

## **Who are Kachin Women? Being (and Being Portrayed as) a Kachin Woman**

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### **Abstract**

In this article a Kachin woman reflects on what it means to be a Kachin woman in Myanmar society. This includes representations of Kachin women, expectations of their behavior, and the many discriminations they face. Kachin women, especially those living in Kachin State, experience multiple layers of repression often invisible to others. These daily struggles in the cultural, social and political spheres are what makes one a Kachin woman. Most Kachin women resist military dictatorship, Burmese chauvinism and traditional patriarchy. Being and becoming a Kachin woman is born from this resistance and defiance.

### **Introduction**

In this article, I, a Kachin woman, aim to problematize and challenge popular notions held by people in Kachin State and other areas about what a Kachin woman is. Two kinds of group representations dominate the public imagination when thinking about Kachin women. The first type are those held and perpetuated by authorities, the state and the media in Myanmar. The second are those dictated by traditional Kachin culture and norms. These group narratives and representations of Kachin women have influenced people's perceptions.

Even though we see the accomplishments and actions of Kachin women in prominent political or social positions, these women do not represent all Kachin women, or their experiences. The main reason is the difference in socioeconomic factors affecting women's lives. Therefore, it is important to question how different social classes, political groups and economic factors

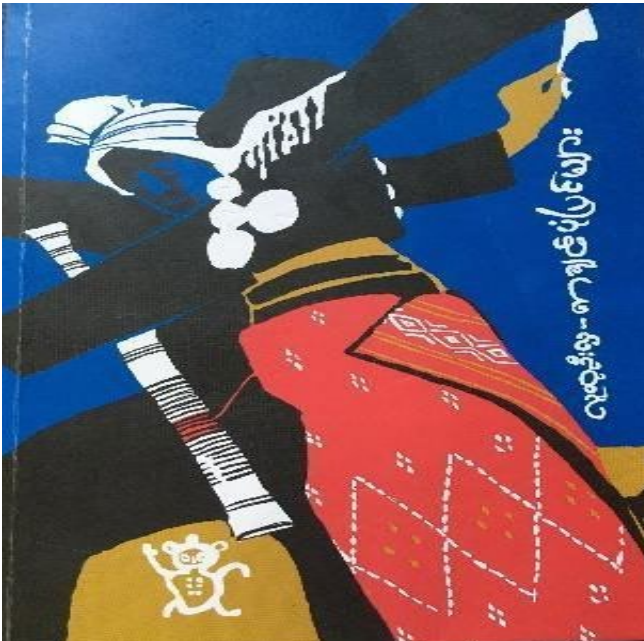
impact Kachin women, and in so doing challenge popular notions of what a Kachin woman is.

### **Public Representations of Kachin Women in Myanmar**

Whenever going through immigration at Mingaladon airport in Yangon, the immigration officer would ask me if I was Kachin, and tell me that Kachin women are beautiful. Many people associate Kachin women with beauty. This has a lot to do with broadcast and print media representations. Kachin models often perform in televised beauty pageants and singing competitions and women dancing in Kachin traditional costumes are popular cover pages for journals and magazines.

#### **Figure 1**

*Representative image of a Kachin woman from a 2018 book.<sup>1</sup>*



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<sup>1</sup> Ludu U Hla, 2018.

Moreover, traditional folktales usually depict Kachin women as charming. In *Hkrai Naw and Hkrai Gam*, a popular story among the Kachin people, the mother of Hkrai Naw and Hkrai Gam was so beautiful that the crocodile king even transformed himself into a human in order to marry her.<sup>2</sup> The wife of the younger brother, Hkrai Gam, is also depicted as so pretty that the twin brothers, Hkrai Naw and Hkrai Gam, fight over her.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 2**

*Illustration of the popular Hkrai Naw story.<sup>4</sup>*



Another story called *Yu Nga Mayawn*, which is a tale passed orally through the Kachin generations, describes a Kachin woman so

<sup>2</sup> Ludu U Hla, 2018, pp. 134–145.

<sup>3</sup> The two bronze statues currently in front of the Manau Park in Kachin state are those of Hkrai Naw and Hkrai Gam.

