5.1. Introduction

Throughout the world women’s history has developed differently in different countries, and among groups within these countries, and cannot be separated from the political context. Mary Beard in her seminal work on women in history, Woman as a Force in History (Beard 1946) argued that women were history makers just like men but had been left out of the narrative. Our exploration has been guided by this question, “If so many great freedom fighters visited the region, then did it not create any ripples in otherwise the idyllic calm serene place called Darjeeling?”

Darjeeling the misty hill station created by the colonial authorities served as a military cantonment, headquarter for the governmental activities during summer, as a social recreational resort for the British officers and their families and a place for education of British and Eurasian children. The area consisted of the aboriginal inhabitants i.e. Lepchas and Bhutias of Sikkim who lived in inaccessible tract of forest with very scanty population. Since, the British sought to incorporate them within the greater colonial framework, these people found themselves in a new set up merging with the pouring migrants from surrounding regions.

The second chapter entitled “life and times of women in Darjeeling” emphasize on introducing the region in focus from the point view of economic and political environment. We have tried to highlight about the study of the racial character of the region. We have taken into account the racial composition of the population of the region with a precise explanation of various castes along with the available date and how the ethnic complexities in the district resulted in a composite culture that took shape in the three hill sub-divisions from the beginning of the present century. However, we have also focused on socio-economic and political environment that had a major influence on the women living in Darjeeling. It also highlighted the religious composition of the region in detailed form with an available data. Here we tried to accentuate the position of the women in Society during the period and how the European education emerged and brought in many renowned Schools in the region which still holds the same records as earlier. These efforts of the Colonial regime are indeed a remarkable one on the path that directly helped the girls in great numbers in
acquiring education during such an orthodox period. We also included the economy of the region and the women’s contributions in earning livelihood and helping their husbands in maintaining the family. Lastly, we tried to elucidate the establishment of Hospitals in the region and thereby gradual development of politics in the region.

In third chapter we have tried to focus empirically on the contribution of women in the anti-colonist nationalist movement from Darjeeling. We have also tried to provide a picture of a decade long history of contribution of Indian women to national struggle. Here we have uses the feminist methodology of understanding perceptions of women’s contributions through their own discourses. The refreshing aspect of this work is how it combines interviews, oral narratives, autobiographies etc. with a focus on the every day world of ordinary middle class who were unable to cross the domestic threshold but experienced and contributed to the movement. However, much has been already written about the contribution of visible and elite women who were active in political sphere compared to these ordinary middle class women. We have also tried to emphasize on how the domestic life was organized, given the political upheavals taking place in the public sphere. Along with it we have tried to highlight how constraining social customs such as purdah and gender segregation were reinvented and made into enabling ones within the confines of the domestic space. We have also tried to explore the significance of domesticity to the Indian nationalist discourse and civic-political life not only among male nationalists but from women standpoint as well and how the domestic space emerged as a site of both contestation and subordination for women. We have also tried to bring out this analytical point with an in depth discussion of various nationalist symbols of motherhood, feminine sacrifice, women as a source of strength and support etc. Here in the process we attempt to provide the collections of few dynamic real life stories of those subaltern women living in Darjeeling and its adjoining areas. Thus, the wider process of the domestication of the public sphere facilitated the entry of women into the movement in great numbers.

The fourth chapter is devoted entirely on the entry of women in the male dominated space further dispels the British stereotype about Indian women. The contribution of Gandhi frequent invocation of the domestic ideology in maintaining the domestic values on the streets by keeping the involvement of women ‘respectable’ and segregated. Gandhi emphasized the inclusion of women in very specific political activities such as picketing liquor shops and cloth shops. However, during the historic
march for breaking the salt law, many such boundaries were broken. We have selected and incorporated some of the significant incidents that took place in Darjeeling during the protest waves that was spreading like a wild fire all over India.

The fifth chapter evaluates that in colonial India the domestic space was not only politicized by the efforts of women but this in turn was a pivotal forces that helped in the mobilization of women in the post independent era by revisiting the role of women in political activities as a continuity of legacy of the past women leaders who participated and sacrificed their life in liberating India from the colonial regime. The changes fetch by political consciousness of women and their more understanding of so called identity and development inevitably gave rise to the demand of Gorkhaland. Therefore, the active participation by women in the nationalist movement helped in sensitizing the women of today about their rights and gender justice in the post colonial period. This remained a vigilant in the form of women presently holding various port folios and exercising their power and influence in the hills politics.

