

## I am Malala: A Feminist Approach

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### Abstract

Feminism, a much-discussed concept in literature and politics, advocates for the liberation and emancipation of women and their right to education and equality. It is a movement of women and girls worldwide against the oppression, violence, sexual abuse, and domination of men in their life. It is a fact that throughout the world, girls are neglected, denied education, and physically abused in the name of tradition, religion, and honor. It is more acute in a country like Pakistan, where women are doubly marginalized and oppressed in the name of religion and tradition. Their voice is suppressed at gunpoint by fundamentalist terror organizations like the Taliban and Mujahidin, which misinterpret religious texts and redefine women's roles according to their suitability. There must protest against such inhuman treatment, and this paper is an attempt to sensitize the world to the cause. I am Malala, a memoir of Nobel Peace prize winner Malala Yousafzai, a teenage girl who fights for women's rights and education dealing with various issues of Pakistan, is a powerful document of feminism. The paper will initiate research on the various issues relating to women and their struggle to get

the right to education and freedom through Malala.

**Keywords:** Feminism, emancipation, domination, discrimination, memoir.

Feminism, a movement to provide equality to the tormented, oppressed, neglected, and voiceless women of the world, has gained momentum, and it has been in constant effort to emancipate them from male domination. Equal opportunities in social, political, and economic affairs, freedom of speech, and action in life are claimed by feminists. The concept of feminism operates in many forms, and gradually extreme feminism is heading towards liberal and global feminism, and very often, the term is closely associated with humanism.

Women are subjugated, exploited, and abused almost everywhere in the world. Violence, tradition, culture, and emotion suppress the woman's voice. A secret mission of males is to dominate and subjugate the beautiful creature of God,

the woman. Somewhere she has some equality, and somewhere she is deprived of all her rights. Black women in, compared to white-skinned women, are doubly marginalized. In democratic and educated advanced nations, women are more privileged than the backward and less educated nations like Pakistan, Bangladesh & Middle East States. Women in these parts of the world are far backward, illiterate, and voiceless due to excessive domination of religion in their lives. Religion defines and allots their roles and monitors their behavior and daily life. The male is superior and has unchallenged authority over the female. Women are governed by religious norms and are subjected to draconian and dark laws. Women suffer silently due to lack of education, violence, and terrorism.

Malala Yousufzai, the Nobel peace prize winner, a teenage girl of Swat valley of Pakistan, protested against the injustice done to the women and girls deprived of their rights and education. In her book, *I am Malala with Lamb*, she narrates incidents of women's life in Pakistan in general and Swat valley in particular. The book is a memoir of Malala, who struggled hard to uplift and emancipation suppressed women and girls of Pakistan through education. It is a non-fiction and accurate account of the life of Malala Yousufzai, a minor girl who raised her voice against the oppression of women by terrorist groups like the Taliban. The main concern and the motive of the girl were to impart

education to Pakistani girls to improve their lot and lifestyle. But she had to pay a heavy price for such a noble act which is seen as a sin in Pakistan. Pakistani fundamentalists believe that Quran is against girls' education and that girls are meant to be confined within four walls. They have to observe the veil system, and they should be in a burqa in public, and they must not go unaccompanied anywhere. The misinterpretations of the Quran by hardcore terrorists make women's life miserable and unbearable in Pakistan. *I am Malala* is a powerful, lively narrative that describes the wretched struggling life of women and girls who are robbed of their happiness, freedom, education & beautiful life due to the intrusion of religion and religious blasphemy in their life.

### **1.A moving tale of Women's oppression:**

Women in Pakistan are expected to be always in burqas, and they are to be accompanied by close relatives. Their movement is restricted. They cannot go to the market; they cannot listen to music and cannot dance. Education is denied to them, as the males misinterpret Qurans regarding female education. Discrimination is a part of Pakistani society... The birth of a girl is never celebrated like that of a boy. Malala describes how her birth could not make her relatives happy except for their parents. The extremists and fundamentalists terrorize the women to stick to the misinterpreted norms of the

holy book Quran. Males enjoy unrestricted rights to roam and eat first and a significant chunk of the food cooked in the family. Malala describes how her grandfather and father got luscious chicken, and only wings were given to the girls and women.

