



Misinterpretation of Women's Religious Rights and Cultural Discrimination in the Novel I Am Malala from a Feminist Perspective

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Keywords

1. Discrimination

2. feminist approach

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to investigate the notion of cultural discrimination against women in Pakistan as portrayed in Yousfzai's I Am Malala. Towards this end, the paper approaches this work from an anthropological and feminist perspective, using Koentjaraningrat's cultural theory (2002). Results reveal that there is still a wide gulf between men and women in terms of gender equality, especially in the religious and cultural system. That is, the analysis of the novel strongly suggests that gender-based discrimination continues to exist in the Pakistani society, particularly when a girl is born. It also indicates that many women are victims of some misinterpretations of women's religious rights granted by Islam, a situation that has led to the emergence of a distinct branch of feminism known as Islamic feminism as well as of activists who have sought to advance the cause of woman within the framework of Islam.



إساءة فهم الحقوق الدينية للمرأة والتعصب الثقافي من وجهة نظر النسائية في رواية: "أنا ملالا"

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الكلمات المفتاحية

٢. النهج النساني

١. التعصب

الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة للكشف عن عدم إعطاء المرأة لحقوقها وتعرضها للتعصب الثقافي والحرمان من الحقوق الدينية الأساسية في رواية أنا ملالا. للمرأة حقوق مميزة في الدين والثقافة، ولكن يقل مستوى حصول المرأة لحقوقها في باكستان. ومع مواكبة الحادثة والتمدن أسيء تفسير حقوق المرأة في الإسلام، وبدأ بعض علماء الإسلام يعترفون بظهور فرع متميز من الحركة النسائية يعرف بالنسائية الإسلامية، ولذلك سعى الناشطون إلى النهوض بقضية المرأة في إطار الإسلام، ومن أبرز المدافعون عن هذه القضية ملالا يوسفزاي. ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة استخدمت الباحثة منهج وصفي تحليلي من خلال نظرية الأنثروبولوجيا لكونينجارانينغرات لعام 2002 والنهج النسائي. وقد توصلت الدراسة إلى عدد من الاستنتاجات من أهمها: أن هناك اختلافا في معاملة الرجل والمرأة وخاصة في الجوانب الدينية والثقافية. وكان لقضية ملالا- الحائزة على جائزة نوبل للسلام- أثر كبير في مطالبة النساء لممارسة حقوقهن في باكستان. وإن العديد من النساء يقنن ضحايا للعادات والتقاليد وإساءة تفسير الحقوق الدينية للمرأة خاصة في المناطق الريفية، مما أدى إلى عدم ممارسة المرأة لحقوقها رغم مطالبتها بذلك الحقوق.

Introduction:

It is widely held that literature is inseparable from social life. Literature utilizes language as a medium to enhance its output in its social context, as one of the primary objectives of language studies. Damono (2003) suggests that literature as a social institution is utilizing language as a medium, and that language itself is acting as a social fact. Consequently, this interpretation suggests that life is embedded in a relationship between societies, between individuals, and a conflict that is typically experienced in the individual.

The events that occurred in the lives of individuals are a manifestation of human relationships with other individuals and with society. It can be asserted, then, there is an inextricable bond between literature, authors, and society, as these elements all interfere and interact with each other (Damono, 2003).

It is evident from the three elements mentioned by Damono (2003) that literature is the result of a long-term process that cannot be separated from the author's cultural influence. Literature is a concept that is associated with a specific outcome in a cultural environment, and is used in communication situations that are governed by a specific culture. Therefore, the birth of literature is closely linked to the culture of a particular society, while literature is part of that culture in its own unique way.

Anthropology is a branch of science that can assist in the analysis of literary works related to culture. It is the exploration of human behavior in society. Although it can be classified into physical and cultural anthropologies, the literalist refers to anthropological literature as "literary literature". This connection between literature and anthropology allows the social occurrences that take place in the social milieu to be easily documented, including gender issues.

