

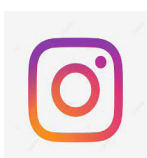
# ROOTS & ROUTES

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Microsoft Copilot. (2024). Indian force labour of plantation workers in the ancient period moving in ships.

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# Editor's Note



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Dear Readers,

Greetings!

Throughout history, the issue of slavery and forced labour has held a prominent position among major social concerns. During the colonisation period many people were forcefully taken from one place to another to work against their will. In the current edition of Roots & Routes, we have covered issues related to slavery and forced labour.

The article “*The Transit Points of an Unprecedented Future*” by **Yash Mishra** provides historical account of the Indian forced migrants. These people were forced to move as indentured labourers to different parts of the world between the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The article highlighted the incidence of British, Dutch and French colonies from four places in India – Kochi, Pulicat, Pondicherry, and Kolkata.

The article argues about the hardship faced by the migrant workers who were forced to move from different parts as the indentured labour. The article also discusses about the struggles and sacrifices of the indentured labourers. In essence, the article made an attempt to present the account of forced migrants during the colonial period. It also discusses the recent memorials and efforts made to commemorate the struggles and sacrifices of these indentured labourers and bring to light this forgotten chapter of Indian history. The current issue also carries a book review titled “*I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban.*” written by **Fabrizio Parrilli**.

We invite readers to participate and share their experiences with us to have a meaningful engagement. You can communicate with us through email at [editorinchief@grfdt.com](mailto:editorinchief@grfdt.com). We wish you happy reading and look forward to your suggestions and comments.

**Feroz Khan**

## THE TRANSIT POINTS OF AN UNPRECEDENTED FUTURE

YASH MISHRA\*

### Abstract

Historically, Slavery migration is mostly associated with the people of African origin who were taken to the ‘New World’ under the Europeans. But did you know that India was also part of it?

Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, about two million Indians were secretly shipped out of India under the European colonialists, in the form of slaves, and then later indentured labourers to different parts of the world. While the mainstream Indian is yet to know about it, the marks of these migrations are located in the present-day states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and the Union Territory of Pondicherry. Three of these places connect India with Trans-Atlantic Slavery and unveil a largely-forgotten chapter of Indian history. They represent not only the tyranny of European colonialism but also the sacrifices and hardships of those people who left their motherland in search of a better life.

They bear witness to the large-scale migrations of those Indians, who not only went abroad, mostly under deceit, or by force—but also made their mark in the countries where they went and created a legacy. A legacy, which remains unknown in their own home country. These are the Transit Points of an Unprecedented Future...

### Introduction

It’s impossible to imagine India’s rich history without its peninsula. It has also played a huge role in shaping the country’s heritage, culture and even cuisine. Right from the forts to beaches, almost every spot within the Indian peninsula has a story to tell. However, if we see historically, there is a largely unknown phase, under which around two million people from the Indian sub-continent were transported to different parts of the

world as slaves and indentured labourers. Between the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century CE and early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE, these migrations were mostly done based on false promises and forced basis by the British, Portuguese, French and Dutch. A major chunk of them was part of Trans-Atlantic Slavery migrations.

Today, only four places in India stand witness to this largely unknown phase of history: Kochi (Kerala), Pulicat (Tamil Nadu), Pondicherry and Kolkata (West Bengal). Interestingly, if we see the history of these together, one also gets to know the whole history of European colonialism in India at a glance.

To know about these places and voyages, let’s go back within the pages of History.

### The ‘Godly’ African Slaves?

Historically, India’s first brush with Trans-Atlantic slavery migrations took place during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The first to commence these were the Portuguese who became influential in India’s Western coast, after the arrival of the explorer Vasco Da Gama in 1498 CE. However, they had commenced the slave trade as early as the 1440s in the Southern areas of the Sahara Desert in Africa. The native Africans were uprooted from their villages and families and sold in the markets of the Mediterranean region. These tragic happenings along with conversion to Christianity were celebrated as the ‘victory of Christianity’ by the Portuguese, terming the latter as ‘journey to salvation’. (Magalhaes, 1997, p. 143)

Post-arrival at India, the Portuguese not only began countering the influence of Arabs who enjoyed the monopoly on the maritime trade during that period but

also started dominating the local politics on the Western Coast. (Sanyal, 2016, pp. 158-175) This made them establish their strategic headquarters at various places, out of which Goa became the headquarters for their Eastern colonies. Here, they not only brought African slaves to India but also transported Indian slaves from Goa, Calicut (Kozhikode in Kerala) and Bengal for their colonies in India and other parts of Asia but also Lisbon in Portugal. (Ghosh, 2012) (Forbes, 1993)

