



Unmasking the Patriarchy: A Critical Look at the Roots of the Filipinas' Oppression

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The patriarchal system, oppression, discrimination, and sexism are a few of the many tribulations that women had to face in the earlier years and still continue to experience up to this day in time. For years, women have been fighting for their rights and for equality, yet, the patriarchy and misogyny are still spiraling out of control. The right to education, suffrage, equality in the workplace, and basically the right to have equal opportunities are some of the rights that were rightfully given to women in the late 1930s. These rights are what made the women of today stronger and more independent than before. These rights exist to protect women from inequality, harassment, oppression, social injustice, and the hateful gaze of misogyny.

The Philippines has somehow evolved and adjusted to the plights of the marginalized sector, most especially the struggles and oppressiveness of women. The patriarchal system, and misogyny still continue to exist everywhere in this country – politics, workplace, institutions, and in every nook and corner of the Philippines. The stereotypical and sexist perspectives of the Filipinos has been long overdue, and it is about time to finally put a halt to the oppression, harassment, maltreatment, and inequality towards women. It was only in the year 1937 were women allowed to vote. However, it was not that easy. Looking back, it was totally unfair and dehumanizing that the right to suffrage was not given easily to women, and the fact that men had it easy while women's suffrage was up to debate at that time. According to the Constitution of 1935, women were only granted the right to suffrage if and only if 300,000 women voted in its favor and fortunately, 447,725 women voted yes in the 1937 plebiscite. The Philippines was one of the countries in Asia that allowed women to vote.

In our present time, women here in the Philippines are still being seen as weak, subordinate, powerless, and incapable. Women in powerful positions are disregarded and ignored, only being heard if they say or do something that conforms to the ideas of the men. Female victims of sexual abuse being accused of causing the tragedy because "they dressed like they wanted it." Women being denied job positions fit for their skills and capabilities just because "a man could do it better". These are just some of the inequalities still present in the Philippines and these could be caused due to cultural norms that we have inherited from our ancestors.

Way back during the Spanish colonial times, women were perceived to be submissive and meek. Their roles are limited to that as a housewife that will handle all the household chores. They were expected to be the nurturing mother of their children. Also, Filipino families also preferred to have a male child than to have female ones. It only got worse during the Japanese occupation. They were being used as "comfort women" for the Japanese soldiers, seeing them as property just for the sake of pleasure. All of these discrimination have trickled down and have rotted the minds of people, most prominent in older men, and have continued the train of hate and injustice. They have grown accustomed to seeing women that way that they forget that they are still human beings like the rest of us. They too have dreams and aspirations of their own that they want to achieve. They don't want to be confined to just one role in society. Thankfully, the veil of ignorance and purposeless hatred is slowly being lifted as newer generations of Filipino men and women have learned to not be afraid of being vocal about something worth fighting for. Women have practiced to not give in to social pressure and just be who they want to be.

Throughout history, Filipina women have played a significant role in shaping the nation's social, political, and cultural aspect. Their unwavering activism has propelled the country forward, challenging gender stereotypes and advocating for equal rights and opportunities. The women's rights movement in the Philippines has been a driving force for positive change, leaving an ineradicable mark on the nation's progress.

The Philippines boasts a rich legacy of pioneering women who have dedicated their lives to the advancement of women's rights. Gabriela Silang was among the earliest advocates for women's suffrage, paving the way for women to gain the right to vote in 1937.



Gabriela Silang

Philippine postage stamp bearing the likeness of Gabriela Silang

It was stated in the Privilege Speech of Akbayan Senator Risa Hontiveros Commemorating Women's Suffrage in the Philippines (2017) that an overwhelming 90%, or 447,725 out of 500,000 women, voted in favor of women's suffrage during the special plebiscite on April 30, 1937 which was done to determine whether or not the women should have the right to vote. That is only one of the endeavors that she did back in time that contributed to the amplification of women rights advocacy in our country. Gabriela Silang also stands as a beacon of courage and defiance in Philippine history. In the 18th century, she led the Ilokano uprising against Spanish colonial rule, demonstrating exceptional bravery and strategic leadership. Her unwavering spirit and commitment to freedom made her a symbol of resistance and a source of inspiration for generations of women.

Pura Villanueva Kalaw

Photo from wilsonboy (from missology), Alex Castro, Manila Carnivals 1908-1939 A Pictorial History of the "Greatest Annual Event in the Orient"

Pura Villanueva Kalaw, another remarkable figure, made significant contributions to the advancement of women and social progress in the Philippines. Kalaw was a staunch advocate for women's suffrage, recognizing the fundamental right of women to participate equally in political life. In 1906, she established the Asociacion Feminista Ilongga, the first women's suffrage organization in the Philippines which played a crucial role in raising awareness about women's rights and mobilizing support for the suffrage movement. Moreover, she tirelessly advocated for access to quality education for girls and women, recognizing its transformative power in shaping their lives and opportunities.



