WOMEN IN POLITICS IN DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION: 
THE CASE OF BHUTAN

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Bhutan, empowerment, politics, transition democracy, women.
Abstract

In 2008 Bhutan became the world’s new democracy. Such a momentous occasion offered a unique opportunity for research to explore the changes that universal suffrage would bring to a society dominated by the monarchy for more than one hundred years. In particular this study set out to investigate the way in which alterations to the political landscape would impact on Bhutanese women. As a traditional society Bhutanese women’s lives were dominated by their biology and their work in the domestic sphere. This shift in the way Bhutan was governed provided women, for the first time, with the prospect of moving to the public and political arena, an area usually reserved for men.

Data for this study were obtained from three sources – semi- structured interviews with 26 women and 17 men throughout Bhutan, analysis of public documents, and observations in the field during the election campaign and later parliamentary sittings during the course of 2012.

This study exposes the patriarchy which is embedded in Bhutanese society and reinforced through cultural practices and the legal framework. Further it examines the public/private dichotomy, the low educational attainment of girls and women and the gendered division of labour which derails women’s public life. It reveals a masculine driven election campaign, women’s marginalised position in political parties, impediments to their seeking candidature, hurdles in their entry to the parliament itself and the challenges of being a woman in the world of men. Feminism as an agency of women is yet to take off in Bhutan.

Nonetheless, the first ten women parliamentarians were trailblazers who were able to demonstrate a principled, feminine, political leadership in a masculine environment. They contributed to Bhutan’s development by enabling legislation which directly impacts on women and children (rape and domestic violence) in their first term.

Bhutanese society was challenged by women’s entry into the public domain. In doing so, women have demonstrated that societal structures are not static and that 2008 was a year of not only political but societal transformation for Bhutan.
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<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aum</td>
<td>Polite form of address to a woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiwog</td>
<td>A group of houses/villages usually about 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dzongda</td>
<td>Governor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dzongkhag</td>
<td>District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driglam namzha</td>
<td>Code of conduct or etiquette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangmi</td>
<td>Elected Deputy Executive of Gewog Administration Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gup</td>
<td>Elected Executive of Gewog Administration Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gewog</td>
<td>Lowest administrative unit in Bhutan’s three-tiered governance system. A group of villages make up a Gewog and are translated as a block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goenkhang</td>
<td>The inner sanctum of the monastery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gyalyong Tshogkhang</td>
<td>The Parliament House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gyalyong Tshogdhey</td>
<td>The National Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gyalyong Tshogdu</td>
<td>The National Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khuru</td>
<td>Traditional Bhutanese game that is played like darts in an open field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyonchhen</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyonpo</td>
<td>Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lam Neten</td>
<td>Head abbot of district’s state monastic body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marchang</td>
<td>Wine offering ceremony to invoke deities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palden Lhamo</td>
<td>Female protecting deity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tshogpa</td>
<td>This has multiple meanings according to its use, usually member, representative or organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeshey Gyembo</td>
<td>Male protecting deity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zomdu</td>
<td>Meeting</td>
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## List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>Anti-Corruption Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBS</td>
<td>Bhutan Broadcasting Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLSS</td>
<td>Bhutan Living Standards Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BKP</td>
<td>Bhutan Kuenyum Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNEW</td>
<td>Bhutan Network for Empowering Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D&amp;C</td>
<td>Dilation and Curettage (medical procedure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCT</td>
<td>Druk Chirwang Tshogpa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIPD</td>
<td>Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNA</td>
<td>Deoxyribonucleic Acid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNT</td>
<td>Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPT</td>
<td>Druk Phuensum Tshogpa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECB</td>
<td>Election Commission of Bhutan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVM</td>
<td>Electronic Voting Machine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FYP</td>
<td>Five Year Development Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GFP</td>
<td>Gender Focal Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNH</td>
<td>Gross National Happiness</td>
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<tr>
<td>GNHC</td>
<td>Gross National Happiness Commission of Bhutan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRB</td>
<td>Gender Responsive Budgeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICIMOD</td>
<td>International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDEA</td>
<td>International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPU</td>
<td>Inter-Parliamentary Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG</td>
<td>Local Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBT</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSM</td>
<td>Man having Sex with Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>National Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>National Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCWC</td>
<td>National Commission for Women and Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPAG</td>
<td>National Action Plan for Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDP</td>
<td>People’s Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCSC</td>
<td>Royal Civil Service Commission of Bhutan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RENEW</td>
<td>Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUB</td>
<td>Royal University of Bhutan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMS</td>
<td>Short Message Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STDs</td>
<td>Sexually Transmitted Diseases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TG</td>
<td>Transgender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOM</td>
<td>Voice of the Martyrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

QUT Verified Signature

Signature:

Date: June, 2015
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2008, the fourth King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, declared that Bhutan would transition to democracy (Gallenkamp 2010:11, Freedom House 2008). This announcement was met with mixed reactions by the Bhutanese people (Sinpeng 2007: 40-4, Council on Foreign Relations 2008). Their responses ranged from enthusiasm for a more egalitarian society to dismay and a feeling of abandonment by the King (Sinpeng 2007: 36: Andleman 2010: 109). For the women of Bhutan this offered the possibility of moving from the private and domestic sphere to having a role in the public sphere (Lyonette 2013: 198-199, Sarioglu 2013: 481). This study sets out to explore the impact of this shift in political power for the women of Bhutan in the process leading up to 24 March 2008 general elections and during the first years of democratic government. Further, it investigates the poor representation of women in public decision-making forums and politics; verifies the voice of women supporters like party workers, office coordinators, campaigners and financers within the two competing political parties; examines whether deep seated gender stereotyping hinders women’s visible presence in politics; explores the seemingly passive stance of women parliamentarians in the National Assembly and considers the ability of women parliamentarians in the National Council to exercise their leverage during the process of reviewing legislation.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Bhutan is a small developing country in South Asia, situated between the world’s largest democracy, India and the powerful emergent economy of China (Sherpa 2013: 42, Jha 2013: 1). Bhutan never experienced British colonial aggression as did the other countries on mainland South Asia and remained a sovereign state largely untouched as a result of its geographical isolation (Phuntsho 2013: 63, Sinpeng 2007: 34).
The total geographical area is 38,394 square kilometres and about 700,000 people live in the country (GNHC 2011).\footnote{Retrieved from \url{http://www.bt.undp.org/bhutan/en/home.html} on 4 October 2013 (The United Nations Development Programme stated the population figure as 720,679).} As shown in the map below, the mountainous terrain is harsh and entails walking to most remote rural areas which are located far from Thimphu, the political capital of Bhutan. Such visiting is important for members of parliament. This difficult physical landscape is an impediment for women’s participation in public life (BLSS 2012: 54, GNHC 2013: 207).

Source: “Detailed administrative and relief map of Bhutan”. Vidiani.com: maps of world \url{http://www.vidiani.com/?p=3196}

The three main ethnic groups are the Ngalong of west, the Sharchop from the east and the Lhotsampa of the south, grouped along ethno-lingual lines. The Ngalong and Sharchop are Buddhist and jointly known as Drukpas. The Lhotsampa are ethnic Nepalese, who have migrated from Nepal to Bhutan, are mostly Hindus and a small portion is Christian (Turner et al. 2011: 189). These socio-cultural features directly affect women as they define the way in which women can actively participate in the

\footnote{Retrieved from \url{http://www.nsb.gov.bt/main/main.php}&slider1=4 on 4 October 2013 (According to National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan as of 4 October 2013, the population was projected as 739,297).}

\footnote{Retrieved from \url{http://data.worldbank.org/country/bhutan} on 4 October 2013 (The World Bank’s research data on Bhutan states that, in 2012, the country’s population was 741,822).}
numerous social and cultural activities which have a high importance in a deeply traditional country (Chuki 2014: 50, NCWC 2008: 37).

Women constitute about (48) percent, nearly half of the country’s 745153 people in 2014 (National Statistics Bureau 2013: 3). According to the Gender Statistics 2010 report, the female population is projected to be about 431,114, which is almost about half of the country’s total estimated population of about 886, 523 in 2030 (GNHC 2010 a:6). Women undoubtedly have great potential to contribute to the overall governance of the country.

The monarchy remained the established political system until March 2008. The fourth King’s devolution of executive power by decree was not driven by international pressure, economic crisis nor the citizen’s movement for democracy (Turner et al. 2011: 185). The King personally travelled across the country and persuaded unwilling people to accept democracy before the new change gained its support (cited in Turner and Tshering 2014: 414). The majority conservative, politically passive and uneducated population supported the monarchy for they preferred “the paternalistic style of governance” (Sinpeng 2007: 40-41).

According to Article Ten, Clause One of the Constitution (Constitution 2009: 29) the parliament consists of the National Assembly, the National Council and the King. Thus, the King remains one of the key actors in Bhutanese politics. Haynes (2013: 19) defines democratic transition as “the period between an authoritarian and an elected government.” He argues that the transition time can be confirmed empirically and is a “self-contained phase of democratization”. This can occur either rapidly or gradually (Haynes 2013: 19). In Bhutan’s case, the fourth King ensured that the democratic process took place through the establishment of democratic institutions. The process was peaceful, slow and allowed political evolution as new events unfolded in a new democracy. Turner et al. (2011: 195-199) argue that the fourth King’s “transformational leadership” and the “strong” nature of the Bhutanese state are the two driving forces of democratisation. The first democratic elections of the National Council took place in December 2007 and January 2008 and the National Assembly in March 2008. A study of Bhutan’s first elections showed that at the national level, voter turnout for the National Council was 53 percent and for the National Assembly 79.3 percent (Sithey and Dorji 2009: 356).
The first democratically elected government was formed by the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT), meaning Bhutan Harmony Party and it completed its five year tenure. The DPT won 45 out of 47 seats from 47 constituencies, in the parliament. The People’s Democratic Party (PDP) won only two seats. During the first period of the parliament, there were six women out of 25 members in the National Council and four women out of 47 members in the National Assembly (Turner et al. 2011: 184).

Upon dissolution of the DPT government on 20 April 2013, parliamentary elections for the National Council took place in April 2013. The National Assembly’s primary and general elections were held in May and July 2013 respectively (Wangchuk 2013a: 1, BBS 2013b). Not a single woman candidate was elected in April’s Council elections although there were five women contestants as well as 62 men candidates. Three of the five women candidates were former parliamentarians from the Council (BBS 2013a). In the Assembly’s primary elections there were two women- led parties the Druk Chirwang Tshogpa (DCT) and The Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT). Both these socialist inspired parties failed to win the required votes and were excluded from further participation. The DCT did not manage to get 10 percent of the votes and the party will not be eligible for state funding in the 2018 elections (Wangchuk 2013a: 1).

The 2013 elections attracted a total of 30 women candidates including two women party leaders. The DCT fielded the highest number of women candidates with 15 out of a total of 47 candidates. The DNT had six, DPT five and PDP four women candidates (Rai 2013: 1). Out of 30, three women contenders, DNT’s woman party leader and two participants who were both perversious parliamentarians from the victorious DPT were elected. Bhutan Kuenyam Party (BKP), a new political party, had about six women candidates but it was disqualified from contesting the primary elections due to its inability to endorse a complete set of 47 candidates, being short by two candidates (BBS 2013d, Dema 2013a: 1).

According to Sithey and Dorji (2009: 362) in the 2008 elections women constituted 51.8 percent of the total 186431 cast votes in the National Assembly election. Men contributed only 48.2 percent of the same cast votes. Women continue to outnumber men in voter registration and participation. According to the Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB), there are about 193,873 female registered voters.
against 187,917 male voters out of 381,790 registered voters for the primary rounds of the National Assembly elections held on 31st May 2013 (Dema 2013:1). Such numbers suggest that women are concerned about the political process and are eager to participate in the democratic process through voting. While men have traditionally been more active in public forums, they seem to take less interest in voting. However, more female voters did not translate into the election of women to political office (Tremblay, 2006). The existing patriarchal socio-culture does not seem to support women’s participation in public decision-making in general and politics in particular. This can be traced back to the history of women’s low status and subservient roles in the Bhutanese governance system.

1.1.1 Women under the Monarchy

Women’s political status was not recognised under the monarchy as not a single woman was invited to become a minister despite the fact that the King chaired the cabinet and appointed the ministers until 1997.

The role of women in the government did not change even after the King devolved a certain degree of his executive power to the cabinet from 1998 to 2007 (Gallenkamp 2010:10). Despite initiating a new process for appointing Ministers which involved a selected list of secretaries in the government being nominated as ministerial candidates, then elected by the people’s representatives through secret ballot in the National Assembly, no women were elected and all secretaries were men.

Women remained excluded from the political process as the nominee with most votes became the Prime Minister while the others took different ministerial positions in the cabinet. The Prime Minister chaired the cabinet and the Chairpersonship was rotated amongst five Ministers in tandem with the number of votes secured during the election. (GNHC 2011: 65-68).

By 2003 there were two women secretaries but they were not nominated for ministerial elections (GNHC 2011: 68, NCWC 2008: 11). The minimum educational requirement for a Minister to hold a university bachelors’ degree was enforced and continues to entrench men’s advantage and further exclude women from the political arena. The other way in which women were excluded was to consider them as “too junior” in terms of seniority and rank as most men candidates were more senior than
two women candidates. Moreover, most of men were former Ministers sitting for the second round of elections in the National Assembly (Mathou 1999: 613-614, 618-620). Thus, despite some moves from an absolute monarchy, political leadership in Bhutan continues to remain a masculine domain (GNHC 2010b: 68).

In the Bhutanese civil service, secretary to the government is the highest rank one can achieve. Under the monarchy, only two out of 11 secretaries were women and one resigned prior to the general elections for the National Assembly in 2008 (NCWC 2008: 11). As for the judiciary, there was one woman judge in the high court. In the previous Royal Advisory Council, a woman got elected to the post amongst six elected people’s representatives. Prior to its dissolution in June 2007, the former National Assembly had about three percent of people’s representatives as women (NCWC 2011: 21). At the Local Government level, most of the 205 elected heads of the Gewogs (a group of villages, normally translated as Block) are men. There was a single woman Gup (Executive in Gewog Council). A few women got elected as Mangmi (Deputy Executive of Gewog Council). Most were elected in to serve as the Tshogpa (village representative). However, the post was generally seen more as a burden than an opportunity as it required representatives to meet with villagers and attempt to solve their complaints. (Helvetas 2010: 4). For women in rural Bhutan this was the highest office they could achieve.

In the Dzongkhags (districts), all Dzongdas (governors) in 20 Dzongkhags who are the top executives were men (NCWC 2011: 22). Further, all the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of the state owned corporations are men. However, there are a few women CEOs in well-established private businesses (DHI 2014).This can be attributed to more personal responsibility related to family than to women’s visibility at the managerial level in the private sector. A number of local Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) initiated by the Queen Mothers over time to support women, youth and marginalised people are led by women.\(^2\) Only two out of seven constitutional bodies’ executives were women (NCWC 2008: 11).

\(^2\)Retrieved from http://bhutanyouth.org/ on 22 April 2011
Retrieved from http://www.renewbhutan.org on 22 April 2011
Overall Bhutanese women’s presence in the public realm in general and representation at the decision-making and leadership positions is extremely limited and women continue to be relegated to the domestic and private sphere of influence.3

1.1.2 Women in Democratic Governance

There has been no big change in women’s representation in the public decision-making realm even under democratic governance. None of the four women members of the parliament became a Minister in the DPT government (NCWC 2008: 11). Two women members served as the Chair of the Women and Children and Education Committees of the National Assembly. Most of the educated elite in the bureaucracy, business, academia and civil society perceived that the DPT’s four women politicians were passive (Wangmo 2011: 1). This is because they were new and young politicians and did not learn to play political game of promoting themselves like some of their seasoned men colleagues. Despite promotion of gender equality, there is only one female secretary in the government. In the January 2011 Local Government elections for the four urban municipalities, only one woman contested a seat but she was not successful. Further, only 198 females out of 203 were able to pass the functional literacy test against 920 males out of 1,012 for the June 2011 Local Government elections.5 Dorji et al. (2012)’s recent research on Bhutan’s Local Government elections concluded that irrespective of gender, capability of the candidate is seen as the top characteristic of a probable candidate. However, voters showed a small degree of preference for male candidates. This is attributed to the traditional view that “women are homemakers and that society has less confidence in them for public positions” (Dorji et al. 2012: 60). Absence of confidence among women is stated as main factor. The two other stated reasons were illiteracy and status of women in society (Dorji et al. 2012: 60).

Further reinforcement of such views was found in the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC)’s study which concluded that “women are portrayed

3 Retrieved from http://bhutan.org/ on 22 April 2011
Retrieved from http://www.renewbhutan.org on 22 April 2011
5 Gewog Tshogde (Block Committee, is the lowest administrative unit under the Bhutanese administrative system of governance). The elections were held in 205 Gewogs and Dzongkhag Thromde Thuemi (District Municipality Representative) for 16 districts on 27 June 2011. Functional literacy is one of the criteria to participate in the upcoming elections.
as less capable than men”. Most men held this view and it was found out that a big section of women themselves recognised this belief. As a result, women had low self-confidence in their leadership ability and any roles they might play in the political process. Women’s low self-esteem was found to be based on the explicit conviction that “leadership and politics are purely masculine activities” (NCWC 2011: 43). Such research further informs the view that women in Bhutan have low public status and their role is largely limited to that of conventional homemaker in the private realm. For positive social change to occur in Bhutanese society and to use the abilities of all its population, women need to be able to move from the private to the public sphere.

The Civil Service of Bhutan does not welcome women to its ranks. The Royal Civil Service Commission (Royal Civil Service Commission Report 2013) shows that females comprise only 33 percent of a little over 24,000 civil servants in Bhutan. Currently women hold only nine of the executive specialist positions while there are 63 men. Further there are only 10 women to 145 males in executive administrative positions (Royal Civil Service Commission Report 2013).

However, some women are forging the paths of change. Two women have recently, January 2014, become Bhutan’s first female Ambassadors – one as permanent representative to the United Nations, New York and the other to Dhaka, Bangladesh. Two new appointments in April 2014 of Commissioners in the newly constituted Civil Service Commission (Kuensel 2014) were women who are well educated and demonstrated the required competency and adequate experience. This shows that education, experience and competency can allow women to enter what was once a masculine civil service. Similarly, both women ambassadors had substantial work experience in executive positions within the Foreign Service. The official tenure for male ambassadors came to an end and these women were the next in line for the job (BBS 2014a). This gradual success by women in entering the male-dominated public sphere demonstrates that there are Bhutanese women who have the education and experience to move beyond the private realm.

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6 The Executive Specialist (ES) refers to work positions in specialised fields like plant or animal science for example. This generally applies for the academics working in the university or research institutions. On the contrary executive position (EX) or executive administrative position confers to top bureaucratic decision-making positions in the Bhutanese civil service.
At present, women constitute about 8 percent of the 72 parliamentarians. Table 1 shows gender statistics in the Bhutanese parliament.

**Table 1: Gender representation in the parliament**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>National Council</th>
<th>National Assembly</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-do-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-do-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Election Commission of Bhutan 2013

Women’s representation in parliament decreased from 13.9 percent of 72 parliamentarians during the first period of democratic governance from 2008-2013 to 8 percent in the second one from 2013-2018. Turner and Tshering (2014: 417) in their recent research on Bhutanese democracy attribute it to the dominant belief that politics continues to remain implacably the provenance of men. Table 2 makes a comparison of Bhutan with its Asian neighbours and indicates women’s parliamentary representation.

**Table 2: Women’s representation in South Asian countries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Parliament (Upper and lower house)</th>
<th>Women’s representation (percentages)</th>
<th>Election year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Lower house</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upper house</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Lower house</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>House</td>
<td>Female Representation</td>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>Lower house</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upper house</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Lower house</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>Lower house</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Lower house</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upper house</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>Lower house</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Lower house</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union 2014

Table 2 clearly shows Bhutan fares poorly in having female representation in comparison with its near neighbours. India, Bangladesh and Pakistan have all introduced a gender quota for parliamentary seats and this has ensured women are better represented than in Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka where there are no such quotas. Research suggests that gender parity in political organisations will not progress on its own and needs to be actively endorsed and supported (Dahlerup 2014: 10 and 25; Quota Project 2013: 2).

While there are academic requirements for political representation, literacy levels continue to entrench advantage and create barriers for entry to the parliamentary arena. Differences between the literacy levels of males and females continue to determine male privilege.
Table 3 shows the differences between literacy and tertiary enrolment levels for males and females in Bhutan.

**Table 3: Gender breakdown in literacy, no education and tertiary enrolment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Literacy (percentage)</th>
<th>No education (percentage)</th>
<th>Tertiary enrolment in Royal University of Bhutan (numbers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3,363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>2071</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bhutan Living Standards Survey (BLSS) 2012 Report and Education statistics 2012

Female literacy levels are considerably lower for women than for men and hence that continues to flow through to entry to tertiary education. The GNHC (2010) Report on gender issues in the Bhutanese population states high gender inequality in tertiary education with less girls completing higher education. This has an impact on labour force participation with only 48% of women compared to 72% of men in the paid workforce. Women then, continue to be involved in unpaid house work and this embeds the view of them as operating in the domestic realm (GNHC 2010a: 12-13). Such entrenchment of women in the home along with the educational requirements for parliamentary participation continue to exclude women from active political life. The low level of female literacy in general and the lesser number of women in university indicates that politics is a special men’s club.

In fact, the European Union 2008 election observation mission’s report indicated that the candidate’s academic qualification was a barrier to women’s participation in national politics (European Union 2008: 8). Such research was rejected by the then male Foreign Minister in the DPT government, Ugyen Tshering who in his periodic report to the UN on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) claimed that the university degree criteria for parliamentary politics was designed to suit Bhutan’s needs (UN-CEDAW 2009a: 8).

Tertiary education is also a key factor in the judicial system where women make up only three percent of judges and four percent of deputy judges (Wangmo
2011: 1, Helvetas Bhutan 2010: 4). On the international stage tertiary education is identified as central to women’s equality. The UNDP Bhutan’s country office has also pointed to the need to address gender inequality at the tertiary education level and to advance women’s poor participation in the national decision-making process.\(^7\) United Nations (UN) Women states that women’s leadership and political involvement are underrepresented in “elected offices, civil service, the private sector or academia...from the local to the global level” (UN Women 2014).

Bhutan is a signatory to CEDAW (2009) which seeks to eliminate discrimination starting from family relations and gender roles to health care, education, employment, law and politics. Bhutan has endorsed a legal commitment to submit a national treaty progress report every four years. Soon after the formation of government, the DPT government presented a report to the UN in 2009. However, the main argument was that the constitution and the existing laws and state policies promoted and protected women (UN-CEDAW 2009b: 2). Bhutan also signed the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of which the promotion of gender equality and empowering women is one. This demands a sense of commitment from the government to meet qualitative and quantitative gender parity by 2015. The advancement of gender equality is delineated as one of the MDGs and is partly measured through the quantity of women in parliamentary seats (UN Women 2014).

Despite women’s poor presence in the public affairs, women and youth were very active in fund raising activities in the events leading up to the 24 March 2008 general elections until the Election Commission stopped them from forming different women and youth wings under the auspices of the two main parties not to “inconvenience voters” (European Union 2008: 2 and 8). Women from large private business houses were involved in funding both the parties in the form of donations, free food and drinks, party outfits like t-shirts and caps and party music audio tapes. At times, they seemed like the torch bearers of the contesting parties. They behaved like lobbyists, campaigners and logistic officers (European Union 2008: 8). During his opening address at a high level gender sensitisation workshop in 2010 in Thimphu Bhutan, in which the researcher participated, the former Prime Minister from the DPT government rightly commented that “women were more forthright, courageous and honest as party workers”. However, in reality women appear to be on

\(^7\) Retrieved from http://www.undp.org.bt/mdg_three.htm on 8 April 2011
the periphery in public life. They were seen as complementary and supporters of men, not participants in their own right (European Union 2008: 8). There would appear to be a gap between state’s promotion of women’s empowerment policy and the actual practice.

1.1.3 Women in Electoral Politics

Unlike the peaceful primary elections in 2008 and 2013, the general election of the National Assembly in 2013 was painful. Women were caught in deeply divided electoral politics (Choda 2013: 1). The current King, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck was deemed to have engaged in partisan politics. The DPT submitted a fifteen point appeal to the King in relation to the process of the elections resulting in the DPT’s defeat. Women were part of the petition and involved in the process (Wangchuk 2013c: 1). The DPT claimed that the officials from the King’s secretariat were involved in electoral politics in terms of the timing of the granting of the King’s census and land welfare to people during the election period. The power to grant citizenship and land (two critical issues for people living in Bhutan) still remain firmly in the grip of the King. Some of the allegations of the DPT were that the PDP was the King’s party and that some of its candidates joined the party based on the King’s command and the hope for favourable treatment (Wangchuk 2013c:1). What emerged was recognition that the power balance in the democratic regime had not shifted from the King. Indeed, while the King accepted the petition and gave an assurance to address the grievances through the ECB nothing changed (Palden 2013a: 1).

Such lack of action and the continuance of power in the King’s hands led the former Prime Minister and DPT President Jigme Y. Thinley to suggest that democracy in Bhutan had not taken root (BBS 2013b). He expressed his disappointment with agencies responsible for election related work, the way parties functioned and the manner in which people used their voting rights. He was apprehensive that small efforts put in by his government might be damaged if the new government did not build from where the DPT government left (BBS 2013e). Further, in his last press briefing at the end of the DPT’s five year term, Jigme Y. Thinley commented that the big challenge for Bhutanese democracy was leadership. He suggested that Bhutanese people were used to following the King and suggested that there was a need to balance power between the King and the Prime Minister.
There was also a view that the Prime Minister felt the King had encroached on his leadership. Haynes (2013: 19) argues that during transition there is a substantial risk of returning to authoritarian rule because of the co-existence of the old and new regime’s political institutions although “authoritarians and democrats share power either as a product of conflict or by tentative agreement”. The institution of monarchy exists with democracy and monarchy’s role is clearly delineated in article two of the Constitution (Constitution 2009: 3-11). There is no explicit presence of conflict or pact between the monarchy and democratic bodies. However, it appears that there is some form of power conflict between the old and new regimes implying political competition. It also impacts on the leadership needed to bring about the necessary social changes to move Bhutan to a more equal society and empower women to enter the political arena.

While Bhutan has steadfastly remained independent of its neighbours India and China, one factor which impacted on the 2013 election was the withdrawal of the Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) and Kerosene subsidies by the Indian government. This greatly influenced the election result and helped the PDP win (Sherpa 2013: 43). Most people blamed the DPT for the sky rocketing energy price, an issue which impacted heavily on women who maintained the family budget. The PDP accused the DPT of straining Indo-Bhutan friendship and accused former Prime Minister Jigme.Y Thinley of creating tensions by meeting Chinese premier Wen Jiabio at the sideline of the Rio+ 20 Summit in June 2012 (Singh 2012: 1). Such issues were seen as needing a strong hand and reinforced the Bhutanese view of politics as a male responsibility; especially on the world stage (Sherpa 2013: 43).

Such powerful and masculine behaviours were endorsed when soon after the elections the Indian Government restored subsides (Sherpa 2013: 44). India always intended to prevent Bhutan from building diplomatic and trade relations with China despite its existing diplomatic and trade relations with the latter (Palden 2013b: 1). Bhutan has strategic importance to India as a buffer zone against China with whom it often had adverse relationship (Turner et al.2011: 194). It seems that the PDP and Bhutanese electorate failed to see beyond domestic politics and succumbed to Indian intervention. Thus, both internal and external political factors played a critical role in the 2013 general elections and the election of fewer women to the national
parliament as the strong stand required in the international arena was not viewed as women’s work (Choda 2013: 1, Pelden 2013a: 1).

1.2 RATIONALE OF STUDY/RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Besides NCWC’s recent studies on women in Local Government elections and violence against women and the RUB’s study on women’s participation in Local Government’s 2011 elections, there is little research on gender and politics in mainstream Bhutanese academic and research bodies. This thesis is more than an academic study. It is a timely opportunity to explore the stories of half of unexplored population’s stories and include their views on women’s place in the public sphere. This is an attempt to be a voice for women and to contribute in small ways to advance women’s genuine empowerment. Hence, it is fundamental to examine whether women have been able to be part of the public life of Bhutan and not remain restricted to the domestic realm.

In view of the broad research background, the main research objective was to explore the impact of the transition to democracy on women’s role and status in Bhutanese politics. This study seeks to scrutinise whether it has been possible for the women of Bhutan to move from the domestic and private arena and to participate in the public political life of the emergent democratic Bhutan. Further it:

- Investigates the poor representation of women in public decision-making forums and politics
- Verifies the voice of women supporters like party workers, office coordinators, campaigners and financers within the two competing political parties in the process leading up to 24 March 2008 general elections and during first years of democratic government
- Considers whether deep seated gender stereotyping hinders women’s visible presence in politics
- Examines the seemingly passive stance of women parliamentarians in the National Assembly in contrast to the ability of women parliamentarians in the National Council to exercise their leverage during the process of reviewing legislation
1.3 THE APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This research uses the case study approach which examines a current issue within its real context (Yin 2003: 13). Women’s participation in politics is examined in Bhutan’s socio-cultural, political and economic environment. The study investigates how women fared in a small developing country’s newly introduced democracy and drew lessons about the role of women in politics. The case study approach enabled scrutiny of women’s involvement in politics in the Bhutanese context using feminist political theory and qualitative inquiry. Qualitative methodology was employed because its philosophy is in tandem with feminist political theory which supports the case study. In-depth interviews (see Appendix A and B), document reviews (Constitution, laws and government policy reports) and participant observation (of the 9th and 10th parliamentary sessions in the National Assembly and the National Council, workshop on gender responsive budgeting organised by NCWC and UN agencies, strategic planning workshop organised by NCWC and observation of a feature film on existing sexual harassment culture) provided different sources of data and validated the research questions. Thus, the case study approach using these three distinct methods captured the special experience of women’s participation in politics at a historical time, when political power shifted from absolute monarchy to democracy.

1.4 OVERVIEW

This thesis has eight chapters. The introduction discusses Bhutan’s historical and political background and sets the context for the enquiry into women and politics. The second chapter explores the literature pertaining to gender and parliamentary representation. Works on patriarchy, and the way this leads to the public/private division of roles for men and women, the gendered division of labour and the role which different and diverse standpoints in society play were found to provide a relevant theoretical framework. Methodology and the use of the case study methods are developed in chapter three along with an acknowledgement of the scope and limitations of such work. The findings and analysis are presented in chapters four, five, six and seven and demonstrate the way in which women’s lives are influenced by the current practices and processes of Bhutan.
Patriarchy (public/private divide) is the theme of chapter four. It demonstrates how patriarchy is manifested in Bhutanese attitudes towards women, education and image of the girl child, cultural practices and the legal framework which underpin unequal gender participation in public life. Chapter five explores the gendered division of labour. It exposes the fundamental difference between men and women on the grounds of biology, women’s work in the home, the patriarchal labour practices and the challenge of being a woman in the world of men and women’s empowerment. Diversity (different standpoints) is the central idea of chapter six. It discloses various perspectives of women and minorities based on religion and sexuality. Chapter seven explores the results of women’s entry into the Bhutanese parliament. It reveals the nature of the masculine political space, how women go about contesting elections and running for office, the dynamics of the interactions between men and women in the National Parliament, the difficulties of passing the Domestic Violence Prevention Bill and the politics of seat reservation in parliament. The last chapter is the conclusion. It summarises the entire study, reiterates the highlights and draws on the analyses and findings to indicate that women’s entry into the public political life of Bhutan has enacted change.
Chapter 2: The Literature Review

There is little literature on women and politics in Bhutan and this is indicative of the role women are expected to play— that is, they should remain firmly in the private sphere. While the King’s election decree for Bhutan’s transition to democracy is generic (Election Commission of Bhutan 2008a, see also Election Commission of Bhutan 2013c) it continues to give tacit support for women to continue to remain in the private sphere. There has been some documentation of women’s role in Local Government (Dorji et al. 2012: 60, NCWC 2011: 43) with women having four percent of leadership roles in Local Government, Gup (Chair), Mangmi (Deputy-chair) and Tshogpa (Members/ village representative) level in Gewog Council (Gewog is a group of villages, normally translated as Block) (Helvetas 2010: 4). At the national level there is an entrenched understanding that women should continue to stay in the domestic arena and not seek to participate in politics in the newly democratic Bhutan. International literature confirms that politics remains a male dominated area, characterised by masculine practices and processes (Lovenduski 2000: xi, Pateman 2007: 1-5, Bystydzieńki 1995: 83, Acker 1992: 567). More specifically, women and democratisation literature argues that the mainstream political science literature has excluded gendered views in politics and women’s participation in transition democracy (Waylen 1994: 327, 331, 333, Waylen 2007: 15). Waylen (1994: 335) asserts that the restricted definitions of democracy, politics, and citizenship together with a focus on the public domain and the use of narrow concepts of civil society demonstrate little understanding of the position of gender in the democratisation processes and outcomes. It is this ideological framework which has entrenched the political, social, cultural and economic structures of Bhutan.

Arguments have been advanced for women’s right to participate equally in the political arena. The first one is that of justice (Swigonski 1994: 390, Charles 2014: 377). This posits that equality is visible through the presence of women in the parliament and the recognition that they have an equal right to participate (Ross et al. 2012: 4, Pateman 1989: 6). The second reason advanced for women’s participation is that it gives legitimacy to the institutions by ensuring that all members of the society are represented and able to contribute (International IDEA 2013, Dahlerup 2014: 10).
A number of themes emerge in the literature that examines women’s role in public life and these are relevant to this study of the role of women in Bhutan since the transition to democracy in 2008. The dominant theme to emerge is the role of patriarchy, defined as “elder male rule of a family” (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004: 93, Millett 2000: 25, Pateman 1989: 4-5). The second theme asserts that society views women as ‘equal but different’ and hence maintains that women are treated equally. Lastly there is a view that real equality can only exist where diversity is accepted and endorsed (Swigonski 1994: 392, Reynolds 2002: 603, Egeland, Catherine and Gressgard, Randi 2007: 217).

It is in this context that feminist scholars continue to challenge patriarchy and its knowledge production (Moreton-Robinson 2014: 334, see also Moreton-Robinson 2007: 255, Kandiyoti: 1988: 285, Walby 1989: 214). They explore the way in which labour has become gendered (Eccleshall et al. 2003: 194, Heywood 2007: 237, Waylen 2012: 26) and the impact this has on how women can participate fully in society. By making visible the power relations between men and women and reflecting on their own experiences, investigators expose the way in which the world can be viewed differently and how such structures continue to constrain women and their role in the public life of the society (Moreton-Robinson 2007: 250-252, Jaggar 1988: 114).

2.1 PATRIARCHY—THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE DIVIDE

remains the unifying platform for feminist scholars to explore and to explain the continuance of male dominance (Walby 1990: 20-21).


Researchers contend that the public/private separation is the central issue in the way in which the practices of male domination and female subordination are maintained and supported (Pateman 1989: 6,131-134, Lovenduski 2000: xi, Thane 1992: 301 Phipps 2006: 132). Waylen (2007: 4) contests that such argument assisted to construct male political performance as the “gold standard” and to reinforce the practical exclusion of women from the public domain. The second wave feminists opposed the persistence of the public/private divide and coined the phrase “the personal is political” to expose such a division and to work to create a society where men and women were equally able to operate in both the public and private arenas (Heywood 2007: 237, Eccleshall et al. 2003: 194, Waylen 2012: 26). The disclosure of the need to address the traditional divide of women’s issues remaining private and hidden became the main concern of contemporary feminist scholars (Pateman 1989: 132-133, Lovenduski 2000: xi, Broussine and Fox 2003: 27).

Pomeroy (2004: 1) and Epstein (1988: 60) claim that the public-private dichotomy connecting men with the public and women with the private can be attributed to the “natural” design of male-female status and functions originating in hunter-gatherer society. Further, socialist feminists like Juliet Mitchell (Mitchell 1971: 102) contend that during the early phases of social development man could overpower nature given his superior physique. Woman’s inferior form did not enable her to do this so she became engaged in basic work and maintenance. Thus, she became the man’s “aspect of the things preserved: private property and children” (Mitchell 1971: 102). Radical feminists like Kate Millett argue that men use force to impose such patriarchal practices if a woman seeks to challenge her insubordinate status (Millett 2000: 23,33-36, 42-47, 54; Waters 2007: 253 ). Moreover, major socialist thinkers like Marx, Engels, Bebel and De Beauvoir suggest that “the
confirmation and continuation of woman’s oppression came after the establishment of her physical inferiority for hard manual work with the advent of private property” (Mitchell 1971: 102, Beneria 1979: 204). These arguments still resonate in Bhutan where the cultural notion of connecting the ‘superior’ male with the public realm and ‘inferior’ female with the private sphere continues (NCWC 2008: 34-35, Dorji et al. 2012: 60).

The first wave feminists’ fight for suffrage equated the entry of women into the political arena to their access to the public sphere (Pomeroy 2004: 1, Van Acker 1999: 7, Lovenduski and Norris 1996: 57). Further, gender in transition politics literature contends that popular movements have high effect in the transition to democracy and most traditional writers of democratisation fail to capture women’s participation in social movements. This is because women usually participate based on their gendered roles, as household workers and mothers (Waylen 1994:328, 334). The women’s movement played a vital role in Latin America and a smaller role in Eastern Europe in transition politics. In Latin America, in the face of oppression and high levels of unemployment, feminist groups established a relationship with general authoritarianism in the public sphere and personal authoritarianism at home. Women’s groups were formed outside of the traditional political space. The nature of transition politics made some form of positive impact on these women’s organisations. The military governments did not observe women’s activities as risky enough to exercise control and women used their traditional functions as the linchpin of dissent. They managed to make several types of practical and strategic gender-based demands on state and military to enhance quality of women’s wellbeing. These demands included campaign for improved services in poor neighbourhoods, income generation artisan’s workshop, common food pot, day care services, return of lost children and meeting human rights. Also, feminist groups in Argentina, Chile and especially, Brazil were primarily driven by middle-class professional women who promoted gender inequality and women’s subservient position. Most of these women were active in left-wing politics before military rule (Waylen 1994: 334-338).

In Eastern and Central Europe, despite communist governments’ official commitment to gender equality, most of the female labour force was engaged in lowly paid low-positions and gender separated employment, and little occurred to change men’s functions and gender relations within the domestic sphere. Moreover,
communist parties’ control over civil society hindered the birth of women’s movements. Notwithstanding communist parties’ opposition to dissent, women were active in opposition when it emerged in the late 1980s but became marginal with masculine control of the opposition movements (Waylen 1994: 346). Above all, ideas of women’s liberation and feminism were associated with the old communist order, which was not respected and alienated the people from any genuine commitment to feminist agendas when new governments came to power (Waylen 1994:350).

