmade products. When fighting broke out in Kachin State, we, together with the ‘White Holding Hands’ charity group, visited IDP camps and made donations to IDPs. During my ninth visit, I started thinking how I could help them to be self-reliant to ensure they don’t need to depend too much on our donations. There are many women IDPs in the camps. My next visit, I took a female handicraft teacher with me to the camps. She taught the IDPs how to create handicrafts and weave



clothes. In Kachin State, there are Kachin traditional clothes. So, we told them which designs would be marketable in Japan and ordered the products we wanted.”

The pioneering spirit of a woman entrepreneur

“I do this job because I like it. I want ‘social-business’ to be stronger in Myanmar, and I have many plans to expand and make it happen.”



Translated by Kaung Kin Ko

DR. CHO LE AUNG

Entrepreneur of jaggery

“*All I have is my two hands and my brain. Relying on them, I can make innovations.’ In this way, I managed to create ‘Tree Food’*”

It's a young woman named Dr. Cho Le Aung who is responsible for producing brown jaggery, a Myanmar traditional dessert with a range of different flavors, and introducing it both locally and internationally. Although she is a medical doctor, she is fond of innovation. She has made Myanmar traditional jaggery, or sweets, with different flavors and stylish packing under her brand 'Tree Food', which has gradually become popular in the world market as 'Myanmar Chocolate'. Here are some life events of Dr. Cho Le Aung, a woman who has successfully modeled herself into an entrepreneur with innovative ideas.





Photo: Aung Kyaw Latt

The innovative idea of an entrepreneur

"I felt like running a business related to food. So, I observed a variety of food and finally found jaggery. When I found it by chance, I noticed that I had not eaten it for a long time. Actually, we just don't notice it, although we often see it. One day, I was served a chunk of jaggery after a meal at a restaurant. It brought back childhood memories to me. At that time, a thought occurred to me that most people have forgotten to value jaggery, as they have been indulging in imported food products with new tastes and shiny packaging.

So, I went to the toddy farms near Yangon. I asked them why they didn't produce small-sized blocks of jaggery. One man told me that it was not possible to do that and that the art of making jaggery was too difficult.

He's not wrong. But, I decided to try it even though they couldn't make it. At first, the small pieces of jaggery melted. I felt disappointed and sat for a while. I tried it again. Finally, the jaggery didn't melt anymore. Again, I asked myself, 'What would be the difference when the large blocks of jaggery became smaller? There must be something else that could attract the attention of consumers. The role of jaggery needs to be more significant. So, I added



different flavors to it and gave consumers their taste of choice. That's the beginning of 'Tree Food'."

Overcoming challenges

"Except for my big sister, no one in my family knew when I started 'Tree Food'. I could ask for pocket money only from my sister. She gave a lot of support to me. I didn't let my family know as I had too many flaws at that time. They didn't like it when I drew paintings in the past. Moreover, after graduating from the University of Medicine, I didn't pursue that profession. I was nothing in their eyes. So, I had no desire to tell them about what I did later. How would it help me if I just had to hear their complaints all the time? I just kept on doing what I love. They got to know about my work only when it was mentioned by one media.

In the beginning, I didn't have enough confidence, as I wanted to be perfect. I used to focus too much on perfection whenever I did something. I just made my jaggery and gave it to my friends to try its taste. They liked it and gave me positive feedback. A friend told me to get started right away. She urged me to open a Facebook account for its sale. At first, I was afraid. But, I decided to give it a try and opened an FB account.

One day, I gave my jaggery to a teacher from Strategy First. He posted the photos of my jaggery neatly packed in bottles to his Facebook account. There, people started to recognize it. And I got my very first customer. He contacted me to send him some sample so that he could buy it if he liked it. This was the first step of 'Tree Food' reaching the outside world.

