

Voicing the Pertinence of Education to Fight the Annihilation of Terror-stricken Women of South East Asia with Reference to Malala Yousafzai's 'I Am Malala'

Arpana

Assistant Professor, Department Of English
Bebe Nanaki University College, Mithra/ Kaputhala, Punjab, India.
Email – arpanabhardwaj15@gmail.com

Abstract: *This research paper aims at pinpointing the miserable condition of women of South East Asia with reference to Malala Yousafzai's non-fiction I Am Malala which canvasses the disquiet and chaos of the life of Pashtun women. Ordained to nothingness by the male monopoly, these innocent women face hardships at all levels. The Islamic terrorist groups like The Taliban impede the development and freedom of women by orthodox norms of the traditional patriarchy and retard their holistic development. They are denied education which is the pre requisite for all round development. This paper highlights the relevance of education for women of South East Asia.*

Keywords: *orthodox, chaos, patriarchy, holistic development, male monopoly.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

"I allow my mind to drift back to my childhood's days with a sense of pity. I was such a small and lonely creature; and my surroundings were those of cold indifferentism that sometimes surely verged on cruelty." (Corelli, 2010)

Since time immemorial, women have been treated as wretched creatures of the earth facing the brunt of servility and annihilation fostered by the patriarchy which "is not only male domination of females but also a militaristic hierarchy among males." (Millet, 2016). The grid of a patriarchal society is constructed by men using some clichés and stereotypes to verbalise his ascendancy over the other sex i.e. women. Women lurch facing the odds of their lives designed by men; sometimes they make an effort to voice their trepidation and ennui but are silenced. They are fallen angels; they are minions moving in alienation without an identity of their own. Living in the ghetto of subjection due to gender discrimination, they live like victims, the subalterns who have no identity and they can't speak as Gayatri C Spivak has aptly said,

"If in the context of colonial production, subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow." (Spivak, 1995).

The subjection is not just social but it is multidimensional. They are not provided the right set of circumstances to build their identity and create a niche for themselves in the society. Confined to the four walls of home and engaged in domestic chores, they never realise their potential. Their contribution to the society is not recognised. Majority of the women belonging to rural as well as semi-urban regions are deprived of the right to education; their dignity faces massive threats due to lack of security and they are prone to domestic violence too. Physical, mental and sexual harassment dooms them to alienation and nothingness. Time and again they try to voice their angst and struggle to break free the shackles of orthodox ideology that only mirrors the male monopoly and dominance. Hence, they urge to emancipate from "those constraints that stop them carrying out what freely they would choose to do, of which war, poverty, oppression, and poor education are a few." (Ken Booth quoted in *Asia Annual 2009: Paradigms of Security in Asia*, 2011).

"Violence and threat directed against women are so predominant across societies all over the world that any talk of human security remains incomplete without incorporating gender security in it. Women are possibly the worst victims of personal threats." (Bhattacharya, 2011).

This research paper is an attempt to suss out the perils foisted by terrorism and extremism prevailing in South East Asia on the existence and emancipation of women. These extremist groups work with the ideology to poison the minds of the masses to inflict terror. These terrorist groups have an organized system and they intimidate and duress people by violence to fulfil some political or religious interests. These extremist groups violate common moral standards and impede the enforcement of law and order. These groups manipulate religious scriptures to fulfil their selfish and inhumane interests. They condition frustrated, afraid and illiterate people to follow their ideology and commit violent and terrorist activities. The Taliban is a terrorist group operating in the region of South East Asia (especially Pakistan and Afghanistan) with an ideology to construct Islamic state and promote Islamic culture all over the world. They perform terrorist activities, slaughter innocent people in the name of Jihad. Though Jihad has pure

connotations and it encourages the activities of excellence to make this world a peaceful and better place for human beings and also inspires Muslims to develop themselves intellectually and spiritually to become better Muslims and lead peaceful lives, but the Taliban use the name of 'Allah' (God) to accomplish their egotistical objectives.