Darjeeling was created by the colonial authorities for its exotic beauty and developed as a place of a Sanatarium and for its cool climate for the purpose of enabling the servants of the government suffering from sickness to avail themselves of its advantages. However, this led to the pouring in of other influences, a whiff of anti-colonial sentiment and heroic stories of freedom fighters and new ideas of emancipation. The new influences generated a new enthusiasm to take on the British and engage in the struggle like the people of the rest of India. The visits of political leaders in flight, further added fire to the movement. All said and done, very few records have entered the annals of the history of India. Few who have entered the local history records are however, male and no records of women freedom fighters unfortunately, were given a space.

Literature on nations and nationalism has rarely taken up the question of gender accepting a general interest and incorporation of the different types of participation of different groups within the nationalist movement. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis(1989). In their opinion, women are involved in the national processes in five major ways:

1. As biological reproducers of members of ethnic connectivity.
2. As reproducers of boundaries of ethnic/national groups.
3. As participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectively and transmitters of the culture.
4. As signifiers of ethnic/national differences.
5. As participants in the national struggles.

However, in India there are four issues affecting the women’s nature of participation in politics require careful consideration.

1. The complexities in the nature of political participation.
2. The way these complexities are related to women’s relationship to the nation state.
3. The possibility of managing or transcending differences among women to create a political community to which women will belong by voluntary association rather than by ownership.
4. The significance of women’s agency in gender politics.
5. The complex interplay of women’s position in the social world and the political world.

The issues must be grounded in an understanding of the long term historical processes in which gender relation and gender politics are articulated. Indeed, many of these issues have to be discussed with reference to India’s colonial past because that is when their terms were set. There are several distinct points of view that seek to explain the impact of the growth of nationalism in the later part of the nineteenth century on the situation of women and the debate on women's status. Natarajan, primarily concerned with the fate of 'social reform' as defined by most nineteenth century reformers - argued that reform issues, and particularly the women's issue lost their appeal and favour by being subsumed within nationalism. (Chatterjee, 1989. pp.238-239)

The emergence of social reform movement placed the women in the forefront of all the main items on the agenda. For the reformers, emancipation of women was a prerequisite to national regeneration and an index of national achievement in the connected discourse of civilization, progress, modernity and nationalism. (Sen 1993)

The social reformers though in terms of women’s right created the space for them to participate in socio-political activities of the day outside the family frame work. They prepared a ground for social rejuvenation of Indian women. The social reformers' attempts to alter social values relating to women's status through the
education of women succeeded in creating a dominant social ideology of gender roles which bore no relation to the critically important roles that the mass of women played in the family and the national economy, and ignored many of the effects of subordination that crippled the growth of intellectual and moral freedom and social responsibility of many women in the growing middle class. In the long run, the reform movements strengthened women's 'socialisation for inequality' within the middle class as a whole, and fostered the growth of institutions like dowry and the supremacy of the patriarchal family in women's lives (CSM 1974 pp50-54,69-77). The controls of caste, community and religious norms which already dominated most women's lives, became in fact stronger and more complex with the added dimension of class norms in the case of the educated middle class. Instead of its expected liberating influence, education became a powerful force in strengthening the sanskritisation process, which manifests the integral links and mutually supportive relationship between patriarchy and hierarchy. (CSWI 1974 pp.234-235, 261-263; Mazumdar and Pandey, Chapter II) Participation in the anti-imperialist struggles however encouraged many middle class women to challenge and break out of these controls during the three decades before independence.

Niroj Sinha, (2000) argues that in 1919 Gandhi entered the Indian Politics and he was the first person who visualized mass participation of women in the struggle for freedom. He insisted that women’s true liberation was intimately tied to the liberation of India. Gandhi’s ideas of political participation was as such that, he remarked women as they has been suppressed under custom and law for which man was responsible and in the shaping of which she had no hand. Woman has as much right to shape her own destiny as man has to shape his. It is upto men to see that they enable them to realize their full status and play their part as equal as men. Gandhi also proclaimed that women hood is not restricted to the kitchen and only when the women are restricted from the slavery of kitchen her true spirit may be discovered. He also stated that as long as we don’t consider girls as natural as boys our nation will be dark eclipse. Although the participation of women in the movement led to the bondage of traditions, as some would argue, it nevertheless helped them to develop a perspective on wider socio-political problems. There developed subsequently a tacit acceptance of women occupying various positions both in political and professional spheres. It also brought in changes in the way of the attitude to life of women themselves which subsequently helped in bringing up the next generation of girls.
Partha Chatterjee argues that "the relative unimportance of the women's question in the last decades of the nineteenth century is not to be explained by the fact that it had been censored out of the reform agenda or overtaken by the more pressing and emotive issues of political struggle." In his view, nationalism "resolved the women's question in complete accordance with its preferred goals." (Chatterjee, 1989)