Gender is a classic issue that has been debated from antiquity to the present day.

Regardless of the subject matter, gender remains a fundamental topic and has its own intrinsic appeal that can lead people to seek solutions to gender-related issues. For these reasons, the issue will never be eliminated from the discourse, so long as the distinctions between men and women remain.

The literary discourse surrounding gender issues has become increasingly popular among readers, particularly female readers. This is due to the fact that the main character of the novel is a woman, which has been discussed in connection with the inequalities between men and women. One such novel that explores the topic of cultural discrimination against women is *I Am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai.

This novel draws upon the experiences of women's literature and can be considered as a reflection of the patriarchal culture prevalent in Pakistan. It was initially co-written with Christina Lamb and was based on the diary of Malala Yousafzai, who was shot by the Taliban in 2013. The title is a reference to the story of the girl who stood up for education and was shot.

The feminist and cultural phenomena that occur in this novel are due to the patriarchal culture prevalent within the community. In light of the aforementioned issues, the objective of the study is to uncover the cultural identity which is more concerned with uncovering the religious prejudice against women within the novel.

Women are typically looked at as human beings that should maintain a lower position than their male counterparts. The primary justification for this view is that women are generally seen as inferior to men due to their biological condition. This biological inferiority is held to be immutable in society due to the stigmatization of woman. But it is the society that perpetuates the idea that man is more powerful than woman, which is rooted

in the culture that upholds the traditional gender roles. In the opinion of Tyson (2006), the traditional gender roles portray man as logical, robust, protective, and resolute, while woman is portrayed as irrational, fragile, caring, and subservient. Such gender-based characterizations persist to this day.

1. Review of Related Literature

A. Anthropological Literature

Anthropological knowledge is the study of human life in society, and is divided into two main categories: physical and cultural. Physical anthropology is related to literature, while cultural anthropology is related to nonverbal objects. Literary anthropology is related to verbal objects, while oral tradition is associated with verbal objects. The anthropological approach is based on the connection between anthropological cognition and language, and the primary focus is not on the "in" aspect of literature, but on the "from" aspect of literature (Ratna, 2004: 63-64).

B. Cultural Theory

Anthropology defines culture as a collection of concepts, behaviors, and outcomes of human activity within the framework of society, which is attributed to humanity. Culture is the product of human creativity, initiative, and intelligence. There are three distinct forms of culture: cultural form, which is a complex of concepts, values, standards, and regulations; cultural form, which involves a complex of activities with a pattern of human activity in society; and cultural form, an object of human activity.

Culture encompasses a wide range of universal components that can be found in all countries of the world. According to Koentjaragingrat (2000:203-204), there are seven distinct cultural components that form the core of global culture: Language, Knowledge, Social Organization, Technology and Life Equipment, Livelihood, Religion, and Art. These components are further subdivided

into a third form, a cultural system, a social system, and a physical culture.

Pakistan's culture is steeped in traditional values, which have had a significant impact on the social and familial sphere of the country. This has resulted in the formation of a patriarchal structure. However, Islamic family law further emphasizes the subordinate status of women, granting men authority over them as husbands and male relatives. This has made it difficult to define the boundaries between religion and cultural tradition, as both have had a long-term impact on the formation of social norms.

C. Women's Rights

Women Action Forum was a gathering of individuals and organizations that held different views on gender. Some of these individuals were academics who had taken feminism seriously and were committed to challenging the patriarchy-based structures of society, such as tribal, feudal, and capitalist structures. Gender is an innate characteristic of men and women that has been socially and culturally constructed over a long period of time, often through religious means (Fakih, 2000: 08).

In contrast, there were some women who were content with the more limited focus on women's rights, yet were hesitant to use the word "feminism" as it could be interpreted as a sign of hatred, exclusion, or outright rejection of men. This was more likely due to a lack of comprehension than a genuine disagreement. Liberal feminism is a form of feminism that is less extreme than socialist feminism, but still advocates for equality for women in the context of the national state. Marxism and socialist feminism, however, are more confrontational in terms of class division and require a radical alteration of the economic and social systems of exploitation and exploitation. Radical feminists, on the other hand, emphasize the ideological and material nature of patriarchy and its particular

manifestation in the form of tribal, feudal, and capitalist structures.

