

**LIFE SPARKS OUT OF DEATH: A STUDY OF THE PEACEFUL PROTEST IN THE
BOOK *I AM MALALA***

Sushmita Bohara
Research Scholar
Department of English,
University of Rajasthan,
Rajasthan

Abstract

Right to education is a fundamental right of every human being. A person can live one's life in his/her own way, with education and knowledge, the life that one deserves. More than that, an educated girl can light lamps of knowledge in lives of many other people. She, in form of a daughter, mother, sister or wife, creates and affects other lives.

It was a very cruel and immoral step against human rights when the Taliban, at times, banned girls from attending school in Swat Valley and places near to that. Malala Yousafzai, who belongs to that region, at the very tender age of 15, fought for right to education for young women. The book *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by Taliban* is a remarkable tale of Malala told by herself with Christina Lamb.

This paper is a deliberate effort to throw light upon Taliban movement and its role. The paper also tries to examine the situation of women under Taliban's rule. How insensitively Taliban responded to the issues related to women and banned girls from going school. This paper also highlights the individual and revolutionary efforts of young girl Malala who fought for girls' education on the stake of her own life. Her life journey, very short yet, is truly a great inspiration.

“One day a maulana called Sufi Mohammad came to the village and asked young man to join him to fight Russian in the name of Islam. Many did, and they set off, armed with old rifles or just axes and bazookas. Little did we know that years later the same maulana's organisation would become the Swat Taliban?” This is what Malala's father told her about Taliban. Another stone in the foundation of Taliban was Pakistan's biggest intelligence service which belongs to military and is called ISI (Inter-services intelligence). It started some training programme for Afgan refugees recruited from resistance camps or Mujahiddin. This training programme in some or the other way, as Malala tells, initiated the formation of Taliban in Pakistan. Taliban in a very short time period started to rule over the Swat valley where Malala lived. People were under

Taliban's terror firstly because speaking against it meant death punishment and secondly the Taliban always used the name of Islam to force its laws and orders on people.

The 2012 annual report from the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan details many challenges women there face, including being “attacked and killed on account of asserting their rights to education, work and generally for choosing to have a say in key decision in their lives.”² During this kind of scenario Malala Yousafzai, at the very tender age of 16, is celebrated as a powerful education and women rights activist from Pakistan's Swat valley. Malala Yousafzai was a Pakistani school pupil and a lower middle class girl who fought for education on the stake of her life at times when Taliban banned girls from going schools. Malala's name was inspired by a brave lady in history of Pashto community who was killed under fire but her courage, words and actions inspired the men to turn the battle around. Literal meaning of her name is ‘grief stricken.’ both of the meanings of her name got reflected in her life. Malala says that “the year before I was born a group called the Taliban led by a one eyed mullah had taken over the country and was burning girls; schools.” By 2007 Swat valley lost its autonomy and safety as Taliban militant began to spread. Later, elections bought Mullah Government to power. The Mutlahija Majlise-Amal (MMA) alliance was a great group of five religious parties. They publically used to appeal people to join them and serve Islam. There were messages on buildings with chalk. CONTACT US FOR JIHAD TRAINING and contact numbers. They also wanted to remove all the traces of women from public life. Within 5 years the insurgent extremist of Taliban had burnt more than 400 schools.

Yousafzai was educated in large part by her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, who is a poet, school owner and an educational activist himself, running a chain of schools known as the Khushal Public Schools. He was also forced to close his school and Malala and her brothers with other girls from valley were bound to stay at home. When we read her life story in the book *I Am Malala* written by Malala with Christina Lamb there arises a question that when the terror prevailed in the entire valley, a time when no one had the freedom to live his/her own life fearlessly, why was it that only Malala raised her voice even after many death threats? What inside her made her to fight for right to education for girls? Was it so that she belonged to an influential family that she got inspiration to move on a path full of thorns?

Malala was born in a community where birth of a daughter was considered an ill omen. It was only her father who was very happy on Malala's birth and always considered Malala as a treasure of his life. From the early childhood her father was her falcon: who inspired her to fight for liberty, freedom and victory. (She was motivated by her father to go to school and have good education.) Her father always provided examples of inspirational personalities like Mahatma Gandhi, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan. He used to quote Abraham Lincon what Lincon wrote to his child's teacher “teach him it is far more honourable to fail than to cheat.” That's how Malala could understand the value of quality education in a person's life. Along with the school education her father also motivated his children to have faith in Islam and love for humanity. He said about fatwa on Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses “is Islam such a weak religion that it cannot tolerate a book written against it? Not my Islam.” This made Malala to understand what it means to have faith in Islam. She could have the insight to understand fake connections and promises of Taliban with Islam. Malala as a child had experienced the zeal and courage of her father and learned how to fight to turn things when they are not moving right. Her father would say “any organisation which works for peace, I'll join. If you want to resolve a dispute or come out from conflict, the very first thing is to speak the truth. You must speak the truth. The truth will abolish fear.” And the words which gave Malala the courage to stand apart

in her community and raise her voice were “I will protect your freedom Malala, carry on with your dreams.” This unconditional love and faith of her father was the source of energy to Malala. She says in an interview “in my heart was the belief that God will protect me. If I am speaking for my rights, for the rights of girls, I am not doing anything wrong. It’s my duty to do so.” She went door to door like a preacher of education.

