

# Women's place in higher education: The 21 Tara model of Compassion, Care and Commitment (3Cs) in action

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## ABSTRACT

Women academics respond differently to men in teaching profession. Teaching is a demanding and important profession which needs compassion, care, commitment, swift response and hard work to educate the young. Women academic are often viewed to have shown these feminine traits to bring out the best in their students and make a genuine difference. Therefore, this article's objective was to explore insightful narratives of how women academics respond to university teaching in the Bhutanese culture context. Semi-structured interview method was used to document professional and personal stories of ten women university academics. Literature on compassion, university teaching and women academics' personality traits and teaching approaches was reviewed to study and draw out nuances of women educators. Since the study covered only women academics, the findings are limited and cannot be generalised.

## KEYWORDS

21 Tara, compassion, higher education, women academic, feminine traits.

## Introduction

Bhutan's Constitution states that access to the higher education is based on "merit" (Constitution of Bhutan 2008). This implies that merit factor supersedes gender equality consideration to avail university education. Further, the Ministry of Education's Tertiary Education's Policy draws upon merit feature stated in the Constitution to access tertiary education. However, access to tertiary education is provided to "in service students, students "re-entering education after a period in employment", persons in "initial stages of career" and those wanting to be life-long learners and to re-skill themselves (2010). This also indicates that the gender equality issue is silent in higher education policy.

Despite male dominance in leadership positions and an increased number of male faculty, women academics have made breakthrough presence in higher education in recent years. The Royal University of Bhutan (RUB)'s 2012 statistics show that women academic constituted about 24 percent against 76 percent for men (2012). This shows male dominance.

But both women faculty and students are yet to catch up in colleges in higher education. In 2020, female student enrolment was about 1336 out of the total 2825 students in RUB (RUB, 2021). Further, there are 310 men and 101 women academic out of total 490 lecturers (RUB 2012). This means that men constituted 63 percent and women only about 21 percent RUB, 2012). Further, in 2023 out 2296 students, female students constituted about 49 percent, slightly lower than about 51 percent of male

students (RUB, 2023). Further, RUB reported that out of 518 academic staff, female made up only 157 as opposed to 361 percent of male lecturers (2023).

Women faculty are much lower in number than men in state university colleges, public autonomous institutes and private colleges. According to Ministry of Education, male constituted 68 percent and female only 32 percent of 785 lecturers in all tertiary education in Bhutan. Further, 13 male and seven female in Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law, 21 male and nine female at the Royal Institute of Management, 68 male and 45 female lecturers in private colleges and institute. However, Kheser Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan had an equal number of male and female lecturers with 30 each in 2022 (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Despite being less than half in a male dominated work environment, women academics approached differently to men in teaching profession in terms of demonstration of compassion and commitment. Teaching is a demanding and important profession. Rana and Soodan (2019) and Faisal et al. (2019) reported work stress in university teachers in South Asian region affecting quality of teaching and learning. In the ever changing 21<sup>st</sup> century world, university teachers need to continuously learn and update themselves (Abduwani, 2017). Tormey (2021) argued that teacher-student's emotional relationship determined students' learning in higher education. An excellent set of teachers who exhibit compassion, care, commitment, swift response and hard work to educate the young is critical to ensure quality university education. Waddington (2018), a practice based academic and compassionate researcher argued that compassionate teaching approach is to apply compassion with students and fellow academics to build kindness and contribute for the well-being of teachers, students and other members in universities. Mazhar (2023) argued that most recent literature on compassion in higher education highlighted compassion as a guide in teaching learning during COVID pandemic's turmoil and beyond.

Also, she argued that compassion practice becomes a humane voice for the disadvantaged and excluded people. Kind actions are argued to help students build positive interactions with lecturers and peers (Cheng & Adekola, 2022). Further, according to Baylor University and Ahern (2019, applied compassion referred to compassionate pedagogy in terms of teachers' ability to listen to students' lived experiences and being flexible to promote human connection and wellbeing in a competitive academic environment (2023). The Chinese students in the United Kingdom found their academic and social life at universities unkind, stressful and dampened their self- confidence. The study argued lecturers' acts of kindness had a significant impact on students' learning and that kindness is imperative in promotion of students' positive social life on campus (Cheng & Adekola, 2022).