What were these 'preferred goals', and how was the 'resolution' achieved? According to Chatterjee, nationalism was not simply a political struggle for power. On the other hand, it related the issue of independence to every aspect of the material and spiritual life of the people. Nationalist, in fact, had to decide what to select from the West, and what to avoid or reject because they were equally sensitive about their own 'self-identity'. This dilemma was finally resolved by accepting a dichotomous framework between the 'material' and the 'spiritual' world, between the 'outer' and 'inner' life. Applied to day-to-day living, this dichotomy separated social space into the home and the world. The world is the external, the domain of the material the home represents our inner spiritual self, our true identity. The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests where practical considerations reign supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world-and woman is its representations. The material superiority of the West had to be matched by learning modern science and arts to overthrow colonial role. But "the inner core of the national culture, its spiritual essence" had to be preserved, protected and strengthened-allowing no encroachments into this "inner sanctum". Matching this new meaning of the home-world dichotomy with the identification of gender roles, Chatterjee discovers "the ideological framework" within which nationalism resolved the women's question. (Chatterjee 1989)

Kumari Jayawardhane (1986) argues that in the third world nationalist movements there were important feminist components. The nationalist movement created a condition under which feminist demands were possible. There were movements for women’s social emancipation in the early 19th century India that went along side the nationalist struggle. The women rarely organized themselves autonomously, but more as subsidiaries of male dominated nationalist groups. Although it was true that women belonging to the upper class benefitted more from this
emancipation but nevertheless the women’s associations that were subsequently formed made their presence felt, Indian women were granted for Suffrage at the point of national independence itself.

The net gain in the process was a heightened political awareness and much greater social consciousness among women. The prevailing political environment and values seem to have positively encouraged the activities of women to move beyond traditional roles. Thus, there was a shift in the roles of women from supportive auxiliaries to direct participation and there was a conversion of leadership that women were coming as leaders. Hence, the ancient prejudices melted, walls of tradition cracked and the rays of new hope started creeping in. therefore, the independence of women showed an upward trend and women started giving up Purdah more. Regarding such challenges of women towards Patriarchal Structure and Colonial Structure can be seen on the event of women’s freedom fighters such as Puttalimaya Devi Poddar, Sabitri Devi etc. Puttalimaya Devi left her house to join the freedom movement. Inspite of her Father’s protest against joining the movement she continued her work towards the Congress. The British Authority tried to bribe her with a job. She was offered the facility to work as a nurse in Kurseong Hospital but nothing could make her greedy and selfish. Beside this, she chose her life partner and married Saryu Prasad Poddar and for the first time during the period there was an inter-caste marriage which created a furor within a caste ridden Nepali community. Puttalimaya Devi was a women of great courage who not only rejected her father’s authority but challenged both the structure of society i.e. Caste structure and the Patriarchal structure. She was a courageous and emancipated woman. Sabitri Devi Chettri whose original name was Helen Lepcha was also a woman of courage. Being a woman from a Lepcha family she stood up from the tribe community alone and joined the movement despite of traditional and orthodox rules of her caste society. Without any hesitation she joined the movement and her great sacrifice to the nations as being a women was indeed a remarkable one because during the period the society did not considered the women to go out in public and the main task of woman was to look after the household.

Though the nationalist movement reflected the unity of women’ commitment and their involvement but in reality the women did not perceive political participation in the same way. Neither had they organized themselves collectively against the unequal structures either in public or in domestic sphere. The women expressed
different motivation and reason for participating in the freedom movement. But their role was enough to be the model for the coming of next generation of girls. It is also true that those women who supported the women from the domain of public sphere later discontinued their activities and concentrated on their domestic responsibilities there was also many women who never left the domestic sphere and had instead negotiated political activities by shouldering family responsibilities in the absent of their men. Women used the discourse of the ‘familial’ to carve out the political niche inside the domestic domain. Is not the manner in which women perceived the contradictions and limitations of their participation itself indicative of their growing political consciousness?

