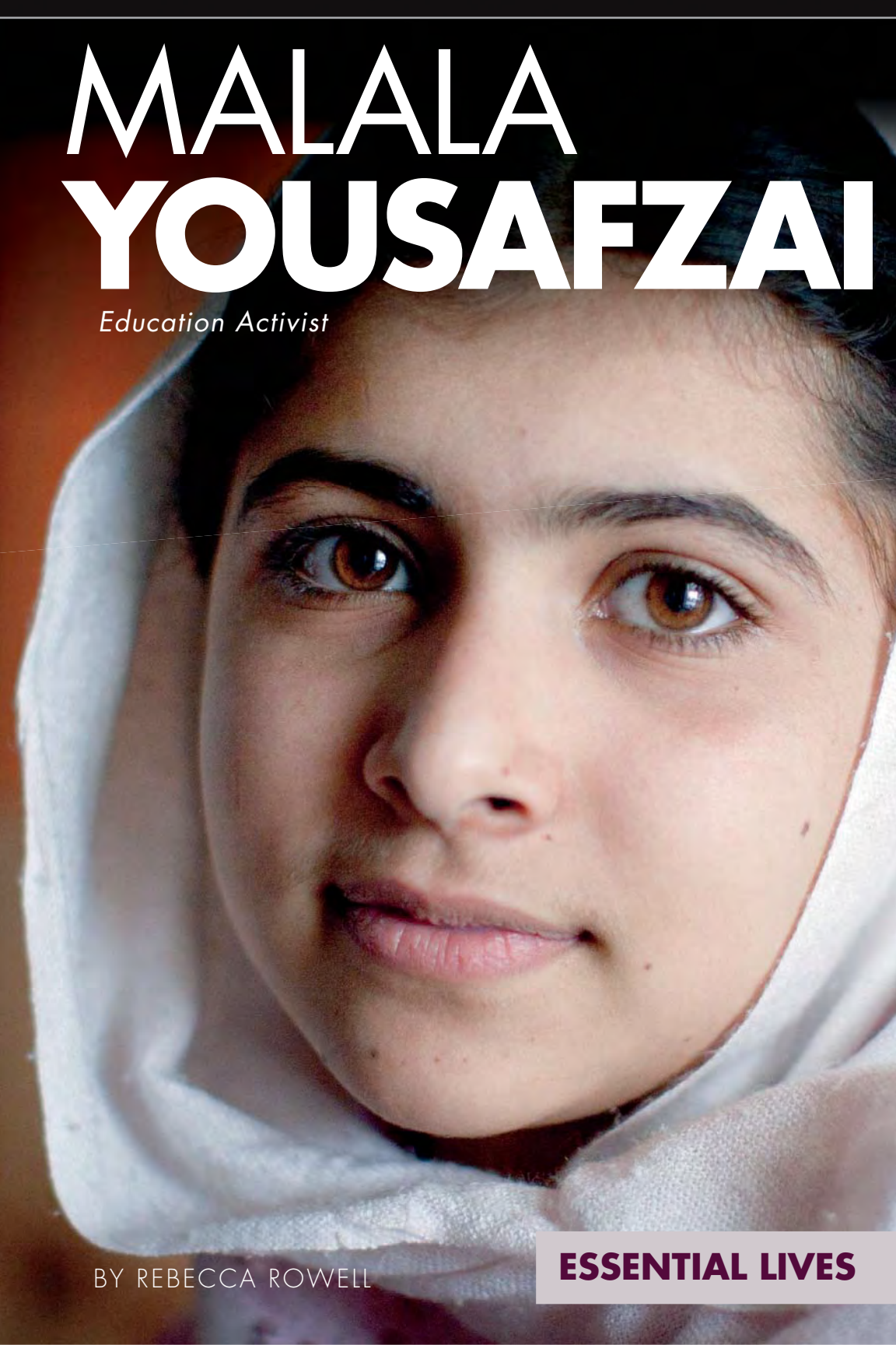


# MALALA YOUSAFZAI

*Education Activist*

BY REBECCA ROWELL

**ESSENTIAL LIVES**





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BY REBECCA ROWELL

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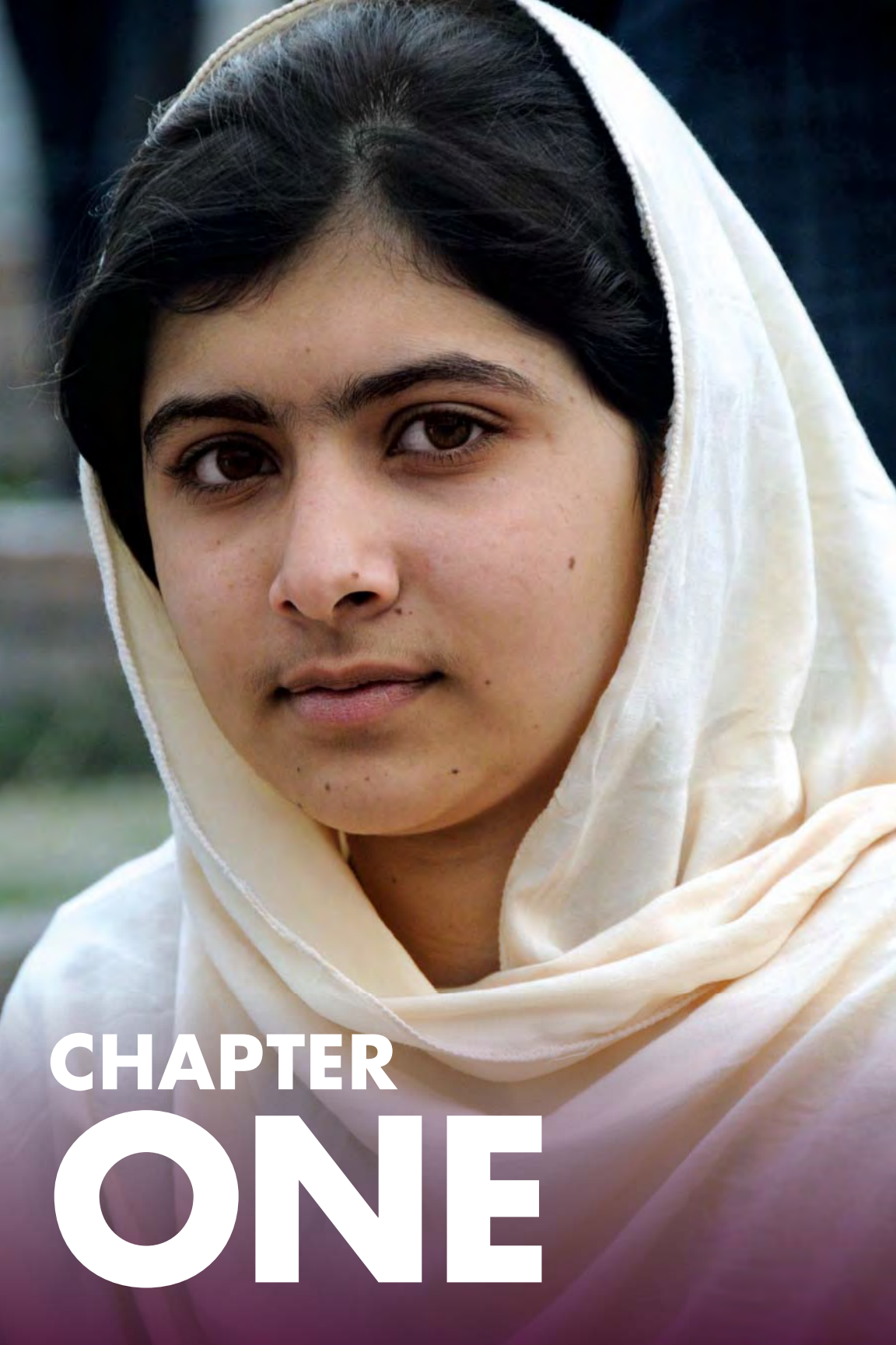
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CHAPTER  
**ONE**



# ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

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**T**he vehicle traveled along the road, taking its cargo of students home on Tuesday, October 9, 2012, just as it did every other day after school. Malala Yousafzai was one of the 25 passengers onboard from the all-girl Khushal Public School. Malala's school was in Mingora, which is the main city in Swat Valley, the area in the northwest Pakistani province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where the Pashtun teenager and her family lived. When morning classes finished that Tuesday, Malala boarded the vehicle as usual. She sat next to her best friend. The two joked and laughed. The day seemed like any other for the 15-year-old Pakistani girl. Khushal school was one of her favorite places to be. Malala's father was a teacher there and also ran the school. Malala learned from him the importance of education, and she dreamed of becoming a politician.