<sup>4</sup> Ludu U Hla, 2018, p. 134.

elegant that she becomes arrogant about her beauty and insults Ya Ma Naw Sam, the first boy to court her, saying he does not deserve her. Here is a translated excerpt from the oral story:

Yu Ma Naw Sam: “Such a divine and good-dancing girl, I like you so much.”

Nga Ma Ja Pan: “It is impossible. I can’t marry someone like you. I am so stunning that only the world’s strongest man is worthy of wedding me.”

Nga Ma Ja Pan searches for the world’s strongest man for years but in the end settles for Yu Ma Naw Sam. Kachin women who resist marrying a suitor are reminded of this ancient tale. When a Kachin woman marries, an essential item in her dowry is a machete, Yu Nga Mayawn, which means procreation.

The depiction of women in these oral narratives and media suggests that people are influenced to think that beauty is the only standard Kachin women should be judged on. In the story of *Hkrai Naw and Hkrai Gam*, the two brothers fall out over a woman. Such a depiction of women as a source of division influences people to conceptualize female sexuality as negative.

Outside these stories, a woman’s beauty is portrayed as virtuous and a source of pride. Beauty is suggested to be the most important feature of a woman, pressuring women everywhere to prioritize it. We should question whether women who do not match mainstream ideas of beauty should not also be treated as human beings. “The ugly condemned as a witch” is a well-known Burmese saying that equates ugliness with witchcraft.

Another influential media portrayal of femininity is Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the former State Counsellor. She often wore Kachin traditional costumes with Kachin fabric patterns in public. Before 2021, some leaders from the National League for Democracy (NLD) government wore *pinni*<sup>5</sup> shirt tops with Kachin

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<sup>5</sup> Orange cotton jackets or blouses are an unofficial uniform for NLD members and supporters. Pinni fabric originates in the dry zone of Burma and the Yaw and Saw areas of Sagaing Region.

longyis. Back in 1988, the tri-color student group<sup>6</sup> wore Kachin longyis with white mandarin-collar shirts. These people helped popularize an image of what Kachin is in the wider population and created an external association between Kachin people and their costumes. Government officials themselves endorsed Kachin costumes and the beauty of Kachin dress by wearing them. They made sure to wear Kachin clothes whenever they went to Kachin State to try and mobilize Kachin people there.

### **Views and Expectations Held by the Kachin Community**

Kachin people expect their women to be modest, religious, pious, and respectful. When Kachin women wear clothes without Kachin fabric patterns,<sup>7</sup> people look down on them and criticize them as unpatriotic. Kachin women are restricted by common beliefs in their community that to be truly Kachin means wearing Kachin patterns. I myself began to question being and becoming a Kachin, and a Kachin woman. Am I no longer a Kachin woman if I do not wear traditional dress? Do people of different ethnicities become Kachin if they wear Kachin patterns? If we make dresses out of Kachin fabric but our dresses are too short, we also face criticism for destroying tradition. Some Kachin people have criticized me for being ‘immodest’.<sup>8</sup> If we are to become good Kachin women, we must learn how to prepare traditional rice meals, weave, and become good mothers. Our womanhood is framed by dos and don’ts. I was always told to follow God’s guidance and be of assistance at church instead of “wandering around the neighborhood” back in my younger days.

Some Kachin people accuse Kachin women who do not speak a Kachin language of being impure Kachins, not worthy of being part of (Kachin) crowds, and look down on them as unpatriotic. Once, someone ignored me as I was not able to answer

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<sup>6</sup> Known as a bodyguard group for Aung San Suu Kyi.

<sup>7</sup> Different clans have different patterns and by wearing particular patterns women identify to which clan they belong to.

<sup>8</sup> *Sari shahpoi* in the Jinghpaw language.

back in a Kachin language. There have been periods of time in my life when I could not rely on the language. In those moments, did I become unpatriotic? There are many non-Kachin people who can speak a Kachin language very well. Do Kachin people regard them as Kachin? Despite being a Kachin woman, I sometimes find it difficult to use a Kachin language all the time, since I must communicate to different kinds of people right across Burma. There are days when I do not want to wear clothes with Kachin fabric patterns or speak a Kachin language. And, I do not know how to prepare traditional Kachin rice meals, or weave. Does this make me something other than a Kachin woman?

Why are Kachin people always telling us, Kachin women, to preserve traditions? Women who do not follow norms are called “*num balar*” which means “lazy women” or shallow women. Society excludes, discriminates, and defames Kachin women who do not follow its standards.