Mainly, I produce four flavors: plum and spice, yogurt, lemon and ginger. I do them by taking the likings of foreigners into consideration. Some flavors are convenient for them, but some are not. Anyway, foreigners come from different parts of the world,

including the Eastern and Western parts. So, I produce different flavors for different target audiences. It's just simple."

Her attitude as an entrepreneur

"Nowadays, jaggery has largely been forgotten. Our grandparents and parents used to eat it in the past. They have memories and stories related to jaggery to share with us. So, if a young person buys this and opens it after meal, he/she will have something to say too. There will be things to share between the old and the young. When jaggery is brought home, mother will talk about grandma. Grandma will talk about mother. Daughter will listen to them. I want to give this message, that jaggery can bring such memories.

I wanted to be a scientist like Albert Einstein. I wanted to innovate like him. He had innovative ideas. I am greatly interested in innovation. I also admire thinking. I thought, 'All I have is my two hands and my brain. Relying on them, I can make innovations.' In this way, I managed to create 'Tree Food'. Innovation is a desire that runs in my blood. I want to be an innovator. I want to be successful."

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

MA CHO CHO THIN

Leader in traditional farming

“ *What we have learnt is never wasted even though we apply it in different ways. Everything is interconnected.* ”

Ma Cho Cho Thin, a woman who lives in A-le-bone village near Pale town in Sagaing Region, is a M.Sc. degree holder in Physics and B.Sc. degree holder in Computer Science. But, leaving behind an IT field with great opportunities, she opted to pursue a career in traditional farming.





Photo: Khin Su Kyi

Traditional farmer Ma Cho Cho Thin

"In my childhood, my father used to say, 'We can't know what will happen in life. So, we must learn and do anything. Even if we make others work for us, we ourselves must know it first.' I have been taught everything related to farming since my childhood. And I spent much of my time with my father. So, I didn't lose too much touch with farming at all, even though I went to university. I have heard much about this work. And I myself have done it. I always worked on farms on my holidays. I lost touch with it just for a while during the days at university.

Actually, farming is a very demanding profession. It's a lot bigger than what we have learnt because it's related to everything, including earth and climate. Mainly, it depends on the climate. Nowadays, it is also dependent on many factors such as the use of pesticides and fertilizers, types of soil, time periods, what to grow, when to grow, when flowers and fruits can be harvested as well as the conditions of rainfall before and during the harvest. I feel very happy and become more interested in farm work when my farms yield good crops. At first, I felt a little upset comparing the life of a university graduate in computer science to the life of a farmer. But, when the market conditions for crops get better, I become interested in farming again.

But it should not be forgotten, leading a farmer's life is very tough. We, farmers, have to make a living by working rain or shine. Sometimes, I don't feel fulfilled by doing this farm work, as I could choose to build my life with my education. But, this is the work I must do. I cannot leave it behind. I cannot transfer the task to anyone else. In the past, it was not modern farming. If I ignore this work, I won't make progress in life. In this way, I got involved in this profession. I have devoted myself to the work I must do."

Overcoming challenges

“I was not quite so skillful for the first three years. And no one could help each other here. I faced losses for three consecutive years because of my lack of skills and bad market conditions. Also, I encountered climate change. When the weather and the crops I grew were not in harmony, I faced such losses. All I saved was completely gone. Because of this, I even had to pawn some of my farm land. Currently, I am working on 20 acres of farm land. Among them, I have outsourced six acres to others as the land is too far from here. I grow various crops like rice, peanuts, beans and sunflowers. Now, I don't have so many challenges like before. That's because I am an educated woman in the profession of farming. And nowadays, there are movements to create opportunities for women and to place smart women in appropriate positions. That's why there have been fewer challenges, I think. My big sister and I have lived together after our mother's death. She has to travel every now and then. We have six other family members who live in the same village. They look after us.”

