

Malala: Stand Up Against Extremism

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Abstract: Throughout its five-year rule (1996-2001) in Afghanistan, the defunct Islamist Taliban regime was notoriously blamed for gross human rights abuses. The most notably among them were denial women a right to education. In Pakistan, few civil rights organizations, mostly supported by the Western powers and operated within and outside the country, stand up against the Pakistani branch of the Taliban. A 15-year-old, high school student, Malala Yousafzai, added her voice to the ongoing struggle. Her 'radical' view against the Taliban almost led to her death, where she escaped an assassination attempt on 9th October, 2012. As a biographical study, this article analyses the life history of this young activist. This study focuses on the assassination attempt, social, political and religious impacts of Malala's action on the lives of Pakistani women in particular, and the country as a whole. The research finding suggests that Malala will continue to be a powerful force in the future of Pakistan politics and the world.

Keywords: Women Education, Malala Yousfzai, Pakistan, Taliban

I. INTRODUCTION

"I have the right to education. I have the right to play. I have the right to sing. I have the right to talk. I have the right to go to the market. I have the right to speak up" (BBC Blog, 2009).

The Taliban is an Islamic fundamentalist political movement in Afghanistan. It spread into Afghanistan and formed a government, ruling as the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan from September 1996 until December 2001, with Kandahar as the capital. However, it gained diplomatic recognition from only three states: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. While in power, it enforced its strict interpretation of Sharia Law, and leading Muslims have been highly critical of the Taliban's interpretations of Islamic law. The Taliban was condemned internationally for their brutal treatment of women.

Afghan women were forced to wear the 'burqa' because according to one Taliban spokesman, the face of a woman is a source of corruption for men not related to them. Women were not allowed to work, they were not allowed to be educated after the age of eight, and until then were permitted to study Qur'an only. Women seeking an education were forced to

attend underground schools, where they and their teachers risked execution if caught.

The Taliban claimed to recognize their Islamic duty to offer education to both boys and girls, yet a decree was passed that banned girls above the age of eight from receiving instruction. Maulvi Kalamadin insisted it was only a temporary suspension and that women would return to school once facilities and street security were adapted to prevent cross gender contact. Within Kabul alone the ruling affected 106,256 girls, 148,223 male students and 8,000 female university undergraduates. Over seven thousand female teachers were dismissed, a more that crippled the provision of education and caused sixty-three schools to a sudden lack of educators.

In Mingora, the Taliban had set an edict that no girls could attend school after 15th January, 2009. They had already blown up more than a hundred girls' schools. After the ban, the Taliban continued to destroy schools in the area. On 19th January, Yousafzai wrote *"Five more schools have been destroyed; one of them was near my house. I am quite surprised, because these schools were closed so why did they also need to be destroyed?"* (Yousafzai, 2012).

On 3rd January 2009, Yousafzai's first entry was posted to the BBC Urdu blog that would later make her famous. She

would hand-write notes and then passes them on to a reporter who would scan and email them. The blog reads:

"I had a terrible dream yesterday with military helicopters and the Taleban. I have had such dreams since the launch of the military operation in Swat. My mother made me breakfast and I went off to school. I was afraid going to school because the Taleban had issued an edict banning all girls from attending schools. Only 11 pupils attended the class out of 27. The number decreased because of the Taleban's edict. My three friends have shifted to Peshawar, Lahore and Rawalpindi with their families after this edict. On my way from school to home I heard a man saying 'I will kill you'. I hastened my pace and after a while I looked back if the man was still coming behind me. But to my utter relief he was talking on his mobile and must have been threatening someone else over the phone" (BBC Blog, 2009).

The infamous campaign against the western education by the Taliban leaders continues. Civil rights organizations in Pakistan mostly supported by the western powers and operated within and outside the country stand up against the Pakistani branch of the Taliban. Malala Yousafzai, teenager, political activist, writer, journalist, fighter for the education of girls' right to education in Pakistan, publicly spoke out against the Taliban regime, leading to the Pakistani Taliban unanimously agreeing to orchestrate her assassination, stating that they were 'forced' to act because previous death threats to silence her would not work.

II. AIMS OF THE STUDY

As a historical analysis, the aims of this research are: first, to attempt to analyze the life history of Malala Yousafzai; secondly, to examine the assassination attempt of the young activist; and the impact of the assassination from Pakistani Political scene.

WHO IS MALALA YOUSAFZAI?

