



Attitude towards Women in Political Participation in Bhutan

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As Bhutan being a young democracy, the idea of political participation is relatively a new idea. Despite being one of the youngest democracies in the world, the political participation has been unequal between men and women. In a study done by Chuki (2015), it is reported that no substantive change in the number of women representation was found after the first democratic election. This claim was backed by National Commission of Women & Children (2012), which reported that out of only 4 women elected in Bhutan's first parliamentary election, none of the four women became ministers. Furthermore, general people have perceived that those women parliamentarians were passive (Wangmo, 2011). Therefore, the process of gender equality in politics has still not gone under any extensive alteration. In correspondence, one major constraint to the democratic workings in Bhutan can reasonably be related to the indifference in the attitude of the people in women's political participation. Though some societies in Bhutan have matriarchal form of family, yet, Bhutan stands out as a patriarchal society in general. Because of patriarchy, women are associated to private sphere and men in public. Secondly, like in most of the country in the South Asian region, Bhutan also has a gendered division of labour. Such division of labour creates unequal opportunity for men and women. Lastly, the difference in standpoint with lack of equality in diversity also impacts the participation of women in politics.

In Bhutan, men and women are thought to be equal in every aspects of daily life. However, the reality is far from this. According to the report by National Commission of Women & Children (2008), patriarchy looks to be active in the Bhutanese society by exhibiting itself through culture practices, legal frame work as well as the structure of the society. Upreti (1996) demonstrated that the key factor of the Bhutanese male dominance is the dichotomy of private and public separation of the two gender. The private-public dichotomy is defined by associating males with public sphere and females with private sphere. Women who are seeking changes in such patriarchal systems are then often influenced by the public-private dichotomy (Chuki, 2015). Additionally, Chuki's study has also found that the pre-existing normative framework also pose to be insufficient in women's advancement in political representation. On top of that, her study found that the existing legal framework favors men. Similarly, another patriarchal factor is the existing traditional sayings and languages which were deeply rooted in the Bhutanese social structure. There are proverbs/sayings which expresses explicit component of patriarchy. One of the phrases, as stated by Pain and Pema (2004) is "*Zam Be May*" in Dzongkha, which can be translated to a female without religion/dharma. Such kind of derogatory words and derogative beliefs devalue women and undermines their capability and caliber. Such kind of phenomenon in Bhutanese society has influenced woman's participation in politics. Politics is often seen as a task that is tiring both mentally and physically that is associated with masculinity (Upreti, 1996), and because of such notion, women, not only are reluctant in joining politics but men also shower less support towards women participating in politics.

One of the underlying issues, related to Bhutanese patriarchy, which impacts women's political participation is the gendered division of labour. The unequal treatment of male and female lead by patriarchal values are revealed by gender roles and division of labour, masculine work culture and the challenges of addressing women's empowerment. According to Gross National Happiness Commission (2010), in principle, both male and female in Bhutan receive greatest equality in education, health services, entrepreneurial chances and employment opportunities. However, the problem is with the deeply rooted customs and traditions that has gender inequity. It is important that society must accept the concept of 'differently equal'. Men seem to hold the idea that while talking about gender equality and equity, their physical and biological differences should also be ignored. But men must accept that men and women are differently equal. Most women feels that the difference in biological aspects of male and female is an issue in coming forward and taking part in political as well as other social fields (Chuki, 2015). The primitive society has ascribed different roles on different gender based on their biological differences, but the roles carried by women are most often ignored and not appreciated. Pomeroy (2004) argued that such kind of assigned gender roles are inspired and retained based on the masculinity and the masculine power of men during those days. Traditionally, the masculine power of men has allowed men to work outside the household, whereas, for women, due to their femininity, they stayed home to support the family. In addition, Chuki (2015) also found that most capable and well-educated women could not come forward in political participation because they had to look after their home and children. Such kind of roles associated with patriarchy are the leading reason that's why there are less number of women participating in politics as well as less men supporting women because political participation is seen as outside work which is reserved for men.

The different standpoint has also influenced women's participation in politics. What is known as equality in diversity has been mostly absent in Bhutanese society. Be it of different religion, different ethnic group or of people with different sexuality, the equality in such diverse groups of people seem to be lacking (Chuki, 2015). In feminism, there is stand point theory, which asserts that dominated people like women and minorities have wide range of lived experience as a result of patriarchy and that of ill-treatment by the majority and they therefore possesses a holistic world view. According to Moreton-Robinson (2014) feminist political consciousness can be achieved only through the feminist stand point theory which claim to compete against the domination of men and patriarchy. In Bhutan, women and minority had a minimal role in its transition to democracy (Turner & Tshering, 2011). Such study clearly states that women are outnumbered by male and the dominant groups even in the crucial stage of the country's democratic transition.