**Pakistani teenager Malala Yousafzai is passionate about education and making it accessible to girls in her country.**

## NOT A TYPICAL SCHOOL BUS

Khushal Public School does not use what people in the United States consider a typical school bus to transport students to and from school. Rather, its school bus is a small Toyota truck. The bus driver sits in the cab, separated from the passengers. The students sit on upholstered benches in the truck's modified bed. Two benches line the side of the truck bed and have cushioned seats and backs. A single upholstered bench with only a seat—no back—runs down the center of the truck bed. A metal frame covered by a light-colored fabric encloses most of the back, except the entrance. Bright turquoise curtains can be pulled from the sides to meet in the middle.

Malala's usual, happy routine of commuting to and from school changed quickly and dramatically that day. Malala would not make it home.

### Singled Out

As the vehicle continued on its route, a man halted it by waving down the driver. The stranger asked if the bus had come from Khushal Public School. As the driver responded, a second man walked around outside the vehicle and then climbed onboard. The schoolchildren initially thought the man was boarding their bus as a joke. They soon found out it was not. The man was on a mission. He asked, "Where's Malala, who is

Malala?"<sup>1</sup> As the one Muslim girl onboard who did not cover her face, Malala stood out. Still, she responded to the gunman's questions: "I'm Malala."<sup>2</sup>



Pakistani police examine the site of Malala's attack: the vehicle in which she rode to and from school in Mingora.

The gunman promptly shot the teenager. “He opened fire and with one bullet she was down,” recalled Kainat Riaz, a friend and classmate who was on the bus.<sup>3</sup> Malala appeared dead, but she was just badly injured. Kainat was also shot, as was another of Malala's friends.

In moments, the children were in chaos. “Everyone was screaming. People started crying,” Kainat said.<sup>4</sup> Realizing what had happened, the driver sped off, and the gunmen got away.

## Why Malala?

Young Malala had made a name for herself in Pakistan and beyond as an activist. Since age 11, she had been vocal about education and her rights. She made it clear she wanted an education and was an activist for education for all girls in her country. Her words defied the Taliban, an oppressive religious and political group that ruled by militant force where Malala lived. The religion of Islam affects all who live in Pakistan—even

### EMPOWERING WOMEN: A GLOBAL PRIORITY

Equality—in education and life in general—is difficult for women to achieve in Pakistan and many other countries. Organizations worldwide are fighting this issue and a variety of other global issues through eight Millennium Development Goals established by the United Nations (UN) in September 2000. The goals focus on reducing poverty, hunger, child mortality, and diseases, as well as improving primary education, gender equality, maternal health, environmental

sustainability, and global partnerships.

Two goals in particular reflect Malala's ideals and message: the first is achieving universal primary education. The second is promoting gender equality and empowering women. Educating girls reaches far beyond the individual students. Educated women can educate their children. An African proverb notes, "If you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a nation."<sup>5</sup>

the minute minority who do not follow Islam. This is in part due to terrorist groups, such as the Taliban, that have extreme Islamic views and try to force them on others. The Taliban in Pakistan believes girls should not be educated. Because Malala loved school and believed all girls, including herself, have a right to attend school, the Taliban opposed her.

The Taliban held great power in Swat Valley. As a female living under such rule, it was difficult for Malala to get the education she wanted. The Taliban had banned girls from attending school at least once before. For a time in 2009, the Taliban completely closed Malala's school. They had made the Swat district a dangerous place to live.

At one point, Malala, her mother, and her two brothers had left their father, friends, and village. Similar to many other residents of Swat, they went into exile to stay safe and alive. Malala's father, Ziauddin, also left Swat for a time. But because the family believed he was a Taliban target, he went elsewhere while his family stayed with different family members in other parts of the country, waiting for the day they could return home and live safely.



Malala survived being shot in the head by the Taliban, but her fight for recovery was just beginning.

