



MALALA YOUSAFZAI'S VOICE FOR GIRLS' EDUCATION THROUGHOUT PAKISTAN IN PARTICULAR AND WORLD IN GENERAL: A STUDY OF HER AUTOBIOGRAPHY

BABLU KARAN

M. Ed Student (2017-19)

Department of Education

Vinaya Bhavana,

Visva-Bharati (A Central University of National Importance)

Santiniketan, (WB) INDIA

ABSTRACT

This paper, Malala Yousafzai's voice for girls' education throughout Pakistan in particular and World in general: A Study of her Autobiography, explains how a teenage girl from Muslim world fights against prejudice of Islam, for every woman's right to go to school even under the repeated threat of Taliban's attack. At the same time it sets a foundation to explore the lives and struggle of Pashtun people to address the root causes of war in Malala's land. It also highlights Malala's struggle against the worst form of violence, by establishing herself as a global symbol of peaceful protest, in favor of girls' education throughout the world which almost cost her own life. This present study describes how the power of education, by the hand of one girl, brings certain change in the world and proves that education is the only tool to transform lives, communities and societies through offering health and hope, options and opportunities.

Keywords: Malala and Education, Violence and Taliban, Voice and Marginalization.

INTRODUCTION

I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban is the full title of the autobiography of a Pashtun Muslim girl, Malala Yousafzai, who lives in a remote place of Swat Valley in Pakistan. This is a real story is about her struggle to get herself educated as well as to iconize her education for the fellow girls from the valley. She tries to expose the worst condition of the girls in the Muslim World in general and Pakistan in

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particular, where even they are not allowed to move outside their house without wearing Burqua. In the present autobiography, she boldly expressed her views on different conditions-regional, social, political, religious, educational etc. like an adventurer.

ANALYSIS

She begins her autobiography with; "I come from a country which was created at midnight. When I almost died it was just after midday." (Yousafzai, P.1) It is clear that as a regular autobiography, *I Am Malala* is also written with flash-back method. She was assassinated by a Taliban terrorist on her way back from school and griping the point she begins to tell her story of struggle, "When I was born, people in our village commiserated with my mother and nobody congratulated my father", (9) and associated her social status with her birth. She reinforces, "For most Pashtun it's gloomy day when a daughter is born" (9), but her father is liberal in his viewpoint for woman and accepts her willingly. He even names her after the greatest heroine of Afghanistan, Malala of Maiwand. Malala was admitted in the school and she had a chance to recite Gandhi, Jinnah, Lincoln etc. which proved to be a great influence on her. She frankly admits; "I am inspired by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the man who some call the Frontier Gandhi, who introduced a non-violent philosophy to our culture." (60)

Malala's main concern is education and naturally assigned to her religion Islam, for which she was assassinated by Taliban. She is wonderstruck by the attitude of Taliban for education. Taliban claim them to be true preacher and interpreter of Holy Quran. She challenges:

"the Quran teaches us saber-patience but often if feels that we have forgotten the word and think Islam means women sitting at home in purdah or wearing burqas while men do Jihad"(75).

She accuses that "Mullah often misinterpret the Quran and Hadith when they teach them in our country as few people understand the original Arabic"(92). Taliban was blowing up schools after schools but she had enough courageous to defend and appeals; "they cannot stop me. I will get my education if it's home, school or somewhere else. This is our request to the world-to save our schools, save our Pakistan, save our Swat"(135). In collaboration with BBC, she started to write blogs to protest the growing influence of Taliban in Swat Valley. She wrote under disguised name Gul Makai means Corn Flower. As Gul Makai, she writes:

"Education is our right, I said. Just as it is our right to sing. Islam has given us this right and says that every girl and boy should go to school. The Quran says we should seek knowledge, study hard and learn the mysteries of our world." (129)

She rejects the Taliban's claim that education will westernize girls like her and take them away from Islam. She claims "Education is education. We should learn everything and then



choose which path to follow. Education is neither eastern nor western, it is human” (136). With earthquake, flood and Taliban nightmare, her school shacked from bottom, but Malala stood firm. She is very optimistic and affirmative. She gives the clear argument about the Quran. “In the Quran it is written, God wants us to have knowledge. He wants us to know why the sky is blue and about oceans and stars”(263). She frankly discloses her ambition, “one day I will be a politician and do these things myself”(180).