At the same time Kumari Jayawardhane (1986) also points out in India women were heroic no doubt but they neither rebelled against the traditional roles nor protested the authority of men leaders. She echoed Maria Mies who depicted Indian women as willingly accepting their subordinate roles in the struggle for independence. This is echoed in the voice of a new generation leader of the hills, Renu Leena Subba who was an MLA from Kalimpong Sub-division, whom we interviewed on 1st December 2014. To her, the women themselves are responsible for the situation of dominance and voicelessness. Narrating her own experiences when she had to fight against odds to secure benefits for the people of the region, she pointed out that women should use the opportunities and should be confident. See for Photo-29.

5.2. Inheritors of the legacy

The participation of women in the nationalist movement particularly from the Darjeeling region was perhaps defined as a repository of enlightenment whose utmost aim was to defend and save society from the unjust rule of the colonial administration. It reveals a new development of the movement of women as an integral part of the nationalist movement in India along with Darjeeling. It analyzed the historic juncture (of Darjeeling) and the causes for the evolution and the various changes in the women participation in society. It represent the present state or attempt to illustrate the present women in politics of Darjeeling and suggest that it has to be understood and analyzed as a lineage of continuity, that evolved from their predecessors who sacrificed their life for liberating the country. The women involved in politics today in Darjeeling region is a continuity of legacy of their mothers, sisters and has been a continuous process from generations. There is also an attempt to revive the fading legacy of great women
historic facts. It is helpful in establishing the primordial tie between the land and the people by arousing sentiments and emotions on the basis of what people observe. The history is interpreted in such a way as to praise their achievement.

Maya Devi Chettri who continued to be an active political member as well a member of many other associations even after independence. In the post independence period Maya Devi held several high positions in politics. She did not resign from Politics but became the first women leader from the region to be elected in the Sate and National level. There are several or uncountable portfolios she held during her entire life. We would begin with her post in 1948 as she was elected a Municipal Commissioner of Kurseong. She was also elected as a member of Education department. She was an accountant of T.B sanatorium of Kurseong and the President of the Azad Pathsala for Muslim students who contributed more than 20 years of her service in the development of this school. She also became a member of the Standing Committee for Defense, Health and Education. In 1953 a Bengali medium school named Parmatharai Urban Junior School was started in Kurseong. She was the member of this school committee for life and made great contribution towards its development. There was also a committee named Sandhani Mahila Samiti which was opened with the sole purpose of making women financially independent by learning sewing. This committee was a self help group for the women. Maya Devi was the President of this committee for 25 years.

In 1976, the chairperson of “Bengal Women Audnation” requested her to organize such association at the Zilla level in Kurseong. The main aim of this organization was over all upliftment of women of rural areas regarding health, nutrition, infectious diseases, family planning, and woman right and to protect themselves and others in case of emergency.

In 1951 Maya Devi Chettry was elected as the Secretary of District Congress Committee. She also became the Chairman of District Congress Committee for twice. In 1952, the first general election took place in democratic India. Maya Devi along with other members made a huge contribution in the election procedure. During this period the Congress President and Secretary i.e. Atulya Ghosh and Vijay Singh Nahar requested Maya Devi Chettry to contest for the Bidhan Sabha election in Kolkata. Thus, both Maya Devi and her husband went to Kolkata. She won the election with huge majority of votes in Kolkata and became the first Gorkha woman not only Gorkha
but the first woman to be elected from Bengal to the Rajya Sabha. She became the first woman to be elected as the Member of Parliament. This was a historic day not only for her family but for the whole Gorkha Community. It was for the first time that a representative was sent to fight for the rights of her own people in the prestigious hall of Parliament sitting with legendary figures like Pandit Nehru, Jagjivan Ram and the top leaders who fought for this glorious day. Thus, she continued to be the M.P from 1952 till 1964. The tenure of the Member of Parliament is of six years and she continued her tenure for two times (12 years). During this period she gave birth to her youngest daughter Ranjana. See for Photo-22 & 23.

