



**WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN MALAYSIA:  
A STUDY OF THE SISTERS IN ISLAM**

**BY**

**ISHAQ HANIS BIN ASMAIL @ ISMAIL**

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International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization  
International Islamic University Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines reform approaches adopted by Sisters In Islam in Malaysia. It analyzes the methods they used and the strategies they deployed over the year of its establishment. This study is generally divided into two major approaches: practical (external) and theoretical (internal) approach. The data collected from this study suggest that the group has not only restricted itself to the appeal of rights of Muslim women, but has extended beyond the women issues. This study finds that the Sisters In Islam (SIS) possesses Western feminism's cell which is not totally compatible with the mainstream teachings of Islam (*ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamā'ah*). Liberalism in thought and practice has consequently made their action irresponsible to the system and religious practices in Malaysia. The contents of the thesis are divided into four main chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the whole framework and idea of this study. The second introduces a brief background to the Sisters In Islam. The third chapter discusses the first layer of the approaches while the fourth elaborates the second layer or the internal foundation of the approach. Taken together these chapters exhibit the mode as well as the trend used by the group to realize its interest. The study provides exceptional information on SIS' reform plans that have led to few public concerns which have been discussed in this study.

## ملخص البحث

تبحث هذه الدراسة في طرق الإصلاح التي تتبناها جماعة " سيسترز إن اسلام " (أخوات في الإسلام) في ماليزيا. حيث تحلل الطرق التي تستخدمها والاستراتيجيات التي نشرتها خلال سنة من تأسيسها. عموما هذه الدراسة مقسمة إلى طريقتين رئيسيتين: طريقة عملية (خارجية) ونظرية (داخلية). المعطيات التي جُمعت من الدراسة تقترح أن الجماعة لم تقيد نفسها بجاذبية حقوق المرأة المسلمة فحسب، بل قد تجاوزت قضايا المرأة. وجدت هذه الدراسة أن لدى جماعة سيسترز إن اسلام خلية حركة نسائية غربية وهي ليست متوافقة تماما مع تعاليم الإسلام المتعارف عليها. الليبرالية في التفكير والممارسة قد جعلت أعمالها مستهترة بالنظام والممارسات الإسلامية في ماليزيا. محتويات هذه الأطروحة مقسمة إلى أربعة فصول رئيسة. الفصل الأول عبارة عن مقدمة للفكرة والإطار لهذه الدراسة. يقدم الفصل الثاني خلفية مختصرة عن جماعة سيسترز إن اسلام. يناقش الفصل الثالث الطبقة الأولى من الطرق بينما الرابع يفصل الطبقة الثانية أو الأساس الداخلي للطريقة. عند أخذ الفصول جميعا فإنها تظهر الأسلوب وكذلك الاتجاه المستخدم من قبل الجماعة لتحقيق مصالحها. والنتيجة بالتالي توفر معلومات مهمة عن طرق الإصلاح عند هذه الفرقة التي قد تؤدي إلى بعض المخاوف العامة التي تمت مناقشتها في بعض أجزاء هذه الدراسة.

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Art (Philosophy, Ethics and Contemporary Issues).

.....  
Abdullah Al-Ahsan  
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Art (Philosophy, Ethics and Contemporary Issues).

.....  
Che Amnah Bahari  
Examiner

This dissertation was submitted to the Kuliyyah of International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization and is accepted as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art (Philosophy, Ethics and Contemporary Issues).

.....  
Sayyid Mohamed Ajmal  
Al-Aidruss  
Dean,  
Kuliyyah of International  
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Civilization.

