

Mukhtar Mai: Transition from bruised to the brave

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Abstract

Marginalised are those who were ignored in the past due to some economic and social causes. The term minority is most commonly used to refer to communities that are numerically small in relation to the rest of the population. Quantity matters, but what females do in spite of a major portion of the society, they didn't get even the basic rights like right to education and to raise their voice against oppression. Mukhtar Mai who was a victim of gang-rape on the orders of a tribal council that was considered 'honour revenge' is a pathetic figure in Pakistan who raised her voice against injustice. She suffered a lot, but she didn't accept those inhuman restrictions that her surroundings put on her. Mukhtar Mai realised the need of education at the age of 28.

The present paper makes an attempt to throw light on the harsh condition of society towards females and extraordinary valour of women to survive and to promote education.

Keywords: mukhtar mai, economic, social causes

Introduction

While the majority of rapes go unreported in Pakistan; Mukhtar Mai was determined not to stay silent. She decided that what happened to her should never happen to anyone else.

Mukhtar grew up in a small village Meerwala in the rural tehsil of Jatoi of Muzaffargarh district of Pakistan i.e. in the Punjab region of Pakistan, where she never went to school and was forced into marriage at the age 13. But her life changed forever when Mukhtar was gang raped at the age of 28 on the orders of a tribal council in 2002 that was considered 'honour revenge.'

Mai's 12-year-old brother, Abdul Shakoor was kidnapped by three Mastoi men. He was taken to a sugar field where he was gang raped and sodomized repeatedly. He was kept imprisoned in the home of Abdul Khaliq, a Mastoi man and accused by the police of having an affair with Khaliq's sister, Salma Naseen, who was in her late 20's. The Mastoi tribal concluded that Shakoor should marry Naseen while Mai be married to a Mastoi man. Mai was called to the council to apologize to the Mastoi tribe for her brother's actions. When she arrived, she was dragged to a nearby hut where she was gang raped in retaliation by four Mastoi men. Mai told CNN through an interpreter:

They decided I should be punished against my brother's crime. They immediately acted upon that decision and dragged me out. That was the hardest moment of my life. When I reported my rape, it was very hard. It was confusing, thumb-prints, papers, statements. People had to read things out to me. I met educated people and they agreed with the course I had chosen to take. They encouraged me. It was then it occurred to me that education is important. It brings enlightenment.

But when Mukhtar first raised her voice, the uneducated people were against her taking the case to the police. They said: "you'll be disgraced; your reputation will be soiled". Often when you stand up for your beliefs, even your family is not on your side. While tradition dictates that a woman should commit suicide after such an act, Mukhtar defied convention and fought the case. She refused to kill herself,

as was expected, and fought for justice and women's rights. Mai is headline speaker at Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy. She said:

There are women in the force. But don't just give them the uniform, give them some powers. They will understand the needs and vulnerabilities of women. When women go the police station about rape, they have to deal with men. The men ask foul, humiliating questions that we can't answer. Why can't women deal with women? They would know how to ask questions in a proper way. Put a woman in every police station with the necessary powers, not just the uniform. That would help the causes of women.

By July 2002, the Pakistani government awarded her the equivalent of 8500 U.S. dollars in compensation money and sentenced her attackers to death—and Mukhtar Mai went on to open a school for girls so that future generation would not suffer, as she had, from illiteracy. Far from destroying her, as her attackers would have expected, the incident made Mai determined to fight for women's rights and she set up the Mukhtar Mai Women's Organization. In addition, she has set up a women's shelter and resource centre for victims of violence.

Convinced that lack of education contributed to the poor treatment of women, Mai established a girls' school, initially in a single room of her family home with a just one teacher and three students, including her. Mai said, "The first school I attended was my own school." For the first three years, she ran the school without any outside funding. Whatever she earned she used to pay the salary of the teacher. Sometimes she had to sell her own things. Mai's school gained worldwide attention following a spate of articles in the international press in 2005 and donations began to pour in as well as some government money. Today the Mukhtar Mai Girl's Model School offers free education, books and uniforms to 550 girls from nursery to the beginning of high school. In 2009, Mai married a police officer who acted as her bodyguard and they now have a one-year-old son. Pakistani woman who shattered stigma of rape is married, this is a sign of change.

Mukhtar's journey was very painful. Her wound is one that can never heal – it injured her beyond the body. Mukhtar said:

As long as I live, I will keep fighting for the rights of women. The women here are fighting for release from their pain. Rape and cruelty happens everywhere, but here there is no justice for women when they fight from their pain. I pray to God to keep my courage alive, to keep it strong.

In the decade since her attack, Mai believes she has made a difference to women's rights in Pakistan, but still has a long way to go. Things have improved, but not as much as they should have done. There are laws, but the laws are not always implemented. It's an evolutionary process and it will take time. But Mai has given the courage to women to speak about women's rights and to open new horizons.

My purpose to take this personality is to show that we all have that kind of spark, but we afraid to take risk in our life. If a rape-victim like Mukhtar Mai can take the bold steps in an oppressive atmosphere and show extra ordinary courage, so why we all can not raise our voice for various social evils inspite of all the facilities. In the Name of Honor, a memoir was published in 2006 and has been translated into 23 languages. It is the remarkable and inspirational memoir of a woman who fought and triumphed against exceptional odds. This is her story of transition from the bruised to the brave.

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