While the history of Indian slaves transported by the Portuguese has been rarely documented, ironically, the burial place of some of the African slaves brought by the Portuguese to the Malabar Coast can still be seen at Mangattumukku, Mattancherry in Fort Kochi, Kerala. In 1663 CE, when the Dutch attacked Fort Kochi (then a Portuguese settlement), while retreating, the Portuguese made niches in their thick walls, tied some African slave(s) and placed their treasures beneath them. They were made to promise that they would keep the treasure safe, till their descendants would come to claim them. The niches were then plastered up with mortar. This was conceived as an act of ‘Sacrifice’ by the locals. (Lucy, 2020, pp. 872-876)

After India’s independence in 1947, when renovation work in Fort Kochi began taking place, a building near the Dutch cemetery, at Mangattumukku was pulled down where the skeletons of the chained African slaves were found. (John, 2016) While the treasure remains untraced, the remains of the African slaves began being surrounded by local beliefs and then worshipped. The locals believe that they (the remains) turned into spirits which were called Kappiri Muthappan. It is made up of two Malayalam words *Kappiri* which is the corruption of the word *Kaafir* (outsider or African) and *Muthappan* meaning grandfather. People offer a variety of things such as toddy, cigar, fried fish, meat, eggs etc.

### **The Lost Chapter Of A Mighty Dutch Fort**

Due to the intensive conflicts with local rulers on the Western Coast and the Dutch by the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, the Portuguese began losing their ground, and the

former became an influential power. As the Dutch became powerful, they established a few colonies in India and a few in further East, one of them being at Batavia (present-day Jakarta, Indonesia) from where the local population was expelled in the pursuit of its sacking. (Wink, 2003, pp. 139-141) When the need for fresh manpower for their factories, plantations and other establishments arose, the Dutch first approached the Portuguese for transporting slaves from the latter’s colony in Mozambique. But as the mortality rate among the slaves during the voyage increased, the Dutch looked towards India which was closer than Mozambique. For transporting slaves from the Indian coast, owing to their powerful influence at their main base Fort Geldria, in Pulicat (built in 1613 CE) and its surrounding areas, the Tamils were taken as slaves to Batavia. (Chavan, 2019)

By the 1650s, when the Dutch expanded their influence to Chinsurah, Bengal on the Eastern Coast, they also began transporting Bengalis as slaves, by first bringing them to Pulicat, and then to Batavia. With time, the Indian slaves were brought to other territories such as Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and other Eastern colonies under the Dutch. (Wink, 2003, p. 141)

More than 50,000 Indians were taken to Batavia till the early 1800s and many of their descendants mixed with the local Indonesian population. (Chavan, 2019)

As The Dutch influence got vanished by 1840s, the system also faded. Today, the mighty Geldria Fort stands as the sole silent witness in India to this largely unknown aspect of Indian history that took place when the Dutch power was at its peak. Now under the Archaeological Survey of India, this fort is a prime tourist location, commanding a picturesque view of the Bay Of Bengal and its flanking areas.

### **Slaves To Labourers: The French Way**

By the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch began losing ground after getting defeated by local rulers like Marthanda

Varma and also due to the growing impact of the French and British who were clashing on India's Eastern Coast as part of the Seven Years' Wars.

On the other hand, the French had made a strong strategic influence in Eastern India at Chandannagore (West Bengal) and Southern India at Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe (now in Kerala), and Yanam (now in Andhra Pradesh) after a brief clash with the Dutch and an ongoing tiff with the British. They also expanded in other parts of the Afro-Asian region, including the southwestern Indian Ocean region. Here, they termed the area as Isle de France, which consisted of the present-day islands of Mauritius and surrounding territories. It was strategically important, as it was located in the middle of the major maritime routes between Europe and the Atlantic Ocean to India, the East Indies, and Asia. Now the French needed manpower to develop the infrastructure in these territories. (Parsuramen, 2023)

