

Diminutive Girl: A Dream Tortured But Reborn

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on the investigation of a chain of events in the life of a little girl named as Malala Yousaf Zai, who has proved herself as a source of courage in the way of every obstacle that hampers the achievement of her aims and objectives. Malala Yousaf Zai is a symbol of pride and strength for the acquisition of education in Pakistan. She started campaigning for girls' education against Taliban who imposed restrictions on the acquirement of girls' education in the region of Swat valley in North West Pakistan. Little Malala is a gigantic challenge for them in the way of achievement of their atrocious aims.

Introduction

Provision of an education is absolutely significant for the future of every girl and society as a whole. Equal access to education for both men and women results in strengthening and flourishing of economies which in turn results in moving forward of societies as well. Education actually is the putting one's potential to maximum use. Therefore it can be safely concluded that a human being is not in the proper sense till he is educated. In this regard, Japan is the pioneering example of enhancing economic growth through social opportunity; especially in basic education (Sen 1999:41) Education is one of the basic rights that provide a tool for development to nations. Pakistan is one of the developing countries that is thriving for the improvement in this area. So, imposing restrictions on such a basic element is no doubt a serious misdeed. Pakistan's official literacy rate is 58 percent, with less than half of women able to read and write, yet in 2011-12 the government's spending on defense was more than 10 times greater than education. The country of 180 million people languishes near the bottom of the world literacy list, 159th out of 184 countries categorised by the UN Development Programme. (Source: Dawn News 26th October, 2012).

The Taliban movement has been a problem for the government and security forces in Pakistan as well as for the Afghan government and NATO forces in Afghanistan. Pakistan has faced numerous attacks by Taliban as a result of ongoing war in North West Pakistan by the military against militant groups. At the same time, there have also been numerous drone attacks in Pakistan carried out by the United States which exclusively target members of militant groups along the Afghan border regions. But these attacks also results in the death of large number of innocent citizens of Pakistan which in turn results in creating a negative image of United States among Pakistani citizens. Unfortunately the Taliban Movement has affected education system all over Afghanistan and in some areas of Pakistan. David Cortright and Sarah Smiles in their research report mentioned that girl's education in Afghanistan is in an alarming situation. Hundreds of schools across the country have been attacked, destroyed or closed due to insurgency. The ministry of education in June 2009 reported that 695 schools were closed across the country which affected over 340,000 students.

According to a Care (NGO) study, from January 2006 to December 2008 there were 1,145 attacks on educational institutions including arson, murder of teachers and acid attacks on girl students (Cortright and Persinger 2010:13-14). David Cortright and Sarah Smiles further said that the girls' schools have been attacked at a disproportionate rate compared to boys' schools. An interesting fact in this report is that the attacks have happened in greatest number in Pashtun areas in the south where the Pashtun insurgency is the strongest (Cortright and Persinger 2010:14).

However, in Pakistan the Taliban took full military control in District Swat in 2008. Women's education was banned in the Taliban's regime. They were not even allowed to come out of their homes without a veil and only when a male member of the household was present. According to a UNESCO publication by Brendan O'Malley, the Taliban are totally against girls' education. They ordered in mosques and on illegal radio stations the closure of all girls' schools and set a deadline of 15 January in 2009. They warned the people that if any school continued to provide classes for girls, the school would be blown up, and if any girl came out of home for school attendance, she would be attacked like in Afghanistan, where acid had been thrown in the girls' faces (O'Malley 2010:79). They destroyed and damaged a lot of schools, especially in many southern and eastern Pashtun populated districts which resulted in an entire generation growing up without knowing how to read, write or do basic math. This scenario created difficulty for young Pashtun people to find jobs for themselves in competition with the well-educated young people from the ethnic minority Hazara community (Trofimov 2012).

Destruction of School system

According to a report published in "The Guardian", during their rule in Swat district, the Taliban destroyed or damaged 401 schools, out of which 70% were girls' schools (The Guardian 2011). The Taliban were of the view that women's modern education brings awareness of women about their rights (i.e. jobs, right of inheritance in society etc) and these things are considered evil in Pakhtoon society. There are a lot of traditions and values of Pakhtoon society, especially regarding women, which are totally against the teachings of Islam, but due to unawareness these are considered as Islamic. In response to all these misdeeds, the Government of Pakistan initiated first military action 'operation rah-e- haq' on October 25 (2007) against the Taliban. In reaction to all these misdeeds of Taliban movement a young girl named as Malala Yousaf Zai started campaigning for girls' education when she was just 11, blogging for BBC Urdu about her life under the Taliban militants. During 2009, Malala began to appear on television and publically advocate female education.

Malala's diary described injustice

An excerpt from Malala's diary, **3 January 2009**

"I had a terrible dream yesterday with military helicopters and the Taliban. I have had such dreams since the launch of the military operation in Swat. I was afraid going to school because the Taliban had issued an edict banning all girls from attending schools. Only 11 students attended the class out of 27. The number decreased because of Taliban's edict. On my way from school to home I heard a man saying 'I will kill you'. I hastened my pace... to my utter relief he was talking on his mobile and must have been threatening someone else over the phone." **5 January 2009**

"I was getting ready for school and about to wear my uniform when I remembered that our principal had told us not to wear uniforms and come to school wearing normal clothes instead. So, I decided to wear my favourite pink dress. Other girls in school were also wearing colourful dresses. During the morning assembly we were told not to wear colourful clothes as the Taliban would object to it."