The students found work and assessment challenging in universities. In such a difficult learning environment, compassionate communication skills practice helped improve students' behaviour as personal behaviours affect everyone in group work (Harvey & Maratos 2021). Also, the students could replicate compassionate communication in family, workplace and social setting beyond universities. Further, compassionate communication is important in virtual teaching-learning to encourage students to use audio and camera as facial expression and body language are critical in teaching (Harvey & Maratos 2021).

Women academics are often viewed to have shown these feminine traits to bring out the best in their students and make a genuine difference. Appiah and Agblevor (2014)'s study on university students 'views of male and female lecturers on teaching learning showed that women lecturers were more warm, sensitive to students' need and encouraged their class participation than male. In addition, students found women lecturers understanding, caring, responsive, dedicated to students and harmonious. They felt comfortable with female lecturers and perceived them to be well prepared and organised for the class (Appiah & Agblevor, 2014; Badrolhisam et al. 2020, cited in Tormey 2021).

Therefore, this study explored women academics' teaching learning approaches in university education in Bhutan. The study documented their professional and personal insights.

## The 21 Tara Model of Compassion, Care and Commitment (3Cs)

A classic Buddhist Literature- liturgy of the “The Praises to the 21 Tara” was used as the theoretical framework to examine women academics’ personality of the 3Cs and related attributes and their application on their teaching learning approaches and drew out nuances of women educators’ different response. The 21 Model of 3Cs was chosen to understand Bhutan’s largely Buddhist guided socio-cultural context which has certain degree of impact on teaching learning in university education. Further, this was an attempt to build home grown feminine values rooted in Bhutanese socio-cultural context drawn from Buddhist ethos of the 21 Tara’s divine feminine traits. At least seven out of 10 interviewees are of the view that the 21 model of the 3Cs tradition needs to be shared with the young people to help bring in positive change in their attitude. The model will also help maintain the Buddha Dharma based Tara practice tradition in the face of an ever-changing world.

Tara or Jetsun Drolma is a female Bodhisattva and is highly venerated in Buddhist countries in the Himalayan region. Bodhisattva is a Sanskrit word and refers to *Jangchubsempa* in Dzongkha (the national language of Bhutan). Bodhisattva is an enlightened being who serves all beings selflessly. In Bhutan, she is worshipped in temples and homes. Tara practice is popular across Bhutan as she is believed to respond quickly to whoever supplicate her. Compassion, care, commitment and swift response in the service of sentient beings stands out in Tara’s divine femineity (Dzongser Khyentse Rinpoche, 2019).

Tara, in her previous life as a young Princess Wisdom Moon, promised to help sentient beings during crisis and liberate them in female form. Therefore, her blessings are believed to be quick. His Eminence, Dzongser Khyentse Rinpoche taught to relate to Tara as a mother or a sister and seek her blessings whenever one experiences varied sufferings. Further, Rinpoche said that female is innately rapid in extending their help than men during difficult situations. In addition, Tara has many manifestations to ease sentient beings’ complex sufferings and to reach out to them any time and everywhere (Dzongser Khyentse Rinpoche, 2019). In the Himalayan Buddhist societies like Bhutan, “Praises to 21 Tara” liturgy practice is common in the community. The 21 Tara emanates in peaceful, semi wrathful and wrathful forms to assist beings (Longdrel, 2020).

Each of the 21 Tara manifests in green, red, yellow, white and blue -black colors to help beings with varied needs. Further, the 21 Tara has different names based on her compassionate roles. The first Tara is “Swift and Glorious Tara”. She is red and stated to respond instantly like a lightening to beings’ distress and prayers and protects from injuries. She truly carries the name Tara or saviouress and is famous among Tara practitioners. The second Tara is white “Glorious Tara” and pacifies from evil spirits and diseases. The third is “Golden Tara” and grants long life and wealth. The fourth is the victorious Ushnisha Tara or the enlightened head of the Buddha and powered with victory blessing. The ancient Chinese emperors were said to have worshipped her for victory (Dzongser Khyentse Rinpoche, 2014, 2022).