Taking cues from their earlier European counterparts Portuguese and Dutch, the French began recruiting Tamils as workers, sailors, carpenters, and slaves. In 1728 CE, the first lot of Tamil labourers arrived from Pondicherry to Mauritius, then a French colony. (Parsuramen, 2023) Later on, labourers from other French colonies in Southern India like Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam were brought to other colonies such as the Reunion Island and the Caribbean islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique (known as French Antilles) by the late-19th century. (Pillai, 2010)

While slavery was coming down to a halt globally, the French meanwhile laid down some terms for the new set of labourers. Before embarking on the journey, they appeared in front of a magistrate and declared voluntarily to go to their destination to work. Under this system for the workers embarking on Reunion, they were given five years of labour with a monthly pay of \$4 and rations. (Maharaj, 2018) Later on, French abolished slavery and resumed Indentured servitude for its Caribbean, following a treaty with the British in 1845, from its colonies Pondicherry and Karaikal and then in Kolkata since 1873 till the late 1910s. (Northrup, 2000)

In Mauritius, as the Tamil population increased in the islands, many businessmen, merchants and traders from present-day Tamil Nadu settled there and went on to expand the community of what could be called today as Tamil Indo-Mauritians. (Parsuramen, 2023)

The only mark of these migrations under the French could be seen today at the Memorial For Indian Indentured Workers at Pondicherry. Built under the project 'Route of Slavery and Indenture' validated by UNESCO, the Global Organization of the People of Indian Origin-GOPIO (Reunion Chapter) and the HISTORUN Association, the memorial houses the statue of 'Stele de Memoire' (16th to 19th centuries) which was installed in January 2010. (Varma, 2022) Unfortunately, this memorial remains irrelevant for most of the visitors, except for the descendants of the indentured labourers who come here every year.

### **The Legacy Of Eastern India**

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, after countering the growing influence of the French and Dutch, the British became the major influential power in the world, the largest of all Europeans the global history ever saw. Utilizing its influence, as global pressure piled up; the British began halting the inhuman system of slavery from 1807 CE onwards and ended by 1833 CE when the Emancipation Act was passed. (Mukherjee, 2023, pp. 2-4) Though it came as a relief for humanity across the world, it also caused panic among many planters of sugar, tea, coffee, cotton and cocoa in different Colonies in the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific islands where the machinery needed more manpower. Many considered bringing the Irish, previous African and even Chinese indentured labourers, whose migrations were also taking place to some extent. But looking at the inability of the Irish and Chinese to operate in these highly tropical areas and the demand by the Africans for a higher pay by the late 1820s, the buck stopped at India.

Once a jewel in the global commerce map, India was lessened with far less Gross Domestic Product due to the tyrannical British financial and commercial policies

which included the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 CE. These stripped most of India's artisans and farmers to tatters after their lands were looted by the British. Once the exporter of the finest goods in the world, India had now become the mere customer of the goods, whose raw materials were developed in the country itself and were manufactured in England as a result of the Industrial Revolution. The lands where rice and other crops dominated now started to have opium and indigo with a higher-land tax system. This joint conspiracy by the British and the Landlords (Zamindars) resulted in Man-Made famine, poverty, and hunger in the once-prosperous Indian rural landscape. (Mukherjee, 2023, pp. 12-21) Added to that, the country was also ravaged by many orthodox practices like Sati where the wife was immortalized with the pyre of her dead husband and untouchability, which harmed the basic core of lifestyle where mostly women and the lower-caste people were the worst hit.

By 1810 CE, Mauritius had become a British colony and the colonialists had been taking a few labourers from India since 1830 CE for their plantations. (Kauleshwar Rai, 1983) But factors like unlimited working hours and strict corporal punishment of the defaulters deterred them from moving forward with the migrations. However, following the amendments in the transportation and lodging system, as an 'experiment', a new lot of the people were again taken to Mauritius in 1834 CE. These were the 36 Dhangar tribals from the Chhota Nagpur region (Eastern India), who were willing to go to the island and work under a system, where they appeared before an officer designated by the British with a written statement of the terms of the contract and work in sugarcane plantations for five to ten years. This marked the beginning of the indentureship. (Jha, 2019, pp. 27, 72)

These lot of people were also called 'Coolies'- a corrupt form of the Tamil word Kuli (some claim it to be Telugu) meaning day labourer. As the 'experiment' began taking a concrete shape in Mauritius, after four years, in 1838 CE, the first lot of Indian indentured labourers was brought to the Caribbean region. Known as Gladstone Coolies, they worked on the plantations

owned by John Gladstone, the father of future British Prime Minister William Gladstone in British Guiana. (Thomas, 1985) They were majorly brought from the present-day Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar.