Turning earth into gold

“Before graduation, I worked in the IT Department of Asia Dana Bank. I resigned from that job in 2006. Actually, we can apply what we have learnt anywhere. For example, before writing a program in the IT sector, we have to calculate estimated costs, benefits and time period. I can apply those skills in the farm work I am doing right now. So, what we have learnt is never wasted even though we apply it in different ways. Everything is interconnected. With good management skills, I have been doing traditional farm work while carrying out social work involving farming-related affairs and women farmer's affairs.”

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

MA SHWE KYAR

Volunteer ambulance driver

“ Nowadays, there are even women pilots who are flying aircraft. There is nothing that we cannot do, except for one limited thing at pagodas. ”

When you hear an emergency siren blaring, you will surely visualize the scene of an ambulance rushing to the hospital. You can see the driver of the ambulance and those inside tending to the patient. They are in a race against time to save a life. The one driving this ambulance is Ma Shwe Kyar, a dedicated volunteer from the Noble Heart Altruistic Organization for Living. Her life events are full of inspiration.

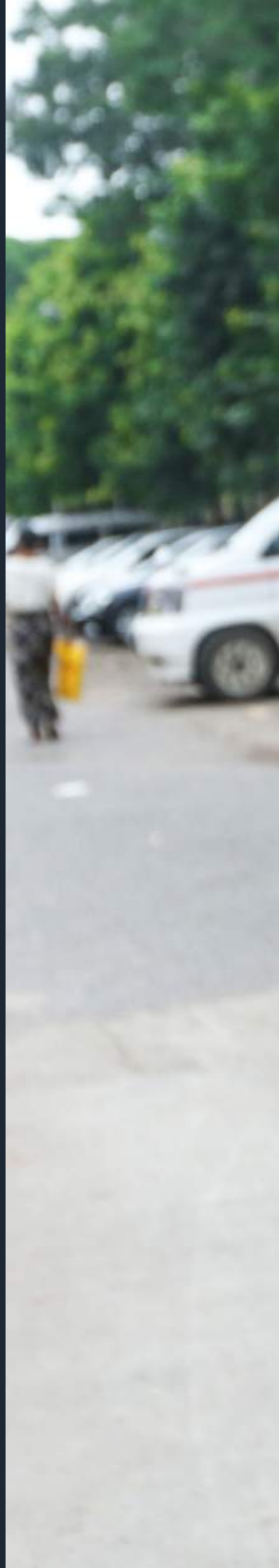




Photo: Hong Sar

From sympathy to philanthropy

"I went to university in Shan State. But, I did not complete my studies. I did not graduate from university. My parents are in Pyin Oo Lwin. I live alone here in Yangon doing social work.



Why have I started philanthropic work? Well, six years ago, I was admitted to Yangon General Hospital due to dengue hemorrhagic fever and I was given a transfusion of eight bottles of blood. I was there for a long time. When I got better, I was discharged from hospital. During my stay in the hospital I witnessed the difficulties of poor patients.

Nine days after that, I had a relapse of the same sickness. I was admitted to the hospital for a second time. I was given another blood transfusion of eight bottles. I was in the hospital for more than 20 days. After I was again discharged from the hospital, an idea came to mind that I would donate rice soup to the patients at the hospital on my birthday, 3 June 2014. There was a reason for this. When the doctors came to give medication in the morning, they made us (the patients) eat something nutritious first. But, we could not eat well as we were sick. Consequently, we became weak and that made it very difficult to take medicine. It dawned on me that just a bowl of rice soup or chicken rice soup is nutritious enough for a patient. And that would be helpful for any form of medication. The thought occurred to me like that at the time.

I once worked for the Free Funeral Services Society. There, I attended international training on Advanced First Aid. There, fellow

trainees from the Saita Thuka Organization of Ton Tay asked me a favor one day. They explained that it takes too long and costs too much to transfer emergency patients from Ton Tay to Yangon via Hlaing Thar Yar. So, they instead carry the patient to Yangon by ferry boat. They asked if we would pick up the patient and transport him/her to the respective hospital. I did not reply to them at once as I had to discuss it with the rice soup donation team. When I had a discussion with the team, they all wanted to do it. It's relevant to what we have learnt. In this way, we established the Noble Heart Altruistic Organization for Living."

