



I am Malala – by Malala Yuosafzai and Christina Lamb

Why are women and girls discriminated against? Why do the Taliban and other extremists ferociously oppose the education of women and girls with threats of violence, and actual violence. In mid June this year, 70 girls' schools in Afghanistan were closed because of Taliban threats of violence. This book does not delve into why this vicious discrimination exists, but describes it and what it does to people affected.

Malala Yousafzai is the teenage girl who wants to be known as the girl who stood up for education, rather than the girl who was shot by the Taliban. She can also be known as the youngest person who, in 2014 at the age of 17, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Unpretentious, down to earth, committed to her cause, passionate about education (including her own) and deeply attached to her native Pakistan, her religion, and her beloved Swat Valley, where she can no longer live for fear of further violence, Malala is a stand out person, who tells a stand out story. This book is of her life so far, and, at age 20, we can expect a lot from her in the future.

Written in an easily readable style, it tells of the history of the Swat Valley, with its "high snow-capped mountains, green waving fields, and fresh blue rivers". It tells how the original Swattees were over run and absorbed by the Buddhists in the 2nd Century, and how they were eventually displaced by the Pashtuns in the 11th century. It tells of the division of India and the horrors of the displacement of so many people. It describes the turmoil of the Russian invasion, the hanging of Zulfiqar Bhutto, and the political machinations of General Zia and others. It continues describing events in Pakistan into Malala's lifetime including the events surrounding the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. Malala's thoughts and impressions of these events are woven into the story of her day to day simple village life, her passion to achieve better school marks and top her class, and her disappointment when she does not do so.

In 2011 she was awarded the Pakistani National Youth Peace Prize, as a person who spoke out publicly for education particularly for girls. Then when the Taliban became more than just a threat, her family left Swat and the Pakistan military warred with the Taliban. Upon their return she says that the military continued presence was almost as bad as the Taliban, but at least she could recommence her schooling. She continued to keep a written diary about her life under Taliban rule, which was broadcast by the BBC.

Then in 2012 the cruel and tragic targeted attack, followed by her whole family being airlifted to the UK by the private jet of the ruling family of the UAE. She woke up in a hospital in Birmingham, and started there a new life .. all of them grieving for their beloved Swat, friends and family left behind.

Now through the Malala Foundation she continues her advocacy for the education of children, especially of girls. Her story tells about inspirational visits to Syria, Nigeria, Kenya and Pakistan where she uses the fund to set up projects and to assist in education. This book is inspirational. It can make us realise how much we have, and how much we can take for granted. It accentuates the fact of women's plight and their severe disadvantage in so many parts of the world. The book's most important message is that the education of girls and women worldwide is and will be the most powerful way of pushing back against all kinds of extremism and prejudice.

CHRIS DONOHUE