By the 1900s, the system of procuring indentured labourers from India expanded to Western Uttar Pradesh, and other parts of Northern India till as far as Peshawar in present-day Pakistan till present-day South Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. These coolies began being locally known as 'Girmitiyas', which was the corrupt form of the English word 'Agreement'. There was another name given to them; 'Kantrakis', which was the corrupt form of the English word 'Contracts'. They were recruited by a group of people, locally known as Arkatis (the corrupt form of the English word 'Recruiters'), rounded in various depots at prominent places like Delhi, Lucknow, Kanpur, Ghazipur (Uttar Pradesh) and Patna (Bihar), (Jha, 2019) and then they were taken from either a boat or railway journey (when it commenced) to Calcutta (present-day Kolkata). Here, they would be kept at depots, according to the countries that they were sent. Following health check-ups and authorised paperwork by the colonial officers, they were then made to let off their sacred marks and then transported to their destined land overseas. (Mohan, 2007) Following the Anglo-Dutch treaty in 1870 CE, the Dutch also commenced taking the Indian indentured labourers to Suriname for their sugarcane plantations, based on a similar transportation system. (Mishra, 2023)

During these voyages, the transporting Indians passed across the Kalapani or black waters, which made them, lose their caste (as mentioned in the fifth-century BC Sutra of the Baudhayana). As indentured slavery resumed, many of them either did not reach their destination due to long sea voyages that they had never even thought of nor could many complete their working years as allotted to them in the countries they were brought. During the journey, some of them lost their lives due to diseases like Cholera, or riots inside the ship itself. (Mukherjee, 2023)

The tyrannical European laws took advantage of most of the indentured labourers based on their illiteracy and poor living conditions, subjecting them to inhuman treatment. They were made to work in scorching heat and often beyond the authorized period. The health of these workers suffered a lot. While they also made laws for their 'welfare', most of them were restricted on mere paper and less on application. The pain and struggle crafted a new community of these people, known as Jahazi Bhais and Behans. (Jahaz in Hindi means Ship)

Women were the worst hit where cases of honour killing based on false assumptions, domestic violence and even rape by the colonial authorities were prevalent. Childbirth saw a huge mortality rate in the initial phase of indentureship, where the blame was put on the mothers for their inappropriate 'maternal instinct'. Despite these, the women not only got uplifted professionally and morally, after coming out of the heinous social environment under which they lived in India, (Pande, 2020, pp. 3,9,10,11) they also played a pivotal role in preserving the culture and traditional practices in the new territories where they were brought. (Bahadur, 2013)

Despite a strong resentment among the British politicians, influential people and writers, the indentured system remained for almost a century. However, by the early 1900s, prominent Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Sarojini Naidu took the initiative and led a mass movement against it. (Mukherjee, 2023, pp. 145-159) While some of the indentured labourers returned to tell their stories and create awareness about the indentured slavery system, local folk literature and many local traders and businessmen from places like Calcutta and Kanpur also joined in to end the indenture system. They went on to spread awareness through posters, booklets and even personally rescuing the indentured labourers from the trains destined for Calcutta. (Kumar A. , 2014) As World War I (1914-1919) and the movement against indentured labour were at its zenith, fortunately for the Indian side, there was little enthusiasm about the recruitment of indentured labourers.

Whereas, on the British side, they faced a humiliating defeat at Mesopotamia and its navy was also being attacked by the Germans during the World War I, thus enforcing them to not carry the indentured migrations forward. As the war came to its end, a lot many ups and downs in the form of debates, and agreements followed in the pursuit of abolishing indentured migrations where this time, the pressure from the Indian side enhanced with the growing support from various organizations such as the Anti-Slavery Society. On 1 January, 1920, the indentured system was permanently ended. (Mukherjee, 2023)

On the other hand, while some Indians continued to return to their motherland till 1955 (Jha, 2019) many remained in the colonies spreading from Suriname to Fiji where they were brought. Here, they became part of their multi-cultural scenario where they spread their tradition, culture and legacies in the form of festivals, food etc., while the people dominated fields' right from politics to cricket. Struggling with multiple issues like racism, and military coups, many of these descendants also shifted to other countries like the USA, the UK and Canada. These factors played a pivotal role in shaping the present-day Great Indian Diaspora.