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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A STUDY OF THE SISTERS IN ISLAM**

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*I dedicate this effort to my loving parents, my dear wife, and son.*

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## TABLE OF TRANSLITERATION

### System of Transliteration of Arabic Characters

#### Consonants

ء	’	خ	kh	ش	Sh	غ	Gh	ن	N
ب	B	د	D	ص	ṣ	ف	F	هـ	H
ت	T	ذ	dh	ض	ḍ	ق	Q	و	W
ث	Th	ر	r	ط	ṭ	ك	K	ي	Y
ج	J	ز	z	ظ	ẓ	ل	L		
ح	ḥ	س	s	ع	‘	م	M		

Short Vowels	
َ	a
ِ	i
ُ	u

Long Vowels	
َ + َ	ā
ِ + ِ	ī
ُ + ُ	ū

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The emergence of gender debates within the perspective of religion causes a growing interest in the academia as well as in the life of modern Muslim society. In Islam, divine guidance is sent down in order to direct human beings to the right path so that they can reach to the right destination. Not only the Qur'ān, Prophetic teachings and the later scholars' consensus are also considered as divine guidance.

In the history of the Arabs, patriarchy was common and widely practiced.<sup>1</sup> It was simply known as a male-dominated system that were predominantly inherited from the regional custom. In many cases, the system had subordinated the position of women while at its worst it brought up the image of women as property possessed by men. Thus, the advent of Islam has given a certain direction to the concept of gender especially in placing the actual position of women in the society. This inherited system seems to exist in various parts in Southeast Asia and the scenario has become tangible in such country like Malaysia. The main factor in this prevailing scenario is perhaps due to the existence of the local custom – known as *adat* in Malay – that becomes central in the life of certain groups of people. That is what Wazir has suggested in his book *Women And Culture*, in which the historical development of people in Southeast Asia was derived from two basic articulation of power, known as *adat* and *Islam*.<sup>2</sup> It is most likely shaped by the prevailing patrilineal-sexual segregation, marriage alliance, male

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<sup>1</sup> Suad Joseph, "Patriarchy and Development in the Arab World", in *Gender and Development*, (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. 1996), 14-19.

<sup>2</sup> Wazir Jahan Karim, *Women & Culture, Between Malay Adat and Islam*, (Colorado: Westview Press, Inc., 1992), 5.

authority and leadership, female domesticity, as well as male-initiated divorce, which are rooted from religious practice. Strong adherence to the religious teachings, customs and religious law is seen as the subjects that often shape the image of gender relation.<sup>3</sup> This cultural norms prevailing in South-East Asia have led women to suffer psychological and physical violence including wife-beating, rape, and physical assault though the cases are different according to various causes and problems.

Generally women in Malaysia contributed to the income of the household. They worked side by side with their husband. However during the post-independence of Malaysia, the country has witnessed major changes in their structure of people's life and the progress of women has moved beyond the space of previous *status quo*.<sup>4</sup> Women are no longer bound with traditional lifestyle, such as being the housewife, but are brave enough to penetrate in professional careers. In addition, the status of women in this country has progressed tremendously by the institutionalization of women's primary safeguards with the likes of the Ministry of Women, Family and community Development and a huge number of women non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have rapidly grown. As a result, the participation of women could be clearly perceived in the mainstream workforce. The emergence of women's groups on the other hand, in the form of NGOs, is overwhelming. This parallel orientation among the groups as well as the ministry seems to create an instrument of power to the women's force.

Consequently, the belief in the traditional male-dominated system has gradually been reduced though the shadow still exists. In all aspects, Malaysian women have

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<sup>3</sup> Shawn Meghan Burn, *Women Across Cultures: A Global Perspective [Second Edition]*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Siti Rohani Yahaya, "The Development Process and Women's Labour Force Participation: A Macro-Level Analysis of Patterns And Trends from the 1980s" in *Readings on Women and Development in Malaysia: A Sequel Tracing Four Decades of Change*, edited by Jamilah Ariffin, (Selangor: MPH Group Publishing Sdn Bhd, 2009), 19-25.

undoubtedly progressed and participated effectively in the nation's development. They have considerably involved in several imperative areas such as education, public corporation, health care, etc.<sup>5</sup>

Since the independence, women's movements in this country have contributed progressively in their rights' renewal, both within and outside political parties. The democratization of gender in politics legitimises foundation in reforming women's worldview in the society. For instance, issues like sexual harassment, discrimination against women, unjust hierarchy, and many other cases that were overwhelmingly highlighted in the media have already been solved by the implementation of several legal acts.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, those unethical practices are considered sensitive with respect to the rest of the Muslims as the majority in this country. This is added yet with issues that are related to the Islamic familial system like polygamy, the need for child care facilities and support for working mothers, poverty amongst female-headed households, the burden that women have to carry as well as violence against them, marital conflicts and unsettled divorce cases that have brought about concern of public and later become national debates. As a result, the scenario has attracted several groups to speak up on behalf of the victims.