So, I wonder what a real Kachin woman is.

Traditions, cultures, and customs come to life because of community. Everyone should cherish these things. But why should they be more valuable and important than individual values? And why do people marginalize women who do not meet Kachin norms in particular? Men do not face such restrictions.

I want to question why men are considered the creators of tradition, leaders, and arbitrators, but women are just followers and subjects. Women are punished if they do not follow the rules of an unjust system. Why are there no voices raised against this injustice? Women survive only as the second sex and it is hard to survive as a full human being in Kachin society if we do not fit into cultural ideals of femininity.

## **Kachin Women as Tokens at National Events**

Nphan Ja Ra, a Kachin woman who featured in a historical photograph with General Aung San taken in Manhkrin, Kachin State on 30 November 1946, recounted that the picture was taken while Aung San was on a trip with Bama and other ethnic leaders

aimed at mobilizing Kachin leaders to support national independence from British colonial rule. She said:

*When that picture was taken we were busy cooking meals for the meeting delegates. But Aung San wanted to take photos with Kachin women to commemorate the occasion, so we had to quickly get ourselves ready.<sup>9</sup>*

Despite assenting to the group photo, the women knew nothing of the meeting details: all they knew was the trip was to recruit Kachin leaders to cooperate with Bama, Karen, and Shan leaders for the collective struggle toward national independence.

### Figure 3

*The famous photo of Nphan Ja Ra and five other Kachin women posing behind General Aung San, with Kachin traditional sword, bag, and turban, in Manhkrin, Kachin State, 1946.*



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<sup>9</sup> Nphan Ja Ra, personal communication, March 2018.

The experience of Nphan Ja Ra is one many Kachin women can relate to. Women appear merely as photograph material in full Kachin costumes, and prepare meals for special guests, but are not privy to information. Young Kachin generations only see Kachin women serving meals in traditional dress, photographed for their beauty. Sporting events and ceremonies in Kachin State are opened by Kachin women in traditional dress, who hold placards with team names. Women in pretty dresses often participate in ribbon-cutting ceremonies, openings of rainy season tree planting events, and gem and jewelry events.

Some women even say that they only have the opportunity to welcome guests at these ceremonies and events because of their beauty. This is due to the ideological framework in which women are proud of their beauty. Are Kachin women only fit to be showcased on the pedestal of beauty? Will future generations of Kachin people continue to see Kachin women only as decorations for events and ceremonies?

## **The Views of Others About Kachin Women**

Non-Kachins stereotype us as Christians, playing musical instruments at church, and always ask us which instruments we can play. Most non-Kachins recount the names of Kachin models and singers—L Khun Yi, L Sai Zi, L Lun Wa, Rey Becca Win, K Ja Nu, and Ah Moon—when they talk to us, trying to convince us that they know Kachin women. Many ask if I am related to them. “This singer is Kachin. This model is Kachin, too. Do you know them?” they ask frequently. Some people identify others by their ethnic costume. If a woman wears a longyi with a Kachin pattern, people usually ask if she is Kachin.

Some say we Kachin women are very bold. Some say we look hot. Some say we look modern. We are often compared to Kachin singers. People assume we all are smart, bright, sweet-sounding and have beautiful bodies. Non-Kachin people expect all Kachin women to be models thanks to popular images of super models Awn Seng, and people like M Seng Lu, Lu Lu Aung and J-Naw.



This makes me think TV channels and programs project a uniformly stereotypic image of Kachin woman in their representations of Kachin singers, models and beauty pageants. Kachin singers participate in Myanmar Idol, a hugely popular program watched the whole country over. Many Kachins such as Nin Zi May, M Zaw Rain, Mary Aung, and Zaw Khon have starred on the program. In the 2015 season of Myanmar's Got Talent, the Kachin traditional dance group Wunpawng Ningja were in the contest. These programs do not help non-Kachins in Myanmar associate Kachin women with modesty. Instead, it leads many to conceptualize us as bold.

### **Do Famous Kachin Singers and Models Represent All Kachin Women?**

While I was attending a long-term training workshop in Yangon in 2016, the participants discussed who would take what responsibility for the closing ceremony. Everyone had decided I was good at singing, simply because I was Kachin, and told me to coach the group to sing.