However in Bhutan, the nature of transition to democracy was largely a masculine phenomenon with very little women’s active involvement in politics under both monarchy and new democracy. Most women continue to remain in the private sphere with participation in low skilled labour at 42% as opposed to 77% for men in urban areas, and a much higher contribution especially for agricultural labour of 69% in rural places (GNHC 2010b: 64, Helvetas 2010: 4, ADB 2014: 18). In addition, the unemployment rate is high for women in urban areas at 10%, compared to 5% for men. Most young women have little formal education and so are forced to engage in lowly paid jobs like domestic help and remain economically dependent on men, father and then husband (Helvetas 2010: 4, ADB 2014: 15 and 99, Roder 2012: 155-156).

Societal structures continue to sustain the public-private divide in a patriarchal society. The fact is that women’s reproductive role and the “socialisation of children and sexuality” continues to define women and hence her low societal position (Mitchell 1971: 101, Walby 1990: 20-21). Women carry out the large volume of household work and this affects their access to the public sphere (Waylen 2007: 5, Inglehart and Norris 2003: 29). In fact, research in political representation, legislative elites, and leadership recruitment has found out that the kind of religious culture poses as an essential contextual condition which hinders women’s entrance into elected positions. It is argued that conventional religious values and religious laws reinforce social rules prescribing a specific and a subordinate role for women as mothers and homemakers and for men as decision-makers in the family and basic bread winners in the paid labour force. The Catholic Church and evangelist Christians in the West and fundamentalist Islamic leaders in Muslim countries have strongly supported women’s role as mothers and home makers (Inglehart and Norris
2003: 50, 68). Further, authoritarian regimes like former Soviet Union and General Pinochet’s government in Chile promoted “Western Christian traditional family values” and raised motherhood as women’s basic role (Waylen 1994: 349, Waylen 2007: 54). In Bhutan, despite being largely a Buddhist country, women continue to be located in the reproductive role and thus are considered inferior to their male counterparts. Mitchell contested that Marxism diminished women’s reproductive role and “socialisation of children and sexuality” to “economics” (Mitchell 1971: 100-101). While Peterson (2012: 9) supports this view, she also argues that the perspectives of an economist differ from those of the feminist scholar. It is claimed that economists are more concerned about productivity while feminist researchers are seeking to ensure that women’s work is recognised in economics policy and discussion (Hoskyns and Rai 2007: 299-300, 302, 308, 311, 313). Such arguments are directly relevant to the Bhutanese situation and help to explain Bhutanese women’s low status and lack of roles in the public domain. The traditional stereotyped notion of devaluing female birth and giving importance to women’s reproductive function and sexuality directly affect women in their daily lives (BBS 2014c, NCWC 2008: 34-35). Women face a double burden that hinders their participation in paid work in general and politics in particular (NCWC 2008: 10, GNHC 2001: 20, Helvetas 2010: 4).

Current gender ideology scholarship also names “structural, institutional and cultural” impediments for women’s political leadership (Thomas, Adams and Madison 2010:109-110, 112, Zetlin 2014: 252 and 264, Roberts 2007: 200). Such scholars refer to women’s status by the use of various social structures, the formal rules of the political systems and gender stereotyped beliefs associating politics with men. Further, structural obstacles consist of stages of socioeconomic development and women’s share and position in professional and managerial employment. Institutional barriers entail the stage of democratisation, political system, adoption of proportional representation electoral system and use of gender quotas in party recruitment. Cultural hindrances include the dominance of conservative attitudes towards women in leadership roles. These factors have played a crucial role in determining women’s entry into elected office. Women in developing countries face challenges to break these obstructions and get into public offices due to traditional perceptions of women’s roles in the private sphere, low level of literacy, limited
health care and inadequate child care. Also, majoritarian electoral systems are stated not to favour women’s election to office (Inglehart and Norris 2003: 130-134). Waylen(1994: 331, 340), argues that while analysing gender relations and post authoritarian rule, it is valuable to differentiate between limitedly focused institutional-level democracy and wider conceptions of democracy, for the former is not sufficiently expansive to include distributed ideas of power. This directly affects women’s political participation. In Bhutan, there are few women in public leadership positions and those who could penetrate the men’s world were forced to “conform to masculine requirements in [their] production and to feminine standards in [their] manners” (Mitchell 1971: 123-129, 131.-133, Millett 2000: 23, Dahlerup 2014: 11-13).

At the global level, politics is identified as “the second most gendered of all institutions next to the military” and women have either not headed offices or received symbolic representation in democracies (Bystydzienski 1995: 83, Acker 1992: 567, Millett 2000: 25-26). Other work (Bryson 2003: 196, Edstrom, Das and Dolan 2014: 3) suggests that state power is always associated with masculine behaviours and in such an environment the patriarchal nature and structures cannot be eradicated merely by having more women in political office. Therefore, involvement with the state will be ineffective for women if they are not be able to address issues and laws that progress gender equality (Edstrom, Das and Dolan 2014: 3).

In patriarchal South Asian countries, women who have been elected to the highest offices had the support or legacy of either their celebrated fathers or charismatic husbands who laid a strong political foundation for them. Indira Gandhi (India), Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan), Sheikh Hasina (Bangladesh), Sirimavo Bandaranaike (Sri Lanka), Chandrika Kumaratunga (Sri Lanka) and Begum Khaleda Zia (Bangladesh) are prominent examples of South Asian women leaders who occupied top political power through male-directed dynastic politics (Paxton et al 2007: 263-284, Richter 1990: 524-40). Despite these women’s entry into the public realm such progression was still made through patriarchal structures which facilitated their advance.

Patriarchy, once entrenched, can continue to dominate all aspects of society and ensure the power structures that remain.
2.2  THE GENDERED DIVISION OF LABOUR—EQUAL BUT DIFFERENT

The notion of ‘equal but different’ is drawn from the liberal political ideology which stresses equal rights in all spheres of life (Eccleshall et al. 2003: 18, Heywood 2007: 23, Jaggar 1988: 33). ‘Equal but different’ then is about attaining political, social and legal rights as women, not imitating men but recognising women’s unique attributes (Pilchar and Whelehan 2004: 37, Cornwall 2003: 1337-1338, Friedan 2001: 43, see also Friedan 1993: 131,-132). This underpins a concept that men and women are differently equal. However, critics claim that the liberal feminist’s equal but different argument does not explain the deeply entrenched nature of gender inequality and analysis of women’s subordination under the broad social structures (Walby1990: 4-5, Walby 2011:86, Hooks 1981: 146, Collins 2012: 224, Tong 2009: 2, 28 and 37, Bryson 2007: 35, Jaggar 1988: 104). Instead, Inglehart and Norris (2003: 29) argue that women still have to manage the demands of family and market work.

Nevertheless, the ‘equal but different’ argument ensures gendered differentiation between male and female, particularly as it applies to the division of labour (Pilchar and Whelan 2004: 59, Lyonette 2013: 199). The gendered division of labour is central to the ‘equal but different’ debate as it helps to mask the manner in which gendered segregated work disadvantages women (Beneria 1979: 204, Martin 2003: 343, Tancred 1995: 12). Thus, the central message of ‘equal but different’ is that women should not succumb to male domination and act like a man but rather transcend gender stereotypes (Tong 2009: 31, Mitchell 1971, Eccleshall et al. 2003: 201). For the predominantly Buddhist Bhutanese context, the principle of ‘equal but different’ resonates as the Buddhist Philosophy embraces the idea of the presence of equality by recognising traits such as ‘the masculine as skilful’ and ‘the feminine as wise’ equally (Rinpoche 1994: 407, 439, Allione 2010: 1).

However, in Bhutan there are the legal, political, economic, educational and geographical barriers which prevent women from being man’s equal (Dahlerup 2014:13-14, GNHC 2001: 20). Women are predominantly involved in unpaid domestic and agriculture labour or lowly paid unskilled work in both urban and rural places (GNHC 2010b: 64, Helvetas 2010: 4, ADB 2014: 15). Pain and Pema (2004: 427 and 428) have found that women in rural Bhutan carry out a very heavy
workload both inside and out in the fields – household chores, child care and weaving in the home; weeding, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, firewood collection and looking after farm animals outside. The Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) most recent study reveals that rural based women are heavily burdened with house and farm work and community obligations (ADB 2014: 15). Women’s little or low educational attainment is named as an obstacle for productive participation in a more highly skilled labour force (GNHC 2010c: 12-13, BLSS 2012: 30, Education statistics 2012: 46-48).

Women’s attempts to overcome unequal gendered division of labour have a long history. In the 18th and 19th century Mary Wollstonecraft highlighted the inequities and later 20th century feminist Betty Friedan asserted that equal educational rights were critical to achieving emotional and economic independence for women (Wollstonecraft 1970: 25, 37, Mill 1975, 427, 429, 442, 44 and 458, Eccleshall et al. 2003: 196-197, Tong 2009: 35, Friedan 2001: 163, see also Friedan 1981: 112-113,148-149). For both urban and rural Bhutanese women such arguments still hold true. Women’s late participation in modern education has hindered them from attaining economic rights (NCWC 2008: 9-10, ADB 2014: 33). Equal education and employment are pivotal if women are to gain entry to the public realm in general and politics in particular. Bhutanese women are yet to attain equality with men in access to higher education and skilled employment, especially in higher positions in the civil service and in politics (NCWC 2008: 11 and 45, Royal Civil Service Commission Report 2013, Education statistics 2012: 46-48). Moreover, such practices remain entrenched and young women students continue to accept the existing cultural norm of economic and social dependence on men (NCWC 2008: 9 and 39, Roder 2012: 155-156, UNICEF 2006: 52).

Gender studies scholars argue that patriarchal political and economic structures supported by social structures like family entrench women in the private sphere. Women continue to shoulder a huge amount of unpaid house work related to child bearing and rearing. This then relegates the role of women to that of mothers and wives (Beneria 1979: 205, Thane 1992: 300, Brines 1994: 652-656, Gilding 1997:188, Bianchi et al. 2000: 219, Washbrook 2007: 5). This is reinforced through culture and education as the notion of femininity is bound to being a committed wife and mother as well as a dependence on a man (Friedan 2001: 166, 311, Nentwich and
Kelan 2014: 121, 125, Sarioglu 2013: 494). Most military governments in Latin America, for instance, supported right-wing conservative family values and strictly reduced women’s function to the private domain as mothers and wives. In Chile, several outstanding women with public portfolios, like union leaders, political activists and academics were arrested and in Argentina numerous women were among those who disappeared (Waylen 2007: 54-55). Such patriarchal views remain widespread in 21st century Bhutan. Women’s literacy rate remains low and thus access to further education and independent employment is not generally accessed by women. Existing studies on gender equality in Bhutan argue that education is a powerful social medicine that can equalise men and women (NCWC 2008: 45, Dahlerup 2014: 14). In addition, Bhopal (1997: 149) claims that women’s educational level influences the South Asian women’s position within family and helps to overcome unequal domestic gendered division of labour. Well educated women (Bachelors and Masters Levels) resist patriarchal structures and share domestic labour with their partners (Bhopal 1997: 150, Tshering, Kelkar 2002: 3 and 14, Philips 2003: 245, 261).

Further, women who overvalue the institutions of marriage and motherhood fail to seek full time meaningful employment and do not let their husbands and children learn to share household chores (Friedan 2001: 22-23, 69-71, Gilding 1997: 188-190, Richards 1997: 167-169). Thus, they fail to demonstrate the need for men’s role in house work as a way to address gender equality. The current problem in Bhutan is that the societal psyche is driven by patriarchal ideology of men as bread winner and women as home maker. Such views continue to disadvantage women’s advancement in the public domain and especially in the political arena (NCWC 2008: 35, Tshering, Kelkar 2002: 3 and 14).

However, Bryson contends that liberal feminist thought overlooks unequal domestic division of labour as a personal issue rather than as a political one (Bryson 2007: 42). She asserts that liberalism stresses the public realm and does not comprehend the importance of the unequal domestic division of labour which affects both men’s and women’s “employment and political opportunities.” This is an important issue for the Bhutanese case study. Research has shown that unequal house work resulting from patriarchal norms, economic dependence on men and absence of a state child care policy derails women’s full participation in public life and can lead
to a high incidence of domestic violence (NCWC 2008: 45, ADB 2014: 99). Such research suggests that state support in Nordic countries for care work made a difference in exhibiting a collective way of addressing domestic work and in promoting equality through men’s and women’s changed behaviours in each bearing significant social responsibility (Bryson 2007: 45, Bystydzienski 1995: 113). Further, gender and politics scholars contend that gender neutral laws do not address equality. Instead, it is argued that gender-specific laws are needed to achieve equality between men and women (Friedan 1981: 255, Walby 2011: 80, UN Women 2014: 1). In Bhutan, state laws and policies are silent on gender and do not take into account the disparity between the roles of men and women (NCWC 2008: 12, ADB 2014: 31, Dahlerup 2014: 13).

In addition, the traditional patriarchal gendered image of femininity in Bhutan prevents women from recognising their genuine potential. There is only one ideal – that of becoming wife and mother. Even some emancipated women think that domestic work is their duty and feel privileged if their spouses share it. This is true for some well-educated women in Bhutan (Friedan 2001: 344, Bryson 2007: 41). This hinders women from getting into jobs which require life time dedication from “art or sciences to politics or professions”, and which enable capable women to attain their complete potential (Friedan 2001: 348). Instead, traditional care-oriented low paying jobs like nursing and teaching are prescribed for women (Tong 2009: 34, Mitchell 1971: 107, Whelan 2014: 539). In Bhutan university-educated and capable women do not choose a career in politics because of the physical, legal, political and cultural hurdles. For some it is easier to be a mother than a professional (Dahlerup 2014: 13-14, NCWC 2008: 10, BBS 2014b).

However, recent research in developed modern societies on women’s lifestyle choice has found that there are a minority of women who prefer family life after marriage and so remain within the domestic realm (Hakim 2000: 195, 197-200). They avoid paid employment and prefer big families. Such women perceive education as a source of marriage marketing and schooling (Unnk 1996: 134-141-3, Singly 1996: 39-41). In the USA and Japan, for example, such women marry men who have considerably superior qualifications (Hakim 2000: 216, Kalmijin 1991: 520). It is also argued that there is an increasing trend of demand for spouses with a university degree in “arts, humanities and languages” which gives “cultural” value in
the marriage market in these countries (Hakim 2007: 202-203, Unnk 1996: 134-141-3). In South Asia, the main cultural norm prescribes women to be homemakers, to depend on men through marriage and disadvantages their position (Bhopal 1997: 151, Kaur and Dhanda 2014: 271).

The gendered division of labour continues to entrench disadvantage for women and does not allow them to reach their full potential or achieve economic independence. Hence the notion of ‘equal but different’ becomes an irony.

2.3 **DIFFERENT STANDPOINTS—EQUALITY IN DIVERSITY**

Equality in diversity refers to the recognition of diverse rights related to political, social, cultural, legal, sexual, and economic dimensions of the minority groups in society (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004: 3, Egeland and Gressgard 2007: 207-208). Feminist standpoint theory argues that marginalised people (women and minorities) in society have different experiences as a result of oppression and therefore have a more holistic world view, with both dominant and subordinate perspectives (Swigonski 1994: 390, Humm 1995: 276, Hekman, 1997: 341, Reynolds 2002: 603, Moreton-Robinson 2014: 331-332).

While it may be argued that feminist standpoint theory can be unclear (Moreton-Robinson 2014:332), contemporary feminists claim that it challenges dominant male privilege, patriarchal knowledge production and gives birth to feminist political consciousness (Moreton-Robinson 2014:332, Hartsock 1985: 231, see also Hartsock 1998: 106). It tries to break “hegemonic masculinity” as constructed by a patriarchal social order that excludes subordinate men and women (Connell 1987: 183-184, Roychowdhury 2014: 34-35). In Bhutan, women and minority ethnic groups have a low status in the transition democracy (Turner et al. 2011: 189, Chuki 2014: 50, NCWC 2008: 37). As the subservient members of the Bhutanese society, women and minority groups have a different perspective than the dominant powerful men whose view of society and its structures dominates policy making and societal arrangements. Such a different stand point is “informed by the social world infused with meanings and grounded in the knowledge of different realities” (Hutt 2005: 124, NCWC 2008: 37). This case study of Bhutan seeks out such differences and explores the reality of life for some Bhutanese women and ethnic minority groups.
The third-wave and postmodern feminists for example, stressed diversity and encouraged each woman to reflect on her experiences and become the type of feminist she aspired to be instead of suggesting a blue print of the ‘good feminist’ (Tong 2009: 270, 286, Budgeon 2011:2-5). In fact, equality in diversity is captured in the politics of personal views (Heywood and Drake 1997: 50, Siegel 1997: 56, Pettman 2009: 219, Dean 2010:134). Standpoint theory then strongly draws on the idea of equality in diversity to address the rights of women and minority groups through exploring the lived and personal perspectives of such groups (Hartsock 1998: 106-107, Reynolds 2002: 599). This argument respects difference from the coloured and queer perspectives (Budgeon 2011: 8, Nicholson 2010: 1, Orr 1997: 37, Heywood and Drake 1997: 8). Further, Walker acknowledges that feminism must bring the intricate, personal and individual stories many of which were omitted from the feminist discourse of understanding women’s oppression (Walker 1995: xxxv-xxxvi). Also, Waylen (2007: 4) asserts that gendered analysis must consider broader frameworks of diversity based on critical factors like race, class, sexuality and disability because women are not homogeneous and therefore cannot be generalised. However, the challenge of standpoint theory is the complexities involved in understanding deeper nuances in the wide ranging and diverse ethnic, national, religious and cultural contexts (Hawkesworth 1989: 553, Egeland and Gressgard 2007: 207-208, Gottschall 2002: 28 and 296).

Bhutan has a number of different ethno-lingual groups (Kohl 1996: 93, Turner et al. 2011: 189). These religious differences can lead to people being treated unequally. Most northern Bhutanese are Buddhists while the southern Bhutanese are Hindus but there is growing clandestine conversion to Christianity in some parts of the north and most parts of southern Bhutan by zealous Christian evangelists. Most converts are poor people who are illiterate (Phuntsho 2013: 39, 42). Despite being ostracised and not being able to bury their dead many people continue to convert drawn by the material attraction, training and the offer of a job as a missionary (Christian Aid Mission 2014).

The constitution prohibits forceful religious conversion and it is considered illegal (Constitution 2009: 19). While there is very little information within Bhutan, The Voice of the Martyrs, a Canadian non-profit Christian charitable organisation, affirms that Christians are persecuted and a Christian received three years
imprisonment for screening film on Christianity (The Voice of the Martyrs 2014). This case study set out to include such women and groups in an attempt to understand their views on equality as it has been identified as critical for Bhutan’s unity in the face of the country’s fragile geo-political location between India and China (Sherpa 2013: 42, Jha 2013: 1).

Further, rooted in the Marxist exploration of working class people’s conditions, the feminist stand point theory’s heart of analysis is women’s situation within society (Swigonski 1994: 392, Hekam 1997: 341, Hartsock 1985: 23, Reynolds 2002: 599). In addition, stand point theory is also used to analyse and bring out views of minority groups such as the lived experiences of black and indigenous women in modern advanced democracies in the USA and Australia (Reynolds 2002: 598-599, Moreton-Robinson 2000: xvi, see also Moreton-Robinson 2007: 245-246, Moreton-Robinson 2014: 332). Daisy Hernandez and Bushra Rehman, for example, in their book “Colonize This! Young Women of Colour on Today’s Feminism”, (2002), argued that their basic aim was to “introduce some of the ideas of women of colour feminists to women who have thought that feminism is just a philosophy about white men and women and has nothing to do with our communities” (Hernandez and Rehman 2002: xxvii).

Moreover, minority members of the society such as transgender individuals are still not well-received even in democratic countries. A recent example was the Transgender Miss Universe Canada pageant contestant Jenna Talackova, whose entry raised controversy but was finally allowed to participate (Cable News Network 2012: 11). Human rights laws determine the needs for legal gender recognition in Canada and these do not discriminate against transgender. Such an example clearly demonstrates the difficulty marginalised individuals face because of their different sexuality.8 The Bhutanese case also shows similar challenges for homosexuals and transgender individuals (Wangmo 2008: 1, Pelden 2011: 1). The Penal Code of Bhutan criminalises homosexuality (Penal Code 2004: 29). Homosexual and bisexual persons are forced to live under cover for fear of disclosure. In recent times, a few of them decided to speak out to both the state and privately owned local media but had to do so under a cloak of anonymity for fear of reprisals against themselves and their families. The Kuensel and Bhutan Observer, for example, covered stories about the

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difficulties faced by homosexuals having to live their lives in secret (Wangmo 2008: 1, Pelden 2011: 1, BBS 2013h: 3).

Chilla Bulbeck, a contemporary feminist, argues that women in developing countries have a difficult life. She attributes difficulty to the developing nature of the countries coupled with suppression of individual rights. She argues that the developing world’s negative elements like being “backward, poor.... and immense repressed voice” have harmful implications for women (Bulbeck 1998: 34-35). Some of Bulbeck’s thoughts on developing countries do explain the situation in some countries (India, Pakistan, Afghanistan) within the South Asian region (Shaheen 2014: 202, Bhopal 1997: 59-60). The poor plight of Afghani women in public affairs and the life-threatening situations of women rights activists, for example, reveal the persistence of the strong patriarchal ideology (Jalal 2013: 1).

In Bhutan’s context, the patriarchal culture is largely conservative and does not permit an open expression of sexuality. There is a “cultural policing of female sexuality” (Dean 2010:147). Unlike men, women’s image is blemished if they are seen drunk, asking men for a date, having casual sex and getting into fights. However, there is a presence of a small segment of young girls who have mostly come from rural villages to urban centres in search of employment. They are found to be bold about their casual sexual attitude, revealing attire and free use of alcohol. Most of them are between late adolescence and early adulthood. This group have very little education and work in entertainment bars popularly known as drayang, literally meaning melodious sounds (Lorway et al. 2011: 298, 299-306).

2.4 CONCLUSION

In sum, the conventional political science literature excludes gendered views in politics and women’s participation in transition to democracy. Patriarchal ideology associates men with the public and politics and women with the private and the home. Deeply embedded in this idea, political, economic and social structures are created to support male domination and female subordination. This affects gendered division of labour in both the private and the public sphere largely in men’s favour. Women continue to experience the heavy burden related to their productive and reproductive functions. This helps to explain women’s low literacy levels, poor higher educational attainments and inhibits women’s meaningful engagement in
public affairs. Most women in urban and rural Bhutan are overburdened with the drudgery of unpaid house work, low paying jobs and community obligations.

Contemporary feminist scholars argue that the gender dynamic can be changed and is not static (cited in Towns 2008: 6). This demands a new feminist stance which creates a different social order that promotes an equal position for men and women in every aspect of life (Millett 2000: 62, Mitchell 1971: 135-140,151). Further, feminist standpoint theory argues that women and other marginalised people experience a different reality as a result of oppression and it is essential to show their stance and the importance of addressing diverse individual rights related to political, legal, cultural, sexual and economic aspects of human life. Through this study Bhutanese women and minority individuals are able to draw attention to their different world view as submissive members of society and reveal the realities of their experiences in an emerging democracy.

This study of the roles of the women of Bhutan uses the scaffolding of a patriarchal society, its impact on the way labour can become gender specific and acknowledges the reality of different views in a society where some are more powerful than others.
This research into the role of women in Bhutan is an attempt to reveal the lived world, to reach meaning and to draw conclusions through unfolding the value of people’s experiences (Kavale 1996:1). This study also explores Bhutan and its people and “how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced” (Mason 1996: 4, Denzin and Lincoln 2008: 4-5). A qualitative approach supports understanding of the “multilayered world” (Mason 1996: 4, Holstein and Gubrium 2008: 174). Therefore, it calls for “flexible” and social context driven “sensitive” methods which generate data instead of “rigidly standardised or structured” methods of data production (Mason 1996: 4). The methods which are responsive to the local social context are stated to respect real life rather than the “experimental method” that is far-fetched from reality (Mason 1996:4, Silverman 2005: 9, cited in Manheim et al. 2006: 309). Social reality, then, is based on context and equal legitimacy is attributed to the many-fold social phenomena and their constructions. (Ravenek and Rudman 2013: 439, Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 26). Thus qualitative inquiry became the tool by which the study could explore the rich and multi-faceted role of Bhutanese women in a changing society.

3.1 QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

Existing literature indicates that qualitative research belongs to the “interpretivist sociological tradition” (Mason 1996: 3). This suggests that various phases of qualitative research may recognise features in diverse ways. They are for instance, noted to be “social meanings, or interpretations, or practices, or discourses, or processes, or constructions” (Mason 1996: 4). Qualitative research’s detailed information is to be found in specifics like the “people’s understandings and interactions.” In addition, the methodology is rooted in thinking which requires comprehending “how participants understand their world and how knowledge is generated through interactions amongst researchers and participants within particular contexts” (Yin 2011: 8, Ravenek and Rudman 2013: 439).
Qualitative inquiry needs a method that builds analysis and explanation and entails “understandings of complexity, detail and context” (Mason 1996: 4). Such an approach is helpful in attaining “intellectual and practical mastery of the social world in much the same manner that possessing a body of empirical explanatory theory in the natural sciences facilitates mastery of the physical world” (Schwandt 2001: 265). Investigation needs to stress forms of analysis and explanation rather than projecting patterns, trends, and correlations. Mason (1996: 4) aptly argues that statistical tools are not emphasised but some form of quantification is used in qualitative research. However, qualitative inquiry is stated to have no well-defined methods of its own. Instead, it employs “semiotics, narrative, content, discourse, archival and phonemic analysis, even statistics, tables, graphs, and numbers.”(Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 7). Other methods such as formal and/ or informal interviews, feminist perspectives, and participant observation are also undertaken but none is considered superior over the other (Denzin and Lincoln 2005:9, Ellingson 2009: 54-55).

Tracy (2010: 839) suggests there are eight criteria for qualitative inquiry. They are “worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics and meaningful coherence”. The objective is to ensure quality in qualitative investigation, advocate value for qualitative research amongst “power keepers” who misunderstand and frequently devalue qualitative work, provide voice and enable qualitative researchers to present a united voice as and when required and ensure a discussion and learning forum for qualitative researchers from different schools of thought (Tracy 2010: 839, Denzin and Lincoln 2005: xv-xvi). “Worthy topic” refers to the work being “relevant, timely, significant, interesting, or evocative” (Tracy 2010: 840, Steinke 2004: 186). “Rich rigor” looks at meticulous care and application of research methods in data collection. It monitors the need for adequate data to enable a substantial argument to be advanced, a suitable research context and a sample in relation to the study’s objectives. It also checks rich theoretical constructions and detailed analysis procedure of the research transcriptions to show that the study is rich and complex in nature (Tracy 2010: 841, Christians 2005: 139). “Sincerity” is transparent and self-reflexive practice about the pros and cons of the research process and “credibility” about reliability of the research. The research reliability criterion is checked on context focused detailed data and the application of data “triangulation or crystallization, and multivocality
“Resonance” is named as a study’s potentiality to have an effect on an audience through clear and engaging writing and “natural generalizations” meaning application in another context (Tracy 2010: 844-845, Denzin and Lincoln 2008: 4-5). “Significant contribution” looks at the study’s ability to generate new insight in theoretical, heuristic and practical applications based on the research (Tracy 2010: 846, Steinke 2004: 190). Finally, “ethics” refers to honest and self-reflexive practices and ethics procedures involved in research. “Meaningful coherence” suggests a coherent research which has a logical interconnection between research objectives, literature review, methods, findings and conclusion of the study (Tracy 2010: 846-848, Steinke 2004: 190). This study demonstrates application of these eight criteria (Gordon and Patterson 2013: 693-694, Ravenek and Rudman 2013: 448-450).

It has also been argued that qualitative research is associated with feminist studies (Mason 1996: 3). Contemporary feminists have pointed out the limitations of male dominated knowledge and methodology and reasoned that it excluded female and the private and is built around objectivity, neutrality, distance, control, rationality, and abstraction (Jaggar 1989; Goodley et al. 2004 ) As a result, other “ideals such as commitment, empathy, closeness, cooperation, intuition, and specificity have thereby been marginalized” and scientific rationality has become an expression of “male domination rather than superior reason” (Alvesson and Karreman: 2011: 6, Kvale1996: 73). Such methods posit that “research should be a kind of cultural criticism; both a way of better understanding ourselves and our society and a way of changing or transforming same” (Schwandt 2001: 265).

These methods provide scaffolding for an exploration of the situation of women in Bhutanese society as they attempt to move from the private to the public domain. Based on qualitative inquiry’s sampling technique, the present study is about drawing meaning from a particular case to help better comprehend wide phenomena (Thomas 2011: 13). Such work along with wider research (Kelle, Udo and Erzberger, Christian 2004: 172-173) represents the justification for the use of the case study method in this inquiry. Case study requires a range of tools- extensive interviews, participant observation and document analysis (Denzin and Lincoln’s (2005: 25).
3.2 REFLEXIVITY—THE INSIDER/OUTSIDER DEBATE

Reflexivity has been seen as central to good qualitative research process and practice (Guba & Lincoln, 2004). Reflexivity is ‘the self-critical sympathetic introspection and self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher’ (England’s 1994. 82). Feminists also refer to this approach as standpoint theory meaning “understanding of the world is related to [gendered] social position” (Pelcher and Whelehan 2004: 163, Hartcock 1998: 106, Hekman 1997: 341).

Rather than making claims to truth, reflexive researchers are explicit about their subjectivities and the way in which these influence their relationship with the field. Thus, reflexivity makes explicit our own position, knowledge, experience and predispositions and interrogates these and the way in which they may have influenced the research.

Today there is an extensive feminist literature on the subject of reflexivity and researcher positionality (e.g., Puwar, 1997; Pini, 2004; Taber, 2005). For example, there is the view that having prior knowledge or experience of a subject – that is, being an insider – may enable a researcher to develop closer connections with participants and to produce a more accurate description of the phenomena they are studying. Illustrative of this is Oakley’s (1981: 57) early and much cited article which posits that as a woman researcher interviewing women she was ‘inside the culture.’ On the contrary, someone who has no connections may have difficulties gaining access and meeting with people as well as establishing rapport. Hence the status of the researcher and the insider/outside practice (Peshkin 1988: 17, Madhok 2013: 187, Crawford 2009: 295-296), may exhibit both advantage and disadvantage for the study.

On one hand, being a research insider has an advantage. My background as a lecturer in gender and politics at the state supported Royal Institute of Management helped in my research on women in politics in Bhutan. My work place facilitated entering the research field which is otherwise quite difficult to access. Through my professional and social network with elite participants I could access different groups of interviewees without many obstacles during data collection. Most men and women participants were cooperative.
Kezar (2003: 400) argues that in elite interviews relation issues must be re-assessed in view of “commitment and engagement, mutual trust, reflexivity, mutuality, egalitarianism, empathy and ethic of care and transformation through consciousness raising, advocacy and demystification”. Elements of commitment, trust, equal respect, empathy and a certain degree of advocacy were present during the interviews. Most women interviewees demonstrated kindness. Interviews with women became an exchange of experiences and information. Often at the end of interview, the researcher was asked to share views on women’s issues including women and politics and other national issues concerning Bhutan. A few women politicians were extremely candid and spoke about difficulties associated with their personal and professional lives. The researcher built a very good emotional rapport with them and forged friendship. Some women interviewees were flexible with the interview schedule and looked for ways and means to fit into time and dates suggested by the researcher. Such experiences were inspiring in terms of genuine human communication. Some of the male interviewees were kind too. Two of them even adjusted times according to the researcher’s convenience and agreed to be interviewed at the researcher’s work place (Kezar 2003: 400-403, Fontana and Frey 2005: 696).

On the other hand, being an insider does not solve all field research problems for I became an outsider to some elite, particularly, male interviewees (Crawford 2008: 121, Seidman 2006: 46). Some participants were difficult to access. In overly elite male institutions (Puwar 1997: 2) a separate formal letter for interview appointments had to be written to a male government Minister, a Secretary and an Opposition Leader, and needed follow up. Contrary to existing literature’s suggestion such as making an initial contact and a thorough interview preparation (Seidman 2006:46, Kavle 1996:126), two elite women from a civil society organisation and a political party refused to be interviewed even after constant efforts to seek appointments. They gave the excuse of being time poor, but really did not wish their views to be exposed to public scrutiny. Two women asked for interview questions ahead of the appointment and these were delivered. However, they were the least prepared of any of the interviewees.

Even using persistence and patience to organise elite interviews (Peabody et al. 1990: 453), did not stop a senior male bureaucrat from an important government
ministry refusing to share honest answers. His non-verbal communication like poor eye contact and frequent gaze at his office windows demonstrated his little interest in the interview. He was keen to demonstrate his authority over the female researcher. A prominent male politician was inaccessible for about four months despite repeated requests for an interview both through electronic mail and telephone communication. The politician’s cell phone numbers changed often and was switched to the off mode. After four months of perseverance, the researcher managed to make an appointment through one of the cell phone numbers. During the interview appointment at a formal office space, he arrived 35 minutes late in casual dress and did not apologise. Throughout the interview, he often looked outside through the window and had little eye contact with the researcher (Peabody et al. 1990: 453). His power emanated from the status quo and he saw no reason for research and change. Thus, reflexive practice is a dualistic construction of insider/outsider positioning. It is neither fixed nor exclusive (Crawford 2008: 121).

3.3 RATIONALE FOR CASE STUDY

In relation to qualitative inquiry’s philosophy and the research question, the main approach considered is the case study strategy. This is because the research is about the case of women in politics in Bhutan. In order to fully comprehend the Bhutanese women’s involvement in politics, in-depth interviews, participant observation and document review were used.

A case study is an empirical query which “investigates a contemporary within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin 2003: 13, Thomas 2011: 10). This means that the case study method can be used to inquire about a current research question to study the social phenomenon in a specified environment. Yin (2003: 13) comments that the case study approach with an objective to “cover contextual conditions” can be used because there is an assumption that the grounded circumstance would be useful for the research question under study.

The approach is suitable to study existing incidents. However, the inquiry can be carried out “when the relevant behaviours cannot be manipulated” (Yin 2003: 13, Thomas 2011:62). This is applicable to the present study as it entails an examination of the meaning and action of the subjects outlined in the research. Since the method
depends on straight scrutiny of the episodes and interviews of the people engaged in
the incidents, it relates well with qualitative ideas (Yin 2003: 7-8, Stake 2008: 119).
The case study strategy blends with several variables to form one result. It depends
on many sources of information in which the gathered data are required to connect
with each other in a “triangulating fashion, and as another result” (Yin 2003: 14,
2011: 9, 2012: 27, Tellis 1997: 1). It also receives assistance from already developed
theory to direct information gathering (Yin 2003: 14, Thomas 2011: 178-179,
Simons 2009: 10). This implies that the technique connects with a construction
model. Hence, the essence of the case study approach is to look at the rationale of the
research design, information gathering tools and precise methods of information
examination based on research questions.

Stoecker (1991) commented that “the case study is not either a data collection
tactic or merely a design feature alone but a comprehensive research strategy” (cited
in Yin 2003: 14, Simon 2009: 2). This means that the case study method entails
several research techniques within the approach itself. For this research, the approach
would help to amalgamate data collected from different sources and this would assist
the convergence of the theory with the assembled data. In this way, the researcher
can analyse the link between the theoretical model and the real phenomenon within a
given social context. This implies an exploration of the association of feminist
political theory with Bhutanese social context. Drawing from it an attempt was made
to construct a standpoint feminist political theory entrenched within the Bhutanese
context based on interviews and direct observation (Hekam 1997: 341).

Case studies are one of the approaches used in analysing “individual, group,
organisational, social, political, and related phenomena” (Yin 2003: 1, Thomas 2011:
3). A case study is often used where a researcher has access to contemporary
documentation. For the current study, most information (Constitution, legislation,
state policy publications and media reports) was available. Since the subject is
topical, the data collected are contemporary in nature. A large part of the primary
data associated with the main research question was gathered through interviews and
examination of Bhutanese social phenomenon such as observation of parliamentary
sessions, meeting of relevant state agencies and civil society organisation’s
discussions. The researcher was able to make a clear connection between observation
and accumulated data. However, the case study method is viewed as the favoured
approach to answer questions related to ‘how’ and ‘why’, when the researcher has small direction over incidents and when the emphasis of the research is on “contemporary phenomenon within some real-world context” (Yin 2003: 1, Simon 2009: 2). Further, there are different types of case studies. They are ‘explanatory’, ‘exploratory’ and the ‘descriptive’. Exploratory and descriptive case studies can be balanced by explanatory case studies (Yin 2003: 1, Tellis 1997: 1). The present work is largely an exploratory case study with some elements of descriptive and explanatory case studies.

3.3.1 Case Study Design

Yin (2003: 19) and Simons (2009: 6-7) argue that a research design is the logical connection between the preliminary research questions, anticipated data collection and expected conclusions from the study. The objective is to help the researcher to remain focused. The case study design needs to link to the questions to be studied, the selection and gathering of data and the analysis of results (Simons 2009: 7). In fact, there are five essential elements in a case study research plan. The first one is the nature of the research question. The present study’s core and subsidiary questions are “how” and “why” type of questions.

How has the transition to democracy had an impact on women’s role and status in Bhutanese politics?

- Why are women poorly represented in public decision-making forums and politics?

- How did the women supporters like party workers, office coordinators, campaigners and financiers contribute/ have a say within the two competing political parties in the process leading up to 24 March 2008 general elections and now?

- How does patriarchal socio-culture hinder women’s participation in public decision-making in general and politics in particular?

- Why are women parliamentarians in the National Assembly seemingly passive?

- How are the women parliamentarians in the National Council able to exercise their leverage during the process of reviewing legislation?
Yin (2003: 5) contends that “What” questions, on the other hand, are suitable for survey and archival analysis. The second important constituent is the study proposal. This is about guiding the researcher to carry out a complete set of activities within the scope of the study. The research undertaken involves field work, data analysis, continuous literature review and attending research related scholarly seminars and discussions. The third is the unit of analysis (Tellis 1997: 2). This can be an individual such as “clinical patients, exemplary students, or political leaders”, an organisation, the global market or a country’s political system. In addition, the body of examination needs to be conducted within a particular time in terms of the start and the finish. The investigation suggests making reference to previous research literature for comparison (Yin 2003: 22-26). The present study’s unit of analysis is women in politics in transition democracy in Bhutan. This implies the linkage between transition democracy, women, politics and Bhutan. The insight will be drawn from both men and women in relation to politics in an emerging democracy. During the process of analysis, male dominance in the public realm in general and politics in particular is shown to have an effect on women’s functions and status. Therefore, it is important to present a balanced account. The case was analysed from 2007 until end of 2014. Since there is very little literature on this topic, the present study attempts to define its own unit of analysis.