Josefa Llanes Escoda

Photo Courtesy of <https://blog.ilovebdj.com/josefa-llanes-escoda/>



Josefa Llanes Escoda, a social worker and suffragette, dedicated her life to uplifting marginalized communities and empowering women. She established the Girl Scouts of the Philippines in 1940, instilling values of leadership and service in generations of young girls. The organization's legacy of leadership development, gender equality advocacy, education support, and civic engagement continues to inspire and empower generations of Filipina women to make a positive impact on their communities and the world. Escoda's unwavering commitment to social justice and women's advancement earned her the title of "Mother of Philippine Social Work."

Corazon Aquino

Photo taken in Mass in 2008 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of her husband's slaying, which sparked nonviolent uprising that toppled dictator Ferdinand Marcos and brought her to power. (Aaron Favila / Associated Press)

Former President Corazon Aquino, a democracy icon and the Philippines' first female president, became a symbol of hope and resistance during the Marcos dictatorship. Aquino actively supported legislation that to protect and advance women's rights. She signed into law the Women in Development and Nation-Building Act (1992), which mandated the integration of gender equality principles into government policies programs. This landmark legislation marked a significant step towards ensuring that women's perspectives needs were considered in all aspects of government decision-making. Furthermore, she also supported the 7877, An Act Declaring Sexual Harassment Unlawful in the Employment, Education or Training Environment and for other purposes (1995), which criminalized sexual harassment in the workplace. This provided much-needed legal protection for women against sexual harassment, which was a pervasive issue in Philippine workplaces.



There are women in recent times who highlighted the ongoing momentum of the women's rights movement in the Philippines. They proved that they could do more than what the society expected them to do, adapting to the changing landscape of the 21st century.

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Leni Robredo

Photo taken during the Comelec's presidential debate on Saturday, March 19, 2022. (VPLR Media Bureau)

Former Vice President Leni Robredo has emerged as a prominent figure in the Philippine political scene, championing social justice, inclusive governance, and women's empowerment. Her Angat Buhay program, which focuses on poverty alleviation and social development, has made a significant impact on marginalized communities. Her unwavering commitment to transparency and accountability has set an example for other leaders.

***Salvador******Mae Paner******Kara David******Joms***

Joms Salvador, Mae Paner, and Kara David are investigative journalists and social activists who have harnessed the power of online media to expose social injustices and advocate for marginalized communities. Their work has brought to light important issues such as human trafficking, labor exploitation, and environmental degradation. Their courage and determination have inspired a new generation of digital activists.

Risa Hontiveros

Photo taken from Instagram/HontiverosRisa

Senator Risa Hontiveros, a senator of the Philippines, has established herself as a staunch advocate for health, women's rights, and social justice. Hontiveros's passion for public health stems from her personal experiences as a community organizer and her belief in healthcare as a fundamental human right. She has been a vocal proponent of accessible and affordable healthcare for all Filipinos, particularly marginalized communities.

Her legislative achievements include the creation of the 105-Day Expanded Maternity Leave Law for working women, ensuring that they have adequate time to care for themselves and their newborns, and being the lead proponent of the SOGIE Equality Bill, which seeks to protect LGBTQ+ individuals from discrimination and promote their equal rights,

These remarkable women represent a small fraction of the countless Filipinas who have dedicated their lives to advancing women's rights and creating a more equitable society. Their relentless courage, determination, and firm commitment to social justice continue to inspire and empower women across generations, paving the way for a brighter future for all. The women's rights movement in the Philippines has made remarkable progress over the past decades, achieving significant milestones in advancing gender equality and empowering Filipina women. From securing the right to vote in 1937 to the election of the country's first female president, Corazon Aquino, in 1986, Filipina women have consistently demonstrated their resilience, determination, and unwavering commitment to achieving full and equal participation in all spheres of society.

Despite these notable advancements, gender inequality remains a persistent challenge in the Philippines, manifesting in various forms that continue to hinder women's progress and limit their opportunities. The gender wage gap, with women earning approximately 25% less than men for similar work, is a stark reminder of the systemic biases and discriminatory practices that perpetuate gender-based economic disparities. Women also face significant

barriers in securing employment opportunities, often encountering occupational segregation, limited access to higher-paying jobs, and societal expectations that prioritize their roles in childcare and domestic responsibilities over their professional aspirations.

Furthermore, gender-based violence remains a pervasive issue in the Philippines, with women disproportionately affected by physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. The country's alarmingly high rates of intimate partner violence and child sexual abuse underscore the urgent need for comprehensive prevention and response mechanisms, including effective law enforcement, accessible support services, and nationwide awareness campaigns to address the root causes of gender-based violence and promote gender-equitable norms.