The family survived the separation and happily reunited after a few months. Malala, excited to return home to her schoolbooks, eventually went back to her classes. Khushal Public School reopened, and Malala got back to studying. She continued speaking out in support of education. This behavior enraged the Taliban. The group decided to kill Malala because she advocated “Western thinking.”<sup>6</sup>

## Uncertain Future

The fact the Taliban was threatened by the words and ideas of a child and sought to kill her speaks to the

organization's ethics. It also says a great deal about Malala. She did not let their words and actions deter her or her mission.

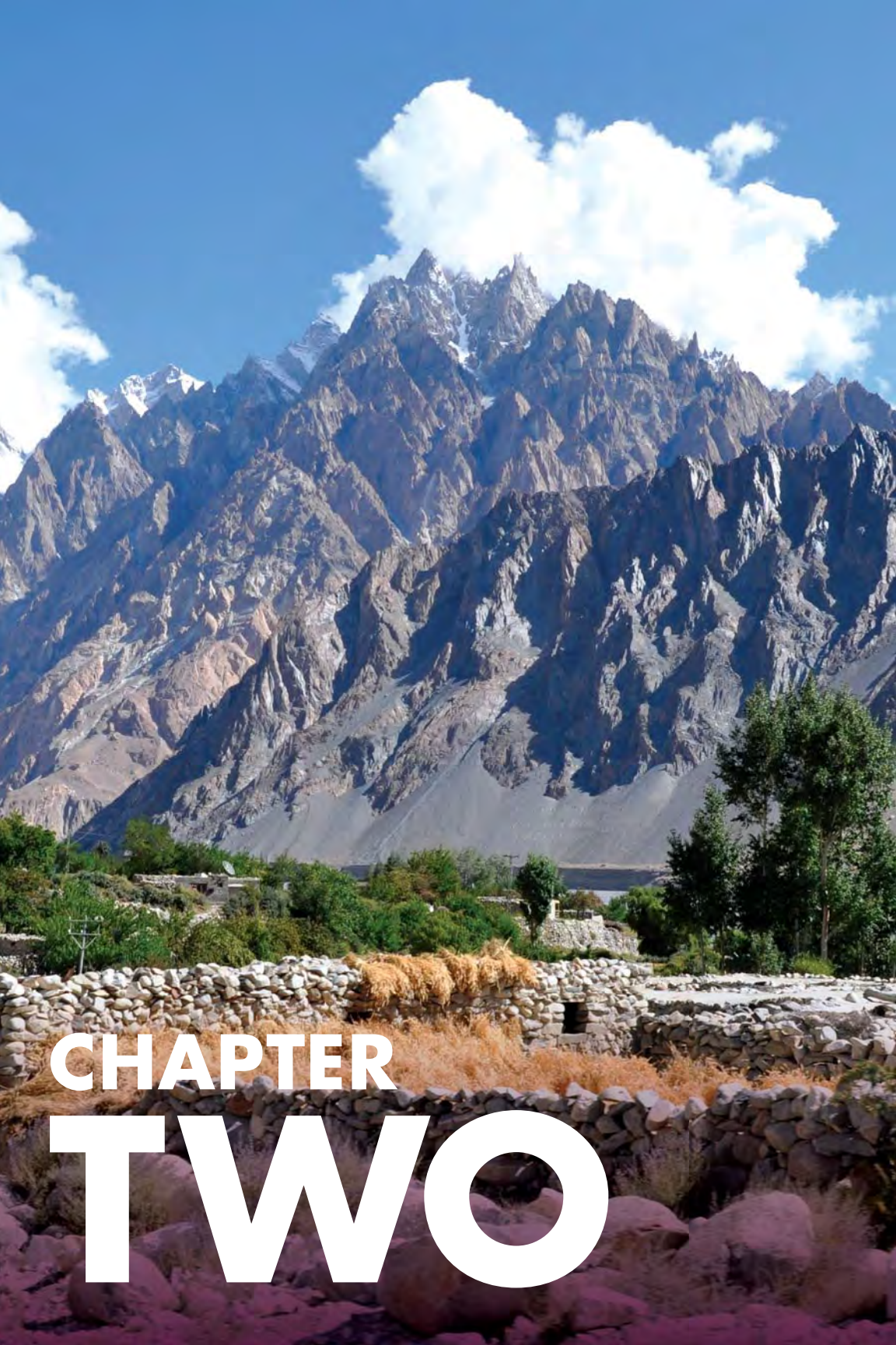
Documentary filmmaker Samar Minallah has worked with Malala's people, the Pashtuns. After the attack, she said of Malala, "She symbolizes the brave girls of Swat. She knew her voice was important, so she spoke up for the rights of children. Even adults didn't have a vision like hers."<sup>7</sup>

The assassination attempt brought greater attention to the young activist and her mission as word of the attack spread the globe via newspapers, television, and Web sites. The gunman's bullet had struck Malala in the head, passed through her neck, and lodged above her shoulder. She was in critical condition in a hospital. The Taliban had failed—she was alive, at least for now.

