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ISBN 978-981-92-2784-6 ISBN 978-981-92-2785-3 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-92-2785-3>

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Contents

Part I Gendered Power and Political Participation

- 1 Feminist Foreign Policy as a Strategy
for Status-Signalling—The Indian Perspective 3**
Poornima Vijaya and Nitin Narayanan
- 2 Strategic Choices in Retaining Political Power: Analysing
the Participative Role of Women Leaders in Global South 19**
Jacqueline Elisha Gomes and Rubina Pradhan
- 3 Women’s Mobility, Leadership, and Inclusion in Bangladesh:
A Call for Structural Reforms 35**
Neeru Sidana, Firdous Ahmad Malik, Alaya Chhabra,
and Divleen Kaur
- 4 Two Decades of Gender Responsive Budgeting in India:
A Stocktaking 51**
Masroor Ahmad and Anam Ul Haq Ganie

Part II Cultural and Institutional Patriarchy

- 5 Resisting Cultural Gender Domination in Africa: Insights
from Drama and Legal Discourse 71**
Stanley Timeyin Ohenhen, Princewill Chukwuma Abakporo,
and Mary-Ann O. Ajayi
- 6 Bhutan and the Female Agency: Intersection of Social Norms,
Religion and Gender in Bhutanese Literature 87**
Vanya Srivastava
- 7 Unwritten Codes: The Individual Struggle with Gender
Norms and Postcolonial Identities 101**
Sakshi Shukla

- 8 From Home to Workplace: Gender Equality and Domestic Labor Division in Malaysian Dual-Career Couples** 117
Daisy Mui Hung Kee, Jamin Kun Peng Xia, and Louis Yong Yu Lee
- 9 Breaching Institutional Patriarchy in Banking: Case Study of the Mann Deshi Bank** 133
Sumedh Dalwai, Sameena Dalwai, and Rajdeep Pakanati
- 10 The Intersectional Politics of Gender: Pedagogy and Practice in Indian Universities** 151
Nisha Nair and Samanvi Narang

Part III Resistance, Right-Wing Populism, and Gendered Narratives

- 11 The Quiet Uprising: Gender, Power, and Women's Roles in Right-Wing Populist Regimes in the Global South** 171
Jyot Shikhar Singh and Hebatallah Adam
- 12 Women in the Media Spaces: Negotiating Inequalities and Power Struggle in a Neoliberal World** 193
Caroline C. Netto and M. Maya
- 13 Reimagining Gender Roles: The Politics of Femininity in the Global South** 209
Ishika Jaiswal

Part IV Voice, Violence, and Visibility

- 14 Climate Crisis and Gender-Based Violence: Ecofeminist Perspectives on Power and Politics in the Global South** 229
Tanni Ganguly and Aaratrika Pandey
- 15 Ecofeminist Resistance in the Margins: Women's Environmental Struggles in Contemporary Indonesia** 247
Iradhad Taqwa Sihidi, Salahudin, Naila Febrina Akmalia, and Muhammad Januar Galang
- 16 Global Capitalism and Female Precarity in India and Bangladesh Workforce** 265
Anna Bashir, Abhilash Aggarwal, and Mehvish Mehraj

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Chapter 6

Bhutan and the Female Agency: Intersection of Social Norms, Religion and Gender in Bhutanese Literature



Vanya Srivastava 

Abstract The youngest democratic and modernized nation of Bhutan is known for its unique approaches for consummate development, environmental conservation and female representation. The country was in isolation till the greater half of the twentieth century and with its end, it emerged as a “Shangri-la” (heaven) on earth. Popular for its breathtaking beauty and gender inclusive romantic culture, there are traces of masked projection of gender performativity and liminality in the traditional matriarchal society of Bhutan. The overwhelming influence of Buddhism and modernization is said to be shifting the existence and identity of Bhutanese women into the growing ‘culture of silence’. Thus, the present paper is an attempt to examine the interplay of gender agency and the grand narratives of gender neutrality in the kingdom of Bhutan. The paper posits that there is a disjunction between the said egalitarian principles and the lived experiences of women in the country. It will analyze the works of Kunzang Choden and Karma Ura using theoretical considerations of Buddhist Feminism and Marxist Feminism to establish that the intersection of religion and socio-political transformation has weakened the gender agency where Bhutanese women are grappling to bring coherence to their existence and identity. The paper aims to contribute to the contemporary discourses on gender studies within the SAARC vicinity by focusing on the significant concerns coming from the underrepresented and poorly studied cultures and nations of South Asia.

Keywords Bhutan · Gender agency · Buddhism · Modernization · Buddhist feminism · Marxist feminism · SAARC literature · Gender studies · Kunzang Choden · Karma Ura

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H. Adam and F. A. Malik (eds.), *The Political Economy of Gender*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-92-2785-3_6