

## **Girls' Education: Danger and Resistance Reflected in *I am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb and *My Name is Parvana* by Deborah Ellis<sup>1</sup>**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study attempts to compare dangers and resistances faced by main characters in getting education, especially girls' education. It also analyzes the significant issues of education in *I am Malala* and *My Name is Parvana* by using the concept of comparative literature in American school discipline. This study applies liberal feminism theory. The research findings can be formulated as follows: 1) there are three barriers endangering girls in getting education such as the weak position of women in society, poverty and conflict; 2) the resistances done by both characters to reach equal position in education. They strive to get better education and criticize the inequalities. The resistances in both literary works are conducted in difference ways. Malala argued that woman should be treated as equals as men; therefore, she never gives up in resisting dangers although she was shot by Taliban. Meanwhile, Parvana argued that there must be equality of role between women and men. Unfortunately, her effort fails and she gives up; 3) the significant issues, Malala and Parvana are aware of the advantages of education; therefore, they resist all dangers they faced. Finally, they become symbol of strong and independent women. In conclusion, both literary works raise clear issues about gender inequalities and the characters' resistances in getting education.

**Keywords:** education, danger, resistance, comparative literature, liberal feminism

### **ABSTRAK**

*Studi ini berupaya membandingkan antara bahaya dan resistensi yang dihadapi oleh para tokoh utama di dalam mendapatkan pendidikan, khususnya pendidikan para anak perempuan. Studi ini juga menganalisis isu-isu penting dalam bidang pendidikan yang ada pada karya 'I am Malala' dan 'My Name is Parvana' dengan menggunakan konsep sastra bandingan aliran Amerika. Studi ini menggunakan teori feminisme liberal. Studi ini menemukan beberapa hal sebagai berikut: 1) terdapat tiga rintangan yang membahayakan bagi perempuan di dalam mendapatkan pendidikan, seperti posisi perempuan yang lemah di dalam masyarakat, kemiskinan, serta konflik; 2) resistensi dilakukan oleh kedua tokoh untuk mendapatkan posisi yang setara*

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<sup>1</sup>This article is a synthesis of a postgraduate thesis written by the same author with the same title.

*dalam pendidikan. Keduanya berjuang untuk mendapatkan pendidikan yang lebih baik dan mengkritik ketidaksetaraan. Resistensi-resistensi di kedua karya sastra tersebut dilakukan dengan cara yang berbeda. Malala berpendapat bahwa para perempuan seharusnya diperlakukan setara dengan laki-laki; oleh karena itu ia tidak pernah menyerah di dalam melawan bahaya meskipun ia ditembak oleh kaum Taliban. Sementara itu, Parvana berpendapat bahwa harus ada kesetaraan peran antara perempuan dan laki-laki. Sayangnya, upayanya gagal dan ia menyerah; 3) isu-isu yang penting adalah bahwa baik Malala maupun Parvana sadar tentang manfaat pendidikan; oleh karena itu mereka melawan semua bahaya yang dihadapi. Pada akhirnya, mereka menjadi simbol perempuan yang kuat dan bebas. Kesimpulannya adalah bahwa kedua karya sastra tersebut mengangkat isu-isu yang jelas mengenai ketidaksetaraan gender dan resistensi-resistensi para tokohnya dalam mendapatkan pendidikan.*

**Kata kunci:** *pendidikan, bahaya, resistensi, sastra bandingan, feminisme liberal*

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history, human rights are the fundamental rights and freedoms that belong to all people in this world; it is the standards that allow people to live with dignity, freedom, equality, justice and peace. One of the most crucial rights for people is education, it has very important role to promote and protect human from their civil rights. Therefore, it must be given to all people without discrimination, it should be free and compulsory, as affirmed in Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 (Article 26, 1-2):

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory ... (and) shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the united nations for the maintenance of peace. (Streich, 2008: 61)

The obligation to supply free education to people implies that each nation should establish free public education system; this right has been further elaborated to address issues like quality and equity. It also deals with the principle of non-discrimination and the right of people to get education. As Cole (2000) stated that equality and human rights are two of the essential key concepts to be reached by the end of compulsory schooling, with a belief in human dignity and equality.

Human rights are universal since they belong to all human in every society. Unfortunately, the education system has hardly shown any credibility in regards of involvement of human rights and its protection.