## PASHTUN

Malala is Pashtun. The Pashtun are an ethnic group of people that live between northeastern Afghanistan and along the Indus River in northern Pakistan. Pashtun people make up a larger portion of Afghanistan's population than Pakistan's population. Though the exact origins of the Pashtun are unclear, according to folklore, the people are related to King Saul of Israel, descending from his grandson Afghana.

The Pashtun people speak Pashto, which is sometimes called Afghani and is an official language of Afghanistan. Pashto is also spoken in India, Iran, and Tajikistan.



**CHAPTER**  
**TWO**



# PAKISTAN

---

Located in southern Asia, Malala's homeland has a varied landscape and people. Although Pakistan has existed as a nation for only a short time, its history is long, with inhabitants dating back thousands of years. Religion has played an important role in Pakistan for centuries and continues to do so today. Political upheaval, economic strife, terrorist attacks, and natural disasters are common. Together, these factors shape Pakistani society and people, including Malala.

## History

One of the earliest known civilizations settled along Pakistan's Indus River thousands of years ago. The Indus Valley Civilization was established in what is now Pakistan in approximately 2600 BCE. Throughout the centuries, many other groups moved into the region. They included, in order, the Persians, Greeks, Huns, Arabs, Mongols, Mughals, and British.

Some of the groups who occupied Pakistan made lasting changes that are visible today. Arabs introduced Islam to the region. The British influence was broad, affecting language, laws, architecture, sports, and more.

Initially, Pakistan existed in two parts: East and West. Part of India separated the two areas. Since the division, Pakistan and India have battled in multiple wars. The first two, fought from 1947 to 1948 and in 1965, were over control of Kashmir, an area northeast of Pakistan and northwest of India. These wars have not resolved the issue of Kashmir. Today, the region is divided in two, with Pakistan overseeing one part and India the other. A third war, in 1971, changed

Pakistan geographically when East Pakistan became its own nation, Bangladesh.

## NAMING PAKISTAN

The name Pakistan is a combination of the names of five provinces that were part of British-occupied India. The *P*, *A*, *K*, and *I* come from Punjab, Afghania, Kashmir, and Indus-Sind, while *stan* is taken from Balochistan. In the Urdu language, Pakistan can mean "land of the pure."<sup>1</sup>

## Government and Politics: Changing Leadership

Pakistan's unsteady leadership has shifted several times between civil and military control. Its government is a federal republic

with three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. The president is the head of the country. The prime minister is the head of government institutions.

From 1947 to 1958, Pakistan had a democratic government. Successive coups in 1958 launched the country's first period of military rule, which lasted until 1971. A second democracy, led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, ruled from 1971 to 1977. Bhutto's military head of staff, General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, staged a coup in 1977. This started a second period of military control, which lasted until 1988. During this time, in 1979, Zia tried to make Pakistan an Islamic state through such measures as implementing Islamic law, and the government executed Bhutto. A new period of democracy began after Zia died in a plane crash in August 1988.

## **First Female Prime Minister**

Though many Pakistani females, including Malala, often struggle today for equal rights, women have held positions of power in the past. Pakistanis made history in 1988 by electing Benazir Bhutto, the daughter of ousted president Bhutto, as prime minister. Benazir was the Muslim world's first female leader. This was no small feat in male-dominated Pakistan. Benazir lived



Benazir Bhutto rose to power as Pakistan's prime minister in the late 1980s, despite the country's political history of excluding women.

Malala's dream of getting an education, having studied at the prestigious Harvard and Oxford Universities. Benazir spoke with strength and conviction, setting the stage for other strong female Pakistani voices, including Malala's. However, Benazir's path was often difficult. Her struggles included exile, house arrest, imprisonment, and accusations of corruption. The last of these led to her dismissal as prime minister in 1990. She held the position again from 1993 to 1996.