The fifth is the Tara who proclaims “Hum” sound and is believed to bless with victory over the seven different worlds of three kinds of god realms, hungry ghost, hell and animal domains. She has the power to bless beings with power of communication and summoning. The sixth Tara is the Victorious Tara over the three worlds and worldly gods such as Brahma, Indra, Agni and Shiva worship her. Furthermore, she has the power to protect beings from evil spirits and obstacle makers. The seventh Tara is Adversaries Crushing Tara and is victorious over the three worlds. She is blue-black and blazes in raging fire. The eighth Tara is the “Destroyer of the Other” and protects from black magic and spell. She is black in colour. The ninth Tara is the “Granter of Boons”. She is green and protects from fear (Dzongser Khyentse Rinpoche, 2014;2022; Longdrel, 2020).

The 10th Tara is “Dispeller of Misery”. She is red and helps eradicate all kinds of fears and suffering. The 11<sup>th</sup> Tara is blue -black in colour and is “Dispeller of Misfortune and Poverty”. The 12<sup>th</sup> Tara is “Light of Fortune”. She is yellow in colour and blesses with creation of auspicious causes and condition. The 13<sup>th</sup> Tara is “Tara, the Ripener” and is red in colour. She helps overcome challenges from harshest

adversaries. It can be both human and non-human trenchant obstacles. The 14<sup>th</sup> Tara is “Frown Shaking” black Tara. By the power of her frowning shake, she subjugates demons, outshines and make them uncomfortable. The 15<sup>th</sup> Tara is “Greatly Peaceful or Giver of Good” Tara. She is white in colour and helps purify our negative karma. The 16<sup>th</sup> Tara is “the Destroyer of Attachment”. She is white in colour and arises out of “Hung” of awareness. The 17<sup>th</sup> Tara is “Accomplisher of Bliss”. She is white in colour and shakes off the Three Worlds to overcome obstacles. The 18<sup>th</sup> Tara is “All increasing Tara”. She is white in colour and protects from poison and harms from Naga or Lu. The 19<sup>th</sup> Tara is “Sufferings Burner”. She is white in colour and alleviates all kinds of sufferings and bad dreams. The 20<sup>th</sup> Tara is “Source of Attainments”. She is white in colour and eradicates contagious diseases like COVID 19. Finally, the 21<sup>st</sup> Tara is “Tara, the Perfector”. She is white in colour and helps achieve Buddha dharma practitioners perfect all the enlightened activities (Dzongser Khyentse Rinpoche, 2014; 2022; Longdrel, 2020).

For the current purpose, “A Praise to 21 Tara Practice from His Eminence, Dzongser Kyentse Rinpoche’s 21 Tara teachings is used as a theoretical framework to discuss and present women academic’s compassion, care, commitment and quick response attributes in teaching learning and in other engagement in higher education in Bhutan.

### **Methodology**

Following qualitative research methodology’s premise of interpreting social world, semi-structured interview method was used to document teaching learning experiences of women university academics. Purposive sampling was used as it helped define and choose the participants relevant for the study (Andrade, 2020). This research explored the application of feminine attributes of compassion, care, commitment, swift response and hard work in women academics’ daily teaching learning. Since the core objective of this study was about exploring women academics’ professional and personal experiences in teaching and learning, only women lecturers were selected as study’s participants. Therefore, the study’s focus was women academics. About 10 women academics with a minimum of a Master’s Degree education qualification and about 10 years of active teaching experience in higher education were included. Further, women academics in different leadership positions including college president, programme leader and members of decision-making committees, those involved in research and innovation and women academics without any extra portfolio other than teaching constituted sample. Women academics without aforementioned criteria including less 10 years of teaching experiences were not included. This was because the main objective was to draw rich and varied professional and personal experiences of female lecturers within this category.

