

Primary Source:

Malabanan, Tarcila. 1916. "The Filipina Woman from the Public Schools." *The Philippine Review (Revista Filipina)* 1 (3): 76–78.

In the March 1916 issue of the *Philippine Review (Revista Filipina)*, Tarcila Malabanan's "The Filipina Woman from the Public Schools" was published which detailed a Filipina's sentiments on co-education, Americanization, marriage, and womanliness. It was one of the goals of the *Review* that year, which began in their February issue, to publish pictures and literary contributions of Filipina women to give recognition to them—to "their mentality and possibilities." A graduate of the University of the Philippines with a Bachelor of Arts degree, Malabanan, who herself experienced public education, emphasized in her article the evolving mindset, expanding abilities, and ongoing challenges encountered by her fellow Filipina women who were also products of public education.¹

Coming from the decades-long education system ran by the Spaniards, it caused a divide amongst Filipinos on where they will send their daughters for education when the Americans introduced public schools: "Should the Filipina woman continue to receive education in convents and other private schools, or should she be educated alongside her brother in public schools?"² Filipino parents and even students were ridden with anxiety with the idea of co-education. The effects of a religious and patriarchal system of education, deeply ingrained in the gears of long-standing social inequality, are evident and pervasive in the country.

Malabanan emphasized the significant impact of a woman's education in a public school, going beyond mere learning and book knowledge. The young Filipina woman has regular interactions with young men from her educational background, enabling her to relate to them as peers and equals, rather than being scared by them or adopting a conventional facade of timidity and deceit towards them. She has the opportunity to have a deeper understanding of men's traits and peculiarities from a thoughtful perspective. Public education has a profound impact on shaping her

¹ Tarcila Malabanan, "The Filipina Woman from the Public Schools," *The Philippine Review* 1, no.3 (1916):76

² Ibid.

mindset, instilling in her the understanding that she has the inherent right to think freely, express her thoughts openly, take independent actions, and explore new and unconventional ideas. Such interactions and character development are crucial, as Malabanan emphasized, particularly when considering the number of marriages that have been arranged solely based on sentimentality and little to no familiarity.

Malabanan noted that since public schools were introduced and women were allowed to take higher courses, the marriage age has increased, reducing the rate of early marriages. A young woman who is determined to finish her course does not consider marriage until afterward. If she is well-educated, she will likely choose someone with at least as much education as she does, someone she can understand and who she can be, not just a wife, but also a friend and companion. Her public education has also empowered her to be economically independent, allowing her to rely on herself rather than feeling the need to marry for financial support.

Some people also criticized the open-mindedness towards new ideas displayed by Filipina women from public schools, claiming that they are being Americanized. Malabanan questioned the double standards on women. The government's efforts to transform the Philippines into a modern and forward-thinking nation are highly praised and backed by the Filipino population. So, why is it that there are still many who desire and strive to maintain the Filipina woman in an educational and training environment reminiscent of the medieval era. "Why should not women embrace modernity as well?" ³

Another point touched is Filipino woman's womanliness. The young woman studying in the public schools has frequently faced criticism for not conforming to traditional gender expectations. So Malabanan queried, "What is womanliness?" "Is it the combination of traits innate in the sex?"⁴ Is it a set of societal expectations that women are encouraged to follow due to the influence of their predecessors? If we embrace the latter perspective, Malabanan argues that the concept of womanliness

³ Tarcila Malabanan, "The Filipina Woman from the Public Schools," 77.

⁴ Ibid.

then becomes subjective and its interpretation evolves alongside the progression of society.

To claim that public school women have lost their true womanliness due to her education and love of learning is absurd. Malabanan declares that her extensive education has helped her recognize her true calling and mission in life. She says that a woman's true sphere can indeed be the house—but it should be a home with a warm and intellectually stimulating environment that fosters deep connections and love.

Malabanan's article is a heartfelt tribute to both the women of her time and the present generation of Filipina women who continue to face societal expectations and unfair judgments regarding their roles. She wrote the piece during the time when the society has started viewing the Filipina not just the “mistress of her house,” a woman restricted to her household with no other companionship other than her family,”⁵ but as an individual of her own, capable of dreaming a life that is beyond the conventions built by the Spanish period. Other authors⁶, particularly those from The Philippine Review, share a similar viewpoint, asserting that women have a strong desire for education and should have access to a wide range of training opportunities that align with their abilities. Overall, this article showcases the growing voice of Filipina women, advocating not only for expanded educational opportunities but also for a greater role in society.

⁵ C.F. Calderon, “The Filipina Woman,” *The Philippine Review* 1, no.3 (1916):71.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 70-72.

Sources:

Calderon, C.F. 1916. "The Filipina Woman." *The Philippine Review (Revista Filipina)* 1 (3): 70–72.