## **The Road Ahead**

Since the last ship carrying returning indentured labourers arrived, the places in India which housed them in the form of depots and transit points went into oblivion. It was almost half of the century, during the 2000s when the third-generation descendant of the indentured labourers from British Guiana, former Executive Vice President of the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO) and President, Ramex. Inc. Ashook K. Ramsaran arrived in India and joined hands with the Governments of India and the state of West Bengal for constructing a memorial which commemorates the journey, struggles and sacrifices of the Indian indentured labourers. (Ramasaran, 2013)

Taking references from the old British maps, several chronicles and the urban plan of Kolkata, the Indentured

Memorial took shape at Khidderpore in 2011 followed by the Suriname Ghat at Garden Reach in 2015. Both located on the banks of the river Hooghly, the major channel of the River Ganges, the former commemorates all the indentured labourers collectively who travelled from India to overseas between 1834 and 1920 under the British. The latter commemorates the indentured labourers who were taken to Suriname under the Dutch between 1873 and 1916. (Mishra, 2023).

The Indentured Memorial at Khidderpore is currently under the Kolkata Port Trust. It houses plaques in English, Hindi and Bengali languages. The English plaque has the following inscription:

*From Here They Set Forth.....*

*This memorial commemorates the thousands of indentured Indian workers who sailed from Kolkata Port between 1834 and 1920, to lands far away, seeking better livelihoods for themselves and their families.*

*This is a celebration of their pioneering spirit, endurance, determination and resilience.*

*They made significant contributions to their adopted countries, yet cherished and passed on the spirit of Indianness – culture, values, traditions – to their descendants.*

*We salute them!*

*Jai Hind*

*January 11, 2011*

*Kolkata'*

It also houses the 1899-built Demerara Clock Tower, whose name refers to a river and region in Guiana (then British Guiana); a rich sugar area in coastal South America where the indentured labourers were sent to work. (Datta, 2017) Unfortunately, one still needs authorization by the Kolkata Port Trust to visit it at the time, when most of the memorials in India are accessed

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1 Press Information Bureau, Government of India. Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (11 January, 2011)

for free. (Mitra, 2023)

Located inside the southern generating station of the Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation, the Suriname Ghat houses the idols of a married couple. This idol is inspired by that of 'Mai- Baba' or Father and Mother, at Paramaribo at Suriname. Due to the free area around it, this memorial place has been reduced to a joggers' park that can be accessed only during the early hours of morning and evening. It carries plaques in five languages: Bhojpuri (in Roman Script), Hindi, English, Bangla and Dutch. The English plaque has the following inscription:

*From this jetty, several people, in the prime of their youth, left Indian shores as indentured labourers to work in Suriname, to face an uncertain future. The migration spanned between the periods from 1873 to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

*With their hard work and undying spirit, they contributed substantially to the development of Suriname. The Indian migrants successfully progressed and integrated into Suriname's multi-cultural society. They at the same time preserved the culture, traditions and ties with their ancestral land, India that is Bharat.*

*We respect and felicitate their spirit of courage, determination & endurance.*

*Jai Hind.*

*7<sup>th</sup> October 2015*

*Kolkata*

*(Jointly by Governments of India and Suriname)*

There is also a section named the 'Diaspora Gallery' at the celebrated Bihar Museum in Patna. Established



in 2015, it also pays tribute to those Biharis who went from Bihar to different British and Dutch colonies as indentured labourers.

Recently, there is another site at Doighat at the Garden Reach area which is coming up, where the descendants of the Indian indentured labourers would be able to pay tribute to their forefathers.

## Conclusion

It's ironic that an important phase of history like slave and indentured migrations has been ignored by mainstream India. This is taking place in the period when we have multiple methods to bring back the lost chunks of our history. Strange for a country, whose marks of indentured labour have been kept alive overseas that can be witnessed at the Aapravasi Ghat in Mauritius which is also enlisted in the UNESCO World Heritage Sites' list and memorials of Janey Tetary (an indentured labourer turned revolutionary) and Mai-Baba in Suriname. Furthermore, there are more organizations, and web portals from the Indian diaspora side, that are working on the pursuit of understanding indentured Indian history. In India, organizations like the Girmitya Foundation and government events like the Pravasi Bharat Sammelan are pushing the envelope in its pursuit. However, the outcome and awareness remain low.