The fundamentalists always wanted to subdue the women in the name of religion, and they cited Quran for the purpose. Malala has described this in the book in the following words:

"Men have authority over women because God has made- them superior to the other and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen parts because God guarded them. As for those who fear disobedience, admonish them, forsake them in beds apart, and beat them." (The Quran, An-Nisha, 4.34 qt in Weiss).

But this has been challenged by Malala and proves that Quran is misinterpreted to dominate women. In Pakistan, women even need permission to open a miserable bank account. If a woman moves alone, it is treated as an offense, and the woman is given a death sentence. Malala describes this regrettable incident in her book.

"She came out of her house with a man who was not her husband, so we had to punish her ."He said, "Some boundaries cannot be crossed." For everything a woman is responsible for and even to prove rape, four men must

support the victim; otherwise, the rape victim must be kept in custody. Malala narrates many gruesome incidents in the book. She describes: 'Soon our prisons were full of cases like that of a thirteen-year-old girl who was raped and became pregnant was then sent to jail for adultery because she could not produce four male witnesses to prove that it was crime.... Shaban, a dancer, was shot by the Taliban as it was prohibited for girls and women to dance or sing in public. Aisa Bibi, a Christian who denied changing her religion, was sentenced to death.

Taliban in Swat valley could spread their network by restricting women in the name of Islam. They were adored and admired by Islam fundamentalists when they closed the schools of girls and deprived girls of their education. Malala and her father were targeted as they advocated for girls' education. Taliban even attacked Malala, a thirteen-year-old girl, as she, they thought, was spreading western education in the valley, which is an offense against God. Eshanulla Eshan, a spokesperson of the Taliban, justified the attack on the teenage girl who championed the cause of education for girls in Pakistan in his words:

"Malala has been targeted because of her pioneer role in preaching secularism.... she was young, but she was promoting Western culture in Pashtun areas. She was promoting western culture, speaking against them; she was pro-west and calling president Obama as her idol."

Malala, in her book, describes the misinterpretation of freedom of women in Pakistan on page no 110 in the following words:

"In Pakistan, when women say they want independence, they think this means we do not want to obey our fathers, brothers, or husbands. But it does not mean that. It means we want to make decisions for ourselves. We want to be free to go to school or work. Nowhere is it written in the Quran that a woman should depend on a man. The world has not come down from the heavens to tell us that every woman should listen to a man."

This indicates that there is no liberty for women and girls in Pakistan as it has a patriarchal society. Women are treated as property and possession of men, and they do not have human rights too. Many incidents describe the sad plight and suffering of females in that country.

## **2-As a Memoir of Protest for Women's Rights and Education:**

I Am Malala's title itself speaks about the book. Its title is I Am Malala: The girl who stood up for education and was shot by the Taliban. It is about a girl's protest against patriarchy which denies the fundamental rights like the freedom to wear, speak, and go to school for education.

The book begins with a dedication "to all the girls who have faced injustice and been silenced. Together we will be heard."

The book puts forth the strong voice of a girl who does not care Taliban and works to spread the education of girls in Pakistan, and she fights for their rights, endangering her life.

Malala has specified her goal in writing the book in the following words, which indicate her passion for girls' education and their rights;

"The goal in writing this book was to raise my voice on behalf of the millions of girls worldwide who are denied their right to go to school and realize their potential. I hope my story will inspire girls to raise their voices and embrace their power with them. But my mission does not end there. My mission, our mission, demands that we act decisively to educate girls and empower them to change their lives and communities. That is why I have set up Malala Fund. (Lamb, Yousafjai, 2014).

Throughout the book, it is seen that Malala is advocating for girls' education as she understands that the plight of women can come to an end only when they know the patriarchal politics and their religion. Malala has narrated how her father has set up a girl's school and is determined to run the school despite the resistance and threats from the Taliban. Malala is in pain when she finds that most of the girl's schools in Swat valley are being shut down forcibly by the Taliban.

Malala ventured to speak against these terror fundamentalists group by writing a diary about life under the Taliban

in Swat valley, which was to be broadcasted by BBC under the pseudonym of Gul Makai.