It was 2008 and the Taliban begins blowing up schools - mostly girl’s schools almost every day. Malala is eleven and is interviewed on several TV channels. She speaks out for girl’s right to go to school. In a BBC interview in Urdu, she voices, “How dare the Taliban take away my right to education?” (BBC) Things go from bad to worse. The Taliban announced that all schools for girls are to be closed. From 15 January 2009 no girl in the Swat Valley would be permitted to attend school. At first Malala thinks it can’t be possible. How could the Taliban stop her and her friends from going to school? But Malala also protested against this Taliban by firmly stating:

“Who is this man to say this? The Taliban are not our rulers. It’s my life, how I live it is my choice”(263).

This widespread protests cause the Taliban to change their minds and allow girls up to the age of ten to attend school. Malala and her friends, who are too old to be allowed, got to school in their normal clothes, hiding their school books under their shawls. The girl’s head teacher calls it the “secrete school”(139).

In January 2012, Malala travels to the big city of Karachi with her family. The provincial authorities have decided to name a school after Malala. She holds a speech for all the politicians, saying, “we must work together for girl’s rights.” (ibid) In her book, Malala talks about sitting on the beach in Karachi and thinking about what life is like for girls and women in her country. “We want to be able to make our own decisions and be free to go to school or work. Nowhere in the Koran does it say that a woman should be dependent on a man or have to listen to a man” (53), she thinks to herself.

On the morning of October, 2012, Malala Yousafzai was shot by the Taliban in school bus heading home from school with her friends. On this morning, however, a member of the Taliban boarded the bus, asked for Malala by name and fired three shots at her. One of the bullets entered her forehead, traveled beneath her face and lodged firmly in her shoulder. That same day, she was flown out of Pakistan to an intensive care unit in England. It has been too dangerous for her to return to her home country ever since.

Malala was targeted by the Taliban because of her controversial role in Pakistan Politics. From the young age, Malala has advocated rights to education, especially for girls. In 2009, when Malala was only eleven years old, she began publishing an anonymous blog for the

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British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) detailing her daily fears and struggles of living in a country dominated by the Taliban. Today, she continues to challenge the institutionalized oppression of women in her country. When she received the Nobel Peace Prize, she only talks about women's right for education. She says:

"I don't want to be thought of as the girl who was shot by the Taliban but the girl who fought for education. This is the cause to which I want to devote my life." (261)

Malala's story is significant because she is an international model of courageous resistance. She voluntarily and consciously endangered her life in order to make education a possibility and a reality for girls in her country. She always inspires the girls who gave up their education because of Taliban and Islamic rules. She voices:

"Let us pick up our books and our pens, I said. They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one Teacher, one book and one pen change the World." (262)

Moreover, Malala's shooting caused a wave of international outrage and concern. It led to greater awareness of the human rights abuses in Pakistan and prompted international education institutions to pay more attention of the educational status in Pakistan. Currently residing in Birmingham England, Malala is an active proponent of education as a fundamental social and economic right. The world needs more individuals like malala with the audacity to confront institutionalized systems of oppression. In light of this need, she stood up against the political and social institutions create by the Taliban in Pakistan.

