
TOPIC 1

THE RIZAL LAW, LITERATURE AND SOCIETY

OVERVIEW

Dr. Jose Rizal lived and died over a century ago; thus, Filipino millennial students may wonder, “How is this man relevant today?” and “Why do I need to study Rizal?”

The answers to these questions can be summed up in two points:

1. It is mandated by law.
2. The life and works of Dr. Jose Rizal comprise a lesson in nation-building that can foster the development of the Filipino youth in all aspects of citizenship.

In this topic, you will be introduced to the Rizal Law and its important provisions, as well as the significance of Rizal's novels – *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

1. Explain the history of the Rizal law and its important provisions;
2. Critically assess the provisions of this law, and
3. Discuss the relevance of studying the life and works of Dr. Jose Rizal.

HISTORY OF RIZAL LAW

Educational institutions in the Philippines are mandated to include Rizal's life and writings in their curriculum. Such mandated action is in accordance with Republic Act No. 1425 or Rizal Law. The Act obliged all public and private schools, colleges and universities nationwide to educate students about Rizal's views which were greatly depicted in his famous writings like *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*. Rizal's firmness toward the abuses of the Spaniards and the role played by the Catholic Church to promote such misconduct during those days were condemned by numerous Catholics. Thus, Rizal Law was viewed as an act of degradation to the Catholic beliefs. The Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines strongly opposed the printing and distribution of Rizal's works because they would corrupt the Catholic faith of the new generation.

The Catholic churches in the country continued to advance their strong opposition to Rizal Law. This opposition persisted until the 1995 Senate election, making then Senator Claro M. Recto, the main proponent of the Rizal Bill and the one who sought its sponsorship to accuse the opposition as communist action. Catholic churches argued that such Bill defied the freedom of religion, encouraging as many supporters as they could get to stop the reproduction and reading of Rizal's novels *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*. Believers of Catholic faith were advised to produce and send written documentaries to their representatives and senators stating unfavorable views about the Rizal Bill. Crusades took place, and tension between the supporters of Rizal and the Catholic Church emerged. Symposiums promoting the eradication of the bill were organized. One symposium with Fr. Jesus Cavanna as guest rendered a message that Rizal's works in view of the past injustices would corrupt the present setup of Catholic churches in the country. Nevertheless, Jesus Paredes, a radio commentator, argued that Catholics were not deprived of their right to decline reading Rizal's novels if they felt like they could threaten their salvation (Abinales & Amoroso, 2005).

As a response, Archbishop Rufino Santos of Manila asserted that Catholic students would be affected if the mandatory reading of uncensored writings of Rizal would prevail. In his pastoral letter, he added that many versions of Rizal's writings would be read. The reading of the circular containing the clear opposition of the Archbishop led to Manila Mayor Arsenio Lacson's walking out of the mass. The Mayor had always been a supporter of the Rizal Bill. During those days, support groups of the Catholic churches, like Catholic Action of the Philippines, the Congregation of the Mission, The Knights of Columbus, and the Catholic Teachers Guild, collaborated to block such bill. However, a countermovement was also organized by *Veteranos de la Revolucion* (Spirit of 1896), *Alagad ni Rizal*, the Freemasons, and the Knights of the Senate Committee on Education, which was opposed by Francisco Soc Rodrigo, Mariano Jesus Cuenco, and Decoroso Rosales (Araneta, 2010)

Furthermore, Cuenco argued that Rizal directly attacked the practices, beliefs, and creeds of the Church. Rizal's views were not limited to the abuses of the friars during his days but it was a total disbelief of the Bible and the Catholic faith. Rizal did not believe in the existence of the purgatory, and that Moses and Jesus Christ were not mentioned in the Bible. The argument that Rizal refrain from doubting the dogmas of the Catholic Church was fallacious and misleading. His denial of a purgatory has opposed the beliefs of the majority of the members of the Chamber of the Senate Committee, including that of Domocao Alonto, senator of Sulu; thus, the senator bluntly exposed his opposition to Filipinos who viewed Rizal as their national hero, and he despised his writings. He viewed Rizal as a saint worshipped by many so that his writings became a Bible of Indonesians in quest of their independence. However, such views of Alonto were countered by a supporter of the Rizal Bill, namely, Pedro Lopez, a Cebuano like