Government policies must actively promote gender equality by dismantling discriminatory practices, enforcing protective legislation, and investing in programs that empower women economically and socially. Civil society organizations should continue to raise awareness about gender issues, mobilizing communities, and providing support services for women. Individuals must contribute to the movement by challenging gender stereotypes, advocating for women's rights in their personal and professional spheres, and supporting organizations that promote gender equality.

Only through sustained advocacy and collective action can the women's rights movement in the Philippines achieve its ultimate goal: ensuring that Filipina women enjoy full and equal participation in all aspects of society, free from discrimination and empowered to reach their full potential.

The Filipina women's movement has a long and rich history, with women playing an essential role in advocating for their rights since the pre-colonial era. Their activism has led to significant milestones, including the passage of the Magna Carta for Women in 2009, a landmark law that mandates gender equality and women's empowerment in all aspects of society.

The Philippine government has shown a strong dedication to promoting women's rights through a range of policies and initiatives. The Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) was established in 1975 to address gender discrimination and promote women's participation in different sectors of society. They implemented policies and programs to achieve these goals. In 1995, the Gender and Development (GAD) budget policy, also known as "The Women's Budget," was introduced through the General Appropriations Act (GAA). This policy provided actual resources to support the implementation of gender-focused programs and projects. Additionally, the government implemented the National Plan of Action on Women, Peace, and Security (2017-2022). This plan aimed to enhance coordination and harmonization of protection and rehabilitation initiatives for women and girls in emergency situations. These efforts demonstrate the government's commitment to promoting gender equality. These policies have played a significant role in enhancing women's representation in politics, improving access to education and healthcare, and promoting economic participation.

Looking towards the future, the prospects for women's rights in the Philippines appear promising. The unwavering spirit and determination of Filipina women, supportive government policies, and evolving societal attitudes create a fertile ground for continued progress. By addressing the remaining challenges and fostering a culture of gender equality, the Philippines can pave the way for a brighter future where Filipina women are empowered, respected, and fully participating in all aspects of society. Achieving full gender equality is not just a matter of justice and fairness; it is also a momentous step towards unlocking the full potential of the Philippines and achieving sustainable development for all.

The fight for women's rights in the Philippines has been a long and arduous one, marked by both significant progress and persistent challenges. Since the granting of suffrage in 1937, Filipina women have tirelessly fought against patriarchal structures, misogyny, and discriminatory practices. While strides have been made, deeply ingrained cultural norms and gender-based violence continue to impair full equality.

Throughout history, influential women like Gabriela Silang, Pura Villanueva Kalaw, and former president Corazon Aquino have paved the way for progress through legislative documents, social initiatives, and cultural shifts. Contemporary figures like Leni Robredo and Risa Hontiveros continue to champion the cause, inspiring the next generation to build a future where Filipina women are empowered, respected, and fully participating in all aspects of society.

From the hard-won right to vote in 1937 to the growing chorus of Filipina voices shaping policy in the halls of power, the women's rights movement in the Philippines has carved a remarkable path of progress, despite persisting challenges. This journey, paved by the unwavering determination of countless women, has yielded significant achievements, including the establishment of the Philippine Commission on Women, the passage of the Magna Carta for Women, and the implementation of the Gender Development (GAD) budget policy.

In the hallowed halls of the Philippine Senate, 25 Filipina voices now rise, a testament to the tireless struggle for equality. In the bustling House of Representatives, 81 women stand tall, their presence echoing the unwavering determination of generations past. This surge of female representation, a symbol of the movement's enduring impact on political participation, is not simply a statistic, but a powerful testament to the resilience and courage of Filipina women who have shattered glass ceilings and paved the way for a more inclusive future.

Despite these significant milestones, the journey towards full gender equality in the Philippines is far from over. The persistent echoes of the gender wage gap, occupational segregation, and alarming rates of gender-based violence necessitate continued action and unwavering commitment. Overcoming these challenges requires a multifaceted approach: powerful advocacy to amplify women's voices, robust policies promoting equal opportunities and protecting their rights, and a shift towards a culture that embraces gender equity through education and community engagement.

The future holds immense promise, fueled by the Filipina spirit of resilience and determination, supportive policies, and evolving societal attitudes. By tackling remaining challenges and actively nurturing gender equality, the Philippines can create a brighter future where Filipina women are empowered, respected, and actively shaping a just and equitable society. Achieving this is not just about justice and fairness, but a strategic investment in the nation's future, unlocking its full potential and propelling sustainable development for all.

As one, they stepped forward, their resolve solidified by a shared purpose. Their journey would be long, but their spirits remained bright, fueled by the unwavering Filipina flame that burned within them. With every stride, they illuminated the path towards a future where equality was not merely a dream, but a tangible reality. A future where the full potential of all women, regardless of background or circumstance, is not just recognized, but unleashed to its fullest. Their voices, once fragmented, now resonated in unison, a powerful melody urging the world to embrace the dawn of a new era – an era where the Filipina flame would shine brighter than ever before.