Dedicated volunteer who lives for the pleasure of helping

"When driving the ambulance, I have to be very careful. I think I am the only woman ambulance driver. Before I drove the ambulance, I had been driving around in my own car every day. So, I know the streets very well. But, driving the ambulance is not the same as driving other cars. It is quite risky because there is a patient in the ambulance. Besides this, I am responsible for the lives of the other volunteers who are trying to rescue the patient.



As for other women volunteers from our organization, they take great care to be able to carry the patients without any mistake. All volunteers feel a sense of pleasure when they see the contribution we make to the work of others. Without doubt, they wouldn't exchange it for money. They just live on pure joy. There is a big difference between the joy of getting money and the joy of helping others. You can ask this of any volunteer. No one wants to step back after they have started social work. They just go on and on like drug addicts. Actually, the sense of pleasure that we want is a kind of ego trip. So-called 'parahita' (philanthropy) consists of two words: 'para' meaning 'for others' and 'hita' meaning 'for oneself'. It's the combination of the self and others for mutual benefit. We gain pleasure from helping other people and we just live on that pleasure.

Sometimes, it can be said that we do have some unexpected sacrifices. My father had been admitted to the hospital In Pyin Oo Lwin for two months. I could visit him only once as I was busy wrestling with my social work. He passed away during that period. As soon as his burial was finished, I had to come back here at once to go on with my work. I could not do anything else for his funeral."



Challenges for a dedicated volunteer

“Of course I get angry when I am treated badly. I just try to control my temper as I am a social worker. Everyone is the king in their own home. Everyone is the master in their own community. I am just a human being. But, when I get furious about their bad treatment, I just console myself that they don’t realize this, as they have never been involved in volunteer work.

We don’t charge any money for our service. Yet some people treat us poorly by saying things such as: ‘I want an ambulance!’, ‘Bring it like this!’, ‘Do it like that! and ‘It would be like this if we hired another ambulance!’. We always encounter such cases. We provide free services. The goodwill cannot be matched. We explain to them that we just do it out of pure goodwill.

The fellow women volunteers are unique cases. They are really great women who try their best. The voluntary work of transporting patients is not the same as other work. It takes both physical and mental effort. It is a very tiring job. Instead of hiding in their own shells, women volunteers come out to help. I am very glad about this. I myself work shoulder to shoulder with men. I don’t want other women to keep hiding in their own home.

Nowadays, there are even women pilots who are flying aircraft. There is nothing that we cannot do, except for one limited thing at pagodas.”

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

MA THAN NWE OO

Kayan Lady Chef

“ *Compared to men, women are more patient, more kind-hearted and more flexible towards their colleagues. When we cook our food for the guests with great patience, they will feel as if they were home.* ”

Greeting the guests in the hotel dining hall, Chef Ma Than Nwe Oo is filled with joy in her heart. With tourists exclaiming ‘Wow, Lady Chef!’, she is tackling the responsibilities of running a modern hotel kitchen, a domain usually dominated by local and international male chefs. As the executive chef of the Inle Princess Resort Hotel, she cooks tasty food for guests with a pair of confident hands and a creative mind. She is also introducing Kayan cuisine to the world. Here is the life story of one of the precious few professional Myanmar women chefs.



Photo: Mann Yan Naing Tun

From Kathe to Inle Princess

"I belong to the Kayan ethnic group. I was born in Kathe village, Phe Kon Township. I finished primary education in my native village and high school education in Phe Kon. When I passed the matriculation exam, my teacher came to ask me if I wanted to work as a teacher at the village school. But I didn't want to be a school teacher because the village was not developed. I wanted to go somewhere else for a chance to improve my life. So, I went to a place that I thought would be a little challenging for me. At that time, I found a vacancy announcement at the GICE Hotel and went for an interview there. In this way, I entered the hotel field.