Most girls in many parts of the world still face difficulties in getting education; they have limited access to get the same education as men, moreover there are many threats and attacks on girls' education, including bombing or burning schools for girls, killing, kidnapping and torturing the girls' students, teachers and academics who supports education for girls (GCPEA, 2014). As a result, girls will be marginalized in society as they are running a risk of becoming less skilled, getting less opportunities and hope for the future.

Those conditions make women try to give their voice to deny their subordinated condition to reach their independence. They need to voice their feeling toward the social life as how the men treat them beyond the limit of humanity. Spivak (1988) mentions it as theory of change; people who are oppressed will rise to challenge the oppressors.

Furthermore, Mary Wollstonecraft explores this problem in her masterpiece, *A Vindication of the Right of Woman*. She stated that the root of women's oppression is lack of education; therefore women should empower themselves through the pursuit of knowledge (Wollstonecraft, 1796).

It is clear that the only way for human being to improve their self is through education; thus, many women are struggling to get it. It was done by R.A. Kartini in Indonesia and Malala Yousafzai in Pakistan.

The struggle by Kartini to promote women's rights in education in the early 1900s and the holding of the first women's congress have exemplified her contributions in building society (Robinson & Bessell, 2002). Meanwhile, Malala also campaign for human rights, especially woman's right to education. In 2013, Malala spoke at the United Nations; she brought attention to global education (Hansen, 2015). Thus, R.A. Kartini and Malala are the examples of women who struggle for getting equality in education; they consider that education as one of the major tools to stop discrimination and violation against human.

The sexual inequality of education does not only occur in real life but also in literary work. Thus, the writer used *I am Malala*, a memoir written by Malala Yousafzai with Christina Lamb and *My Name is Parvana* written by Deborah Ellis. It is because both literary works raise a problem about women's resistances against violence that endangers them in getting their rights, especially their rights in education.

*I am Malala* was a great memoir in the middle 2013 by Malala Yousafzai with Christina Lamb. It talks about the spirit of feminism reflected by young adult named Malala. The series of events in this memoir take place in Pakistan and discuss its social condition. Malala lives in a society in which women are treated as an inferior without the rights to get an education. However, Malala believes that education is vital to her future; so she fights to get education although her life is threatened.

Meanwhile, *My Name is Parvana* was a novel written by Deborah Ellis. It was the story about a family from Afghanistan who always get terror because their fight for girls' education. The story tells how Parvana and her family's resistances, how they brave threats and challenge circumstances from the villagers to educate girls. Parvana and her family have an ambition to make their students who are all women realize that they also have the same opportunities to reach the highest education and to determine their own future.

Normally, in the society women are known to be passive who often entrust the condition, they just wait their fate without trying to fight. This argument is rejected by Wollstonecraft, she disagrees with the ideas that women are weak because she thinks that God created men and women to be partners in life, and therefore they should be equal.

Wollstonecraft also proclaims women must get their rights and have their personhood. As she stated that, women as well as men get the same education because all human being deserve an equal chance to develop their relation and moral capacities so they can achieve full personhood (Wollstonecraft cited in Beasley, 2005: 31).

Wollstonecraft's ideas are in accordance with what has done by Malala and Parvana. They show some characteristics that make them different from other women in the patriarchal society they are living in; they are described as smart, courageous, confident and independent persons that make them aware of their rights as women in the society. They fight to find their own identity and keep standing for education especially for girls.

The writer found several studies that analyzed and criticized about girls' education. First study entitled, *"Isn't it too early to drop out of school? A study of girls' education in the Chepang community of Nepal"* by Tryndyuk (2013), Master's Thesis from University of Tromsø. Second is *"The Taliban and Girls' Education in Pakistan and Afghanistan - with a case study of the situation in the Swat District"* by Ahmad (2012), Master's Thesis from Lund University. They found several factors that make girls cannot get access in education. Whereby, those previous studies are used by the writer to enrich the analysis of this study.

For that purposes, the writer used liberal Feminist Approach; it is an individualistic form of feminism and theory which supports women's equality (Eagleton, 2003; Gamble, 2000; Wollstonecraft, 1796). The writer also used comparative literature to conduct this study, as Gayley stated that it involved study of two or more literatures (cited in Bassnett, 1993:33). This study is generally an effort to elaborate two cases with the same topics, that is gender inequality in getting education and effort to fight the problems; meanwhile the differences are in the way of resistance, region and time.