Likewise, when I attended an English class in Yangon in 2013, the teachers told me to do decorations for the closing ceremony. They assumed that Kachins were good at decorating. And they made me teach the other students how to dance, saying that there is no dance that Kachin people do not know. When my Kachin colleague reached Yangon for the first time, she got asked on her first taxi ride if she was ethnic, since she looked fair and pretty, and the driver asked her to enter Myanmar Idol since Kachin people had good voices and many competed in the event.

I used to live with my cousin in Yangon. She is interested in dancing, and she often taught Kachin traditional dances. She always got invited to dance in traditional dress at welcoming ceremonies for special guests, religious ceremonies and events ushering in authority figures. In 2017 my cousin and her friends performed on a Thingyan water festival stage in Kachin traditional dress and many Kachin people condemned them, as though

Thingyan was some kind of restricted event, maybe because people get drunk there.

Kachin women are simply humans living among other humans. Some of us cannot play musical instruments. Some do not know music. Some do not adhere to hegemonic ideals of beauty, or have ideal body figures, or have the ability to sing. But Kachin women can still be Kachin women without these attributes. In fact, it is almost impossible to live up to others' expectations of what a Kachin woman is.

## **Burmese Chauvinism and Patriarchy**

Myanmar is a country where patriarchy dominates. There are men in leadership and decision-making positions enjoying privileges but women stay in oppressed positions and supporting roles, politely ushering in dignitaries and their guests with discipline.

As a Kachin woman, I face discrimination from other Kachin and Bama people and suffer under Burmanization. Since childhood, teachers always told me that our Kachin names are difficult to pronounce. For instance, they pronounce “*Khon*” as “*Khaw*”. I never heard a teacher say my real name. Most of them came from middle or lower parts of Myanmar. They laughed at we Kachin students when we spoke in the full Burmese literary style.

We usually used the casual first-person pronoun *nga* (instead of the expected polite *kyundaw* or *kyunma*). In the Jinghpaw language, *nga* is *ngai* and we can use that word to talk to our elders, it is not considered rude. But at these “Burmese schools” we were taught to use Burmese pronouns such as *thamee*, meaning “daughter” to refer to ourselves. They said not to use *nga*, as it is considered rude in formal settings. I avoided teachers at school as I was afraid to talk to them in the Burmese language. I never got close to them. I was so stressed about going to school and I thought having an ethnic accent while speaking Burmese was to be ashamed of. So, I was afraid to talk to Bama

people in Burmese. I began using apologies such as “I am afraid I cannot speak Burmese very well” when I had to speak Burmese.

Myanmar society equates Bama standards as universal standards and downgrades others. Bama people call us *taingyin-thar*, similar to the English term indigenous, when they hear our accents. Obviously we do not have accents when speaking our own languages. Only when we are judged by Bama native speakers are we evaluated as having accents. Furthermore, we are sometimes told not to speak Burmese with an accent, as it is not pleasing to listeners’ ears. Our apologies symbolize our internalized demeaned indigeneity: “Please bear with us as we have accents.” Burmanization dominates our everyday lives and makes us ashamed, so that we think the way we talk is some kind of character fault.

When I grew up, the government authorities checked and questioned me whenever they saw ‘Kachin’ on my national registration card (NRC), saying I could be a member of the Kachin Independence Organization/Army (KIO/A). Bama authorities always assume that any non-Bama civilians, who actually suffer in conflict zones, belong to ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). Those who hold identity cards marked *taingyin-thar* are subject to oppression. If an NRC has a Kachin woman’s name, Kachin in the ‘race/ethnicity’ box, or Christianity as religion, the cardholder will face relentless threats and harassment.

*Are you ethnic?  
A Kachin?  
What do you do?  
Why are you traveling?*

Even before the 2021 coup, ethnic people did not have the right to move freely and our NRC cards were checked frequently. If the person checking me was Bama and had a weapon, I would be too scared to speak. Traffic police make a lot of random arrests so I have also long feared them in particular. Having your legal license with you does not help; the fear is deep. The system triggers terror subconsciously. At these moments, we Kachin feel

insecurity and concern; just the sight of a military uniform inspires fear. It's been this way for almost a century for us.

As I grew up in an armed conflict area, I thought twice about going to the courts to report injustice, oppression, and violence. I always felt intimidated by the Burmese language and Bama people. There are also a lot of practical challenges for us since we cannot understand official and legal terminologies.