Actually, though the vacancy announcement was for GICE Hotel, at the same time the Inle Princess Resort Hotel needed some staff. So, I just stayed here with Ma Su (Ma Yin Myo Su, the owner of Inle Princess) instead of going there. They taught me everything. At first, I had to work in various departments as I didn't know the hotel industry very well. I've found out that I prefer working in the kitchen to working in housekeeping. I am more interested in the kitchen work. And another thing is that I am weak in English as I attended school in the countryside. What's more, I am a strong woman. For these reasons I have chosen the kitchen, which I thought would be suitable for me. I tried my best and gradually rose in position."

Life as a chef with international guests

"At first, I had a lot of difficulty. As I was not smart like others, I had to try harder. Also, even though we had the same qualifications, I did not get the same position because of my quiet nature. When I tried much harder, they became aggressive. I encountered many situations in which I didn't get what I deserved despite my capabilities. In my free time, I sharpened my English skills by listening to CDs, reading books and learning conversations in English so that I could communicate well with the international

guests. As a chef, I have to know the needs of the guests. And I must have good communication with them. So, I have tried my best to achieve some level of proficiency in English.



I have been the executive chef here since 2006. I have worked hard with confidence in order to meet the guests' preferences. I have also faced many situations in which the guests didn't find my cooking to their liking. Take, for example, 'Intha Fish Curry'. The fish and green chili curry is very popular in this region. Nga Yant, or Snakehead fish, is used to cook it.

The local people very much like that fish. They fry the fish first before cooking the curry. They also use lots of garlic. So, the curry has a very strong smell. And the fish becomes hard as it is fried. So, the guests do not like it. Once, a guest complained that he was very upset, as it was not a curry at all. I even had to learn from the guests how to make it better suited to their taste. Based on that experience, I always prepare tasty food to their liking. So, I don't have such difficulties anymore.

I have had many happy experiences as well. For example, I am on cloud nine when guests praise me like, 'Wow...Our lady chef!' As they recognize me not only as a Kayan lady chef but also as a woman executive chef. It makes me feel that I have lifted the pride of my ethnic group. I feel that my job is much more meaningful than getting money alone. At such times, I am very proud of myself. In this way, I have been leading the life of an executive chef."

Her family life

"While doing this job, I give a lot of support to my family. I have managed to support my brothers and sisters till they completed their studies. As there is not much left for me, I cannot start my own business yet. What I am doing now is just for my family alone. I think that I will be able to help other people besides my family if I have my own business. So, I want to run my own business some day, efficiently and without much greed. I want it not for my independent living, but for the welfare of my family and my ethnic group. That's been my aspiration for a long time."

Her attitude as the leader of the kitchen

"Compared to men, women are more patient, more kind-hearted and more flexible towards their colleagues. When we cook our food for the guests with great patience, they will feel as if they were home, like the day when their own family patiently cooks them a delicious meal. If we cook to the best of our ability with goodwill and patience, it will bring mutual benefit to us. And if so, we will be successful. The most important thing is that we will get the best result if we try our best in what we do."

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

MA HAY MAR AUNG

Outstanding tour guide

“Some trips we need to climb mountains in the jungle, which can be very risky for female tour guides. But, women tour guides can do all things.”

Ma Haymar Aung, a Myanmar tour guide, received the Outstanding Tour Guide Award for 2014 given by the England-based Explore Worldwide travel company. The prize is given in honor of Nepalese tour guide and mountain climber Deepen Rai, who died in an air crash in 2012. She beat out tour guides from over 150 countries to win the prize. She is a seasoned tour guide with over 20 years experience, and has worked as an English teacher as well. She is not only an experienced tour guide, though, but also as a representative of Myanmar to the world.