After being elected as a M.P she had to leave for Delhi. Though Maya Devi had visited Delhi only for once, she had no other idea about the region. Somehow she managed the courage to go by plane from Bagdogra Airport to Delhi. She reached Palan Airport in Delhi. There was an arrangement for lodging in Delhi Western Court. She was nervous and apprehensive about this huge responsibility that she had to carry. But the question was would she be able to fulfill the demands and expectations that her people had put on her? She was so nervous at the moment when she went down for breakfast that her mouth became dry and her stomach in knots. But she managed herself and went for breakfast where she came across the M.Ps of different states who were also newly elected. She felt that this was a new experience for all because this was the first time that the people were going to the Parliament to form a new government for free India. Meeting and interacting with each other boosted their confidence and thus they proceeded towards the formation of the new Parliament of Independent India. See for Photo-24.

On 13th May 1952 the Rajya Sabha sat for the first time. It was Tuesday. Maya Devi could hardly sleep the previous night for the excitement and anticipation of the next day. In the morning she did puja and thanked God as she always did for everything. She went in a taxi with her new found friends and entered the imposing circular building built by the British. She had never dreamt that she would be entering the building in such a capacity as she did now. It was just like the first day of school that the people were huddled in groups in the corridors, not knowing where they should be going. The people were confused and were asking questions about the direction. They were rushing here and there. The building was very huge and after a few enquiries they found out where the Council of States Chamber was located.
A large impressive room with benches in a semi circle at the top of a Dias with the Chairman’s chair was located. Some of them were already in their seats and chatting with each other.

There were fourteen members from West Bengal out of whom Maya Devi was the only woman. When her name was called, she got up and walked to the Secretary’s table and took the form from him and faced the Chairman. She took the oath while trying to look and feel confident, but with emotion welling inside her, “I Maya Devi Chetry, having been elected a member of Council of States (Rajya Sabha) do swear in the name of God that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India as by law established, that I will uphold the sovereignty and integrity of India and that I will faithfully discharge the duty upon which I am about to enter”. She shook hands with the very tall Dr. Radhakrishnan, who had a kindly smile for her and walked to the other side of the table where she signed the form. She felt as though she was walking on a cloud as she walked back to her seat and didn’t see or hear the next person going up to take oath (Giri 2010: 68). See for Photo- 27 & 28.

After her retirement from Parliament she worked tirelessly for her community and people. She became the Vice Chairman of Darjeeling District Zilla Parishad and a member of the District School Board besides being involved in various other social organizations. Thus, she breathed her last on 23rd December 1993. People came out in droves, filled the roads and showered her with petals and say their final goodbye.

The contribution of the past women leaders in Politics and Society are outstanding and are truly something to treasure. Such devotions and sincerity of woman are examples set during the period when the society was backward and education was absent, although women being mostly uneducated had the abilities to form leadership and bring dynamic changes in the society at large. They lack access to education and their lack of literacy, vocational skills and exposure did constrains the ability of many women but there were still few extraordinary women who exceeded all the possibilities to create a new world view of women’s power and excellence in both Politics and Society. Thus, in such society the challenges faced by the women were too difficult and it was not an easy task as they had to listen to people's taunts and allegations. Yet the women showed great courage and tolerated it by continuing their political role.

Therefore the participation of women in the nationalist movement has explicitly facilitated the women in hill politics at present. Thus, the pattern of political
participation was set by these nationalist women freedom fighters of the region for the future generations. The women active participation in the post independent period following the ethnic movement is not a sudden act but perhaps these women had an inherent link to, and therefore their activities should be counted as a lineage of their predecessors. Not surprisingly there is a history behind and some argue that this was inevitable in integrating women in the mainstream politics. This should be considered a hard-won achievement on the part of women in recent hill politics as women started poring in great majority as compared to the past political history of the region.

The freedom and agency can best be understood as actions in which we believe that our choices matter to us, we have reasons for them and that they make sense to us. This could be called personal “autonomy”. The expansion in possibility for choice brings with it an expansion in the responsibilities for choosing well. In this dynamic process of the movement for political determination, what we have observed that there has been a development in the field of competencies, (one needs to have competence to choose better) to navigate through the new complex social world. The social transformations that took place in the region was ably supported by the women of the next generations who not only inherited the new found competence but carried it further and participated in the dialogic space created by the new democracy.