An hour-long interview was conducted in person and over telephone to suit interviewee’s different contexts. Seven interviews were conducted over phone for the researcher could not travel to different colleges located in various districts due to COVID 19 restrictions in the country. Three interviews were conducted in person prior to major nationwide lock downs in Bhutan. The interviews were not tape recorded for the interviewees did not approve it. Instead, data were documented in field notes. The written field notes were analysed along emerging major and minor themes. Drawing upon the research objective of women academics’ compassionate traits and different approach to teaching learning, the 21 Tara Model of Compassion, Care and Commitment (3Cs) theoretical framework was used to analyse the themes.

### **Analysis and discussion**

The following themes are drawn from the 10 semi-structured interview data based on the 21 Tara Model of Compassion, Care and Commitment (3Cs). The themes were chosen based on the frequency of themes and sub themes occurrence and their depth of occurrence. The interviewee’s views were

discussed and presented in the form of numbers for confidentiality. Each theme is interpreted and discussed under separate headings.

### **Teaching and learning experience**

This theme is on the feminine style of treating students and the influence of gender traits of care, compassion, commitment and flexibility in teaching learning space. Eight interviewees found 21 Tara model to be an appropriate theoretical framework for current study. Interviewee no five, for example, a Tara devotee and a competent woman lecturer at management institute said that 21 Tara Model of 3 Cs is relevant to analyse women's role in academia in higher education as compassion is the foundation to one's intention in teaching-learning area. She commented that she consciously tried to practice compassion in her classroom teaching.

All 10 women lecturers across different age groups in colleges and institutes under RUB, Kheser Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan and Royal Institute of Management shared that they enjoyed teaching profession and put in extra efforts to reach out to varied students' learning needs. Further, the only woman president commented that she made concerted and additional efforts to create enabling teaching-learning environment at her college. She added that she tried to practice compassion to address students' discipline issues. She monitored college's task force committee members working with student's discipline problems to help mend students' behaviour and not miss out learning. She used her motherly trait of care and attempted to help students mend their behaviour. She used all possible solutions and resorted to the last option of asking to leave the college. As a mother, she ensured that she considered all types of options and explained to students about them. "Being mother, [I] always say that I am their parent, mother and president." This implies that women academic's practice compassion and care as stated in (Baylor University,2023, Ahern 2019). It confirms the 21 Tara model of 3 Cs.

Interviewee three, a dedicated senior woman lecturer at an education college commented that her students' respected women faculty and preferred women than men tutor due to former's care and commitment. Despite their commitment, young and single women lecturers faced difficulties teaching older women students. The latter did not seem to recognise young women lecturer's commitment. But married women lecturers did not experience this problem. Interviewee three attributed this to senior women students being jealous of young and single women lecturers. This showed that there is a challenge in the use of the 3Cs approach in teaching-learning.

Further, young woman lecturer teaching small class size seemed to like teaching in higher education. Interviewee number eight, one of the youngest lecturers with about ten years of active teaching experience said that she had an interesting experience and enjoyed teaching small groups of students at her college. "[I found teaching] quite a fascinating, satisfied with students, small groups of students". She added that her class size was about 20-26 students and they come from humble background, were self-motivated, good mannered, respectful of both male and female teachers. She said that she is proud of her students. Some of the students earn their pocket money selling their manual labour in physically draining work during college vacations. Since the class size was small, the teaching and learning classroom space was like a family environment implying a presence of caring ambience. Interviewee eight's challenge was students' difficulty in learning English language as students learnt most of the subjects in Choekey- classical Tibetan. However, most students worked hard to improve their English language and graduated successfully. Some of her former students are now her colleagues in the same college and they share well-bonded teacher-student relationship. Also, she enjoyed learning Information Technology (IT) skills from her former student, now a colleague, who is very good at IT skills.

