

RSOG Seminar

The Future of Debate

with

Ameera Natasha Moore

When : 21 August 2015
Where : Razak School of Government
Speakers : Ameera Natasha Moore

About the Leadership Forum

The famous poet, Khalil Gibran once said, “Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding.” Whilst there are many ways to break out of “shells”, this seminar explored one of them, namely debate. Debate is the contestation of arguments between two or more sides who hold opposing views on certain topics or issues. Nonetheless, debate is not a forum for asserting absolute truths but rather a means of making and evaluating arguments that allows opposing sides to better understand their own and others’ positions. A healthy debate avoids descending to insult, emotional appeals, or personal bias. Social media have allowed virtual round the clock debate across continents. At home, debating competitions are common in schools and universities. The famed *Bahas Piala Perdana Menteri* used to have huge followers. Of late, debate seems limited to certain academic disciplines and social groups. Is there a future for debate? How would debate look like in the future? Is debate indeed alive, and is it losing its place in society?

Summary

Ameera Natasha Moore gave an enlightening perspective of her own insights to debating. Debating, as she shared, is often seen as something that is regarded as an exclusive sport for the nerdy as well as those who belong to an exclusive club. It is also often correlated with liberalism that is far from our own culture and values. Ameera argues that this perception is one worth challenging and changing.

According to Ameera, change can start from the discussions that we have on a day-to-day basis. Debates do not just tackle issues that are often talked about, but also those that are controversial and sensitive to many. She asserted that change can only happen once people start discussing issues on the ground, even those that are sensitive. It also allows one to question certain beliefs and ideas that they already have while allowing one to get out of their own comfort zones. Unfortunately, people sometimes feel apprehensive to discuss certain issues, as they are scared of knowing the answers to some of the issues raised. For Ameera, debating is not only a hobby that she enjoys, but also an avenue that structures her worldview while making her more empathetic and questioning of certain issues. For instance, are we living in a world that discriminates against certain people? Are we culturally indoctrinated with certain worldviews?

Despite having to wreck nerves before a debating competition, Ameera believes that the benefits of debating are massive. Besides being able to understand a certain issue from different perspectives, debating also allows one to become a much more involved and informed individual. Instead of being one who jumps to conclusions, debating allows one to become a lot more informed and appreciative of what others think and how others would react to certain issues while pushing one out of their comfort zone and their shell.

Nevertheless, important discussions sometimes do not take place and questions that are worth questioning are sometimes sidetracked with other issues. This, according to Ameera, can happen when one is too absorbed in what one wants to believe or is too distracted by trivial things to address the more fundamental issues. It is unfortunate that in our society and culture, people are sometimes punished for questioning issues that are worth questioning. Culture is indeed one of the limiting factors to meaningful discussions. For instance, in certain cultures, it is deemed improper or rude to question those older than us. Children are taught to not question so much or argue, and such behaviour is often equated to western notions of liberalism that are incompatible with Asian values. However, the hunger for knowledge, as Ameera asserts, should not just be attributed to Western ideologies. In fact, the spirit of inquiry has long been a tradition in Islam as well as in other cultural discourse and doctrines.

Issued raised

- Support systems and values nurtured from young often help the debater in debating on critical and unfamiliar issues.
- Regular knowledge sharing sessions could help to improve the perception and acceptance of people towards debate.

- At times, emotions play a role in convincing judges in a debate. Ideally, emotions should be balanced with maturity, which can be developed through training.
- Debating in social media, though convenient, may not be as impactful as face-to-face debate. Perhaps the rather shy culture makes people more comfortable to debate virtually. The option for anonymity to some extent facilitates such a culture.
- Contrary to popular belief, good debaters can come from wide range of disciplines including the sciences and engineering. There is also little evidence to support the notion that females are better than males in debate.
- More importantly, good debaters often display a hunger for new knowledge, excellent listening skills and the courage to try and explore new things.
- Debating in English differs from the debating in Malay in terms of spontaneity – the latter appears to be more poetic and metaphorical while the former is more direct. Perhaps, such inclination is cultural.
- In terms of the overload of information in this day and age, debaters have to be selective and strategic in competitive debates.
- Parents are important role models in inculcating a child's interest in debate. The future of debate in this country will have to start from the home.

About the Speaker

Ameera Natasha Moore is currently into her third year of studying law at the International Islamic University. She is an accomplished debater, being the current Asian Grand Champion and Malaysian Royals National Champion. Expanding outside the Asian debating circuit, Ameera is part of the team that won the Australasian Debate Championship in the English as a Second Language (ESL) Category, twice in a row. Also having debated across Europe, she

is the recent semi-finalist and Overall Best Speaker of the Cambridge Women's Debate Open, a grand finalist at the Durham Intersarsity Debate and Jacobs Intersarsity Debate in Germany, and champion of the UCU Debate Opens in Netherlands. On the global level, she has been awarded the TOP 10 ESL Best Speaker two years consecutively.

Contact

To get more information on this event, you can contact us via email at programmes@rsog.com.my