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Malala got the Nobel peace prize; here's why Nabila won't

By Staff, Firstpost of India

This is an opinion article by Firstpost, a digital and internet news service based in India.

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Last week, the Nobel Peace Prize committee announced two winners: Pakistan's Malala Yousafzai and India's Kailash Satyarthi for their struggle for the rights of children. While for most Indians K Satyarthi's name was a bit of a mystery, Malala was already a widely known international figure, her personal story documented on magazine covers around the world.

The celebration of Malala in the West has long inspired conspiracy theorists who view her as a CIA stooge -- and that she is now the youngest recipient for the Nobel Peace Prize is likely to prove more fodder for the same. But you don't have to be paranoid to ask the question raised by Murtaza Hussain in Al-Jazeera: What about Nabila Rehman?

'Nabila who?' great many will ask of the other Pakistani girl who has been casting light on a far more uncomfortable truth: drones strikes in the North Waziristan.

Nabila's story is no less moving. The 10-year-old girl survived a drone attack in 2012 (she was eight then) and has testified before the US Congress to describe the horror of these attacks. Hussain notes that the strike killed Nabila's grandmother Momina Bibi, severely injured seven children.

Nabila, along with her 13-year-old brother who survived the attack and her father Rafiq ur Rehman, a Pakistani primary school teacher, appeared on Capitol Hill last November to testify against the US drone strike and demand justice. But where the US Congress was sufficiently moved by Malala's heroism to award her a Congressional gold medal, only five out of 430 representatives showed up for Nabila's testimony, as the Al-Jazeera report points out.

The Guardian report describes Nabila's account of the attack, "Everything was dark and I couldn't see anything. I heard a scream. I think it was my grandmother but I couldn't see her. All I could think of was running." Her testimony was so moving that even the translator broke down in the midst of the hearing. But none of it could quite compare to the power of Malala's story which has a far more palatable villain, ie the big, bad Taliban.

Husain argues this vast discrepancy between the reception of the two Pakistani girls reflects the United States' priorities, where Malala "was seen as a potential tool of political propaganda to be utilised by war advocates," to justify the war on terror, which can then be portrayed as crusade to liberate Muslims from their oppressors.

Nabila's story, on the other hand, turns the spotlight on the actual human costs of the war on terror, and puts a face to what is otherwise dismissed as 'collateral damage'. She puts the focus on the tough questions about civilian deaths in drone strikes (close to 900 people according to an Amnesty International report last year), about torture, illegal imprisonment and more.

Where Malala allows Americans to play the role of the knight in shining armour, Nabila's tale casts Americans inevitably in the role of villains. Last year when Malala wasn't given the Noble peace prize, Max Fisher in the Washington Post argued that "the entire West [was] trying to co-opt Malala, as if to tell ourselves: 'Look, we're with the good guys, we're on the right side. The problem is over there.'"

"While Malala was feted by Western media figures, politicians and civic leaders for her heroism, Nabila has become simply another one of the millions of nameless, faceless people who have had their lives destroyed over the past decade of American wars," writes Hussain.

There will be no Nobel prizes for Nabila, no fawning acknowledgements of her heroism, no tears of sympathy for the plight of Pakistani girls like her, who leave alone the right to education, are not even accorded the right to life.

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