

## **I AM MALALA: The Story of the Girl Who Stood Up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban**

**Malala Yousafzai, *I AM MALALA*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, United Kingdom, Brown & Co, United States, 2013, 288 pages**

Review by **Bernice Nyambura**

### Introduction

*I am Malala* is a bold autobiography published in the year 2013 on October 8<sup>th</sup> by at the time the 16year old, Malala Yousafzai, with the help of Christina Lamb. It was published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in the UK and Little, Brown and Company in the US. The book is 288 pages long.

*I am Malala* tells the story of Malala's rise into education activism, how her father, the events in her hometown, Mingora or Swat Valley, other natural disasters and the extremists, Taliban, made her who she is today.

### Content Summary

The autobiography begins with the stories of Malala's parents and their various backgrounds. Malala's father Ziauddin Yousafzai is very passionate about education and goes ahead to study teaching later in Pakistan despite his father's opposing views of teaching as a meagre career for his son. He depicts leadership and bold activism. In contrast, Malala's mother, Toor Pekai Yousafzai, did not get the chance to be educated. There is little value on women's education at the time and even though she gets to start school, due to the demoralizing environment she drops out, sells her books and buys sweets with the money.

In 1997, she is born and her father names her Malala after a famous warrior woman from Afghanistan. Though she was a girl and girls were not celebrated at birth, her father celebrated her by inviting family and guests to put sweets in her crib. From here, Malala is elevated continuously by her father as he gives her a gentle nudge towards his same love and education. Ziauddin, Malala's father is in the process of establishing his school despite his financial difficulties; the

intolerance towards this new culture of education amongst both sexes, the rise of extremists especially the Taliban and natural disasters striking one after the other, specifically earthquakes and floods in Swat valley.

Malala on the other hand is slowly picking up on her quest to achieve equality in treatment for both sexes and especially in the education sector. With the help of the media and one of her father's friends, she gets to start writing a blog on BBC about her life amidst the Taliban's extremist, radical, and violent actions. The extremists begin to bomb schools, attack, kidnap and murder those that are not in line with their views of Islamic teachings. She is invited for interviews on various local news channels to give her views on the terrorists' attacks both verbally via threats to teachers and students and physically through beheadings, bombings and many more; it helps that she is well knowledgeable for a girl and possesses good verbal skills. She blossoms into a well-known education activist and ends up receiving various achievements and notable recognitions from the UN, President Barack and even Angelina Jolie, the actress. With all this backup, support and encouragement, she fiercely pursues her quest. Due to her nonstop activism, she is targeted and unfortunately shot by the Taliban on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2012. From then Malala and her family move to the UK for her gunshot wounds treatment and eventually for asylum. They are still in the UK to date.

### Analysis and Evaluation

*I am Malala* portrays Pakistan and Mingora in particular, as a very anti-feminist society dare, I say misogynistic. Women are put down and discriminated against in various aspects. In family life, for instance, a woman is discriminated against from the onset of her life. In Ziauddin's childhood, for example, he and his brothers enjoyed special treatment as they were allowed to go to school whilst the girls stayed home and waited to be married. Girls were married off as early as 10years old. Another instance is that women are not allowed to go out unless for emergencies and even then, a man should accompany them, for Malala and her mother's case the man in one instance was her 5year old brother, which was still acceptable.

Girls also are denied simple privileges of social interaction with the opposite sex especially. Seema, a neighbour to Malala, was poisoned by her family for bringing shame to her family by “flirting” or winking at a boy. Moreover, girls are given as a token whenever there is a family feud which is almost always. This depicts girls as property or as a means to an end, despite the fact that girls as equally as boys are meant to be seen as an end in themselves.

In addition, women in the professional space are discriminated against as well. Women who decide to become teachers or doctors find a hard time studying, however, the irony is not lost on Malala because at the end of the day the misogynists claim they prefer female doctors to male doctors. In the economic sphere, women are also not allowed to open a bank account without a man’s permission. Even in the sports sector, despite Pakistan being good at hockey, women are discouraged from playing the sport. Last but not least, in the justice system, a woman’s evidence in court is counted for only half of that of a man. For instance, in a rape case where a girl comes forward without four witnesses to substantiate it, she goes to prison for adultery. These are all but perfect situations to expose the inequality in Pakistan.

Lastly, Malala has come a very long way receiving numerous awards and acknowledgements in regards to her activism in her fight for equality and educational rights. Pakistan, in contrast, has recently ranked 151 out of 153 in the global gender gap index report of 2020. This clearly indicates the absurdly high levels of inequality.

### Conclusion

In my opinion, there is a need for a reintroduction of feminism in accordance with their Islamic culture and teachings. Women and gender issues have been a universal priority undertaken by the UN and its member states. Without perfect equality, there is no room for gender complementary and hence Pakistan will not achieve its full potential in terms of social, economic and political development. As seen above it starts from the family life and spills over to other aspects of life and the society at large. Thus, I concur with Malala, women and girls in Pakistan and all over the world should be elevated and enjoy equal treatment as men and boys do.



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