While Mangattumukku attracts only a handful devotees and not history enthusiasts, Fort Geldria and the Memorial For Indian Indentured Workers cry for attention from the history enthusiasts. Whereas, the memorials in Kolkata in the recent past have generated a lot of attention within the public and bureaucratic circles, due to being ignored for their historic relevance.

It's high time one visits these places, explores the tragic past behind them and gets enlightened. So that, more work on the topic of indentured Indians and slave migrations history is done to create a new bridge between the old and the future. As I conclude this

paper, I would like to share the statement spoken by an indentured labourer descendant Mr David Sheoraj.<sup>2</sup>

*We are the forgotten children of Mother India. Mauritius, Trinidad, Suriname, Guyana and Fiji celebrate Indian Arrival Day and have memorials for the Indian workers. But in India no one remembers them.*

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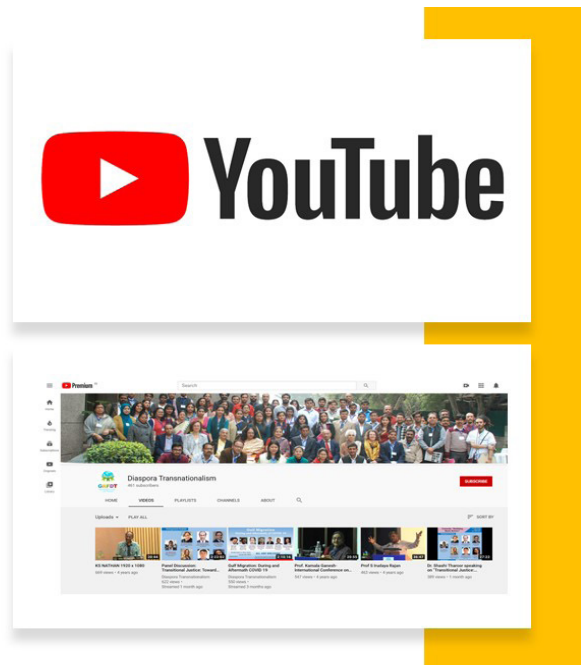
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### I AM MALALA: THE GIRL WHO STOOD UP FOR EDUCATION AND WAS SHOT BY THE TALIBAN

“I am Malala. My world has changed, but I haven’t. “ Malala is a world-changer and her book is an autobiography that made her a global female icon, an international symbol against the subjugation of women. Malala challenged an oppressive system rooted in a society that does not allow women and girls to be educated, and her commitment to ensuring rights nearly cost her life.

Swat Valley, Northern Pakistan, 9th October 2012. Malala is only fifteen and the thoughtless nature of her age is ripped away from her in an instant. She has just left school, her exams are over and as usual, she gets on the old bus that takes her home together with her friends. Suddenly the bus comes to an abrupt stop with an unknown man getting on the back of the bus and shoots three bullets hitting her in the face, leaving her dying. This will be only the beginning of a long, arduous journey that will make her, her parents, and two younger brothers leave their homeland. After the life-threatening attack, Malala is immediately hospitalized in Pakistan and then transferred to the United Kingdom where she, still today, lives with her family. In the meantime, the Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack and were ready to hurt Malala or one of her family’s members again, and even vowed to destroy all the schools that allow girls’ attendance.

Malala’s only fault has been to raise her voice for gaining the right to freedom and education for women. At the age of eleven, she decided to write a blog on the BBC website, where she starts talking about her life as a schoolgirl under the Taliban regime in the Swat Valley in Pakistan, which considered her a threat: indeed, according to their notions of the society, women were considered inferior creatures whose main role is to stay at home making meals for the men and raising children,

going out only if accompanied by a male relative, without the possibility of studying, dancing and singing. The Taliban are fundamentalist Sunni Muslims, mostly from Afghanistan’s Pashtun tribes, who dominate a large part of Afghanistan and Pakistan’s territories which are used to recruit young vulnerable people as terrorists. The Taliban seek to establish a puritanical caliphate that neither recognizes nor tolerates any version of Islam divergent from their own, and of course any other religion. It is possible to notice an oxymoron within the term “Taliban” itself as it derives from the Arabic word Talib which means student”.