One man from the community came to Malala’s home and said to her father “I am representing good Muslim and we all think your girls’ school is haram and a blasphemy. You should close it. A girl is so sacred that she should be in purdah, and so private that there is no lady’s name in Quran as God doesn’t want her to be named.” Except this some more illogical behaviour of the Pashtun community used to disturb her a lot as marrying young girls to a person much elder to them. No focus on girl’s education, giving girls away to resolve a feud were among the things she was much concerned about. When Taliban talked about women and their limits in society many of the people in valley agreed. They think this means women don’t want to obey their fathers, brothers or husbands. But it does not mean that. It means women want to make decisions for them. They want to be free to go to school and to work. Malala says “we Pashtuns love shoes but don’t love the cobbler; we love our scarves and blankets but do not respect the weaver. Manual workers made a great contribution to our society but received no recognition, and this is the reason so many of them joined the Taliban to finally achieve status and power.” this is true about every community in the world. Partiality, marginalisation and lack of fundamental rights force human beings to involve in any kind of activity to have at least some power and identity.

Taliban destroyed history and its traces; it became enemy of fine arts and culture. They destroyed everything old and brought nothing new except violence and terror. Later there was an agreement inside the organisation and Taliban formed a united front under the banner of Tehrik-e-Taliban, Taliban-Pakistan and claimed to have more than 40000 fighters. Taliban even stopped health workers giving polio drops, saying the vaccination were an American plot to make Muslim women infertile. This MMA government banned cds dvds and other sources of entertainment and media.

Again there was a threat to Malala’s father “you teach girls and have a uniform that is unislamic. Stop this or you will be in trouble.” When Malala used to see her father sad and when she herself was deprived from school, being a child her thoughts ran like “I wanted to be an inventor and make an anti-Taliban machine which would sniff them out and destroy their guns.” She wrote a letter to god “God give me strength and courage and make me perfect because I want to make this world perfect.” In 2009 Malala began blogging for BBC under pseudonym of Gul Makai to describe her day to day threatened life under rule of Taliban. Then she became an active blog writer, diary writer, bold speaker for interviews and meetings. She used to find herself most of the time surrounded by journalists. Her story and situations of life under Taliban was now known in various parts of the world. She told in a documentary “I will get my education if it’s at home, school or somewhere else. Education is neither eastern nor western, it is human. This is our request to the world to save our Pakistan, save our Swat.” State and government were not able to protect people and policemen were afraid of the Taliban and losing their lives. Malala’s father used to motivate people to fight for themselves with Martin Niemoller’s poem

“First they came for the communists,
And I didn’t speak out because I wasn’t a communist.
Then they came for the socialists,

And I didn't speak out because I wasn't a socialist
Then they came for the trade unionists,
And I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Jews,
And I didn't speak out because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for the Catholics,
And I didn't speak out because I was not a Catholic.
Then they came for me,
And there was no one left to speak for me.”

After so much pressure of media worldwide, Pakistani government and other individual efforts like Malala's and her father's Fazlullah, head of Taliban, agreed to lift ban for girls up to ten years old. Also he agreed to a peace deal and government declared a 'permanent ceasefire' in the valley. Malala's father well stated in an interview focusing upon quality education “if we had not put guns in the hands of Madrasa students at the behest of foreign powers we would not be facing this bloodbath in the tribal areas and Swat.” This “permanent ceasefire” happened to be very temporary. There again started a constant fight between Taliban and government. Many a people were missing and many families were broken due to this confrontation. People were forced to leave their valley. The family of Malala also became what they call IDPs (internally displaced persons) for a long-time. Taliban was especially against those who spoke in society about public issues and fundamental rights. “The Taliban is not an organised force like we imagine, said Hidayatullah, it is a mentality and this mentality is everywhere in Pakistan. Someone who is against America, against the Pakistan establishment, against English law, he has been infected by the Taliban.”

As Malala Yousafzai became more recognised, the dangers facing her became more acute. Death threats against her were published in newspapers and were there on internet. On facebook, where she was an active user, she began to receive menace. When none of this worked, a Taliban spokesman says they were “forced” to act. On 9 October, a Taliban gunman asking “who is Malala?” shot Malala Yousafzai as she rode home on bus. Two other girls were also wounded in the attack. She says “the sounds in my head were not the crack, crack, crack of three bullets, but the chop, chop, chop, drip, drip, drip of the man slaughtering heads of chickens and then dropping them into the dirty street.” It was the cruellest act possible and extremely inhuman that's why Malala felt herself as a chicken which is being slaughtered. When Malala was hovering between life and death, the Taliban issued a statement assuming responsibility for shooting her but denying it was because of her campaign for education. “We carried out this attack and anybody who speaks against us will be attacked in the same way and anyone who sides government against us will die.”