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Pictures of Primary Source:



Miss TÁRCILA MALABANAN
of Lipa, Batangas.

A. B., of the University of the Philippines, now taking A. M. "The Filipina Woman from the Public Schools" is her notable contribution for this month. Filipina girls, particularly in their unique, dainty costumes, as in this picture, are rather unknown abroad. It is the purpose of the REVIEW, as outlined in the January issue, to secure for them a place in the world womanhood, and, accordingly, we are, beginning with the February issue, publishing some of their pictures, as well as their literary contributions, exclusively written for the REVIEW, thus giving, at the same time, a quite complete idea about them, their mentality and possibilities.

B. A. por la Universidad de Filipinas, hoy está cursando el M. A. Su artículo "La Filipina educada en las escuelas públicas" que en este número aparece, lo debemos a su pluma. Casi son desconocidas en el extranjero las hijas de este país, especialmente en su traje, tan elegante como único en el mundo. Es el propósito de THE PHILIPPINE REVIEW, como lo ha expuesto en el número de Enero, conquistar para ellas un asiento entre las mujeres cultas del mundo. Para esto, desde el número de Febrero, venimos publicando algunos de sus retratos y producciones literarias, exclusivamente escritas para esta Revista, dando así, al propio tiempo, una idea más aproximada de ellas y de su mentalidad.

The Filipina Woman from the Public Schools

TÁRCILA MALABANAN, A. B.

IN the past, all writers who have attempted to make a relatively comprehensive survey of Philippine conditions always had a word or two to say on the enviable position which woman in the Philippines has for centuries enjoyed. But they usually limited their comments to a word or two. It is only recently, very recently, that the subject of woman has become a question; and today it is recognized as a question of primary importance—one which in its complexity presents phases that call for the greatest consideration. Not the least important of these phases is the subject of education. This subject, always a hard one for any country to solve, is especially hard to settle in the Philippines, where, because of its peculiar history, discordant if not diametrically opposed influences are brought to bear on almost every topic under discussion. Should the Filipina woman continue being educated in the convents and other private schools, or should she be educated in the public schools with her brother, as the present government has instituted? The citizens of the country have shown their preference for the one policy or the other by sending their daughters to this or that institution.

Thus we find the Filipina young woman divided as regards their education. But the young woman studying in the public schools finds herself in a more difficult position than her sisters in the convents and other private schools. All know more or less what those girls educated under the old system turn out to be; but many wonder what the young woman studying in the public schools will finally become. Co-education is a new idea in the Philippines, and co-education through high school and university forms a real problem on which mature minds ponder with anxious concentration.

Many watch the Filipina woman in the public schools with suspicion; others regard her with a curiosity that is not always kind. It is a noticeable fact that this attitude is found not only among men of the old generation but also among those of the younger generation, even among men nurtured in modern co-educational institutions, who, though heartily approving of individual young women from the public schools, still are doubtful of the effect of the system as a whole. But as doubt and suspicion are often only the effects of a lack of perfect understanding, a study of the woman educated in the public schools, an analysis of her thoughts, ideas, and propensities, and her general attitude toward life may be sufficient to put her in a clearer light, and thus do away with many of the prejudices against her.

We shall take as a type in our discussion a young woman, who, after completing the primary and intermediate courses, finishes the secondary studies in a high school or the Philippine Normal School. A person who has finished the secondary course as outlined by the bureau of education may be considered fairly well-informed, and a young woman with a high school diploma may lay claim to the possession of book knowledge which not all men of her acquaintance can boast of. She can discuss with intelligence things connected with her studies, and has some opinions to give on various every-day questions and problems. But more important than the book learning she has acquired is the effect on her character and on her opinions and ideas of the daily contact with young men with whom she had been educated. From this daily association she has learned to meet men who are not her immediate relatives, on a basis other than the sentimental. She has learned to treat them as

companions, friends, and equals, and not as dangerous beings, before whom she should assume a conventional pose of shyness and dissimulation. Her attitude towards man is more frank and sincere than heretofore: she exchanges ideas and opinions freely with him and has learned to understand his point of view. For in her association with him in school, she has learned to know him better, to gauge his character, and to view his traits and peculiarities from the proper perspective. Such is an experience that can not be overvalued when we think of how many marriages have been arranged simply on the sentimental basis and on very little or no real acquaintance.

Her education and the influences that surrounded her in acquiring it, the influence of her teachers and of her boy-classmates have done a great deal in shaping her point of view and have taught her to look at things in a broad-minded and tolerant spirit. She extends this tolerant spirit to include herself, so that she feels she has a right to freedom of thought, freedom of speech, and freedom of action, to a certain extent. She feels that she does not have to do only what has been sanctioned by time-honored conventions, but also some things which, though new or unusual, are perfectly right and moral.