The fourth is the connection between the data and proposal and basis of result interpretation. Yin comments that this feature, the “data analysis step”, is not well developed in the case study method (Yin 2003: 26, Simons 2009: 4-5). The fifth is related to the fourth, as it is about the relation between data and proposal. One interesting way of conducting this is called “pattern matching”. This refers to a comparison of an empirical “pattern” with a predicted one (or with several alternative predictions) (cited in Yin 2003: 26,116). Yin states that, the findings can assist a case study to improve its causal relationship, should the patterns correspond (cited in Yin 2003: 26,116, Tellis 1997: 1). However, for the present work, this was not used as it does not involve conducting causal investigations (Yin 2003: 34, Tellis 1997: 1). In addition, the case study design involves theory function, that is, the researcher needs to understand the theory prior to the field work. (Simons 2009: 10). The theory comprehension entails an adequate knowledge of the proposed theory. Theoretical framework is also helpful in designing a suitable research plan, mode of
information gathering and in applying the case study findings for general perspectives. In the process of analysis, an attempt was made to build a feminist standpoint theory embedded in Bhutanese social reality (Yin 2003: 28-29, 33).

The present study used a single case study design. There are five reasons to justify single case study. The first reason is the case stands for “the critical case in testing a well-formulated theory” (Yin 2003: 39-41). This includes a clear understanding of the features of the theory and the environment in which the features are stated to be correct in order to confirm, challenge, or extend the theory. The Bhutanese case was used to verify whether the feminist political theory’s suggestions are accurate or whether some optional proposition is relevant. Through the case, an effort was made to develop a standpoint feminist political theory. In this way, the single case can contribute towards the creation of new knowledge and theory building in the areas of feminism and gender and politics. The second rationale is that a single case shows “an extreme or a unique case”. The Bhutanese story is a “unique” one for it does not demonstrate similar conditions of developing countries, particularly of those in the South Asian region.

The third reason is that a single case is termed as “representative” case. This means that the case shows common characteristics in different contexts. Lessons learned from these cases are assumed to be informative about the experiences of the average person or institution” (Yin 2003: 39-4, Thomas 2011: 3). This implies that the Bhutanese case must symbolise the common characteristics of women in politics in transition democracies. Some elements of the process of democratisation in Bhutan in general and women’s involvement in politics may account for other countries in the South Asian region and even beyond. The fourth reason for a single case study is the “revelatory” case. This refers to a condition in which the researcher has an opportunity to watch and probe an experience which was earlier not accessible for “scientific investigation” (Yin 2003: 42). This inquiry examined and analysed women’s participation in politics. Such occurrence was not visible in an explicit form prior to 2008.

The final justification for the use of case study is when a single case is a “longitudinal” study. This means investigating the same single case “at two or more different points in time” (Yin 2003: 42). This is carried out to verify how some
situations change over the course of time. This case started in February 2011 and ended in October 2014. The researcher has been a constant observer over this time.

The single case study is not free from limitations. It has a risk of deviating from its original plan. It may turn out to be different from what was envisaged (Yin 2003:42).

**The standard of quality case study design**

Case study design needs quality validation. There are four tests – “construct validity, Internal validity, external validity and reliability” (Yin 2003: 34). However Simons (2009: 19) argues that other than internal and external validity, terms like reliability are less applicable in qualitative study because the latter is related to quantitative research and suggests positivism. Construct validity refers to introducing accurate “operational measures for the concepts being studied” (Yin 2003: 34). For the current case, this means, studying the kind of changes women experienced after the advent of democracy in line with the central research question. The techniques employed use several sources of information, introducing series of information and having “key informants review draft case report” (Yin 2003: 34, Stake 2008: 133). These tools are used during “data collection”. Internal validity calls for an introduction of “a causal relationship” between one condition and another, as opposed to false connections, to draw a clear and logical conclusion of the study. This quality check criteria is needed only for “explanatory or causal studies” (Yin 2003: 34-35). Since this research is a mix of descriptive, explanatory and exploratory one, it seems irrelevant (Yin 2003: 34-35). Simons (2009: 19-20) contends that researchers must care for credibility of the case account instead of relying on technical criteria.

External validity explores how the research’s results can be applied more generally. This research attempted to account for similar contexts beyond Bhutan through the study’s findings. However, there are limitations such as the “external validity problem” and “single cases which offer a poor basis for generalizing” (Yin 2003: 34, 37, Thomas 2011, 4). Finally reliability means demonstrating how a study can be replicated (Yin 2003: 34). The objective is to ensure that a future researcher who pursued identical methods and carried out a similar case study would draw similar results. (Yin 2003: 34, 37). Future Bhutanese and international researchers will test this case study as it is the first of its kind for Bhutan.
3.3.2 Rationale for Interviews

Drawing upon the philosophical premises of qualitative research, the interview method was used to collect primary data. In-depth interviews help to gain insight into a detailed and a holistic lived human experience (Crawford 2008: 25, Powell and Amsbary 2006: 148). This is because face to face interviews provide first hand access to people’s knowledge, experiences, memories and behaviour expressed in their own words and actions (Seidman 2006: 7-9, Hermanns 2004: 209). Moreover, this study was concerned with interviewing a political elite and interviews are the main source of information in the political field (Peabody et al. 1990: 452). Feminist inquiry advocates elite interviews in terms of the interviewee leading the discussion and keeping interviews open-ended in design (Kezar 2003: 398). Further, Peabody et al. (1990: 452) assert that interviews are the most suitable research method to study politicians, political organisations and public administration. Based on this, the women’s political participation in Bhutanese democracy is studied through the elite group’s perspective as they were the core players in Bhutan’s transition to democracy. The category of interviewee was elite in terms of university level education, respectable employment, economic and social status, and power and influence in the society. Most of them were from the mid- or upper middle-class socio-economic background, with a few from the upper socio-economic category (Peabody et al. 1990: 451, Kezar 2003: 397).

3.3.3 Design of Interview

Semi-structured in-depth interview design was used to collect primary data from July 2012- February 2013 for about eight months. The interview ranged from an hour to three hours to understand the meanings of emerging democracy, gender and politics, patriarchy, equality and diversity in Bhutan’s transition democracy (Hopf 2004: 203). Silverman (2011) states that detailed interview stories from participants’ perspectives help to understand the nature of phenomenon under study and provide a vital insight to comprehend theory (Silverman 2011: 137). This proved true for the study because an exhaustive analysis of interview stories (as discussed in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7) provide evidence of women in transition democracy politics.

As shown in Table 4, the interviewees were grouped into seven different categories. They were bureaucrats, constitutional body employees, politicians, party
supporters and financiers, relevant academics and civil society and international agency workers. The details of each interviewee are attached as Appendix A.

Table 4: Background of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bureaucrat</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constitutional body</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Politician</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(National Assembly—ruling party)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Do- (Opposition party)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Council</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former political candidate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspiring politician candidate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party Financier</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party supporter</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civil society and international organisation</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transgender (Males living as females)</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Fieldwork

Although an attempt was made to incorporate equal numbers of interviewees in each of the delineated groups, only those who consented to be interviewed could be included. Also, more women were engaged in addressing women’s issues. Above all, since the research question is about the impact of the transition democracy on women’s status and functions in Bhutanese politics a few more women and men who were former, current and aspiring politicians were included. This is because they possessed some of the key information related to women and politics (Peabody et al. 1990: 452). These elite members of society observed women’s participation in politics in the 2008 and 2013 elections and were connected with the ongoing Bhutanese political discourse (Peabody et al. 1990: 452). The border between bureaucrats and politicians, former and aspiring politicians, bureaucrats and civil society workers and aspiring politicians and entrepreneurs appears thin. This is true also for the border between former bureaucrats and current constitutional employees because the respondents have shifted from one employment to another.
The interviewee sample consisted of 45 persons – 17 male, 26 female and two transgender persons. The interviewees were organised to include different categories of participants as described above. The average interview duration was one hour. However, (Powell and Amsbary 2006: 120 and 122) suggest use of a telephone interview if the researcher has little time to travel to various locations. Thus, one interview was carried out over the telephone for 30 minutes as the interviewee lived too far from the researcher’s location. It was important to carry out the interview over the telephone as the interviewee was the only woman party coordinator out of 20 coordinators in the DPT.

The sampling size was developed based on the local research environment’s political, social and cultural context to include relevant persons even though they were not originally envisaged as part of the sample (Simons 2009: 11). Since the research topic is a contemporary issue, it was important to remain sensitive to the research ambience and include appropriate persons. Based on this, aspiring men politicians, women party leaders, women issue promoters were included in the sample. These individuals have a direct impact on the main research question. The qualitative research inquiry permitted flexibility in terms of number and focus after acquiring a fractional understanding of the subject through first-hand experience during the field work (Mason 1996: 4, Denzin and Lincoln 2008: 4-5). Instead of more bureaucrats, aspiring politicians and women’s issues advocates were considered because the latter were well informed.

The interview was audio-taped using a small audio recorder which was supported by a rechargeable battery. This was done to facilitate a smooth flow of conversation between the researcher and the interviewee and to prevent the loss of interview data (Seidman 2006: 114). Recording the interview in the field note book was done as an alternative although it risked losing critical information during the process of writing for it demanded much writing time. However, one interviewee found audio-taping uncomfortable and the information was noted in a field book. The field book was also used for the telephone interview and another two interviews when the audio tape stopped functioning after it ran out of battery. The field recordings were immediately converted into soft data after the interview to maintain quality of the original information. Also, the audio-taped interviews were instantly
saved on a computer to ensure data safety. This was carried out meticulously throughout the field work (Seidman 2006: 114).

Based on the idea of the research interview as a daily life conversation, the interview language was mainly English and Dzongkha, the Bhutanese national language. However, some interviews were conducted in other Bhutanese dialects that made the interviewees more comfortable in their mother tongue than in two mainstream languages (Kvale 1996:5). The interviews were carried out either at the interviewees’ offices, homes, coffee shops or restaurants and researcher’s home and in open ground depending on their choice. An important part of interview is the interview schedule (Crawford 2008: 28). Questions started with general issues and then moved to more specific ones (Crawford 2008: 28). The interview questions are included as Appendix B. Due to personal associations with persons in the selected group, meetings were held at restaurants or homes. The interviews in rural places were carried out in the informant’s homes or in nearby open ground. There was little difficulty in collecting primary data although some form of limitation was anticipated in the form of the interviewees associating the researcher with a state owned work organisation.9

The main research site was Thimphu, the political capital of Bhutan. Parliament house, constitutional agencies, central Bhutanese bureaucratic headquarters, the head offices of the core market, media, political parties and civil society organisations are all located in Thimphu. Almost all the elite politicians, bureaucrats, business men and women, popular journalists, political party supporters and civil society leaders who are key actors in the Bhutanese politics live in Thimphu. Some of the major political meetings like a party’s general assembly and executive committee meetings were held there. Thus, Thimphu is the source of Bhutanese politics which has an impact on all the 20 Dzongkhags (districts) and 205 Gewogs (group of villages) in the country. Other study areas included selected Gewogs and Dzongkhags (see Appendix C). This was done to include the views of elite political actors based in rural and semi-urban centres in Bhutan.

9 I am a civil servant and work for the Royal Institute of Management (RIM). It is a state owned academic institution. I have no full academic freedom as I am bound by the civil service code of ethics. I assumed that there may be a risk of interviewees seeing only my civil service role. However, after explaining about my academic study, I experienced little difficulty in getting appointments. However, some interviewees avoided tough questions and responded in a vague and condescending manner.
3.3.4 Data Analysis

For the purpose of the present study, 45 interviews were fully transcribed using advanced features of Microsoft 2007 which allowed audio transcriptions. The transcriptions were assembled and stored according to different groups of participants. Interviewees were given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality (Seidman 2006: 9, Kvale 1996: 259-260). As an insider the researcher had adequate knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation and use of fictitious names did not alter study’s themes (Kvale 1996: 260).

The data transcriptions were manually processed along the main and subsidiary themes of the research objectives and then used for analysis. Unlike computer assisted data sorting, the manual method enabled the researcher to reflect deeply and broadly on main and sub-themes during the process of data sorting, and organisation (Seidman 2006: 117, Yin 2011: 178). During the data processing, continuous memos were maintained to select the most significant theme based on the nature of the deep structural meaning and frequency of its occurrence (Miles and Hubermann 1994: 9, Yin 2011: 186). This type of data processing is referred to as “latent” and “manifest” content analysis in qualitative research (cited in Granehim and Lundman 2004: 106). This allowed the data to direct the researcher in choosing and grouping the research themes reflecting interviewee’s experiences (Wengraf 2002: 234). The researcher could avoid a narrow focus of data coding. The analysis procedure was rigorous for it often involved reading and re-reading line by line data from the transcriptions (Seidman 2006: 118). This was done to present the research participants’ views and to ensure that main and sub-themes were included (Kavle 1996: 188-190).

3.3.5 Participant Observation

Participant observation is a rich method of collecting information by taking part in and observing the study under investigation (Tellis 1997: 9, Luders 2004: 222, Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 7). Drawing upon this, the researcher engaged in a few significant activities relating to the research. During field work, parliament’s summer and winter sessions were accessible to observers and researchers. The researcher observed the 9th and 10th parliamentary sessions in the National Assembly and the National Council, particularly, the Domestic Violence Prevention Bill deliberations, which was directly relevant to the study. Other observed events included
participation in the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) and UN agencies organised gender responsive budgeting workshop which the researcher attended in the capacity of a commissioner of the NCWC and also a NCWC’s strategic planning workshop. However, at the time of field work, workshop reports were in the process of being written and were not accessible for the study. The researcher also used the NCWC’s commissioner role and a women’s issue advocate to invite students and colleagues from her institute to watch a feature film titled “Gawa: the other side of moon”. The film was about existing sexual harassment and the plight of children born out of wedlock as a result of popularly stated “night hunting” culture which is still prevalent in rural Bhutan. In addition, the researcher participated in the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, a local Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), organised workshop on the impact of Bhutan’s transition democracy on the Bhutanese society with a serving woman parliamentarian, a former woman political candidate and two active male party workers and in doing so got insight into deeper nuances of women in transition democratic politics.

3.3.6 Document Analysis

Document analysis is yet another technique of case study which is a valued addition to the research context and contributes to the analysis of the subject under examination (Simons 2009: 32, Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 7, Denzin and Lincoln 2008: 4). Using this idea, public documents such as the Constitution, the state laws, government policy publications related with the study were reviewed. Specific information related to the National Council elections in 2007, 2008 and 2013 and the National Assembly elections in 2008 and 2013, election disputes, international and local observers’ reports, political parties’ registration, voter education and local government elections was obtained from the Election Commission and the state owned and private print, broadcast and social media. There was regular and extensive media coverage in the 2008 and 2013 elections and current Bhutanese politics by both state-owned and private media companies. The government publications were reviewed to examine state’s social and gender policies, gender statistics, Bhutan’s population, women’s status, voter behaviour, and political system and elections. Secondary sources such as international organisations’ reports were also used.
3.4 LIMITATIONS OF METHODOLOGY AND CASE STUDY APPROACH

Qualitative study is time consuming and therefore the researcher needs to keep field work within a practically drawn time frame (Mason 1996:91). This has proven to be true in the current study. The conduct of in-depth interviews for more than an hour during the field work and data transcription demanded much time. Another distinctive problem related to the qualitative method is that of data reduction to a manageable level in terms of requirement. This is because qualitative information is known for its huge size from the number of audio transcribed interview documents and field notes.

Although, the researcher received formal research approval from the Queensland University of Technology’s research ethics unit, the researcher was advised to seek clearance from organisations and individuals who were part of the research. Also, the study was limited in terms of the elite perspective and the main research location. Since the nature of research information was “politically sensitive” in a transition democratic context and research participants were guaranteed anonymity based on ethics, research materials were not shared to gather participants’ questions, critiques and feedback. Thus, the participant’s reflections are absent.

Case study is sometimes considered as the “exploratory stage of some other type of research strategy and can appear to have a “definitional flaw” (Yin 2003: 12). The literature’s conceptual definition is found to be produced as “a description of either the ethnographic method or of participant-observation as a data collection technique” in real situations. Yin states that several usual methodological texts mention field work simply “as a data collection technique and omit any further discussion of case studies” (Yin 2003: 12). This is because of the historical development of the case study method from an American methodological perspective. Platt (1992) refers to the use of the case study style in relation to “life histories, the work of the Chicago School of Sociology, and the casework in social work” (cited in Yin 2003: 12-13). Without a clear definition of case study, Platt, Yin argues states that “how participant-observation” emerged as a data collection technique, leaving the further definition of any distinctive case study method in suspension (cited in Yin 2003: 12-13). Platt is also stated to have clarified how the first edition of Yin’s book conceptually left out the case study method from “the
limited perspective of doing participant-observation (or any type of field-work)” In her view, the case study method starts with the research design, in which a method is chosen based on suitable conditions and the research question rather than based on “ideological commitment” in any environment (cited in Yin 2003: 12-13). This is important as ideological loyalty may hinder the researcher from adapting to the field situation.

In addition, the case study method is stated to suit examination of only one big case rather than investigating more big cases. However, the approach seems to permit investigation of a small number of cases. Also, in qualitative work, cases are singled out “on a random basis” (cited in Silverman 2005: 126). Above all, cases are chosen based on accessibility for study. It is difficult to define the unit of analysis in the case study method as the delineated definition may appear unclear and even confuse the researcher. This is because the definition of the unit of analysis may contain several related core features of the study and can overlap with each other (Yin 2003:4-25).

3.5 CONCLUSION

In sum, qualitative research methodology was used because such an inquiry enables an understanding of the social world through meanings, interpretations, practices, processes and discourses (Denzin and Lincoln 2008: 4). This interpretative philosophy blends well with feminist epistemology and brings the female researcher’s interests into the exploration (Tanesini 2013: 82, Acklesberg, 2005, Randall 1997). Women’s participation in Bhutan’s transition democracy was analysed in its breadth and depth through the triangulation of in-depth interviews, participant observations and document review. Reflexivity assisted the researcher in positioning herself during the research process and at times assisted advantage and at others exposed the disadvantage of the researcher’s insider/outsider positions (Madhok 2013: 187). The case study method facilitated the scrutiny of the complexities of the way in which the Bhutanese elite engage in politics and led to a multifaceted understanding of how women are attempting to move from the private to the public sphere in modern day Bhutan.
Bhutanese men and women are perceived to be equal in all aspects of life. However, this is not the reality. Patriarchy appears to be alive and well in Bhutan (NCWC 2008: 35, Upreti 1996: 54). It manifests itself in the social structures, legal framework and cultural practices (Dahlerup 2014: 13, ADB 2014: 33). The public/private dichotomous patriarchal social structure associating men with the public and politics and women with the private is the key defining factor of masculine dominance in Bhutan as demonstrated by gender scholars (Mitchell 1971: 101, Walby 1990: 20-21, Pateman 1989: 6,131-134, Lovenduski 2000: xi, Upreti 1996: 52). A deeply rooted patriarchal mindset has determined an entrenched attitude towards women, unequal treatment of women and men and a legal framework to sustain such practices. Gendered Bhutanese social structure is the genesis of patriarchy which influences state laws, rules and policies (Beneria1979: 205, Thane 1992: 300, Brines 1994: 652-656, Gilding 1997:188). Therefore, Bhutanese women’s attempts to move from the private to the public sphere face antipathy from long held ways of thinking which have underpinned male behaviours (Dahlerup 2014: 13, Helvetas 2010: 6).

4.1 ATTITUDES TO WOMEN

Most respondents in the current study argued that there were no gender issues in Bhutan. However, most women participants thought that the patriarchal attitude obstructs women’s participation in public affairs (see Table 5). They also found that the existing legal framework is inadequate to advance women’s political representation and favours men. This then flows into patriarchal cultural practices which have negative influences for women seeking change. Gender issues are termed women’s issues when it is do with both men and women. The gender issue is not received well in public discourse in bureaucracy, parliament, and corporate, private and religious organisations, and among Bhutanese development professionals in the UNDP country office in Bhutan.
Table 5: Participants’ perceptions about Patriarchy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patriarchal structure</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Public (patriarchal structure affects women’s role in public sphere)</em></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(53%)</td>
<td>(73%)</td>
<td>(65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Private (women play better roles in private sphere)</em></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(41%)</td>
<td>(23%)</td>
<td>(30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legal Framework (Inadequate)</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(53%)</td>
<td>(81%)</td>
<td>(70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Practices (patriarchal)</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(88%)</td>
<td>(88%)</td>
<td>(88%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bhutan is largely a Vajrayana (diamond vehicle) Buddhist country and Vajrayana Buddhism per se does not discriminate against women (Phuntsho 2013: 119-254, Kinga 2009: 31, Reynolds 1996: 26). The female aspect is associated with wisdom and it is worshipped (Rinpoche 1994: 317, 407, 428 and 432, 439). However, the Buddhist-based social structure appears discriminatory in its application in Bhutan (Upreti 1996: 53). In general, the Bhutanese social structure is extremely hierarchical in nature (Dahlerup 2014: 14, Zangmo 2014: 1). The social structure such as daily life revolving around hierarchical masculine organisation, values and customs in the public domain exemplify observations made by Western authors (Broussine and Fox 2003: 27, Pateman 1989: 132, Acker 1992: 567). Traditionally, the social structure has power symbols in the form of patang or the sword. It also has rules for the use of colours of scarves and boots associated with position and status in the public space (Appendix D).

The sword symbolises authority and is typically a male privilege (BBS 2013g). The King, male members of the royal family and the public figures wear swords. Today, this has translated into the use of different brands and sizes of tea cups and cars for Ministers, government secretaries and directors, parliamentarians, and corporate and private executives during the public meetings and functions. In short power is indicated by the public use of the sword, the colour of scarf and boot and the brand and size of car and such symbols are restricted in use to men. Women, fare
very poorly in such a deeply embedded masculine driven hierarchal society as such symbols are denied to them (NCWC 2008: 11, UN Women 2014: 7).

Deeply rooted in the hierarchical social structure are the existing traditional proverbs and beliefs and language which contain explicit elements of patriarchy. This thinking is subtle but powerful as it is deeply ingrained in people’s psyche and determines their attitudes and behaviours. Socio-cultural values are significant in Bhutan where the traditional culture is well-preserved and promoted as one of the four central features of the country’s development philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH) (NCWC 2008: 34-35, Zangmo 2014:1, Phuntsho 2013: 597).

There are several derogative common beliefs and proverbs about the female. It is ingrained in language which is the gateway to culture. The national language Dzongkha and local dialects carry patriarchal phrases which hold condescending views of women. In Choekey, a classical Dzongkha female is referred to as “kay may” meaning low birth. The phrase shows that the birth of the female has inferiority attached to it. The alternative demeaning word is “Be May”, meaning the one who has fallen from the path of enlightenment and is bereft of dharma or religion. The female is also called as “Zam Be May”. “Zam” means female and the essence is female without dharma or religion. This clearly states that female birth is devalued. Therefore, it appears that the notion of inferiority is used to develop negative stereotypes about female. Some beliefs are crude and imply a staunch patriarchal norm. A crude traditional Dzongkha saying states “no matter how black the pot is, it always sits on the stove, even the ugliest man will get on top of woman”. This reveals the patriarchal psyche in terms of power and the sense of absolute male superiority. Likewise the most popular belief that degrades female birth is “men are nine times superior by birth than women” (NCWC 2008: 34-34, Pain and Pema 2004: 428).

Bhutanese society has ascribed rules for females and these draw on the idea of women’s inferiority. Women are not allowed to plough the field as the oxen will not be reborn as human in their next life. Women must not step over men’s kera, a traditional belt. Kera is worshipped as a talisman for protection. Another proverb states zam ngagay che na gu dung meaning a female will bang one’s head if she is overly confident. It is also expressed in Hindu culture for Lhotsamkha (Nepali spoken in southern and south eastern Bhutan) that states if a rooster crows it is good
but if a hen does it is not, implying the need for female’s submissiveness. An over-confident woman is devalued and cautioned. A man who talks too much without any substance or indulges in idle gossip is considered to be like amsu morem gi kha zum bay, literally meaning ‘a single woman’s mouth’ but used to disgrace women. The words amsu morem, meaning single woman is often used to demean women. A few male respondents mentioned a common belief which considered a capable woman to be a man. Ability is seen as a man’s trait and a woman is not recognised for her talents and skills. The NCWC study on women’s participation in 2011’s Local Government election concluded that “women are portrayed as less capable than men” (2011: 43). The usual norm is to appreciate women’s physical beauty more than the inner attributes like intellectual and spiritual qualities. The underpinning is that grace and beauty are associated with women. Further, women also carry patriarchal beliefs. Women think that it is acceptable to be beaten. Recent studies and media reports confirm there is a high prevalence of domestic violence in urban and rural Bhutan (ADB 2014: 9-10, Rinzin 2013: 5, RENEW 2007:1). Females continue to recognise the need for compliance and subservience to one’s male relatives. Such narrowly defined cultural stereotypes have subtle but deep implications for women seeking involvement in public life.

Samdrup, a senior male bureaucrat, who is considered an intellectual sees a slight, positive change in this trend of thinking from 1970s to 2000 and beyond as a result of modern education. Education is thought to be a social pill to change people’s patriarchal mind set. Despite the small change, mainstream patriarchal thought appears to persist. Here, urban areas seem to be a little more progressive than rural ones. Most interviewees from urban areas considered changes were occurring in the way women were treated and the roles they should be able to fulfil. Young people were also perceived as agents of change. Tashi, the young male bureaucrat, argued that patriarchal culture is the source of inequality:

So, compared to many countries, we are far equal in gender but we have our last mile. Our last mile is deep in our cultural practice, which has to change.

In simple public ceremonies tea is first offered to men, although by protocol, it must be served to the chief guest, followed by the superior, even if she is a woman. People have failed to recognise these women and involuntarily serve men.
Hierarchical custom reinforces patriarchy and people continue to relate superiority and authority with men.

Further, women are not received well playing the traditional khuru – a game similar to darts and played in an open field (Appendix E). A pair of darts is shot at the target which is set about 10 metres from the players. Traditionally khuru is associated with men. In recent times, women who are illiterate and semi-literate started playing khuru during their leisure time and at special local festivals. People in general blamed women playing khuru for natural disasters like earthquakes and flood. Tashi, the young male bureaucrat said:

...some of my colleagues view women playing khuru negatively as challenging age old tradition of women’s role in society.

Women’s accepted societal role continues to be restricted to the domestic sphere when even women’s participation in simple sports is questioned. Professional women dancers are also sexualised as they are often asked to entertain men who sometimes demand sexual favours instead of being recognised as artists.

On the contrary, some respondents commented that, Bhutan seemed like a matriarchal society as the dominant cultural bias against women is not explicit as in neighbouring countries in South Asia (Upreti 1996: 52). In most Buddhist communities, women inherit property and make decisions at household level. The decisions made relate to farm work, setting dates and times to conduct annual family deity appeasement rituals, debt payment, children’s education and mobilising funds (Pain and Pema 2004: 427). Women are often referred to with the respectable term nangi aum, literally meaning, inner madam. The essence is care takers of household affairs and implies that women’s role is within the domestic sphere. However, there is also a perception that women have leverage to influence men in public affairs. Zam, a senior woman bureaucrat in her late 50s, thought that Bhutanese society was matriarchal as women are involved in making decisions:

I come from family where females are dominant. We have always taken part, taken decisions, made sure our views are known. If a man goes for a meeting, women prepare him and advise them what to say.

Khandu, an active old male party worker, shared this view:
… if one visits each household in the village, women are much more capable than men because women make decision starting from the work plan, what a man must do and which farm he must attend to.

Jangchub, a former senior woman bureaucrat and aspiring politician disagreed that *nang gi aum’s* role is inferior in the household. Instead, she argued that *nang gi aum* takes real decisions and men simply implement them. This study found that women’s domestic decision-making authority does not elevate their status in the public sphere despite one or two women seeing this differently. Women still lack confidence in being visible in the public domain (Dorji et al. 2012: 60, NCWC 2008: 36). Tashi, a bureaucrat in his late 30s and a critical but a liberal intellectual, working in the government ministry, thought that the Bhutanese society was matriarchal in terms of women’s ability to own property but he also felt that women were engaged only in domestic chores. Males dominate public life, particularly, in decision-making. UNDP’s woman gender specialist’s study underlined Tashi’s opinion that women’s power does not move from private to public realms. Although women outnumber men, they are found to passively participate in public meetings at the village and Gewog levels. Tashi mentioned:

The only place I see women taking part is village meeting-zomdu. This is also because men are too busy doing something else. They send housewife, mother, grandmother or the daughter to attend. My own sense is that these are not significant. They are sent as substitutes.

This view still holds true as the media covered a high female attendance during April 2013’s National Council election events like candidate nomination and campaign meetings and televised public debate. In Chumey Gewog, Bumthang in the central region, for example, 90 percent of the participants during candidate nomination were women. The men were found to be busy with farm work. Similarly, in western Wangdue Dzongkhag (district) eight Gewogs saw high female participation during public debate called common forums. The men stayed back to tend the animals (Choden and Namgyel 2013: 1). Nonetheless, there is a persistent view that there are a few women who are active and even forceful in village zomdu. While Dendup, another respectable bureaucrat in his early 50s, suggested that:

If these women in the households are slightly charismatic and powerful, they have impact on village decision-making also.
This research found that only a few women exhibit influence in the public realm. Most women seem to take a back seat in public spheres. Culturally, women are associated with emotion. The existing belief is that women cannot be schooled to be public figures because throughout history they played quiet roles of raising a family. Zema, a senior woman bureaucrat working in an important government organisation, was involved in the gender pilot study conducted in 2001. She said that the study’s finding that men are better decision-makers in the public realm and women in the private realm holds true even now. Women are thought not to be capable of making important public decisions. According to a gender pilot study (2001), both men and women perceived women “as less capable and confident than men especially in matters of governance and interaction with external agencies”.

In public meetings, women were seen to be “shy and inarticulate”. Also, time and travel demands prevented women’s participation in public meetings outside their village at Gewog and Dzongkhag levels.

The study covered both male and female opinion through key informants’ interviews, focus group discussions and a survey conducted in rural and urban Bhutan (GNHC 2001: 5-6 and 20). After more than a decade of transitioning to democracy patriarchal thinking is still endemic and widespread in both urban and regional areas of Bhutan.

4.2 EDUCATION AND THE IMAGE OF THE GIRL CHILD

In Bhutan a girl child is regarded as weak and sexually vulnerable and needing protection. She is raised in a restrictive social environment. On one hand, this has allowed women and girls to inherit both movable and immovable property such as land, houses, shares and cash (Pain and Pema 2004: 425 -426, Helvetas 2010: 4). On the other, it has a negative impact on women’s participation in public life as this belief has impeded their broad professional and leadership progression. During the beginning of modern education in late 1950s parents preferred not to send girls to schools because of practical constraints like physical hardship, having to walk long distances to schools and traditional perception of vulnerability associated with a girl child (GNHC 2003: 28, Dorji 2012: 1-2 ). Therefore, women participated later in public affairs. Although there are an equal number of boy and girl child enrolments at the primary level, as Table 6 shows, girls are yet to catch up with boys in
secondary level enrolment (Helvetas 2010: 4, Education Statistics 2012: 44-49). In The Cigay Blog, March 2010, in past two decades only 2 percent of the Bhutanese were university graduates and few were women (Dorji 2010) and female male ratio in RUB is 2:3 (Education Statistics 2012: 35). This has resulted in less women having professional skills and being able to seek employment in the public sector.

Table 6: Boys’/girls’ education enrolment rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrolment</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Beyond Class 12 (secondary)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>95 %</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Education Statistics 2012 and Bhutan Living Standards Survey (BLSS) 2012 Report

Education is regarded as the gateway to women’s equality. Pangchen, the young woman politician from the National Assembly, was the first female university graduate from her Gewog in remote eastern Bhutan. Initially her parents did not send her to school for they needed her as farm help. She went to school at 13 years old, progressed well and supported her own higher education. She passionately advocated for girls’ education to attain equality, particularly, for adolescent and young female adults to continue education after child birth. She observed that girls experienced social stigma if they returned to school after having children but the boys were treated as normal students even though they were fathers: “My intention was to change the education policy if the policy did not permit girls to continue education after child birth.”

According to the (BLSS 2012) report, across all age group only about 55 percent of females are literate compared to 72 percent of males. Also, about 63 percent of women were reported to have no education as opposed to 47 percent of men. Further, (Education Statistics 2012) stated there are less girls enrolled in tertiary education with 2,071 girls out of 5,434 in the institutes and colleges under the RUB. This results in less women participating in paid employment including politics. Politics is exclusive as it needs a university degree to contest parliamentary elections. The low level of female literacy in general and the fewer women in university continues to rule out women from political participation and politics remains a special men’s club.
4.3 CULTURAL PRACTICES—WOMEN TREATED AS LESSER

Bhutan’s patriarchal structure is reinforced by power sharing, images, ideas and cultural practices, (Acker 1992: 567, Pateman 1989: 1989: 6, Millett 2000: 25, Humm1989: 54). It is apparent in explicit cultural practices. One such oppressive practice is the culture of “night hunting”, a popular casual sexual practice in which men sexually predate on women. The derogatively constructed phrase “night hunting culture” has its genesis in the Western equivalent of traditional dating and courtship practices translated into young men out strolling looking for a maiden (Chuki 2014: 64-65). Over the years “the night hunting” became a tool to sexually exploit women. The men who engage in it are from all sections of society ranging from King’s courtiers, elected Ministers, top government bureaucrats, civil servants, corporate and private employees to truck and taxi drivers and students. Samdrup commented that the “night hunting culture” cannot be talked about light heartedly:

In today’s context, it is very crude. It is so much a problem, a boy going after a girl climbing through the window; it is the government official who goes with the status, where the woman is automatically disadvantaged. It is kind of helpless in that sense.

Women are partly blamed for being gullible and listening to men’s false marriage proposals. Most of the victims of this culture are illiterate women dwelling in rural central and eastern Bhutan. Similar studies confirm this argument (RENEW 2007: 35, Penjore 2009: 113-116, Chuki 2014: 65). Some of these women are believed to easily accept casual sexual flings for fun or to have extra material resources including a cash income. Others involve in it seriously believing in men’s artificial marriage promises to escape the drudgery of farm work and poverty. A film titled “Gawa: the other side of moon” based on a real life story about this practice was produced and screened to raise awareness of the practice and how women go through physical and psychological suffering. Moreover, children are sometimes born outside marriage and this has ill effects on these children’s status in society. The director of the NCWC said:

…the NCWC has partly sponsored this movie. This was brought to our attention. A number of cases that we dealt with were about this kind, the promises were made saying I will marry and children were born.
These children were given the seemingly comical but derogative term, "rooster’s child" implying that their biological father left the mother’s home at the sound of the rooster’s crowing. In traditional agrarian society, people often listen to roosters to keep their time. This kind of patriarchal language has frequently used condescending words in local eastern dialects such as "cockte" meaning bastard. Hence, illegitimate children face discrimination.

Women and girls are not permitted to enter the Goenkhang, the inner sanctum of the monastery for fear of pollution because a menstruating female is regarded as “impure” and 97% of research participants (237 male and 432 female) in NCWC’s gender stereotype study respected this norm (NCWC 2008: 30-31 and 34). The prevailing belief is that a disaster will befall if a woman is permitted in the Goenkhang. Nyen Kha, meaning sensitive deities like Palden Lhamo (female protecting deity) and Yeshey Gyembo (male protecting deity) are empowered with vows by the Buddha to protect dharma, who resides in the Goenkhang. They are thought to be susceptible to impurities associated with birth, death and menstruating blood. This means that if a female has not walked straight from the delivery room and is not menstruating, she can enter the Goenkhang. In a conservative culture, a caretaker of a monastery, who is usually a monk, can never openly ask if a female is menstruating. So, females are barred from entering the Goenkhang. A male can enter at all times except when one has visited the dead or been to funeral or a birthing room. Dorji, an elderly male party worker, who has extensive knowledge about Buddhist culture stated:

Women’s permission to enter Goenkhang, can happen if they are clean and not menstruating. For example, if I visit a dead body and have impurity such as “ba dip, tsok dip, lue dip”, meaning impurities associated with dirt, and visit a Goenkhang, it will not be good for me. The existing belief is that there will be no timely rainfall and experience poor harvest. If one really understands such beliefs well, it will provide us security. But the reason why women are not permitted to enter Goenkhang is that, it is not known when women menstruate in terms of time, period etc… It is said that menstrual blood is harmful for the deities and therefore they will be annoyed. The second reason is that female birth is thought to be an inferior birth.

Such a belief, then, is more about culturally defined human impurities in deity worship than about looking down on females. These practices negatively affect
women’s status as female, and instead they become a biological phenomenon which is regarded as undesirable. The inability to enter the Goenkhang has exposed a conflict with a woman’s professional career. During June 2011’s Local Government elections, a woman candidate from Teowang Gewog in Punakha stated that rural voters may not elect a woman Gup because one of the roles of the Gups in Punakha is the cultural function carried out during famous Punakha Domchoe. The cultural role is perceived to be wearing monk’s robes and entering the Goenkhang during a warrior dance. In actuality, Gups do not even have to enter the Goenkhang but have to look after the warrior dancers. The Gup’s assistant called zimpon performs the dance. One of the traditional roles of Teowang Gup is this responsibility in Punakha Domchoe. Traditionally, it was all carried out by men. In BBS televised programme on women’s participation in June 2011’s Local Government elections, a woman voter, for example, commented that an elected woman Gup may not be suitable to perform the warrior dance. The Bhutanese have unquestioning faith in such beliefs and it will take a long time to change this societal mindset. These beliefs have been transmitted for generations and form part of people’s sentiments and relate to human security (Upreti 1996: 53. This is true for the rural society which is found to have retained its feudal cultural attitude.

One immediate delineated solution is to hire a professional traditional male dancer to do the job as it is a simple cultural role which is carried out once in a year. The Gup’s chief responsibility is leadership at the Gewog level in terms of managing Gewog’s overall development and running the local administration. The local cultural milieu is not ready for women Gups. Pem, a well-educated and worldly female senior bureaucrat, said she did not feel restricted by her inability to enter Goenkhag because she grew up with this belief right from childhood. Patriarchal cultural beliefs are deeply ingrained in people’s minds and accepted without question (Zangmo 2014: 1).

Research on Bhutan’s 2011 Local Government elections found that about 81 percent of 952 respondents said that the potential candidate’s gender would not

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10 A group of villages make up a Gewog. The near English translation is block. It is the lowest formal administrative unit in the governance structure in Bhutan.
11 The Gup is the elected executive of the GewogTshogdey or Gewog Council and makes decisions related to Gewog development. Currently, there is only one woman Gup out of 205 Gewogs.
12 This is local but a significant religious festival, where the king, members of the royal family, Je-Khenpo (Abbot of the central monastic body), the Prime Minister, and parliamentarians attend.
influence their voting. Irrespective of gender, capability of the candidate is seen as the top characteristic of a probable candidate, but leadership ability continues to be associated with men and not women (Dorji et al. 2012: 60).

In the workplace there is a prevailing stereotyped notion of suspecting a male boss and female staff to have illicit affairs. This is found to be challenging for female staff who may need to travel and have professional meetings. Dendup, a senior bureaucrat, for example, had removed a part of his wooden door and replaced it with glass so that all his meetings were open to other workers and there could be no suspicion about his actions when meeting with women colleagues. He laughed and said:

…with women I cannot be seen walking one to one over time because of society. This is why I have glass window. Anybody inside the room also can be safe from suspicious mind.

