

ដើមគោលគោរព primary object of respect

ព្រះពុទ្ធរង្គ The Buddha

រកទ្រព្យនេះឲ្យបាន "[Make sure you] acquire this possession" (a command/exhortation)

វៃវ៉ាង sharp, quick, clever

គិតឃើញវែងឆ្ងាយ to think deeply; to consider all angles; to be far-thinking

ក្រដាសប្រាក់ bill (as in \$5 bill, \$10 bill, etc.)

កូនកញ្ចប់ small package

verb phrase + រៀបរយ "to have [verb phrase]-ed already"

ព្រះនេត្រ eye(s); (formal/poetic) usually said of royalty, gods, monks

Some Important Concepts in Chapter Two

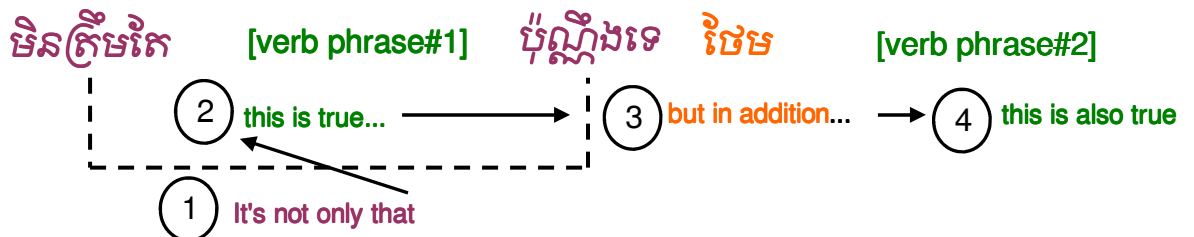
The Hardships of សុឃារ's Youth

1. There's a useful grammatical structure in the first line of paragraph 16:

មិនត្រឹមតែព្រួយនឹងបុរសប្តីប៉ុណ្ណឹងទេ ថែមមកកើតទុក្ខម្យ៉ាងទៀតដោយទ្រព្យសម្បត្តិក្នុងផ្ទះរលាយអស់ ...

"It wasn't only that she was distraught over her husband, she was also upset over the loss of all the possessions in her home".

Let's isolate the kernel of this structure, which we can paraphrase as: "it's not only that *this* is true, but in addition, *this* is also true":



"Verb phrase #1" is the first condition or situation we want to describe or emphasize, and "verb phrase #2" is a related condition or situation seen as amplifying verb phrase #1, providing more information about it, or possibly showing that our expectations of the overall situation based solely on verb phrase #1 are being exceeded. Whew, that's a mouthful, huh? Or at least a brainful. Take a minute to consider this structure, referring back to the more complete sentence on the previous page (and to the larger context of the story), so that this can all sink in.

Maybe you can see already how useful this structure can be in your spoken Khmer. Just to make sure, let's use it in a few different ways, to get an idea of its potential grammatical (and expressive) power:

Example 1: មិនត្រឹមតែគាត់ជួយខ្ញុំប៉ុណ្ណឹងទេ ថែមអោយខ្ចីប្រាក់ទៀតផង។

"It wasn't only that she helped me, she also loaned me money". Note that adding ទៀតផង to the end of verb phrase #2 is quite natural here; it emphasizes the "contrary to prior expectations" nature of the second verb phrase.

Example 2: មិនត្រឹមតែចេះនិយាយខ្មែរប៉ុណ្ណឹងទេ ថែមចេះអក្សរទៀតផង។

"Not only can he speak Khmer, he can read and write it, too".

Is this starting to make sense? Assuming "yes," here's your assignment: practice this structure using a number of different "verb phrase #1s" and "verb phrase #2s". Finally, make up 2 of your own examples of this structure in use, and be able to *say* (not read) the sentences from memory.

2. Another thing to make note of in the paragraphs describing the hardships of Soyaa's youth (paragraphs 16-23) is the way that her mother going into debt (and subsequently losing all her possessions) is emphasized. Remember that Khmer peasants, like all peasants everywhere, truly live on the edge. Surpluses in crop production are small,

usually just enough is produced each year to feed one's family, maybe sell a little rice to the local Chinese rice broker. If one's really lucky, one can save some money for fulfilling important obligations, such as contributing to the temple (which also brings you spiritual merit), marrying off a child or two, etc. People try to keep some surplus rice (and money--or rather, in the case of most Khmer peasants, gold) on hand in case of disaster (drought, flood, illness). But there's usually not too large of a safety net to be had. The only recourse left in a situation like that of Soyaa's family--assuming one has a few decent possessions to begin with, most likely in the form of gold jewelry--is to sell those possessions to help deal with the hardship. Which is exactly what Soyaa's mother does to treat her husband's illness. Remember, the illness itself was brought on by a drought, so the family was already stretched pretty thin. There are no "social services" in rural Cambodia, no "relief," no "welfare". If you go under, you really go under. You lose your possessions, then your land, and eventually, you just starve, or maybe--nowadays--you end up begging on the streets of Phnom Penh. Nobody begs in the villages; your neighbors would just laugh at you.