This tolerant attitude towards innovations has caused the Filipina woman from the public schools to be charged with being "Americanized." Just what is meant by being Americanized is a question that has not yet been decided. If by being Americanized is meant that the Filipina woman is being gradually modified by modern influences current the world over, then it is well for her to undergo the process of Americanization. Why should not the woman be modern and keep pace with her countrymen and her country? No Filipino would like to see the Philippines behind other countries in commerce, in industry, in intellect, and in education. Every Filipino applauds and supports all efforts of the government to make the Philippines as enlightened and progressive as any other country in the world. And

yet, strange to say, many expect and wish and work to keep the Filipina woman in the semi-medieval atmosphere of education and training that surrounded her up to the end of the nineteenth century. A strange thing it would be for a country to have half of its citizens modern and half medieval! How can these two halves understand each other? How can they work together in harmony for the common good, the common uplift, if between the intellectual development of the two yawns the gulf of centuries?

Now, if, by being Americanized, people mean that the Filipina woman educated in the public schools has dropped off altogether her individuality as a Filipina, so that she now thinks and acts as an American woman, then decidedly she is not Americanized and never can be. Each race possesses certain inherent qualities and temperamental characteristics which may be modified by the education, the training, and the civilization of another race in contact with it, but which can not be destroyed or eradicated. That the Filipina woman, with her oriental temperament modified by Latin culture and inherited Latin influences, will become completely Anglo-Saxon, is impossible of belief. She has been modified, greatly modified, we may concede, by Anglo-Saxon culture and education, but her distinctive individuality persists and will always persist.

The young woman studying in the public schools has often had another charge laid at her door. She has often been accused of being unwomanly, or less womanly, than her sisters. Playing tennis, basketball, indoor base-ball; treating men frankly; openly devoting herself to books—all these evidences of a so-called revolting prepossession for changes apparently hyperprogressive, are perhaps responsible for the lodging of this sad complaint. But again we have to arrive at a definition. What is womanliness? Is it the combination of traits innate in the sex? If so, then all Filipina women are womanly. Or, do some people understand by womanliness a line of conduct that society expects women to pursue because women who have

gone before them have been guided by it? If we accept this latter definition, then womanliness is a relative term and its meaning changes as civilization changes. Being womanly in the twentieth century is different from being womanly in the fifteenth or the tenth. In the childhood of the race, doubtless, it was womanly for the wife to build the shelter, hoe the garden, and plant the corn, while the men hunted and made war. If, later on, man found that instead of making war continuously he could stay at home, build his shelter, and hoe the garden for woman, so that only to cook and do other household work was womanly, why should it not be womanly in the twentieth century to get a diploma and play tennis and basketball?

Now that we are better acquainted with the woman studying in the public schools and know something of her education, her ideas, and her opinions, it may not be amiss to talk of her attitude toward life. Her philosophy is just an expression of her composite make-up. With a little of oriental fatalism are mixed Latin idealism and Anglo-Saxon practicality. These forces, then, all have their part in determining her actions, sometimes one or the other getting the upper hand and impelling her one way or the other.

But as no discussion of a woman's philosophy of life is complete without an incursion into her views on marriage, it is necessary for us here to study the attitude of the Filipina woman from the public schools towards this question of momentous import in every woman's life. Many charge her with indifference to marriage. It is an undeniable fact that, since the introduction of public schools, and since women were allowed to take higher courses, the usual marriage age has been raised, so that now a lesser number of women

marry early. There are a number of reasons for this alteration. In the first place, a woman who is bent on finishing some course of study, does not think seriously of the question of marriage till after she has finished the course. In the second place, if she is broadly educated, she would very likely try to choose one who has had at least as much education as she has had, one whom she would be able to understand, one to whom she could be not only a sweetheart and a wife but also a friend and a companion. In the third place, her education has enabled her to become independent economically, so that she does not feel the need of marrying to be supported. All these things have contrived to lessen the number of early marriages among girls who have completed higher courses in the public schools; and will probably lead some to remain single throughout their lives. But to say that education, love of learning, or desire for fame through the obtaining of diplomas and degrees, has stifled within the woman studying in the public schools all true womanly instincts, is false and merits immediate denial. Her broad education has made her perhaps realize better what her real sphere is, and what her mission in the world is predestined to be. But she is careful not to mistake the shadow for the substance, and not to make an error in her choice through her haste in trying to realize her ideals. She knows that woman's true sphere is the home, but then she will not admit any definition of the word except the highest. She aspires to possess a home where not cold luxury reigns, but a home cozy because of its permanent atmosphere of intellectual harmony and spiritual companionship, the indispensable elements of the highest form of love.