Talibanisation is an ideology that includes:

“all Islamic endeavours that range from selective scriptural assertions to use of physical force to politically establishing the monopoly of doctrine-directed Islam in a state, then within a region and ultimately at the global level [...] it believes in eradicating that which causes moral decadence according to Islamic standards in whatsoever ways possible including violence. Thus Talibanisation sanctifies violence in the name of purification and religious sanitization.” (Naskar, 2011)

Islam condemns violence on innocent people especially women but these monsters are deteriorating the life, existence and freedom of women to ascertain the patriarchal regime over them. Education is essential for the upliftment of everyone. The State provides the right to education to all men and women. It is education that enables women to create their own identity and play a potential role in nation building. But the Taliban is against women education. According to the Taliban, women should be veiled and have no right to get education and go out of house for work. The Taliban religious police give severe punishments to women who used to go against them. These punishments include public execution, flogging and stoning to death etc. The Taliban policy is a replica of traditional patriarchal ideology and they consider women as a private property. They instruct women to:

“cover their heads, legs and arms and to observe a strict interpretation of Islamic law regarding the *hijab* [...] In public, women must be covered from head to toe in a 'burqa', with only a mesh opening to see and breathe through. They are not permitted to wear white (the colour of the Taliban flag) socks or white shoes, or shoes that make noise as they walk.” (Physicians for Human Rights, 1998)

The Taliban are against women education. They destroy or set ablaze the girls' schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan, murder school teachers and perform acid attacks on girl students. They oppose modern education system calling it a Pro-West education system. Nowhere in the Holy Koran is written that women can't get education but the Taliban suppresses the right of women to live peacefully and deprives them of the rostrum to excel in all domains of life.

“Girls' education is a particular target: in early 2009 after the Taliban took control of the Swat valley in KP province, they 'banned' girls' schooling outright, forcing 900 schools to close or stop enrolment for female pupils.” (Henley, 2014)

2. DISCUSSION:

In the introduction of Jean Paul Sartre's book *What is Literature?*, David Caute has rightly remarked, “Literature [...] can be a powerful means of liberating the reader from the kinds of alienation which develop in particular situations. By this process the writer also frees himself and overcomes his own alienation [...] It is the writer's mission to dispel inertia, ignorance, prejudice and false emotion.” (Sartre, Caute & Frechtman 2012)

Malala Yousafzai has voiced her concern, frustration and alienation in her non-fiction *I Am Malala* (2014) which is the replica of her strife for education for girls. The novel *I Am Malala* (2014) has been used for the purpose of analysis in this research paper. Addressed “to all the girls who have faced injustice and been silenced.” (Yousafzai, 2014), this novel is the story of her endeavour for the right to education for all girls because she believes in what Mohammad Ali Jinnah says,

“No struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men. There are two powers in the world; one is the sword and the other is the pen. There is a third power stronger than both, that of women.” (Yousafzai, 2014).

On October 9, 2012, she was shot in the head by the member of the Taliban, an Islamic extremist group for promoting girls' education. At that time, she was only 15.

The book is *I Am Malala* (2014) is divided into five parts that are subdivided into twenty chapters excluding Prologue and Epilogue. There is Prologue titled *The Day My World Changed*. Part One : *Before The Taliban* includes eight chapters- A Daughter Is Born, My Father the Falcon, Growing Up in a School, The Village, *Why I don't Wear Earrings and Pashtuns Don't Say Thank You*, *Children of the Rubbish Mountain*, *The Mufti Who Tried to Close Our School* and *The Autumn of the Earthquake*. Part Two: *The Valley Of Death* includes seven chapters- *Radio Mullah*, *Toffees*, *Tennis Balls and the Buddhas of Swat*, *The Clever Class*, *The Bloody Square*, *The Diary of Gul Makai*, *A Funny Kind of Peace and Leaving the Valley*. Part Three: *Three Girls, Three Bullets* includes five chapters- *The Valley of Sorrows*, *Praying to Be Tall*, *The Woman and the Sea*, *A Private Talibanisation* and *Who Is Malala?* Part Four: *Between Life And Death* has two chapters- *'God, I entrust her to you'* and *Journey into the Unknown*. Part Five: *A Second Life* includes two chapters- *'The Girl Shot in the Head, Birmingham'* and *'They have snatched her smile.'* The novel ends with an epilogue entitled *One Child, One Teacher, One Book, One Pen...*

Born in Swat valley, that “is a heavenly kingdom of mountains, gushing waterfalls and crystal-clear lakes [...] fields of wild flowers, orchards of delicious fruit, emerald mines and rivers full of trout.” (Yousafzai, 2014). Malala belongs to a Pashtun family. Her father's name is Ziauddin Yousafzai, mother's name is Toor Pekai Yousafzai and she

has two brothers- Kushal and Atal. She used to go to Kushal School for education. She used to value education. But when Malala was ten years old, “[...] a group called the Taliban led by a mullah had taken over the country and was burning girls’ schools. They were forcing men to grow beards as long as lantern and women to wear burqas.” (Yousafzai, 2014).

