

End discrimination of the aged

NO PREJUDICE: Learn to celebrate the wisdom of elders

“HOKAHEY. Today is a good day to die” is the saying attributed to the Red Indian Crazy Horse from the Lakota or Sioux tribe, before the Battle of the Big Little Horn in 1876.

The saying means man is ready in mind, heart, body, and spirit and to enter the never-ending-timeless hereafter. This sublime surrender is regarded as the ultimate spiritual growth of the Indian because of the gift of knowledge of the perpetual sacred symphony of the universe.

In a poignantly romantic sense, a village elder wakes up one morning when all the signs are right to be with nature and the creator, and declares: “This is a good day to die” and then walks away into the sunrise to be at rest in the happy hunting ground, conceived as paradise, where hunting is plentiful and game is unlimited.

This particular concept of the af-

terlife is held by the Great Plains Native American tribes especially the Iroquois and Cherokee,

Elders have reflective wit and humour, whether wry and cynical or inspirational. They would attempt the summing up of life’s experiences with deep awareness of human frailties, vulnerabilities, and achievements, with glimpses of the past and the hereafter.

In all situations, they want to continue to contribute and battle against ageism. Of life and aging, Yahaya Ibrahim, past his mid-80s inspiringly said: “It is not the years of your life that count but the life of your years that matter.”

He observes the processes of aging and notes the following states: Advanced in years and relaxed and coiled at home in love with sleep!; advanced in years and lazy and lacklustre; advanced in years and still active; or advancing in years and more active. He sums up the insight: In life you get what you deserve, not what you want. Lynn

Peters Adler reports that the seven secrets of centenarians are: positive attitude, diet, exercise, faith, clean living, a loving family and genetics.

In many situations, doctors and nurses may practise euthanasia, rightly or wrongly to provide dignity in death rather than to allow ailing patients, particularly the aged, to continue to suffer. Whether euthanasia is practised in Malaysia or not is not in the Official Secrets Act, but in the solemn silence of the profession and the community, and, no open debates have been opportuned.

So also the question of ageism, prejudice, and discrimination on grounds of age. Schooling had provided an institution of relationship continuity for various generations of school cohorts. There are the celebrations of various alumni groups for social or reminiscence purposes.

Of the groups who meet, teachers, classmates, husbands, wives and families are the Victoria Institution Class of 1961 in Form 6. They come

from Italy, Australia, the United Kingdom, United States, and Kelantan, meet every year, share stories, and reinforce their bonding.

Then, there are the hundreds of now elderly teachers — Brinsfordians and Kirbytes from Malaysian Teachers’ Colleges in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, who meet regularly and have much to exchange

They are in their 80s and beyond and are comfortable with the relationship among themselves and their families but are unsure about the relationships with the state.

While the state may focus on the clinical factors of their existence, there are contradictions or empty messages regarding their possible continuing contributions.

These lost professional generations require motivational factors of recognising and seeking their continuing roles and contributions in society. As there is discrimination based on gender, particularly against women and children, there is discrimination against the “aged”.

Gerontology is the study of aging, and, in Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia has taken the lead in this field. Studies on aging have

shifted from focus on “the aged” to focus on the aging process, “from biological or physiological elements as the primary determinants of the ageing process, to ageing as a social phenomenon”.

In studying ageing, scholars have identified many theories, and eleven of these are: activity, disengagement, personality (continuity), social breakdown, social-clock, minority group, sub culture, age stratification, exchange, dual labour market (political economy), and phenomenological (social interactionist theories).

There are, of course, other evolving theories from religious, ideological, or indigenous perspectives. These social gerontology theories try to explain the experiences of aging. There is the critical need to understand and shape socio-historical environments, and nurture relationship between the elderly and the state, community and the family. From the personality continuity or role continuity experiences of the elders, the knowledge corpus of wisdoms for intergenerational learning could be harnessed.

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