In July 2020, I went to Yangon for an eye checkup. As my NRC name is Kachin, the clinic staff spelled it wrong on my paperwork, but I thought that was probably due to simple ignorance, so I fixed it. The staff refused to accept the corrected spelling. They crossed out my real name and conformed it to Burmese pronunciation. We Kachin cannot even exist with our correct names in Myanmar. Ethnic people like me have to fight these silly but outrageous battles everyday.

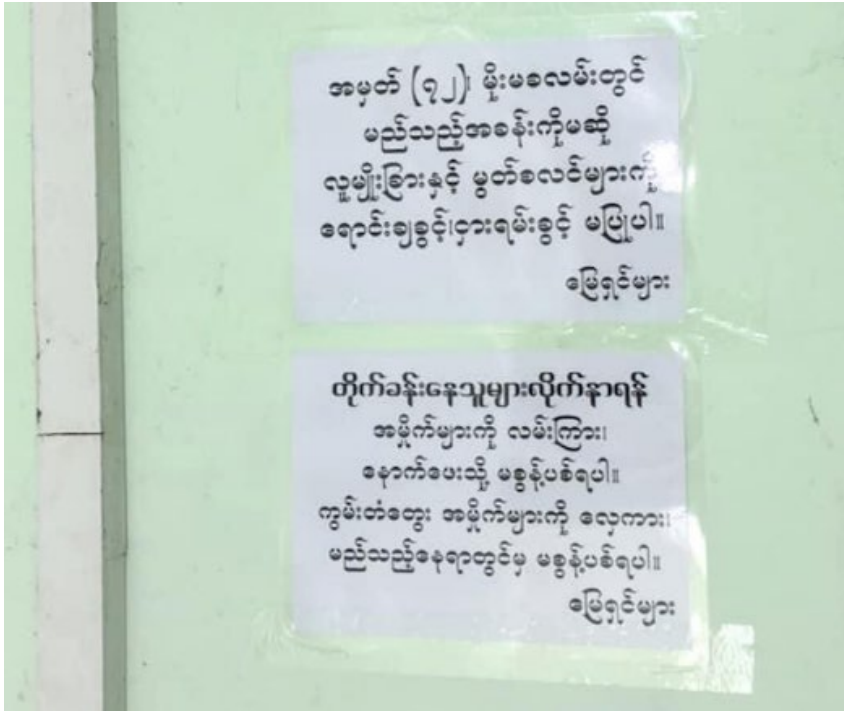
Many Kachin people migrate to Yangon for economic reasons. Then, they have to rent apartments to stay in. When apartment hunting, a real estate agent showed me an apartment and said it was lucky as it was in direct view of the Shwedagon Pagoda and I could pay homage every day. They irritatingly presumed everyone is Buddhist and did not even consider other religious beliefs.

In the late 20th and early 21st century, a lot of people moved from Kachin State to Yangon for education and work, with Sanchaung Township popular for settling in. In October 2019 I saw a discriminatory notice posted in a building hallway (figure 4): "No rooms available for rent for Muslims and people of different races."

Every day, we have to face threats, harassments, and mockery by the government and its representatives like school teachers and traffic police. They attempt to Burmanize us or diminish our ethnic identities by making fun of them. In everyday experiences such as going to a clinic and renting a house, we face harassment because of our identity, and receive daily reminders about who we are: the Other, non-Bama, with our ethnicity and religion disrespected.

**Figure 4**

*Sign stating other ethnicities and Muslims not allowed to rent, buy, or sell.*



**Trapped Between Two Extremes**

While Kachin women are associated with singers, models and dancers, many people in Myanmar also see the Kachin as armed rebels. For example, when I first got to Yangon in 2013, a taxi driver asked me if I was Kachin because of my accent, and when I said yes, he asked me if I came here because there was war in Kachin State. It is true that there was war, but many people lived in cities such as Myitkyina. However, average people living outside of Kachin State never visited because it was listed as a

“black” area.<sup>10</sup> A teacher friend of mine had to leave the south to go to Kachin State for training and her parents cried, they were so worried. Color coding war zones is a systematic attempt by the Bama state and popular media to separate Kachin people from others by portraying Kachin State as war-torn and restless.