One of the dynamic women leaders of today, Ms. Shanta Chettri, points out that, women are by nature sincere and devoted. They are non aggressive, peaceful and having the power of understanding. Women had played a very crucial role in the past history of freedom Movement and are playing the same till date. Without them nothing can be made possible either at home or in the movement. Recounting her own experience when she decided to join politics, she observes that she met with many challenges on the home front as she was a mother of two kids. She had to maintain her life equally balanced outside and inside. She was a working lady and was also involved in social work too. But her husband never complained her for any negligence of family and supported her in all walks of life. She was never blamed for being an irresponsible mother or wife. She asserts that the thing which seems minor in the home front is really a great challenge for a woman. Normally it is taken for granted for a woman to easily manage both private and public life (Chhetri, 3rd December, 2014).

Nevertheless, to her, a large number of women have joined politics today in the hills. In Panchayat level, the reservation of seat for women has helped them to actively
come forward through government procedure. The women are showing interest in solving the grass root problems as they are more attached to it (Chhetri, 3rd December, 2014).

Arguing further, interestingly she too, similar to the social reformers of the 18th and 19th century vouched for education as the way out for women to have a voice. Thus, she emphasized on women’s education and qualifications. She asserts until the women don’t understand the value of education their conditions in society cannot be changed and developed. The improvement in life needed a proper education leading to rationing power and making a right decision. An educated mother makes an educated family and ultimately providing a responsible citizen to the society too. The women also have the power of understanding the grassroots problems of society as they themselves are associated with it.

With the passage of time the hill people are becoming more conscious and educated. The society is leading towards the path of modernity and technological development. This is in turn helping the people to communicate more easily than the earlier days. The communication facilities have become very flexible providing the work to be done more speedily and effectively (Chhetri, 3rd December, 2014,) See for Photo-30.

A similar argument was made by another firebrand new age woman leader of the region, Nanita Gautam. She emphasizes on education and the development of the community rather than the demand of a separate state. She asserts as being a teacher of a primary school and a social worker she would rather emphasize on education which would enlighten the children. Once the education reaches each and every house there is no place for making wrong choices. People would themselves know their rights, the unemployment problems which is eating our society for so long like a disease would also come to an end if the state government would establish some more schools and colleges in our region. She also stated there is a need for awakening programmes for girls. Human trafficking had made the society worse. Alertness among the girls and women should be provided to keep them safe”. Each woman should be educated as the family is run by them which indirectly lead to making a civilized society. Life is not a straight line there are lots of curves and circles. Each and every experience will give you something valuable. (Gautam, 8th February, 2014). See for Photo-31.
Arguably true, our journey through the annals of the past pointed to one of the major reasons behind the marginalization of the voices --- the lack of communication between the region and the rest of India.

The feminist scholarship has been critical of the exclusion of gender perspective leading to limits on political and civic equality. Our intention here is to reorient this gender perspective to the study of the Indian national movement. In fact, such intention is largely shaped by the ‘third wave’ (Mack-Conty, 2004) of feminism that has brought a number of regional or plural perspectives, such as ‘black feminism’ ‘youth feminism’ or ‘postcolonial feminism’ on to the ‘first wave’ feminism’s search for gender equality and ‘second wave’ feminism’s radical critique of ‘patriarchy’. While the general feminist direction to equality remains unchanged situational variations in women’s experience are now considered and brought to bear on current political issues and movements. We are also interested in the possible link between women’s quite visible frontal, numerous, and energetic political participation in Darjeeling hills in recent years and their connections with Indian national movement, if any.

One of our hypotheses, that the participation of women of the Darjeeling subdivision of India in the nationalist movement was conditioned by the existing patriarchal structure and the participating women failed to make any major change in the status of women of their region, has been proved to a great extent, as the cases unearthed by us hinted at the existence of an enabling support structure either in the form of a family or the political party of which the woman leader was a member. However, the participating women leaders, to name a few did initiate some moves but they were more in terms of addressing the general needs rather than specific needs of women or moves for gender equality and justice.

The second hypothesis has also been proved through our study. Our research found out that the majority of women freedom fighters of the Darjeeling subdivision of India worked in the domestic sphere, in the form of silent supporters to their husbands or other male members of their families who had joined the freedom movement, which also raised their level of political consciousness that brought about slow changes in the gender balance within the family and paved the role for greater participatory role of women of the next generation.

