

Abstract

The 4th Seminar on Gender Issues in Academia

15:30-17:30, 26 November (Mon)

The Development and Growth of the Gender Studies Program at the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia/ Dr. Shanthi Thambiah

In Malaysia, women's studies and gender studies are new fields struggling to be accepted as legitimate academic fields equal to mainstream disciplines. The academic and intellectual validity of women's studies and gender studies was recognised because of the research done by early feminists. Research and studies on women before the seventies were scarce but researchers who welcomed international changes achieved by the global women's movement were prepared to work to localise the need to elevate the position of women in society. Public universities were also urged to look into ways of contributing towards uplifting the status of women. The article outlines the history of the institutionalisation of gender studies and its profile since its inception at the University of Malaya.

Special Seminar: Frontiers of Gender Studies in Asia

14:30-16:30, 27 November (Tue)

Gender in Southeast Asia: Fluid, Contested and Negotiable/ Dr. Shanthi Thambiah

This presentation examines the bilateral organization of kin in Southeast Asia and women's active role in social and economic activities in all its complexity in a diverse and changing Southeast Asia. It is the bilateral kinship system that contributes to the consideration of Southeast Asia as a region that has certain shared practices and a region with a wide cultural span, diversity and hybridity. A Southeast Asian "cultural matrix" that is fluid and dynamic can be related to the bilateral social organization system that allows for flexibility in its gender relations and inclusiveness in its group formation contributing to the flourishing of diversity and hybridity. Kinship in Southeast Asia is associated with a lack of structure and a lack of permanence and therefore the "cultural matrix" of the region emerging from this context is more of shared resemblances rather than fixed or normative in nature. Therefore, gender in this region can be seen to be constructed and constituted from such a context and this is an attribute of the "cultural matrix" of Southeast Asia. This is not to make a claim for a generalized and essential bilateral principle and with it gender equality in the region but that this social organization system that may manifest in myriad forms in the local context contributes to the outcome on how gender is seen in the region as fluid, contested and negotiable. Such diversity of behaviour, responses and outcomes were and are being overwritten by homogenizing colonial, state, nationalist and global capitalist ideologies and discourses.