She says in the book: why not me? I wanted people to know what was happening. Education is our right, I said. Just as it is our right to sing. Islam has given us this right and every girl. Should go to school. She was worried about the closure of the girls' school. Even her father's school, where she was a student, was to be closed soon. She states emotionally:

"But the Taliban's deadline was drawing closer; girls had to stop going to school. How could they prevent more than fifty thousand girls from attending school in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? She was apprehensive of her propaganda about education. She said to documentary makers about girls:

"I was startled that if the Taliban caught me going to school, they should throw acid on my face as they had done to girls in Afghanistan. However, she was confident in getting an education. No force would be able to stop her from going to school.

In her words: "They cannot stop me. I will get my education at home, school, or somewhere else. This is our request to the world to save our schools, our Pakistan, and our Swat."

When her school was closed, she cried helplessly, although she was a strong and determined girl. Her father assured her that she would go to school.

The government and different organizations awarded her for educating the girls. In her speech in Punjab, she declared:

"I know the import of education because my pens and books were taken from me by force. But the girls are not afraid of anyone. We have continued with our education. "She got a national Peace Prize, and the Government of Pakistan felicitated her. On that occasion, she presented a memorandum to the prime minister on 20 December 2011. She demanded the rebuilding of schools and the establishment of a girl's University in Swat. Taliban issued threats against Malala for spreading secularism, a sin in Pakistan, and she was to be killed. Ziauddin, the girl's father, suggested hibernating for some time and stopping the campaign for girls' education. But the girl replied sharply.

"How can we do that? I replied. The one who said if we believe in something greater than our lives, then our voices will only multiply even if we are dead. We cannot disown our campaign". Malala was a bold and brave girl who did not succumb to the threats of the Taliban. She went on in her campaign for girls' education and rights, and one day she was shot in her head but narrowly escaped death and set up the Malala fund for the sake of deprived girls of the world.

### **3- Global Feminism:**

The memoir of Malala Yousufzai advocates for liberal and global feminism. She does not go against tradition and

culture, unlike extreme theorists. She does not entirely denounce and ignore religion. She has respect and regards for Islam and the holy book Quran. She does not instigate girls to go against it. Instead, fundamentalists protest the wrong interpretation of the Quran and Islam.

Although she does not hide her face, she does not advocate wearing western costumes. She pleads to provide equal opportunities to lead the life of a human being.

She states 'The Quran teaches us 'sabar' - patience, but often it feels that we have forgotten that word and think Islam means 'women sitting at home in Purdah or wearing burps while men do jihad'. She is not concerned only with the emancipation of women and girls; instead, she is a humanitarian and blends feminism into humanism.

She tells God to bless all human beings for a better life. In her words:

" .... No all Muslims. Tom, No, Not just Muslims; bless all human beings. In her note in 'Malala Fund,' she has advocated not only her liberation and freedom of education for the Muslim women but all the world's women.

She says: "Peace in every home, every street, every village, every country- this is my dream, education for every boy and girl in the world. To sit down on a chair and read my books with all my friends at school, to see every human being with a smile of happiness

on my right. I am Malala, my world has changed, but I have not (Yousufjai) 313). I do not doubt that Malala is proud that the world recognizes her by her story and her dreams rather than her name."

This indicates that Malala is a humanist, and her feminism is not confined to any boundary. To her, feminism means equality. She told an audience in Devos in January 2018 about feminism. She says:

"I just looked more into it and realized that feminism is just another word for equality- it means equality, and no one would object to equality, and it just means that women should have equal rights as man". But, she is not in favor of the feminism that advocates for the superiority of women.

She asserts the power of women in the world in the following words:

"There are two powers in the world: one is the sword, the other is the pen. There is a third power stronger than both, that of women."

The tone of the girl is very commanding in the book. She says: "If one man can destroy everything, why can't one girl change it"? She does not isolate females from the male. In her concept of feminism, males play more significant roles in acknowledging women's rights.

### **Conclusion:**

I am Malala is an excellent memoir about women's lives in a patriarchal environment. Women must struggle for freedom. It is an extraordinary realistic historical memoir that pleads

for women's emancipation in all respects. It demands equal status and freedom for women in society. It condemns the domination, discrimination, and injustice done to women by men since the beginning of civilization. Malala, an inspiration for women's rights, is a great feminist. The memoir indeed claims to be excellent writing of feminism.

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