

Dr. Jose Rizal

Dr. José Rizal is known as the National Hero of the Philippines because he fought for our freedom not with weapons but with his mind, his education, and his writings. He believed that the pen is mightier than the sword and that real change can come through knowledge and peace. Rizal taught Filipinos to love their country, to think freely, and to fight injustice with truth and wisdom. His life became an example of courage, sacrifice, and love for the nation.

RIZAL IN THE CONTEXT OF 19TH CENTURY PHILIPPINES

During the 19th century, the Philippines was under Spanish rule. Filipinos were treated unfairly and had no rights or freedom. The friars and government officials had all the power, and ordinary Filipinos were forced to work, pay high taxes, and obey the church leaders. Those who disobeyed or spoke out were punished harshly.

But at this time, new ideas from Europe were spreading ideas about liberty, equality, and human rights. These ideas started to inspire young Filipinos, including Rizal, to open their minds. He saw how unfair the system was and began to believe that change was possible through education and unity. Rizal realized that the only way to truly help his country was to prepare himself through learning and to use knowledge as a weapon against ignorance and abuse.

The harsh conditions of the 19th century and the influence of new liberal ideas shaped Rizal's awareness and sense of duty. It gave him the desire to fight injustice in a peaceful and intelligent way instead of violence, forming the foundation of his mission for reform and national awakening.

RIZAL'S LIFE, FAMILY, CHILDHOOD AND EARLY EDUCATION

Rizal was born on June 19, 1861, in Calamba, Laguna, to Francisco Mercado and Teodora Alonso. His parents were loving, educated, and deeply religious. His mother was his first teacher. She taught him to read, to pray, and to be kind and humble. Rizal grew up in a happy family, but he also witnessed the unfair treatment of Filipinos by the Spanish friars.

His family's land was often taken advantage of by the friars, and his mother was once jailed for something she did not do. These events hurt young Rizal deeply and made him realize that even good and innocent people could suffer under Spanish power. Instead of turning to anger, he promised to fight injustice through education and good works. This is where his dream of helping the Filipino people began and the struggles of his family became his motivation to study harder and to dedicate his life to freeing his people from ignorance and oppression. Rizal studied hard in Ateneo Municipal de Manila and became one of the best students graduating Bachelor of Arts with Highest Honors.

During his study in Ateneo, the three Filipino priests, GomBurZa, were executed by the Spaniards which deeply affected Rizal and opened his eyes to the reality that Filipinos could be punished and even killed for seeking justice. This strengthened his desire to help his people and fight for reform further.

RIZAL'S HIGHER EDUCATION AND LIFE ABROAD

After finishing his studies in Ateneo, Rizal went to the University of Santo Tomas to study medicine. He wanted to cure his mother's blindness. But while studying there, he faced discrimination because

Filipino students were treated as inferior to Spaniards. This experience made him realize that he could not grow freely under Spanish control, so he decided to study abroad.

He went to Spain and entered the Universidad Central de Madrid, where he finished medicine and philosophy. He met other Filipino reformists such as Marcelo H. del Pilar, Graciano Lopez Jaena, and Mariano Ponce. Together, they formed the Propaganda Movement, which aimed to seek reforms peacefully. They created a newspaper called *La Solidaridad* to express their ideas and fight for equality.

Rizal's studies and experiences abroad strengthened his belief that education and freedom of thought were the keys to progress. His exposure to liberal ideas and his work in the Propaganda Movement proved that he could fight for the Philippines even from far away through his pen and intellect.

RIZAL'S EXILE, TRIAL, AND EXECUTION

Rizal returned to the Philippines to serve his people as a doctor and teacher with compassion for others. He built a school, a hospital, and a water system and also taught children science, arts, and values.

But even though he was living peacefully, the Spanish authorities still saw him as a threat because his ideas inspired many Filipinos to want freedom. He was later arrested and accused of rebellion, even if he was not part of the Katipunan as he always believed that change should come through peaceful means, not violence.

Rizal was put on trial and was falsely accused of leading the revolution. Despite his defense, the Spanish court sentenced him to death. On December 30, 1896, he was executed in Bagumbayan, now Luneta Park. Before his death, he wrote his final poem, **Mi Último Adiós**, which expressed his love for his country and his hope for freedom up until his death.

Rizal's sacrifice became the spark that inspired the Philippine Revolution and it awakened the hearts of many Filipinos to continue the fight for independence.

NOLI ME TANGERE AND EL FILIBUSTERISMO

While he was still in Europe, Rizal also wrote his novel *Noli Me Tangere* in Berlin in 1887 which exposed the injustices and abuses of the Spanish friars in the Philippines. Rizal then later wrote his second novel *El Filibusterismo* in 1891 that showed his disappointment that reforms were still not happening in the Philippines.

The novels angered the Spaniards because they clearly criticized their government. It showed how corruption and greed destroyed society. It also showed Rizal's disappointment that reforms were not being achieved and warned Filipinos about the danger of hatred and revenge as he still believed that education and moral strength were the true paths to freedom.

Through his novels and essays, Rizal used his pen as a weapon to fight for his country. Instead of violence, he chose to fight with truth, knowledge, and courage. His writings opened the eyes of Filipinos to the injustices around them and encouraged them to value education, freedom, and self-respect. His words awakened a sense of unity and hope among the people, inspiring them to work together for real change in the country.

OTHER WRITINGS

Aside from *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, he also wrote **The Philippines: A Century Hence**, an essay where he predicted that the Philippines would one day gain independence if Spain refused to reform. He believed that the Filipino spirit was strong and capable of building its own nation.

Then, in his essay, **The Indolence of the Filipinos**, Rizal defended his people from the accusation of being lazy. He explained that the so-called indolence was not natural but caused by the effects of colonization—such as lack of education, poor leadership, and oppression. He proved that Filipinos were hardworking when given freedom and opportunity.

And lastly, In his Letter **To the Young Women of Malolos**, Rizal praised the bravery of young women who demanded education. He encouraged them to be strong, wise, and patriotic because mothers and women play a big role in shaping the values of future generations.