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ISSN:2278-9529

GALAXY

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Vol. 3, Issue - V September 2014



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I Am Malala: Voice of a Teen Girl from the Muslim World

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'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 the far remote area of Swat Valley in Pakistan. The 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 particular, where even they are not allowed to move outside their house without wearing Burqua. In the present autobiography she boldly expresses her views on different conditions – regional, social, political, religious, educational etc. – like a daredevil.

She begins her autobiography with the words: 'I come from a country which was created at midnight. When I almost died it was just after midday.' (Malala 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 associates 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, Malalai of Maiwand. In the beginning of the autobiography, we have short history of the Swat Valley. In the ancient time, it was Buddhist place. The Buddhist arrived in the valley in second century B.C. Later Islam came to the valley in eleventh century with Mahmud of Ghazni. It was also under the control of British for some time, but then they were forced to evacuate the place by the pride Pashtuns. She has a very delicate and beautiful description of Swat Valley: 'Our valley is full of fruit trees on which grow the sweetest figs and pomegranates and peaches, and in our garden we had grapes, guavas and persimmons.' (13) She '...like to sit on the roof and watch the mountain and dream. The highest mountain of all is the pyramid-shaped Mount Elum.' (14)

Malala is born in a poor Pashtun family. Her grandfather had studied in India and had great influence of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Jawaharlala Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. After partition, he shifted with his family to newly created Pakistan. Malala's father lost his mother when he was about to complete his graduation. He had stammering problem, but later he became a very good preacher. He participated in many debates and won many prizes. He had very balanced view about Rushdie's 'Satanic Verses': 'First, let's read the book and then why not respond with our own book...' (37). He is the true follower of Islam and defends his views firmly: 'Is Islam such a weak religion that cannot tolerate a book written against it? Not *my* Islam!' (37) With his friend, her father decided to open an English Language School at Mingora. Swat is a tourist destination and such education will be useful for the local people, was his sublime motive. But with adverse attitude of local conservative Muftis and Mullahs, he had to face the corrupt Bureaucracy. 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)

She has her own political viewpoints. She defies the partition when she says: 'My father says that Jinnah negotiated a piece of real estate for us but not a state.' (75) She also despises the childish experiments of politicians with democracy: 'I had been born into a sort of democracy in which for ten years Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif kept replacing each other, none of their governments ever completing a term and always accusing each other of corruption.' (61) She minutely describes the coup when Parvez Musharaff and overruling the power by him. She clearly condemns the attack on the World Trade Centre when she asserts: 'The Clerics said 9/11 was revenge on the American for what they had been doing to other people round the world, but they ignored the fact that the people in the World Trade Centre were innocent and had nothing to do with American policy and that the Holy Quran clearly says it is wrong to kill.' (70) She clearly shows her dislike for the speeches of Maulana Fazlullah, the Taliban leader, on radio, his fatawa to burn CDs, DVDs, secretly killing of Osama Bin Laden in Abbotabad and assassination of her idol, Benazir Bhutto.

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 *sabar* – patience – but often it 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: '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 courage to defend and appeal: '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 that education will westernize girls like her and take them away from Islam. 'Education is education. We should learn everything and then choose which path to follow. Education is neither Eastern nor Western, it is human.' (136), she claims. With earthquake, flood and Taliban nightmare, her school shacked from bottom, but Malala stood firm. She is very optimistic and affirmative. She frankly discloses her ambition: 'One day I will be a politician and do these things myself.' (180)

She has to pay heavy price for her self-consciousness. Alerted Taliban considering her as a threat to their very existence, shot her at her head. On Tuesday, 9 October 2012, while she was returning from school to her home in a bus, a gunman fired three shots. She survived miraculously and her endless journey began – from remote area of Pakistan to the hall of United Nations. She has become a global symbol of peaceful protest for girls' education and the youngest ever nominee for the Noble Peace Prize. The present research paper is homage to her and her family's efforts to educate the girls. The autobiography makes us believe in the power of one person's voice to inspire change in the world.

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Wikipedia