Phina So, who is a popular artist, is photographed reading the anthology of poems she helped edit.

"My Parents Are Women"

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Kamsort Khoeun, a poet, visited children and families living around the Stung Meanchey dump site in Phnom Penh. Interacting with the community gave him a better understanding of the challenges faced by families who relied on picking waste from the dump site.

But it also raised questions about other Cambodian families — families that are not considered traditional. Families that don't have one mother and one father; or set masculine and feminine roles. Who was talking about families where the power structures at home are reversed or cases where these roles do not exist?

Khoeun knew there was a diversity of experiences in Cambodian households and wanted to showcase them beyond the regular narratives of family life. These questions moved the poet to write a Khmer-language poem called "My Parents are Women" that was later included in the Cambodian Women Poetry project, an anthology of works from 38 people, including women and members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

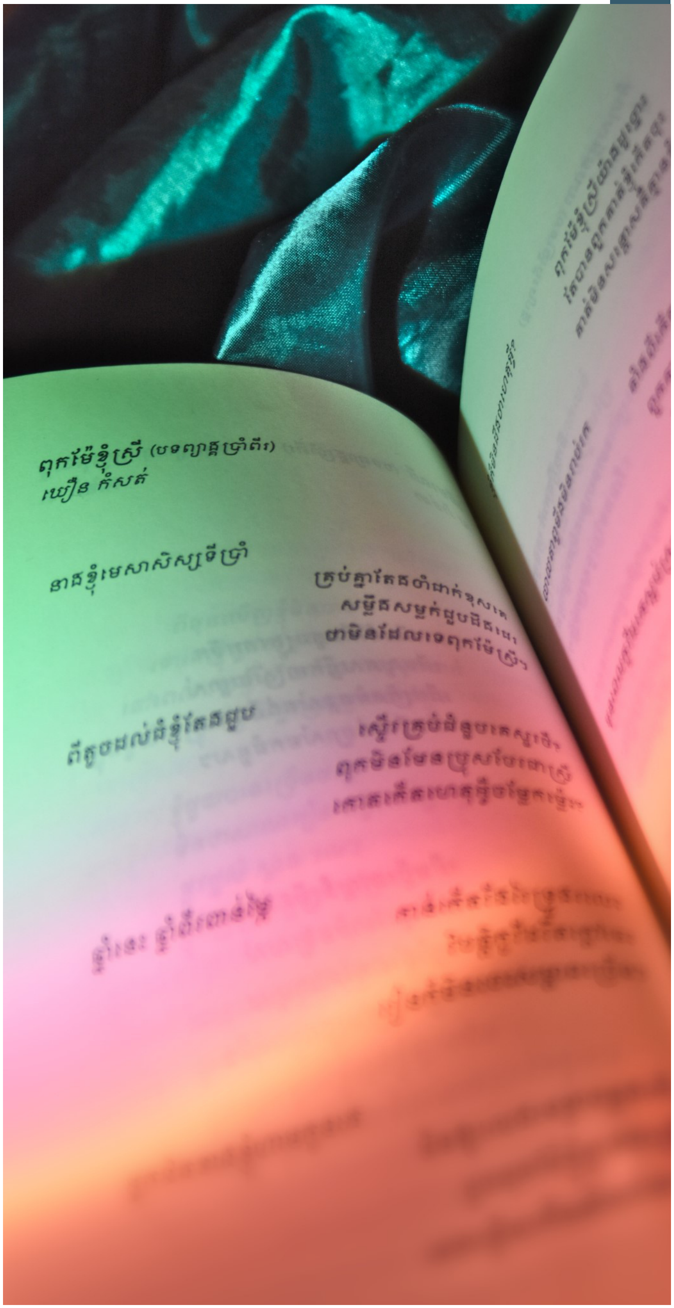
"The poems touch on the experiences faced by women, such as the pressure to get married, their human rights, the marginalization of voices, LGBTQIA+ issues, and ideas of self-love, education, injustice and issues like breastfeeding in public," says So Phina, an artist, poet and the editor of the anthology.

ពុកម៉ែខ្ញុំស្រី

(បទពាក្យប្រាំពីរ)

នាងខ្ញុំមេសាសិស្សទីប្រាំ
គ្រប់គ្នាតែងចាំដាក់ខុសគេ
សម្លឹងសម្លក់ជួបដឹងដេរ
ថាមិនដែលទេពុកម៉ែស្រី។
ពីតូចដល់ធំខ្ញុំតែងជួប
ស្ងើរគ្រប់ជំនួបគេសួរថី?
ពុកមិនមែនប្រុសបែរជាស្រី
គោតកើតហេតុអ្វីចម្លែកម្លេះ?
ឆ្នាំនេះ ឆ្នាំពីរពាន់ម្ភៃ
កាន់កើតរីងរ៉ៃទ្រូងរលេះ
វិបត្តិកូវីដរឹតក្តៅឆេះ
រៀនក៏មិនចេះសម្ពាធច្រើន។
អ្នកជិតខាងខ្ញុំហាមកូនគេ
មិនឱ្យលេងទេខ្លាចឆ្លងកើន
ដូចពុកម៉ែខ្ញុំគ្មានចម្រើន
គេថាខ្មើយកើននាំអាប់យស។
ខ្ញុំក៏មិនដឹងថាហេតុអ្វី?
ពុកម៉ែខ្ញុំស្រីយ៉ាងដូច្នោះ
តែបានពួកគាត់ខ្ញុំកើតចុះ
បើគ្មានគាត់នោះគឺគ្មានខ្ញុំ។
យាយតាពូមីងមិនរាប់រក
តាំងពីកើតមកមិនជួបជុំ
មុខមាត់បែបណាស្ងាត់ជ្រងំ
ឱ្យពុកម៉ែខ្ញុំរស់ខ្លួនឯង។
មុនពេលកូវីដគេស្អប់ស្រាប់
កូវីដបិទផ្កាប់គេមិនក្រែង
សូម្បីមើលមុខក៏គេលែង
ពុកខំប្រឹងប្រែងចេញពី ឃុំ ។
គេថាតើច្បាប់ឯណាចែង?
ឱ្យស្រីគ្នាឯងអាចផ្សំផ្គុំ
ខុសពីធម្មជាតិពិតមិនសម
ដូចពុកម៉ែខ្ញុំមិនគួរសោះ។
ខ្ញុំចង់សួរថាកើតជាមនុស្ស
ទាល់តែស្រីប្រុសទើបស្រស់បស់?
អាចមានគ្រួសារអោចរួមរស់?
ស្រីនិងស្រីនោះពិតខុសគេ?

អ្នកនិពន្ធ: ឃឿន កំសត់



A photograph of the "My Parents Are Women" poem in the book.