

## Myanmar Rural Culture Reflecting in *Ainggyin* Poems

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### Abstract

*Ainggyin* is a form of Myanmar poetry, normally sung by village girls. Myanmar cultural aspects such as clothing, daily life, love and marital affairs, ideas that reflected in *ainggyins* are studied in this paper. So *ainggyins* are of great value to Myanmar literature for they are depicting Myanmar cultural traditions.

**Key words:** *ainggyin* poem, rural, Myanmar culture, tradition

### Introduction

The cherishable Myanmar traditions of rural area where most of Myanmar people live could be found in *ainggyins*.

### Myanmar Rural Scenes Depicted in *Ainggyins*

*Ainggyin* is a form of Myanmar poem or folk song that dedicated to a man sung by village girls with a resounding voice.

*Ainggyins* usually begin with a phrase "Dear ones, good friends and sister-in-law", composed as if a girl were getting something off her chest. They vividly depict Myanmar rural ways of life concerning love, marriage, economy, religion etc. So images of Myanmar folk culture can be found in them.

Some *Ya-byae-aings* (*ainggyins* that composed circa 1100 Myanmar era), composed by Shin Nyein Mai of *Nyaung-yan era*, viz. 'A Guide to My House', 'Because of My Destiny', 'Oh My Fate' and 'The Son-in-law-to-be' are presented in this paper.

### A Guide to My House

In this *ainggyin*, the girl tells her beloved how to come to her house.

First, follow the row of coconut palms till to the south of the palace. Then you will reach the banyan tree that planted on a pedestal. Here you have to take the lane. You will find a champak tree and some *hnin-bans* lilies in front of my house, she guided:

Should you wish to visit your younger sister's house,  
Coconut palms row to the south of the palace,  
At the corner, a banyan tree on a pedestal.  
A champak tree and *hnin-bans*. (*Ainggyin*: 1986: 11)

In addition, she tells him how her house looks: a lean to roofed annex at the back of the house; rice barn and a salt store also there; in front there is a stable:

At back a lean to roofed annex,  
barns for rice and salt.  
There, in front is a stable. (*Ainggyin*: 1986: 11)

Then she tells her love where to meet: 'in the south lane of Man-aung Pagoda'. The beloved who looks like a lily should halt the house there and come to the south window of her house to meet and chat with her.

In this *ainggyin* the girl tells the layout of her house such as, lean to roofed annex at the back of the house, a stable in front. The rice barn and salt store show their prosperity. It is also learnt that they use horses as a means of transport. Their rendezvous of the south lane of Man-

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aung Pagoda shows that there is a main road with lanes diverged from it. Man-aung Pagoda and banyan tree indicates their religion as Buddhism. From this *ainggyin* we can learn the rural life style of her village.

### Because of My Destiny

This *ainggyin* tells the love story of a village girl. The girl meets her love who is protested by her aunts (sisters of her mother), so they are parted for a long time. And then they meet unexpectedly.

She tells us how she met her love and why and how they part:

I have loved my love since thirteen, when he had just returned from holiness,  
but my stubborn aunties would not let me greet him over my  
spinning wheel at courting time. (*Ainggyins*: 1986: 18 )

She takes the sorrow as her destiny. And then one day she meets her love unexpectedly:

Bad luck and ill fate kept us apart  
for ages, until we met the other evening,  
when I was on my way back from fields,  
It was south of my aunt's house,  
beside the carambola orchard,  
east of the silk-cotton tree, where the lane's narrow into a bend.  
(*Ainggyins*: 1986: 18)

He wore round his neck a new indigo scarf of silk mixed with cotton that she had woven for him. He spoke no word. With an arm around her shoulder and touching her back, he stood there weeping. Seeing her love's misery she simply said, 'But my sweet heart, did I say I did not love you?

And she was enraged too much that she cursed her aunt.  
That jealous, hateful, tale-telling hag  
who works evil daily to separate our love,  
may that monster dry up like the drought. (*Ainggyins*: 1986: 18)

It shows the candid state of a simple village girl, and true love of young villagers.

In olden days there was a tradition in courtship in villages. By the time the sunset, the girl sat at the loggia of her house working at her spinning wheel, or rolling cheroots, or shredding betel nuts. The young men came in groups of five or six and they would sit and chat with the girl. The parents never present at the loggia were inside the house and watched. If they were displeased with some young man, they would lean the spinning wheel against the wall so that she could not work at it. The village girls usually can perform the whole process of cloth making-from cotton wool to cloth, and likes to give her product such as scarf to her love. The young man naturally would wear it around his neck fondly. These are some information that we learnt from this *ainggyin*.