In the middle of this scenario when women issues have made the public restless, there is a group of women, named Sisters In Islam (SIS), that initiated an attempt to reform the situation. The group is consisted of some professionals such as lawyers, academics, journalists, and activists who have common concerns on women's legal problems and the difficulties they face when seeking legal redress especially from

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<sup>5</sup> Rashila Ramli and Saliha Hassan, "Women and Political Development In Malaysia: New Millennium, New Politics" in *Readings on Women and Development in Malaysia: A Sequel Tracing Four Decades of Change*, edited by Jamilah Ariffin, (Selangor: MPH Group Publishing Sdn Bhd, 2009), 81.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-83.

religious authorities. They began this initiative in 1987 to support a concern out of a number of complaints regarding discrimination in Muslim family and law.<sup>7</sup> With the commitment to promote the right of women within the framework of Islam, they started their fundamental standpoint which was based on a proposition; ‘if God is just as Islam is just, therefore why do laws and policies made in the name of Islam create injustice?’<sup>8</sup>

Immediately after the official launching as the non-governmental organization (NGO), SIS started taking steps in promoting the rights of Muslim women which are based on the philosophy of equality, justice and freedom enjoined by the Qur’ānic understanding. Several programs have been conducted in order to convey their reform plans and ideology. They found activities like workshops, conferences, seminars, and conducting researches to fulfill the needs of many. The popularity they possessed has put them to a certain level of achievement in women activism. They are known as the most aggressive group that has spoken about the rights of Muslim women in Malaysia though there are some other groups such as *Nisa’*, Interactive Muslimah Association (IMAN), *Ameerah*, etc, which have similar passion.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

As one of the leading group that champions the rights of Muslim women, SIS is considered suitable to be a case study in women’s activism and feminism in Malaysia. This is due to their involvement in the society and the restless efforts they have made so far which has made them the most qualified entity, representing the struggle for the rights of Muslim women in Malaysia. However, the main focus of this study is not on

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<sup>7</sup> Sisters In Islam, “The SIS Story”, via website, <<http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/page.php?35>> (accessed 19 February, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

the grey area of legal context but concentrating on the approach of reform made by this group.

Due to the use of the word 'Islam' in the group's name, the evaluation of those approaches anticipate a broadly external and internal spectrum that is much related to the framework of Islam and the Muslims in Malaysia. It is important here to extend the meaning of 'reform approach' in the context of this study. The term refers to 'the approaches they use and the strategies they deploy' in achieving their main goal. The approaches include providing public education, legal services, as the pushing force to the current legal implementation, and their use of the theological framework in the publication. All of these can be generally divided into two main approaches; practical (external) and theoretical (internal) approach.

A preliminary examination of SIS approaches suggest that the group has not only restricted themselves to the rights of Muslim women, but extending it beyond the women issues. SIS' reformatory approaches have led to a huge concern in the public when the group has once been alleged as among the three non-governmental organization (NGO) which was a party to undermining Islamic values through its talks and publications. This issue was highlighted in the annual United Malays National Organization (UMNO) assembly in 2006.<sup>9</sup> A local newspaper, *The Sun*, reported further details on the response by delegates when the issue of Muslim survival was raised:

Early today, Penang UMNO delegate Shahbudin Yahya accused SIS of undermining Islam through its programmes and actions.