He said that people misinterpret professional relations and cause unnecessary rumours. He said with suspicious people around, it gets more difficult to travel with one woman than with a few of them. He added that he could not conduct meetings after work hours and scheduled meetings the following day to prevent malicious gossip. This may seem subtle and trivial but can have a harmful implication for women’s moral reputation as women are subjected to much closer scrutiny than men. The normative patriarchal attitude of perceiving women as subordinates and a source of men’s sexual gratification continues to prevail.

This study found that female support staff in the civil service face sexual harassment from their male colleagues and bosses. The challenge is the difficulty of proof. The experience of sexual harassment like flirting is so subtle that is hard to prove. In the process of proof, the woman’s moral character is examined more closely than the man’s action. Yuden, who is in her early 40s and now an aspiring politician, worked as a bureaucrat in an important government ministry and said she experienced it. She said:

People have this belief that all the female officers have affairs with their bosses. People will always made [make] a judgement on your character. But if it is male colleague, even if he is a non-performer, he may be a person who would really be a chamcha [sycophant] of his boss that kind of a comment will not be passed on a male.
She added that she underscored this through three gender studies but nobody paid any heed. Thus, the practice is to allow sexual harassment through silence. Both married and single women experience sexual harassment at public work places (RENEW 2007: 1 and 33) but women must remain silent for the sake of family (RENEW 2007: 1). Karuna, a young woman NGO employee, who works very closely with victims of domestic violence, said this is also true for victims of emotional violence.

The patriarchal cultural practices influence every aspect of private and public life. There are fewer women in civil service, parliament, corporate and private firms including civil society organisations (NCWC 2008: 11 and 45, Royal Civil Service Commission Report 2013, Dahlerup 2014: 16, ADB 2014: 32,71 ). Women are noticeable only in small enterprises. Traditionally, women are not visible and are less respected in the public space. This seems apparent in recent years. A leading woman bureaucrat at Tashi Chhoe Dzong, the headquarters of the civil administration, was once stopped and asked her to show her civil registration identity card on her way to attend the committees of secretaries’ meeting but her male colleagues easily passed through without any checking. The few women executives in the civil service also thought that male chauvinists in executive offices attempted to undermine their abilities but they stood their ground. Zam experienced this and said:

I had to make my issue because it was becoming too difficult. I gave piece of my mind and felt good about it.

Zam added that she was not given an opportunity to air her views and had to literally shout at her male colleague to make her point in a male dominated work environment. Woman like Zam are an exception. The study found that most women have low self-confidence and low self-esteem and are impeded from participating in public affairs and politics. Although some women have received education through formal and non-formal programmes, self-confidence building continues to remain an issue.

Most of the women interviewees and a few men interviewees alleged that women have to work extra hard to prove themselves at work to gain acceptance. However, both men and women thought that women were industrious, detailed, less corrupt and careful and committed to their professional responsibilities more than men. Generally, women were also found to refrain from financial embezzlement and
took good care of state funds. Despite the valuable additions that women bring to work, they are still associated with having less ability compared with men and are not recognised in the public domain. Women continue to be labelled incompetent in a masculine defined meritocratic workplace (Puwar 2004: 120, 145), Zema said that during her initial years in the civil service in the mid-1990s, her male colleagues were given a lot of responsibility but she was not and there was no mentoring and the male boss undermined women’s abilities. She added that she had to work extra hard to be acknowledged. However, as a result of improved government policies, male managers have become open to new ideas and accept a young junior officer’s proposal. Women managers in the government face the challenge of not being listened to by male staff that have conservative attitudes. Women staff while cooperative with female managers, sometimes engage in gossip behind their women colleagues’ backs. At least two senior women bureaucrats suggested that male officers found it difficult to report to female supervisors. Hence, female managers have to work more to earn respect from the male staff.

4.4 THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The existing Bhutanese legal system is silent on gender and often supports patriarchal structure (NCWC 2008: 23-24, Dahlerup 2014:12). On one hand, the highest legal reference, the Constitution ensures gender equality through articles on fundamental rights and principles of state policy, which state equality, protection of human rights and non-discrimination. On the other hand, the article on the institution of monarchy favours male heirs demonstrating patriarchal values. The article’s section 3 b in the Constitution states that a prince shall prevail over a princess in succeeding the throne (Constitution 2009: 4, 15 and 18). This means that there is a contradiction between the given basic equal gender rights and its application in the institution of monarchy. Tashi, the young bureaucrat, argued:

…that in institution of monarchy, who becomes the crown prince is what we have the last remaining symbols of gender disparity. The throne has to go to the first born and not to the first son.

This article devalues females and shows persistence of patriarchy. Raju, a senior academic engaged in teaching and research on politics remarked:
… it goes on to say that when we make decision, male decision will be better, a male leader will be better.

Bhutan has introduced The First-Past The -Post (FPTP) Bhutanese voting system which supports a single elected member for every single seat constituency (Elections Act 2008: 3). Some studies assert that a single member majority electoral system can be a structural barrier for equal gender participation but the issue of pre-selection for women to run as party candidates continues to dominate the discussion (Dahlerup 2014:12, IPU 2012:8, International IDEA 20).

4.4.1 The Citizenship Act and its Impact on Women

One of the critical legal instruments of Bhutan, the existing citizenship law, discriminates against women. The government has amended the citizenship law and in principle, it has equal application for men and women. If either a man and or a woman marry a non-Bhutanese, the parents cannot transfer their citizenship rights to their children. This is not clearly stated in the existing Citizenship Act but implied under the definition of citizenship through birth (The Bhutan Citizenship Act 1985: 2). Women appear to have experienced a negative impact in not being able to transfer their citizenship rights to their children. Hence, women rights are directly linked with children’s rights. Men seem to be able to access citizenship rights for their children even if they have a non-Bhutanese spouse. This appears to be a continuation of the 1958 Nationality Law, which defined Bhutanese nationality through the father’s identity (The Nationality Law of Bhutan 1958: 1). However, the citizenship issue is seen as more than a women’s problem for it concerns the broader issue relating to the nation’s sovereignty and immigration policy. It has implications for the nature of the country’s demographic composition which needs to be well balanced as a small nation state, geographically located between two Asian military, economic and population power houses, China and India. The nation’s sovereignty is more important than women’s rights.

Today, the law appears outdated. The concern expressed is that the citizenship law must change in line with changing times and at the same time protect the nation’s security. The Constitution’s article on fundamental rights recognises gender equality (Constitution 2009: 21). There seems to be a gap between the citizenship law which was enacted in 1985, prior to the introduction of democracy and enactment of the Constitution. At the time of this research it was found that under the
amended law, women are still placed one position below men. When a Bhutanese man marries a non-Bhutanese woman, the woman and children are placed in the census registration form number four. When a Bhutanese woman marries a non-Bhutanese man, the man and children are placed in form five. In this system, that higher the form number the lower the status. This indicates women’s inability to transfer citizenship rights to their children. In the USA up until 1934 women and in the UK until 1948 women lost their citizenship when they married foreigners. Women in the UK could attain their citizenship rights to transfer their citizenship to their husbands to enable them to reside in the UK only after 1983. However, British welfare policies did not completely acknowledge women’s position as individual citizens (Pateman 1989: 52).

In Bhutan, the 1985 Citizenship Act recognises those persons as citizens by birth if both the parents are Bhutanese. This implies that the law applies equally to both men and women. The Constitution’s article on citizenship has maintained major clauses of the 1985’s Citizenship Act (Constitution 2009:12-13). There is no mention of forms four and five. Instead, the act permits citizenship application through naturalisation at the age of 21 and 15 years of officially recorded residence in Bhutan for those who have either parent being Bhutanese. There is a gap between the law and its application. The delineated forms are form “kha-1” which is an application for naturalisation, “kha-2”, the personal details of the applicant which has the names of both the father and mother, and “kha” which is a written “oath of allegiance to the King, the country and the people of Bhutan” (Citizenship Act 1985: 2-7). Lhendup, a former judge and current politician, commented that different types of forms were created to determine Bhutanese nationality through segregation during the illegal immigration problem in southern Bhutan and it is anticipated such forms will be removed. This was the dominant view of the respondents.

The change seekers argued that the patriarchal belief of placing importance on the father must be changed as the mother has equal importance. The concept of family bloodline coming through the father is stated to be obsolete. The change must be applied to school enrolments and to school academic result sheets. At present, these papers demand the father’s name and signature. Yangden, a well-educated woman politician in her early 50s, said:
When a child born to a Bhutanese father gets to be a citizen why not a child born to a Bhutanese mother? I used to think that it was very unfair. For me I had been luckier than most. I had access to information. I accessed and approached the highest authority, the throne for my children’s citizenship.

Since censuses and citizenship are closely related to the nation’s security in terms of independence, the research found that a high degree of meticulous systems must be built to authenticate the real citizens without allowing it to negatively affect women and children. The Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs has been carrying out extensive work on building information and complex census recording issues to address citizenship problems. It found that there had been false applications and deceptive practices to attain citizenship. Non-Bhutanese individuals, for example, had attempted to activate dead individual’s citizenship identity cards to claim citizenship and used dishonest means to be Bhutanese. As a result, the government has decided to remain cautious about citizenship issues. Recently, the media covered such stories (Dema 2014) and the census continues as a major concern for the southern Bhutanese (Rinzin 2013).

There is disquiet that patriarchal law has created a category of sub-class within Bhutanese society. One such sub-national group is mothers and children without a legal father. The plight of children born out of wedlock, often referred to as fatherless or illegitimate children, is viewed as more of a social issue than women and children’s problem. In traditional society, these children are well looked after by the extended family consisting of grandparents, uncles, aunts, sisters, brothers and cousins including the community. The mother is not physically and emotionally pressured, hence, it was not a problem. Modern Western-modelled laws demand patriarchal identity to register these children for education, health care, employment and to apply for citizenship. This has caused distress to mothers who cannot trace the father and obtain a copy of the father’s identity card for the children’s education and citizenship. Most of the illiterate women living in rural central and eastern Bhutan face this difficulty. Eastern Bhutan has not progressed at the same rate as western and southern Bhutan in economic development (NSB 2014: 14-15, GNHC 2010c: 63).

The “night hunting” culture has contributed to the birth of numerous children born out of wedlock. These children are discriminated in school and society by the
name cockte or golapo, meaning bastard. There is an emerging thought that children must be allowed to be registered in their mother’s name for school enrolment. The Ministry of Education has permitted children to be enrolled in school in their mother’s name. Zam stated that one can never distrust one’s mother’s identity although a father’s identity can be doubted:

As for father, you can claim somebody to be your father but you can be 100 percent sure about who you mother is. If you say there is no gender disparity, the law also must not make a distinction like that.

There is a further worry that the fatherless children’s registration issue may have created artificial data about the existence of incest in the Bhutanese population. This is because the children are registered in the civil registration system in the name of their mother’s father, brother or uncle in the absence of the actual biological father. Such data make it imperative that children should be permitted to be registered in their mother’s name, if they are found to be genuine Bhutanese.

Some of these children are believed to be fathered by temporary foreign workers who mainly work in the country constructing hydropower plants. Most of the old and new power plants are located near villages and small towns. Dendup seemed concerned and said:

Definitely, there is a need to protect the identity but I think there must be specific laws not to encourage the foreigners to father. Money could lure an economically poor woman. There can be accidents which may lead to unwanted pregnancies.

These children may have to go through the naturalisation process to seek citizenship. It shows that the citizenship laws need revision and must include provisions in line with growing social issues which affect people.

This issue was brought to the limelight when an anonymous woman social activist using the pseudonym Keasang Chhoden threatened the then current DPT government to address the plight of fatherless children. Kesang Chhoden used the social network media site Facebook to address social justice for women who became victims of “night hunting” culture. She posted a letter to the Prime Minister on Facebook and demanded a deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) test for all the men who studied at Sherubste College in East Bhutan about 25 years ago. She claimed that the
boys impregnated about 178 women in Kanglung area alone. She even threatened the DPT government that if no action are taken, she and her team would “stone the college gate” on 8 March 2012, International Women’s Day (Wanghuck 2012: 1).

Kesang charged the Prime Minister, the Health and Education Ministers for their failed responsibilities of Sherubtse College affairs about 25 years ago as the former zonal administrator in eastern Bhutan and as the principal and vice principal of Sherubtse College, respectively. Her stance implies radical feminist’s ideas. In the small society, where most information is transmitted through the ‘grape vine’ mode of communication, and with the next elections due in May 2013, the Prime Minister promptly answered Kesang’s questions. He stated that the “problem is serious, faced by the entire society”, but he was sceptical about the actual numbers of victims (Wangchuk 2012: 1). This topic prompted an active online discussion on the Bhutan Observer, a local print newspaper’s website and many participated in the discussion. This issue is significant as father’s identity is required in obtaining a civil registration card, which is critical to education, employment and citizenship. These events show that Bhutanese women are joining together to inject positive social changes to better their lives. Democracy has had a positive impact on freedom of expression. Well-educated young Bhutanese women have dared to voice their rights using technology (Wangchuk 2012: 1). Recent research in gender and politics also shows the reappearance of interest in new types of activism by younger women using social media such as blogs (Waylen 2012: 28).

Many people, including some women, thought that Kesang Chhoden’s approach was radical and even militant. Kanglung is also a shared space for Indian border road workers who could be responsible for fathering some of the illegitimate children. One of the suggested solutions is to provide a strong college regulation orientation programme for young boys who join Sherubtse College. This would make the young boys aware of the deleterious effects of the “night hunting” culture. Alternatives include a comprehensive investigation to find out who the perpetrators are so that the children do not suffer and to seek the King’s welfare for citizenship as the King has the royal prerogative to grant citizenship (Constitution 2009: 8).

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13 I also participated in the discussion and made my suggestions using my real identity. Most of the participants used anonymous names. Since Bhutan is a conservative and a close country in terms of locating each other, perhaps, the discussion participants hesitated to reveal themselves for the fear of negative repercussion. Rightly so, the topic has been removed from the discussion forum after a couple of weeks.
Others believe that working with the existing state institutions and addressing women and children’s problems, instead of being confrontational and making very short lived sensational headlines in media which do not bear any results, is the preferred action. Some view Kesang’s strong stance as a high level of anger and frustration about a complicated issue. Kesang is a trendsetter in Bhutanese feminism which is little understood and often disliked by both men and women in Bhutanese society.

This also seems to be true for South Asian women. Mitra (2011: 196) contends that educated middle and upper class urban Indian women expressed reservation against feminism. A recent discourse on feminism in South Asia shows that in India, for instance, the word feminist is an abhorrent word (NDTV You Tube video 2014). Both men and women have argued that feminism by Western definition may not bode well for the Bhutanese socio-cultural context. Bhutanese feminist theory must be embedded in its socio-culture and evolve slowly, to win over the mainstream view and avoid earning a bad name for feminists. Samdrup, the senior bureaucrat, commented thus:

I think people talking about it, raising issues and convincing is very important. What form the activism takes place is a reflection of society. You are saying about this woman who wants to stone the gates of Sherubtse, saying or behaving like that is the product of our own society because the problem that they are dealing with is equally crude and difficult problem. I don’t have a problem with activism as an issue. I think it has to be done in a right way, with some sensitivity and taste. Then you get more respect also.

4.4.2 The Legitimacy of Prostitution and Abortion and its Impact on Women

Prostitution and abortion are two emerging women’s issues which are problematic for many women. Prostitution and abortion are illegal (Penal Code 2004: 67, NCWC 2008: 25). These topics are sensitive in a deeply religious country but the study found that it is contested by those interviewed. Some women felt that women have the right over their bodies and supported the possibility of the legalisation of prostitution and abortion in Bhutan.

The view for legalisation argues that women have the right to be protected by laws. Women who work in sex related jobs suffer from clients’ physical and mental
abuse in the absence of police protection. They are also sexually exploited by pimps. They cannot keep the entire earnings and have to share a large portion of their cash income with the pimp who supplies the customers. Since prostitution is illegal, the sex workers engage in sex business in hideouts. They do not report the abuse to the police for the fear of being caught. Thus, women are doubly affected. Choden aptly argued that “the illegality of it makes men abuse women.”

Some feminists assert that prostitution is work like any other employment and that prostitutes must have their trade rights (cited in Waters 2007: 261, Tong 2009: 287-288, Dean 2010: 151). Prostitutes in Australia, for example, have voiced their need for the decriminalisation of prostitution, enhancement of their work environment, raised public health implications and have fought against violence. Thus, decriminalisation of prostitution has been attained in some Australian jurisdictions (Pateman 1988: 190-191, 200, Rea 1997: 300).

In Bhutan, prostitutes are criminalised although they look after their young children and elderly families through this profession. There was a story of such an example where five women caught as prostitutes were actually supporting their families (Dema 2012: 3, Bhutan Observer 2012:1). These women were divorced, had children and were unemployed. The NCWC’s Director felt that the issue of prostitution is within the mandate of the police and not within the NCWC’s jurisdiction. However, the institution supports women who seek assistance if they are forced into prostitution or their rights are violated during the course of a police investigation. The Director commented that the NCWC would like to carry out a study to build actual research data to validate the nature of the importance of the topic. She thought that prostitution was not an issue that was widely discussed. However, it can be argued that prostitution is illegal and carries a negative cultural connotation. In reality, the demand for sex creates a commercial supplier. Yet prostitutes, who are mostly women, are demeaned and have a low social status in society.

Young girls also engage in prostitution so they can have additional cash income and buy luxurious consumer products. Choden commented that the NCWC rescued a young girl who had been sexually assaulted and provided shelter and a job but she was unable to be completely integrated into mainstream society. She appeared to have become used to her engagement in the sex business:
She has come to a stage where she enjoys and cannot do without it. We counselled her every day. Finally, we could not do. Our young are so materialistic and enjoy the pleasures of it. It is a source of money and that money can do wonders for their desires. They get good clothes, good food, entertainment and whatever luxuries they want. For them it is easy, they don’t have to toil hard. Once in a while she will run away, be with somebody for a few hours and come back, oh!

The young girls are involved in commercial sex in urban centres. They are observed to work at night and rest during the day. They are often abused in the absence of the law. Some of these young girls work in popular dancing bars called drayang. However, under the disguise of dance, the clients buy sex. The clients include Ministers, businessmen and powerful bureaucrats from the civil service. This issue was discussed in parliament. The Minister for Labour and Human Resources decided to offer training in tailoring for those girls who worked in drayangs as another avenue for employment. The girls showed no interest at all for they earned more money at drayangs. Only one girl received tailoring training as the rest of the girls questioned the Minister’s alternative employment programme. Therefore, the pro-legalisation view argues that prostitution can be treated as a licensed commercial enterprise that pays tax to the government, the sex workers would be subject to regular health checks and it would protect young girls and women sex workers from violence. This also allows for monitoring of the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS. The main challenge is whether the female sex workers would be ready to declare their occupations, as prostitutes are lowly treated in society.

It has been argued that legalisation of abortion is essential to save young women and adolescent girls from seeking unsafe clinics in border towns. As a safe guard there must be a good reason for abortion. The data showed that abortion is conducted under the name of D&C (Dilation and Curettage-medical procedure) within the Bhutanese hospitals for those who have access to this facility. The government report acknowledges the increasing trend of abortion (GNHC 2010b: 11). The majority of the women who seek abortion in unsafe clinics in nearby border towns are from the lower socio-economic groups. Dendup brought this issue out and said:
…but those people who have connections here (avail it) and do it (and) is called D&C [Dilation and Curettage—medical procedure]. Unfortunately, people who do not have the connections go to Jiagoan, pay money and risk their lives.

Those against legalisation of abortion argue that the source of prostitution and abortion needs to be addressed. Legalisation of abortion is seen as an unvirtuous action as killing is against the basic Buddhist precept of nonviolence. Instead, this view advocates instilling values in children and youth through education and counselling services, eradication of poverty, access to family planning and reproductive health care like simple access to contraceptives. It is equally argued that legalisation of prostitution may risk opening a flood-gate and spread HIV/AIDS and STDs, and encourage the growth of commercial sex. This view holds that commercial sex may disturb the institution of marriage. Therefore, the state agencies like the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources and NGOs like RENEW and Tarayana should address women’s employment problems, particularly for single and vulnerable women so that they may have a livelihood. There is a need for a proactive institution to care for unwanted children who can be put up for adoption. The need to revitalise and build the traditional extended family care system is named as a relevant solution so that children are not aborted or abandoned. A society that does not support unwanted children lacks compassion. Thus, it is important that Bhutan build a care system on its Buddhist and GNH roots. At present, RENEW has a transit shelter for women who suffer from domestic violence. The shelter also looks after children who come with their mothers.

4.5 CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that most of the women participants found Bhutan’s patriarchal structure instrumental in being treated as a lesser human being. The negative gender stereotypes affected women’s self-confidence building and hence a failure to recognise and practice leadership abilities in public affairs, and constrained their exercise of full citizenship rights. Conversely some men did not realize the privileged position they enjoyed and their ability to direct public discourse and benefit from full citizenship rights. There is a need to consider the way in which the legal framework continues to endorse men’s advantaged position and apply the law equally to men and women. Therefore, women’s participation in public affairs and
politics under patriarchal structures and the legal frameworks that sustain them is challenging.

The way forward lies with educated women who seek to contribute to the nation through political life. They can become agents of change to contest, discuss and alter power distribution, processes and practices (Hinterberger 2013: 7). They have the ability to infuse small positive reforms through existing domestic institutions (the parliament, ECB, NCWC, political parties, BNEW and media) and international organisations (such as the UN Women, UNDP and supportive overseas organisation like DIPD, a Danish political institution) to advance women’s empowerment. In March 2012, ECB, NCWC and UN Women organised a workshop for elected women leaders at local and national levels. Women leaders named political experience as the key for more women to join politics and allow them not only to break the myth of difficulties associated with the political profession but also to reach out to the larger society and address societal problems. Women must initiate, encourage and support each other to join politics and break patriarchal conditions. Thus, state support for women’s education, training and advocacy is the long and short term solutions to enhance women’s participation in politics.

Further, women across the board feel that there is lack of role models for woman seeking political office. Women who have attained the highest leadership in the government and constitutional bodies have either been single or married without children or been married to government Ministers or Secretaries. The ideal role model is someone who is married, has children and holds a leadership position in the public office through individual merit. Bhutan’s first woman Minister, Dorji Choden fulfills this criteria – she is a Minister, a wife and a mother. However, such a requirement is patriarchal as the woman is seen in terms of her relationship to others not for her own talents. There are women leaders in the political sphere who lead their countries without spouses and children (Wright and Holland 2014: 466, Thomas and Adams 2010: 106, 127-128).

For Bhutan, there is a need to challenge the patriarchal structures, attitudes and laws by demonstrating that women can and must make a contribution to the wellbeing and advancement of society. The way forward is to draw inspiration from former and serving women politicians and to look to a future in which Bhutan is enriched by the skills of its clever, educated and politically aware women.
Chapter 5: The Gendered Division of Labour—Equal But Different

Patriarchal values leading to unequal treatment of men and women are revealed in the gendered division of labour, masculine labour practices and challenges in addressing women’s empowerment. In the Bhutanese context men and women receive, in principle equal educational, health care, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities (UNICEF 2006: 10, GNHC 2010: 12, ADB 2014: 4). Bhutan does not have conspicuous gender inequity like in the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal and Bangladesh in the South Asian region (NCWC 2008: 5, Helvetas 2010: 3, Upreti 1996: 52). However, Bhutan has its own share of home-grown gender inequity rooted in its local socio-cultural context (NCWC 2008: 6-7, Zangmo 2014: 1, Dahlerup 2014: 14).

Embedded in liberal political ideology, the notion of ‘equal but different’ stresses equal rights in all spheres of life (Eccleshall et al. 2003: 18, Heywood 2007: 23, Jaggar 1988: 33). ‘Equal but different’ then is about attaining political, social and legal rights as women, not imitating men but recognising women’s unique attributes (Pilchar and Whelehan 2004: 37, Cornwall 2003: 1337-1338, Friedan 2001: 43). This underpins a concept that men and women are differently equal.

Most women participants thought that the biological differences between men and women is an issue (Table 7). Also, more women viewed Bhutanese labour practices as patriarchal in nature and divided by gender. However, all men and women respondents agreed on the need for women’s empowerment.
Table 7: Participants’ perceptions of gender divisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological Differences</td>
<td>13 (76%)</td>
<td>24 (92%)</td>
<td>37 (86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour Practices</td>
<td>13 (76%)</td>
<td>18 (69%)</td>
<td>31 (72%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Empowerment</td>
<td>17 (100%)</td>
<td>26 (100%)</td>
<td>43 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1 BIOLOGY—THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

Although men and women are born as equal human beings, the innate biological difference determines their status and functions in society. Society has assigned roles based on biological differences often in men’s favour. Women’s key roles and special traits are not recognised. This view argues that the underlying principle of men’s and women’s roles have been retained from men’s muscular power during the cave days (Pomeroy 2004: 1, Epstein 1988: 60, Mitchell 1971: 102). Traditionally, men’s physical strength enabled them to go out and do outdoor work whereas women stayed home and supported the family. This resulted in men’s dominant participation in the public sphere and women’s in the private realm. Men are found to be better at more physically demanding work than women. Bhutanese society has not changed the fundamentals of traditionally defined men and women’s functions. The public-private dichotomy connecting men with the public and women with the private can be attributed to the “natural” design of male-female status and functions originating in the hunter-gatherer society (Pomeroy 2004: 1, Epstein 1988: 60). Therefore, gendered division of labour is central to the ‘equal but different’ debate as it helps to mask the manner in which gendered segregated work disadvantages women (Beneria 1979: 204, Martin 2003: 343, Tancred 1995: 12).

According to the Bhutan Living Standards Survey (BLSS 2012) report, about 70 percent of the Bhutanese live in rural areas. This means that physical muscle is valued for subsistence labour intensive agriculture, which is the main livelihood. However, women participants in this research stated that even in urban centres educated women naturally felt responsible to look after family affairs. Most women
agreed that women easily take on work related to home although some men share household responsibilities.

However, women’s child bearing and rearing role, which has a large impact on shaping physically and mentally healthy citizens, has not received societal recognition. This is also true for women’s inherent positive qualities which are not publicly acknowledged. Women’s maternal instinct of caring for others is seen as a special value which relates to women being more focused at work, better at people management due to their ability to empathise with fellow workers and caring for subordinates. Women are also argued to possess strong moral conviction and respect integrity. These traits demonstrate the additional value they can bring in the public sphere and politics. Jangchub, a strong, senior former woman bureaucrat and aspiring politician said:

I worked in revenue and customs, the job is very very susceptible to corruption and no matter how good my male colleagues might be, I always find that our women, especially, revenue and customs, we are very strong women, they sort of seem to have inner strength in keeping up their principles which men seem to compromise much.

Jangchub thought that she was a successful mother and a manager for her ability to care for her colleagues and subordinates and teaching her children to be good human beings. Drawing on her mothering and professional experience, she was passionate about promoting ethical politics based on compassion and care for the nation, as she found it to be a sustainable approach of managing a nation.

Further, two founding older male members of the DCT said that women were more compassionate than men and more women candidates were needed in parties. When they referred to their female party president, Lily Wangchuk, J.N. Sharma and Tandin Tshering related women with attributes of compassion and love “… a GNH country needs woman candidates, who can govern country with more compassion and love. A paradigm shift needs women’s care, love and courage as we have enough males ruling us” (cited in Wangmo 2012: 1). They also commented that Lily’s “open discussion” style leadership may help practice “participatory governance.” This suggests ideals that women can bring to governance.
On the contrary, Yangden, a strong and senior woman politician in the National Council, argued that men and women must respect and complement each other based on nature’s creation implying biologically driven gendered based roles:

I feel that a man should complement a woman and a woman should complement a man. By doing that, we will complement Mother Nature. Mother Nature has created man and a woman for a purpose. Physically and mentally we are different.

However, she felt that women are mentally stronger than men and can bear stress. She cited her mother and sister who made decisions for the brothers.

5.1.1 Women’s Double/Triple Burden in an Unfriendly Political Environment

The concept of women’s double or triple burden refers to the roles women must play in society – the productive and reproductive roles and the task of ensuring “socialisation of children” – all continue to overburden women (Mitchell 1971: 100-101, Walby 1990: 20-21). In Bhutan’s context, a few men and most women participants in the study considered that looking after family had prevented many well-educated and capable women from joining and participating in the political life of Bhutan. Only a few women had their family’s support to opt for a political career. The biological difference between men and women has created a gap. Women’s child-bearing and rearing function is named as the most difficult challenge in a political career. The political profession demanded time away from family most of the time. A parliamentarian is obliged to visit constituencies twice a year. This proved difficult for young women parliamentarians who were mothers with young children. Single and senior women politicians who had adult or adolescent children did not face this difficulty. Also women who had supportive husbands experienced a lower degree of stress than those who did not have such assistance.

The Bhutanese geographical terrain is harsh and politicians are expected to walk across huge rugged mountains to meet up with their constituents (Appendix F). Most of the villages in the 47 constituencies are located in remote parts of rural Bhutan. Three of the first cohort of women parliamentarians in the National Assembly had children during their tenure and faced difficulties. During pregnancy, they were unable to walk to these remote villages which were located about one to two days’ walk from the nearest motor-able road. They were challenged to juggle
carrying a breast fed infant during the constituency tours and to conduct endless meetings in different villages and Gewogs. Both the mother and the child suffered physical hardship during the journeys.

Among the politicians, one woman said that she had to leave her breast feeding child during an intensive political campaign period in 2008. It was very rigorous as she was forced into a door-to-door campaign because people refused to attend her meetings. She was campaigning against an older, experienced and intelligent male Minister. In addition, she had to store her extracted breast milk in a feeding bottle for her six-month old child who was looked after by her cousin during the day when she was visiting her constituencies. In the evenings, she rushed to her cousin’s place to feed and care for her child. Two other women politicians commented that they hired full-time female baby sitters and had their mothers’ and relatives’ support. However, when the child got sick they had to attend to their young children and were thoroughly exhausted.

One woman politician said that she returned to work only two weeks after child delivery and had attended a scheduled meeting with the King the very next day after her delivery. She could not avail herself of her entitled three months maternity leave and her first child suffered from being underweight as a result of inadequate care. Despite this, she did not miss constituency trips as her priority was commitment to the people. She attended all long hour meetings during the day and tried to spend time with her young children at night. Her seven-month old child was fed Lactogen formula milk when she was at work and breast milk only at night when she returned home. She stated that a political career is different from the civil service where one can be substituted during child birth. Instead, the political profession demanded a high degree of accountability to the electorate. The demanding rural voters often failed to understand the human demands on their electoral candidates and politicians.

Three women politicians who were mothers expressed that problems related to child bearing and rearing were typically women’s difficulties for men did not experience them. They did not have to go through physical pain related to pregnancy, could easily attend lengthy meetings, parliamentary sessions and complete their field tours on time for their spouses cared for their young children while they were at work. In fact, one of the young male politicians became a father during his tenure in office but nobody noticed it as there was very little change in his professional life.
Instead, a woman politician said that some men politicians made condescending comments when she had two children during her term in office stating that she was quick in having babies. This is not simply women politicians’ experience in an emerging democracy like Bhutan. Women politicians in an advanced democracy like Australia experience the challenge of balancing political career and family work. Women have faced repeated criticism about neglecting their husbands and children even from their colleagues in the parliament (Sawer and Simms 1993: 141, 143, Crabb 2014).

However, there were a few male politicians who were gender sensitive. Kinga, a young male politician, acknowledged this difficulty and said:

… it was touching to see her [Deki, young female politician] responding to concerns of the constituency by carrying her baby daughter and her domestic helper crossing a huge mountain. During her travel, she had sprained her leg while crossing a huge mountain and saw her having a very difficult time with a domestic helper.

Similarly, Tobden, a senior male DNT party proponent, member and a former PDP candidate, expressed that politics demanded a lot of time. He said “… the number of time, you spend away from family in the villages, with your party people, discussing and debating and takes away a lot of time …” from the family suggesting an unconducive nature of work. Thus, men and women’s problems arise due to biological differences even though they are viewed as equal. This difference is critical as it overburdens women. Dema, a young women politician, who has two young children commented:

Another challenge is constituency tour during pregnancy. I was about eight months pregnant and wanted make a final round of constituency tour before delivery. I was afraid that I may not be to able make constituency visit after my delivery. One village was about four hours by foot for normal villagers and I take about six hours. The walk involved mostly climbing. I could not walk. I discussed with the local leaders and they told me that the people are willing to come down to meet me. I was advised to serve lunch and some refreshment. The whole day, I waited by the roadside for the people to come. When the meeting was over, I served lunch and some drinks. One or two who did not support me managed to speak to the media. A male journalist from Kuensel wrote a story about me stating that after the elections I made
people walk to meet me instead of meeting people in their village. When the King visited my constituency, I could not be present as I was on the verge of child delivery. My people expected me to be there. My three male colleagues were present. I was the only one who was absent. If I am not a mother, I would not face this problem. This is specifically women’s problem.

In addition, the political work environment is thought to not be women friendly and does not meet women’s practical needs. Women politicians have to hire a close female companion during their rural tours to walk with male party workers. A single female with several male travel attendants could risk breeding malicious gossip which would tarnish her personal reputation. This is particularly true for public figures like politicians. The prevailing cultural stereotype prevents single or married men and women who are not a married couple from walking together in public. The existing culture appears to be the source of inequality. Choezom, a senior woman politician in her early 50s, said:

… as a woman the biggest challenge is really the physical environment, the safety and vulnerability of woman, it is really a physically challenging work, travelling with all male, trying to meet mostly male.

Pangchen, a young woman politician who was born and bred in her village and lived a physically difficult rural life acknowledged this limitation of the male dominated rural political environment:

Most of people who walked with me are men. The party’s Dzongkhag and Gewog coordinators are men. The challenge of walking with men is taking toilet breaks during long journey. I kept a fellow woman party worker for practical purpose like toilet break.

There are no toilets and women have to make an extra effort to find a practically secluded place in the forest as an alternative. It is easier for male as it is less demanding to identify a place. Usually, most public offices do not have different toilets for females, especially, in Dzongs (literally meaning fortress), where most of the government offices are located in the country. Also, there are few female toilets in Parliament House. Interestingly it is stated that there are few female toilets in Westminster (Appignanesi 2013: 119). Despite practical difficulties, Pangchen opined that male party workers were more influential than females and they had to
select the most powerful one to hold voters’ support. This meant working and travelling with dominant male party workers in her constituency. All male politicians commented that travel and choice of sleeping venue were not a problem for them except in a few cases of inability to make a continuous strenuous physical journey and safety from wild animals. They were free from extra responsibilities related to choice of travel companion and taking care of young children.

In spite of challenging political ambience, women politicians were found to be less hierarchical, and accessible, more approachable and comfortable in discussion of family problems than men. Men and women voters called up women representatives late at night to seek help. Women’s accessible nature seems to negatively affect women. Some women politicians said that women are sensitive, emotional and cannot bear the political profession’s pressure from different sections of the electorate, media and demanding voters. Dema, a young and passionate woman politician, said:

… there are voters who directly challenge stating, we voted for you, you are not able to meet our aspirations and we will see in 2013. Men are able to tolerate it but since women are emotional it can be difficult.

Women parliamentarians face heightened expectations in a young democracy where most voters are politically immature in terms of a political dialogue between representatives and the electorate. The voters were said to constantly pressurise four women parliamentarians in the National Assembly ranging from serious issues related to their party and personal pledges to that of seemingly petty yet bothersome requests like personal monetary support, selling their agriculture and handicraft products, seeking children’s employment and obligation to offer monetary and human resource assistance during expensive Buddhist death rites. The rural voters used the traditional gift giving culture to receive regular gifts in cash or kind during their constituency tours. All four women said that men colleagues faced similar stress but voters demanded more from women because of their easy accessibility.

The four elected women from the Council did not face this difficulty as they had no party workers to support. The Council is a non-partisan entity of the parliament. Eight elected women from the Council and Assembly, one woman party coordinator, two former women candidates from the PDP and three aspiring women candidates including two women party leaders named the harsh physical
environment as a major challenge in the political profession. Further, Tobden, a male politician in DNT, thought that:

… women are even more reluctant when they realise all the problems faced in politics [with] the uncertainty of politics and the no security of a job and the fairly stringent set up by the Election Commission makes it very difficult for people to enter politics.

Women can be forced to make a choice between family demands and their caring responsibilities and a desire for a political career.

5.2 WOMEN’S WORK AT HOME

Gender is used as the basis to assign distinct roles to men and women (Beneria1979: 205, Thane 1992: 300, Brines 1994: 652-656, Gilding 1997:188). Women continue to shoulder responsibilities relating with child bearing and rearing and remain the primary care givers and managers of household chores. Such work continues to entrench them in the private sphere. Any move by women into the public sphere does not lessen the burden but household responsibilities continue.

This study found that most working women engaged in professional jobs faced the challenge of striking a balance between domestic and professional work. Women leaders in districts face the difficulty of managing domestic responsibilities in the absence of helpers, particularly, when visiting officials call on them at home. Raju, a senior male academic engaged in teaching and researching on gender, stated:

If a child is sick, the first and foremost is the woman, the mother who will take care. If someone goes out and leaves the child with the father, if woman is working and is out, the society raises eyebrow. The family itself seems to be pulling women back.

Bhutanese society places child bearing and rearing responsibility solely on women. Pangchen commented that her great grandmother had 14 children, her grandmother 12 children and her own mother six children. She has four children. She argued that frequent pregnancy and childbirth derails women from participating in productive work, as child bearing and rearing, per se, becomes a full time job. Dechen, a young academic woman, thought that young mothers have to compromise a professional career:
I did not have to make compromises on my professional life as a wife and a daughter. I had to make a lot of compromises being a mother. I don’t think there is balance between being a mother and in your professional life. I think you need to be a mother first.

Some women claimed that women and men must carry out work which they are good at. This view accepts the existing gender division of labour which defines that women are better at care giving jobs. Zam, a senior woman bureaucrat, has three grown up children and said:

I believe as a woman I do a better job of bringing up of children of giving them the feeling of security. By nature we are more nurturing. So there are some things that I rather do myself than delegate to my husband.

Gender roles are ingrained in women’s minds and it takes time to change. Similarly Tshendu, a young and independent woman documentary film maker engaged in advocating for women’s and children’s issues commented that:

The fact that women themselves carry the home responsibilities more dearly is what tears women apart especially if they have family but they are very capable and qualified. But they feel that it shouldn’t come at the expense of the children, the family.

Women continue to place importance on mothering and nurturing and have difficulty of balancing the two. Feminist scholars argue that even the most emancipated women remain committed to domestic work and feel blessed if her spouse shares it (Friedan 2001: 344, Bryson 2007: 41). Further, the “dominant cultural climate” which stresses women’s fundamental role to be a mother is named as one of the obstacles for women to participate in politics even in a western country like Italy. Active political engagement is seen as an additional responsibility along with family work (Re 2005: 40).