Furthermore, people in Myanmar generally view Kachin people who have long lived camps for displaced people as pitiable. It is difficult to know such people’s real lives. This is partly because accessing these areas in Kachin State and meeting Kachin people is hard, and partly because people are simply not interested in doing so.

### **Negative Perceptions of Smart Kachin Women**

Many people portray Kachin women in leadership positions as aggressive, rather than as brave, confident, capable, and/or intelligent. For example, people often describe Khon Ja, a political activist who led the Kachin Women Peace Network, and Neng Pu, a political activist and leader in the “Htoi Gender” group, as being “aggressive”. Women leaders and their organizations are undermined by such characterizations. They are called aggressive, confrontational, or sharp-tongued, rather than smart and assertive.

Some also comment that since Kachin women have to suffer more and face more repression, they get used to it and become more confident. For example, in Nay Pyi Taw on 30 October 2017, a group of Kachin women met the Ethnic Affairs and Internal Peace Development Committee, the House of Nationalities, and the House of People’s Representatives. When they met the Legislation and Special Issues Commission, the commissioner said that parliament was responsible for listening to the voices of people and communicating them to government, but people rarely spoke up—only Kachin women were confident enough to

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<sup>10</sup> Starting during the high tide of the civil war in the 1950s, regions were designated as ‘black’ or intense fighting zones, ‘brown’ semi-intense zones where both the government and rebel groups occupied, or ‘white’ Bama military-controlled zones.

do so. However, most people only see and hear about supposedly modern, extroverted Kachin supermodels and celebrities, not these women.

### **Famous Kachin Women in Kachin State**

There are a lot of well-known Kachin women in high positions. Consider Esther Htusan, the first Pulitzer Prize-winning Kachin woman when she won in 2016, and Laphai Seng Raw, who in 1997 founded Myanmar's largest civil society organization, the Metta Development Foundation, and won the Ramon Magsaysay award in 2013. Then there is also Ja Nan, Director of Shalom, who actively participated in peace talks as a technical adviser on the side of EAOs. These are important examples of famous Kachin women, but overall, the number of Kachin women in leadership positions is still very small.

These successful female Kachin leaders have very different experiences and backgrounds to ordinary Kachin women. They had the opportunity to receive and pursue education. Therefore, they cannot claim to be representative of the common Kachin woman's experience. The daily socioeconomic experiences they embody are not the same as most Kachin women. There is a huge gap.

### **The Real Situation for Kachin Women in Kachin State**

Kachin women continue to suffer from civil war, enduring hardship, and many have been forced from their homes into displacement and refugee camps. Most of the people in and from Kachin State can be accurately called victims of war. As of August 2021, there were 97,011 Kachin displaced people sheltering in camps in Northern Shan and Kachin states.<sup>11</sup> If they attend school, kids from the camps face discrimination and are often teased as "IDP children" and bullied.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> UNOCHA Myanmar, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> From the acronym for "internally displaced people"—IDP.

Being displaced and facing situations out of their control with no clear solution, many Kachin people have to endure hardship. Many women experience sexual assault and feel insecure and vulnerable in their daily lives. Some are exploited for their cheap labor. Lack of jobs and low wages lead many Kachin women into being trafficked to China.

Kachin women face discrimination because of patriarchal Kachin culture. For example, men are the center in a family, only sons get an inheritance, only men's voices are respected, and women's and children's voices are ignored. To this date, women cannot become pastors in Christian religious institutions. Women are pressured to give birth in order to grow the population under the banner of propagating the Kachin nation. Women cannot easily marry people of different ethnic or religious groups, and relatives, friends, and religious leaders force single women to marry other Kachin people, even if they want to stay single.

If there is a social event, the invitations are sent only with men's names, not women's. Kachin women introduce themselves as "the daughter of Mr. X" or "the wife of Mr. Y." Kachin women should not have to introduce themselves as daughters or wives and should be confident to introduce themselves with their own names rather than in relation to a male family member.

Meanwhile, Kachin women continue to be sexually abused and killed. For example, consider these three well-known cold cases: the Sumlut Roi Ja case from Khine Beng village, Momauk Township, 8 October 2011; the infamous sexual abuse and murder of two Kachin teachers in 2015; and the sexual abuse and murder of 51-year-old Daw Nan Htang in Kutkai Township, Muse District in July 2019. There has been no justice for these victims until the time of writing and Kachin women still live in fear.

