



# Analysing the Paratextual Implications of Malala Yousafzai's Memoirs: I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by Taliban, and I Am Malala: How One Girl Stood Up for Education and Changed the World

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## Abstract

Malala Yousafzai has been one of the most celebrated figures in the global context, known for her life, activism, and recognition, which have sparked considerable curiosity, especially among Western readers. Two of Malala's co-authored memoirs bearing the main title I am Malala, published in 2013 and 2014 respectively, both exploring her life in Pakistan through her journey of recovering from a deadly attack by the Taliban, have been read and discussed by scholars and critics as a lens to look at the socio-cultural and political realities of South Asia. Both the memoirs written in collaboration with native English-speaking authors and being published by an American publishing company, tell more than a mere life story. The idea of "Paratext", introduced by Gerard Genette, provides a framework to analyse these elements that accompany the main text as the factors which help transform a text into a book. Paratexts do not exist in isolation from the time period or culture in which the text was written, suggesting their broader influence on the development, publication, reception, and circulation of a book. This paper examines the paratextual elements alongside the main text of memoirs to understand the implications of paratext in shaping an understanding of the identity of South Asian women in a global setting, with a focus on how these memoirs negotiate the complex relationship between identity, culture and power through the two selected memoirs by Malala Yousafzai.

Keywords: Paratext, memoirs, human rights, title, authorship

“Do not judge a book by its cover” is a common quote used universally in different contexts to talk about anything, but books. What if this quote, in fact, talked about books? Can a book actually be judged by its cover? Gerard Genette, a French theorist, has implied that one actually can “judge a book by its cover”. By cover, he essentially doesn’t mean the literal cover page of a book, but a broader category of some elements that inform a reader about the content and direction of the book. He calls them paratexts.

## What are paratexts?

In his book *Thresholds of Interpretation*, published in 1987, Genette defines paratexts as “what enables the text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public” (1). A text, while being presented to the public, is accompanied by a set of elements that inform the readers about its content. People often refer to elements like the cover, title, table of contents, summary, reviews and other available resources on a book before reading or purchasing the book. These elements are called paratexts. According to Genette, paratext consists of peritext and epitext, which he demonstrates through a formula “Paratext=Peritext+Epitext” (5). Peritext refers to those elements that are actively a part of the text including the cover, foreword, table of contents, illustrations, publication details etc. Epitext on the other hand, are broad range of contents outside the text including book reviews, book trailers, author correspondence etc, that attracts attention towards the book (Latham and Gross). These elements have clear functions that involve reception and circulation of a book among a wider section of readers. Genette uses the metaphor of a threshold to illustrate the concept of paratext. It offers the readers a space to explore the details of the text and decide whether to step in or turn back. Paratext is hence an “undefined zone” between the interior or the content of the text and the exterior or the discourse on the text (Genette 2). Thus, the primary function of paratext is to generate a perspective in the audience that enables them to subscribe to the main text in a book. This is not entirely an independent activity, specific to individual readers. It involves a deliberate steering of the readers’ attention to the authorial intention or ideology that is reflected in the text. Genette calls this function the “illocutionary force” of the paratextual message (10). The author or publisher can inform their intention or interpretation of the text to the readers through the medium of paratexts. The title and subtitle, illustrations, preface, table of contents, inclusion of different opinions and quotations, dedication, etc., perform this function. This function has broader social, cultural and political implications, enabling readers to look at the content through a lens shaped by the people who have authority over the text.

Memoirs are one such genre of literature in which paratext plays a significant role in the circulation, reception and interpretation of the books. Memoirs are defined as “how one remembers one’s life” (3) by American writer G. Thomas Couser. Being a self-referential writing, memoirs bring attention to the life of individuals by portraying the peculiarities of their culture and society in which they live, and the political realities of the location from which they write, as they remember them. Memoirs are often framed as first-person narratives, directly addressed to the readers. The paratext of memoirs sometimes implies the kind of readers targeted by the author. In a global context, memoirs are gaining significance, after the memoir boom of the 1990s, where the production of memoirs peaked. Although historically the development of the canon largely consisted of the writings from the West, in contemporary times, the non-Western cultures have been active in contributing to the production of memoirs. The evolution of memoir has popularised the act of narrating and writing among people from the margins. The voices that were once obstructed from being heard by a larger audience due to diverse factors began gaining more listeners, and the untold stories of different people from across the world gained attention, exposing the curious readers to a world that is unknown to them.

