

Incorporating philosophy into Malaysia Madani

THROUGHOUT the course of ancient and modern history, prominent leaders of statecraft tasked with governing entire nations who have sought to introduce unique ideas, concepts and values relied on creating meaningful and significant paradigm shifts in society, through various means, in order that the fruits of their leadership objectives are holistically translated into reality.

Achieving national and societal reforms in a way that orients nations towards trajectories that ultimately yield prosperity for all does not only depend on strong leadership that actively advocates for such ideals as it ultimately rests on the conviction of those who are under that very leadership: the people.

If the nature of the public consciousness is such that it is lacking in the enthusiasm and passion necessary to have these values inculcated in society, then those values get lost in translation resulting in total failure.

Whether one wishes to use King Ashoka, emperor of the Mauryan Empire who renounced warfare and subsequently desired to inspire values of pacifism in Mauryan society or Harun al-Rashid of the Abbasid Caliphate who strived to promote the arts and sciences among Arabs, or Thomas Jefferson, a founding father of the United States who encouraged progressive values in American society as examples, one finds that, among other tilings, it was a love of philosophy and a passion for a renaissance that characterised their leadership initiatives.

Their efforts contributed immensely towards the advancement of civilisation.

Through the patronage and celebration of philosophy in the academic world - reviving interest in the wisdom, knowledge, and virtues of ancient and renowned thinkers - the surrounding culture is acclimatised to the values of rational inquiry, open discussion, curiosity, and respect, resulting in progressive shifts in the societal psyche.

This then allows for greater adoption of the newly introduced ideals on the grounds that the people's hearts are open to not just receiving them, but then championing and honouring these ideals.

It is precisely this important lesson in history

that could very well if considered, contribute towards the promotion and public reception of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's national slogan of Malaysia Madani and its corresponding values of sustainability, prosperity, innovation, respect, trust and compassion.

Earlier this month, Anwar expressed his admiration of the contributions of Al-Azhar University in Egypt for its advancements in fikrah (philosophy of thinking) as he believed it served to enhance the rational capacities of the Madani communities of Malaysia and the world, and that the exchange of philosophical concepts and ideas were instrumental in raising the dignity of Muslims.

In the past, the prime minister has also described the ways in which the reading of important classics in Confucian, Islamic, Christian and Enlightenment philosophies held great personal significance along with the exposure to a multitude of different perspectives - each rich with its depth and virtue - and its capacity to act as moral repositories, which enriched his life.

The wisdom of philosophy and its various traditions could similarly enhance the moral conscience of Malaysian society, stratifying national unity and inspiring the heights of civilization if it were to be made more widespread.

The Malaysia Madani concept has the potential to facilitate changes in Malaysian communities necessary for moral evolution.

Its objectives could be complemented and supplemented with efforts to promote the virtues of philosophy in Malaysia so as to not just guide public perception but restore the confidence of the people in the current government's pledge to transition into a new dawn for Malaysia, one that actively addresses the moral concerns of its citizens and seeks ways in which reforms could be implemented.

Advocating philosophy in all aspects of Malaysian society, particularly education, has proven to be beneficial in making important national values and ideals accessible and well-inculcated, guiding students to understand the reasoning that underpins Malaysia's civic code and the norms that pervade Malaysian society.

This could very well ensure that Madani values are better inculcated in Malaysian society and could address the challenges of a currently divided and polarised Malaysia.

Malaysians nationwide have recognised the benefits of using philosophy in raising awareness on moral issues and encouraging discussion.

The Malaysia Philosophy Society, an NGO in Malaysia dedicated to making philosophy more practical and accessible for all, have organised events touching on important moral issues and the perspectives of great philosophies that garner considerable attention from the public and have provided opportunities for Malaysians to learn the way in which philosophy not only betters oneself but also the nation.

It not only encourages a person to review their ethical and moral code but strives to discuss societal taboos, heighten public awareness and promote enriching values of inquisitiveness, practicality, boldness and open-mindedness.

Chew Zhun Yee and Dr Tee Chian Giap, co-founders of the Malaysia Philosophy Society, have expressed that through the NGO and efforts of the team they "envision a world where philosophy plays an important and practical role in improving the quality of lives and influencing social change".

Through the organisation's efforts, they have achieved significant strides in this space inspiring many Malaysians to explore the ways in which philosophy brings communities together, inspiring mutual respect and tolerance within society through the study of distinct

wisdom traditions of Malaysia's many cultures, which in turn promotes the Madani values of unity and innovation.

One such turn Malaysia could explore towards reviving philosophy in Malaysia is the adoption of a philosophy syllabus in Malaysian schools.

Arvin Thurairaj, community director at the Malaysian Philosophy Society, has advocated for the "replacement of moral studies in favour of philosophy" and has emphasised how it "imparts the importance of intellectual rigour in students".

This suggestion for a much-needed update in Malaysian schools can raise the level of critical thinking in schools, giving birth to the next Madani generation.

It equips Malaysians with the rational capacity to resist dangerous and harmful ideas.

Malaysia could look to explore how it could popularise and revive the love of philosophy by studying how more public universities could facilitate the learning of the academic discipline as there aren't that many opportunities to study it due to its unavailability.

It could also incentivise the creation of philosophy clubs and societies in schools and universities as this is significantly lacking and is near absent.

In many ways, philosophy draws our attention to the beauty of Malaysian culture and heritage.

It gives us a window to cherish the wisdom of our various backgrounds but also provides an avenue by which we reach the goals of Malaysia Madani, that is to consecrate Malaysian society as one that is highly civilised.

In recognising how a revival of philosophy could benefit Malaysia Madani, working towards incorporating it into society could change the future of Malaysia forever.