Men remain free of two roles – child bearing and rearing. Working women are professionally and personally burdened. Although both husband and wife have full time paid employment, it is the woman who has to shoulder the extra burden of household chores. Shreejana, a senior woman politician in the National Assembly, pointed out the essence of the existing gender division of labour:
Our personal experience shows that if both husband and wife are working, the husband will sit on sofa and watch television but the woman has to go straight away to the kitchen and start cooking once both are at home.

Shreejana’s husband is an exception for he is a house husband and supports her with domestic chores – cooking, cleaning and spending time with their children. He was her driver and field companion during her campaign and in constituency visits. In recent years, there is a trend for young couples to share household chores. Dema’s and Deki’s husbands assist them with household chores, babysitting, children’s school work, preparing children for examination and grocery shopping. In addition, Dema and Pangchen have a full time helper who provides care for their young children and does domestic work. Deki’s parents live with her and her mother cares for her young child.

Two male academics posited that gender is not about creating a tension between men and women or women against men. Instead, it is about building a harmonious relationship between men and women based on each other’s strengths and weaknesses. Pema, a male academic in his 40s involved in research on gender and politics in local government elections, insisted feminism must be aligned with men and women’s inherent characteristics. The gendered division of labour then continues to be based on the biological differences between men and women. For women to be able to move into the public sphere their labour should not be predicated on their biology.

KCD Productions, a private media women’s issues advocacy firm, aired information about sensitisation on the socialisation of boys and girls that was along an equal gender division of labour. This was part of a televised radio programme to encourage women to participate in the 2013 elections from September until December 2012. Through a cartoon animation, a story about a boy named Dorji and girl called Pema was told. The story starts with how Dorji and Pema were brought up at home in terms of Dorji’s exclusion and Pema’s inclusion in household chores including babysitting. As a child Dorji was shown to have plenty of free time to do his homework and play, while Pema was burdened by school work, household errands and looking after her little baby sibling. In addition, as an adult, Dorji has a progressive career, but Pema fails to climb the career ladder because of her additional roles. The story sent a strong message through Pema and Dorji about the
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equal sharing of child rearing and bearing responsibilities by men and women. Dorji was shown taking care of his small child. The story also indicated the need to create an enabling environment for Pema to have a progressive career like Dorji through adequate day care centres. Thus, the programme showed how women experience a triple burden consisting of productive, reproductive and community service roles. These are often taken for granted in the traditional cultural context.

5.3 LABOUR PRACTICES—WOMEN IN THE WORLD OF MEN

Unequal organisational labour practices demonstrate “beliefs, images, stereotypes based on gender, race and class” (Acker 2009: 214, Broussine and Fox 2001: 27, Zetlin 2014: 252 and 264). In Bhutan masculine images, values and norms entrenched in gender define labour practices in public organisations (ADB 2014: 69 and 108, NCWC 2008: 25, Dahlerup 2014:13). In masculine dominated public organisations, the existing culture is to emulate male models rather than recognise, appreciate and exhibit womanly virtues. Older women with good education, substantial work experience and overseas exposure have coped well in the male controlled public sphere. Puwar explains that women from elite families or an academic background will be able to adapt very easily in a male world (2004: 127). This also applies in the Bhutanese context. At least two senior women executives in the bureaucracy have learnt to be open-minded and adapted to men’s foul language, crude jokes and aggressive nature. Pelzom, a former bureaucrat and now a commissioner in a constitutional body, stated:

You have to be a little open minded because every time people will have to monitor what they speak, how they speak because you take offence for every little thing, then it doesn’t make for good networking. You lose the bigger picture because you are so particular about small things. So, I think there is a bit of give and take and is a process of maturity.

This means that men do not accept women as themselves but through their lens and women must attempt to accommodate the male world to survive and maintain a career. Choden, a senior woman bureaucrat exhibited confidence and said:

I never felt small or incapable as them. I always thought that I delivered my goods as good as them and I also fought back as good as them.
However, there are a few women who have worked exceptionally well as women in a highly male dominated work environment. These women demonstrated excellence in personal and professional competence and ethics. Dasho Neten Zangmo, current Chairperson of the Anti-Corruption Commission, is one of them and said:

I never looked up to another woman as the role model and never tried to be a man to survive among the men.

Instead, she believed in honesty, humility, commitment and fairness to do her job well. She worked as tertiary educator, foreign and cabinet secretaries in the government and is one of the highest ranking women leaders who have received the Druk Thuksey Medal (The Heart Son of Bhutan), the highest civilian award bestowed by the King with title Dasho, meaning excellent. She is also a diligent spiritual person in terms of being a consistent Buddhist meditation practitioner. Zam, a senior woman bureaucrat, who works closely with senior men bureaucrats stated:

The tendency is that where there is male dominance, there is always a crack, like sexist jokes and things like that, they do. But you put your foot down and say that this type of joke is not acceptable, [and] then they will not do. When you are in male dominated areas, you have to be a little more aggressive than you would be. You have to make sure that you make your points very clear and you are heard.

Personal strength and hard work enable some women are able to assert themselves and set their own standards in public life to maintain a career in the public sector. The country’s only woman Secretary, Aum Sangay Zam, recognised the importance of being accepted as a woman by men rather than avoiding them although it demanded extra efforts. During the 10th five year development plan’s midterm review meetings conducted in all 20 Dzongkhags in 2012, she travelled in a bus with 10 male Secretaries although she had the choice to journey with women staff:

As the only woman Secretary I felt even more important to sit with them and not go where other women are, then somehow, you weaken your position.

Younger women with less job experience and overseas exposure have experienced difficulties in being women and working most of the time with males. In
order for them to be included, they accepted and even imitated male behavioural traits such as foul language and crude sexist jokes. Such a predicament is recognised as “the disorder of women” (Pateman 1989: 4). Women’s inclusion in the public realm is structured along their bodily often sexual distinctiveness which differs from men. It is women’s “sexual embodiment” which hinders them from “enjoying the same political standing as men” (Patemen 1989: 4). Dema and Deki, the two young women parliamentarians in the National Assembly, stated that men forgot to see that they were women. Deki experienced it and said:

Since I recently graduated from the college and hesitate to use vulgar language I felt awkward. But they treat me like men and are not sensitive about my existence.

In the beginning, Deki was intimidated and uncomfortable and tried to avoid conversation and work-related travel with men. Later, she maintained a strict outlook and men treated her seriously. Dema added that she was lonely when she avoided conversation with men. She felt excluded from mainstream discussions and was forced to adapt a men’s style of socialising and working:

I am a changed human being now. In the beginning, when men cracked dirty jokes in the presence of women, I was offended and thought that they do not know how to respect women even when they are old. I clearly showed that I was annoyed and even told them that I was angry. My interest and nature had to be changed as there was no choice.

It is women as the minority who have to accept the domination of men, as the majority, to fit into their environment. Dema said that she often looked at Dasho Nenet Zangmo and Aum Sangay Zam as role models for aspiring women leaders. Women politicians like Dema accepted men’s ways of functioning for practical convenience but idealised successful women leaders.

During the first democratically elected government, DPT’s tenure, the first woman Dzongda was appointed. She stated that in the first few days of office she felt disoriented in a male dominated work place and was made to feel excluded. This is because the “social contract in the political realm” rejected “emotion, bodies [women’s bodies] nature, particularity and affectivity” (Puwar 2004: 142, Pateman 2007: 4, Mitchell 1971: 123-129, 131,-133). In the districts where there are only a few women officers it was normal to feel out of place in the beginning. She
mentioned that the educated men could not accept her as their boss. During her first five months, the men refused to follow her directions, undermined her knowledge about *driglam namzha* (code of conduct or etiquette), decision-making abilities and even refused to call her by her title:

If I was male, there would be no hesitation to address me as Dasho [literally meaning excellent but applied as a title] But since I am a female, there was so much hesitation to address me as Dasho. They called me Dasho, madam, aum and ama, all sorts of names.

For change to occur men need to recognise the changing role of women particularly where women enter traditionally male dominated organisations (Puwar 2004: 141, Pateman 1989: 6, Moreton-Robinson 2007: 246).

Several women parliamentarians had a similar view. People took time to refer to them by the title Dasho but easily called their male colleagues Dasho without hesitation. The lady governor said that she felt proud that she proved these assumptions wrong through her fair and transparent leadership. She added that she tried to understand the issues, obtain feedback from the people and made evidence-based objective decisions. She named patriarchal mindset as the most difficult challenge:

So far whatever it is they have been under the male Dzongdas and they been so used to listening to male Dzongdas. It took quite a while for them to see that a female Dzongda can equally and in fact, perform even better than the male Dzongda because the way we see is different.

Further, some women respondents stated that some male politicians engaged in playful affairs with women voters to win the elections. Pangchen, the young woman politician, commented that her male contender was flirtatious during the political campaign:

My contender was a man and several young girls in villages were attracted to him. We women get straight to business and do not flirt around and men do.

In retrospect, my male colleagues commented that being man was certainly an advantage to attract women voters.

Men continue to display forceful behaviour by exhibiting their rough traits in public without respecting women’s differing attributes. Men fail to respect women as
equal but different partners in business. Zhiwa, the young woman Councillor, commented that she often trusted her intuition and followed it in public dialogues with men and adapted well. She said:

… we need to understand men’s psyche. Our men folks are very egoistic. You have to build on your feminine intuition and adaptability and move along.

Women have learnt to use their special characteristics to live in a male directed professional life. “Women and racialised minorities” require promoters because they do not fit in with traditional “higher echelons of the public realm” (Puwar 2004: 121). Feminist scholars argue that in the male dominant environment, the masculine structure and language are perceived to be “neutral” and often taken as a standard (Puwar 2004: 135, Mitchell 1971: 102, Millett 2000: 23, 33-36, 42-47, 54). In Bhutan, gender policies are found to be gender blind. The Director of the NCWC thought that the state policies did not mention gender and then became gender blind in not recognising specific gender problems. Some women from the civil society organisations who closely observed gender policy also perceived it to be gender silent and no longer relevant.

Although Bhutan is a small society, it is easy to observe the small number of women politicians and some male bureaucrats did not know them and used masculine norms to measure them. They thought that women politicians did not make any positive impact in the country and were less prominent. Dendup, a senior bureaucrat said:

… we wait for parliament session twice in a year where he or she gets to be seen. They wait invariably to be seen. Other times, they are insignificant. The onuses will definitely lie on women who have been elected and in positions in NC and NA. They will have to prove themselves and convince the people who have [are] not supportive.

The first cohort of women parliamentarians’ performance was used as a barometer for the election of the next group of women politicians to office. Further, the media did not receive the first cohort of women politicians well. The mainstream media, for example, reinforced negative gender stereotype about women’s inferiority. Dema, a young woman politician, found that soon after the 2008 elections, a print media covered a story about how women politicians in the National
Assembly were gearing up for the first session of parliament by buying silk kira (traditional women’s dress), getting a new hair style and learning Dzongkha language. On the contrary, men politicians’ preparations were about the kind of issues they would raise and substance they would bring to parliament. Women’s public roles were trivialised and men’s elevated. This is not exclusive to an emerging democracy. Women politicians in advanced democracies in the West experienced comments made about their bodies such as hair, make-up and clothes, especially from men in conservative parties and the media demanding a balance of caring feminine and forceful masculine traits at work (Puwar 2004: 86, 88, Bystydzienski 1995: 92).

In Bhutan there is a three pronged approach to increasing the number of women leaders in public affairs. This is the development of a genuinely inclusive gender equality policy, civil society based women’s organisations’ advocacy to promote women in the public realm and advancement of higher education for girls.

Despite the barriers of biology and gender difference women have exhibited strength, sensitivity, adaptability and some have even brought their virtuous values to the existing masculine defined labour practices and male dominated public institutions of Bhutan.

### 5.4 WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT—CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

Feminist literature defines empowerment as an enabling path to achieve equality through women’s empowerment (Humm 1989: 78, Pilchar and Whelehan 2004: 37, Cornwall 2003: 1337-1338). An interesting breakthrough occurred in women’s empowerment in the form of changing public roles when the first woman Dzongda offered *marchang*. This is a cultural function which involves wine offering to the deities to receive blessings before a major public event such as the inauguration of important meetings, celebrations and the opening of new public infrastructure (Appendix G).

Traditionally, this has always been a male’s cultural role and is the cultural function of the district Dzongda. In 2012 when the first woman Dzongda (Ngawang Pem) did the offering there was no opposition. Instead she received compliments that she had carried out *marchang* gracefully. In addition, the district monastic institution, which is often regarded as the custodian of Buddhist culture, welcomed Ngawang
Pem as the governor despite her being a woman. The local *lam neten* (head monk) and other monks of the district bowed to the woman governor and treated her with respect. The Dzongda sought *lam neten*’s advice whenever she needed his guidance about traditional religious based cultural etiquette. The local head monk exhibited genuine respect for the new woman leader and demonstrated that patriarchal cultural interpretation can change.

Further, society views about women’s fundamental role as home maker (reproductive function) is beginning to change. Although the numbers of women in public leadership positions is small, it is growing. Moreover, some women felt that men needed to recognise women’s family nurturing role as imperative for future citizens of the country are being shaped in the home. Sedon, a senior female executive in a constitutional body, rightly opined that: “… nurturing a family is important because family is the universal smallest cell in our society.”

She argued that men must be made responsible to be home makers and contribute to the building of the family. In this way, men may acknowledge the vital role women play as home makers. Some women participants in the study thought that if the children are well loved, cared for and moral values instilled in their childhood they will grow up as law abiding and responsible citizens. Child bearing and rearing remains a challenge which hinders women’s professional growth with no state support for care work (ADB 2014: 108).

Bhutan is a signatory to CEDAW and has committed to the MDGs which promotes gender equality and women’s empowerment as one of its goals (UN-CEDAW 2009: 2, UN Women 2014). However, the state was not proactive, open and honest about addressing women’s issues. The NCWC, the country’s only state organisation (as shown in organisation chart) dedicated to women’s empowerment lacks adequate infrastructure and human resource support to function. One of the important policy advocacy works that NCWC covered was to develop the National Action Plan for Gender (NPAG) during the tenth FYP period 2008-2012. But the organisation did not have a clear direction to implement NPAG. Despite its limited human resource, it has a network of the Gender Focal Persons (GFPs) from different government agencies which serve as critical ambassadors of the NCWC. Zema, as one of the active GFPs, played a key role in following up with NPAG. She worked with one of the woman officers in the NCWC to update the NPAG document and
included it in the tenth FYP. However, in recent years the government agencies have started appointing the most junior officers, who are mostly women as GFPs. Most young women GFPs have limited influence to address gender issues in their work places due to lack of support from their senior and experienced male managers.

The chart above shows the NCWC’s functions in addressing gender equality. The government’s gender mainstreaming, inclusion of gender in all public policies and produce gender equal policies (Lombardo 2013: 112-113, UN 2001: 1, Walby 2011: 97-99) remained only on paper. Therefore, the NCWC initiated gender mainstreaming training in the tenth plan at the Local Government level. However, the effect was poor for there was no follow up after the training. The Local Government officials in the districts assumed that gender silent policies addressed gender equality. There was inadequate awareness about gender issues among bureaucrats at the Local Government level in the districts. In the eleventh (current) plan period, which started on 1 July 2013, gender mainstreaming is included to
address gender equality. Zema, the senior woman bureaucrat who works very closely with the gender mainstreaming in government planning stated thus:

"We always say that gender has to be mainstreamed and sex segregated data has to be collected even in the plan guidelines. But it mostly stays on paper. Most sector lack capacity. Some don’t even know how to mainstream gender. With that in mind, hardly anything has happened. Of course we have the National Plan of Action for Gender. That is also in the paper. We could not make dent. Only the activities which the NCWC were responsible for got carried out but not so well. So, somehow National Plan of Action failed to integrate into the sector plans. But now, in the 11th Five Year Plan, the most effective way I feel is to integrate gender issues right from the planning and design stage."

Further, in order to strengthen gender equity, the NCWC initiated awareness building on Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) with the technical expertise and funding assistance from UN Women and the UNDP in July 2012. The UN played an important role in financing gender equality work of the state and the civil society. The NCWC organised GRB sensitisation workshop for senior government officials and civil society participants and a specific technical training for all finance officers, who are anticipated to deal with the operational aspect of GRB. According to the Director of the NCWC, the Ministry of Finance, who is the lead agency in practical translation of GRB supported in training of Finance Officers. She added that she managed to involve the Finance Minister, the Budget Director and the Chief Budget Officer as the focal point in the NCWC’s effort to engender finance to attain the long term goal of women’s empowerment.

During the field study, the NCWC was in the process of finalising its report of the GRB workshop and training. The NCWC intended to circulate the GRB report to all the government line Ministries and particularly, requested the Finance Ministry to spearhead the translation of GRB into action. She said that the development partners have assured support for GRB if the Finance Ministry becomes the implementer. She thought that the eleventh FYP included gender mainstreaming in each line Ministry and agency’s sectoral plan and GRB should automatically be part of the process. She hoped that if the budget is engendered it will mainstream gender. However, this will be seen only at the end of the eleventh FYP, which is in 2018.
In recent times, feminist studies have stressed women working within the state and public sector in Scandinavia, Australia, Canada, England, France and the United States to progress women’s issues (Bystydzienski 1995: 98). This approach is referred to as a new kind of feminism. Instead of following conventional social movements, feminist ideas are institutionalised within the state and civil society to avoid criticism and stigmatisation (Walby 2011: 2). Despite the strategy of attempting to bring in change from within traditionally masculine organisations, grassroots feminists have demonstrated that the approach co-opts and weakens feminist interests (Bystydzienski 1995: 98).

On the contrary, it is heartening to note that civil society, particularly, women related NGOs made a significant impact on women’s progress. Pema, a senior male academic, who is engaged in observing women’s issues, commented that:

… the NGOs have played a tremendous role in opening our eyes to issues related to children and women’s issues including women’s rights to participate in the political process. Today, there is greater awareness of the need for women to participate as evidenced in NGO publications, media, in number of workshops and seminars held in the capital.

One proactive NGO engaged in women’s empowerment is Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women (RENEW) founded in 2004 under the leadership of Queen Mother, Sangay Choden Wangchuck. Since then it has spearheaded advocacy and support for disadvantaged women and adolescent school girls who are victims of domestic violence, abuse and rape. It works very closely with state agencies like the NCWC, the police and international organisations like the UN who have played a critical role in financing support.

Most of the advocacy work is carried out through its outreach programme which is supported by a wide network of volunteers in 20 Dzongkhags and is called Community Based Support System (CBSS). Most of the volunteers are women based in the community in which they live. They are teachers, doctors, entrepreneurs and home makers. Volunteers are regarded as the spine of RENEW in absence of its reach in all the 20 Dzongkhags. The small number of devoted volunteers are said to sacrifice their public holidays to work for RENEW. Some of them are said to conduct gender sensitisation workshops in the Gewogs after receiving Training of Trainers (TOT) on gender sensitisation from the RENEW centre. Karuna, a young
woman NGO worker is optimistic about many volunteers as she believes that they will advocate on women’s issues because of their recognition of RENEW’s role. Despite its wide reach through a broad network of volunteers, RENEW faces challenges of reaching out to some of the remote communities which are located in far flung corners of the harsh geographical terrain.

RENEW worked very closely with the National Assembly’s Women and Children’s Committee during the process of drafting and reviewing the Domestic Violence Prevention Bill in July 2012. It also actively lobbied the support for the prevention of Domestic Violence Bill from various political actors. According to some women respondents, the Bill was passed as a result of women supporters’ pressure. Women’s interest group from state, market and civil society showed that common issues affecting women can be addressed through shared responsibilities. The NCWC and RENEW’s partnership backed by civil society actors from the Tarayana Foundation, civil servants, corporate employees, state and private media organisations and online social media sites like Facebook, helped to exert pressure on the male dominated National Assembly to pass the Domestic Violence Prevention Bill.

Tshendu, a young independent women’s issue advocate played an active role in support of the Bill and commented thus:

My involvement with the Domestic Violence Prevention Bill was when that newspaper article came out I got very concerned like you did and everybody else did by the remarks that was there, ridiculous comment. So, that was when I started sharing on social media and immediately everywhere else like-minded people who are outraged said that this should not be and we must get it through came together. Then, we became an active, what shall I say, a very proactive media launch was formally started. We got the articles etc…got this countdown inviting everyone to come to the deliberations and we wanted, this was the first time anything of the sort. I think it was a good thing. This how it should be in a democracy, people should care, they should watch, and make their voices heard.

5.5 CONCLUSION

The patriarchal values and norms reflected in the gendered division of labour continues to enforce women’s reproductive functions (child bearing and rearing) as
their fundamental role. Working women face difficulties of balancing their productive (work outside house) and reproductive roles. However, some women felt that women were better nurturers. Men were largely resistant to change but a few saw the need for Bhutanese society to embrace the talents of women. Most women professionals and politicians faced challenges of appreciating and exercising feminine leadership in the male dominant public organisations. Instead, they adapted to suit the mainstream masculine norms. Thus, the politics of equal but different appears ironic for women still experience inequality at home and work. A just society cannot be built if one is less equal than the other and if women continue to remain subordinated. The onus lies with men to address gender equality because they direct policies and practices of power distribution, labour practices and empowerment.

Scandinavian (Norwegian) policy addressing care policies within the domestic realm suggests that openness and flexibility to new ideas in the public sphere, political organisations responsiveness and state responsibility are all needed for change to occur (Bystydzienski 1995: 113). Men and women can be equally different if there is a public recognition of addressing obstacles to gender inequality through care policies and hence women who are primarily burdened with care work are not hindered from participating in the political sphere.

Actual change can happen if women continuously exercise their pressure in the public realm. They need to form an efficient women’s agenda concerning less hierarchy, more flexible rules and the creation of the connection between different groups inside the system to remove structural barriers (Bystydzienski 1995: 113, Acker 1990: 155). Bhutanese politics continues to see men and women as equally different. Women’s interest groups’ ability to pressurise the male dominant parliament to pass Domestic Violence Prevention Bill demonstrates how educated elite women’s concerted efforts can address inequality despite patriarchal structural impediments.

Further, recent views from International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance state that women’s empowerment cannot be addressed in a “piecemeal” way of looking at only some parts of inequality (International IDEA 2014b). Instead, women’s empowerment can be attained with the basic transformation of equal distribution of power between men and women. Political leadership and will are
argued as the key towards the politics of equality (International IDEA 2014b). Political will from the government of the day is critical for creating an environment of sharing power and opportunity equally between men and women. The existing piecemeal approach appears less effective for it does not shift the fundamental gender power imbalances.

In the Bhutanese social context, harmony is the crucial phrase in the politics of the equal but different debate. Dominating feminist politics of equality are issues of gender differences, engaging with existing institutions and ensuring societal harmony. Bhutan is not ready for radical feminist politics. Instead, the mainstream argument supports liberal feminist politics of equal co-existence between men and women through shared power. However, the equal but different argument does not assist a genuine transfer of rights to women. Women continue to dwell in the private sphere and men dominate public affairs. The way forward is to ensure strategic and practical gender specific policies, particularly care policies to enable Bhutanese women to participate at an equal level to men in the public sphere. Men also need to take equal responsibility for work in the private sphere to bring about change of traditional gendered divisions of labour.
Chapter 6: Different Standpoints—Equality in Diversity

The idea of equality in diversity adopted by feminist scholars is an attempt to acknowledge difference and the way in which roles and structures within the society impact on different people differently (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004: 3, Egeland and Gressgard 2007: 207-208). True equality can be achieved when the society recognises these differences (Swigonski 1994: 390, Humm 1995: 276, Hekman, 1997: 341, Reynolds 2002: 603, Moreton-Robinson 2014: 331-332). However, diversity can also be used to mask unequal treatment of people who are different and not part of the dominant majority (Moreton-Robinson 2014:332, Hartsock 1985: 231, see also Hartsock 1998: 106). Bhutanese society recognises such differences but legal protection is not available for those who wish to operate differently in the Bhutanese community. Within Bhutan diverse people have different ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, and sexuality from the Bhutanese majority.

6.1 DIVERSITY IN BHUTAN

Diversity in Bhutan is a socio-cultural construction originating from Buddhism and Hinduism (Kohli 1996: 93, Sinha 1983: 93). There is not a large number of different ethnic groups in the country (Turner et al. 2011: 189, Phuntsho 2013: 39, 42, 51, 59). However, in recent years, some former Buddhists and Hindus have converted to Christianity. There is a growing concern about such conversions, especially in what is perceived to be a small Buddhist state, expressed at state and society levels. The Constitution’s article on fundamental rights prohibits forceful religious conversion (Constitution 2009: 19). There are few statistics on major and minor ethnic and religious groups (Table 8). The figures in table 8 are estimates only.
Table 8: Ethno-lingual Groups in Bhutan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bhote-50 percent</td>
<td>Buddhist-75 percent</td>
<td>Dzongkha-28 percent</td>
<td>Drukpas are also referred to as Bhote.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Nepalese or Lhotsampa-35 percent</td>
<td>Hindu-25 percent</td>
<td>Sharchopkha-28 percent</td>
<td>However, the phrase carries a derogative connotation and is often used as a racist remark.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous or migrants tribes-15 percent</td>
<td>Lhotsamkha-22 percent</td>
<td>Others-26 percent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CIA World Fact Book 2013

There is little information about the Christian population. The Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) Christian evangelistic and charitable organisation based in Canada claim that about two percent of the Bhutanese population is Christian (VOM 2013). This is the best estimate the study has found.

In addition, there are other regional ethnic groups with individual languages like Kurtoep of the north eastern Lhuentse Dzongkhag and some parts of Mongar Dzongkhag, Bumthap, Mangdep and Khengpa from central Trongsa, Bumthang and Zhemgang Dzonkhags, Brokpas in north-eastern part of eastern Trashigang Dzongkhag and Laypas from north-western part of western Gasa Dzongkhag. There are a small number of Adivasi ethnic groups living along the Indo-Bhutan border within the south-western Samste Dzongkhag (Phuntsho 2013:51-59). Hence, women are located within an array of different socio-cultural contexts and are not a homogenous group. Their practical and strategic concerns differ and are often driven by the larger ethnic and religious issues than women’s issues.

Further, even ethnic integration has been a slow process between the Drukpas and the Lhotsampa. These two groups have distinct religions, languages and cultures (Permanand 1996: 102-103, Upreti 1996: 79). The state’s assimilation policy encouraged inter-ethnic marriage but was not well received (Thinley 1996: 237, Upreti 1996: 83, Permanand 1996: 104). The common people in the urban town’s entry point of integration share the Dzongkha and English languages, and there is a cultural exchange of food and festivals of both the ethnic groups. There is no major
tension, but, at times, conflicts are noted in the form of racial remarks (Upreti 1996: 85).

However, within the Drukpa group, there is an open and an easy assimilation between Ngalong, Sharchop, Mangdep, Kheng, Bumthap, Kurtoep, Layap and Brokpa, mainly through marriage, the Buddhist faith and language. The Drukpa group is strongly bound by common ethnic character, Buddhism and Buddhist based culture and language (Permanand 1996: 102). In urban towns, there is a growing trend of class consciousness on the basis of education, income, power and status within the broad ethnic groupings. The relatives of royal families form the upper class and educated ordinary citizens with stable employment and income are labelled as middle class. Conflict between upper and middle classes is observed in access to and control of resources, employment and in exercising influence.

After the introduction of democracy, a small degree of political diversity emerged in the form of different political parties with similar ideologies but different political strategies. However, the political party’s identities are based within the predominant Buddhist culture. Religion is considered sacred and the Constitution has delineated religion to stand above politics. The Constitution does not permit the formation of political parties on the basis of ethnic, religion, sex or regional lines (Constitution 2009: 13 and 42). This means that the formation of faith inspired parties like in some countries is restricted. This is a safeguard against divisive politics for a small country like Bhutan that cannot afford to be divided in the face of its fragile geo-political location.

The BBS YouTube Video (2013) showed the King’s address to over a thousand 2013 university graduates, where he stressed the importance of a united national identity for the purpose of the country’s sovereignty, solidarity and peace. “You must think that you are first Bhutanese. What is important is a strong sense of national identity, whether you speak Tshangla [another name for Sharchop], Dzongkha, Lhotsamkha, whether you are from East, West, North and South” This indicates that the King aspires to build unity through a shared national identity to preserve the country’s independence and peace.
6.1.1 Women’s Groups in Political Parties

Based on the state’s definition of diverse politics, women party supporters mainly participated in women’s wings within the two contesting parties, DPT and PDP during the first democratic elections in 2008. However, women’s wings were less effective and remained outside the mainstream Drukpa male directed politics. Om, an erstwhile senior bureaucrat and former PDP candidate argued that the women’s wing was ineffective and said:

…but within the party not much importance is given to women’s cell because Dolkar and Dem [key women workers] were all there in women’s cell. There is not sort of a merging thing.

PDP’s former men and women candidates and party workers said that the party leadership heard them but women’s issues received less attention as the women’s wing worked in isolation. Sangay, a 48 old male politician in PDP, said that women did not drive their agenda in the party meeting. Lhendup, an old male politician thought that women were more concerned with national problems than their issues. On one hand, it showed the importance given to women and youth’s problems through separate women and youth’s sections. On the other, it indicated that the very creation of this different branch pushed them to operate outside the mainstream. Pelzom, in her late 40s, perceived as one of the intelligent and successful women, a former civil servant and now a commissioner in a constitutional body, expressed her reservation about the women’s wing: “It is kind of as if women are not part of the mainstream. It is a wing; therefore the men are the main.”

The ECB stopped the DPT and PDP women and youth’s wing from campaigning separately in the latter part of the campaign in the 2008 elections. DPT’s women’s wing was renamed as the women’s support group and worked outside its party office. According to the Party’s Secretary who managed the party’s administration, the DPT women’s support group is thought to be the Party President’s wife’s personal initiative to address women’s wellbeing and to tap into their potential. The group’s representative, mostly the Prime Minister’s wife, attended party executive meetings and the general assembly and informed the party office about its programme through reports. The group had a network of women members in Dzongkhags and Gewogs and liaised with the NGOs. The ordinary women were not included in the party politics. Therefore, women’s separate status
within the DPT and PDP’s actual politics reveals that they were excluded from the mainstream politics and their issues were sidelined. They were seen to be given a role in politics but it was neither central nor important and contributed to an apparent veneer of equality while the main party and its political work remained firmly in male hands.

6.2 ETHNICITY: WOMEN’S POSITION IN DIVERSE SOCIO-CULTURAL EMBEDDED POLITICS

In general, the process of electoral politics in the 2013 National Assembly elections was difficult. The campaign was often marred by allegations between the DPT and the PDP. The widely discussed issue was the coalition between the DNT and the PDP and DPT’s accusation against the PDP’s Kanglung-Samkhar-Udzorong candidate, Norbu Wangchuk, the current Economic Affairs Minister. The DPT submitted a written complaint with Norbu Wangchuk’s audio recorded speech as evidence to the ECB through the returning officer in Trashigang. The DPT seemed to have used the opportunity to take a strong stance against a seemingly formed coalition between the DNT and the PDP. Its complaint letter was reported to have mentioned that “DNT and PDP had consciously deceived the Bhutanese electorate so far vehemently with denial of operating under one umbrella”. The letter stated that the joining of DNT, DCT and PDP is a visible indicator of a formation of coalition which is a “blatant violation of constitutional spirit of a two-party system and a means to gain an unfair electoral advantage”. The letter also contained concerns from DPT supporters in the five constituencies of Trashigang about Norbu Wangchuk’s claim to balance regionalism by joining PDP. DPT’s protest letter argued that “people from five constituencies in Trashigang were stunned by Norbu Wangchuk’s remark on media that primary round electoral results insinuate DPT as party from east”. The letter pointed out that the DPT had candidates from western, central and southern regions as different components of the party (Wangdi 2013: 1). This indicates the political candidate and his supporter’s used ethnic driven identity politics to woo the voters. Traditionally, eastern Bhutan is associated with Sharchop and west with Ngalong ethnic people. East was seen as DPT’s strong hold as DPT secured more seats from the eastern constituencies in the primary elections. Minister Norbu Wangchuk’s comment about making a regional balance implied PDP’s intention to penetrate into DPT’s stronghold that seemed to have opened up sensitive
divisive ethnic politics, which is usually avoided. No wonder that DPT claimed that it is inclusive and had members from all parts of the country.

In addition, following DPT’s defeat in the general elections, the party held a two-day convention, which the party’s supporters, office bearers and members from all parts of the country attended. After an intensive discussion it was deemed that the election was unfair. According to media reports, the meeting decided to submit a 15 point appeal to the King in relation to the process of elections resulting in DPT’s defeat. About 20 individuals, consisting of five elected candidates, five elderly men, five women and five youths were selected to submit the petition to the King. DPT attempted to include various sections of society through its party platform to address its concerns (Wangchuk 2013c: 1). Women and youths were included even in a conflict ridden electoral campaign where men were the key actors.

Further, in a harsh electoral political context, women political candidates and DPT supporters appeared to have been positioned along different ethnic-lingual lines even in small Gewogs in Bhutan. During the primary and general elections of 2013, voter’s behaviour demonstrated ethnicity driven politics. The classic example was a fierce contest between DPT’s young female candidate Karma Lhamo and PDP’s old male candidate Jigme Zangpo, who is the current Speaker of the National Assembly. Karma Lhamo and Jigme Zangpo engaged in a heated argument during the electoral debate in Mongar on various national and international issues. Jigme Zangpo had more support from Sharchop speaking voters and Karma Lhamo won from Kurtoep-Cho-Cha-Nga-Cha spoken areas in their constituency. Karma Lhamo is from ethnic Kurteop Cho-Cha-Nga-Cha speaking Tsakaling Gewog and Jigme Zangpo is ethnic Sharchop speaking Drepong Gewog (Tshering 2013: 1).

In order to win votes from their non-stronghold areas, Karma Lhamo and Jigme Zangpo were involved in a vigorous micro-level campaign. Both of them were reported to have visited the Gewogs where they received low votes in the primary rounds. Karma Lhamo went on a door-to-door campaign in Mongar and Drepong Sharchop speaking Gewogs which supported Jigme Zangpo. In the same vein, Jigme Zangpo used a door-to-door campaign at Kurtoep-Cho-Cha-Nga-Cha Tsakaling Gewog, which is Karma Lhamo’s stronghold (Tshering 2013: 1).
In addition, according to media reports, the passionate supporters’ zeal turned violent. One of the worst examples of vicious ethnicity based electoral politics was about tearing down competing candidate’s campaign posters in their home Gewogs. Karma Lhamo’s campaign poster was stated to be removed in Mongar and Drepong Gewogs and Jigme Zangpo’s in Tsakaling Gewog. Jigme Zangpo’s poster in Mongar was reported to have been knifed several times. Also, DPT supporters blocked the road to Tsakaling with boulders to keep PDP’s president from visiting the Gewog (Wangmo 2013: 1). Jigme Zangpo claimed that DPT party workers prevented people from attending PDP meetings and even threatened people who tried to help with information and door-to-door campaigns. He alleged that nearly every household in Tsakaling had a DPT membership card without any membership fees. Karma Lhamo refuted the claims as false. She stated that the PDP did not have registered members from Tsakaling and other Gewogs, and could not collect people for the meetings, so it was unfair to blame the party’s Gewog coordinator. Tsakaling is stated to have about 100 DPT members. She said, “if Jigme Zangpo thinks that his poster is torn in Tsakaling, mine face the same fate in Mongar and Drepong Gewogs” (Wangmo 2013: 1).

She also said that there were less people in Drepong Gewog when DPT’s president visited because PDP’s coordinator in Drepong had told the people not to attend the meeting. The election was closely and intensely contested on the basis of ethnicity to the point of becoming a little violent. However, the Election Commission regulated the political parties and candidates seemed cautious. The Election Officer commented that his office would only examine written complaints (Wangmo 2013: 1). Sensitive ethnicity based verbal allegations were ignored as invalid accusations. Even though the Constitution debars ethnicity based politics, it became evident in the elections.

Both Jigme Zangpo and Karma Lhamo are from Mongar Dzongkhag and belong to the broad Sharchop category in eastern Bhutan but minute details of their ethnicity strongly determined the electorate’s behaviour. In cut-throat electoral politics voters identified with candidates who shared similar ethnic territorial boundaries and language. Harmonious co-existence with dissimilar groups and the politics of equality in diversity does not bode well in Bhutan’s conservative social–cultural context even within the broad Drukpa Buddhist ethnic group. Bhutan is
neither politically mature nor ready to accommodate diverse politics and build alliances on matters of common concern. The women voters placed their ethnic identity first and support for a fellow woman second. Thus, the emerging Bhutanese voter’s behaviour showed ethnic values over women’s progress.

Illiterate rural women voters were victimised by political parties through unfair means in an electoral struggle to win. Several observers found that the general election was unfair because of the bribery of rural voters in cash and kind. There were complaints lodged to the ECB during the campaign. These complaints continued even after the official declaration of results. A few rural women dared to report to the ECB about political bribery after the elections, even though they agreed to take bribes. One incredible example involved two village women from Jomtsang village; Udzorong’s complaint against a PDP coordinator in Trashigang Dzongkhag. The women were stated to be PDP supporters. They accused the coordinator of bribing and deceiving them. The two women reported that on 7 July the PDP coordinator handed out party supporters’ cards to the people asking them to vote for the PDP. He is stated to have promised to pay Nu 3,000 soon after the PDP won the election and Nu1,500 during the five-year term. Four people were reported to have received Nu1,000 each immediately after the elections. “We supported the party but after winning the election, they said we did not vote and it has been found through the computer. Some supporters have received money right after the election. So we wanted to know if it is legal to give money or not” (BBS 2013f).

The evidence strongly suggests that the coordinator had cheated, although he denied the allegation and commented that it was baseless, he did not promise monetary bribes or give money after the election. It shows that he took advantage of illiterate female rural voters. Trashigang Dzongkhag is stated to have discussed the problem with the ECB (BBS 2013f). Some ordinary rural women voters’ attempted to seek the truth in the face of unjust male controlled intra-party politics.

Further, one minority ethnic group is not aware of the challenge of citizenship and prefer to support ethnicity issue over state policy. Adivasi people who are mostly Hindu with a distinct language have a cultural belief that everyone living within their own village is their kith and kin and therefore cannot marry each other. They seek a bride or groom from the neighboring Adivasi communities living across the Indian border. Shreejana, a senior woman politician from a Hindu background, commented
that the Adivasi community is oblivious to the difficulties involved in obtaining their citizenship cards resulting from an engagement in matrimony outside the Bhutanese state. Adivasi women see their ethnic identity as more significant than the concerns of mainstream Bhutanese women in attaining gender equality. Non-Citizenship constrains their existence irrespective of gender.

