

The Middle Class Women and Developmentalism

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Abstract—The understanding of the political issues of Malaysia is interesting. The accenting of any right, regardless the ethnic, class or religion frequently attained to political bargaining and exchange. However, gender rights especially women's issue in Malaysia been superseded by the ethnic rights. Thus, in this paper, the implications of the emergence of middle class women and its movement in the *developmentalism* will be analyses using secondary data and references that related to the subject reveals. As a conclusion, this paper will provides an insight of the contribution of women in term of: (1) emergence of women representative in political arena, (2) women contribution to democratization, and (3) the emergence of activist organizations role to protect women rights in Malaysia.

Index Terms—Developmentalism, women middle class, economic and political.

I. INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia politics fell into two categories which first; depending on the genealogy in “*communalism*” and the central notion of the ethnically “*plural society*”; secondly were the “*class*” which is independent regardless of ethnicity [1]. The middle class include the multi ethnic group to cope with the increasing surveillance and domination of the state in relation to the civil society. He also argues the part of a growing interest in the middle classes in Southeast Asia and its impact on political processes. It is understood against the backgrounds of two developments. First, the more or less economic growth in and industrialization of Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia; second is the persistence or even increase in level of state authoritarianism.

These two poses problems for traditional theories of modernization that assume a causal link between development and the emergence of democratic institutions. Saravanamuttu's arguments further say that the emerging Malaysian middle class shows a strong “affective orientation toward democracy.”

II. THE RISE OF MIDDLE CLASS

In 1957, when Malaysia took over the power from the British, the political dominant group was economically

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weak. As such, the introduction of New Economy Policy in 1970 and its implementation in year 1971-1990 when Tun Razak became the second Prime Minister successfully eradicate the poverty among ethnic as well as restructure ethnic balance in education. Thus, emergences of the middle class as result of economic development since independence [2], [3]. The middle class had grown quite rapidly in the last 15 to 20 years. During the New Economy Policy period, the middle class occupations significantly growth from 4.0% in 1957 to 5.9% in 1970 and in 1990 the percentage increased to 15.3% [4]. The middleclass occupational are categories by the “professional and technical” as well as “administrative and managerial” [5]. Due to this rise of new middle class, a significant impact has been seen on the market for consumer goods. The middle class population can further divided according to the different consumer cultures or subcultures. This can be related as psychographic segmentation in the consumer market.

Reference [6] study found that there are two things inseparable, which are the developing urban lifestyle and the consumer preference and aspirations of the new middleclass. In Kahn's study, there are four important things stated for assessing the impact of the New Economic Policy and its success in promoting changes in the ethnic division of labour. These include the changing consumer demands, creation of urban cultural forms, religious revival, and fertility and rates of population growth. In his study, he asked few questions about the nature of the middle class in Malaysia leadership ask in review of policy. Does it testify to the emergence of a true class of Malay entrepreneurs who will contribute to the commercial development of the Malay community, or has the NEP created a group dependent on the state for its continued survival?

Fertility and the growth rate of population was an issue raised which emergence of the middle class. Like in Singapore, in Malaysia also it may happen to affect the growth rate of population. The growth of middle class has significant implications for women's position and gender relations in contemporary Malaysia. In such, the changes in women's employment patterns associated with the growth of this class significantly impact on gender relations, domestic structures and fertility patterns, women's political participation and the discourse on gender in Malaysia[7]. The prominent role played by middle class women in non-governmental organizations, women's groups and Malaysia's feminist movement in particular[8], are issues that related to middle class women and *developmentalism*.

The social scientists having an interest in social, economic, political and cultural development in contemporary Malaysia had considered the development of a growing and increasingly influential middle class. The middle class can be defined in singular by means of production [9]-[11].

III. THE POLITICAL APPROACH OF THE MIDDLECLASS

Reference [12], explored the political behaviour of the middle class, firstly with the issue of the embourgeoisement of the Malaysia middle class by Crouch (1996). This means the middle class was formed and they are interested in home ownership and ownership of consumer durables, which makes this class a stabilizing influence on the other hand it will be unlikely to resist authoritarian trends in the Malaysian State. Middle class organizations played a vital role in supporting for opposition parties in the 1986 election; the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), in advocating a politics of democracy in opposition to authoritarian moves by the state. These organizations were behind opposition to the amendments to the Societies Act (1981), the Official Secrets Act (1986) and the Operation Lalang detentions of October 1987, as well as the protests against the dismissal of the Chief Justice Tun Salleh Abas. This middle classes are not ethnically minded, but are more concerned with the issue of democracy.

IV. THE IMPLICATION FOR EMERGENCE OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Rights such as, ethnic, class or religious in attained through political bargaining, but for the gender rights the politics is not much taking into consideration until women's movements started to democratize. In Malaysia, there is a dualistic side to the women's movement, due to their limited role in electoral politics [13]. Reference [13] stated that the most significant contribution of gender politics towards democratization in this country has been achieved through the presence and prodding of marginal women's voices. There are two groups of women, Mainstream women's group and Radical or Left-centre organizations. The Mainstream group consist women informal politics and organizations that are closely connected to the ruling elite therefore, they complement ruling structures, whereas the Left-of-centre organizations are more feminist-oriented. The mainstream known as women's movement at the centre while the other one is known as the women's movement at the periphery.