As we revisited the past and tried to look at the present involvement of the women of the Darjeeling subdivision in politics, we could unearth the legacy of
continuity. The heightened political awareness among the women of the region, who are not just members of the mainstream political parties, but are the proud members of Gurkha Jan Nari Mukti Morcha (GJNMM) a women’s wing of the Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha (GJMM), that is presently leading the movement for a separate state of Gorkhaland within the territory of India. Women’s involvement in the national movement contributed significantly to the movement in the subdivision and in the process developed the potential to challenge the existing power structure.

The women active participation in the post independent period following the ethnic movement is not a sudden act but perhaps these women had an inherent link to, and therefore their activities should be counted as a lineage of their predecessors. Not surprisingly there is a history behind and some argue that this was inevitable in integrating women in the mainstream politics. This should be considered a hard-won achievement on the part of women in recent hill politics as women started pouring in great majority as compared to the past political history.

Women still have not been seen in the position of leadership and decision making. Within an organization the women turn out to be ‘head nodders’ who are manipulated by dominant male leadership. They have not been able to accomplish the position from where they can direct the movement and make radical decisions. Infact, it has been pointed out by one of the disgruntled members of the GJNMM, who did not want to be named that, although the name suggests that it is a women’s wing, but the decisions are taken by male leaders, which did not go down well with her and she decided to quit the party.

She argued that it is due to the lack of intelligence and incapable women who were submissive but elevated to high ranks within the party, so that the dominant patriarchal that are quite benevolent towards women does not have a problem in fulfilling their agenda. Though the women leaders are invited to attain the meetings and give advices and suggestion yet their advices are not obligatory to accept. In case of attending high level meetings at Kolkata and Delhi, the arguments behind not including women leaders seems to be the difficulties that the benevolent patriarchal leaders consider to be overpowering. However, at the end of the journey of our research which we consider still unfinished, as many heroines can never possibly be given their due respect as many are no longer alive to tell their tales, the present generation of Nepali women like us, when celebrating our freedom and voices, would bow in gratitude to
these heroines whose legacy we are carrying. The demand for more equality and space although came out in the form of murmurings of the modern women leaders, but we believe that these would soon transform into loud voices of protest and claims.

Nevertheless, the women in Gorkhaland Movement seem to be demanding re-evaluation of their existence and value by new conscience discarding age old traditions. They wanted to assume the feelings of liberty and wanted to prove themselves as a competent to contribute to any social or political movement creating a new history.

However, women still have not been seen in the position of headship and decision making. Within an organization the women turn out to be head nodders which are manipulated by dominant males. They have not been able to accomplish the position from where they can direct the movement and make radical decisions.

5.3. Conclusion

Since, the women are aware of this fact but there is no objection to such trend. The women appeared in great number exceeding men in the movement. They successfully initiated the programmes of the party. But equally it is true that they have no role in decision making of all these programmes. The male leaders are the one to decide the future strategy of the party. They argue that it is due to lack of intelligence and incapable women to direct the movement, who can attend the higher level meetings at Kolkata and Delhi. Though the women leaders are invited to attend the meetings and give advices and suggestion yet their advices are not obligatory to accept. On the other hand the fact that revealed from the study is the women themselves are wholly dependent on male leadership. One of the prominent GJNMM members in one of the meeting exhorted the present women folks that we should blindly support the decision taken by our leader.

The present study has charted out the journey of the hill women of Darjeeling in the path of political emancipation and has come to conclude that the lineage of political awareness and consciousness has come down to the modern women of Darjeeling from the women of the era, when India was under the colonial rule. The passionate demand for freedom and liberty could be traced to the history of the women of the yore. From the narratives, one gathers that these women had laid down the road for the future women of the region inspiring them and setting examples, which unfortunately due to neglect and non-recognition both by the national and local leaders seem to have been
buried. The present study, although limited, as most of the narratives are lost in the throes of history, some didn’t want to share, some dead with none to be their voice whereas in some other cases, the relatives had migrated which finally restricted our spectrum. However, despite these limitations we hope that the present research would inspire researchers to probe and take up other issues and record the contributions of the people of this region in the nation building process of India.
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All interviews were conducted between January 2011 and February 2014. All the respondents were middle class Hindu, Buddhist men and women.

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