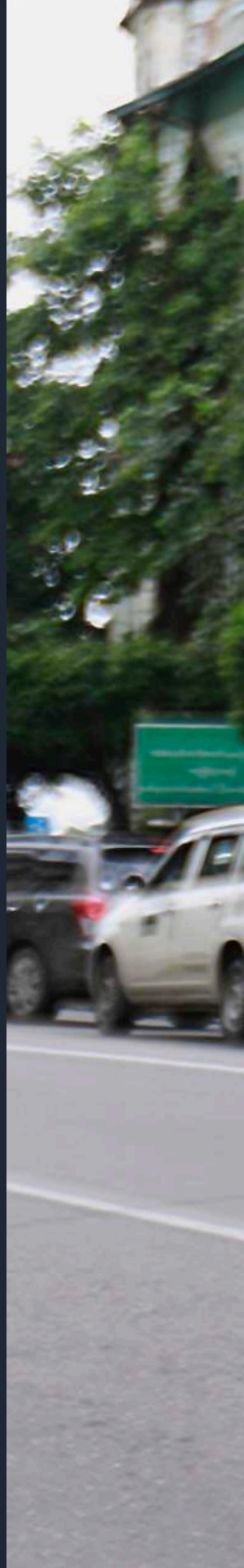




Photo: Aung Kyaw Latt

An outstanding tour guide who represents Myanmar

The Explore Worldwide travel company has branches in over 150 countries. There are about three thousand tour leaders in total. Among them, the company selected seven tour leaders from Myanmar, Ecuador, Morocco, Peru, Nepal, Turkey and Albania for special recognition.

To be selected for this honor, a tour guide must be very good when working together in a group or team as well as proficient in office work. Feedback from tourists also factors into the selection process. The seven finalists were selected according to this criteria. After requesting additional feedback from tourists who traveled with the seven finalists, four or five referees decided the overall winner.

From English teacher to tour guide

“I am from Taunggyi. At the time when I finished school there were just a few areas of work, not as many as now. So, I taught children. Those who passed the tenth standard matriculation examination in school came to me to learn spoken English. The year 1996 was Visit Myanmar Year in Myanmar. As I knew the language (English), I joined a tourism class. By this way, I became a tour guide. At first, prior to 2002, I worked as a station guide. As I was from Taunggyi, I was stationed around Inle Lake, Pindaya and Kalaw. But, since 2002 I have lived in Yangon and travel around the country as a tour guide.”



Challenges for a tour guide

"I have been working as a tour guide starting from 1996, so my experience is over 20 years. At first, it was not that easy. How skillful you are at languages is very important. You also do not know the specific likes and tastes of the tourists. But, if you invest deeply in the job, you will overcome such challenges.



We have to do everything for the convenience of our guests with regard to flights, drivers, hotel reservations and so on, in addition to addressing any problems that may occur. A tour guide has to keep watch all the time so as to avoid potential problems. I feel worried all the time. Some trips we need to climb mountains in the jungle, which can be very risky for female tour guides. But, women tour guides can do all things.

Visitors normally learn about Myanmar before they come to Myanmar. They already know what kind of country it is. They know how Myanmar people live. But, even somebody who does not yet know about Myanmar, after traveling for a while in Myanmar comes to know sooner or later how Myanmar people are so friendly.

Now, the Myanmar tourism business is a little bit better than before and there are a great deal of tour guides and hotels as well. But, compared with the international tourism scene, there is a pressing need for improvement. Just look at our neighbor Thailand

and how they are they managing the tourism business. Their management is very good, even though there are a lot of tourists. Management here is not so good, even though it is expensive. But, it can get better within one or two years.”

Moral spirit of a good tour guide

“Be patient. Be tolerant. Be sociable and friendly. And then, service will be good. Be benevolent. We have to join training classes and read books. We have to upgrade ourselves. In this way, we will have good tour guides.



