

# Malala Yousafzai: Voice for the Women Empowerment

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**Abstract:** *Malala Yousafzai has become a global icon for her socio-cultural activism. At an age when children only think about playing, Malala chose to rebel against the savage Taliban. From a very young age she advocated for girls education and Women Empowerment in Swat Valley. With the help of Malala Fund she is helping girls to receive their education, thus, her activism is not restricted to national level but it is spreading all over the world.*

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, Socio-cultural activism, Gender Disparity

## 1. Introduction

Women Empowerment is an amalgamation of two words- Women and Empowerment. Empowerment means giving strength or power. Thus, Women Empowerment means giving power or strength to women so that, they can live independently and make their own decisions. The first thing for decision making is education. Empowering a woman helps to improve the country's growth.

Pakistan's Swat Valley which was once known as the Switzerland of the East, a peaceful place which was known for tourism suddenly became a place of terrorism in the hands of Taliban. Taliban restricted Women to their houses, Women were banned from going to markets, girl's education was banned and more than 400 schools were destroyed. Thus, Malala Yousafzai raised her voice against such discrimination; she raised her voice for Women Empowerment.

Malala Yousafzai is female education activist who spoke out publicly against the Taliban's prohibition on the education of girls and the discrimination done on the Women. She survived an assassination attempt made by Taliban and became the youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner and has won many national and international awards.

Malala Yousafzai was born on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1997 in Mingora, Swat District of Pakistan's Northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, to a Sunni Muslim family. Her first name Malala was given to her after a famous Pashtun poet and warrior from southern Afghanistan- "Malalai of Maiwand". She was the eldest daughter of Ziauddin Yousafzai and Toor Pekai Yusafzai. Her father Ziauddin Yousafzai was a school teacher, who in 1994 started his own school named Khushal school where he taught to both girls and boys. He was an education activist who protested against the Tehrik-i-Taliban who had opposed the education rights of Pakistani girls. He encouraged Malala to stand up and speak up for the rights of education. He stood against everything that threatened Malala's future. In the society where the girls were stopped from going to school, from going to places where crowd including men and boys gathered, girls who were forced to give up their education and futures, Malala was supported by her father to get

education, to give speeches in public, he let her fly, he did not clip the wings of his daughter.

Malala was passionate about getting education, she loved reading books, she enjoyed going to school, but as the Taliban entered the Swat Valley region they started to impose strict laws which took away girls rights. They believed that girls did not have equal rights to an education; these extremists banned watching television, listening to music and banned girl's education. Those who did not obey these orders they would enforce harsh punishments. It resulted in heavy dropouts from schools; girls were stopped from going to school. As a result Malala at very young age raised her voice against this exploitation.

### Women Empowerment Initiated by Malala

When Malala Yousafzai was eleven years old she began her activism (Began to advocate for girls education in Swat Valley). One day in Khushal school Malala and other students wrote speeches on how they felt about Talibans campaign of destroying girls schools. Malala and other students stood in front of Pashto Tv crew and began to tell about their friends who had quit the school out of fear and the love they had for school. Next it was Malala's turn she said "This is not Stone Age but it feels like we are going backward. Girls are getting more deprived of our rights. We are afraid of no one, and we will continue our education. This is our dream".

In 2008 Malala began to speak for the right of education to all the local and National Tv channels, Radio, and Newspapers. She then began to spread her activism not only at national level but at international level. Once her father's friend who was working at BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation Network) asked Malala's father to find a female teacher or older student from the school to write a diary about life under the Taliban rule, but teachers were not ready to write about Taliban, an older girl named Ayesha had agreed but her father out of fear decided not to allow her daughter to write against Taliban. At this point of fear Malala stood up and took this initiative of blogging for BBC. Malala began to write under a Pseudonym as "Gul Makai" which means "Cornflower" and is the name of heroine in Pashtun folktale. In her BBC blog she wrote about how life was difficult under Taliban rule, how hard it was to study, especially for girls who were not allowed to

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study. Everything that she wrote for BBC was available for every individual on the internet, many reporters and The New York Times (A Big newspaper in America) began to talk about the story of Fazlullah's attempt to shut down the girls school. Malala's voice for Women Empowerment reached at international level.

In early 2009, Adam Ellick a reporter (The New York Times) worked with Malala Yousafzai and made a documentary called "Class Dismissed" where she said, "They cannot stop me. I will get my education. This is our request to the world-save our schools, save our Pakistan, save our Swat". With her efforts in 2009 Malala successfully got the schools open. Her identity as Gul Makai was revealed and she became popular teenage activist. Later she began to deliver speeches at different stages. In 2011 Malala was nominated for an International Peace Prize, and in the same year she was awarded with Pakistan's first ever National Youth Peace Prize by the President of Pakistan. For her activism she was receiving awards and on the other hand she was receiving threatening notes by Taliban. Because she spoke against Taliban publicly on Women Empowerment and girl's education, this made her a target. In October 9, 2012 on the way to home from school Malala was shot on the left side of her head. She was taken to Swat central hospital and then at 3 PM she was taken to another hospital at Peshawar and finally on Dr. Fiona's (who treated Malala along with Dr. Javid) advice Malala was taken to Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham for advanced medical treatment. After undergoing several surgeries like – a custom made titanium plate was fitted to her skull and a cochlear implant was done to help her recover hearing in her left ear. After recovering she did not end or gave pause to her activism rather she began to talk about Women Empowerment at different places.

Along with her father and Shiza Shahid (a Pakistani social entrepreneur, social activist, investor, and educator) she established Malala Fund, a charity dedicated to giving every girl twelve years of free, safe and high quality education. For her activism she was given Nobel Peace Prize in December 2014 where she said "I could choose between two alternatives. One is to be silenced and to wait for being killed. Second option is to speak out and to be killed for doing that. I chose the second option. I decided to raise my voice".

On Malala's 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, she was invited to speak at the United Nations conference in New York city, on that day 12<sup>th</sup> July 2013 she gave speech on, Peace, Education and Equality there she said "they (Taliban) thought that bullets could silence us. But they failed. Instead of their expected silence, thousands of voices were raised. The terrorist expected to change my goals and to destroy my dreams. But such changes were not at all there in me. The death of weakness, fear and despond way took place instead. Strength, power and courage got life also. I am the same Malala. My wishes are the same as the earlier and so the hopes. My dreams do not have any change". The UN named the event as "Malala Day".

In the year 2020 Malala graduated from Oxford University, she said "after taking time to relax, I am more dedicated than ever to my fight for girls".

Apart from winning Nobel Peace Prize and Pakistan's first ever National Youth Peace Prize, Malala has also received many other prestigious awards for her activism, like: In January 2012, Malala Yousafzai was given Anne Frank Award for her Moral Courage. In October 2012, she was given Sitara-e-Shujaat (Pakistan's Second Highest Civilian Bravery Award). In November 2012, she was awarded Mother Teresa Award for Social Justice. In December 2012, she was given Rome Prize for Peace and Humanitarian Action. In January 2013, she was given Simone de Beauvoir Prize. In the year 2013, she was awarded Doughty Street Advocacy Award of Index on Censorship. In the year 2013, she was awarded Fred and Anne Jarvis Award of the UK National Union of Teachers, and still many more awards.

## 2. Conclusion

Malala Yousafzai raised her voice for Women Empowerment at the time when all others had lost their hopes. Malala's activism inspired girls all over the world to achieve their goals, her story inspired others to raise their voice against the discrimination. Through her organization Malala fund she is helping out the girls all over the World to pursue free, safe and quality education. This is a big step that she has taken in empowering women. Her love for education, her dedication towards Women Empowerment is appreciated.

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