The point is, going into debt and losing everything is pretty serious, and certainly cause for the type of illness which eventually overtakes Soyaa's mother.

Note that such a cause for illness--emotional pain and distress--is considered wholly valid and real in Khmer culture. Emotional pain is for the most part not considered a "real" cause of *physical* illness in mainstream American culture. This is the legacy of Western science and the specific history of Western medicine in particular: the old "Cartesian Split," a strict conceptual division between the body and the mind. If you think that Khmer culture carries things a little too far in one direction--that is, basically implying that a woman could die of a broken heart and from worry over financial woes--consider also that we take things a bit too far in the other direction, often totally ignoring the influence of one's state of mind on one's physical health. Think about some of the casual ways we talk about illness, saying derisively that someone's pain is "all in their head". Or how about the Western medical concept of "psychosomatic illness"? In Khmer culture, *all* illness is "psychosomatic:" the mind, body and spirit are inseparable and all affect the other. Each is inextricably linked to the other, and each exerts great

influence over one's state of well-being.

3. Here are a few additional literary, grammatical and vocabulary points which come up in the flashback to Soyaa's youth turmoils:

Paragraph 17: កើតទុក្ខនឹងខ្សត់ធនធានជាការទ្រាំបានទេ? ឯកើតទុក្ខនឹងព្រាត់សង្សារ តាប់ចិត្តចេញពីខ្លួន ជាទុក្ខវេទនាខ្លាំងពន់ពេកណាស់។ "Is suffering due to the loss of

of one's possessions [and capital, savings] something that's bearable? As for losing one's loved one, that's truly a source of miserable pain and suffering". The first part of this sentence is a rhetorical question, the "answer" being "well, maybe one *could* withstand such a loss, but it's doubtful..." The second part of the sentence stresses that the loss of one's beloved in addition is truly a serious thing, and it's no wonder it leads to disease and death as in the case of Soyaa's mother.

Paragraph 18: ឯមាតានាង សូយា ណាមួយព្រួយនឹងថ្លី ណាមួយព្រួយនឹងបង់ ធនធាន

"As for Soyaa's mother, for one thing, she was grieving over her husband; for another thing, she was worried about paying back the debts incurred in treating her husband's illness [which necessitated the sale of her belongings]..." This structure, "ណាមួយ + clause #1, ណាមួយ + clause#2," works pretty much the same way the English structure "for one thing...for another thing..." works. **You would do well to practice it and incorporate it into your spoken (and written) Khmer repertoire.**

Paragraph 19: ថ្ងៃមួយជម្ងឺរីតតែខ្លាំងឡើង "One day, her disease got much worse". The structure រីតតែខ្លាំងឡើង means "to increase, to worsen". It's almost always used to describe an increase in degree or magnitude of a situation deemed catastrophic or

negative by the speaker/writer.

The rest of paragraph 19 is that extended "lamp allegory," where the writer points out how Soyaa would have done well to compare her mother's illness to a kerosene lamp, which just prior to running out of oil and dying out, bursts forth with flame, to such an extent that one might think it's going to keep burning after all. The final burst is a false sign of hope, however, and after that the lamp quickly goes out for good. I think personally that the author pushes this allegory a bit far, but subtlety is obviously not one of his strong points!

សូយ៉ា's Lullaby to សូដាត

First of all, this is not really the typical sort of lullaby a Khmer mother sings her child. There are a few nods here to traditional lullaby form, but not many. What this really is is a lament in verse form. The way it's recited is what we (from a Western viewpoint) would call "singing". Khmers, however, do not call this ច្រៀង, but rather សូត្រ ... this is an important distinction. This is the way that all Khmer verse (remember, all literature prior to the 20th Century was in verse, not narrative form) is recited: that includes the prescriptive proverbs called ច្បាប់, the Ramayana or រាមកេរ្តិ៍, and stories such as កាកី, ទុំទាវ etc. If you'd like to hear what this type of "recitative singing" sounds like, just ask a native speaker with at least a high school education in Cambodia to សូត្រ this lullaby for you.

Now, a few assorted comments on the content of the lullaby, by line number from the text (paragraph 27):

Line 1: សូដាត កូនរើយកូនគេងទៅ This line is very typical of Khmer lullabies. If

you'd like to learn more about them, just ask your instructor. If that happens to be me, I have a book in which you're basically instructed step-by-step how to play with and soothe babies in Khmer!