In the presence of many passive bystanders, Malala is admirable for her resistance to the Taliban's unjust ordinances. She describes how Maulana, Fazlullah, leader of Pakistani Taliban, gained power through increasing levels of hostilities and violence. Even though Fazlullah rescinded many rights of the Pakistani people, he was met with little resistance. Malala says:

"It was as though everyone were in a trance. My father said people had been seduced by Fazlullah. Some joined his men, thinking they would have better lives. Some came up to him and whispered, don't speak any more in this way it's risky. Meanwhile Pakistani, authorities, like most people, did nothing." (Ibid)

Sadly, many people refrain from action because of the fear of persecution. In spite of difficult life conditions and fear of impending consequences, Malala spoke up and broke the cycle of silence.

"There cannot be two kings in one land. Who is in charge the government or Fazullah?"(143).



Her steps remind us that individuals are capable of putting pressure to authorities to start respecting human rights. Her pre-conditions, context, and network allowed her to resist Maulana Fazlullah and the Pakistani Taliban. She says; “they can stop us going to school, but they can’t stop us learning” (47).

Malala’s father valued education, including education for women. Malala learned the value of resistance from her father, who encouraged her to be vocal about the unjust educational system in Pakistan and to accept responsibility for instituting change. In addition to her father, the community in which Malala was born shaped her views on education. Malala is born in the Swat Valley, which once took pride in being called the Switzerland of Pakistan (11). Adnan Aurangzed, says; “it would have been unusual anywhere else in the North West Frontier at that time, but in Swat girls were going to school”(Ibid). The influence that Malala’s father and the Swat community had on Malala were instrumental for her to put education as a priority.

Women in Swat Valley understand that education gives them more options. Part of the reason for this drive to succeed is that only white collar professional jobs will allow these girls a life outside their homes. While poorly educated boys can hope to find jobs as unskilled workers, the female counterparts will find their earning power restricted to what they can do within the four walls of their home. She gives a common example:

“For my brothers it was easy to think about the future. Said Malala-they can be anything they want. But for me it was hard and for that reason I wanted to become educated and empower myself with knowledge.”(141)

Malala understood that if she were not to be educated, her only option would be to find a husband and spend her life managing house. That is why she was Encouraged to resist. “I wanted to speak up for my rights”, she says, “And also I didn’t want my future to be just sitting in a room and be imprisoned in my four walls and just cooking and giving birth to children. I didn’t want to see my life in that way” (BBC). However, the insurance of the Taliban in Pakistan continues to challenge Malala’s dream and enforce their extremist views upon her and other women in Pakistan. The deep roots of the Taliban in Pakistan and its ideology used to oppress women’s education create a political and social context in which Malala must reassert her commitment to her right to education in order to actualize her hopes for the future.

“I believe that female teachers should educate girls....but first, we need to educate our girls so that they can become teachers!” (118)

Malala saw the Taliban shut schools down throughout Pakistan. In 2013 government authorities in north western Pakistan reported that the Taliban had attacked more than 800 girl’s schools since 2009. The Taliban believes that; “girl’s education is a symbol of Eastern

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decadence and government authority”(Ibid). After shooting Malala, the Taliban issued a statement that;

“Malala has been targeted because of her pioneer role in preaching secularism.....she was young but she was promoting western culture in Pashtun areas. She was pro West; she was speaking against the Taliban; she was calling President Obama her idol.”(216)

The Taliban saw Malala and her western thinking as a threat to Pakistan nationalism and Islamic ideology. The Pakistani Taliban preaches to parents that girl’s education is unIslamic and encourages them to reject education in order to reaffirm their commitment to Islam. Within this repressive political environment, Malala has experienced the extensive injustices and she hopes to dismantle in her goal to secure women’s rights to education; “the Taliban could take our pens and books, but they couldn’t stop our minds from thinking”(122).

Malala advocates for girl’s education because Pakistan has despairingly fewer educational opportunities for girls. She describes; “As we crossed the Malakand Pass, I saw a young girl selling oranges. She was scratching marks on a piece of paper with a pencil she had to account for the oranges she had sold, as she could not read or write. I took a photo of her and vowed I would do everything in my power to help educate girls just like her. This was the war I was going to fight”(217). This dismal education status in Pakistan is perpetuated by numerous social and economic factors, namely poverty, religious, fundamentalism gender discrimination and governmental mismanagement.