6.3 RELIGION FIRST, WOMAN SECOND

Women from religious minorities place the right to practice their religious beliefs before their right of equality as a woman especially those who are Christians in a dominant Buddhist and Hindu society. The new Christian converts are protective of their new faith and Christian community. Shreejana, a senior woman politician said that some parts of her constituency have a trend of people leaving Hinduism and adopting Christianity. She said that most of them belong to the Rai and Limbu caste in Hindu society. She named material attraction and community pressure, particularly, on disadvantaged sections of society as the main causes for the growing trend of poor people embracing Christianity:

They said that in Christianity there is minimal expenditure for death rites. The death rites are very expensive in Buddhist and Hindu communities. Hence, one is economic reasons. A few Christians within the community try to convert others. They tend to help each other during needy days. They visit the sick and say prayers for them and tell people that if they become Christian they will be well. Usually, they attack the sick, the poor and the ones who suffer. These people easily get lured by money and become Christian.

Shreejana’s experience and observations show a small number of Christians in a rural village’s zealous attempt to attract non-Christians through material assistance, especially during difficult times such as sickness and death. The intention of the Christian missionaries in rural Bhutan is such that while assisting the poor they show no respect for their original religion. They attempt to lure the poor and the weak when they are at their most vulnerable with promises through material wealth. It is natural for people in a harsh situation to fall prey when someone extends spiritual and material assistance. Most poor people in rural villages are illiterate and are often not able to make an informed choice. Christians organise activities such as free Christian-focused seminars in the capital city to which the poor who have never
visited there are taken, and try to spread their new faith widely in an attempt to strengthen their religious identity.

In addition, the state and private Buddhist and Hindu spiritual organisations and communities have failed to support the needs of the weak and the poor for expensive death rites in Buddhist and Hindu society. The poor succumb to such attractions as they lack a deep and broad understanding of their indigenous faith and, the religious societies have failed to build awareness and knowledge about it among many of these communities.

Close observation of the new converts in the capital and even in remote parts of different Dzongkhags in the country pointed at Christian preachers generally visiting the poorer communities where there is a stark presence of material poverty and illiteracy. A typical example is the semi-skilled and unskilled road workers’ community in various Dzongkhags. Most of these families have embraced Christianity. In 2011, the author visited several Dzongkhags in the western, northern, eastern and southern regions in the country as a consultant to a state agency. The work entailed development of each Dzongkhag’s vision, mission and development strategies. Most of the Local Government officials from the Dzongkhags expressed apprehension about the rising spread of Christianity in rural Bhutan. They saw it as a challenge to preserve and promote predominant Buddhist culture which is established as the Bhutanese cultural identity for geo-political reasons of its fragile location. The existing studies on challenges of diversity in Bhutan confirm this view (Kohli 1996: 95, Permanand 1996: 104-105, Upreti 1996: 83). Shreejana, the senior woman politician shared the author’s observation. She noted several small Christian groups in every nook and corner of Thimphu, Haa, Paro and Wangdue Dzongkhags and saw it as a problem. There is an emerging implicit division between Buddhists and Christians and Hindus and Christians and the rich and the poor in Bhutan. Thus, this religious diversity is not welcomed and has been seen as a divisive social change.

Shreejana added that the Christian community in her constituency do not seek her support and refuse to attend her constituency meetings although she attempted to address their problems. However, she held public meetings to inform people that they must not adopt a new religion under coercion. Christian converts are fearful to openly express their adopted religion and withdraw from participating in public
meetings. They are aware of the mainstream societal backlash on them as a minority. Their intention to hide their religious identity and their rejection of public meetings also demonstrates that their religious identity is much more important than their ethnic Lhotsampa identity and their ability to participate in Bhutanese life. The Christian minority group continues and publicly exhibits their resilience despite the majority’s dominance.

According to one of the female respondents, an entire Chiwog (a community consisting of several villages) converted to Christianity and left their former Hindu faith. This became an issue at the Local Government level in the Gewog. The local Gup tried to address the matter through fear tactics. The Gup asked the people to either change their religion or leave the country. The Gup used the fear approach to solve the problem although there is no authority in local elected leaders to evict people from their homes. Instead of becoming frightened the people demonstrated their strength and said that they would neither change religion nor leave the country. The adoption of a new religion in a closely knit, well-entrenched Hindu society appears to create tension within the community. Thus, it will take a long time to attain equality in diversity.

Similarly, Chimi, a university educated and well-travelled Christian woman entrepreneur from a well-established company proclaimed that she faced challenges in her daily life, not as a woman, but as a Christian. Chimi lamented that her competitors in similar business areas often associated her business success with donated money from churches overseas. In reality, she struggled hard to pay big loans that she took on. Despite this, she seemed to cope well with difficulties, demonstrated her resilience and postulated that:

As a Christian with the higher up people to be honest I really never had [any problems] because they all know that I am a Christian. I got a lot of warnings also. If I am not careful, I have been told that they could revoke my business license. This is the idea of proselytisation and all that, they have such a fear about it. But I don’t have any fear in this because as a Christian I know exactly where I stand as far as God is concerned. If there is certain amount of persecution, I take it.

Chimi’s experience shows mainstream society’s contradicting perspectives of a Christian. On the one hand, the elite section of society appears to accept another faith
as Christians are able to live a normal life like Buddhists and Hindus. They receive equal opportunities. On the other hand, the majority see Christians as a threat in terms of its community’s intention to proselytise non-Christian through material assistance as discussed earlier. Chimi’s fear of losing her business licence shows that the state does not view the growing Christian population and their ability to spread their newly adopted religion well and can exercise a certain degree of control. She seemed to be already cautioned on this. This shows that Chimi is more worried and even protective of her religion than being concerned about women’s issues. She has emerged stronger by living under challenging conditions for she said that she invests a lot of time and effort in spirituality to overcome professional and personal hurdles:

If I have to go to a government official for some favour, you know what I do, I always fast for three days and I pray before going. There could be opposition because of who I am. I attribute my success to my prayer.

Further, Lily Wangchuk, a woman party leader who led DCT in the 2013 primary elections of the National Assembly attributed one of the reasons for her party’s loss to critics linking her party with the Christian electorate. Although the Constitution does not permit voting on religious grounds, it seems that in reality people used their faith during elections. After the declaration of primary election results and loss of elections through social media Facebook, Lily Wangchuk clarified that her party was not a Christian party as was stated during the elections. According to Lily Wangchuk’s clarification statement titled “Few very important clarification for all to understand- from DCT president- aum Lily Wangchuk”, the following was the central message:

DCT is neither a Christian party nor did any Christian community fund it. It was unfortunate that on the eve of the election, party workers had gone house-to-house requesting people not to vote for DCT as it is a Christian led party that will spread Christianity in the Kingdom. DCT has been formed by and for every Bhutanese. Such rumours have been maliciously created for political objectives. In addition, the party performed badly at the elections because of financial challenges and couldn’t afford hundreds of party workers across the country. This makes it evident that DCT didn’t have huge financial resources at our disposal, ruling out the absolutely hilarious rumour that Christian organisation were funding DCT. However, DCT respects all faith and ethnic background (DCT 2013).
Lily Wangchuk’s view implied that one of the key groups of actors in Bhutanese electoral politics, the party workers, played an active role in using the party and its leader’s identity to garner votes for its party against the other in an unhealthy manner. The Bhutanese people remain conservative and not open to a minority’s voice within Bhutanese politics. The DCT’s party leadership was politically uncomfortable at being associated with a Christian electorate’s support. The fact that Lily Wangchuk used widely accessed social media Facebook to post a clarification showed that she was concerned about her party’s blemished identity, particularly, about its vote and financial support from the Christian population. She called it “hilarious rumour” but at the same time said that she was from “a very religious Buddhist family”. She lamented that her faith was “ politicised.” Although she said that she respected all religions, she appeared hesitant to be connected with Christianity. Bhutanese society is not ready for diverse politics based on different religions, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and minority support of particular political parties. The dominant Buddhist and Hindu society does not welcome the arrival and practice of Christianity in a deeply Buddhist-Hindu religious and traditional socio-cultural environment well. Thus, the application of starkly diverse politics is difficult. Moreover, it appeared that people perceived Lily to be an immigrant as her name is likened to a Western name. Citing information about her ancestors, she clarified that she is not an immigrant. “Questions about my country of origin has [have] also been raised ... My family ancestry is evidence enough that I have not immigrated to Bhutan from any foreign country” (DCT 2013: 1). This clearly indicated the traditional electorate’s prejudice against diversity. Bhutan is not yet ready for the public accommodation of women’s diverse views and voices.

6.4 THE LOW STATUS OF QUEER PEOPLE

The analysis of women in politics needs to be seen from diverse locations for equality in diversity recognises political, social, cultural, legal, sexual, and economic rights of the minority groups in society (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004: 3, Egeland and Gressgard 2007: 207-208). Feminist standpoint theory asserts that women and minorities in society have different experiences as a result of repression and therefore share a more holistic world view, with both dominant and subordinate opinions (Swigonski 1994: 390, Humm 1995: 276, Hekman, 1997: 341, Reynolds 2002: 603, Moreton-Robinson 2014: 331-332). Further, Waylen (2007: 4) asserts that gendered
analysis should consider broader frameworks of diversity based on critical factors such as race, class, sexuality and disability because women are not homogeneous and therefore cannot be generalised. Thus, the discussion about queer people, who form a minority group, is presented in light of different standpoints in Bhutan’s new democracy.

The issue of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) is not discussed openly in Bhutanese society. Most people, particularly, in rural Bhutan do not talk about them. However, in urban towns people talk about this section of the population in private. Hence, while homosexuality is still a taboo subject in a religious and traditional society, homosexual and bisexual persons live under cover. In recent times, a few of them spoke out for themselves on both the state and privately owned local media. The Kuensel and Bhutan Observer, for example, covered stories about the difficulties faced by homosexuals, as the Penal Code Act of Bhutan considers homosexuality illegal (Wangmo 2008: 1, Pelden 2011: 1, Penal Code 2004: 29). The Penal Code criminalises homosexuality. Its chapter on “sexual offences” clauses 213 and 214 states that “a defendant shall be guilty of the offense of unnatural sex, if the defendant engages in sodomy or any other sexual conduct that is against the order of nature” and it is categorised as “petty misdemeanour” (Penal Code 2004: 29). Thus, the law treats homosexual relationships as unnatural sexual behaviour. According to the Bhutan Observer, lesbians are usually referred to as “Tom and Jerry Couples” (Bhutan Observer 2008: 1). This indicates a slight degree of emerging open culture to talk about diverse identities.

Buddhism does not permit sexual relationships with people of similar sex. According to Dza Patrul Rinpoche (1994: 107), the 19th century highly respected Buddhist master of Rime or non-sectarian Tibetan Buddhist tradition, anal sex is prohibited and falls under sexual misconduct, one of the ten non-virtuous deeds in basic Buddhist precepts. The cause of being born as LGBT individuals is argued to be the result of inappropriate sexual behaviour in their previous lives. Buddhism places significance on the law of karma or cause and effect, one of the salient features of the philosophy. Emotions, for example, are stated to originate based on causes and conditions (Rinpoche 2007: 40).

Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche, one of the versatile Bhutanese Buddhist teachers of the 21st century said that “when causes and conditions come
together and there are no obstacles, consequences arise. Consequence is Karma” (Rinpoche 2007: 112). The karma is stated to be “gathered by consciousness, the mind, or the self. If this self-acts out of greed or aggression, negative karma is generated. If a thought or action is motivated by love, tolerance, and wish for others to be happy, positive karma is generated” (Rinpoche 2007: 112). This implies the LGBT individuals’ engagement in inappropriate sexual thought and behaviour in their former lives bore results in their present lives.

Further, His Holiness the Dalai Lama defined sexual misconduct in relation to sexual orientation and mentioned that “from a Buddhist point of view, men-to-men and women-to-women is generally considered sexual misconduct”. He also added that “even with your wife use of one’s mouth or the other hole is sexual misconduct. Using one’s hand, that is sexual misconduct”. Moreover, heterosexuals are forbidden to have sex “more than five consecutive times with a partner” (Peskind 1998: 1-2). Buddhism views homosexuality as improper sexual conduct and even sees heterosexual’s intention to deploy anal and oral sex, hand and even excessive sexual activity as sexual misconduct. However, some homosexual Western Buddhists have argued that this view is discriminatory (Peskind 1998:1).

In dominant Vajrayana Buddhist Bhutan, in principle, the path includes all kinds of people from different ethnicity, sexuality and gender. Mindroling Jetsun Khandro Rinpoche, a well-known woman Vajrayana teacher based in North India, explained that the most important thing in a human being is to be able to overcome attachment and attain spiritual awakening and it is possible for everyone irrespective of different sexual orientation (Peskind 1998:2).

However, in reality queer people are discriminated. In the recent LGBT story covered by the broadcast media, BBS, LGBT individuals seemed optimistic about their situation. They viewed that since most Bhutanese are Buddhist, they hoped that they would be tolerant. The LGBT population is reported to have created a Facebook page and Twitter handle titled “LGBT Bhutan”, but shared their views under the cloak of anonymity. The group is associated with rainbow colours, for being neither black nor white, implying no clear relation with normative masculine and feminine gender (BBS 2013h: 3).
Despite optimism many homosexual individuals hide their sexual identity for they fear societal backlash and rejection and some homosexuals’ experience validates this. Through one of the local print media, Gamo, a 22 year old lesbian who has masculine features and emotional orientation, shared that she suffered severe depression for being a homosexual. Her school friends called her all sorts of names and some even spread a malicious rumour that on “every full moon night, she becomes a hermaphrodite—a person with both male and female genitalia”. To avoid spiteful gossip she hid her sexuality by “dressing and acting like girl” although it made her more confounded. “I am a guy trapped in a woman’s body. It was really painful not understanding who I was, what I was” (cited in Gyeltshen 2013: 1). In the same vein, Letro, a young gay man, admitted that he concealed his sexual orientation from Bhutanese society because they thought it was an abnormal behaviour. He shared that there are gay men who are old and young and even married living in Thimphu. Lamenting his secretive life in Bhutan, Letro commented that he aspired to migrate overseas and live a free life as a homosexual man instead of pretending to be a heterosexual (Wangmo 2008: 1). Gamo and Letro’s stories show that the Bhutanese society is not tolerant of homosexual persons. Also, this research found that Kiba and Lhakyi, two young transgender interviewees, experienced the same predicament. Therefore, LGBT individuals are secretive about their sexuality and the mainstream population does not appear to know them.

The Director of the NCWC mentioned that she does not have much information about these kinds of people and even doubted the existence of a large number of LGBT persons although they were now coming out more. She thought that this was part of “modernity” and there was a need to accept it. The liberals think that society must be open-minded and accept LGBT people, namely, homosexuals and transgenders for they have equal rights like heterosexuals to live a decent life in terms of choosing their partner from the same sex or the opposite sex. This view argued that the government must facilitate a constructive debate on this issue and society must acknowledge their existence. However, there is also a liberal strand of the same view that the Bhutanese society was and is quite liberal and accepts everything. Choden, a senior woman bureaucrat, shared her high school experience in the 1970s about a boy who looked like a girl and how he was easily accepted in the school where she was studying in eastern Bhutan:
In 70s when I was studying, there was a boy like that. He used to be like girl. Then, we had no idea about homos. He used to have our sympathy. But he was so good at weaving and knitting. We used to appreciate him. So, may be for rural the acceptance level was higher because it was already there. It is not something coming out of the world. For urbanities, they have been reading about it and put two and two together and come out with five.

Some respondents stated that rural society is reported to be more tolerant of these people than urban society. The only two transgender respondents, in their early 20s, who could come out in public commented that an illiterate village society was much kinder to them than literate and educated people in urban centres. In this instance traditional rural societies are much more accepting of sexual difference.

Bhutanese society is yet to fully acknowledge the LGBT individual’s existence. Zam, a senior woman bureaucrat, commented that on one hand Bhutanese society is in a state of denial and on the other hand, tolerant of homosexuals and transgender persons. Her view presented society’s dilemma:

We are in the state of denial, so to say. We haven’t really thought about it. But you will be quite amazed that Bhutanese society is quite liberal and accepting. You may think that it will be stigmatised or things like that but people are quite accepting, if they really want to come in open. We are so accepting and perhaps too accepting, may be this is why this happen.

Peldron, a well-educated and experienced woman entrepreneur and owner of a well-established company, said that nobody seems to know about the life of homosexual and transgender individuals in a quiet agrarian society. This section of society is known only when either media informs the people or when rural villages becomes part of the city and people move to the city, the latter opens a space for different types of people and the existence of homosexual and transgender persons. Thus, this is how people know about queer people in a social context. Homosexuals and transgender people are not publicly accepted although the society knows about one or two people.

She added that queer people were and are persecuted in every society and were “burnt on stake” even in highly developed countries. She expressed that as a GNH society Bhutan must care for them. She suggested elevating their status through law by legalising their existence, encouraging them to come out into the open, finding
core support of their peers, seeking comfort and finding out some kind of direction in their lives.

Chimi, a devout Christian woman entrepreneur, expressed disagreement with the idea of a legal recognition of LGBT people but supported the need to have legal protection if they are ill-treated by society or face violence such as rape or genital mutilation. Zam’s perspective of Bhutanese society displayed it as both inclusive and exclusive of LGBT persons. Some sections of the society appear conservative while others are liberal.

6.4.1 Being a Woman in a Man’s Body: Complexities of Transgender Identity

Bhutanese culture does not accept an open expression of sexuality including an overt expression of intimacy for the dominant heterosexuals. In this context, homosexual and transgender persons face the challenge of freely expressing their sexual orientations like heterosexuals. Kiba and Lhakyi, the two courageous transgenders, faced many difficulties when they attempted to become women. Kiba and Lhakyi are now 21 and 22 years old, respectively, unemployed young adults living with their parents. Their experience shows the hardships they faced at home, school and public places and continues to face them being transgenders. They were both born as boys and have masculine physical features. However, psychologically their earliest childhood memories were a longing to be girls. Both were childhood friends and remained best of friends until now. Kiba’s early childhood memory was an attempt to be a girl and shared that her mother told her that she resisted wearing pants and cried in protest. Instead, she enjoyed wearing kira (traditional girl’s dress) and played with dolls. Kiba added that Lhakyi also refused to wear gho (traditional boy’s dress) and wore kira at home after school. They recalled girl’s behaviour as children.

At school Kiba faced difficulties of not being able to use male or female toilets, being teased and even bullied by fellow students, who were mostly boys. The boys stripped her to validate her sex and she was extremely embarrassed to reveal her under sized male sexual organ. Her friends rejected her after discovering her sexual identity. She added that she suffered the discomfort of wearing gho at school and her father refused to seek the school’s permission to wear kira. Although later the school permitted her to wear kira, after she had first left school, it did not help her
to continue her education. She briefly returned to the same school but left after she failed in class nine.

Kiba’s father was hesitant and perhaps embarrassed to approach his child’s school authority to seek a practical solution for the child to continue her education. Kiba found refuge outside school and home for she could wear girl’s clothes. She said that she wore gho and attended school until class eight. The patriarchal institution of family and the school’s rules were inflexible. However, the Education Secretary who is also the country’s only woman Secretary commented that the Ministry permitted the particular school to allow the child to come in kira and continue her education or to change schools in the same area to complete her schooling.

The state dealt with such a contentious social issue as and when it surfaces and provided a solution. The LGBT people are a minority section of the population living in disguise in a conservative society. The state does not place importance on formulating a non-binary male-female sensitive gender policy to address emerging concerns of the third gender. The Education Secretary rightly commented thus:

Coming out with a policy is a big decision. We can start in a small way. Now we have counsellors in every school. We can have workshop for counsellors, at least sensitise them so that they are in a better position to address it. Not in a policy thing, there will be hue and cry about it. It sort of should creep in, where you start with counselling and be mindful of these things. You must bring out the issues slowly based on the real situation.

The state agency’s intention is to slowly bring in a positive change based on actual information and this is appropriate in a conservative society where there will be groups critical of social policies intended to include the excluded sections of the society. Kiba acknowledged the Education Ministry’s support and her School Principal’s encouragement to advise her to return to the school:

I got ... permission from the Ministry and you can continue study. You can wear kira and go ... my principal he really really support[ed] me and I really thank him ... They had a really tough time to bring in the right way.

During the short period after leaving and returning to the school, she worked as a bar tender and dancer for about three months. She recalled that she was frustrated in the absence of support and took to drinking and smoking. Kiba vented her bottled-
up stress through tears, smoke and drink. She also relieved her emotional problems through partying. She met strangers who were mostly private entrepreneurs. They offered to converse with her and some even helped her buy women’s clothing. She added that many people, including the media, came to know her through the bar. She shared that she had a natural skill to dance and entertain people, but was also introduced to promiscuous behaviour.

Her new-found free space and life scarred her physically and emotionally. At the age of 16 years, a group of six boys raped her at midnight in the bar. She did not access medical or police assistance for the fear of revealing her identity. Although she was a minor under the existing law, she was injured, bled and suffered pain and was confused about whether she had the right to fight the case as a transgender. Conventionally rape is defined as a forced sexual intercourse between man and woman. The Penal Code’s chapter on rape includes rape of married person, women and children and is silent about the third sex (Penal Code 2004: 26-29). In Kiba’s case it was rape of a young man’s physical body by six men because Kiba had the physical characteristics of a male. This incident implies the need for dynamic legal protection and social justice for the third sex and a rethinking of the criminalisation of homosexuality. It also means there are sexually active gay and bisexual people exposed to the risk of transmitting STDs and even HIV resulting from unprotected anal sex.

As for Lhakyi, she did not receive support from her family to be a girl. She went through a difficult psychological period as a child and adolescent for not being accepted for who she was. Both her family and the neighbours rejected her behaviour and the latter even blamed her for natural disasters. She told her parents about her wish to be become a girl when she was 17 years old. Her mother accepted her, but her father still insisted that she remain a boy until a neighbour, who happened to be a health worker, convinced him to recognise her:

I had such a difficult time to be accepted by my parents. In addition, even my neighbours blamed natural disasters like earthquake and floods are results of people like us. They insulted me so much but I did not do anything. Only after that HISC’s[Health Information and Service Centre]counsellors met my parents and explained about my situation to them and advised them very well. They advised my parents to permit me to do
things that I want to do or else I will risk committing suicide. Now, not only my parents, siblings but also my parents’ cousins have accepted me.

At a local primary school in Thimphu, fellow students teased and called her all kinds of names, she faced difficulties in using a common toilet, most of the teachers treated her like a boy and one even pulled her hair and banged her head on the desk calling her chaka (a Hindi and a Nepali derogative word which referred to a man who behaved like a woman) and scolded her in front of her class mates for not wearing her gho well and using cosmetics. Home, school and community around Lhakyi refused to acknowledge her as an equal human being. Instead, in the absence of support she suffered serious emotional stress. Eventually, she left school after class eight to seek a real change in her strong aspiration to become a female:

I left school because I wanted to change myself. After leaving school, I went through all sorts of experiences ... A big thought which was so different came to me. I thought that all people knew who was really was and started wearing kira.

Kira is seen as a powerful symbol of liberation in Lhakyi’s struggle to be a female under a controlling patriarchal home and school environment. The school did not permit her in kira and she left to be in places where she could be herself. She found solace wearing kira and strolling aimlessly in the heart of town with her friends. Moreover, Lhakyi has a bigger problem of not being able to obtain a new citizenship identity card after her family accepted her as a female. She said that she is embarrassed to show her citizenship identity card and often hides it from others. She was registered as a male on her current citizenship identity card. A citizenship identity card is a critical legal document for a common citizen to establish one’s nationality, and access education, healthcare, employment, and for travel and to obtain a business license. Her father agreed to seek the Home Ministry’s assistance in re-registering her as a female. During the field work her father had not done anything about it. She is pessimistic about marriage and said that no man would like to marry a transgender, although she is sexually attracted to heterosexual men. She said a few men accepted her, but lied that they loved her only to avail themselves of a temporary sexual favour and then rejected her. She intended to adopt a child and become a small time entrepreneur.
Both Kiba and Lhakyi shared that there are homosexuals and transgenders who are not willing to come out in public out of fear. The media reported that a global gay networking site revealed about 50 men aged between 20-50 years who claimed to be either Bhutanese gay or bisexual and stated they were members of the network (Pelden 2011: 1). Such a practice seemed true because through the most recent Bhutanese LGBT online site, and under an anonymous name “K”, a homosexual person said that he “found the strength to accept his homosexuality through an online ‘It’s Gets Better Project’ and America’s talk-show celebrity, Ellen Generes” (BBS 2013h: 2). Kiba and Lhakyi remain the only transgenders who decided to reveal their identity. They named a gay friend who is working as a police person. He planned to resign from work for he felt constraints on not being able to keep long hair and follow work discipline. They enjoyed meeting fellow transgenders and homosexuals as they could identify with them. Kiba counted about 12 transgenders she knew and Lhakyi said that she has two transgender friends and enjoyed their company, especially sharing about their personal lives. At the time of the field work, Kiba and Lhakyi exhibited confidence about their identity and even shared their story on BBS television. In fact, the recently launched “LGBT Bhutan” page in social media’s anonymous administrators said that they drew strength from Kiba’s example (BBS 2013h: 1). Compared to their childhood and adolescent period, they commented that they are less discriminated now. They explained that they have learnt to cope with snide remarks made about them in public places, assisted the Health Ministry in gathering information about other LGBT people to curtail STDs and HIV and enjoyed visiting drayangs (entertainment bar) partying and drinking. Sometimes, they worked as drayang girls. Their new beginning to join mainstream society appears optimistic.

However, Peldron, a woman entrepreneur from a reputed private company, knew a transgender through her daughter. She viewed it as a challenge to bring them into mainstream society. She heard that they had volatile emotions and were extremely hard to look after:

She took one of the girls, they can’t deal with emotions. They go to bars, they get drunk, they say all funny things. So, unless you are a social worker or you are totally committed to the cause of helping these people, as a person, one to one, I think your patience runs high.
Peldron and her daughter’s experience indicate that there is a presence of recognition and tolerance of queer individuals despite the presence of conventional stigma associated with difference and the challenge of supporting them. In fact, Peldron acknowledged that their orientation is nature’s creation. She attributed homosexuals and transgenders’ emotional problems to modern society’s negative attitude towards them.

This is one of the core issues about queer people’s fragile emotion for they are not recognised as who they are and go through immense emotional trauma. In fact, Kiba thought that she was normal although she had a masculine body and feminine emotions:

We think that we are innocent and normal human being. Even the transgender also, they are normal actually. This is part of life you know. It is a gift of God. So you should accept. This is not that you want to become.

On the contrary, Kiba and Lhakyi admitted that they do not have breasts but aspire to have breasts implanted to feel more “natural”. They also said that they think that they are women, although they have no uterus and do not go through menstrual cycles. Peldron commented that their fragile temperament resulting from their distorted identity may hinder them from getting employment. Her daughter could not bear emotional tantrums and her attempt to help the particular transgender person failed. Peldron reiterated that as a GNH society, the Bhutanese people need to care for them. She suggested the state, civil society and social workers address LGBT’s problems. During the time of field work both Kiba and Lhakyi were fully engaged with the Ministry of Health’s project. Kiba commented that the Bhutanese society will take time to accept the third sex. However, she expressed that it was vital to address LGBT’s problems for it is going to affect society. She said that she would like to seek assistance as a transgender to collectively solve LGBT’s problems. Lhakyi shared a similar view:

Everybody is going to get married ... There are chances of children’s children’s children being born like this. If we don’t make a way from the beginning, in the future there will be problems. It is important to solve them. It is our responsibility being transgender, being Bhutanese and as a society. At the same time, we need support from everyone.
6.4.2 State Support: The Health Ministry’s Initiative to Address Third Gender’s Unsafe Sexual Behaviour

The Health Ministry has taken a proactive approach to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS acquired through risky sexual behaviour within the LGBT population. The Ministry is concerned about the danger of spreading it to the mainstream heterosexual population. However, Public Health officials commented that all current HIV-positive individuals were infected through heterosexuals. According to a media report, the Ministry is concerned about the quickly growing global trend of the spread of HIV/AIDS through homosexual behaviour. Therefore, it initiated a programme “to prevent and to treat HIV and other sexually transmitted infection” for man having sex with man (MSM), transgender and lesbians. A health official said that “unsafe ‘penetrative anal sex’ carried a high risk of HIV transmission and, because it is artificial in transgender, the chances of infection are higher” (Pelden 2011: 1). This view appears quite correct for an anonymous gay man acknowledged that “... gay Bhutanese have a very carefree attitude towards sex-safe sex is not important” (BBS 2013: 2).

The objective of the programme is to “build capacity and train people in the government and non-government sectors to have a national consultation meeting, and to develop behaviour change material on how to protect themselves”. This implies that the Ministry’s intention is to include state and non-state actors to formulate a practical protection policy in HIV/AIDS age. Dr Ugen Dophu, the Director of Public Health, said that there is need to provide equal Health Care Services to the homosexuals by including them “whether they are genetically inclined to be gay or lesbian, they should be treated equally, and be given the kind of health services they need. To this end, the state has put in efforts to gather information about LGBT population” (Pelden 2011: 1).

Dr Ugen Dophu candidly stated that the first step was to “trace” LGBT people to be able to provide health services. The public health officials mentioned that about two percent of the male population in Bhutan is gay. The officials are also aware about gay and lesbian meetings (Pelden 2012: 1). The recent LGBT’s website reported that the Health Ministry conducted information mapping on LGBTs in seven Dzongkhags. It was mostly conducted in urban centres where there are reported incidences of HIV among its population. The Ministry shared the study’s
findings at the end of 2013 (BBS 2013h: 2). Thus, the state health sector’s effort to provide equal Health Services irrespective of sexual orientation appears to be a noteworthy initiative towards equality in diversity.

During the UN and the NCWC organised GRB workshop held in July 2012 in which the author was one of the participants, the Director General of the Department of Medical Services brought up the issue of LGBT. He argued that it is important to include the third sex in the state’s gender budgeting to address their problems. He did not name them as LGBT and seemed cautious about not using the term. This is significant because the key state actors like the senior bureaucrats are open and worried about LGBT’s health problems although homosexual relationships are termed illegal. This may pave the way for an inclusive policy in other aspects of governance and contribute towards equality.

Kiba and Lhakyi were included in the Ministry’s homosexual and transgender information mapping project. Lhakyi’s neighbour, who was working for the Ministry, alerted the Ministry about the existence of homosexuals. Gradually, he got Lhakyi and Kiba to participate to track down LGBT individuals in the Dzongkhags. According to both of them they were paid for the work. Initially, Lhakyi was frightened to accept the invitation. She was suspicious that she may be imprisoned for being a transgender as she already had traumatic experiences. Eventually, after repeated persuasion she accepted it and felt empowered.

Kiba explained that the project is research on MSM and transgender. Both Kiba and Lhakyi travelled to different Dzongkhags on an MSM and transgender information study. Kiba said that she even visited Bangladesh as a part of project. Kiba seemed quite passionate about supporting the study. She also viewed the project to be helpful for homosexuals. Her sexual behaviour improved after counselling for she admitted that she practices safe sex and used contraceptives. However, she suggests educating the mainstream heterosexual population through advocacy and supportive state policy for co-existence of different kinds of people in society. Kiba explained that it is essential to provide equal rights to homosexuals and transgender. She thought that the Ministry of Health’s officials working with the third sex study were not supportive of her idea of forming a transgender people’s group as a civil society organisation to address their concerns. She added that initially the Indian consultant who worked for the project had advised the formation of a transgender
people’s group like in India, but later he dropped the suggestion. The Ministry is cautious of not contradicting the existing laws but at the same time attempting to solve bigger social issues of the country.

In such a context, tracing transgenders for counselling is challenging for some of them preferred to conceal their identity. Kiba and Lhakyi said that there are transgenders that they know of who declined to attend the Health Ministry’s workshop. They knew a transgender, for example, who worked as a bar girl in Thimphu. She appeared as a normal woman. She was adamant about hiding her identity such that Kiba had to literally challenge her to the point of revealing her sex and proposing a court case. This showed that the Health Ministry’s LGBT information mapping is not an easy undertaking. This also means that the LGBT people do not trust the state and non-state actors and even fellow homosexuals and transsexuals out of the fear of being either persecuted or being embarrassed in closely knit conservative society. Laws are needed to support their sexuality while family and community continue ostracise them.

Further, Lhakyi’s experience of her inability to access Health Services after suffering a sex related infection validates LGBT’s perception of mainstream society. She said that she could not trust health care professionals in the hospital and private pharmacy shops for the risk involved in revealing her identity in a small society. She suggested that the state and civil society organisations like the NCWC and RENEW must try to understand them and extend assistance. Similar LGBT persons like Lhakyi aspire to communicate with state and the civil society agencies to address their problems and be productive citizens. The Health Ministry’s objective to offer equal health care irrespective of sexual orientation is a progressive move to ensure every citizen’s physical and mental health is well looked after thereby contributing to building productive human beings.

6.5 CONCLUSION

Equality in diversity argues that each person can make a valuable contribution to society. Therefore, each of them must be treated equally and justly. However, within a dominant patriarchal culture supported by a legal framework, women and people of different sexuality and religion are excluded. Feminist stand point theory argues that the society would not progress without using skills and talents of such
people and by supporting a muscular hegemony. The maintenance of a single hegemonic world view is no longer possible or realistic.

In a globalised and changing world, different points of view are essential to build a sustainable society and address humanity. Bhutan has a responsibility as a GNH nation. Differing views are needed to address complex life’s issues and need to be drawn from various human experiences. This is important to tap individual’s talents, be enriched by them and contribute to the wider society. The King’s devolvement of his executive power recognises the significance of diverse perspectives in democracy.

There is a hope for the politics of difference to attain equality in the Bhutanese context. Despite the non-recognition of the third sex by the existing laws, the state agencies like the Ministry of Education and Health have taken small but life changing initiatives to include homosexuals and transgender to access Education and Health Services. Similarly, although the Christian population’s attempt to proselytise is legally prohibited and perceived as a threat by mainstream Buddhist and Hindu society, Christians are recognised as citizens (Constitution 2009: 19). The latter appear to enjoy a certain amount of religious freedom and equal civil, economic and social opportunity. Therefore, it is important to build on the existing inclusive policy practices within the state and among common citizens towards a point of broader convergence of the politics of equality in diversity. It may demand much time and concerted effort in an emerging democracy as there is a risk of divisive party politics turning the electorate against each other through ethnic and religious differences. Instead of being critical about ethnic and religious differences, it is vital to rise above the contradictions and address the bigger issue of human and gender oppression.

Five years of democracy has brought some changes to the lives of Bhutanese citizens. Minority religious and sexual groups were able to articulate their rights and live a normal life. Further, the fact that both state owned and private media including the social media’s efforts to cover women and minority group’s issues show that there is a possibility and a respect for the politics of equality in diversity. It indicates that a free and objective press can play a critical role in Bhutan’s transition democracy. However, it may take several years to truly build an inclusive democracy. An inclusive democratic society would enable men and women and heterosexual and homosexual, major and minor categories of people from various
ethnic and religious groups to co-create and co-maintain the politics of harmony and rise above each other’s differences to address common problems of humanity. A healthy politics of equality in diversity, which accommodates more than conventional dual gender definition of man-woman, and an appreciation for diverse people’s strengths, would help enhance democratic values.
In 2008 following the first democratic elections in Bhutan ten women were elected by other male and female citizens to the National Council and the National Assembly. They were entering a political space which was implacably masculine in its practices and processes. While these women approached the parliament with a sense of victory their male colleagues were unwelcoming and sometimes intimidating because they had challenged and changed the norm for what it meant to be a politician in Bhutan. Within this dominant male environment women had to carve out their position. This demanded extra effort on the women’s part and a clear demonstration of their leadership skills. Their involvement in the Council’s and Assembly’s Committees, their voice and leverage during the process of legislation exposed the parliamentary milieu as masculine and not an easy work place for a woman.

During the process of legislation different dynamics between men and women parliamentarians were revealed. This was apparent when the issues of rape and domestic violence prevention were discussed as was the manner of the women’s parliamentary behaviour. Male politicians were not subject to the same scrutiny.

The entry of women into the parliament also raised issues about furthering gender equity in the parliament. One method which has been embraced in some advanced Western democracies and a few developing democracies is seat reservation. However, such strategies are not widely welcomed in Bhutan. The women parliamentarians were also examined over their seemingly passive stance in the National Assembly and their leverage in the National Council. These women politicians are heavily scrutinised by the Bhutanese society as to their presence and activity in the parliament.

14In the 1970s under very limited franchise a female had entered the National Assembly under the protection of the Monarchy.
At the global level, women’s representation in parliament is not impressive. The Inter-Parliamentary Union’s (IPU) recent statistics state that the world average women’s representation in both houses is about 22 percent. The average women’s representation in the Asian region is about 19 percent. Some of the South Asian countries have poor women’s representation. Bangladesh, India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka have about 19, 11, 7 and 6 percent respectively (IPU 2013, IPU 2015). Bhutan is similar to the Maldives and Sri Lanka with about 8 percent (see Table 2, page 9).

7.1 MASCULINE POLITICAL SPACE

Patriarchy is rooted in “political, social, or economic forms, whether of caste or class, feudality, or bureaucracy, just as it pervades all major religions, it also exhibits great variety in history and locale” (Millet 2000: 25), parliament is a patriarchal space. In Bhutan, the National Assembly is housed in a traditional Dzong (fortress) architectural design although it was built in modern times. Traditionally, Dzongs were a completely male space in terms of purpose, structure and functions although today the female workforce share its space with minimal practical needs like a separate washroom. Until the new parliament house was complete, the National Assembly was housed in Tashi Choe Dzong in the capital (Appendix H). The National Assembly building shares space with the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader’s offices and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The structure has a very formal and hierarchical ambience with clearly defined space for the King, Speaker, Prime Minister, Ministers, Opposition Leader and members. A few women members are scattered around in a big hall amid a large male presence (Appendix I). However, the National Council is located in a less formal structure, a single storeyed modern building which was once used for royal banquets (Appendix J). The Council is less intimidating with members sitting quite close to each other in a semi-circular arrangement although the Chairperson has an elevated seat. The women members in the Council appear quite at ease during deliberations. During the author’s parliamentary observation it was more comfortable to watch the Council’s deliberations at the back of the parliamentarians seats than sitting in common gallery located a long distance away in the Assembly’s hall. Since renovation of the Assembly and Council buildings, modern wash rooms for men and women are available, at least addressing basic practical gender needs unlike several traditional
public buildings. However, it is yet to be seen whether women will be permitted to breastfeed their children in these buildings.

The Bhutanese parliament’s nature and structure exhibits masculine domination in terms of male supremacy. The fundamental masculine political culture, symbols and language are carried forward through the dominant Buddhist culture in the form of sword, scarves and boots which are largely a male prerogative. The parliamentary language, Dzongkha, is difficult for most women politicians to articulate their ideas in debate because they were not as proficient as most men. This is attributable to their less experience in the use of high-flown official Dzongkha in public debates than simple spoken Dzongkha in every day communication.