"SIS concentrates on how to weaken the shariah court system. They created issues, not to improve it (the shariah court), but to create doubts

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<sup>9</sup> "Don't let mob rule prevail", *The Star*, Tuesday, November 28, 2006, via The Star Online, <<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2006/11/28/focus/16148502&sec=focus>> (accessed 5 April, 2014).



so that people will reject the court. They focus on one or two cases to try to belittle the shariah court,” he said.<sup>10</sup>

This account indicates the perception of public in which the SIS’s reform approach is looked at as going beyond the group’s actual scope. By using several methods and strategies that popularly used by liberalists, the group has been identified as part of the movements.<sup>11</sup> This is not the only indication of public refusal to the group and the movement.

It was in 2005 that SIS’s name had gone into public when they showed their support to the formation of the Interfaith Commission (IFC). The group’s name once again became intense in 2012 when SIS showed their support to *Seksualiti Merdeka* festival that was fundamentally promoting a platform for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights in the country. Those actions have prompted various public response, and the most unwelcomed remark came from Malaysian Prime Minister, Najib Abdul Razak, while speaking at the 50<sup>th</sup> National Women’s Day celebration, emphasizing that there was “no need for a women’s right movement in Malaysia”.<sup>12</sup>

These public responses are important in this assessment as Sisters In Islam is among the very vocal movement that believes themselves as the voice of Muslim women in this country. By this brief observation, there is a probability to assume that their approach is not well accepted by some within this country. Therefore this study is imperative to examine whether their approaches are truly upholding the real messages

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<sup>10</sup> “SIS: Accusations are ‘baseless and slanderous’”, *The Sun*, November 17, 2006, via Sisters In Islam, <<http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/news.php?item.62.27>> (accessed 2 April, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> “Don’t let mob rule prevail”, *The Star*, Tuesday, November 28, 2006, via The Star Online, <<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2006/11/28/focus/16148502&sec=focus>> (accessed 5 April, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> “No need for women's rights movement in Malaysia, says PM”, *The Malaysian Insider*, October 2, 2012, via <<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/no-need-for-womens-rights-movement-in-malaysia-says-pm/>> (accessed 10 April, 2014).

of Islam and preserving the rights of Muslim women, or perhaps there is another possible interest in their movement.

Since the formation of this group is claimed to be based on the idea of justice and equality framed by God in the Qur'ān, the conclusion on this study will see whether their belief on the idea of equality and justice in Islam is in conformity with the Muslim mainstream theological discourse which shapes the understanding of the majority of Muslim population in this world over the past years. Hence, this is a very crucial study on feminism since it is related to the discourse of Islamic creed (*'aqīdah*) that should not be underestimated by such a Muslim country like Malaysia.

### **A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENT**

The historical narrative of ancient civilizations presented a predictable perspective in gender relation in which women did not enjoy much in the social rights within the society. Women, in some cases, were pictured as a possession because of the undeserved treatment they faced from the opposite gender.<sup>13</sup> Some people believed that the natural protest against Plato and Aristotle's opinions that humiliated women was the beginning of women's reform to fight for their rights.<sup>14</sup> The prevailing treatments had continued to a certain period of time until the coming of social changes when women covered almost one-third of the workforce in the industry. Due to the unjust response they face by the managerial position, women started to campaign for their supposed rights.<sup>15</sup> They achieved certain goals in their movement, and later when women

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<sup>13</sup> Shawn, 35.

<sup>14</sup> Hojjatollah Raftari and Zabihollah Bahrami, 'Gender Equality According To Islam and Feminism', *2011 International Conference on Social Science and Humanity*, (IACSIT Singapore: IPEDR vol. 5, 2011), 492.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

extended their demands to involve in politics, women's movement appeared as a remarkable mechanism in order to seek the actual rights for them.

In most of the women's studies, notably with regard to the institutionalization of women, the issue of patriarchy has been central since the beginning of their journey. And most probably the movement has become the impetus behind the waves of feminism during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This factor has obviously set the fundamental discourse on the women's history. Here, the inter-related association between feminism as an ideology and the historical perspective of women's movement needs to be well determined.