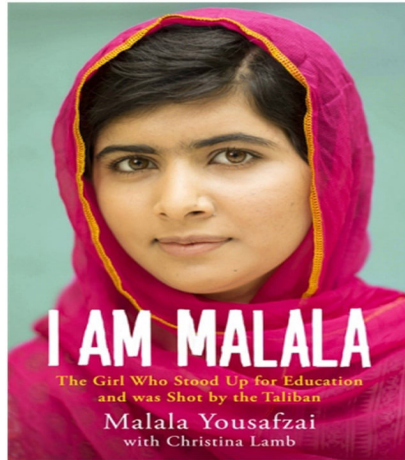


Photo Credits : <https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2015/nov/27/i-am-malala-malala-yousafzai-review>

Despite suffering serious injuries, Malala has become even stronger and braver, and since then she has not stopped spreading awareness about the inalienable right to education, in particular for women. She has always been curious and has always desired to study: for her, knowing how to read and write is essential, and knowledge is as important as eating and breathing. She has had the great opportunity to attend a school thanks to her parents: her father was engaged in the social sector and in the foundation of a school, for both boys and girls, succeeding with great efforts and sacrifices; while her mother, despite not having the opportunity to study, did not prevent her from following her path and dreams.

The book presents the biography of a special and courageous girl, who fought for an ideal for which she was willing to do anything, even to risk her young life. ‘I am Malala’ is a text which is a testament to a young girl’s resistance and resilience, it marks you inside indelibly. She helps us understand that very often we take the right to education for granted in a world where millions of children do not have access to it, where they

are compelled to stay at home or struggle seeking food and water.

Another important aspect you will find while reading her book is that we often forget that leaving our own country, forcibly, becomes the only alternative between the opportunity to survive and die. Malala reminds us how privileged a lot of us are in not having grown up in countries ravaged by wars and conflicts.

Certainly, Malala presents before us a precious testimony of a child, a girl, a woman, a migrant, a refugee forced to leave her homeland only because of an oppressive regime that, through the use of violence and denial of fundamental rights, does not recognize the right of women to gain an education. Nevertheless, she has always had the desire of going back to her country. When thinking about the hardships refugees undergo, we think of their physical journeys, but the emotional cost is equally difficult. Malala acknowledges that while she feels grateful to the United Kingdom for welcoming her family, she also misses her friends, the Pakistani tea, the Pashto has spoken in the streets, the beauty of the Swat Valley.

Currently, in exile in Birmingham, Malala has just realized her dream, perhaps the biggest one, the one she fought and risked her life for she graduated in philosophy, politics, and economics at the University of Oxford last year. For her braveness and fight for freedom to seek education, Malala has been awarded the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize, the youngest winner ever, together with Kailash Satyarthi, 60, an Indian activist who has been involved in defending children's rights since the 1990s, particularly in India. Today Malala goes around the world to tell her story, the story of this girl who has only one purpose: to bring justice and hope to a land where there is none.

Moreover, what is remarkable is that Malala never takes pride in what she does, telling her story with humility and simplicity, convinced that what she has done and it continues to do is simply necessary, a duty towards every girl and woman stuck in regimes of terror.

The book is a constant reminder of the enormous disparity in privileges that exist for people living in differ-

ent parts of the world. It can be an important text to be read by all children and students at school, perhaps in the first years of high school, so that they develop empathy for fellow human beings even if they come from a different society and culture. It might serve as a vital read for adults as well so that they realize that the prejudices we have towards other cultures are just irrational and that there are men and women who fight every day against the absurd impositions of extremist groups.

Malala's book has been acknowledged by the academic and humanitarian community as a powerful weapon for demanding human rights which also makes us reflect on the larger socio-political discourses which make such reigns of terror still possible. It emphasizes the importance of gaining knowledge as a tool that allows people to be free, to think and choose freely, and not to be afraid.

However, the mass media in the Global North has been depicting her story through a certain prejudiced lens which represents her as a vulnerable young girl who has been just a victim of patriarchy and religious dogmas, without focusing on the role of global politics in fermenting these oppressive regimes. Women and girls in Pakistan are still largely viewed through the oriental gaze which confines them and their society to notions of victimhood, extremism, and corruption (especially after 9/11). However, many feminist scholars and experts have demanded of them to pay closer attention to the multifaceted social, cultural, political, material, historical conditions in which women live in Pakistan. Malala's advocacy and activism exemplify a growing trend across the Muslim world: how women and girls have been contributing to the transformation of Islam as a force for peace and progressive change. She has set before us an example, along with many others, of a young woman who has put her ideal in the foreground to reemphasize that education belongs to everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, and political orientation.

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