Interviewee 10, is a young lecturer, who worked in the college where men and women lectures were in equal numbers, about 50 percent in strength. She was a Programme Leader (PL) and said that she enjoyed teaching-learning. Although it was tough for her in the beginning, she learnt to learn, read relevant literature and teach. She taught an equal number of male and female students. Her



undergraduate degree programme students were a mix of 18 years and in late 20s and early 30s with more than 10 years' work experience. She found it difficult to teach mature students who worked as health technicians but they coped well with study. Her students approached in person in class to seek extra help. However, there were some shy and quiet students who could not share their problems in the class. Therefore, she initiated students learning group in Whatapps, a social media platform to reach out to needy students who required additional coaching. There were students who could not cope with assignments and needed extra help. These students communicated to her about their academic challenges and she followed up with their learning progress. In addition, some students sought her help to address their personal problems. She shared that, a student with a family problem sought her counselling help and was uncomfortable to see their college's counselling department. This implied that the particular student had more confidence in her than the counselling department. This showed compassionate communication and swift response of addressing students' different needs as (Harvey and Maratos 2021) emphasised on compassionate communication's positive impact on students.

Like most of the interviewees, Interviewee 10 commented that women lecturers are considerate with their students than men lecturers. Women tended to make extra efforts to reach out their students and hold professional ownership and responsibility supporting the 21 Tara model and existing literature on compassion.

Despite women lecturers' considerate attitude towards their students, male students sought help from men lecturers at Interviewee 10's college. This showed that some male students preferred men faculty and women lecturers' caring quality seem irrelevant.

Interviewee five said that she built her professional teaching experience in her 14 years teaching career to learn from her seniors and cater to different adult students in various academic programmes. As a woman lecturer, sometimes they experienced sexist comments made on their physical "looks" in teaching learning space. She shared that she learnt to tackle it well. Further, she added that she used motherly approach such as dedication and commitment to teach and help students. For example, she tried to help students find jobs in market after graduation. Also, she shared that there were a few women colleagues who helped students buy lunch as some of them could not afford lunch. At least women colleagues created a Wechat, a social media platform group to provide financial support to vulnerable students and to improve students' diet. This implies that women academic's compassionate and flexible style in supporting students.

Further, she said that compassion, commitment, care and empathy came easily to her as a woman and as a mother. She shared that she developed attachment to her students as she saw her students from motherly view. She used an informal personal space such as, institute's canteen to discuss their personal problems like relationship issues. The students found it hard to share their personal issues in public space where there was no privacy. She encouraged students to use phone and social media platform like Wechat to reach her. She observed that younger students were open-minded and bold, and students found Wechat platform easy to share both their academic and personal issues. A girl student, for example, used phone at midnight to convey Teacher's Day greetings. She shared that the girls used phone and Wechat platform than boys to connect with her. However, she maintained professional boundary and corrected when students needed. This reiterated women lecturers' demonstration of 3Cs in catering to students' complex needs and confirms (Appiah & Agblevor, 2014, Badrolhisam et al. 2020, cited in Tormey 2021)'s studies.

Interviewee six, a senior woman academic in her late 50s and with over 20 years of teaching experience in higher education commented that as a lifelong learner she enjoyed teaching intelligent cohorts of undergraduate students. She added that she built her professional credentials and shouldered varied leadership responsibilities as a matron for girls' hostels, dean of academic and student affairs, officiating director of the college where she worked. She said that she did not experience problems as a woman, and she attributed it to her lack of knowledge on gender issues.

Instead, she used her accommodating attitude at work. This showed her use of feminine qualities of patience and flexibility although she did not realise that she exhibited feminine characteristics.

Interviewee seven, lecturer with about 14 years of teaching experience stated that she her college ambience enabled her to stay updated, creative and innovative. She said that she found teaching interesting, challenging and satisfying. She planned and prepared her lessons very well and her classroom discussions were fruitful restating (Appiah & Agblevor, 2014)'s findings about female lecturers.

She added that she received appreciation from her students and colleagues. She observed women lecturers to be focused on their professional work, created friendly, interactive and respectful atmosphere. They were committed, caring and compassionate. They cared about their students, put in efforts for students who needed support, and provided equal support for both boys and girls. As mothers, women lecturers view compassion as feminine trait. "Being mother, we are compassion[ate] meaning compassion is inherent in mothers. Even single women are compassion[ate], very feminine trait". On the contrary, she found most of her male colleagues to be "carefree and not concerned like female colleagues". In her experience, two out of 10 men colleagues exhibited commitment, care and compassion. This demonstrated that 3Cs are dominant in female faculty.

