

# The malala debate

Politics



The Malala debate There is a groundswell of sympathy for Malala and also a strong demand for the Pakistani state to do something about the issue. Much of the discontent is directed toward the Pakistani Taliban, the extremist group that has claimed responsibility for the shooting and declared it has vowed to kill Malala if she recovers from her injuries. Also, it has issued fresh threats to another girl Hina Khan of Islamabad who is also known for her female rights activism and proeducation stance.

This threat comes two weeks after the Taliban shot Malala. Hina is originally from the Swat valley but was forced to move with her family to Islamabad in 2006 after she publically criticised the Taliban's atrocities. The Malala incident has renewed the attention on the plight of women in Afghanistan. Twenty one year old Afghan activist Noorjahan Akbar, who has been leading a fight for women's rights in Afghanistan, has articulated that Malala's case will strengthen her and others fight for girl's rights.

Cofounder of a non profit group called Young Women for Change; she has been instrumental in organising trailblazing efforts such as the first Afghan march against street harassment, radio campaigns about gender equality and street posters against child marriage and abuse. This year, her group opened a women's Internet cafe in Kabul, providing a forum for women to gather and share ideas. Although women in Afghanistan are for the cause of Malala and support her fight but there are many other women activists like Akbar who are fighting for the same cause and not getting the support they deserve.

No doubt, Malala's case is more horrifying as she is young and nobody would look at her as a threat as a 14-year old girl promoting education, no one has heard about Hanifa Safi women activist who was killed this summer. Fifteen

girls had acid thrown on their face a couple of years ago but no public protest was held. More than 300 girls were poisoned in Afghan schools this summer specifically because they wanted to have access to education; unfortunately no one talks about it. Malala's case has created a buzz which it deserves and the way its gaining popularity can help to highlight these cases which re otherwise completely ignored. The Civil Society Movements The Malala incident and eventually her cause got support from almost all parts of the World especially from the South Asian Countries where human rights activists, acedemicians, students and members of civil society took to streets to condemn the attack. From Madonna to Angelina Jolie to top Politicians like Hina Rabbani Khar and Rehman Malik, people from all walks and corners of the World are appreciating her courage and have vowed to support her mission to ensure education for girls in Pakistan.

The Pakistan government has offered to provide security to Malala when she will return to Pakistan and has promised to provide all necessary help. Even the Sunni clerics in Pakistan have issued a Fatwa against the Taliban, decrying an attack on a girl as un-Islamic, which speaks volumes about Malala and her cause and how people from diverse background are in the same boat for the cause. In a message of defiance to the Taliban, authorities in Swat have decided to rename a government college after Malala. The College offers high school and undergraduate education for 2, 000 girl's and young women.

Can this be sustained? Although the cause for women's rights in Taliban affected areas has been supported by the developing countries and the western world, it has always been very hard to implement it at the grass root

level. The women activists or others spreading education or fighting for women's rights have to face the brunt of the Taliban. Malala's cause has gained support from every corner, the blog she wrote for BBC with the pseudo name Gul Makai about the poor state of girls in Swat under the Taliban earned her innumerable sympathizers.

The International Children's peace prize in October 2011 and Pakistani first National peace prize further gave recognition to her work and the documentaries made on her added to the popularity. The Taliban feared that she is being held as a hero by the World and thus shot her which only added to more support for her cause. Thus, considering all the above factors and the debate and support she has generated, it is not wrong to say that the momentum evoked by the Malala movement is likely to sustain for a longer period of time and even more so if she returns to Swat and take the battle to its logical end.