But Malala rose her voice against the atrocities on women. She used to write against the Taliban with a pseudonym ‘Gul Pekai’. She continued her campaign to support girls’ education. On October 9, 2012, she was shot in head along with two more girls by a masked member of the Taliban. The bullet passed through her forehead and stuck in her left shoulder. Her brain started swelling. Ultimately, she was moved to Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham. By the grace of God, She survived but the terrorist attacks deteriorated her physical appearance massively as she says, “[...] half my face was not working and that I couldn’t smile. My left eye bulged, half my hair was gone and my mouth tilted to one side as if it had been pulled down so when I tried to smile it looked more like a grimace.” (Yousafzai, 2014).

Despite so much pain and miseries, Malala didn’t give up and continued her mission of education for all girls. She had “a deep love for learning and knowledge as well as keen awareness of people’s rights.” (Yousafzai, 2014). She received first ever National Peace Prize of Pakistan. She has also been honoured with Nobel Peace Prize in 2014. To put in Pakistan President Zardari’s words, Malala is “a remarkable girl and a credit to Pakistan.” (Yousafzai, 2014).

3. ANALYSIS:

Malala Yousafzai in her non-fiction *I Am Malala* (2014) has aptly portrayed the patriarchal social set up prevalent in Pakistan. She explains that a baby girl is never accepted in their conservative society. Gender Inequality is the root cause of the atrocities that a woman has to face in the traditional patriarchal society. She says:

“I was a girl in a land where rifles are fired in celebration of a son, while daughters are hidden away behind a curtain, their role in life is simply to prepare food and give birth to children [...] When I was born, people in our village commiserated with my mother and nobody congratulated my father.” (Yousafzai, 2014)

The Islamic terrorists or extremist groups are inspired by the orthodox patriarchal ideology. These groups view women as a private entity. They don’t treat women as equal to men and dominate women to establish male supremacy over them. The novel explains the Taliban regime over Pakistan as a dark age in the context of women freedom. The Taliban follow the traditional patriarchal ideology which is not in the favour of women emancipation and empowerment. She says, “[...] the Taliban had even banned women from laughing out or wearing white shoes as white was a colour that belonged to men. Women were being locked up and beaten just for wearing nail varnish.” (Yousafzai, 2014)

Mullah Fazlullah, the leader of the Taliban put ban on the freedom of women in the Pashtun society. He put restrictions on women and instructed them what to wear and how to behave in the society. According to him, “Women are meant to fulfil their responsibilities in the home. Only in the emergencies can they go outside, but then they must wear veil.” (Yousafzai, 2014)

Malala felt upset about the restrictions that the Taliban put on women and she said, “We felt like the Taliban saw us as little dolls to control, telling us what to do and how to dress. I thought if God wanted us to be like that He wouldn’t have made us all different” (Yousafzai, 2014). The Taliban used to treat women as they wanted. On one side, they imposed restrictions on women but on the other side, they also created a ‘Burqa Brigade’ which they used to preach orthodox patriarchal ideology and asked women to be veiled always and not to go to the markets. In this way, they also used women for terrorist activities. Malala said,

“We saw pictures on the news of what people were calling the Burqa Brigade- young women and girls like us in burqas with sticks, attacking CD and DVD shops in bazaars in the centre of Islamabad.” (Yousafzai, 2014)

The Taliban were against female education. They were not in favour of girls’ schools and destroyed many of them. They used to warn Malala’s father, Ziauddin Yousafzai who founded Kushal School:

“You teach girls and have a uniform that is un-Islamic. Stop this or you will be in trouble and your children will weep and cry for you.” (Yousafzai, 2014)

The whole Swat valley was divided between two kinds of people. In fact, the valley was “torn between the two extremes, secularism and socialism on one side and militant Islam on the other.” (Yousafzai, 2014). The Taliban used to hate modern education system because the modern education system was westernized. But Malala knows the worth of education. She emphasizes the significance of education for the development of a holistic society. She feels tormented to see the pitiful situation of women in society. She says, “We have so many people in our country who are illiterate. Many women have no education at all. We live in a place where schools are blown up.” (Yousafzai, 2014)

Malala always followed the footsteps of her father who was a great educationist. Her father believed:

“Lack of education was the root of all Pakistan’s problems. Ignorance allowed politicians to fool people and bad administrators to be re-elected. He believed schooling should be available for all, rich and poor,

boys and girls. The school that my father dreamed of would have desks and a library, computers, bright posters on the walls and, most important, washrooms.” (Yousafzai, 2014)

The novel *I Am Malala* (2014) is the saga of the victory of the brave and remarkable girl Malala Yousafzai, who has sincerely fought for peace and education for all and has brought accolades to her family, nation and the whole world.