Under the colonial rule, among the important reforms is that women was access to formal schooling, also the bureaucratic sector needs a trained and Westernized local ruling elite as well as native labour to fill the administrative positions. Schooling for the middle class was encouraged by both colonial authorities and the local intelligentsia [2], [14], [15], especially for women presence in the nascent civil society [16]. Early initiators of the women's movement among Malays were teachers, among Chinese and Indians were those who had educated in the English schools. The first Malay women's organization formed was the Malay Women Teachers Union in 1929, with the aim of improving the knowledge of its members [17]. Malay women's first involvement in a political cause was in anti-Malayan Union struggle. The Persatuan Kaum Ibu Selangor or Kaum Ibu (The Mothers' Association of Selangor), originally a welfare-oriented women's group, but took on a political character becoming the women's wing of the largest dominant political party United Malays National

Organisation (UMNO) and renamed as Wanita UMNO in 1971 [18]. It has become the largest women's party auxiliary in the country and played the role of the chief gatherers of votes during elections.

When these women's movements when raise issues of greater representation in society, later had experience dismal failures when it came to negotiating for more rights within Islam. The left-wing nationalists recognize women's rights where PUTERA was a parallel coalition of Malay left-wing groups and AMCJA the non-Malay counterpart formed PUTERA-AMCJA coalition [19]. The women's component of PUTERA was Angkatan Wanita Serdar (AWAS) formed in 1945, and that of AMCJA was the Women's Federation, but both had ceased to exist in 1948 when government banned all left-wing movements. With this, three of its most prominent women leaders separated to follow different paths in politics [13].

During 1950s, the multi ethnic party politics that emphasized social issues were unsuccessful. Among them were the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP) emerged in 1951, the Parti Negara was launched in 1954, the Pan-Malayan Labour Party, promised equal opportunities, like equal pay for equal work, regardless of the sex, also failed to make much impact.

The women's participation in labour struggles prior to independence was not documented, however, few of the more stated, the labour protests in Ulu Langat, Negara Sembilan and in Kuala Lumpur, workers strike in Klang Estate in 1939 was an end to sexual harassment of women. Even in The post-independence period, working class women participated in struggles for women's right. In 1960s, women in the Labour Party were primarily Chinese industrial women workers. In mid-1970s and 1980s, the ethnic composition of the labour force had a dramatic turn by mass recruitment of rural Malay female labour. In 1985, several hundred women workers strike in Penang, due to dismissing of workers in the multinational companies, which went through one of the worst recession faced by the country. The early anti-colonial and nationalist struggles were all participatory democracies. The women's movement is divided into a movement at the centre, which is the ruling political parties, and a movement at the periphery that include the left wing, labour and feminist groups. The central leadership also closely guided women's groups at the periphery, although indicating more autonomy than the mainstream groups. In the past, women workers fighting for labour rights had met with violent resistance from the patriarchal and authoritarian state.

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENTALISM

The first women who benefited from formal schooling were the first to enter to the formal job market, they are the ones who attempted to protect and enhance their newfound status [13]. They had no political aims instead; their objectives were simply to upgrade the lives of women. [20]. However, during post independent period, entry of women in to labour force were encouraged, their rights were not automatically granted. The National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO) formed in 1963 in order to gain

recognition for the rights of working women. One of the first issues is which displeased middle class working people into an open demonstration of their frustration was the issue of unequal pay. It is noted that the orientation of women's organization in Malaysia has exhibited progressive developments. For instance, since 1970, NCWO has to incorporate "Women in Development" issues through organizing specific committees and several conferences on the topic. Even NAWI and YWCA facilitate activities associated with Women's Decade. As well as NACIWID and the Women Affairs Secretariat, PUSPANITA, women's section of the Malaysia Trade Union Congress (MUTC) and Women's Aid Organization (WAO), all of these groups work towards one aim that is the issues of women in development. Among these, NCWO kept the leadership as multiracial and most of the women initiators were urban-based professionals. NCWO fought to get better maintenance allowance for divorced women and children, equal pay for equal work in the public sector, entry of women into civil, diplomatic and legal services, as well as pension rights for women. Later in 1970s, as the number of women in the manufacturing sector increased rapidly, negotiations involving wage and working conditions were considered to be politically sensitive and outside the purview of the NCWO. The NCWO leadership preferred to be "non-confrontational" approaches to further its struggles on behalf of women. They also got support from high-level government representatives and cabinet ministers towards its cause. The NCWO was an important player in the history of women's struggle, as well as it was standing in the centre by sponsoring issues arising from the periphery.