Therefore, this study attempted to find out dangers and resistances that Malala and Parvana face to achieve equality for girls' education, and then find out the significant issues of education reflected in *I am Malala* and *My Name is Parvana*.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Feminist Approach

This study concerned with female characters as the object of the analysis, so the most appropriate approach is feminist approach; it presumes an interdisciplinary approach for understanding women's lives and women's issues (Mulvey, 1988: 74). This approach has been innovative in its choice to study particular groups of women formerly ignored by social science (e.g., upper-class women), particular behaviors (e.g., feeding one's family, adult adoption of orthodox religion, improving one's community) and new forms of data (e.g., women's subjective social experience or subjective self) (Reinharz, 1992: 215).

From those explanations, feminism concerned with issues of broader social change and social justice and committed to changing the condition of women. Therefore, the ultimate goal is to increase the understanding of women's experience, both in the past and present, and promote appreciation of women's value in the world (Tyson, 2006: 119).

For the purposes of this study, the writer reviewed one types of feminism; it is liberal feminism. Liberal feminism is theory that talks about woman as human being that has the same human rights as the other (Eagleton, 2003; Wollstonecraft, 1796). Thus, the basic understanding of liberal feminism is demanding the equal right for everyone, including women.

This form of feminism aims to establish women and men have equal access to the public sphere and bringing changes through their resistances. Therefore, this approach considered suitable for this study due to both literary works consists of females' characters that showing their resistances to obtain equality in getting education.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study concerns with social reality in two literary works, for the method of the study the writer applies qualitative method. Qualitative method concerns with life as it lived, things as they happen, situations as they are constructed in the day to day, moment to moment course of events (Woods, 1999: 2). Meanwhile, Ary, Jacobs, and Sorensen (2010: 22) stated qualitative method focuses on understanding social phenomena from the perspective of the human participants in natural settings. The

data are reported in words or pictures rather than in number so the writer does not need a statistic to collect and interpret the data (Creswell, 2012: 18).

From those statements, qualitative method is done to understand the social phenomena, which concern in the process of description, analysis and interpretation of data in written form rather than in number or statistical result. Therefore, the result of this study is in the form of description and interpretation of some phenomena. By using qualitative method, this study is aimed to describe and compare the dangers and resistances that faced by the characters in getting education. Besides that, it also analyzes the significant issues of education reflected in *I am Malala* written by Malala Yousafzai & Christina Lamb and *My Name is Parvana* written by Deborah Ellis.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Education had big role in human life; it was one of the most important things to make changes in girls' life. According to Solovic (2001: 131), education not only helps people to succeed professionally, but it also personally enhances people's life by opening up new worlds and insights. Therefore, well-educated women will have vision and wide knowledge, they will be aware of their position and they not only end as housewives who only serve the husband, child and do household chores but they also can do anything they want. Thus, education is a tool for creating opportunities of human, making people knows their importance and rights in life and to gain confidence to claim them.

However, girls often face barriers to get education. There are a lot of barriers that they faced when they want get education, according to Department for International Development (2005) at least there are three barriers that make education is endangering for girls, such as the weak position of women in society, poverty and conflict. Thus, women tried to do any resistances toward these barriers.

The way out of this condition is called as women's empowerment or feminism. Feminism is an ideology that is believe by the people who struggle for the equality between men and women (Tong, 2009: 11). Therefore, this analysis presented dangers and resistances that faced by the characters in getting education. Besides that, it also analyzes the significant issues of education reflected in *I am Malala* written by Malala Yousafzai with Christina Lamb and *My Name is Parvana* written by Deborah Ellis.

*I am Malala* implied the inequality between men and women, especially their inequality in getting education. In this memoir, women are the victims of this inequality, they are forbidden to do any activity include going to school meanwhile men can do everything they want. Malala is the main character in *I am Malala* resembles a girl who resists the danger in getting equality between men and women, especially in education. She believed that women also can get education as men so

that they can participate fully in society. She showed her braveness in getting education although her life is threatened.

When BBC Urdu asked her to write about life under Taliban, she seemed very enthusiastic because it was one of her ways to criticize the Taliban. Unfortunately, she was shot by the Taliban. Taliban thought they could stop Malala by killing her. But in fact, Malala became stronger. After she regained consciousness, she continued to campaign and promote education for girls. She spoke at the UN on her sixteenth birthday and called for free education for all children.

Malala was not afraid to show her resistance toward Taliban, she wanted to be free and wanted to help other people surround her, she believed that education was the only solution against it. As Lange (2012: 1) proclaimed that education is the way to eliminate terrorism, prevent extremism and violence by promoting critical-thinking skills, empathy, peace and tolerance. In short, it can be said that *I am Malala* showed how amazing of young girl changed the community as well as to make women be respected in all aspects.