And then, I want to say something to women tour guides, to maintain our value and our character. Foreigners like black hair, black eyes and wearing Myanmar traditional dresses. Now, many foreigners come to visit Myanmar, and I want them to experience wearing Myanmar traditional dresses. I myself like wearing Myanmar traditional dresses, and I want them to wear this kind of dress as well.”

Translated by Ko Ko Aung

MATHANDAR LYNN

Inventor of the six numbered Ozi dance

“ My father taught me that we have to collect things in a bag like fools, meaning we have to keep all knowledge in one bag. I myself learned from a lot of teachers. Now, learn from me. Anytime I will give. ”

Ma Thandar Lynn is the daughter of U Toe Lynn, who was a tutor in the Department of Fine Art of the Ministry of Culture, and the only daughter who inherited his love of art. As an a-nyeint-min-thami, she has performed a variety of Myanmar dances, chorus dances and puppet dances on the a-nyeint stage. She has entertained at the SEA Games ceremony as well as in neighbouring countries. Also a proven pyrotechnic and accomplished in the art of drumming, a skill she inherited from her father, she is noted for inventing the six drum dance (six ozi dance). Here we explore the life of this famous artist.



Following in her father's footsteps

"As inheritor of my father's legacy, I started playing on the drum, ozi, at the Myanmar-Gon-Yay-A-nyeint held at the National Theatre. My siblings encouraged me as it is the legacy of my father, which is never easily forgotten. When I played my drum, the audience applauded and encouraged me. I learned the art of drum



diligently through the help of my father. I learned from Saya U Ohn Nge as well, who I knew through my father. Saya U Ohn Nge has already died. He was a real expert at drumming. And then, I learned from Saya Bo Hlaing, who worked at that time at Myanmar Radio and Television. So, you could say I entertain the public with the knowledge of my father, Saya U Ohn Nge and Saya Bo Hlaine."

Ma Thandar Lynn started taking part in competitions in 1984 at the age of 6, advancing from one level to the next before eventually appearing on the international stage. In her childhood, she amassed 10 gold medals in all competitions. "I was taking part in scholar-level competitions, a-nyeint dance competitions and Zat Taw Gyi and I even got acknowledged as the best min-tha-mi

(princess dancer) in Wi-du-ya Zat. "Art looks very gentle and delicate if you watch from a distance. However, in reality, it is not. It is hard to do. Life can be very hard and a struggle, as we must keep learning from our teachers. My hobbies are diverse and many. In childhood, I played harp, pat-ta-la (xylophone) and drum. And then, on my holidays, I went to the meditation center and practiced meditation.

Now, I am earning my bread as an a-nyeint-min-tha-mi (traditional Myanmar dancer). By doing this, I want to show the audience



the world of the a-nyeint and the art of a-nyeint that. For the time being, I am a public servant in the Department of Fine Art of the Ministry of Culture. Before, I served as a government official in Nay Pyi Taw. I was also an assistant lecturer at the Nation University of Art and Culture (Mandalay) for two years and am currently jointly working as a lecturer and government official in Nay Pyi Taw."

Handing over her technique to the next generation

"My father taught me that we have to collect things in a bag like fools, meaning we have to keep all knowledge in one bag. I myself learned from a lot of teachers. Now, learn from me. Anytime I will give. And then, please maintain, protect and share this art. In this way, this kind of art will be everlasting So, I want to tell the next generation to come to me and learn earnestly what they want to learn from me, whether it's the art of anyeint or whatever. Ask me anytime, I will teach them."

Translated by Ko Ko Aung

KHINE HNIN WAI

**An actress with a heart
to dedicated to children**

“ We must stand up again when we stumble and trip. There is no need to feel shy about that. It is shameful only when we can't stand up again. We women need to be strong-minded. Nothing happens for long. ”

We would like to introduce you to actress Khine Hnin Wai, who is taking an active role in child affairs, anti-human trafficking and charity for the needy, all the while continuing with her profession. Most people just know her as a beautiful film actress. Yet, we've come to know through her words that there is another hobby in her heart in addition to acting.