4. CONCLUSION:

Hence, this research paper is a thoughtful endeavour to gauge on the trepidations of women living in patriarchal societies of South East Asia with reference to Malala Yousafzai’s novel *I am Malala* (2014). These women are subalterns in real sense and they have no identity in the society. Their roles are assigned by men and only men decide what it is to be a woman. They bear the torments of male chauvinism and are bereaved of education and freedom. The terrorist groups like the Taliban agonise them and their affliction, wretchedness and distress remain unseen and unnoticed. It is only through education that they can shape their identities, voice their desires and break the fetters of the orthodox patriarchal society. Only education can enable them to fight the injustice, male monopoly and dominance and contribute to the development of a peaceful society. Malala says:

“Whether the men are winning or losing the battle,

O my country, the women are coming and the women will win you an honour.” (Yousafzai, 2014)

REFERENCES:

1. Corelli, M. (2010). *Open Confession to a Man from a Woman*. Mumbai, IN: Wilco Publishing House.
2. Millet, K. (2016, March 1). *Sexual Politics by Kate Millet*-Books on Google Play. Retrieved April 22, 2018, from https://play.google.com/store/books/details/Kate_Millet_Sexual_Politics?id=fAJeCwAAQBAJ
3. Spivak, G. C., Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffins, H. (2017). *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* [Pdf]. Retrieved from https://www.google.co.in/search?rlz=1C1CHBD_enIN742IN746&ei=xtbgWvH8AcnMvgS3objQBw&q=the+post+colonial+studies+reader+pdf&oq=the+post+colonial+studies+reader+pdf&gs_l=psy-ab.3..0.7507.8752.0.11724.4.2.0.2.2.0.242.457.2-2.2.0....0...1c.1.64.psy-ab..0.4.470...0i22i30k1.0.VqftQKpH9b4
4. Jamdhagni, U. K. (2011). Alternative Maritime Security Perspectives for the Indian Ocean Region. In A B Roy et al (ed.), *Asia Annual 2009: Paradigms of Security in Asia*. New Delhi, IN: Manohar Publishers & Distributors.
5. Bhattacharya, R. (211). Gender Needs and Human Security: Portrayal of Hill Women in India. In A. B Roy et al (Ed.), *Asia Annual 2009: Paradigms of Security in Asia*. New Delhi, IN: Manohar Publishers and Distributors.
6. Naskar, I. (2011). Talibanisation and South-East Asian Politics: Impact on Security and State Response. In A. B. Roy et al (Ed.), *Asia Annual 2009: Paradigms of Security in Asia*.
7. Physicians for Human Rights. (1998). *The Taliban's War on Women: A Health and Human Rights Crisis in Afghanistan*. Retrieved from <http://www.law.georgetown.edu/rossrights/docs/reports/taliban.pdf>.
8. Henley, J. (2014, December 21). The Taliban's 'alarmingly efficient' war on education. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/world/shortcuts/2014/dec/21/taliban_alarmingly_efficient_war_education_pesh_aware_attack.
9. Cate, D., & Sartre, J. P. (2012). *What is Literature?* (B. Fretchman, Trans.) Newyork, NY: Routledge.
10. Yousafzai, M. (2014). *I Am Malala*.: London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

About the author:

Ms. Arpana, 32, is working as an Assistant Professor in English in Bebe Nanaki University College, Mithra, Kapurthala (A Constituent College affiliated to Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar). She has the experience of 7 years in teaching and research. She has presented 6 research papers in national and international conferences and three papers published in her name. She has also convened a UGC Sponsored National seminar on LEXICOGRAMMATICAL ASPECTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING.

It is to state that I have read the submission guidelines, I agree to the policy of the journal and that the submission is original and does not contain plagiarized material.