Line 2. រស់នៅធ្វើអ្វីរស់ឥតភ័យ ស៊ូស្លាប់ទៅគាប់រូបរំលាយ The useful structure here is ស៊ូស្លាប់ , which means "I'd rather die than..." Here it appears in a rather stilted and non-colloquial poetic setting; its usual usage is something like "ខ្ញុំស៊ូស្លាប់ជាជាង ,,," which means "I'd rather die than...." The structure is "ខ្ញុំស៊ូស្លាប់ជាជាង + [the thing I'd rather die than doing]". Examples: ខ្ញុំស៊ូស្លាប់ជាជាងញ៉ាំប្រហុក "I'd rather die than eat Khmer fermented fish paste" or ខ្ញុំស៊ូស្លាប់ជាជាងរស់នៅ Milwaukee "I'd rather die than live in Milwaukee". You get the idea.

Line 12. ឪកូនម្តេចឡើយចង់ពេបអី "Oh child, why do you scrunch your face up as if to cry?" This is another typical lullaby line.

Other than the above points, don't worry too much about studying/understanding the lullaby. There are a lot more important things to focus on in this novel.

សូយា's Illness

Of course, សូយា ends up getting sick and dying in a similar fashion to her mother, although there's an important extra element in សូយា's situation. Let's consider three major cultural (and vocabulary) points relative to her illness (you might want to first review the full tale of សូយា's illness, by reading paragraphs [29-35](#)):

A. The Concept of ស្អ្លុះ (paragraph 29)

ស្អ្លុះ means "to be stuck, blocked." It's the verb used to refer to traffic jams, for instance (ឡើងស្អ្លុះ). And it also refers to a diseased condition in Khmer worldview in which one's blood gets "blocked" and doesn't flow freely through one's veins. The complete phrase used in this novel is វត្តលស្អ្លុះឈាមរត់ក្នុងសរសៃ "the blood that flows through [her] veins became stuck and blocked". There are a few concepts in Western cosmology of the body that overlap with the concept of ស្អ្លុះឈាម (such as blood pressure disorders), but none that are as all-encompassing as the concept of ស្អ្លុះ, or that have the same explanatory/causative "power" as the Khmer term. ស្អ្លុះ is considered very real (and serious) in a traditional Khmer way of thinking about health and illness. This can be seen here as it is the beginning of ស្រីយ៉ា's descent into illness and eventual death. If you're at all familiar with Chinese conceptions of illness, you can see the similarity between the concept of ស្អ្លុះ and "blocked energy" or Ch'i. Ask in class if you want to know more about this.

B. The Concept of ខ្យល់គចាប់ (paragraph 29)

The next stage in ស្រីយ៉ា's worsening condition is ខ្យល់គចាប់ or "the entering of bad air/energy into the bloodstream". In particular, this refers to a type of bad air which causes one to lose one's voice, become short of breath and in general to be "struck dumb" (គ). This is a bit more serious than ស្អ្លុះឈាម ... though a causative path is definitely implied in the narrative of this chapter (that is, the first condition leads to the second). You should already be familiar with the concept of ខ្យល់ចាប់ (see this chapter's vocabulary notes if you're not). This is just a much nastier and specific form of that condition. Note that the immediate effect of this condition on ស្រីយ៉ា : she

"collapses in a heap; falls over in a slump" (ដួលស្រែក). And the presence of this condition lets us know what's *really* ultimately wrong with ស្រីយា, in the larger sense is...

C. The Concept of រោគទាស៍ (paragraph 34)

So ស្រីយា collapses and is obviously very ill (her breast milk stops flowing, her arms and legs swell up, and she can't keep any food down...if you didn't get this from reading the text the first time, go back and read it again). The older folk in the village, being good Khmers, know right away what's going on: she has រោគទាស៍. This is a very Khmer illness concept, often (erroneously) translated as "allergy". It does *not* mean allergy in the English/Western sense. What it does mean is a condition women often contract in the days or weeks following giving birth. The onset of រោគទាស៍ usually follows the new mother's neglect in following one of the many strict taboos and prescriptions one must follow following childbirth. One of these prescriptions is to abstain from sexual intercourse (okay, we know this was not a problem in ស្រីយា's case!). Another is the rejoinder to eat plenty of "hot" foods (to replenish all the heat lost from the body in the birthing process). Another is that one must ដេករវាំងភ្លើង, which is to lie wrapped in blankets on a bed, under which is placed a pan of hot coals. Another prescription still is to drink a type of medicinal wine which is believed to contain pulverized tiger bones.

The process of giving birth (and birth itself) is in general thought--quite rightly!--to be a very tenuous and delicate time, a time in which a lot can go wrong and often does. One is susceptible to all sorts of imbalances (such as the heat imbalance mentioned

above), including malevolent spirits after both mother and child, and to a host of ailments. ស្រីបារា's defenses are therefore "down" already. When the news comes that ស្រីន has remarried, it just wrecks her emotions, which are just as much a part, remember, of one's health in Khmer cosmology as the physical state of one's respiratory or digestive system. The result, as you've read, is rapid and grave illness, and death.