



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

Displaced, Not Lost

(Book Review: Yousafzai Malala, *We Are Displaced: My Journey and Stories from Refugee Girls around the World.*)

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Globalisation has played a massive role in the shaping of the narratives of our lives. Ironically it has managed to make the world closer and the people further away from each other. Millions leave their homes every year in search of better opportunities, more than that number, are forced to do so. Displacement is a by-product of the changing times, the lack of empathy for every displaced person more so. One might argue here, that on a surface every person is a living embodiment of displacement, but an important aspect to that is that it is a 'chosen' displacement. Malala Yousafzai's *We Are Displaced* is delineating the forced displacements in a bid to 'honour the people I've met and those I'll never meet' (Malala, xi)

This book traces the story of 8 young girls and 2 women who have been internally displaced, refugees and those who have helped to make the life for these refugees easier in their country. According to the 1951 Refugee Convention of UNHCR, a refugee is defined as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion."

These brave-hearts who share their experiences come from Yemen, Iraq, Columbia, Congo, Myanmar, Guatemala, Uganda, and Syria. The book is divided into two parts. The first part begins with Malala's story of getting internally displaced, much like the Kashmiri Pandits in India, of how she had to give up her country (or was it vice versa?) after the Taliban attacked her at the age of 15 for standing up for her right to education, and then the final move to Birmingham, UK (is it even the *final* one?). In the prologue she shares a poignant thought,

"Millions of men, women and children witness wars every day. Their reality is violence, homes destroyed, innocent lives lost. And the only choice they have for safety is to leave. To 'choose' to be displaced. That is not much of a choice." (Malala, ix-x)



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She subtly hints at what Islam actually means and how the radicalists have distorted it to fend for their personal interests. Is it politically motivated? That's something to ponder on, but what strikes one as a reader is that the IDPs or the internally displaced persons are coerced to move making their identity at stake. Malala has deftly resonated this feeling of lack of identity in all the successive stories too and equated it with the opportunity of receiving education, which is the first blow in the time of crisis. Malala states, that the blow to education is masterfully done, so as to stop making the individuals, thinking ones and their voice to be subdued, which in her case failed terribly.

In the second part of the book, we are introduced to the 10 women and girls who briefly discuss their escapades, with Malala sharing how she met or got to know about each of them. There is a common thread to all the stories; the resilience and endurance of the women in varied circumstances in each story is evident. The book is a chronicle of the voices of the Yemeni sisters, Zaynab 18 and Sabreen 16, where Zaynab received her visa for US, her sister was not as lucky and after a grueling journey of staying 'at an empty warehouse with a concrete floor and no furniture or even blankets' (73) and travelling in black tinted buses and boats on the rough waters of the Mediterranean she finally makes to Italy. It is the record of Muzoon, a fighter for women's education in the refugee camps of Jordan, of Najla, who is an IDP in Iraq, who ran away from home to fight for her right to education, of Maria, another IDP of Columbia, who suffered discrimination within the borders of her country due to her color and accent. This book is a record of Analisa of Guatemala, who in her bid to reach the US was transported and kept like an animal for days, of Marie Claire, who could leave the hatred she felt in Zambia, only through the ultimate sacrifice of her mother and also of Ajida, the Rohingya Muslim, who has no semblance of what the future will hold for her children.

This book is praising the human spirit of fighting against all odds, especially being a displaced woman. The circumstances of these ten are similar, yet different. Some have left their country, some are within the country but away from home. For which of them is the feeling more difficult- within the country or without, that's hard to contemplate, but as a displaced woman, they have a harder battle to fight. Malala doesn't hesitate to share that the binding factor in all



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these stories, including herself, is the sense of alienation and deracination. She writes, ‘We were comfortable; we were being well taken care of- but it had not been our choice to come here, and we missed home’ (Malala, 37). What is very pertinent here is that home is not linked to being free, and herein lies the irony of the expatriates and IDPs. Alienation is the fruit of their labour to achieve freedom and even though, they feel it’s a temporary situation, in their hearts they know the truth.

There have been countless books before Malala’s which speaks about the refugees and their problems. What sets this book apart for are the present day photographs that Malala has shared of the girls. The contrast between their sombre past and their bright present is huge, and this is suggestive of a story which makes you feel thankful for. The participants of the book are heroes in their own stead, they have managed to grab the present but in the hope to go back again to their countries and make it a better place.

Towards the end of the book Malala shares some statistics: “more than 44,000 people a day are forced to flee their homes” (Malala, 205). This in itself is a staggering number. Malala Yousafzai is not a refugee, but a displaced person. A foreigner in her host country, which is not and never will be her own, but the as a privileged person, she understands the onus of responsibility she holds as becoming the voice of every displaced person.

This book is not a cry for help; it is a call for attention. Though the author has not been able to fully state the brutality and the agony of the displaced persons, and does not shed any light on the details of their respective journeys, it sends a strong message of hope to everyone who reads in a simple manner. This book is aimed for every age group and offers food for thought to every person that reads this book. Malala offers solutions to the common woman, of helping out; it’s not only monetary, but the identification of and attention to this issue. One will have to dig deeper to know more about this humungous problem. She has shared a starter to the problem; it is our choice as the privileged ones to carry the legacy further. Our world is suffering from the worst refugee crisis since World War II and most of us know nothing about it. This book



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implores and encourages the humanity to rise to the challenge of showing empathy and action towards these displaced people.

Works Cited:

Yousafzai, Malala. *We Are Displaced*. London. Weidenfield & Nicolson. 2019.