D. Women's religious rights in Islam

The issue of the rights of women within Islam is a highly contentious issue when considering the significance of the religion in modern times. As the Holy Quran was revealed in Ancient Arabic, and contains certain verses that are only comprehensible in the context in which they were first revealed, it is essential to comprehend the historical context of these revelations. In recent times, a number of verses have been misinterpreted, which has had a direct effect on the interpretation of Islam's fundamental concepts, and, as a result, has led to the perpetuation of gender discrimination (Kaidi, 2020).

Western feminists have traditionally viewed Islam as a religion that restricts women's freedoms, which has frustrated many scholars interested in the field of gender equality. However, this has led to the development of Islamic Feminism as a new branch of feminism.

In the eighteenth century, the emergence of the modern Islamic feminist movement was marked by the work of Tahiri, an Iranian poet who was one of the first modern women to focus on the interpretation of Qur'an. Subsequently, a group of Islamic scholars with a strong interest in the advancement of women in Muslim countries began to investigate the concept of Islam's feminists in Egypt. This was in response to the emergence of nationalism in the former colonial countries, particularly in Egypt, France, and Algeria, as well as in other countries such as Libya and Morocco, which highlighted the need to re-establish traditional values and align society with the beliefs of the people.

These Islamic thinkers not only worked to promote the recognition of their nation's citizenship, but also to incorporate gender equality into Islam. Egypt's physicist Qasim

Amin was particularly influential in this regard, advocating for equal opportunities in space and the Women's Revolution. He strongly believed that women should be given the opportunity to pursue higher education, as this would enable them to educate future generations. His work inspired other scientists to reconsider the practices that had been used as a means of oppression against women in Islam. Other Muslim thinkers, such as Nabawiya Musa, Malik Hifni, and Leila Ahmed, as well as Margaret Badran, also played a role in the struggle for female equality within Islam.

Margaret Badran argues that Islamic feminism was born out of criticism of both patriarchal Islam (ism) and secular feminism. She argues that the Quran is a testament to the concept of equal rights and fairness for all individuals, however, the practices of patriarchy prevalent in contemporary Muslim societies have had a detrimental effect on the practice of gender equality. Feminist interpretations of religious texts are based on the Quran's teachings of gender equality in both the public and private spheres.

Amina Wadud, an African-American academic, argues that Muslim feminists have adapted their concept of Islam's "contextualization" to promote gender equality in the context of their faith. Since the 19th century, both men and women have struggled with Sharia law restrictions that affect women, such as compulsory veiling, separate education, isolation, polygyny, and concubine practice. As part of their efforts to address these social issues, Muslim women have called for legal reform, established girls' educational institutions, and challenged cover-up and polygamy.

Malala Yousafzai, the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, was born in the Swat Valley region of Pakistan on July 12th, 1997. She is a Sunni Muslim from a Pashtun tribe from the Swat Valley. Malalai (Malala) of Miland, known as the "Grief Knocker" due to

her Pashtun origin, is a renowned poet and fighter from the Swat Valley region of Southern Afghanistan. Her family origin is from the Swat tribal confederation, where she was raised, and her battle for female empowerment has captivated the world.

Malala a Pakistani human rights activist and educationist, was inspired by the works of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Benaziri Bhutto and others to strive to be more like her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai. This inspired her to pursue her education and to advocate for the rights of women to pursue higher education. She spoke openly about the need for girls' education and, despite the Taliban's occupation of Swat Valley in Pakistan having eliminated all prospects of female education, she remained steadfast in her efforts to ensure their right to education. Despite being shot by an extreme group, Malala was able to recover from her injuries and was left with critical brain injuries. This experience did not have a negative impact on her, but rather strengthened her resolve to achieve her goals.