Interviewee number six thought that individual personalities influenced teaching-learning implying that male and female teachers have certain degree of influence on university teaching. In fact, she observed some women lecturers were compassionate, caring and committed. They were found to take initiatives and active at work. This showed that female lecturers exhibited some traits of 3Cs.

Generally, students' degree of close relationship with lecturers depended on the latter's personality. But, with some women lecturers, even older in-service students sought help about their personal issues. Therefore, this issue could be contested. Further, senior students were cautious sharing their personal problems with their lecturers unless they had a close rapport with the lecturers. Interviewee seven shared that the girls were more reserved, quiet, not open-minded and did not take initiatives whereas the boys talkative, noisy and took initiatives. She attributed this to women being conscious and cautious about sharing about themselves and tended not to share with people that they did not trust. Men, on the other hand, are casual about "everything" and "reveal unconsciously". This implies that women lecturers cared to understand their students.

Interview eight commented said that in her college female students were more comfortable and shared their personal problems with her. She knew both boys and girls very well. She added that her open-minded approach helped built a good rapport with her students. The girls felt shy and embarrassed to share their problems with senior male lecturers. Also, she made time for her students. Depending on the students' need she used social media to connect with them. Further, she started students' mentorship which included counselling programme and male students availed it. This demonstrates use of 3Cs.

### **Feminine approach of supporting students in appropriate space**

Women lecturers said that women are by nature caring. About eight women lecturers tried all approaches to support students outside classroom.

Women lecturers used informal space such as college corridors and in between the classes to communicate with students. Informal yet comfortable space was found helpful to exercise their care and compassion to help address student's personal problems in private. Interviewee one, a senior and a caring woman lecturer expressed that her commitment to students was based on her personal values and her dedication to her professional responsibility implying 3Cs was inherent in her personal values.

On the contrary, male lecturers used phone for communication with students and talked to the students in groups. Male faculty did not take time with students to converse, were less patient with

students, took students' behaviour personally and felt that students were being disrespectful of them. They were not professional in differentiating between the personal and professional boundaries and in maintaining professional boundary with the students. Interviewee one shared that "There was female student who suffered from mental health issue. She was infatuated with a male lecturer and invited him for coffee in town. His ego was large and was unable to see that he was her lecturer and not the boyfriend". Since the male lecturer violated his professional boundary and he lost his job. This showed that women were strictly committed to professional ethics and appeared more ethical than men lecturers.

Further, some women lecturers shared that student usually concealed their true identity in the class and opened up to their tutors outside classroom space. Interviewee three, a young woman lecturer said that during one of the field trips, students felt free and behaved like friends with her. The students listened to her, could understand their feelings and the students shared their personal things. She enjoyed it and felt close to them implying caring characteristic. A woman PL used her office space over coffee to talk to a problematic boy student who missed many of her and other tutor's classes. This student refused to listen in formal space and scolding did not work at all. An informal conversation about the difficult topic over coffee helped mend student's problematic behaviour. Interviewee three, shared similar experience. She helped improve a problematic girl student's behaviour through informal conversations over coffee at college canteen. This student had a negative influence on her peer and they disturbed classroom teaching and learning. After their informal conversations, the student became less trouble some in classroom. This showed 3Cs' attributes of women lecturers.

However, interviewee five addressed students' mental health issues in her normal classroom environment. The postgraduate students that she taught experienced stress as they compete for job positions after graduation. She tried to tackle students' stress with her newly acquired mental health knowledge from Australia. She shared that the students opened up to her about their personal problems and she tried to help them.