After independence, more women became politically motivated, due to their educational achievements. The interest and participation in politics arise among the women of the different ethnic groups between the years 1957 to 1969. Only the Malay women were involving in political arena at the beginning. During that time, Chinese and Indian women attempted to start a women's section by MCA or MIC respectively. Because of New Economic policy, Malay women provided with greater opportunity to get tertiary education. Evidence of this as seen in the young highly educated women were encouraged to take over the leadership of the Kaum Ibu by the male leaders who realized the need for women to be more actively involved in the politics and progress of the Malay people. As a result the name of the Kaum Ibu was changed to Wanita UMNO. Likewise, other ethnic groups also formed women's section in order to protect the rights of the women in their ethnic groups and to support their male leaders, in 1972 the Wanita MCA and in 1975, Wanita MIC was established. Maznah also states that though few women were participated and elected for the parliamentary seats compared to men, women's rate of success in getting elected has actually been much better than that of men. Thus, the strength of women voters and votes allied to gender reforms must ultimately become the critical element that pushes for women's more meaningful representation in parliamentary democracies.

In 1980s, turning point in the women's movements occurred emphasizing about feminism, sexual oppression and violence against women. Among these the issue of violence against women had become a major concern, and

the first women's organization to deal with this issue was the WAO established in 1985, named JAG or Joint- Action-Group Against Violence-Against Women to publicize the VAW (Violence Against Women) issue in a broader way. They organize several events under the theme, like workshops, exhibitions, rallies, and media programmes in order to publicize. During that time, Women's Crisis Centre was set up in Penang; Sarawak Women for Women Society (SWWS) and Sabah All-Women's Organization (SAWO) and All-Women Action Society Malaysia (AWAM) was founded in 1988. In 1991, Sisters in Islam was formed, which straddled both the centre and the periphery, with the issues related to women. Overall, in 1990s more Malay based NGOs were set up to deal with the grievances and problems women faced with regard to marital and family problems. Groups like the Persatuan Ibu Tunggal in Kuala Lumpur, Women's wings of Islamic NGOs such as the Jemaah Islah Malaysia and Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia also began to take up positions on women within Islamic framework.

Reference [13] study stated that the women at the centre and women in the periphery worked together to further the cause of women's rights. For instance, when an issue accepted as a common social concern of all women, all the women's groups together provide strong rationales and empirical evidence on the need for such legislation. Eventually bills have been worked out with Official representative from the government's Women's Affairs Department (HAWA) as well as police towards drafting the bill; Domestic Violence Act in 1985 was approved as a law in 1994.

With the success of the VAW campaign, these organizations attempt to widen the context of women's issues, linked the status of women to housing, land, environmental and health issues were indistinct. These activists felt that the only option left for social and political reform was through their participation in electoral processes. Several women's groups worked on a Women's Agenda for Change (WAC) officially launched on 23 May 1999. Another strategy was push for a women candidate to contest the election on a gender-issues ticket. More attention focused on women's issues and women's votes in the country's tenth general election. It is known that Barisan Nasional was a better party since it paid more attention to women's rights.

VI. CONCLUSION

The middle class include the multi-ethnic group to cope with the increasing surveillance and domination of the state in relation to the civil society. Reference [12] argument further says that the emerging Malaysian middleclass shows a strong "affective orientation toward democracy". The middle class defined as possessors of educational qualifications and technical skills. Since independence of Malaysia, the middle class had been growing because of economic development and more significantly, during 1980s, those in the middle class occupations had grown quite rapidly. Due to this rise of new middle class, a significant impact has been seen on the market for consumer goods. This middle class population can further divided

according to the different consumer cultures or subcultures, this can be related as psychographic segmentation in the consumer market. This middle classes are not ethnically minded, but are more concerned with the issue of democracy.

Until the women's movement emerged, the rights of women were not an issue in the political arena. The mainstream women's group and Radical or Left- of- centre organizations worked together in order to approve the laws of the legislation regarding women's rights. The first women who attempted to protect and enhance their newfound status were those who were first benefited by education of formal schooling and to enter the formal job market. They had no political aims instead their objectives were simply to upgrade the lives of women. During that time several women's movement organizations were formed and worked for the same aim of women and development.

Since 1957, the percentage of women involved in the labour force of the country has increased. This is due to the effect of growing educational opportunities for women and the subsequent "revolution of rising expectations" among educated women. All three sectors namely the agricultural, the expanding industrial and service sectors, women are involved. Eventually women became politically motivated, and participation in politics arises among the women of the different ethnic groups between the years 1957 to 1969.

In general, if women in pre-colonial and women at present compared, the women today can be considered as more actively participate in political arena in terms of direct participation. In addition, they are now more organized in their demands for political rights. Even the number of women ministers in the cabinet is increasing. However, their role in politics defined within the boundaries of the traditional role of women as supporters in a male-dominated leadership.

In 1980s, among the issues raised by the women's movements, the issue of violence against women had become a major concern. Women in the centre, who has the power of the state, have actually been less successful at promoting gender democracy. The challenges provided by the movement at the periphery have been more notable and successful in promoting the democratization of Malaysian society. At that point, in time, agenda like VAW/DVA campaign initially proposed from periphery but finally embraced by the institutions in the centre. Later on women at the periphery attempted to enter mainstream politics through direct electoral participation, with the hope that the democratization of politics will be the ultimate gains.

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