Malala's mission was to provide girl children with free, secure, and superior education. She founded a charitable organization and was shot by masked men in her school bus. Her story is seen as a symbol of bravery and is inspiring to women refugees and women everywhere. She has galvanized and energized the feminist movement. Malala co-authored the memoir *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Shot by Taliban* with Christina Lamb, and continues to work to achieve her goals. Her story is one of strength, courage, and the triumph of good over evil, as she has stood for women's rights, particularly education. However, the beauty of her stance is that it has been demanded within the context of religion, thus resonating with Islamic Feminists.

When these men asserted that women should not be educated, her father responded by citing the Quran, which states that all men and women are encouraged to pursue their education and gain knowledge. On another

occasion, a dispute arose over her father's school, which was monitored by a mullah, referred to as a Mufti, an Islamic jurist and authority in the field of Islamic law. The mullah contacted the owner of the property and charged Ziauddin with running a prohibited school.

The Mufti accused the receptionist of the school of being a male and asserted that the girls attending the schools should observe purdah. The Mufti went to the owner of the building and requested that the owner provide the building to the mufti for the purpose of opening the madrassa, however, the owner refused to do so and warned Malala's father to be wary of him. The following day, the mufti assembled a group of elders and influential figures and led them to Malala's residence. The man argued to Malala's father that a girl was so sacred that she should be kept in purdah and that there was no need for her name to be mentioned in the Quran as God did not desire her to be named.

Her father confronted the mufti with the fact that Maryam's (Mary's) name had been referenced in the Quran, which caused the mufti to be perplexed. Her father further questioned the mufti's scholarship in Islam, noting that he had not responded to greetings. To her astonishment, the mufti responded that he had thought himself an infidel, yet had observed Qurans in his residence. Her father eventually proposed a solution to the problem, stating that the girls would be allowed to enter from a different entrance, which satisfied all parties, but the mufti departed.

E. Feminism

Feminism is a concept that focuses on the struggles of women to gain recognition of their existence. The terms "feminism" and "feminist activists" are among the most debated terms in Pakistan. This concept seeks to illustrate the ways in which the patriarchal tradition of depicting women as creatures is suppressed, misrepresented, and disregarded.

Feminism is a concept that advocates for the full equality of women in all aspects of life, from economic and political to educational ones. Feminist activism, on the other hand, is a movement that seeks to define, create and protect the rights of women, including equal political, economic and social rights, as well as equal opportunity. The most recent generation of feminists in Pakistan is composed of individuals from all backgrounds. Activists are not only striving to achieve equal rights, but are also attempting to challenge the areas of life where patriarchy is still prevalent.

Women's rights are a fundamental human right, and it is essential that they are provided with the opportunity to reach their full potential and make a positive impact on society. To achieve this, the patriarchy must be eliminated in order to liberate women from oppression in the true sense of the word. Pakistan's feminist movement is a relatively recent development, and it has been met with criticism from both traditional and progressive feminists alike.

E. Previous Study

Previous relevant research on *I Am Malala* includes the following:

The first research is an essay written by Daiya in 2013 entitled *Cultural Policy, Gender, & History in Malala's I Am Malala*. This essay examines the implications of Malala's story on the traditional cultural attitudes towards the role of women in families in South Asia today, as well as how these attitudes shape the experiences of girls and their relationship to Pakistan's history of secularism. Drawing on postcolonial feminist theory, the researcher examines the implications of cultural politics, gender, and history that address women's issues.

The second research is also an essay written by Sari in 2014 entitled *Malala Yousafzai's Life Under the Taliban Movement*:

Psychological and Feminist Approach. It focuses on the psychological and feminist approach taken by Malala Yousafzai. Through her investigation, she found out that the Taliban movement had a significant impact on Malala's psychological development, leading her to become a mature and courageous young woman. She further revealed that the type of feminism reflected by Malala was Liberal Feminism, which prioritized "rights" over "goodness".