Similarly, at interviewee eight's college, the students suffer from worries of not being able to get jobs after graduation as their degree had limited opportunity in the Bhutanese job market. She said that she engaged in counselling students. The college started students' mentorship programme to support academically weak and problematic students. Further, she said that some of her students came from broken homes and suffered from its negative impact on their motivation to study. These students are vulnerable to risky drinking behaviour under peer pressure. She attempted to cater to each students' mental health issues through her student-centred counselling services in her office room. The students sought counselling services through appointments. She said that her office room is spacious and comfortable to support students. In addition, she said that there were four monk students from Buddhist Monastic education with limited English language and were challenged with learning subjects taught in English. She made extra efforts to help them learn implying traits of 3Cs in her.

As discussed earlier, women academic naturally exhibited 3 Cs. Since they cared a lot about work and made additional efforts for students' well-being, they get exhausted. Unlike Mother Tara's divine feminine intervention and infinite compassion for sentient beings, mortal feminine lecturers suffer from 3 Cs fatigue. Therefore, they need to self-care and renew their lost energy. The college and institutes' leaders need to build gender responsive staff welfare system.

### **Women in leadership positions in higher education**

Broadly speaking, the inclusion of women in leadership positions depended on top leaders in the colleges and institutes. Interviewee seven stated that the president at her college treated both men and women equally in the professional space. She saw him as a very supportive, encouraging and humble leader. She added that if he appreciated individual lecturer's ideas, he got it translated into action. Further, she commented that he encouraged everyone to apply for vacant leadership positions. Interviewee 10 shared similar view. Her college leader provided opportunity to everyone



irrespective of gender. Also, since women constituted half of the total faculty in her college, most of the women were members of the college committees and shoulder PL responsibility.

Women leaders commented that that they made extra efforts for public visibility in their organisations. The male staff tended to not easily recognise women leaders. Interviewee five for example, stated that at her institute, there is a trend of all the male members of faculty receiving a male director during the institute's events. But, none of the male faculty members received their female director at the institute's events. Further, women lecturers were assigned roles based on conventional gender stereotypes such as serving in catering services, relegating women's football match name to an "exhibition match" and not given an equal treatment.

Similarly, interviewee seven commented that when she chaired in house meetings, male colleagues did not listen. Men lecturers tried to distract woman chair from making her points in the meeting. Interviewee seven added that during the process of her PhD study, her department's Head of Department (HoD) became dean and HoD post was vacant. The college president encouraged her to apply for HoD based on her past international project's contribution to her department and college. The college management waited till she joined her college. She was yet to finish her PhD and did not want to shoulder HoD's additional responsibility. But she did not want to let down college leadership. However, some male colleagues disliked her out of jealousy.

Despite male colleagues' challenges, she initiated to start STEM education research centre. The dean encouraged her and representatives from the relevant STEM education stakeholders from the government appreciated her idea of the research centre. The college leader recognised her idea and asked her to head the centre. But this did not bode well with her male colleagues within the department. She shared that "there was a commotion in department and didn't like me, all men". This implied that women leaders at the HoD level were challenged in professional space despite leadership's support. Interviewee seven said that she felt bad about it. However, her aspiration to enhance STEM education for children, teachers and for the country enabled to work hard in the centre although male colleagues did not support her. This showed that women leaders are committed to attaining organisational goals.

### **Women lecturers voice in management and committees**

Women continue to work in a male dominated work environment. Interviewee five said that at her institute, most of the members of the committees are men and only a single woman lecturer is the Head of a Department and represented her department in a committee and did not represent women's voice per se. The organisational system and leadership did not make an additional effort to include women in various committees. Also, the competitive work ambience negatively affected trust among female colleagues. "I can trust only a few female colleagues... cannot have a true friend in colleagues. There is so much competition".

Women lecturers were undermined and not heard in a male dominated work environment. A college president, for example, seemed gender blind. He did not listen women's voice. The College Management (CMC) is the highest non-academic committee. Most of the members are men. Interviewee three a well-qualified, experienced and passionate educator stated "They do not pay attention to me. I had to say, excuse me, I am talking. They do not listen to me. I felt it". All the deans are men. She applied for a vacant dean's position but her application was rejected. "I applied for dean's position and [went to] submit application at 12:30 PM but office was closed. I submitted at 3:00PM [when the office was open]. [My] application was rejected because I submitted late. There were no candidates submitting [though].