Malala Yousafzai was born into a Muslim family of Pashtun ethnicity in 12th July, 1997 and given her first name Malala, meaning 'grief of stricken'. Her last name Yousafzai is that of a large Pashtun tribal confederation that is predominant in Pakistan's Swat Valley where she grew up. At her house in Mingora, she lived with her two younger brothers, her parents and two pet chickens. Malala was educated in large part by her father Ziauddin Yousafzai, who is poet, school owner and an educational activist himself. (BBC New, 2009) Malala want to become a doctor but her father encouraged her to become a politician, Ziauddin is permitting his daughter to stay up at night and talk about politics after her two brothers had been sent to bed. Malala started speaking about education rights as early as September 2008. Her father took her to Peshawar to speak at the local press club *"how dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?"*

Yousafzai told her audience in a speech that was covered by newspapers and Television channels, throughout the region. At the beginning of 2009 Malala had a chance to write for BBC Urdu when her father was asked by a BBC reporter, if any women at his school would write about life under the

Taliban. At first a girl named Aisha from her father's school agreed to write a diary but then the girl's parents stopped her from doing it because they feared Taliban reprisals. The only alternative was Yousafzai, four years younger than the original volunteer and in seventh grade at the time.

As Malala became more recognized, the dangers facing her became more acute. The Taliban has been known to attack civilians who speak out against the group. Death threats were published in newspapers and slipped under her door. On Facebook, where she was an active user, she began to receive threats and fake profiles were created under her name. Malala deleted her personal page and attended digital-security sessions, but vowed to never stop working for education for girls.

When none of this worked, a Taliban spokesman says they were forced to act. In a meeting held in the summer of 2012, Taliban leaders unanimously agreed to kill her.

III. ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

On 9th October, 2012. One of Taliban gunmen shot Malala as she's coming back home on a bus after taking an exam from the school. The gunman who puts a mask on his face shouted *"which one of you is Malala? Speak up otherwise I will shoot you all"* (Ellick, 2012). on her being identified, he shot at her. She was hit with one bullet and the other two girls that are together with her were also wounded in the shooting. After shooting Malala was airlifted to a military hospital in Peshwar where doctors were forced to begin operating after swelling develops in the left portion of her brain which had been damaged by the bullet, after three-hour operation doctors successfully removed the bullet.

A day after the attack, Malala was still being treated in the intensive care unit of the military hospital. On 11th October 2012, a panel of Pakistani and British doctors made the decision to move Malala to the Armed Forces Institute of Cardiology in Rawalpindi. A medical team treating her at the hospital said she's improving and had a 70% chance of survival. Pakistani Interior Minister Rehman Malik said that Malala would be shifted to Germany, where she could receive the best medical treatment, as soon as she was stable enough to travel. A team of doctors would travel with her and the government would bear the expenditures of her treatment (Ellick & Arfan 2009).

On 13th October 2012, doctors conflicting reports of where Malala would be treated abroad and the current status of her health. Pakistan's ambassador to the United Arab Emirates said Malala would be treated in Dubai, with a medical jet from UAE on standby to take her abroad, conflicting with the previous report about Germany. (BBC blog, 2009). Offers to treat Malala came from around the world, with several from United State. On 15th October, Malala travelled to the United Kingdom for further treatment approved by both doctors and family. Her plane landed in Dubai and continued to Birmingham where she was treated at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham. The hospital provided integrated care, doctors at the hospital repeated at Malala is *"not out of the woods yet... but at this stage we're optimistic that things are going in the right direction."* (Owais,

2012). On 18th October, Malala had been able to write notes in order to communicate, and for the first time since the shooting had been able to stand. However, one of her doctors also noted there were still some concerns about her smooth recovery. Malala met her family on October 26th 2012. Her father gave a briefing to the press, saying that when she was put on the plane to Britain, her brain had started to swell dangerously as she was in a medically induced coma, and they had started to think of the possibility of needing to make funeral arrangements.

On 3rd January Malala was discharged from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham to continue her rehabilitation at her family's temporary home in West Midlands. (APP, 2012). On 19th March 2013 Malala starts to school in Birmingham, United Kingdom, six months after being shot by Taliban. Malala describes returning to school as the happiest moment. She said "I am excited that today I have achieved my dream of going back to school. I want all girls in the world to have this basic opportunity" (AFA, 2012).

IV. AWARD RECEIVED

Malala received numerous of national and International awards for the recognition of her courage and advocacy. Among the awards she received include:

On 25th October 2011 *the Dutch international children's advocacy group* Kids Right Foundation included Yousafzai as one of five nominees worldwide for the prize. She was the first Pakistani girl ever nominated for the award. The announcement said "*Malala dared to stand up for herself and other girls and used national and international media to let the world know girls should also have the right to go to school*" (BBC News, 2012). She became the runner-up.

On 19th December, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza awarded Malala with Pakistan's first National Youth Peace Prize for those less than 18 years old. Subsequently renamed the National Malala Peace Prize. Speaking to the media after attending the proceedings, Malala expressed her wish to form her own political party comprising people working for the cause of education (CNN, 2013).