Cuenco, saying that the essence of the independence movement began in their province when Lapu-Lapu fought Ferdinand Magellan (Pangalangan, 2010)

The tension brought by the Rizal bill, led to the threatening of various Catholic schools to close down if the bill was passed. This threat created a counterattack from Recto, saying that if such dilemma in the educational sector happened, schools would be nationalized. The words of Recto made an impact that led Catholic schools to punish legislators who supported the Rizal bill by not supporting them in the next election. Furthermore, Recto argued that the people who eliminated Rizal's writings from schools buried his memories as national hero. He added that this was not a fight against Recto but a fight against Rizal (Abinales & Amoroso, 2005).

The Chairman of the Committee of Education catered to the views of the Catholic Church and made adjustment to compromise the opposition and the approbation of the supporters of the Rizal Bill. On May 12, 1956, the inserted compromise (contents) on the bill, which specified that only college (university) students would have the option of reading unexpurgated version of clerically contested reading materials, such as *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, was approved unanimously. The bill was enacted on June 12, 1956 (Araneta, 2010).

HONORING FILIPINO NATIONAL HEROES

The Philippines recognized the significant contribution of certain personalities to the growth of Filipino minds, the acquisition of independence, and their participation in the molding of Philippine history. Nonetheless, there was no law nor executive order nor proclamation issued officially to proclaim a Filipino icon as a national hero. Even Jose Rizal, despite his enormous contribution to Philippine history, was not clearly proclaimed as National Hero. There were laws enacted honoring significant historical persons and their heroic acts that molded history. Jose Rizal's position in Philippine History is a tribute to the continued respect or acclamation of the people in recognition of his contribution to the significant social transformations that took place in our country.

Jose Rizal was not the only one who was recognized as a hero; Bonifacio also acquired a spotlight in heroism. He remained an inspiring icon who did his best to acquire knowledge and fight against the Spanish Colonizers. He received an indirect acknowledgment of his heroic deeds, by being recognized as a national hero and his day of birth was made a national holiday. Rizal and Bonifacio were great men who contributed to the acquisition of the Philippine independence from the Spanish regime and abuses. Despite the absence of a formal declaration proclaiming them as national heroes, Philippine history applauded these men and had kept their contributions passed on to generations. As historians argue, that heroes must not be legislated, the acclamation for heroes would be recognition enough. Also, their recognition is better executed in the academe, where the stories about their contributions to our country's history would be relived.

To recognize important personalities in our history, the Government promulgated programs and committees that would keep an eye on remarkable icons from the past. Thus, on March 28, 1983, then President Fidel V. Ramos issued Executive Order No. 75 titled "Creating the National Heroes Committee under the Office of the President." The said Committee was created to learn, assess, and suggest national personalities in recognition of the impact that such people made on Philippine history. It was the Committee's duty to make sure that just recognition be given to heroes for their authentic character and extraordinary triumphs for the country. In compliance, the National Heroes Committee submitted criteria for national heroes. The Technical committee of the National Heroes Committee held a series of meetings on June 3, 1993, August 19, 1993, September 12, 1994, and November 15, 1995, defining, discoursing, and deliberating upon the merits of the various definitions and criteria of a hero. The committee adopted the following criteria as basis for historical researchers in determining who among the great Filipinos would be officially proclaimed as national heroes: (a) heroes are those who have a concept of nation and thereafter aspire and struggle for the nations' freedom, heroes are those who define and contribute to a system of life of freedom; (b) and order for a nation; and (c) heroes are those who contribute to the quality of life and destiny of a nation (National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2015).