Even the most brutal sexual violence cases do not attract significant attention. Few people are interested in these cases and people in many parts of the country do not even know about them. Many view these cases as ones that only Kachin people should be concerned about, undermining the experiences of



Kachin women by normalizing sexual violence as an inevitable outcome of war. Some say obtuse things like: “Since this is war, it is normal that there will be sexual abuse and murder.”

## **Undermining Women’s Problems**

Almost no Kachin people go to government courts to seek justice in Kachin State. We rely on customs and traditions. But are these customs fair? What these traditions often lead to is lessons to be fair to one another, love each other, and to avoid creating problems, emphasizing discussion and reconciliation. But traditionally, Kachin leaders are men, and in these customary hearings women often end up marrying the men who abduct them by force, even those who rape them. Since tradition does not take account of the considerations of women, customary conflict resolution is biased and unjust. Traditional leaders emphasize reconciliation and force marriages upon women without their consent. There is no justice for women in a system that forces them to marry their abductor.

Kachin women experience layers of cascading oppression, as Kachin and as women, from ideologies like Burmanization, which legitimates the domination of the majority Bama over other ethnic groups, and the customary patriarchal system in Kachin society, which facilitates the domination of men over women.

## **How Kachin Women Try to Break Free From Oppression**

Kachin women have been subject to the abuses of the Bama military for years. Some Kachin women’s organizations and individuals have revolted in various ways to liberate themselves from a society that centers men in everyday familial, communal, and religious life. For example, some Kachin organizations protested on the streets on International Women’s Day in 2016, holding a banner saying, “Stop sexual violence immediately!” and many campaigns keep these messages alive. In March 2022, there were

movements to elect Kachin women as Christian pastors. Movements continue. We resist every day. People from different fields should stand in solidarity. Women's movements should include fights against discrimination based on sex, ethnicity, region, and different experiences such as having to flee and becoming so-called refugees or IDPs.

## **Changes Within the Spring Revolution**

Since the 2021 military coup, the whole nation has faced the violent oppression of the Myanmar military and the negative consequences of war. Kachin State has suffered from the destruction of war and oppression for over 60 years. Kachin people have been displaced, raped, murdered, accused of EAO membership, unfairly arrested, abducted for forced hard labor, had their houses burned down, and had their freedom of movement severely restricted. After the 2021 coup, now most of the country is sharing what Kachin people have faced for over 60 years.

In this revolutionary period, EAOs like the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) have taken on the role of well-experienced seniors helping their juniors. Many urban revolutionaries, mostly youths from Generation Z, are taking refuge in KIA and liberated areas. The KIA cooperates with them and these new revolutionaries are reliant on and trust their ethnic revolutionary leaders. Many people across Myanmar have lost the prejudices they held toward EAOs before the coup. They now see the rationale behind armed resistance. Now is the best time for the KIA to bring down the military dictatorship together with these young revolutionaries. They are able to build mutual trust together, a crucial step to escalate revolutionary momentum. From this revolution, almost the whole country has learned more about the situations of the victims of war in ethnic areas.

## **Conclusion**

There are many people who weave, create, and treasure their own traditional clothes. But Kachin women who do not fit into

idealized beauty standards, and those who choose not to wear traditional clothes—what about them? Are they not also Kachin women? Are Kachin women who are not models or singers somehow not Kachin women? Those who do not fit into these stereotypes are still Kachin women and are definitely real human beings. In this article, I have made it clear that when people say, “Kachin women”, they imagine only those fleeing from war zones, sitting in refugee camps, or they think of politicians in Kachin longyis, or famous people, sexy models and singers. But all Kachin women, especially those living in Kachin State that experience multiple layers of discrimination and repression should be recognized.

So who are Kachin women? What defines Kachin women? In fact, all Kachin women, including those from cities and enjoying privileged positions, face discrimination. This can include weaponized rape, abuses, human rights violations, and the loss of opportunities. It is the embodiment of all of these struggles and daily experiences, in the cultural, social and political spheres, that make one a Kachin woman. Every day many Kachin women resist the military dictatorship, Burmese chauvinism, Kachin patriotism and patriarchy, and the real Kachin women’s identity emerges out of this resistance and defiance.

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