In this way Malala stood against the oppressive policies imposed upon the citizens of Pakistan by the Taliban. She raised her voice against the brutality of Taliban in all over the world through media and become a symbol of hope in a country beset by violence and oppression. She represents the future of Pakistan where young girls can attend school and expect equal rights. As, girls' education is being considered very important and beneficial for bringing changes in every sphere of life therefore it is not wrong to say that young Malala plays a vital role in the development of country by raising her voice for girls' education. She has shown more courage in facing down Taliban than Pakistan's government and its military leaders. This stand for girls' education and gender equality resulted in the fatwa issued by Taliban calling for Malala's death.

The courageous voice of Malala was attempted to blow down by Taliban on 9th of October 2012, when Malala YousafZai was reportedly shot by three unidentified gunmen from the Taliban, in the bus taking children home from school after a mid-term exam. The incident occurred in the city of Mingora situated in the Swat Valley, North West Pakistan, as the bus was coming from Khushal Public School. Malala was shot in the head and a second shot injured her in the neck area. Two of her classmates were also wounded in the attack (Source: The Observatory, 11 October 2012) After the shooting, Malala was airlifted to military hospital in Peshawar where doctors successfully removed the bullet that had lodged in her shoulder near her spinal cord. She was flown from Pakistan on board on air ambulance provided by United Arab Emirates to United Kingdom where she was taken to Queen Elizabeth hospital. (Joycebabu 2012)

Malala made a “remarkable” recovery and was fit to be discharged after the three months murderous attack by Taliban. She suffered serious skull injuries after being shot by militant and is to go reconstruction surgery in February 2013. Her father, Ziauddin Yousaf Zai, has been given a job at Pakistani consulate in Birmingham so that she can continue to stay on in Britain after her medical treatment. (Source: The Hindu, January 4, 2013)

Awards and honors

Young Pakistani peace activist Malala received following rewards and honors for her courage and conviction to raise her voice for girls’ education:

- 25 October 2011, International Children’s Peace Prize (runner-up): The Dutch international children’s advocacy group Kids Rights Foundation included Yousaf Zai as one of five nominees worldwide for the prize. She was the first Pakistani girl ever nominated for the award. (Source: The Express Tribune, 15 December, 2011)
- 19 December 2011, Pakistan’s National Youth Peace Prize: Former Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani awarded Malala with Pakistan’s first National Youth Peace Prize for those under 18 years old, subsequently renamed the National Malala Peace Prize. (Source: Pakistan today 20 February 2013)
- 3 January 2012, Malala Yousaf Zai Government Girls Secondary School: The Government Girls Secondary School on Mission Road, Karachi, was renamed in her honor. (Source: Pakistan today 21 February 2013)
- 13 January 2012, Tribune Gamechanger: The Express Tribune named Malala in their list of “Gamechangers 2011” (Source: The Express Tribune 13 January 2012)
- 15 October 2012, Pakistan’s third-highest civilian bravery award: Pakistan’s Interior Minister Rehman Malik said that Malala is a symbol of bravery and will be honored with the Sitara-e- Shujaat award. (Source: lenson news 16 October 2012)
- Authorities in Pakistan’s Swat Valley renamed a government college in Malala’s honor. (Source: CNN, 30 January 2013)
- In 2012 Malala was named by Foreign Policy Magazine on its list of **top global thinkers**. (Source: Samaa, 26 November 2012)
- On 26 November 2012, she was nominated for Time magazine’s Person of the Year for 2012, and on December 19, she was announced one of four “runners-up” for the award. (Source: Time News feed 18 December 2012).
- 28 November 2012, Mother Teresa Memorial Award for Social Justice: Mumbai based Harmony Foundation awarded their 2012 prize to Malala along with Afghani women’s rights activist Sima Samar who has also received death threats from Taliban. (Source: Bihar Prabha 10 December 2012)
- On 29 December 2012, the Mayor of Rome, Gianni Alemanno on behalf of the city government of Rome awarded Malala 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, Tehmina Janjua. (Source: The Express Tribune 30 December 2012)
- On 1 January 2013, “2012 Tipperary International Peace Award” (Source: The Express Tribune 4 January 2013)
- Simone de Beauvoir Prize in 2013 (Source: Daily Times 10 January 2013)

Conclusion

It is very difficult for Taliban to implement their atrocious agendas in Pakistan in the presence of audacious and courageous young girls like Malala.

She has proved herself as a symbol of strength and hope for the development of Pakistan. The cowardly attack on Malala Yousafzai and subsequent global reaction and attention to the troubles of students, especially girls' students, in Pakistan eclipsed almost everything on the country's educational scene. On one hand this incident raised the young child especially female ones, to fight for their right to education and on the other hand it led to the debate over indifferent attitude of rulers towards the cause of education.

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