## I Am Malala: A Paratextual Analysis

Malala Yousafzai's memoirs are significant as a representation of South Asian life writing that has captured the interest of readers worldwide. Malala is a human rights activist who advocated for education, especially for girls in Pakistan. She voiced her thoughts through international media and her own blog under the pen name 'Gul Makai', which eventually provoked the Taliban to shoot her on 9<sup>th</sup> October, 2012. She was later honoured with the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize in 2014. The story of her life became memoirs with the main title, I Am Malala. The first book, I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by Taliban, was published in 2013, co-authored with Christina Lamb, a British author and journalist. Immediately after the publication of this memoir, her next book, I Am Malala: How One Girl Stood Up for Education and Changed the World, was released in 2014, co-authored by Patricia McCormick, an American author and journalist. The books trace Malala's life as a young girl in Pakistan who lives in a society where access to basic rights, including that of education, became the biggest struggle for young girls after the Taliban takeover of the region. Malala's agitation had already gained attention across the world, the instances of which are reflected in the text, informing the rest of the world about the struggles of girls in Pakistan under the rule of the Taliban. Her story also sheds light on Pakistan's political history and culture by connecting the broader history to her personal context. Both the books received attention worldwide after their release, especially due to the immediate relevance of the events including the shooting of Malala and her being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The book exclusively talks about the experience of being a girl in a politically turbulent region, where human right violations are common. Hence, these books are read and understood under a broader framework of human rights literature. However, the paratext of the books tells a lot more than the content and socio-political relevance of the books. The interpretation of the paratexts of the books including the title, subtitle, publication details, authorship, dedication and prologues suggest the possible authorial intention, the targeted audience and generated imagination of the cultural experiences.

### Paratextual Implications

Two books that bear the same title, are written by the same person, are published by the same publishing company, yet are co-authored by different individuals, and were published a year apart, appealing to two different age groups, are the peculiarities of the first two memoirs by Malala Yousafzai. The two memoirs, I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by Taliban (2013) and I Am Malala: How One Girl Stood Up for Education and Changed the World (2014), published by the American publisher Little, Brown and Company, convey more than the life and struggle of a young girl. Co-authored with international journalists Christina Lamb and Patricia McCormick respectively, and addressed to adult and young readers across the globe, the memoirs exhibit a complex dynamics of interaction between entirely contrasting cultures: South Asia and the West.

The main title I Am Malala highlights the genre of the books as memoirs. The author owns her story through the main title, indicating that she intends to narrate it through the text, implying that the book is a life writing, which can be identified as an autobiography or a memoir. The phrase "I Am Malala" could also be read as a loud political statement, the context of which is reflected in the main texts of the books as well as the prologues. It symbolises the voice of Malala Yousafzai, which is an assertion of her determination to fight against injustices. "Who is Malala?" was the question asked by Taliban militants before shooting the girls in the school van, and the title of the book responds to the question by challenging the very intention of the question. Additionally, it represents the individual identity of Malala as a symbol of human rights advocacy celebrated across the world by people, organisations, and institutions, immediately after the life-altering events she survived.

Although the books bear the same title, the sub titles of the books are different. Both books are intended for different sets of readers. The first book, published in 2013, appeals to adult readers and the second, published in 2014, addresses young readers. The sub title, *The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by Taliban* implies the storyline of the text by directly reflecting the turn of events and climax in one sentence. This signifies the identity that Malala assumes in front of a global community of readers after the significant turn of events in her life. The subtitle here seems to function as an element of stimulation in the minds of the adult readers, a sense of consciousness towards the human rights concerns and assaults on people who raise their voice. However, the young readers' edition with the sub title *How One Girl Stood Up for Education and Changed the World*, seems more instructive in nature, implying a lesson for the young readers across the world to learn from. The phrase contains an epic style of informing what happens in the main text. The usage of phrases like "How One Girl..." and "Changed the World" presents the protagonist Malala as a super heroic figure, further inducing the young readers or children to look at the text through the lens of great expectations and draw inspiration from it. The sub titles of the books stand detached from the main title in terms of the narrative voice, where the main title is presented in first-person narrative, and the sub titles of both books are presented in third person. Such a structure implies the way the subject of the memoir chooses to identify themselves to readers. For adult readers, Malala presents herself as a political figure by asserting the adversity she survived, and for the young readers, she is presented as a role model of universal significance they can look up to.