Interviewee six shared that as a woman Bhutanese faculty in an international faculty dominant college environment, she tried to be proactive, build her professional experience and learnt from senior colleagues. Also, she added women lecturers offered their best possible services despite high attrition rate of young lecturers. There were three women PLs although PL change is frequent at her college.

Women found it challenging to shoulder additional administrative responsibility with full time teaching and family work.

Further, interviewee six mentioned that her male college president included women's voice if they took initiative and was responsible showing lack of understanding gender equality.

Interviewee eight said that she never felt scared or intimidated in the presence male colleagues. However, as a young woman lecturer, she was "conscious" about "others judging her" and did not speak much in her college meetings. Nonetheless, she spoke whenever urgent issues related to academic arose in the meetings. But her senior woman colleague was confident with years of professional experience and shared her views in the meeting. She added that sometimes, male colleagues listened in a male dominated meeting, but decisions were always male driven. Since men were more in number, majority decision rested in male lecturers. The dean and PLs are all men. Despite male dominated atmosphere, her senior woman colleague supported and encouraged her. The senior woman colleague initiated a students' research seminar and was successful. Male colleagues received this initiative well and provided constructive feedback. The members of the HRC and Disciplinary Committees were rotated on the basis of six months and appeared gender blind.

On the contrary, interviewee seven commented that many women lecturers at her college were HoDs, and PLs and were shouldering their managerial responsibility very well. There were equal number of male and female lecturers at her college implying gender inclusive leadership depends on the adequate number of women faculty in a college.

### **Work home life imbalance**

All 10 interviewees shared that there is a challenge between work and family life. Married women lecturers with young children found academic work demanding as it took their time away from family.

Interviewee six commented that most of young women lecturers were committed to their work but struggled to balance between work and family life. She said that office meetings for PL and HoDs needed time and took away family time for young children and elderly parents who required care. There were only a few lecturers who have extended family like parental support to care for young grandchildren. Most lived in nuclear family and tried to balance professional and care work. However, she was positive that there is a trend of men shouldering household work as both men and women earned income for the family.

Interviewee seven said that women multitasked, balancing home and work responsibilities. Women shoulder responsibilities related to family and child care in South Asian countries like Bhutan, Nepal and India. Therefore, it is important to have a supportive partner at home to address the family's well-being.

### **Conclusion**

University teaching is a demanding job (Rana and Soodan (2019) and Faisal et al. (2019). Compassionate pedagogy was used to build kindness culture in competitive environment to address students, teachers and other staff's wellbeing in universities (Waddington 2018, Mazhar, 2023). Further, applied compassionate approach saw teachers' ability to listen to students' actual experiences and adapt to promote human connection and wellbeing in a hard academic ambience (Baylor University,2023, Ahern 2019). In such a context, Women academics often exhibited these feminine traits to make a genuine difference in students' life.

The 21 Tara model of Compassion, Care and Commitment (3 Cs) was used to study Bhutan's university education context. The model supported women academics' 3Cs based feminine approach in teaching- learning and in discharging academic responsibilities in Bhutan's university education. Women leaders and lecturers in existing RUB and KGUMS colleges and RIM made extra efforts to respond to students' learning, wellbeing and to make themselves heard in a highly male dominated environment. Although, women leaders had less voice in colleges and institutes' decision-making

committees and leadership positions, they made significant contributions in the learning growth in higher education. Women walked extra miles beyond normal job requirements to reach out their students and hold professional responsibility. Since women academics suffer from 3Cs' fatigue, the college and institutes' leaders need to build gender responsive staff wellbeing system to support women lecturers.

This small yet focused study using semi-structured interview revealed insightful professional and personal roles of women academics in university teaching, addressing teaching-learning challenges, using feminine traits of 3Cs in meeting students' wellbeing and in exercising their voice in a highly male driven professional ambience. This study cannot be generalised due to its limited objective but has scope to conduct future search in similar area.

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## Disclosure statement

Not applicable

## Notes on contributor

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