After her party lost elections in 1997 and Benazir faced legal troubles, she left the country in 1999. Pakistani laws kept Benazir from seeking a third term as prime minister and barred her from holding an

office for her party. Arrest warrants kept Benazir out of Pakistan for eight years. She returned in October 2007 after the president, Pervez Musharraf, granted her amnesty. But Benazir's future role in Pakistan was yet to be determined—and it never would be. Assassins killed Benazir on December 27, 2007, shooting her and exploding a bomb near her vehicle during a motorcade procession at an election rally.

Pakistan was under its third period of military rule while Benazir was in exile, lasting from 1999 to 2008. In 2008, a new democratic era began when Pakistanis chose Yousuf Raza Gilani as prime minister and elected a new president: Benazir's widower, Asif Ali Zardari.

## Deadly Forces

In addition to dealing with a government that seems to be in constant flux, Pakistanis have faced deadly forces—some human, some natural. The Taliban, a militant group that took power in Afghanistan in 1996, expanded in Pakistan and fought for control. The group used threats and violence to take hold in areas such as Swat Valley, where Malala lives. The group was responsible for the attack on Benazir, and later, on Malala.

The nation has faced natural disasters, too. Earthquakes and floods have caused tremendous damage to personal property, farms, and infrastructure across the country, including in Malala's Swat Valley, as recently as 2010.

## THE 2010 FLOODS

In 2010, Pakistan had the worst flooding in its history. Record rainfall in the northwest, where Malala is from, began around July 22 and caused flash floods in multiple provinces. By August 1, the flooding, which included the Indus River, had killed an estimated 1,000 people and forced at least 1 million more from their homes.<sup>2</sup> The rushing water moved south as rain continued in the northwest. By the middle of August, 20 percent of Pakistan was struggling with rising water levels.<sup>3</sup>

Problems surrounding the flooding lasted for months. By October, the Indus water levels were mostly back to normal. But even after the water subsided, hundreds of thousands of flood victims continued to live

in makeshift camps with poor sanitation and not enough food.

The floods destroyed millions of acres of crops and killed many livestock. The water also damaged or destroyed hundreds of medical facilities and thousands of schools, in addition to washing away thousands of miles of road and railway.

Pakistan's government estimated the economic loss from damage caused by the flooding at \$43 billion.<sup>4</sup> Donations from a variety of sources totaled \$1.3 billion—just a fraction of damage estimates.<sup>5</sup> Many Pakistanis wondered how they would survive. In early 2013, many who suffered from the devastation still continued struggling, but several groups, such as International Medical Corps, offered aid.

## People

Pakistan has more than 190 million inhabitants.<sup>6</sup>

Pakistanis belong to several ethnic groups. Most of them—almost 45 percent—are Punjabi. Malala's people, the Pashtun, are the second-largest group, making up a little more than 15 percent of the population. Other smaller groups include the Sindhi, Saraiki, Muhajir, and Balochi.<sup>7</sup>

The nation's population is young. Most Pakistanis are 54 years old or younger. The median age is approximately 22 years. Malala is part of the abundant youth majority in Pakistan: 56 percent of people are under the age of 35.<sup>8</sup>

Most Pakistanis live in rural areas. Approximately one-third of the population, including Malala, is urban. Bordering the Arabian Sea in the south, Karachi is the most-populated city in Pakistan, with more than 13 million inhabitants.<sup>9</sup> Mingora, Malala's hometown, is the largest city in Swat district. Recent estimates place the population near 500,000.<sup>10</sup>

More than one-fifth of the Pakistani population lives below the poverty line.<sup>11</sup> Most poor Pakistanis—80 percent—live in rural areas.<sup>12</sup> Poverty in Pakistan



Malala is a part of Pakistan's majority as a youth and Muslim but a part of the minority as a literate, Pashtun female.

is due to several causes. Agriculture is the core of rural economies. People living in mountainous areas struggle to find quality land to farm, while those living in drier areas have a limited supply of water. In other areas, people simply do not have much land to farm. A small number of landowners hold most of the land throughout Pakistan. This leaves a limited amount of land for millions of others to own.

Poor or limited education can also lead to and worsen poverty. A little more than half of Pakistanis are



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