The nature of the authorship of these memoirs is peculiar. Memoirs, often understood as a kind of writing in which one records one's life as one remembers it, are typically expected to have a single person being the author as well as the subject. However, in certain cases, the main author receives assistance from another person for various reasons of personal and public significance. Autobiographies and memoirs sometimes involve people called ghost authors. They are professionals who help draft the text, but are not credited as authors. When a person other than the subject is acknowledged as an author, they are called a co-author. Co-authorship is denoted by the word "with", where the main author is listed first, followed by the name of the co-author. Both memoirs feature a co-author. In the 2013 memoir, Christina Lamb, who is a British journalist and author, appears as the co-author, and in the 2014 memoir, an American journalist and writer, Patricia McCormick, becomes the co-author. Both authors were approached by literary agents to work on the memoirs. With Malala being a globally recognised figure, the memoirs were originally written in English, though there are translations in regional languages available. However, the idea of co-authorship raises several questions about the negotiation between two cultures, conditioned to develop entirely different understandings of reality. Malala and her family, being the natives of Pakistan's Mingora until 2012, and the co-authors being from America and Britain respectively, pose several contrasting elements, including their cultural experiences, education, professional exposure, values, and belief systems. This exposes the text as well as the paratext to a tendency to be subjected to cultural appropriation in terms of lived experiences and political realities.

Another notable paratextual element is the dedications presented at the beginning of the books. The dedication on the adult readers' edition, which reads "To all the girls who have faced injustice and been silenced. Together we will be heard" (Yousafzai and Lamb), conveys solidarity with a broader struggle fought by girls against injustice. The young readers' edition focuses specifically on the issue of education. It says "To those children all over the world who have no access to education, to those teachers who bravely continue teaching, and to anyone who has fought for their basic human rights and education" (Yousafzai and McCormick), asserting the crisis of human rights violations with particular focus on education and people's struggle to protect their basic human rights. In both books, the dedications are presented in such a way that a local struggle in Pakistan is placed in a broader framework of universal human rights, where the regional concerns resonate with global political concerns. Similarly, the choice of cover images of the memoirs, where both the books bear the

photograph of Malala in pink clothes, confidently staring at the camera, clearly suggests the intended readers. The adult readers' edition of the memoir has an image of Malala that is in close-up, with a scarf covering her head. The background colour, which is a gloomy shade of grey and the font with which the main title is written indicate the mood of the text one expects to read further. Whereas the young reader's edition portrays Malala from an angle where she is visible sitting on a carpet. Her head is covered, but the clothes have a floral print, essentially with the intention of conveying a cheerful atmosphere. The background colour is bright sky blue, resembling a hopeful journey through the text for a young reader.

## Conclusion

Malala's memoirs have been received by the readers across the globe on a large scale with great enthusiasm as a representation of South Asian cultural experience and a testimony of surviving a politically turbulent childhood. The books attracted significant scholarly and critical attention soon after their release, where the narratives were usually treated as a part of the wider arena of human rights literature, post 9/11 literature and resistance literature. The growing global curiosity about the lives, struggles and survival of people from geographical locations where civil and international conflicts are part of lived reality has produced a demand for women's memoirs from these regions, often received with celebratory attitudes in Western markets. *I Am Malala* has been subjected to similar treatments. The interpretation of the paratextual elements of both memoirs suggests that the design of the text and paratext of the memoir primarily functions as a medium largely addressing Western readers. The authorial and publication details imply that the books were produced for the Western market, for a global audience. The possible appropriation of cultural experiences and realities of a location that could have taken place during the process of writing and publishing the memoirs necessarily has an impact on the readers. It holds immense potential in directing the readers in developing perspectives on the cultures, political realities and social interactions of the locations reflected in the text. Additionally, the tendency to place a lens to look at the regional concerns of different places, preferably through Western understandings of human rights and gendered experiences, might disregard the intersectionality of cultural experiences specific to those places. Memoirs, although in form seem to be an individual's personal narrative, have greater implications as a representation of the experiences of a larger community. Malala's story, narrated through these memoirs, offers the readers a glance into the lives of girls in her region, domestic and public life under the invasion of the Taliban, and their daily struggles to protect their rights. On a broader level, the memoirs also offer an understanding of the political developments in Pakistan, the internal struggles of people in terms of gender, class and economic position in the society, and the history of the country as portrayed in the text. Although the paratexts directly convey the elements like the intended readers, it also implies the political significance behind its choice. In the case of *I Am Malala* the paratexts perform functions like influencing the perspectives and perceptions of the readers, serving the commercial interest of the authors/publishers, expanding the scope of engaging a wider population with the socio-political concerns of different cultures, inspiring broader solidarities and movements, along with generating curiosity among readers and offering an insight into the main text.

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