Further, in Indonesia, Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter of the country’s charismatic first President attracted a huge following when she assumed political leadership of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle in 1996. She was accepted as the president’s “child” and not his “daughter.” In addition, her opponents used her sex as a political weapon to oppose her (Bessell 2005: 11). In Bhutan the first cohort of ten women parliamentarians had to try and fit into “ill-fitting” men’s attire. These women attempted to fit the feminine into a political space which is largely constructed to suit masculine behaviours. During the process of trying the male political skin, the female body experienced more pressure because it is strikingly different from the presented masculine norm. “Gender blindness has been the orthodoxy in political theory, even in radical critiques of liberal democracy” (Puwar 2004: 14).

A young woman parliamentarian, who is also a mother, lived within the vicinity of parliament to attend to her young breast feeding child during the lunch hour. Two of her colleagues who were young mothers quickly returned home during short breaks to feed their children.

Some advanced democratic countries still operate within the masculine model in parliament. In the UK, for example, breastfeeding was prohibited in the House of Commons in 2000. The Speaker, Honourable Betty Boothroyd told female MP Julia Drown that “she could not breastfeed in a committee because beverages are not allowed in committees” (Puwar 2004: 88, see also Puwar 2002: 129). The only small amendment the new Speaker made in 2002 was permitting women to use a special
room created for breast-feeding in the women members’ rooms. Notwithstanding the effort of women parliamentarians to turn over this patriarchal rule, breast feeding remains banned in the “Chamber, committee rooms and the press gallery” in the House of Commons (Puwar 2004: 88). In a similar vein, the Australian Parliament House had no child care room until 2009 but had a gym, pool and meditation room (Crawford and Pini 2010: 613, Crawford and Pini 2011: 93). Moreover, opponents mercilessly blamed Edith Cowan, the first woman who was elected to parliament during her first campaign for abandoning her husband and children although she was 60 year of age then and her youngest child was 30, and her husband was out campaigning for her (Sawer and Simms 193: 82).

This patriarchal attitude still appears to remain in contemporary Australia. Australia’s first woman Prime Minister, Julia Gillard was criticised for not being a “natural woman” in terms of having no husband and children and therefore not being able to relate to average Australians (Kent 2010: 227,231). In addition, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) YouTube video (2012) revealed that former Prime Minister, Julia Gillard faced misogyny and sexist comments from Tony Abbott, the then Leader of the Opposition. In the House of Representatives, Prime Minister Gillard stood up against chauvinism and sternly expressed... “I will not be lectured on sexism and misogyny by this man [pointing at Tony Abbott], I will not, not now, not ever..... I was personally offended by the leader of opposition cat-calling across this table... I was offended when the leader of opposition went outside the parliament and said ditch the witch” (ABC 2012). Kerry-Anne Walsh, who worked in the federal parliamentary press gallery for about 25 years observed that Prime Minister Gillard exhibited her best oratory skill and political art in her parliamentary speech against misogyny and misogynistic man (Walsh 2013: 257).

7.2 WOMEN AND ELECTIONS

Entering the male political space, parliament has not been easy for Bhutanese women (see Table 9). Wangmo, one of the senior woman members in the National Council, summed up the challenge of a woman politician to be included in party politics:

…the next election is right round the corner and nothing has changed in the electoral system despite the fact that the last electoral system failed to be
inclusive of women. The risks are so much higher for women. Only a radical change like the reservation of seats will make the real difference.

Table 9: Composition of Parliament of Bhutan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wangmo’s experience is true for most women. During the 2008 elections, all four women in the National Assembly from the victorious DPT joined party politics with men’s support. Two women received encouragement and support from their spouse and father, respectively, and male party coordinators and workers to join the party. Two women joined politics out of their own interest and received support from core male members at party headquarters and people in the constituency. In 2013 general elections in the National Assembly, only three women were elected from the winning PDP. Although their tenure in office ended, the King re-appointed two former women Councillors as his eminent representatives in the National Council, which did not have a single elected woman representative.

Grey and Sawer (2005) argue that in Australia and New Zealand women’s low representation in parliament and leadership roles within it for about half a century can be attributed to the masculine driven political parties’ “gate keeping” function (Grey and Sawer 2005: 176). Australia and New Zealand experienced male dominated politics for most of the 20th century. Also, during the period until 1940, about 75 percent of women decided to either run as independent candidates or through minor parties. Those women who were part of the suffrage movement did not trust masculine political parties. These parties “were created by men to protect men’s interests”. Therefore, women stood outside the parties in a hope to “purify and achieve social reform without being corrupted by the party spirit” for they believed in “the power of vote” (Grey and Sawer 2005: 176). The recent IPU statistics show that women’s representation in the Australian parliament is 31 percent (IPU 2015).

In the Bhutanese National Assembly, during the second parliamentary elections the number of women dwindled from four to three women out of 47 parliamentarians. However, the PDP government provided one of the ministerial
berths to a woman. Thus, the country has its first woman Minister (Appendix K). However, Bhutan’s first woman Minister, Lyonpo Dorji Choden, in 2013 politics showed the positive and negative aspects of party and electoral politics in Bhutan’s transition democracy (Bhutan Observer 2013: 1). In the primary elections, she led the DNT. After the elimination of the DNT, she and three of her male colleagues joined the PDP. Her political move from being the DNT’s president and joining the PDP as a candidate became a widely discussed issue in Bhutanese politics, which often questioned her ethics (Lamsang 2013: 1). Thus, on one hand there was a breakthrough in enabling a competent woman to enter a masculine Bhutanese cabinet. On the other, the manner in which it occurred failed to set a principled political trend for future potential women leaders.

Further, the 2013 general election was highly disputed. The DPT questioned their loss and attributed it to that the current King’s involvement in partisan politics and India’s intervention during the election. The DPT’s president and former Prime Minister Jigme Y Thinley won his constituency by a large number of votes but he resigned. He did not give any reason for his resignation in public to avoid unnecessary speculation amidst the unpleasant post-election political environment (Wangchuk 2013d: 1). The DPT supporters nominated 31 year old Dechen Zangmo, a woman entrepreneur. She is said to belong to an influential local family engaged in well-established enterprise in Samdrup Jongkhar, a growing market town in eastern Bhutan. The family is stated to have known the local community well and even claimed to have supported the community. It is easier for women from influential families to obtain political nomination from male party gatekeepers (Dema 2013b: 1).

A by-election was conducted on 9th November 2013. Dechen Zangmo won with a total vote of 1,751. Despite this being his fourth time contesting an election, in 2013 the PDP’s Pema Wangchuk only obtained 1,162 votes and lost, the difference being 589 votes. Both educated voters who had access to a postal ballot and rural voters who used the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) in the constituency supported the DPT. Dechen Zangmo’s win can be attributed to former DPT president’s leadership, party worker’s commitment, her family’s influence and the electorate’s support of the party after disputed election results. Thus, in Bhutan’s young parliamentary democratic history, Dechen Zangmo was the first woman member
elected to office from the opposition party in the National Assembly. Thus the number of women in the Assembly rose to four as in the first period of parliament and the percentage of women’s representation increased to 8 percent from 7 percent with six females out of 72 members (BBS 2013j).

When the opposition adopted Ministries and agencies based on the custom of shadow Ministers, Dechen Zangmo was given the responsibility for women and children issues (Dorji 2013b: 1, Wangchuk 2013b: 1). In the traditional male defined political arena, women’s roles in both ruling and opposition parties appear to be relegated to conventional soft subjects (Puwar 2004: 89). These issues are considered less important when compared to “hard” and significant issues like “foreign policy, economic or defence.” At present in the Opposition, the shadow Ministries of Foreign Policy, Economics and Finance are overseen by former experienced male Ministers.

7.3 MEN AND WOMEN IN THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT

In general, men and women parliamentarians are of view that they have a cordial personal professional relationship. Regular observation of parliamentarians during the field work confirmed this view. However, men and women differed on issues of ethics and moral values such as rape and domestic violence. These two issues have a direct bearing on women and children in society.

Most women in National Council and National Assembly agreed on severe rape penalties for those found guilty of committing such cruel acts. Only two women viewed rape and domestic violence from both men’s and women’s lens. Research from other countries suggests similar findings and men and women politicians’ behaviour in Legislative Committee meetings in the USA, for example, indicated that women appeared likely to be more inclusive and cooperative when more of them became leaders. However, men were observed to be less likely to be inclusive and cooperative when more women took up leadership positions. As more women enter the political arena women extended cooperation but men saw women’s power as a threat to their own power and privilege and obviously extended less cooperation and had a low level of compromise (Rosenthal 1998: 88-89). Men then, carry the patriarchal mindset with the need to dominate and the tendency to hold their majority
position. Increasing numbers of the female minority actually frightens the male majority and eventually lowers their sense of cooperation (Paxton et al. 2007: 275).

Men parliamentarians in the National Council of Bhutan were more open and accommodating about harsh rape laws than men in the National Assembly. Most men on the Council have had the benefits of higher education, exposure to the outside world and adequate job experience before joining politics and this enables them to think more broadly. There is a tendency for the majority men to cooperate with the minority women (Paxton et al. 2007: 275). Some men in the National Assembly demonstrated a narrow understanding of rape and its strong negative effect of scarring the victims for life. Similarly, their stance against the Domestic Violence Prevention Bill indicated their poor knowledge of the actual realities of women and child victims of violence. They had limited understanding of human rights and the international treaties on women and child rights conventions that Bhutan had signed and the gender equality and social justice that the Bhutanese state promoted.

Men parliamentarians in the House of Commons in the UK were said to give less importance to women’s issues (Puwar 2004: 88). Although women parliamentarians in Nordic countries could address particular women issues and were able to “influence certain legislation to reflect women’s interests”, the masculine nature and structure of Scandinavian parliament’s functioning makes it difficult for women politicians to efficiently advocate for women’s issues (Bystydzien ski 2005: 215-216). There is the presence of the ideals of “justice and equality” beside “practices and attitudes that treat and regard women as different and inferior to men” (Bystydzien ski 1995: 17-20). This holds true for mature democracies with a long history of female representation as well as for Bhutan.

7.3.1 Men and Women Parliamentarians: Perceived to be same but distinct

Women participants in the research study generally perceived men to be more ambitious, publicity seeking, changing stances depending on situations and playing politics in a negative manner. Men were seen to accept pressure without upholding their principles either being diplomatic or crafty in their professional conduct. On the contrary, women remain steadfast, principled and consistent with their views in an erratic political environment. Women saw themselves to have less ambition than men and preferred working behind the scenes and meeting deadlines rather than emerging
into the limelight. Women also felt that they were more easily accessible than most men. There is a general view that men parliamentarians were more visible than women as the latter were not seen as often as men on television or heard on radio. Similarly, IDEA’s recent study showed that women focus less on media coverage during their election campaign than men. In Peru, for example, men spent “4.8 times more on media coverage than women” in their 2006 elections. Men put in time and effort for political marketing and therefore fare well at the polls (International IDEA 2014).

Yangden, a senior woman parliamentarian in the Council, stated that men are “real” politicians implying a negative undertone. She laughed and remarked:

… men are real politicians, men are real politicians! That is what I really believe. Generally, women cannot show two faces, they speak up, very expressive and reactive but not our men.

Yangden reiterated that she had no qualms about expressing her honest views about men to their face. Zhiwa, a young woman parliamentarian and Wangmo, another senior woman parliamentarian in the Council, agreed with Yangden’s views. Wangmo opined that women spent more time working and less time marketing themselves where as men just did the opposite. She said:

… someone once said that men spend 10% of their time working and the 90% of their time selling that. Women on the other hand, do just the opposite.

A study of gender in the Australian parliament confirms that men spent more time on self-promotion than women (Crawford and Pini 2011: 91, 96). Shreejana, a senior woman member in the Assembly with more than a decade’s work experience prior to joining politics, said:

Usually women are not harsh and sensitive to other’s feeling where as men can easily scold in public. This is why people find women politicians comfortable. Men really play politics. In our recent consultative tour, men from the villages commented that it is easier to tell me than men politicians.

Seven out of 10 women parliamentarians said that women politicians were much more committed than men in supporting individual and collective voters’
needs. They said that they ensure that all possible is done until the problem is resolved. They thought that men were casual about individual voter’s problems.

The two youngest women parliamentarians felt that senior and veteran men, including an old Minister undermined their capacity. During her interview, Yangzom reported that she was scolded for raising the land replacement issue in her constituency related to displaced people whose land was taken by the government to build hydro power. She said that problem could not be addressed during public meetings and she made an appointment with the Minister to seek a solution with an open mind. She said that she was humiliated by the Minister, saw her as a young woman and did not respect her as a parliamentarian from the Council. One of her older male colleagues also undermined Yangzom’s ability. During a Council session, she and Yangden were asked to comment on an issue tabled in the plenary and they were sorting out who should speak. The older male colleague with a surprised face asked if she was going to comment implying that the older woman member should speak. She felt hurt and thought that he must have perceived her to be too young and inexperienced to speak on the issue. She reflected on the issue, did the all necessary homework and wrote about it that night. The next morning, she went to the older male colleague to ask his feedback lest she missed out any important points. He understood that she was hurt and said that it was well done and that she was sensitive. After that he never undermined her capacity but encouraged her.

Another young woman member’s professional ability was devalued during the Committee’s Chair assignment allocation in the Assembly. The Speaker who had equal status to that of Ministers felt that she was inappropriate to shoulder the responsibility. Pangchen, one of the young woman parliamentarians in the Assembly, stated that men tend to disapprove when women stress women’s issues. Instead, she found it easy to seek men’s support politely by including men’s concerns. She put forward example of her husband and son to empathise with men and win their support. Deki, the youngest woman member in the Assembly, said that in general men in the Assembly were supportive and helpful but there were some men who simply disliked women. She added that she often lobbied one or two men for support and had them to convince the rest of the men when all four women in the Assembly failed to seek men’s support. Women tend to use a non-confrontational approach when seeking male support for a redress on issues that largely affect women.
Some men parliamentarians thought that women in the Council were more capable than women in Assembly. A single woman in the Assembly was named as capable but tough and emotional. The other three members were seen as passive participants. However, Kinga, an intellectual young male member, who is the Deputy Chair in the Council, said that he did not look at men and women with different glasses. Rather he saw them as people’s representatives in parliament and had an equal amount of respect for his male and female colleagues. Like Kinga, Lhendup a senior male member in the Assembly stated that he respected men and women as the people’s representative irrespective of their gender. Tshering, a senior male member in the Council, thought that despite the abilities of women in the Council they appeared individualistic and could not strike a consensus and work as a team to address bigger women’s issues. He added that none of the women Councillors took the initiative to spearhead women’s issues. However, Kinga opined that:

Women themselves taking different stand even if the issue has to do with gender. In fact, there will be men who will be supporting some group of women and other men supporting another group of women. Therefore, in the last four years the experience is that issues are discussed on its merit and not on gender perspective.

Gender was given less importance than merit and capable women Councillors appeared to overlook women’s issues and act in a gender blind manner. However, women Councillors ensured inclusion of both ‘he/she’ in the Constitution during the first session of the parliament in 2008 when ‘he’ was used to refer to both male and female.

A male DPT Minister in the Assembly claimed that Bhutanese politics was not yet tainted with the negative labels of politics and suggested that both men and women politicians were in the process of learning to deal with the complexities of politics. He said that:

… both men and women are naive. When I look at men and women in both National Assembly and National Council, over all, if you put them together, some of the members have actually been very vocal, articulate and are able to argue on points and deliberate on issues. So, the signs are good.

The Opposition Leader had a differing view. He argued that several men and some women parliamentarians in the Assembly had poor conduct. He cited women
parliamentarians in the Council as role models for aspiring women politicians. Both men and women parliamentarians labelled one senior, capable woman Councillor, who promoted women’s issues, as a feminist in a negative sense. Yangzom viewed her as not being able to relate and said “… she stresses on women issues a lot it sounds irritating on people’s ears.”

Dema shared the same concern and commented people disliked the senior woman Councillor and “men do not appreciate feminists who stress women’s issues.”

Able women parliamentarians were cautious of openly promoting women’s issues lest they be negatively termed feminist in the face of huge male dominance. Both men and women have very little understanding of feminism other than its association with women’s issues. Hence in such a context, feminism seems to cause fury among the educated and influential elite. In a mature and much admired democracy like Norway, for example, there were a few women politicians who were feminist activists and men did not receive them well. Women faced difficulty in representing their sex (Bystydzienki 1995: 93-95). In Australian party politics, women with strong feminist views face disappointment in a political environment where women’s issues are sidelined (Sawer and Simms 1993: 208).

### 7.3.2 Men and Women on Parliamentary Committees

Both the National Council and the National Assembly have a set of committees related to key areas of governance. There were 15 different committees in the Assembly and seven in the Council during the first term of parliament. In the Assembly, two women served as Chairpersons of Education Development and Women and Children’s Committees. The other three women participated in other committees as members. All four women agreed that they learnt from their colleagues in small groups of different committees. In principle, women stated that equal opportunity is given to both men and women. However, one woman’s Chairperson responsibility was given to a male member in the Ethics and Credential Committee even after her nomination as the Chair by her male colleagues within that committee and her full agreement to accept the position. Pangchen, a young woman member, felt that the Speaker who approved the Chairpersons of different committees assumed that the work related to ethics dealt with corruption and
demanded a lot of credibility and viewed her young age and junior-most position as a limitation in not being able to manage the senior members. He asked her to reconsider the role of being Chairperson. Gradually, she surrendered the Chairperson responsibility and refused to carry out the work.

Women parliamentarians in the UK have needed to work hard to prove themselves continuously and experienced “a double burden of doubt and representation” (Puwar 2004: 91). In Norway, most women politicians have experienced difficulties in influencing decisions in committees. Moreover, although both men and women preferred certain committees, men could get into committees of their choice more than women. Men were also observed to wield power and direct decisions (Bystydzienski 1995: 86-87). Similarly, in Australia, men have dominated “Legal and Constitutional Affairs, Primary Industries and Resources, the Broadcasting, economics, defence, terrorism and national security” committees (Crawford and Pini 2011: 91-92). On the other hand, women have tended to be in conventional women’s areas of interest like “health, education and welfare” committees (Crawford and Pini 2011: 90-91).

Deki, the youngest woman member in the Assembly, did not Chair any committees but was a member of Environment/ Land, Urban Development and Poverty Reduction Committees. She was apprehensive about the Chair’s role as it entailed leading the committees’ work and was worried that if she failed, the committee may suffer. Her male colleagues in the committee offered her the Chairperson’s job but she declined and felt that she needed to acquire more exposure and experience of Chairing a Committee. She added that men members encouraged and provided her equal opportunity to share her views. Dawa, a young male member in the Assembly, was a member of Ethics and Credential and Public Accounts Committee. He said that he encouraged young women members to learn and improve their managerial capacity in the Assembly. He added that he found the senior woman member of the Council, who was Chairperson of the Joint Public Accounts Committee of parliament, to be a tough but balanced person.

As opposed to the Assembly, the Chairperson of all seven committees’ responsibility is rotated among 25 members including six women in the Council and appears democratic. The main reason was to provide equal opportunity to everyone. The Chair’s main duty was to organise the meetings, identify issues and set the
agenda. It was important as the entire sessions of the Council depended on the Chair’s work. In the conduct of the meeting there was very little difference between the Chair and members as everyone was treated equally and had equal amount of voice in the discussions. Wangmo, a senior woman Councillor, opined that Chairperson was just a title. Instead, the role was result oriented in nature and the Chair had to seek all members’ support to get the work completed. She observed that a young Chairperson faced the challenge of gaining all committee members support and often worked alone. Kinga, a young member in the Council, stated that he had no reservations against women Chairing parliamentary committees. He said:

When I work with women, I work as member of the National Council and as member of the committees. I have no reservations or inhibitions about a lady leading a committee in which I am a member. I do not think anyone in the Council has any reservation about a lady leading a committee.

The youngest woman member chaired a Committee whereas the oldest and the most experienced Councillor remained a member of the Committee. Women Chaired the Good Governance, Public Accounts, Legislative and Socio-Cultural committees based on a system of rotation. The Committees were important working bodies where most of the critical debates related to parliamentary agendas were discussed in great detail before the formal presentation and discussion in the Council and in joint sittings of the Council and the Assembly. It was in these small groups that women attempted to persuade their men colleagues on highly contested issues like rape, child support in the case of divorced parents and domestic violence. Zhiwa, a young woman member, stated:

…we voice out and show our concern here which is taken care off. In the formal session whoever speaks is okay because our points are being incorporated.

Kinga and Yangden commented that the Council had a democratic spirit in the form of an open-minded work culture. The men in the Council were also noted to be well-educated, experienced, worldly and therefore open to ideas and dialogue.

The fine difference between the Council and Assembly was that the Council members were free of party affiliation and clear and confident about their stance. The Assembly members were guided by their party positions and restrained in taking individual stands and questioning cabinet policies in parliament, particularly, to
check whether the policies were in line with the people’s aspirations. Further, all women in the Council thought that women from the Assembly lacked an open attitude of learning and were least prepared for the Joint Committee discussions. The experienced women thought that the two youngest women members in the Council exhibited an open attitude of learning and sought advice from senior and experienced men and women Councillors as and when required and built their professional capacity. Yangzom, a young Councillor, expressed her gratitude to the senior and experienced colleagues who mentored her: “I tried to learn from them. I know where I stand. So, I go [to] any 24 of them.”

She added that four senior women and two men were her mentors and friends. In addition, according to the National Assembly (2014), currently there are ten Committees in the Assembly. The former Women and Children’s Committee was renamed as the Women, Children and Gender Issues Committee. The new name appears broader in scope as it implies inclusion of not only women and children but also emerging gender issues related to different gender orientations.

7.3.3 The Divergent Views of Men and Women on Rape

Women parliamentarians in the National Assembly interviewed for this study stated that their men colleagues were usually supportive of gender issues because almost all of them had a family. There were times when they refused to support women’s issues for they did not experience the same problems that women faced. Women had to make efforts to persuade them and win their support. Dema, a young woman politician, stated:

…when we discussed about life imprisonment for person who rapes an under age children, initially several men were against it but we could manage to convince them later on. They appear to be less aware of the issues and we have to educate them. We have to build awareness, share information and be able to persuade them.

Male parliamentarians were worried about serious penalties against male rapists who inflict irreversible pain on children and they seemed to identify with the perpetrator. Women did have the ability to address significant social issues like rape through strong preventative law. Dema added that she was able to lobby and convince her sceptical male colleagues through evidence-based information from
national and international perspectives. She said that she attempted to win the majority's support and ignored a few who had obstinate views that the majority’s opinion was recognised in democracy. She also thought that her lobbying skills failed when the majority were against her views. Persuading skills seem challenging in a work place with only four women, who were young in age and inexperienced and 43 men, who were older in age and experience, particularly, the ten seasoned Ministers.

Well-educated, experienced, worldly and articulate women in the Council made extra efforts to convince male members, including Ministers in the Assembly, during the discussion of rape in a joint sitting of parliament. Yangzom, the young member in the Council, noted that she and her colleagues in their Committee in which rape was discussed worked very hard to gather comprehensive information on rape registered in all the 20 Dzongkhag courts, the Thimphu referral hospital’s forensic unit and police and a comparative research on rape penalties from 15 different countries. She said that men members in the Council were convinced after listening to a well-researched argument with hard facts. She added that it is critical to garner men’s assistance through conciliatory means while discussing sensitive women’s issues like rape:

When we work together, one thing has to be at the back of our head, that is, out of 72 we are only 10 women. If we want to push any women issues, we cannot fight against them. We need to garner their support.

Zhiwa, a young woman politician, who was one of the King’s eminent representatives in the Council, added that men politicians in the Council were convinced of and agreed to the need to make the rape penalty more a deterrent but some of male members in the Assembly argued that the rape penalty was too heavy:

Some of them made obsolete comments. They were saying [if] rape happens because of ken barche [unforeseen reasons or problems]) and because one does [not] want to get into that problem. That is when I had to get up and say, please don’t say that. We leave every accident as ken and if we think that law is not required that will be a perfect situation. I wished that people behave themselves that there is no requirement for law and if you are to blame ken then let us not make law at all even for other[ things].

Zhiwa argued that there is no need to make another law if people behaved and rape does not take place. She added that male members including the Ministers in the
Assembly argued against tough rape penalties. She thought that it was important to institute a stringent rape penalty because despite the awareness, rape occurred and a strong penalty would serve as preventative measure. It is interesting to note that gender alignment took place while discussing rape. Men parliamentarians identified with perpetrators and women with victims of rape during the process of discussion. Yangden, a senior and one of the stronger woman parliamentarians in the Council, observed thus:

The gender division came into play. Women felt that the victims are the women. The thinking and decision was already biased. My experience was that if you discuss anything you have to discuss with an open approach. The moment [bias] enters the discussion, you can never come up with a fair decision. I felt it went like that. Although it does not specify who the rape perpetrator is, he or she, but it was assumed that it is always men who is the rape perpetrator but never looked at the case it will also be a woman.

7.4 THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION BILL-FEMALE POLITICIANS SEEKING SUPPORT FROM MALE COLLEAGUES

Radical feminists view male sex and power along with domestic violence as an explicit manifestation of patriarchy (Millett 2000: 23-26, Waters 2007: 253). The patriarchal social structure of masculine domination and feminine subjugation exposes women to violence. Despite the rise in domestic violence, women parliamentarians struggled to convince men. During the process of the Domestic Violence Prevention Bill enactment, Dema was the Chair of the Women and Children’s Committee. She commented that she lobbied with her male colleagues during the tea/ coffee break and lunch hours, initiated ten rounds of Women and Children’s Committee discussions in which she invited supporters and sceptics to comment on the contested clauses of the Bill and involved related bodies like Human Rights, Legislative, Media and Information Communications and Technology (ICT) Committees to include broad perspectives. In addition, Dema and her colleagues in the Women and Children’s Committee met with the relevant stakeholders in the government and civil society. She stated that most of the parliamentarians including the Prime Minister supported the Bill. It was mentioned that the Bill was discussed and approved in the cabinet prior to its deliberation in the National Assembly.
However, the study found male members had reservations during the process of the Bill’s discussion in parliament. The Speaker of the National Assembly, an old man, casually commented that several women had come to support the Bill when they saw many women observers from state, market and civil society organisations in parliament. He seemed condescending when he expressed that there were only about 50-60 women instead of 250 women who were given permits to observe the discussion. The Chair of the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), the Education Minister, who is known for his quiet demeanour presented the Bill to the Assembly but could not articulate the Bill’s purpose clearly in the Dzongkha language. He commented that the Bill would benefit both men and women and stated that it risked misinterpretation if it was only going to support women. He grounded the reasons for the Bill from a great ancient Indian Buddhist philosopher and Saint Nagarjuna’s view of respecting women as mother, sister and daughter. He stated that the Bill’s objective was to bring peace and harmony within the family, society and the country and that he hoped that all the members of the Assembly would think carefully about the Bill and pass it in the ninth session of the Assembly.

This was followed by a long session which was entirely composed of men who spoke against the Bill. A young male member from the ruling party seemed conservative and expressed irrelevance of the Bill as only a few women suffered the violence. Two more young male members supported this view stating that there were too many women’s support organisations and men were neglected. One of them even argued that it was wrong of NCWC officials to seek support for the Bill from common citizens, visiting one shop after another and informing media about the issue. He commented that he received a Short Message Service (SMS) message from a voter in his constituency, who asked him to support the Bill. He thought that it was wrong of the NCWC officials to include common citizens and media to pressure the legislators.

As recorded in the researcher’s field notes from the parliamentary proceedings on 4 July 2012, these young male parliamentarians appeared insensitive to the rising domestic violence against women in the recent years, all of which had been covered by NCWC and Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women (RENEW)’s study, print and broadcast media. Another old male member from the opposition party stated that the Bill may exacerbate the existing high rate of divorce instead of
addressing the issue. The author’s observation of the parliamentary debate showed that out of four, three women supported the Bill. Dema demonstrated confidence, clarified questions and presented her argument with facts and figures. Deki, a young woman member seconded Dema’s fervent view about the need to enact the Domestic Violence Prevention Act to prevent rising violence against women. With her shaky voice she argued that awareness creation on domestic violence was not helpful and a legal instrument was required to prevent the problem. Pangchen made one clarifying comment and did not seem zealous about the issue. Shreejana, the senior most woman member was silent all through the discussion. Her limited Dzongkha language prevented her from speaking.

The institution of protection and social welfare officers to care for the victims in all 20 Dzongkhags was the most important aspect of the Bill. This clause resembles the Indian “The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005” for it has instituted protection officer in the Act (The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005: 2).

The protection officer are state government appointed public servants and authorised to carry out key functions related to protection of victims of domestic violence (The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005:4 and 9). However, in Bhutan’s context, this clause became the point of debate and was not well received during the discussion of the Bill. Eight male members including an old veteran male Minister objected, stating that there was a conflict of interest with the police as the police looked after the cases related to domestic violence. They were insensitive about the existing culture of silence amongst the victims as many bore emotional trauma to save their family image. The victims sought police assistance as the last alternative when everything else had failed. Bhutanese society values are about the collective rather than individual needs. Some members felt that it would be expensive for the government of the day to introduce a new set of human resources and thought that Local Government officials like the Gup, Mangmi and Tshogpa could carry out the responsibilities. The latter was seen as a part of rich cultural practice. Local Government officials did not have specialised knowledge and skills to take care of individuals who have gone through traumatic psychological experiences. The rationale was that the Local Government Act mandates elected officials to address domestic violence problems. Most of the Local Government
officials have a traditional education and do not have basic knowledge and skills in handling emotional abuse.

A long discussion on this issue indicated that the eight male members who spoke against protection and social welfare officers had a narrow perspective on understanding the nature of domestic violence in the Bhutanese cultural context. One old male member commented that the Bill was an imitation of an advanced country Bill in terms of domestic violence and he was shocked because Bhutan could not afford specialised human resources due to lack of financial resources. However, India another developing country in South Asia had instituted a specific public servant to address domestic violence (The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act.2005: 4). Further, another old male member expressed his reservation about penal laws and stated that when the Bill was composed it was affirmative law and cabinet approved it as penal law. He stated that penal law demanded provision of services and the issue was related to penal law. This demonstrated his limited understanding of the bigger implication of an ineffective law. In the absence of penalties, the law has no effect. The Opposition Leader, a senior male politician, mentioned that it was important to have a women and children’s unit to provide services to everyone, especially to the victims. He added that abusers are intimate partners. Police support may not be adequate to deal with personal experience of violence and therefore it is necessary to introduce excellent protection officers.

In the hierarchical Bhutanese cultural context, people tend to listen to senior members in organisations including parliament. The Prime Minister attended a few hours of the morning session of the second day’s discussion and did not utter a word though it was implied he had supported the Bill in the cabinet. Besides the Education Minister, the Minister of Economic Affairs, another senior male Minister spoke in favour of the Bill and said that most of the women in the country experienced violence and there was a need to tackle the issue for the sake of equity. One of the elite woman observers from a civil society organisation in the public gallery commented that the Minister supported the Bill because a well-educated senior woman bureaucrat from his constituency, working in his Ministry sent an SMS requesting him to support the Bill mentioning that she was his voter from his constituency. Perhaps, he must have felt the voters’ pressure to second the Bill. A
small degree of voter demand appears to have had positive impact on the process of legislation.

After two days of detailed and heated discussion observed by many Bill supporters, who were mostly women, the National Assembly cast a vote on 5 July 2012. Out of 42 members present in the Assembly, 40 of them voted for the Bill, one abstained and one voted against the Bill. The Prime Minister's support helped the DPT dominated National Assembly pass the Bill with a huge ‘yes’ vote. However, an intellectual woman observer from a civil society organisation commented that the whole process of discussion lacked substance and those who opposed the Bill did not have a reason for their dissent. The existing literature on gender in masculine organisations points out that when women are a minority, they have the leverage to use their symbolic position to advance themselves (Yoder 1991: 187).

On the contrary, in the National Council the Bill was well discussed in relation to critical issues and was easily passed. The women members did not have to make extra efforts to persuade their male colleagues. Yangzom, a young woman politician, who is one of the young members in the Council and the Chair of Socio-Cultural Committee in which the Bill was reviewed, commented the Bill was well prepared and needed only a few consultative meetings with relevant stakeholders before it was tabled for discussion in the Council.

Compared to the Domestic Violence Prevention Bill, the Child Protection Bill faced less resistance from men parliamentarians. The Women and Children’s Committee in the National Assembly discussed it about five times as it did not demand lengthy discussion in house meetings. Also, the Bill did not require stakeholder discussions like the Domestic Violence Prevention Bill. Dema opined that she did not have to persuade her male colleagues in the Assembly. Further, contemporary Bhutanese media coverage stated that there was a high rise and tolerance of domestic violence (BBS 2013k, Pelden 2013b: 2, Dema 2013: 3, Rinzin 2013: 5).

7.5 SEAT RESERVATION IN THE PARLIAMENT

Present research on women and politics has centred more on the issue of candidate selection than political recruitment. It is regarded as a vital field requiring more inquiry and research (Kenny 2013: 13). The topic of seat reservation or quota is
an important aspect of current thinking on women and politics. The existing literature indicates that the concept of quota and its implementation is highly contested. On one hand, quotas have a number of advantages. Quotas are argued to help women obtain a fair share of political seats, control stress experienced by a lone or a tiny number of token women with more women “in a committee or assembly”, address women’s right to equal representation as citizens and bring in women’s experiences in political life. A pro quota view stated that election is not about educational qualifications but about representation. Qualified women’s credentials are “downgraded” in a male controlled political milieu and the political parties violate the voters’ rights by deciding on candidate nomination. Quota conflicts may last for a short period but contribute to the “process of democratisation by making the nomination process more transparent and formalised” (Dahlerup 2009: 3). On the other hand, since a quota has the principle of positive discrimination, giving preference to women over men, it is said to be against “the principle of equal opportunity”, “undemocratic” as voters do not decide candidates’ election to office and breaches the belief of a liberal democracy. Quotas indicate that politicians are elected through gender and not qualifications and better qualified candidates “are pushed aside”. Several women do not aspire to be elected as simply women and quotas produce major disagreements inside political party organisations (Dahlerup 2009: 3). Moreover, scholars point out that there is no adequate empirical research to support that a critical mass of women matters to influence policy (Paxton et al. 2007: 274).

In spite of the limitations of the quota system, past and recent research shows that gender quotas have been introduced in several countries around the world. According to International IDEA (2013), about 110 countries use quotas either “voluntary, legislative or through reserved seats”. More than 60 countries have initiated gender quota in the past 15 years. It was instituted through constitution revision, electoral laws and party rules to allocate a certain number of party seats for women (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005: 26; Paxton et al. 2007: 269). Scholars of gender and political recruitment argue that political parties “may select their candidates on the basis of subtly gendered criteria” and hence gender quota is an innovative political recruitment approach to increase female candidates (Kenny 2013: 23). Moreover the quota debate looks at alternative measures such as
instituting a pro women candidate electoral system. The IPU report states that more women candidates are elected through a Proportional Representation (PR) system. The PR system is also observed to be the best to implement quota (IPU 2012: 7, Grey and Sawer 2005: 183). In addition, Krook (2010) contends that past research showed that PR system supports higher representation of women in parliament than majoritarian electoral system (Krook 2010: 888). Australian and New Zealand experiences, for example, show the benefit of the PR to advance women and minority representation in the parliament. It is argued that the PR enables issuance of “a balanced party ticket that appeals to different sections of the community as well as satisfying different elements within the party” (Grey and Sawer 2005: 183). Both in Australia and New Zealand, the PR assisted better representation of women in parliament than through single–member constituencies (Grey and Sawer 2005: 183).

Argentina is cited as the first country in the world to introduce “a national electoral law quota” in 1990. It helped increase women’s representation in the “Chamber of Deputies” by about 17 percent in elections after the initiation of quota (Paxton et al. 2007: 269). It also helped other countries in Latin America adopt a similar measure to increase women’s representation. Paxton et al. (2007: 269-270) and Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2005: 27) viewed the male-led legislators’ introduction of quota across Latin America as meeting a strategic objective of “the desire of political leaders to present their countries as modern” (Paxton et al. 2007: 269, 270; Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005: 27). “Modern” here meant a liberal attitude towards including women in political leadership and seemed serious about having women in governance. This was an interesting turning point in discourse about women’s representation in legislation because it opened up a quick approach to women’s representation rather than the Scandinavian “incremental track” model, a slow but steady increase of women representation (Paxton et al. 2007: 269, 270; Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005: 27).

“The very high representation of women in Scandinavian parliaments has been used to support the introduction of electoral gender quotas, first in Argentina and later in several other Latin American countries” (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005: 27). The Scandinavian model may not be applicable in various countries across different regions of the world. Instead, the example “is somewhat misleading” (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005: 27). Unlike countries in Asia, Africa and Latin
America, Nordic countries had adequate political conditions to support a gender quota. Denmark, Norway and Sweden had about 20-30 percent of women holding seats in parliament when a quota was first introduced in the 1980s. Then, 20-30 percent of women in parliament were the highest in the world. In fact, the 1970s were stated as the “real take-off” period in the history of women’s representation in Scandinavian countries prior to the introduction of quota which is voluntary and some political parties used it. It did not need legislation. This shows that the Scandinavian countries had their home-bred women-friendly political culture as “a solid power base in parliament and in the political parties” (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005: 27). This advanced women’s steady progress and significant attainment of political empowerment. However, it took Denmark, Norway and Sweden nearly 60 years to meet the threshold of 20 percent and 70 years to achieve 30 percent (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005: 27). Thus, the replication of the Scandinavian model in young democracies like Bhutan demands similar political conditions which were unique in Nordic countries in the 1970s and 1980s. It does not appear easy in terms of women’s supportive political culture and requires a long time period for genuine political empowerment of women.

A recent BBS YouTube video (2014) revealed a televised panel discussion on women in politics in Bhutan in which Professor Drude Dalherup, the eminent Danish political scientist, participated as an international expert and commented that the Nordic model is not relevant for emerging democracies like Bhutan. The Nordic model was a step-by-step model which took about 100 years for women to reach their numbers in parliament. Instead she named the gender quota approach of South Africa and Rwanda as a good example. Except for one, the rest of the three women panellists who contested in the 2013 elections supported a quota.

As opposed to the Scandinavian model, a gender quota is viewed as a fast way of increasing women’s representation where women are a minority in parliament. There are cases of success. Costa Rica managed to increase women’s representation from 19 to 35 percent in parliament in just one election. In its first democratic parliamentary election, South Africa had about 30 percent women elected to office (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005: 27). Rwanda is considered a model of the fast-track approach to accelerate women’s representation through a gender quota and inject gender balance in politics. A poor developing country like Rwanda has surpassed a
rich developed nation like Sweden in women’s parliamentary representation with 56.3 percent (Dahlerup 2009: 1). Moreover, current statistics from the IPU state that Rwanda with 63.8 percent women’s representation in parliament is ranked number one in the world (IPU 2013: 1). In fact, it was observed that women around the world have aspired to attain a quick gender balance. This is felt even in Nordic countries like Sweden and Norway. The Swedish and Norwegian centre and left parties were noted to talk about the fast track model (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005: 43).