The third study is conducted by Ulum in 2016 entitled *Malala's Struggles against Unfairness in Malala Yousafzai and Cristina Lamb's I Am Malala*. The researcher employed the Islamic Feminist approach. The researcher divided Malala's struggles against unfairness into four distinct categories: Victimization in the Name of Honor, Selling of Bride, Restriction of Political System, and Terrorist Factor; Malala's Struggle in Getting Education; and Malala's Struggle for Muslim Women's Access to Public Space.

This study seeks to explore women religious right misinterpretation and discrimination depicted in the novel book *I Am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai and Cristina Lamb. Drawing on the theory of liberal feminist prescriptive.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to uncover the discrimination of women by men, which occurred in the context of the novel, *I Am Malala*. This condition unbalances all aspects of life in Pakistan, particularly those related to religion and culture. In Pakistan, women have various rights in religious and cultural matters, where women have a lesser right than men.

3. Objectives of the study

The objectives of study are:

1. To understand the concept of women's empowerment and its influence on the quality of life for

women in Pakistan due to religion and cultural discrimination.

2. To study about the lifestyle of women who are subject to cultural discrimination in Pakistan.

4. Methodology

Methodology is the systematic methodology used to address any research issue. It is the method used by researchers to describe, investigate, and predict phenomena. It is a particular approach or technique used to identify, select, process, and analyze data related to a particular topic. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of women's empowerment and its influence on the religious and cultural life for women, as well as to investigate how women have experienced discrimination and how it has affected their empowerment. Therefore, the descriptive analytical method was employed in this study.

This paper utilizes qualitative research, anthropological and feminist perspective, using Koentjaraningrat's cultural theory (2002) to explore the religious and cultural discrimination in the novel *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Shot by Taliban* by Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb (2013). The primary data source for the paper is the memoir, while the secondary data sources are materials from multiple sources.

5. Results and Discussion

This paper revealed that religious and cultural discrimination exists in certain areas of Pakistan. Despite the fact that many women have come to terms with the fact that they are subject to religious and cultural discrimination, women and girls in rural areas still face inequality, which has a significant effect on their fundamental rights. This paper highlighted the need for women to become more aware of their own empowerment and to address the inequality they face, with the majority of women responding that they are experiencing religious and cultural discrimination. The empowerment of women has enabled them to take advantage of a

variety of opportunities, as they possess the necessary abilities to manage both domestic and non-domestic tasks. This empowerment has had a positive effect on the growth and development of women.

The position of women in Pashtun society is distinct from that of men. For many Pashtuns, the day of the birth of a daughter is a sad occasion. In a culture where a son is celebrated by firing a rifle, while a daughter is kept hidden behind a curtain. Woman's primary job in life is to prepare food and bear children. Woman is also treated differently in terms of food when she is dining with man. This was the case for Malala's father when he was still a young man. His father would receive cream or milk, while his sisters would receive tea without milk. When chickens were slaughtered, the girls would receive the wings and neck while the juicy breast meat was consumed by Malala's father.

Malala Yousafzai made a valiant effort to emphasize the importance of women's education in her speech. She resides in the tranquil Swat Valley with her family, where her father Zianuddin runs Khushal School, which offers two distinct types of education: boys' and girls' schools. Many students attend the girls' school, including Malala, Moniba, and Malka-e-Noor, who strive to excel in their studies and strive to be considered as intelligent.

When the Taliban came to power in Swat Valley, they established a radio station, Radio Mullah, or Mullah FM, which they broadcast nightly. The station featured the surah of the Holy Quran, which Fazlullah referred to as an "Islamic reformer" and "Quran interpreter". Fazlullah used his broadcasts to urge people to abandon bad habits and practices, and to threaten them with the wrath of God if they did not. His voice was sometimes reasonable, such as when he encouraged someone to do something they did not want to do, and at other times it was frightening and filled with fire. The radio began to disturb people when it broadcast that people should cease dancing and watching movies, as God disapproved of these sinful

acts, and that if they did not, they would be subject to an earthquake.