The term feminism has been generally widely used to refer to the struggles of women's movement in most parts of Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Through the broad historical view of womanhood, feminism is predominantly defined as an active desire to change women's position in society.<sup>16</sup> The term was first used by a socialist, Charles Fevrier, to defend the women rights movement. According to Bahrami and Raftari, the word 'feminist' was firstly derived from a French word '*femme*', coined in 1837. While *femme* is referring to female, the addition '-ism' indicates a school of thought.<sup>17</sup> Feminists, for such a long time, have been involved in so many activities within various different perspectives. Hence, the identity both feminism as a school of thought and women's movement is part of the image of contemporary feminist.

There are three different waves of feminism that were regularly staged by historians to draw the journey of women's movement. First of all, the initial

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<sup>16</sup> Rosalind Delmar, "What Is Feminism?", *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences* (edited by Anne C. Herrmann & Abigail J. Steward), (Colorado: Westview Press, 1994), 9.

<sup>17</sup> Raftari, Hojjatollah, & Bahrami, Zabihollah, v2-492.

manifestation of feminism has been in the context of industrial society and liberal politics during late nineteenth and twentieth century of the United States and Europe. Women's struggle to get the right of voting by a group of women embarked the starting line of women's movement during World War I.

After some of the European countries, like the earliest Finland and Norway, had given the suffrage for women, the mobilization of women in other influential countries like Germany and the United Kingdom and the United States had seemed to be standing on the similar track.<sup>18</sup> In the United States, for instance, several women's movements were established to fight for women suffrage. National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA) was formed in May 1890 as a unification of the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) and the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) to mobilize women's right in voting.<sup>19</sup> It was a long struggle before American women won the right of voting in 1920.

Political landscape is understood to be the main reason for the mobilization of women demanding for their right during this first wave of feminism. Women's right activists were determined to rectify the sense of injustice despite the issue of voting was a highly controversial issue. This first wave of feminism consisted largely of White, middle-class, well educated women who confronted stereotypes of women in which those days the women were dictated with the system of being in the home, fulfilling the needs of husband and children. For them, women and men were equal in all respects, at

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<sup>18</sup> J. Stanley Lemons, *The Woman Citizen: Social Feminism in the 1920s*, (US: University of Virginia Press, 1973), 13.

<sup>19</sup> Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States*, Enlarged Edition (1959; Harvard University Press, 1996), 208-217.

least in legal terms, therefore to deny women their votes was to deny them their full citizenship.<sup>20</sup>

The impact of feminist literatures prior to this epoch to the women's mobilization during this period was undeniable. The eighteenth to the twentieth century had witnessed the vast scale of introduction to the idea of feminism in Europe. One of the earliest writing in liberal feminism was a book *A Vindication of the Right of Women* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft. It was written in the wake of the French Revolution. It later continued with another big sketch, with the likes of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) that introduced the ground of second wave of feminism.

The second wave of women activism is referring directly to the emergence of radical feminist of the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. This wave was first inspired by a protest in September 1968 associated with the Miss America Pageants.<sup>21</sup> Hundreds of feminist activists marched down the Atlantic City Boardwalk to enact their Miss America Protest organized by New York Radical Women. They staged several theatrical activism like throwing 'oppressive' gender symbols, such as bras, girdles, false eyelashes, high heels, curlers, hairspray and make up, into a trash can in front of reporters. They also distributed publicity materials titled "No More Miss America!" and "Women's Liberation" to catch the media's attention.<sup>22</sup>

Protesters saw the pageant and its symbols as an oppression of women. They decried its emphasis on an arbitrary standard of beauty. They were against the labelling, public worship and exploitation of the most beautiful girl in America. The indirect

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<sup>20</sup> Karlyn K. Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak for Her: Key texts of the early feminists*, (Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1989), 14.

<sup>21</sup> Rosalind Delmar, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Bonnie J. Dow, (Spring 2003). "Feminism, Miss America, and Media Mythology". *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6 (1): 127–149.

impact from this protest was relatively influential. In fact, it pushed up some of the leftist movements into being in the West, for instance, the anti-Vietnam student protest, the lesbian and gay movements, as well as the civil rights and black power movements in the United States.