PHILIPPINE NATIONAL LITERATURE

Rizal's written masterpieces, the *Noli Me Tangere* and its sequel *El Filibusterismo*, are considered constant and inspiring sources of patriotism and nationalism for the youth during their formative years. The Rizal Bill showed the existence of a corrective space, an ensemble of discourses and practices creating the field of literary education in the Philippines. It is a written work, which shows the life of Filipinos from the past and is a good source of learning the value of education. The novels portrayed the Filipino people whose national character had been shaped by literary works and the reading of these works; the Bill gave Rizal and his novels not only a central place in the state's nationalist project, but also a recognition of their vital role in enabling Filipinos to grasp the ideals of freedom and nationalism (Hau, 2000, p.1).

Rizal was equipped with extraordinary literary skills. Such was seen in his masterpiece the *Noli Me Tangere* (1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (1891). The *Noli* dealt with the country's present, and the *Fili* pointed to its future. Meanwhile Rizal's remarks of Morga (*Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*) traced the lineaments of the country's past. Writing had become his tools for reforms to awaken the Filipinos from abuses that the colonizer's had been doing for centuries in the country. Literature give importance to nationalism; thus, Rizal viewed it as something essential. Literature has always been reliant on history, bringing people back to the past where social, psychological, and linguistic resources portray old events that impact the present time. Two presuppositions exist in the vitality on nationalism accorded to literary works and vice versa: the ability of literature to honestly present history and to intervene in history. Literature opens the door leading to significant events, which describe certain setups, behavior and the current image of society today (Mojares, 2013).

Literature can be a good basis of history and taking a glance of the past attributes of Filipinos. Nevertheless, literature has its intervening function, taking a look at Rizal's novels; it was artefactual; a mixture of reality best portrayed by fiction characters, which represent certain people back then. It's a result of all the observations and experiences of Jose Rizal in Philippine society. Literature was his way of showcasing society's creative hard work and ambitions. Hence, Filipinos back then were able to acquire, preserve, and reshape their culture through literature, which was rooted in their ancestors' days. This shows the intertwined relationship of literature and Philippine nationalism, strengthened by the idea that literature embodies and creates culture.

Furthermore, literature is a good driving tool to execute authority and command one's country. Rizal argues that Tagalog literature is living and vigorous. Through writing people can exercise authority; hence, Filipinos ought to be participative in the literary field, especially in matters affecting the country as a whole. Literature allows people to speak and change the future, it's an execution of dominance in one's literary work.

Nevertheless, literature assumed an intervening function precisely because Rizal's novels served as artefactual, concrete examples of a "Filipino culture" that was conceived as the sum total of all the products of a society creative labor and aspirations. At the same time, these works were the means by which any other Filipino could acquire, preserve, and reshape such a culture. In this manner, the relationship between literature and Philippine nationalism was cemented through the paradoxical notion that literary works both embodied culture and helped create that culture. Also, literature must not only demonstrate that it has a past to show but also a future to touch. Thus, Rizal asserted that Tagalog literature is living and dynamic. Likewise, he also recognized that writing is an exercise in authority, and in the contest over authority Filipinos must not only be active participants, they must - particularly in matters pertaining to their country-exercise command (Hau, 2020).

Rizal has written Tagalog novel after the appearance of *Fili*. In 1891-1892, he wrote his third novel, "*Makamisa*." This novel was written for the Tagalog readers and not for the European readers. At the time he had written such novel he was on his way back to the Philippines, and the propaganda movement was starting to shift. At home when Rizal embarked on his third novel, he was also assisting his brother Paciano in translating the *Noli* to Tagalog. Making tagalog novels was Rizal's way of speaking to his fellow Filipinos. Rizal was also motivated to write a novel with a modern sense of the world, an artistic and literary novel. Rizal's third motive was to write a novel that would deal exclusively with the usages, virtues, and defects of the Tagalogs. To achieve his motives Rizal wrote *Makamisa*, which he admitted to have given him a hard time in Tagalog. Though it was aborted, Rizal's "turn to the native" was not in vain, if taken as a sign of the desire for a literature more deeply anchored in the realities of home (Mojares, 2013).