Meanwhile, *My Name is Parvana* represented the truth condition about Afghanistan, about the difficulties of people especially girls in getting their rights. Feminism in *My Name is Parvana* arose because of Parvana as the main character resisted all of the injustice that happened in her society, including inequality in getting education. She resisted all people who prohibited the girls' education, even though in the end of the story she gave up and asked the parliamentary of Afghanistan to save her. From that story, it showed that a fifteen year old girl have braveness against the danger by her action and voice.

Based on those explanations, it can be seen that both literary works expressed the same ideas, which are dangers and resistances in getting girls' education. The main characters in both literary works are aware of the advantages of education; therefore, they resisted all of the dangers in getting education. They believed that education is human basic right; it was not only for men but also for women. Therefore, women also should be educated as men, it was also clearly written in the Holy Quran. As statements at the following narration:

Education is our right. Islam has given us the right and says that every girl and boy should go to school. The Quran says we should seek knowledge, study hard and learn the mysteries of world. (Yousafzai and Lamb, 2013: 143)

In accordance with the above quotation, women should be equal to men in every aspect, especially education. Thus, there is no reason to forbid them if men can do anything they want. However, both characters in *I am Malala* and *My Name is Parvana* found that there were inequality of women rights, such as women got less of social status, power and opportunities in getting education. They also got dangers in getting and maintaining education such as, their family, teachers and the other girls who have still encouraged girls' education were threatened; moreover their school was closed and bombed-out.

These happened because of patriarchy factors and influenced by the Taliban. Thus, liberal feminism is the response of gender inequality as it claimed about gender equality, which states that all men and women are created equal and have the same opportunity (Wollstonecraft, 1796).

By seeing that condition, Malala and Parvana resisted all of the dangers that they faced to get their rights, rights to live peacefully and rights to get education for every girl in the world especially in their country. Malala and Parvana always fight for girls' education, they have good purpose; they wanted to get their right as women, especially rights to education. Malala and Parvana really want to make educational equality between men and women, not just in Pakistan and Afghanistan but in the entire of the world.

The efforts of Malala have brought some positive changes to education in Pakistan. It has brought worldwide attention to the ongoing challenges. Malala also received several awards and even became the youngest nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize. She was one of four runners-up for Time magazine's person of the year and has received numerous other awards. On her speech in every place, she wanted to make the same position between men and women especially in education because education is human basic right.

Meanwhile, the efforts of Parvana also brought some positive impacts, such as she gave the opportunity of girls in her society to get education in the school that she and her family built and it also made society considered that their daughters also need an education for their life. She also did any contribution to the society by letting her student to help people in her village to do anything they do as they learn from the school.

The consciousness to resist any danger that main characters faced in getting education as the symbol of the social reform, their resistance toward the danger that they faced in getting education showed their existence in society and it made people realized the importance of education. Thus, the stories of *I am Malala* and *My Name is Parvana* gave spirit and enrich the people's understanding about the power of a woman's resistances for getting equality and happiness in their life.

Besides the similarities, the two literary works also have differences. The settings of both literary works are different. *I am Malala* settles in Pakistan when Taliban took control on it and the story also influenced by Taliban while *My Name is Parvana* took place in Afghanistan after Taliban regime, the story was influenced by a lot of armies who want to take control over the country.

Malala's resistance for the broader scope, that is for the education's right of all children and girls in the world. Meanwhile Parvana's resistance is narrower, it for her school and girls' education in her village. Though both of main characters resisted the danger that they got in getting equality in education, they ended it differently.

Malala never gave up to resist the danger in getting education although she was shoot by the Taliban, at the end of the story she became totally independent woman. Meanwhile Parvana gave up and submitted to the fate. She stopped to struggle when she considered that all she has was gone, like her mother, her students, her teacher and her friends due to the brutal condition in her country.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the main characters in *I am Malala* and *My Name is Parvana*, it is clear that the main cause of the movement is the unequal status that happens in the society from the generation to the next until they realize their injustice. This movement is in order to reach the equality of right to men in many aspects, such as education, politic, social, economy and culture.

As showed in both literary works, when women's voices continue to be ignored and neglected they try to struggle to get equality in education although their action sometimes threatens their life. But their bravery in conveying their opinion or idea are very impress. They did not just depend on men or follow the social rules, but they also had bravery to struggle to be equal as men.

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