Furthermore, the lack of equality in diversity can be found in religious minorities. Bhutan is dominated by Buddhism in the northern part and Hinduism in the south. However, the emerging number of Christianity means religion is diversifying but the equality is not there. According to (VOM, 2013) a Bhutanese Christian has been imprisoned for screening a Christian movie. Such kind of different and diverse stand point helps in analyzing women's oppression and dominated situation in the society (Reynolds, 2002). In the end, such lapses and lack of equality in diversity greatly impacts women participation in politics and their under-representation in politics. The dominant male and the hierarchical system that is championed by male has benefitted only men and thus women participating in political activities are often viewed from patriarchal though and lens which is why the patriarchal attitude towards women is still prevalent.

To conclude, in recent years, women have been given equal rights and opportunities regarding political participation that only a man had many decades ago. This has given rise to a huge growth in the involvement of women in politics. However, because of patriarchy, women are connected with the private sector and men with the public sphere. It is also claim that most women are unenthusiastic to come forward due to the gender role and responsibilities of women being in kitchen and doing household chores, which was inheritance and historically confined to the boundaries within families and home. Therefore, the stereotypes associated with patriarchy are the key reasons why there are less women involved in politics and fewer men encouraging women's political participation. In addition, since the domination of women are systematically hierarchical, women participating in political activities are often perceived through the lenses of patriarchy, that is why patriarchal attitudes against women still exist in the society.

Base Line Survey

We have conducted a base line survey and interviewed some individual to grasp students' attitude towards women's political participations in the country.

Some of the researchers and experts on women's political participation constructed few questionnaires to measure and examine the attitude towards women's political participation. Based on that, we also framed some questionnaires to support our above assignment. The respondents for this survey were the students of Sherubtse College as 46 respondents took part in the Survey, out of whom 22 were males and 22 females. We briefed the participants on how to use survey forms to determine their attitudes toward women's political participation. The data was calculated and the results were analysed based on the findings from the survey. Additionally, few individuals were interviewed in the campus to examine and explore the obstructions to women's political participation in the country. The findings and conclusions of the interview is added to the Survey Report.

Summary of the Findings:

Men and women's roles and responsibilities in terms of leadership in society are believed to be based on patriarchal attitudes. Even today political participation is assumed as a man's work, and women are designed to fulfill their gender roles in the family such as doing household chores. Additionally, more than men, women were aware of women's lower representation in political processes and less potential for women to participate in politics because women have less chances to engage in major election campaigns and voting systems than men. However, a substantial number of students believe that political participation is a work for both genders. But there is no clear distinction upon this as both men and women (mostly women) lack access to political activities and they even could not meet their elected political leaders. Nevertheless, it is believed that women's involvement in political processes is hindered by the atmosphere of political parties and male dominance of political participation in the country. As many students claimed that women's representation and interest in political structures will grow only if there are more female participation in the politics. Moreover, there is a clear claim that more women would participate in democratic and political systems if women are involved and opportunities are provided for equally for them.

Summary of Depth Interview:

A depth interview was conducted with few individuals in the campus to examine the obstructions and challenges to women's political participation in the country. It is paradoxical to know but still in the college, 1 in 22 men still have a notion that women belong in kitchen and they don't have any ideas on what it takes to be a politician. Corresponding, Bhutanese society does not accept women in the same way as it supports men because most people feel that men are best suited to politics and other aspects of leadership. In addition, it is also worth noting that most women are not able to come forward due to the prescribed position of women within the bound of immediate home that's why people tend to support men regardless of how capable a woman is. Likewise, patriarchal attitudes and stereotype of women should always be in the private sphere discourages women to participate in politics. Similarly, some of the students claim that the lack of political trust from the people is the main reason for their reluctance to participate in politics.

However, those few individual students were also requested to address the challenges to women's political participation in general with some policies and strategies to encourage women's participation in politics. Women are looked-for to execute their gender roles and run their household chores, but, due to the strain of everyday household duties, women find it challenging to feel more comfortable beyond their families. For instance, a woman who is CEO or a doctor had to be at their homes to cook for their families. However, one of the female students suggested that community-based training centers should be developed to teach young girls or women the skills and platforms to participate in politics and elections system, as well as other relevant formalities to boost their participation in the politics. Furthermore, some individual feels that quota system of 50% should be introduce in our country to encourage women's participation in the politics and to have reserved seats for women in the parliament as well as local government. In addition, governments should make sure that every single woman's voice is heard and the Election Commission of Bhutan should implement a mechanism that ensures this by giving a major priority to women. Moreover, it is a positive indicator that women are becoming more educated, and that, as a result of the widespread recognition of the role of women in politics, a large number of women are stepping forward to be a part of the political structure.