There were international reactions in media. The whole world was outraged. UN secretary general called it ‘a heinous and cowardly act’ Obama said “reprehensible, disgusting and tragic”³ She was immediately taken to Peshawar, where the bullet was removed. After sometime her situation again became critical. Offers to treat Yousafzai came from around the world. Later she was shifted to Birmingham, England in Queen Elizabeth hospital. After 9-10 days of attack she came out of coma. In England also she had a miserable time of painful treatments without her parents. Even after so much pain Malala states that what the Taliban had done was make my campaign global. She was happy that while she was lying in the bed waiting to take her first steps in a new world, Gordon Brown, the UN special envoy for education and former Prime

Minister of Britain had launched a petition under the slogan “I am Malala.” The petition contains three demands:

We call on Pakistan to agree to a plan to deliver education for every child.

We call on all countries to outlaw discrimination against girls.

We call on international organizations to ensure the world's 61 million out-of-school children are in education by the end of 2015

Yousfzai’s father said “we wouldn’t leave our country if my daughter survives or not. We have an ideology that advocates peace. The Taliban cannot stop all independent voices through the force of bullets.” On 12 July 2013, Yousafzai's 16th birthday, she spoke at the UN to call for worldwide access to education. The UN dubbed the event "Malala Day". It was her first public speech since the attack. She said "The terrorists thought they would change my aims and stop my ambitions, but nothing changed in my life except this: weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage was born ... I am not against anyone, neither am I here to speak in terms of personal revenge against the Taliban or any other terrorist group. I'm here to speak up for the right of education for every child. I want education for the sons and daughters of the Taliban and all terrorists and extremists." So that ,they will not be blindfolded by Taliban and will be able to choose their own path. Yousafzai has been awarded many national and international honours including International Children's Peace Prize nominee, 2011, National Youth Peace Prize, 2011, Mother Teresa Memorial Award for Social Justice, November 2012, 2013 Pride of Britain, October 2013, Glamour magazine Woman of the Year and many more. She says “I began to see the awards and recognition just like that. They were little jewels without much meaning. I needed to concentrate on winning the war.”

To sum up I want to say that living under very heart rending circumstances Malala fought with Taliban with all her knowledge and strength. She really had proved with her actions that she is a Pashto girl and love her community. As Pashto couplet says “rather I receive your bullet riddled body with honour than news of your cowardice in battlefield.” She belongs to a country where 75% of young girls never attend a primary school, contributing to global scale of 32 million girls without this opportunity.” (Rochon) and it is not just the economy of the country to be blamed for poor state of education but more than that the local Taliban. After Malala’s brave efforts, all the running political parties promised to improve the local education system. According to a study Pakistan’s most developed province invested near \$3 billion since 2008 in education, marking the highest investment in the education sector in last 50 years. When Yousafzai spoke at U.N. headquarters in New York, she was adorned with a shawl of the late Benzir Bhutto, Pakistan’s first female Prime Minister. She concluded her speech by saying “so let us wage a global struggle against illiteracy, poverty and terrorism and let us pick up our books and pens. They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world. Education is the only solution.” Now Malala Yousafzai is the co-recipient of the 2014 NobelPeace Prize and is advocating across the world for girls’ educational rights. The beautifully written book *I Am Malala* by Malala with Christina Lamb, both biography and autobiography, tells her painful yet inspirational story. There are certainly many other stories like Malala’s either they are unheard or could not have chance to raise their voice again. Malala expresses her reverence to them and says “this book is dedicated to all the girls who have faced injustice and been silenced. Together we will be heard.”

References Used:

- Galston, William A. “Malala Yousafzai: the Struggle between civilisation and barbarism”. Web. October 15, 20212
<www.Brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2012/10/15-malala-yousafzai-pakistan-galston> November 21, 2014
- Kunwar, Ranu. “I Am Malala: A Review” *The Newspaper*. Web. November 20, 2014.
<http://theviewspaper.net/i-am-malala-a-review/>
- Lamb, Christina and Malala Yousafzai. *I Am Malala* Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 2013.
Print
- MoveMe Quotes*. Web. October 15, 2014
<<http://www.movemequotes.com/tag/conflict/>>
- Rochon, Nicolas. “Malala Yousafzai and the Fight for Young Girls’ Right to Education” *Record*. July 25, 2013. Web. October 20, 2014
<<http://www.newsrecord.co/malala-yousafzai-and-the-fight-for-young-girls-right-to-education/>>
- “Women, Girls and Malala: Research on Gender and Education in Pakistan and Beyond”
October 10, 2014. Web. November 20, 2014
<journalistsresource.org/studies/international/human-rights/Pakistan-women-equality-education-economic-development-research-roundup> web.