

Women in Malaysian Society: The Continuing Struggle for Equality

Dr. Sanghamitra Buddhapriya

Professor

FORE School of Management

New Delhi

e-mail: sanghamitra@fsm.ac.in

Abstract

The status of women has declined over the years in Malaysian society, even as its economy has registered remarkable economic growth, and it has stuck to democracy. This is primarily because of increasing emphasis on a conservative form of Islam which undermines women's rights and their status vis-à-vis their men counterparts in the society. There is a clear lack of political will to bring about reforms in law to enable women to seek legal recourse against violation of their rights. Women's groups and civil society organisations have been trying their best to redress the balance in favour of women without much success. However, under pressure from both domestic and external forces, the Malaysian government may feel compelled to bring in laws loosening the shackles around women in an incremental manner. The real challenge for the Malaysian women would be to ensure that these laws are upheld in practice rather than allow regressive forces to turn them into dead letters. It is hoped that the continued vigilance shown by women movements will ensure them a better future in the days to come.

Key Words: Malaysian Women, Women's rights, conservative Islam, Islamic family laws, Syariah