On January 2012. The Government Girls Secondary School on Mission Road, Karachi, was renamed Malala Yousafzai Government Girls Secondary School.

15th October 2012, Pakistan's third-highest civilian bravery award. Pakistan's Interior Minister Malik said that Yousafzai was a symbol of bravery and will be honored with the award (Lorrane, no date).

In 2012, she was named by the Foreign policy magazine on its list of top global thinkers. On 26th November 2012, she was nominated for *Time* magazine's person of the year for 2012, and on December 19th 2012, she was announced one of four "runners-up" for the award.

Rome Prize for Peace and Humanitarian Action. On 29th December 2012, the Mayor of Rome Gianni, on behalf of the city government of Rome awarded Yousufzai the 2012 Rome Prize for Peace and Humanitarian Action. Malala had been given honorary citizenship of Rome, the document being collected on her behalf by the Pakistani Ambassador to Italy. (Guardian, 2013).

On 1st January 2013, "2012 Tipperary International Peace Award" for her courage and determination to speak out in support of equal access to education for every child.

On 29th March 2013 it was announced that Yousafzai had been awarded the Fred and Anne Jarvis Award by the National Union of Teachers in the UK because of her advocacy for girls' education.

V. POLITICAL IMPACT OF MALALA'S ACTION

Malala showed amazing bravery and persistence in the face of an assassination attempt by the Taliban. She refused to back down from her heroic activism for girls' education, not allowing her serious head injury from the attack to dampen her commitment to her cause. Malala's courage proves that you are never too young to make a difference. In fact, Malala started very young, speaking out at the age of eleven about the atrocities committed in her hometown under Taliban control. Malala's spirit and conviction will spur young women everywhere to become leaders and take action about issues they are passionate about.

Pakistan's army chief called her an icon of courage and hope, right after the attack last year, and the country has since vowed to take down and prosecute her attackers to the highest degree. The United Nations also deem her birthday the official 'Malala Day'. Her father, Ziuaddin Yousafzai, was appointed to the Pakistani consulate in England as the head of the education section, and has proudly called Malala "*the daughter of the whole world,*" (International children's peace prize, 2011). declaring that his daughter's brave actions have called attention globally to the attack on education rights.

The Taliban have been clear in their response to the assassination attempt in that they will continue to target her, despite her survival, with a spokesman saying, "*The attack was a warning to all youngsters in the area that they would be targeted if they followed her example.*" (BBC News, 2012). The assassination attempt received immediate worldwide media coverage and produced an outpouring of sympathy, along with widespread anger. Protests against the shooting were held in several Pakistani cities the day after the attack. Pakistani officials offered a \$105,000 rewards for information leading to the arrest of the attackers (Liza, 2013).

Although the attack has been roundly condemned in Pakistan, some minor political parties, right-wing groups and other individuals have aired conspiracy theories like the shooting being staged by the CIA in order to provide an excuse for continuing drone attacks. While the Tehrik Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and some other pro-Taliban elements have branded Malala as an "American spy" (Fazal, 2012).

World leaders unanimously denounced the attack. United States President Barack Obama found the news of the shooting reprehensible, disgusting and tragic. Pakistan's president described it as an attack on civilized people.

FINDING

When examining the life history of Malala Yousafzai, the result shows that the young activist has strong ambition to become a political actress, she reiterated her desire to become

the political icon on different occasion. She named *Benazir Bhutto* as her 'role-model'. Malala constantly criticized the Pakistani government on Television and her blog page. She also goes against Taliban and boldly criticized the Islamic extremist group against terrorism for education. She had hoped to organize the Malala foundation which would help poor girls go to school she says my purpose is to serve humanity. Malala became a celebrity in Pakistan and she's likely to become the future leader.

VI. CONCLUSION

Malala Yousafzai, a 15-year old girl from Pakistan, is an inspiration to anyone advocating for girls' education around the world. Malala added her voice to the ongoing struggle against the Taliban, her view nearly causes her death. On 9th October, 2012, Malala suffered a terrible tragedy when she was shot in the head by the Taliban for being such a strong advocate for girls' rights. She received medical treatment at a military hospital in Peshawar and Armed Forces Institute of cardiology in Rawalpindi and later moved to the United Kingdom where she received the best medical treatment. After her recovery Malala continue with her Western education in the UK. Malala showed amazing bravery and persistence in the face of an assassination attempt, she refused to back down from her heroic activism for girls' education. Her ambition is to become a political actress with Benazir Bhotto as her role model. Malala became the youngest nominee for the Noble Peace Prize in history.

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