The Taliban requires the women to remain in their homes and fulfill their duties. They are only permitted to leave their homes in emergency situations. Many women were so impressed with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad that they presented him with gold and cash, particularly in rural areas or households where husbands were working overseas. Tables were designated for women to present their wedding bangles and jewelry, and a queue of women would queue up to receive them or send their sons. Some women even donated their life savings in the belief that this would bring them great joy.

Ghulamullah, a man in Pakistan, attempted to close the Girls' School in Khushal due to his belief that it was a "haram" school. However, Malala Yousafzai, the daughter of Zia ul Haq, spearheaded the fight for girls' education. She and her father conducted numerous campaigns with educational themes. Unfortunately, Malala was shot in the head while walking to school. Despite this, many girls in the country remain unable to obtain formal education. Woman in the area is limited to becoming wife and daughter, with limited opportunities to pursue other professions, such as doctor or teacher, due to the pressure of men.

This memoir is about the involvement of women, particularly those in Swat Valley who are selling their jewelry to support their husbands. It also reflects the efforts of Malala Yousafzai, who has undertaken numerous campaigns to achieve gender equality. In her speech, Malala spoke particularly about the importance of education for girls, emphasizing the need for free access to education in order to enable them to become productive members of society, as envisioned by Malala.

This memoir serves as a testament to Malala's commitment to woman's rights. Malala believes that the primary issue is the unequal access of girls to education. She emphasizes that there is no distinction between boys and girls when it comes to education, and that all individuals, regardless

of age, gender, or race, should have equal access to education. She advocates for the right of all individuals to attend school and receive formal education.

Malala has demonstrated remarkable resilience after being shot by the Taliban while she was in her way to school. Initially, many thought she would never recover, and she was taken to multiple hospitals in Pakistan, including Swat Central and Lady Reading Hospitals in Peshawar. Ultimately, she was taken to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham for treatment and rehabilitation. With the help of God, she was able to open her eyes again. Following this tragedy, Malala has expressed her ambition to become an educational activist, and has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize as a result. She wishes to be remembered as a "girl who fought for education" rather than a "girl shot by the Taliban". The results of the paper demonstrate a close relationship between the memoir and the social life in Pakistan regarding the religious and cultural.

7. Conclusion

Theoretically, power play is a manifestation of unequal power relationships between men and women, which have been fostered by male-centric social and cultural norms and practices. This has resulted in men having a greater degree of privilege and power, as well as the ability to take advantage of women. This has had a detrimental effect on the status of women, and power-play contributes to the perpetuation of this inequality. Power-play is a form of discrimination against women, and is one of the most prevalent expressions of male power. The underlying causes of such practices are largely attributed to patriarchal culture, however, each practice has its own unique characteristics.

Malala draws attention to the plight of Muslim women, not only in Afghanistan, but across the globe, through her memoir. She

emphasizes the significance of modest clothing, five-day fasting, and adherence to religious beliefs, while also emphasizing the discrimination facing women due to misinterpretation of the Quran. She concludes that the solution lies in education, and that unless women are educated and taught the true word of God, they will remain subject to the exploitation of patriarchal power.

Women in Pakistan are still subject to discrimination due to their gender identity. Awareness-raising programs have been implemented to increase recognition of their rights and influence. Some women seem to be eager to undertake further initiatives to promote their empowerment in the future, as many others are still victims of gender-based discrimination. Through this effort, women can gain a better understanding of the reality of gender-based cultural discrimination, as it has a direct effect on women's empowerment, status, and basic education. If women remain unaware of the issues of gender cultural discrimination and women's empowerment, their efforts will be of little value. In particular, women and girls in rural areas are still facing inequalities, domestic violence, and violations of their rights. To sum up, this paper has shown that the misinterpretation of women's religious rights and the cultural discrimination practiced against them are a pervasive problem across the globe and that women are determined to fight against it.

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