Religious fundamental has a huge impact on Pakistan’s educational status, especially among girls. Many antifeminist religious leaders justify women’s oppression in the name of Islam. People thus tend to hold the view that Islam restricts women to the four walls of the home. Extant customs and traditions advocated by religious clergy lead to family restrictions that often hold girls back from attending schools. However, societal customs and traditions that restrict women’s rights, including the right to education have overshadowed the fundamental teachings of Islam; “Girl should not be going to school, he continued. A girl is so sacred she should be in purdah, and so private that there is no lady’s name in the Quran as God doesn’t want her to be named” (77).

In addition to a restrictive political and social context that incites acts against Malala to oppression of women’s education, she has had access to a network of political role models and leaders in her life that have inspired her to become a courageous resistor. Benazir Bhutto, the first female prime minister in the Islamic world, is an example of a woman who gave Malala hope for her country and inspiration of her own life in politics. She stated;

“It was because of Benazir that girls like me could think of speaking out and becoming politicians. She was our role model. She symbolized the end of dictatorship

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and the beginning of democracy, as well as sending a message of hope and strength to the rest of the world.” (129).

Many Pakistanis, such as Malala, look to Bhutto for guidance. When Benazir was elected to be prime minister, Malala said, “Suddenly there was a lot of optimism about the future”(Ibid 44). When Benazir was assassinated, Malala said, it felt as if my country was running out of hope (Ibid 133). Benazir was one woman who had a widespread impact on the attitudes of many Pakistanis. Her role in politics gave Malala the inspiration and political framework necessary for implementing change.

Malala’s father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, also had a significant influence into her motivations to become a social and political activist. Malala receives encouragement, guidance, and inspiration from her father. It seemed natural for her to assume the role of a BBC, blogger because, she explains, “they want to interview a small girl, but the girls are scared, and even if they’re not, their parents won’t allow it. I have father who isn’t scared, who stands by me. He said, you are a child and it’s your right to speak”(141).

After watching and admiring political leaders such as her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai and the former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, Malala gained inspiration to become a political leader herself and inspire others. Now everyone knows who she is and is aware of her attack. Many also know that the reason for the attack was that Malala and her family had long been known as fighters for educational rights. Malala says; “When people talks about the way I was shot and what happened I think it’s the story of Malala, a girl shot the Taliban, I don’t feel it’s a story about me at all”(255).

As a result of the shooting, however, Malala’s fame has grown, which has created negative reputation among some people of Swat. Some even question whether the event was related to Malala’s fight for education at all. But malala states, “I always prayed to God, I want to help people and please help me to do this” (254). Many advocates of women’s rights in education wish that Malala would return to her home and be more active with the people there. In an interview with Jon Stewart, Malala herself says that her ideal would be to return to the home she considers her paradise. Despite the violence and continued threats, she hopes to someday return to the home country she was forced to leave behind:

“To see each and every human being with a smile of happiness is my wish. I am Malala. My world has changed but I have not.” (265)

CONCLUSION

Pakistan experienced a continuum of destruction as human rights were continually denied with the insurgence of the Taliban in the region. The Taliban oppressed the women through laws governing the clothes they could wear, music they could listen to, places they could go

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and things they could do. In addition, women were expected to be fully submissive to and subservient to men. In a long history of oppression, Malala consider the denial of education for young girls as the final straw which demanded opposition. As human rights abuses were occurring in Pakistan, Malala makes the courageous decision to take a stand. Growing up in a town that valued the education, receiving support from her family, an inspiration from Benazir Bhutto, Malala was predisposed to help. She used the positive influences in her life, namely the preconditions of being raised in a more liberal community and in her network of activist role in political and social contexts. Malala identified the denial of education as a fundamental problem and she identified herself as responsible for change and reminds the world that small acts can have a significant impact and every person has the capacity to implement change.

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