### Oh My Fate

Again in this *ainggyin*, we see a village girl in distress.

She loved some young man against her elder's consent. Her uncle and aunt put in some relatives to guard over her. As the girl did not get a chance to meet her love, perceived them as obstacles such as: garuda, demon, spikes, wild bull, blades, needles etc.:

The old man and the old lady who bore me  
have spoilt my love affair.  
Spikes are scattered at the corner of the house  
garudas stand gurad on the door step,  
at the head of the staircase a demon waits,

at the foot of the stairs there's a door mat of thorns.  
 A wild bull is tied to each post of the house  
 a sharp sword is hung on the walls,  
 needles stick out from the floor boards, side he. (*Ainggyins*: 1986: 19)

So how could he climb up to me or how could I go down to him, she thought. If he scurried like a mouse along the purlins or crept like a cat along the beams, they might snap in the middle, as they were weak and worm-eaten. Then those on guard would cry out 'THIEF', light torches and surround the house. So did he reach the cross-road? She thought and thought:

How can my love climb up to me?  
 How can I go down to meet my love?  
 Scurrying like a mouse along the purlins,  
 creeping like a cat along the beams,  
 the beams are weak, the timber worm-eaten ...  
 they snapped in the middle,  
 There was a clamour of THIEF...  
 torches were lit  
 and the house was surrounded.  
 Though he jumped and ran away,  
 Did he reach the cross-roads? (*Ainggyins*: 1986: 19)

She was sick with worry about everything. The worries were so illusive that at long last she sent her youngest sister to find out about her love. The youngest sister reported back:

Oh big sister, I have seen my elder brother-in-law  
 sitting on the wooden platform, in the middle of the village,  
 most unconcernedly plucking his harp. (*Ainggyins*: 1986: 19-20)

It is ironic that her love was playing his harp without any concern, while the girl was worrying to death.

This *ainggyin* was composed with empathy about a young village girl who indulged in fantasy. It is learnt that: the elders used to interfere in young girls' love affairs; if not pleased with the suitor they would protest; and they even would guard over her.

### **The Son-In-Law-To-Be**

In this *ainggyin* we can have a glimpse of the villager's choice of marriage partner. Here we can hear the voice of the girl who found it very difficult to choose between her love and the elder's choice.

She met her love when he had returned from the novice hood at the age of sixteen. There was a relationship since then. But for some reasons the elders did not accept him. So they stood between them. She felt heartache whenever she recalled their fate. To worsen the situation, her aunts chose a *bhodi-daga* (donor of pagoda) from Ava area for her husband. He was rich, skinny, not handsome and divorced. He himself came to her house three times to court, and sent go-between three times too. Her mother pleased with his wealth, so wished to accept him as her son-in-law. So she started to consult with any Brahman astrologer she saw, in comparing her daughter's horoscope and that of the son-in-law-to-be.

Naturally parents wish to see their children prosperous. That was, why the mother arrange to have a rich man as her son-in-law. Last month she already received the dowry. The girl thought her mother as a money-lover and a snob:

Being a money-lover, she chose him as her son-in-law  
 Accepted dowry already in last month.  
 Oh my finicky mother. (*Ainggyins*: 1986: 14)

To her eyes her lover is not rich, but handsome, young and tender, adorable and over indulged as he was the youngest amongst cousins. He lived with his uncle, the broker. She also pointed out that he was a beloved brother of many sisters who adorned him with an indigo scarf.

The poet compared the outlooks of those old and young. The daughter was a teenager with limited experience who prioritized love. So she preferred a young handsome and joyful one. In their eyes, the elders thought the young man as a spoilt, fun-loving, easy-going playboy with no ability. So they liked to choose the rich man, even though he was a 'skinny divorced.' We find out the goodwill of the parents towards their child's well-being and the girl's unhappiness of living with someone she did not love or not living with the one she loved. We also learnt how rural people arrange a marriage, choose a son-in-law-to-be, receive dowry, consult astrologer etc. from this *ainggyin*.

### Overview

The *ainggyins* composed by Shin Nyein Mai are the reflection of the Myanmar rural people's attitudes, love, marriage, economy, society, religion and culture. So we have to acknowledge that *ainggyins* portray the images of Myanmar rural people's life.

### Conclusion

*Ainggyins* that reflecting Myanmar customs, habits, behaviors, culture exist as a genre in Myanmar Literature. As we can gain knowledge on rural people's social, economical and marital life from *ainggyins* it should be concluded that they are precious to Myanmar literature.

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