According to IPU’s 2012 report, the Asian region is reported to be slow with only a sheer 3 percent increase in the past 10 years. It increased from 15.2 percent in 2002 to 17.9 percent at the end of 2012 (IPU 2012: 5). Closer to Bhutan, in the South Asian region, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal have introduced a quota system through legislation (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005: 32 and 33; Paxton et al. 2007: 269; Dahlerup 2009: 2). This has helped improve women’s representation. At present, Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan have 27.7 percent, 33.2 percent and 20.7 percent respectively, of women parliamentarians (IPU 2014: 1-2).

In Bhutan’s context, since 2012 there has been a discussion in the public domain about a need to institute seat reservation for women to increase women’s representation in parliament. The UN has played an active role in advancing women’s political rights. The quota issue emerged in mostly UN supported discussions. UN Women organised a two-day workshop on empowering and strengthening women’s participation in politics in March 2012, and again the topic of quota was discussed. According to media reports, there were views for and against a quota. These differing perspectives were from some of the key actors in gender and politics in Bhutan and around the world. The Chief Election Commissioner, Dasho Kunzang Wangdi, appeared sceptical and suggested that since the Bhutanese religious and cultural structures are “complex”, it would be more feasible to organise advocacy programmes and build women’s capacity. He suggested “serious” research on the applicability of quota for the Bhutanese women. Aum Phintsho Choden, the Director of the NCWC, supported a quota system. She lamented the fact that women would be unable to attain equal political opportunity in waiting to equalise gender balance and saw quotas as a “catalyst” to increase women’s representation:

My biggest fear is that, in our wait for the quota, it might take a long time and women will miss a lot of opportunities.
She was concerned that despite extension of the facilities to women, “men pulled the strings” (Zangmo 2012: 1). In addition, some participants from the South Asian region supported a quota. Saloni Singh from the Institute of Gender Equality and Social Justice thought that quota was a vital solution for equality. Anne F. Stenhammer, Program Director from the UN Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women’s Regional Office in South Asia, who was elected as a mayor through quota in her home country, Norway, said that addressing women rights and correct decision-making in society can contribute to the country’s growth and happiness. The workshop pointed to the need for deeper discussion on the quota issue following the first election and the lack of legislation to ensure minimum level of women’s representation in the country (Zangmo 2012: 1). Such discussions exposed the difference in men’s and women’s views on quotas and the need for further work.

In a similar vein, UNDP Bhutan initiated an e-discussion from 27 February until 19 March 2012 on the scope of women’s participation in politics in the 2013 elections. The discussants were participants from the state, corporate, private, civil society, constitutional, academic and international organisations within Bhutan and a few independent participants from overseas who are linked to UNDP Bhutan’s solution exchange, an online discussion forum. According to the author’s participation in the solution exchange discussion on the topic, one view suggested seat reservation in parliament until a certain percentage of women in parliament is attained. This school of thought drew on India’s example to argue that it helped change the attitude of voters towards women. This is because women politicians made positive changes and the voters were more likely to vote for women candidates in the future (Solution-Exchange Bhutan Discussion 27 February -19 March 2012: 3). As opposed to this, the contested view was that there is no discrimination against women and advocates of seat reservation may face some degree of confrontation. Instead, it argued for letting capable women exercise their own choice rather than asking government to encourage them. It was felt that there were adequate numbers of able women in professional jobs who would gradually opt for politics as a career and if women were elected to office based on their capacity, it would help build confidence for all women (Solution-Exchange Bhutan Discussion 27 February-19 March 2012: 3).
In addition, women’s seat reservation in parliament was raised during the National Assembly elections of 2013. In those primary and general elections the ruling party promised formulation of a legislation to initiate a quota for women in parliament. The PDP was the first party to mention the seat reservation for women in parliament. At the party convention held on 9 May 2013, the present Prime Minister and President of the party stated that the party would address quotas for women in the National Council and the National Assembly. The PDP also stated that one of its priorities was to remove gender gaps (Wangdi and Wangdi 2013: 1). According to PDP’s manifesto, a legislation for 20 percent quota for women in all elected offices, parliament and local government would be formulated (PDP Manifesto 2013: 50). The DCT, one of the woman led parties which lost badly in the primary rounds also talked about introducing a quota for women. Krook (2011) argues that political elites pursue quotas for tactical reason (Krook 2011: 165). This appears true for Bhutan during elections.

Further, according to the interviewees, the women’s quota issue is a highly contested subject. There were men and women respondents across a wide spectrum who argued for and against seat reservation. The reservation supporters argued for quotas as a time bound short-term measure to include a critical mass of women in parliament to ensure an equal number of men and women until a level playing field is met. It was acknowledged that it was going to take a long time to equalise the men-women ratio in parliament if capability is the premise to include women. However, there was a recognition that it was important to balance men’s and women’s perspectives in dealing with societal issues in legislation. Tashi, a young male bureaucrat, cited the current Indian government’s policy of having one-third of the parliament to be women in 15 years’ time as a good example to emulate. Two senior well-educated women bureaucrats supported a quota. Initially, both women thought that quota would undermine women’s ability but later this view changed. Zema, a senior woman bureaucrat in the government, stated:

I used to think that it was not right to have quota for it would not make people respect women. In 2001, when gender pilot study was carried out, my view was against quota. Over the years, I have changed my view. Now I feel that there is a need to have temporary measure to have equal men and women in the parliament.
She added that there is a need to have a solid voice of women to support capable women who become the vanguard in parliament. She felt that a good number of women in parliament may help bring in a changed attitude in young girls to opt for political career. In her interview with the researcher, Dasho Neten Zangmo, the Chairperson of ACC shared the same view and raised key themes in the quota debate:

There was a time, where I was totally against quota because that was my arrogance. But now having become old, wiser hopefully, if I say no to quota system only from my point of view, it will hurt my ego. But people are worried about it has not worked and will only breed mediocrity. But I said, let’s build a system and not stop here just because it has not worked elsewhere. May be it will work here and let’s learn lesson about what not to do and make it a time bound thing. The Nordic countries have done it. They have no more quota and women are able to fight on their own. They have literate society unlike ours. If such intervention has to be made, let’s do so and not allow arrogant woman like me to say no to quota system, that is egoistic, ego coming into play. If we can tap into every citizen of this country, we must do so.

She added that if a critical mass of women, for example, about 40 percent is included in the process of decision-making, their potentials tapped, GNH can be translated into action. She opined that women will bring a different perspective of life and society. According to Dasho Neten Zangmo, women are empathetic, soft, detailed, sensitive, accommodating and understanding. They are also team players and concerned about small things that men would not even think about and ignore. Sometimes small things matter in a person’s life. Men are seen to rush, avoid details and are aggressive. Samdrup, an intellectual and a senior male bureaucrat, agreed with Dasho Neten Zangmo’s view:

There should be every attempt to get as many women as possible for a balance in the parliament. Some people say to go by the capability at every level. I would say no to the top leadership, it might take too long if we go by capability. We need women because parliament deal [deals] with society, even as a woman because women have different perspective from a man.
To achieve equal parliamentary representation of women may take time as women’s educational levels rise and they are given opportunities to develop political capabilities. This was also the concern of the current Director of the NCWC.

Two women politicians sincerely thought that quotas were the right approach to getting women in parliament without delay. Wangmo, a senior woman politician in the National Council who was known to promote gender issues, commented that:

Women’s capabilities are being questioned every time quota issue is brought up. People need to realise that it was the failure in the system that has produced a gender imbalance in the parliament. It is easier speaking in the context of the present pool of parliamentarians because honestly for every one male member, we can find a dozen equally competitive women. The problem therefore is not with women but with the democratic system and the electoral system that is not sufficiently gender inclusive.

Bhutan has a majority First-Past-The-Post electoral system. Similarly, in a recent BBS YouTube video (2014), Danish political scientist Dalherup argued that Bhutanese men enjoyed an “indirect quota” privilege for in 38 out of the 47 constituencies women could not vote for women as there were no women candidates and without women’s full participation democracy is incomplete.

The quota issue featured during a five day international conference on gender and sustainable mountain development held at Thimphu from 15th until 19th October 2012. It was organised by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, NCWC, and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). Dr David Molden, director of ICIMOD, stated “it is been argued that the best way to begin to achieve gender transformative change is by introducing quotas for women in key decision making positions, institutions and bodies”. During the discussion, Karma Lhamo, a young and passionate woman parliamentarian in the National Assembly, expressed the need for quota as a provisional measure to include women in decision-making legislation against the creation of an enabling environment for women as the latter was an impediment in terms of time (Dorji 2012: 3). At present, at the local government level, there is only one woman Gup out of 205 Gups and some women mangmis.

Tshendu, a young woman private documentary film-maker, who was involved in making award winning films on Bhutanese women leaders at local and national
levels viewed that quota would provide an opportunity for women to be a Gup or Mangmi at the Local Government level for it is extremely difficult for women to be elected with low education and patriarchal cultural beliefs. As for parliament, she opined that it is “a very sensitive issue” where well-educated and capable women were against a quota more than men. One way is for political parties to take responsibility in including more women like in Denmark. International IDEA (2013: 1) states that political parties require systemic change to include women for they are the primary gatekeepers for women to enter politics.

In Australia, women candidates experience a biased attitude from selection panels within political parties (Crawford and Pini 2011: 90, Crawford and Pini 2010: 613, 616). Despite her capability in political leadership, the country’s first woman Prime Minister Julia Gillard faced the challenge of obtaining pre-selection from her party (Kent 2010: 106, 252). Tshendu was also engaged in drawing lessons from Danish politics for Bhutan including women in parliament. However, as stated earlier, the Danish example may not be applicable in the Bhutanese context because the Bhutanese women politicians do not have a big power base within the political parties and the parliament like in Denmark. Moreover, the electoral quota is a voluntary initiative used by some political parties and Denmark had about 20-30 percent women in parliament even before the quota was introduced.

In Bhutan women have little voice in parliament and within party politics. The two women who led political parties were removed in the 2013 primary election of the National Assembly. Even women party leaders did not appear supportive of a quota in parliament. Yuden, a young aspiring woman politician who headed a political party in 2013’s primary elections of the National Assembly, seconded Tshendu’s suggestion of seat reservation in Local Government as aspiring women candidates faced nomination challenges. Yuden felt that there was no need for reservation at the national level for there were enough capable women to contest elections. She appeared to be oblivious of a similar kind of difficulty women faced at the national level.

Most interviewees (men and women) did not support quota. Some respondents contended that the Constitution did not permit quotas. They also pointed to the fact that there is no blatant gender discrimination unlike in existing neighbouring South Asian countries and a quota would not solve gender inequalities. Instead, equal
opportunity must be ensured at the entry point to access education and employment for women to participate in political, economic and social life and women should be allowed to exhibit their potential. They posited that there was no substantiative evidence indicating that women cannot come into parliament without a quota, and strongly argued that women’s abilities would be undermined and women’s positions considered tokenism. A senior woman bureaucrat said that in India, women who were in parliament through quotas were seen not to make positive contributions to the decision-making process contrasting with women who joined politics with their own convictions. Bhutan’s only woman Secretary’s view captured the core message of this argument:

I don’t really support quota. No matter with what criteria, the fact that you came through a quota will always be there. I am elected through a quota; I always feel that I am a lesser person. I don’t know. I would like to believe that where we are, whoever we are, we have come on with our own esteem because we can deliver and not because we have to be counted. That should be the thing. May be like you are saying with all the criteria and all but still the fact that you came through a quota is there. I know I believe it is done in the most developed countries. May be the most developed countries, things are a little different. I don’t believe that. I think now you see more women coming forward and doing a good job.

Two women bureaucrats, one former political candidate, a man and a woman aspiring politicians, a woman gender specialist from UNDP, two men and three women politicians from the National Council, four men politicians including two male ministers and Opposition Leader from the National Assembly were not in favour of quota. The Minister for Education and Agriculture suggested the creation of women-centred favourable conditions for women to prove themselves. The Education Minister thought that quotas may help in the short-term but become a liability in the longer-term and believed the issue was sensitive and controversial. He said that:

…it isn’t so much of a charity or so much of a condescending attitude towards women but it is about respecting and honouring them and taking them as equal partners in development.
Promotion of equality without understanding the difference between men and women may derail women’s leadership advancement. The Agriculture Minister said that he was sceptical whether the “time is right” to introduce quota in developing countries, especially Bhutan but admitted that the quota method worked very well in Scandinavian countries. He attributed gender inequality in top decision-making positions in Bhutan to historical cause in the form of an absence of a women friendly environment: “When we started our education system, it involved walking by foot for days and days through dense forests.”

Although the Opposition Leader, who is now the Prime Minister, did not support reservation on the basis of its complicated nature, the PDP pledged legislation to institute a quota for women in the parliament and elected offices during the 2013 general elections. Further, as opposed to his former view against quota, the Chief Election Commissioner from the ECB suggested the need for quota after April 2013 National Council elections in which none of the women candidates were elected. Also, recently the ECB reiterated the need for quota to help improve women’s participation in elected posts based on its study of two parliamentary and Local Government elections after the 2013 parliamentary elections (Kuensel 2014). Further, the need for quota re-emerged as an important resolution after the NCWC and Bhutan Network for Empowering Women (BNEW) organised a “National Consultation- Conference on Women in Politics in Bhutan” on 1-2 April 2014 (Lamsang 2014: 1-3). UN Women and the DPID supported the conference. Most participants from the state, parliament, market and civil society voted in favour of a quota to enhance women’s participation in politics. The NCWC is formulating the quota legislation in collaboration with the legislative committee of the National Assembly (Lamsang 2014: 1-3). Krook’s seminal work on women in politics argues about the “importance of situating quotas within a country’s candidate-selection process and the degree to which quotas reinforce or disrupt these interactions” (Krook 2011: 165). She asserts that it is important to identify various features of candidate selection, formal elements of political system like electoral system and formal and informal practices of political elites who control entry and exit to political life. These are named as “three categories of gendered institutions” (Krook 2011: 165). She concludes that if quotas affect only one institution and collides with other institutions, it is less likely to increase women’s level of representation (Krook 2011: 165).
In Bhutan’s context, the need for quota is supported by the core state, civil society and international actors and the ruling party. These actors brought out the limitation in existing candidate selection system which excludes women. Further, women’s low level of representation in parliament is attributed to absence of quota, non-P.R electoral system and low level of development in developing countries, namely, Malawi, Mali and Niger in Africa (Krook 2010: 902-903). This echoes Bhutan’s situation.

Karuna, a young woman RENEW worker, argued for an equal number of seat reservations for both men and women stating that quota itself implied inequality: “Why can’t you create quota for men, quota for women. We are 10 seats here, we are five men here, five women there so that decision will be together.”

This strand of debate against quota is unrealistic as it is not applicable in the Bhutanese context where men lead and women are yet to catch up. Her view implied a gender neutral stance.

In short, there were about fifteen respondents arguing against reservation and eight for it. The present Prime Minister and his colleague, who served as Member of Parliament from PDP in the National Assembly, changed their stance during the elections. Hence, there were ten respondents who supported reservation. Another view is associating women in politics and quota with Western ideology. Kuenchap, an aspiring young male politician who headed a party which was disqualified in 2013 elections, argued that a quota connotes acknowledgment of discrimination which does not exist in Bhutan. He warned against replicating Western ideology:

At the same time we should be mindful, mindful that we shouldn’t be bombarded by these western ideologies of quotas and women in politics, women representing, 30 percent, there is no need, if there is a factual need, then we should work our means and ways, our skilful means, I would say.

This suggests a political party leader with a gender blind attitude and a poor understanding of women’s issues.

7.6 CONCLUSION

Women across the world participate in a structurally masculine political space and face difficulties in trying to fit into the male costume (Pateman’s 1989: 6). The IPU’s current statistics state that women’s representation in parliament at the global
level is poor at 22 percent. Closer to Bhutan, women’s representation in parliament in some of the South Asian countries is single digit figures. Bhutan falls under this category with 8 percent. Right from the process of being elected to parliament to their ability to influence the outcome of decisions within the parliament, women face challenges. In the Bhutanese context, women entered parliament with support from key male party gate-keepers.

Despite their small numbers, the first cohort of Bhutanese women parliamentarians managed to convince their male colleagues to pass critical Bills related to women and children’s issues. However, well-educated, experienced and worldly women who exhibited confidence were well received compared with young women who had little work experience prior to joining politics. Similarly, most men and some women politicians disliked feminist women politicians who promoted women’s issues. Like women politicians in advanced democracies, Bhutanese women politicians were allocated soft subjects related to social affairs in parliament. Women parliamentarians were principled, committed and industrious. On the contrary, men were found to be good at political marketing and switching their political gear in tandem with an erratic political environment. Although contested, parliamentary seat reservation appears to be a way forward to improve women’s representation in the Bhutanese parliament and the state efforts seem progressive towards this end. Seat reservation has enhanced women’s representation in both mature and emerging democratic countries.

Women’s entry to the Bhutanese parliament has ensured that change has occurred. The first ten Bhutanese women parliamentarians have demonstrated that it is possible for women to play a role in Bhutan’s political life and move from the private to the public sphere. Despite the impediments which they faced due to the entrenched masculine values and practices, these ten women did pursue a legislature programme and actively participated in parliamentary committee work. They were trailblazers and challenged the male hegemony of Bhutan’s parliamentary system. They have shown other women that a political career and a role in the public space are possible in Bhutan.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

In 2008 Bhutan became the world’s new democracy and ended over 100 years of absolute monarchy (Sinpeng 2008). It was a significant year in Bhutan’s political history because the Bhutanese people experienced a unique change. Although there had been various forms of limited suffrage, women were still largely confined to the private sphere. This massive political change provided the Bhutanese women with an opportunity to vote and run for political office and to move from the private to the public sphere. It also offered an exclusive opportunity to study and document how the emerging democracy changed women’s lives. This thesis then, set out to investigate the impact of the transition to democracy on women’s status and role in Bhutan.

8.1 OVERVIEW

This study explores the case of women in politics in the democratic transition of Bhutan, a small developing country in South Asia. Women constitute half of the country’s 700,000 population but the existing patriarchal socio-culture does not support women’s participation in public decision-making and politics. Women experienced low status and roles in the Bhutanese governance system. Under the monarchy women’s political status was low and the new democracy did not make a huge impact on women’s representation in the public decision-making realm. There are few females in key public institutions. The low level of female literacy in general and fewer women in university meant that politics which requires a university education, remains a special men’s club.

Despite women’s poor presence in public affairs, they were very active participants in the first and second democratic elections in 2008 and 2013. However, in reality women are located on the periphery of public life. There is a gap between the state’s promotion of women’s empowerment policy and actual practice. There is little research in gender and politics in mainstream Bhutanese academic and research agencies. Therefore, this study attempted to provide a voice for women and to contribute in small ways to advance women’s genuine empowerment. In light of this background, the main objective explored the impact of the transition to democracy
on women’s role and status in Bhutanese politics. Further exploration investigated women’s poor representation in public decision-making forums and politics, the voice of women supporters within the two competing political parties during the first five years of democratic government, the deep-seated gender stereotypes within society in Bhutan and the treatment of the women who did enter parliament. The early chapters of this thesis scrutinised the context of the study in Bhutan, developed a theoretical framework and established a methodological approach for the study. The later chapters analysed the findings within this construction and looked forward to further work in the field of woman and Bhutan.

8.2 FINDINGS

- Patriarchy remains at the heart of the gender inequality debate in Bhutan. The findings demonstrate that most of the women participants found Bhutan’s patriarchal structure instrumental in being treated as a lesser human being. The negative gender stereotypes affected women’s self-confidence building and hence a failure to recognise and practice leadership abilities in public affairs, and constrained their exercise of full citizenship rights. Conversely some men did not realise the privileged position they enjoyed and their ability to direct public discourse and benefit from full citizenship rights.

- Legal structures continue to legitimise patriarchal practices and processes in Bhutan. Therefore, there is a need to consider the way in which the legal framework continues to endorse hegemonic men’s advantaged position and apply the law equally to men, women and minority religious and sexual groups.

- Leadership continues to be viewed by society at large and political parties in particular, as a masculine domain. Women have less experience, particularly, in political leadership. Elected women leaders named political experience as the key for more women to join politics. They found they needed to not only break the myth of difficulties associated with the political profession but also to reach out to the larger society and address societal problems. Therefore, women must initiate, encourage and support each other to enter the political world and break patriarchal conditions.
• Women face social, cultural, economic and geographic barriers in seeking political candidature for running for office in the masculine political environment of Bhutan.

• Some well educated women who have substantial work experience and overseas exposure have been able to enter the parliament, executive offices in the civil service, constitutional bodies, and civil society organisations and play a role in the public life of Bhutan. They can become agents of change to contest, discuss and alter power distribution, processes and practices (Hinterberger 2013: 7).

• Education remains the single most important factor for women to be able to leave the private sphere. The Bhutanese case exposed that women’s education is the social medicine for genuine empowerment. Recently, Christine Lagarde, the first woman Finance Minister of a G8 economy and the first woman Head of the International Monetary Fund argued that education is the basis of change because learning empowers women to break the chains of exclusion (Lagarde 2014: 2). In advanced democracies like Australia, there is “Parliamentary Friends of Women in Science, Maths and Engineering” to encourage more girls to pursue careers in traditionally male dominated areas of Science, Maths and Engineering (Parliament of Australia 2014). Thus, the Bhutanese state’s support for women’s education, training and advocacy is an important long and short term solution to enhance women’s participation in politics and leadership.

• Facility and high level literacy of the Dzongkha language is a key for many women’s entry into the public life of Bhutan. Dzongkha is the official language used in public discourse. Most women are not as proficient as men in Dzongkha.

• The absence of child care policy continues to confine women to the private sphere. Patriarchal values and labour practices are reflected in the gendered division of labour and continue to enforce women’s reproductive functions (child bearing and rearing) as their fundamental role. Working women face difficulties of balancing their productive (work outside house) and reproductive roles. Thus, it is important that child care policies be
enacted to enable Bhutanese women to participate at an equal level to men in the public sphere. Men need to take equal responsibility for work in the private sphere to bring about change of traditional gendered divisions of labour.

- Women across the board felt that there is lack of Bhutanese role models for woman seeking political office. Women who have attained the highest leadership in the government and constitutional bodies have either been single or married without children or been married to government Ministers or Secretaries. The way forward is to draw inspiration from former and serving women politicians and to look to a future in which Bhutan is enriched by the skills of its clever, educated and politically aware women.

- Bhutanese women politicians have brought social change through legislation. They have ensured that the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, the Child Protection Act and an Amendment of Rape Penalties in the Penal Code of Bhutan have all been enacted and become law through their efforts.

- Women and other groups of different religion and sexual orientation continue to remain marginalised in Bhutanese society as power continues to remain largely in the hands of a dominant male group. However, the King’s devolution of his executive power recognises the significance of diverse perspectives in democracy and there is hope for the politics of difference to be addressed and true equality achieved.

- Education Policy has been changed as a result of women’s entry to parliament to be more inclusive of all groups and locations in Bhutan. Children born out of wedlock can now register in school and access education without the requirement to produce a paternal identity document.

- Location continues to be a determinant of women’s ability to exercise their rights and fully participate in a more democratic Bhutan. Urban women are much better informed and aware of their rights than are rural women.
The transition to democracy in 2008 did bring significant changes to Bhutanese society, specifically, for women. It enabled them to become, for the first time, full participants in Bhutan’s public realm.

8.3 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This study is significant because it captured a unique political phenomenon – the transition to democracy in Bhutan and its first democratic elections. It scrutinised the impact this momentous event had on women’s participation in politics in a special political environment where democracy was introduced through decree by the King against many people’s will. It recorded the first hand experiences of the Bhutanese people from rural villages to urban centres. This project is the first ever study which set out to document women’s participation in politics at the national level in Bhutan. It responds to the challenge of the absence of an extensive study of women’s participation in politics in Bhutan and seeks to fill such a void (Turner and Tshering 2014: 417).

The study investigated the impact of democracy on women’s status and roles and examined the process of gender equality in governance. Women’s low status and limited functions in the public sphere is an issue in both advanced and emerging democratic countries across the world but has special significance for Bhutan and other developing countries in the South Asian region although there are differences between Bhutan and other countries in the region. Women in Nepal and Maldives, for example, have participated in politics in an unstable often conflict ridden political situation. Nepal has experienced political instability since it became a republic in 2008 and the Maldives’s first democratically elected president was overthrown prior to the completion of his official tenure (BBC 2014). In Bhutan, the monarchy, the location of the country, and its education, ethnic and religious systems may not be relevant to other contexts.

Women’s participation in politics in an emerging democracy is presented through a feminist theoretical perspective. The Bhutanese case shows that the issues of patriarchy (the public/private divide), equality (gendered division of labour) and diversity (intersection of gender with other identities) are applicable in contemporary gender politics at a global level because patriarchy is an obstacle for equality in both emerging and advanced democracies. In today’s multicultural social world, politics
of equality in diversity is relevant for political stability and world peace. To this extent feminist political theory contributes to the existing body of feminist knowledge.

Methodologically, detailed lived experiences of women from different academic, social, ethnic, religious and economic background reveal subjective knowledges of women on the public/private divide, the gendered division of labour and the diverse standpoints in emerging democracies. Such information is essential for an analysis of the way in which gender is “played out” in Bhutanese society. The combination of in-depth interviews, participant observations and document reviews ensured that the sensitive and complex subject of feminism and politics, particularly, in conservative and fragile democratic countries in South Asia, was well-received.

Thematically, the case of women in politics in democratic transition in Bhutan validates some issues that are central to feminist research around the world. The gender silent policy environment which existed during the monarchy was carried forward under the newly introduced democracy. It accorded less priority to issues that directly impacted on women and their families. Despite biased cultural practices against women, the patriarchal legal framework and violence against women and children, gender is not seen as a significant topic in mainstream politics. Women bureaucrats and politicians operated in a women unfriendly public domain. Concurring with this research, a recent study of Bhutanese democracy revealed the persistence of patriarchal attitudes which impacted on women’s ability to run for political office and win elections (Turner and Tshering 2014: 417, 427).

Most women, particularly, young women with little work experience faced difficulties to be accepted and recognised as women in masculine public organisations. Rural women with very little education and exposure to the outside world participated as mere voters during elections. They were not active agents of democracy. Instead, their priority was for basic services for their community over their individual rights as a woman. Minority religious and sexual groups exercised minimal fundamental rights as delineated in the Constitution. The existence of a few critical obsolete laws enacted prior to democracy coupled with dominant ethnic, sexual and religious groups’ suspicion of the often bold stance of minorities appear to be an impediment. Therefore, feminism as an agency of women is yet to take off in the conservative patriarchal context of Bhutan. Feminism is often misunderstood
and it may take some time for mainstream feminist thought with a definitive Bhutanese flavour to evolve. Nonetheless, the Bhutanese story authenticates existing feminists’ arguments on patriarchy (public/private divide), inequality (gendered division of labour) and diversity (feminist standpoint theory).

### 8.4 Future Research

This study has opened up directions for future research which are beyond the scope of the current project. Research needs to be undertaken to expose other factors which have been identified as integral to women’s ability to enter the public sphere. They are men’s views on gender equality in national politics, girls’ higher education, women voters’ behaviour, women candidates and political funding, the role of gender equality agencies and legislation and the media’s portrayal of women politicians. There is also a need to consider issues like prostitution and abortion. Further there is now a need for a comparative study of women’s lives across old and new democracies.

This project offers the prospect of a longitudinal study in the next five or ten years to make some internal comparisons. Such a study could enquire as to whether change has occurred in Bhutan’s patriarchal structures and how such change, if any, have impacted on gender equality, girls’ university education and the nature of prostitution and abortion. A further review needs to be made of the media’s portrayal of Bhutan’s women politicians. This needs to cover the wide range of platforms – print, radio, television, women’s magazines and social media. Currently the media portrays all Bhutanese women from a perspective of glamour, beauty and as sexual beings, reinforcing the notion of woman as bearer and carer of children rather than as career woman and powerful leader.

It will be vital to conduct a similar study in 2018 and compare the perspectives of women’s presence in Bhutanese politics and the parliament. This is an ongoing project. The examination of changing roles and practices in party politics and the parliament enables comparisons. It can keep a record for Bhutan and facilitate a comparison with other countries in the region and countries like Australia and Denmark which are connected to this project. A further project could investigate women’s poor performance in the 2013 elections and examine the reasons for such a dismal showing. This will enable a monitoring process to be put in place and
continue the work of women’s representation in Bhutanese politics. Thus, the Bhutanese story offers further opportunities for international and Bhutanese researchers engaged in gender and politics scholarship.

8.5 CONCLUSION

The case of women in politics in the democratic transition of Bhutan has exposed some interesting lessons emerging from Bhutan’s stable and peaceful, political context. The study revealed that five years of democracy has had a positive impact on women’s lives. Democratic governance created leadership opportunities for both elite and ordinary women in Bhutanese politics. For the first time in Bhutan’s political history, women from humble family backgrounds became public figures as politicians and party workers. When the democratic institutions such as The Election and Anti-Corruption Commissions were established, long serving and capable former women bureaucrats were made leaders. They demonstrated a different style of ethical leadership. Although most women politicians could not make a huge impact at a national level, they contributed at the local level in their designated constituencies with a high degree of diligence and dedication. The first cohort of ten women parliamentarians did set the trend of principled feminine political leadership in the difficult masculine environment. They contributed to societal development by addressing women and children’s issues through critical laws related to social issues. They sought and received the support of the dominant men through well-researched work when sensitive issues like rape and violence against women and children were discussed in parliament and they managed to have these social Bills passed. Women politicians in the party-less National Council demonstrated their competent leadership abilities in the Council’s democratic political culture. All women were recognised as voters and they formed a large portion of the electoral roll.

Women bureaucrats who worked closely with women’s empowerment groups attempted to include gender mainstreaming in the current development plan for state institutions. Women used their positions to advance women’s rights by extending cooperative gender politics. Changes are yet to be implemented. Women bureaucrats and politicians fared well using their sensitive, flexible and adaptable skills in predominantly male- directed work places. Older, well educated, experienced and
well-travelled women exhibited a higher level of confidence and were well-received, as opposed to young women who had little work experience and exposure. Moreover, minority religious and sexual groups have been able to exercise some rights despite the hegemonic Drukpa masculine heterosexual, Buddhist social milieu of Bhutan.

Outside the state and legislative bodies, a private media firm dedicated to women’s issues and the NGOs committed to women have made better progress in women’s empowerment. The Bhutanese case shows that five years of parliamentary democracy has raised the importance of women as key players in Bhutanese politics. Elite women politicians, party workers and supporters, bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, academic and civil society workers have exhibited their abilities to advance women’s issues and have displayed principled and committed personal and professional values. As a result, educated women based in urban centres have become much more aware and concerned about gender equality. There is a hope for feminist politics to take shape within the Bhutanese political system.

This project is a stepping stone to a broader study on women’s empowerment in emerging democracies such as Bhutan. Despite being a case of a small developing country, the study has opened up a number of significant contemporary gender issues. The entrenched nature of patriarchy confining women to the private sphere, the continuity of the gendered division of labour, girls’ low access to higher education, the media’s differential treatment of women, the illegality of prostitution and abortion and patriarchal laws are some of the important concerns in gender studies.

This study investigated the impact of Bhutan’s transition to democracy on women’s ability to move from the private to the public realm at an exciting period in Bhutan’s political history. It revealed that educated women have an important role to play in advancing women’s empowerment. Well educated women have been pioneers in breaking patriarchal structures, have entered the public, masculine, Bhutanese political environment and demonstrated that change can occur. There is now the possibility for all Bhutanese women to move from the private and domestic domain and to play a role in the public sphere.


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**List of Appendices**

**Appendix A**

**Interviewee Profile**

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<th>Interviewee</th>
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<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Mid-50s</td>
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<td>Bachelors’ Degree</td>
<td>Secretary in the government</td>
<td>Thimphu</td>
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<td>-do-</td>
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<tr>
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<td>King’s eminent member in the National Council</td>
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<td>Former political candidate/educator in a private college</td>
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<td>Former political candidate/Head of a Unit, UNDP-Bhutan</td>
<td>-do-</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Medical doctor/Master’s Degree</td>
<td>Founder of a political party and vice-president of the same party</td>
<td>-do-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Location</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Bachelors’ Degree</td>
<td>Party financier/CEO/owner of a well-established private company</td>
<td>-do-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Illiterate (has a high degree of economic and social influence)</td>
<td>Party financier/owner of a well-established private company</td>
<td>Bumthang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Late 50s</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Masters’ Degree</td>
<td>Party financier CEO/owner of a well-established private company</td>
<td>Thimphu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Late 50s</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>High school level</td>
<td>Party coordinator at district level</td>
<td>Pemagatshel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Bachelors’ Degree</td>
<td>Party secretary</td>
<td>Thimphu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>High school level</td>
<td>Party coordinator at district level</td>
<td>Bumthang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Masters’ Degree</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Thimphu</td>
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<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>-do-</td>
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<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>-do-</td>
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<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Masters’ Degree</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>-do-</td>
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<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Former civil servant/aspiring politician</td>
<td>-do-</td>
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<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Former party worker/party president</td>
<td>-do-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Former civil servant/aspiring party president</td>
<td>-do-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Bachelors’ Degree</td>
<td>Former broadcast journalist, Owner-Women issues advocate, Production, private media firm</td>
<td>-do-</td>
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<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>Gender Specialist in UNDP-Bhutan</td>
<td>-do-</td>
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<td>Interviewee</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Location</td>
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<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Head of a Unit, Civil Society Organisation</td>
<td>RENEW</td>
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<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Transgender</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Homosexual group activist</td>
<td>-do-</td>
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<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>-do-</td>
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Source: Field work
Appendix B
Interview Schedule used for all Participants

1. Why did you join politics?
   Prompts: Was it your own interest? Did the people encourage you to join politics?

2. How has democratic transition made an impact on women’s status and roles?

3. I am sure there are women and girls in your constituency. How is the situation of women in the villages?
   Prompts: What were their views? Did the women feel that democracy has been helpful?

4. Do the existing patriarchal socio-cultural norms, especially, negative gender stereotypes about women hinder women’s participation in the public decision-making forums in general and politics in particular?
   Prompts: Phrases such as men are nine times superior than women and use of word morem

5. What was the most difficult experience that you had in the process of decision-making?

6. How do you perceive your male colleagues personally and professionally?

7. I am sure four of you adapted in a male dominated work environment. How did four of you adapt in male dominated work environment?

8. Do they accept you as a woman and treat you as a woman?

9. How different are they are in terms of respecting women from 2008 to 2012?

10. In your view, how different are women and men politicians?

11. When it comes to honesty and ethics, how different are men and women?
Prompts: What about ethics in finance, when it comes to using state fund? How is the ethics exercised in handling public money?

12. You said that sometimes you use men to convince men. I understand that you all discussed and amended rape issue under penal code and amended marriage act. These issues are about man–woman relationship. During these discussions, what kind of lobbying skills did you all use to convince men?

13. Did you all have to lobby for the domestic violence prevention bill? How was the process of discussion?

14. You talked about difficulties but what is the most difficult challenge for a woman politician?

15. What kind of support system must be in place to make your work easier as a politician, wife and mother?

16. How do you balance between professional and family time?

17. How is the voice of women political candidates- four of you, party workers, supporters and financiers within your party?

Prompts: For example, how is the voice of women in party’s general assembly or executive meetings? Do women have adequate voice with the party?

18. What is the main cause of fatherless children?

Prompts: You mentioned that women are to be blamed. Why are women engaging in casual sex?

19. Do you think that in the long run, there is a need for a law to protect children and women?

20. How do you perceive quota mechanism to include a critical mass of capable women in the parliament so that it contributes to a balanced decision-making in the parliament?

21. How is the women’s level and quality of participation in your constituency meeting? Prompts: Are they still shy of public speaking like
before? What kind of issues do they raise in the meetings? If they fail to express themselves in public space how do you get to listen to them?

22. Do you think that in the next elections the rural women will be sensitive enough to vote for women based on their present experience of their comfort with women politicians?

23. How do you see the existing citizenship laws, which do not allow a woman to transfer her citizenship rights to her children should she marry a non-Bhutanese man but a man can?

Prompts: Do you think it needs an amendment to be equal and fair?

24. The new political parties are taking about including women and playing number games of how many women they have in their parties. Do you think that they are genuinely interested to include women for the sake of giving importance to women or are they seeking women voters?

25. What is your view of the “La Aum Lyonchhen series” that is being telecast on the BBS TV and broadcast over Kuzu FM and BBS radio?

26. How do you anticipate women’s participation in the 2013 elections as political candidates, party workers, supporters, financiers and voters?

27. How do you view feminism and its application in Bhutan?

Prompts: Women who are much more confident and vocal are referred to as feminist. I have seen women some women bureaucrats who did not want to be associated with word feminist
Appendix C
Map of Bhutan showing Research Locations

The Map of Bhutan showing research field locations: Thimphu, the main site is shown in dark blue, followed by Bumthang in bright orange, Lhuentse in yellow, Mongar in light blue and Pemagatshel in light orange colours.

Appendix D
Symbols of patriarchal power

The King and the Queen at the inauguration ceremony of the newly constituted cabinet Ministers after general elections, July 2013. Lyonpo Dorji Choden is seen with her narrow width orange scarf while her 10 male colleagues are adorned with widely spread scarf, sword and boot.

(Source: Bhutan Broadcasting Service, 29 July 2013)
Appendix E
Women Playing Khuru

Women playing Khuru at Bondey, Paro Dzongkhag.

(Source: Bhutan Observer, 4 April 2014)
Appendix F
Typical Mountain Terrain in Bhutan

A typical mountainous Bhutanese geographic terrain where most of the villages in 47 constituencies are located. Most women politicians found endless walks across such physical terrain women unfriendly.

(Source: Field Photo 2012)
Appendix G
The First Lady Governor offering Marchang

The first woman Governor offering Marchang.

(Source: First Lady Governor’s private collection)
Appendix H
Tashi Choe Dzong, Parliament House and The National Assembly Building

Tashi Choe Dzong where the National Assembly was housed prior to building of the new Parliament House opposite of the Dzong.

(Source: Field photos, 2012)

The Gyalyong Tsongkhang or the Parliament House (Distance view).

(Source: Field photos, 2012)
The Gyalyong Tsogkhang or the Parliament House (close view), where the Tshogdu or the National Assembly is housed.

(Source: Field Photo, 2012)
Appendix I
The Interior of the National Assembly

The masculine dominated parliament.

(Source: Bhutan Broadcasting Service, 20 January 2014)
Appendix J
The National Council Building

The Gyalyong Tsogdhey or the National Council House.

(Source: Field Photo, 2012)
Appendix K
Lyonpo Dorji Choden

Lyonpo Dorji Choden, Bhutan’s first woman engineer and Minister.

(Source: KCD Productions, 29 July 2013)