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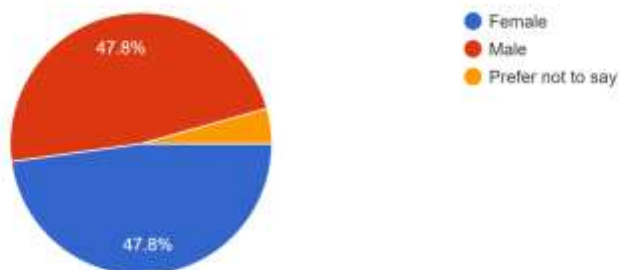
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The Findings (Appendix)

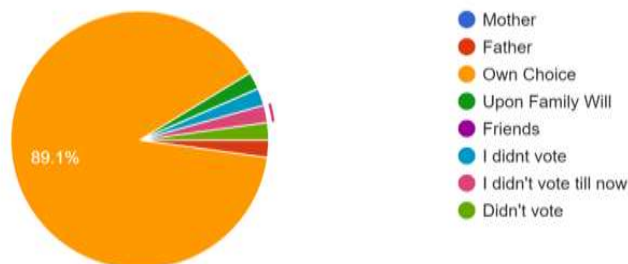
1. What is your gender?

46 responses



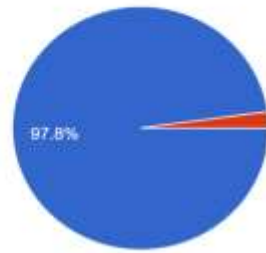
3. Upon whose instructions you polled vote?

46 responses



4. In your opinion whose choice female should poll vote?

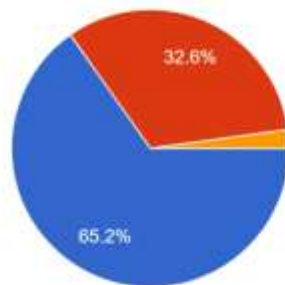
46 responses



● Own choice
● Own father, brother, or friend choice

5. Do you have interest in country politics?

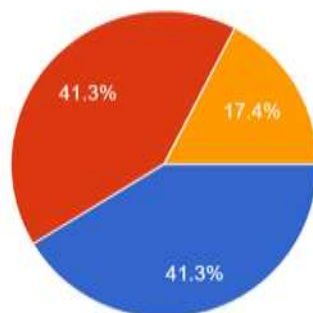
46 responses



● Yes
● No
● I have no idea

6. Are you satisfied from the current representation of females in politics?

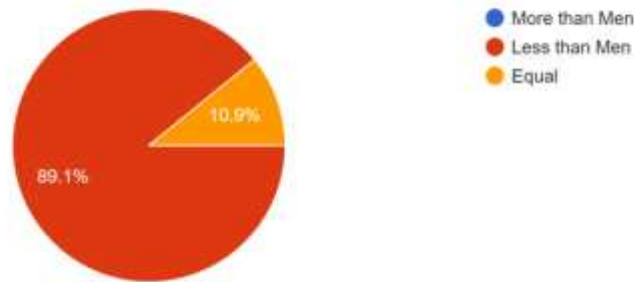
46 responses



● Yes
● No
● I don't know

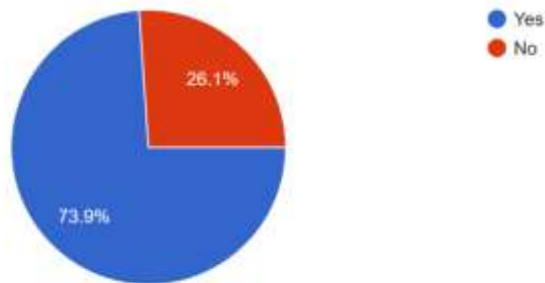
7. What in your opinion is the current ratio of women's political participation compared to men?

46 responses



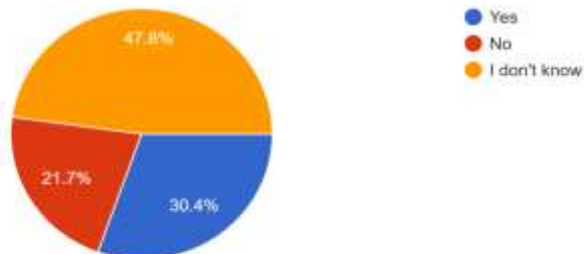
8. 11. If you get any opportunity ,will you participate in the election?

46 responses



13. Does the Member of Parliament and other political leaders of your community works to encourage women's participation in the politics?

46 responses



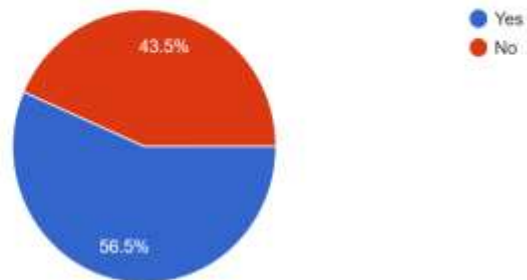
14. In your opinion, should a female become Prime Minister of country?

46 responses



15. Should there be any laws or legislation such as quota system for increasing the participation of females in local governments or in political parties?

46 responses



16. Do you think female should take part in political campaigns?

46 responses