The scenario occurred during these 1960s and 1970s indicates that feminism had shifted their focus from politics and working matters to sexuality and moral aspects. Subsequent decades onwards show the central framework of women's movement had expanded slightly from the original form. Feminists which drove the route of the most women's movements extended their action ranges to being more critical on capitalism and patriarchy with more complex intense of post-war welfare societies and highlighting women's empowerment in terms of motherhood and caretaking. Some of the key struggles were around domestic violence, rape, pornography and sexism in the media. These components had been neglected by both liberal and socialist feminists previously and derided by early radical feminism.

From the 1970s, feminism has generated a strong affiliations with the academy, in which research and teaching on women's issues has grown into a diverse discipline. Compared to the earlier identity of feminism which was embedded in the issue of structuralism, the later identity is rooted in methodology and theory of critical discourse and analysis. Feminism has no longer been looked as one, but many. The question may arise not relating to whether you are a feminist, rather which kind of feminist you are.

The third wave in women's empowerment seemed not to be galvanized around specific one or two key struggles. They are mostly motivated by the need to develop particular identities as women and feminists. They embrace ambiguity rather than certainty, engage in multiple positions and practice a strategy of inclusion and exploration. The central focus also has been changed to more wider and complex

intersections ranging from the gender, sexuality, race, class and age-related concern. These diverse types of women's group are inspired by the new global world order characterized by the fall of communism, new threats of religious and ethnic fundamentalism, biotechnologies and so on.

In Europe it is called 'new feminism' while in America it is common to refer to it as the 'new' wave of women's empowerment that is characterized by local, national, and transnational activism. It highlights the contemporary issues like violence against women, human trafficking, body surgery, self-mutilation, women's circumcision, as well as pornography in the media. Even the term 'feminist' is not universally adopted but often rejected by new activists. The effect of globalization is allied to create a platform for what has now split into the lesbian, gay, bi-, and transsexual movements. They call for recognition of these beings and defining the right of their own chosen identity so that the society has to respect their choices.

In short, the third wave of feminism and women's movements constitutes a pragmatic move in its theory and politics, turning from thinking to acting, developing the systems, structures, contingencies, complexities, and connecting the idea to a broader intellectual transformation.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objective of this study is to meticulously assess the development of a female group in Malaysia, Sisters In Islam. The group's historical background has to be properly addressed in this account in order to examine the development of the movement. Thorough study on the foundation of feminism may give certain important preview to women's movement in general. By evaluating a group like SIS, several doors of perspective would probably be opened. First of all, the study will expose the way in

which feminism can be accommodated under the label 'Islam' since there are many who believe the impossibility of both sides to be intertwined to one another.

In order to propagate their fundamental idea, SIS has used a variety of approaches that suited different levels of people in Malaysia, ranging from the lower class housewives to educated white-collar class. This study will help to understand feminist paradigm to see how far this movement has gone and the degree of response they receive from the public. The religious brand they deploy is certainly a very useful product to attract the attention of the masses. SIS' understanding on justice, equality, and freedom may perhaps have been different to the mainstream theological concept of those terms. Therefore the study could draw the comparison between both sides.

On one hand, SIS' strategy is perceived as a means to propagate Islam and promoting the global Muslim revivalist movement. While on the other hand, a new question is set to be brought up in which the issue on the relevancy of a group to speak on behalf of Islam has become contentious particularly when the ideas challenge the prevailing Islamic discourses. The tradition of Islam itself is understood to have its own grey area where qualification is imperative for those who want to speak for Islam. *Sunni* mainstream's tradition will grant only qualified people to practice religious opinion (*ijtihad*) as there are various conditions for a person to become the person who can give religious opinions and interpretations (*mujtahid*). Hence, the process has to be assessed clearly, or otherwise, it will be damaging to the understanding of Islam itself. In the case of SIS, it is crucial to evaluate whether this group is reachable to the stage of *mujtahid* to speak for new interpretation.

By evaluating this dimension, the three contentious aspects; justice, equality and freedom in the framework of Islamic theology and philosophy can be placed in each proper place. It is possible to find common ground between Western ideas and