

Local issues: Why bias against Bahraini women married to foreigners?

Meena Menezes: Discrimination against women is a worldwide phenomenon and Bahrain is no exception. Recently at a meeting, Bahraini women married to foreigners spoke about the raw deal they and their children are getting though no fault of theirs.

According to the law, when a Bahraini man marries a foreigner, his children automatically get the citizenship and all the rights that go with it. But when a Bahraini woman marries a foreigner, her children are not entitled to Bahraini citizenship and are treated as foreigners.

In a country like Bahrain which has made impressive strides and moved forward in various sectors, it is a shame that women have to fight for their rights. In the case of Bahraini women married to foreigners, the situation becomes more complex – the children are denied citizenship which is their fundamental right. Some of the women I spoke to voiced their bitterness and said they had for many years lived outside Bahrain to avoid having their children being singled out as foreigners, or having to renew their passports every two years so that they can live in the country of their birth. But even if these children live in Bahrain, they have no access to free health and education services which are available to the children of Bahraini parents. Yet, when these women heard of human rights and the fact that women's societies have taken up the cudgels for their rights, it gave them some hope.

Some women, who are married to foreigners, said that although they were Bahraini, they were living in fear because if their husbands lost their jobs, the children too would have to go with them because they would not be allowed to continue living in Bahrain.

Children need their mothers, more so when they are very young and to deprive them of that is not only cruel but also unjust. I wonder how the authorities have failed to see the consequences of all this.

Families in Bahrain are close-knit and driving a wedge into their lives, just because some women chose to marry foreigners is unfair. Like one woman said – let the same law apply to the men as well.

Every citizen should have equal rights. Why Discrimination against women?

Yet, it is reassuring that organisations like the Bahrain Women's Society is doing its bit to highlight the injustice in the hope that the authorities will right the wrong and provide women and their children with their rights. As one official put it – it is their right and they should have it.

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