

In the 19th century Philippines under the Spanish Colonial rule, Filipinos were treated as inferior to Spaniards. What of the Filipino women? Their race and gender put them at rock bottom of the societal food chain. Rizal was an advocate of women's rights in his educational reform, literary works, preaching of a mother's role in shaping her child's early education and values along with his firm belief that women should be active members of society.

Ang isang babae ay mahinhin, masunurin, at tahimik. Mga katangian ng isang perpektong Filipina noong panahon ng mga Espanyol. Ang kanilang gampanin sa buhay ay maglingkod sa kanilang mga asawa at anak, alagaan ang tahanan, at magkaroon ng takot sa Diyos.

Ang edukasyon ay isang pribilehiyo ng mga kalalakhian. Babae? Kahit siya ay may kaya tulad ni Maria Clara sa nobela ni Rizal na "Noli Me Tangere", tanging maabot niya sa buhay ay nasa loob ng tahanan o kumbento lamang.

Isang tagumpay para sa mga babae ng Malolos noong 1888. 20 Filipinang naglakas loob na mag-petisyon ng isang "Night School" kay Heneral Weyler para pag aralan ang wikang Espanyol. Tagumpay na kinilala ni Rizal bilang simbolo ng pagkamulat ng kababaihan sa sistemang patriyarkal.

Ang madilim na landas na tinatahak ng ibang Filipina, madalas ay sapilitan pa. Bayarang babae. Isang "puta" kung tawagin nila. Ano kaya ang maaaring tawag sa mga kalalakhian tumatangkilik sa ganitong serbisyong pwersado?

Rizal believed that women have the capacity for critical thinking, to distinguish right from wrong, thus their own autonomy. That God bestowed His children with reason and will of their own and so must use it to light their own path—to not be deceived but instead help each other see reason.

The times have changed. Women enjoy the same legal rights as men. In practice, the patriarchy is still deeply ingrained in our society also enabled by religion in our country. Quezon City Rep. Boy Suntay's sexual remarks about the award winning actress Anne Curtis—reducing her to an object of sexual desire despite her numerous achievements and high status in life. The patriarchal interpretations of some passages in the Bible—Ephesians 5:22, "Wives, submit to your husbands."—are still used to oppress women to this day. The practice of the separation of the church and state is lax with Bible verses used against the Anti-discrimination (SOGIE) Bill in a House hearing.

Women are openly challenging these harmful stereotypes imposed upon them. They hold key positions in the government like Senator Risa Hontiveros and the late former president Corazon Aquino. They participate in rallies, lead their own businesses, and thrive in their own industries.

Women are not mere decorations in society. To be controlled and owned as if they are lacking autonomy. History may cling to the present tightly but consistent progress destroys oppression.