Hobby-based art and charity

“In 1999, I entered the field of acting with films directed by Captain Thet Tin from MRTV. People recognize me from the films ‘San Yay’ or ‘Against the Current’, in which I was the lead actress. They got to know me as the niece of Daw Myint Myint Khine, with the lovely dimple in my cheek and long hair.

I have a great love for making donations. I always donate to an orphanage. Two years ago, I organized a noviciation ceremony for 108 poor children and parentless ones. I invited my Facebook fans to come and join me at that event. Since then, they have been supporting me in whatever donations I make.

At that time, there were flood-hit areas in the country. I wrote a post on my Facebook page that I would go to such and such a place and give donations. Anyone who wanted to donate could contact me. As for some people, they had a wish to donate, but they could not go to the place personally. So, they contacted me through Facebook and requested me to convey their donations. In this way, items for donation piled up in my house. The amount of financial aid increased as well. I became much more responsible as I wanted to organize effective donations for other donors. Some members in the group advised me to establish a charity organization so that we could make any kind of donation in addition to those directed to flood victims. In this way, the Khine Hnin Wai Charity Association of the Youth was founded on 10 July 2015.

As for our activities, we give donations to two orphanages per month. We also arrange for meal donations at hospitals. Being a charity organization, we make donation arrangements to the heart’s content of the donors and make it happen with a financial amount they can afford. The important thing is the successful implementation of the donation.”

Actress as a dedicated volunteer

“When doing charity, it must be based on the idea that it is a hobby or a true desire. Regardless of being an actress, it is not possible for me to dress and behave like an actress during donation



trips. Once, I went on a donation trip to Hintharda for flood victims. The motorboat broke down. We had to spend a night in that motorboat. We may face such accommodation difficulties, and we must be able to cope with it. Normally, it is not easy to bear such a circumstance for long. As an actress, I have lived a life of convenience most of the time. So, it is not an easy thing for me. Anyway, I am happy to do charity work.

Our association is not very big. We are not as financially strong as big foundations like Ko Wai Lu Kyaw's foundation or Ko Pyay Te Oo's foundation. We just manage to help the needy with the financial support we receive from donors. As we don't have much money, we don't have high expectations as to what extent our association can help or how many cars we must have. We just help for the convenience of those who request help. Wherever or whatever, we will help the needy physically or financially to the best of our ability.”

Ambassador for children

In December 2015, because of her charity work for children, Kine Hnin Wai started to serve as an ambassador of United Act, an educational drama group for the prevention of child trafficking. As an ambassador of that organization, she directed and produced a short educational drama named 'Help them' with her own money. She also distributed DVDs of that drama for free at public talks. What's more, she herself has acted in short educational dramas and helps United Act as much as she can whenever requested.



“Some people criticize me, saying things like ‘She doesn’t have her own child. How will she manage to look after children?’ It does not make sense. Some parents do not know how to nurture their children even though they have many. I have a reason to take care of children and orphans. I myself have a broken family. My parents have divorced as well. So, I understand that feeling.”

Actress with a brave heart

As a strong-minded woman, Khine Hnin Wai once overcame the domestic violence of her husband. She managed to build an independent life again with a brave heart. Now, she is actively

working for child affairs, anti-human trafficking and charity for the needy while continuing her profession as an actress. Commemorating International Women's Day, which fell on 8 March 2017, the Women in Myanmar Society program selected her as a brave-hearted woman.

"We must stand up again when we stumble and trip. There is no need to feel shy about that. It is shameful only when we can't stand up again. We women need to be strong-minded. Nothing happens for long. So, I'd like to say to be strong-minded. There is no need to feel weak for being a woman. Just try hard to be smart."

Translated by Aye Chan Aung



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