

He'd had nothing to do with the Taliban. He was just a simple shopkeeper. Afterwards the army apologised to her and said they'd been confused by his name and picked up the wrong person.

It wasn't just poor women who came to our house. One day a rich businessman arrived from Muscat in the Gulf. He told my father that his brother and five or six nephews had all disappeared, and he wanted to know if they had been killed or were being held so he knew whether to find new husbands for their wives. One of them was a *maulana* and my father managed to get him freed.

This wasn't just happening in Swat. We heard there were thousands of missing all over Pakistan. Many people protested outside courthouses or put up posters of their missing but got nowhere.

Meanwhile our courts were busy with another issue. In Pakistan we have something called the Blasphemy Law, which protects the Holy Quran from desecration. Under General Zia's Islamisation campaign, the law was made much stricter so that anyone who 'defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet' can be punished by death or life imprisonment.

One day in November 2010 there was a news report about a Christian woman called Asia Bibi who had been sentenced to death by hanging. She was a poor mother of five who picked fruit for a living in a village in Punjab. One hot day she had fetched water for her fellow workers but some of them refused to drink it, saying that the water was 'unclean' because she was a Christian. They believed that as Muslims they would be defiled by drinking with her. One of them was her neighbour, who was angry because she said Asia Bibi's goat had damaged her water trough. They had ended up in an argument, and of course just as in our arguments at school there were different versions of who said what. One version was that they tried to persuade Asia Bibi to convert to Islam. She replied that Christ had died on the cross for the sins of Christians and asked what the Prophet Mohammad had done for Muslims. One of the fruit pickers reported her to the local imam, who informed the police. She spent more than a year in jail before the case went to court and she was sentenced to death.

Since Musharraf had allowed satellite television, we now had lots of channels. Suddenly we could witness these events on television. There was outrage round the world and all the talk shows covered the case. One of the few people who spoke out for Asia Bibi in Pakistan was the governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer. He himself had been a political prisoner as well as a close ally of Benazir. Later on he became a wealthy media mogul. He went to visit Asia Bibi in jail and said that President Zardari should pardon her. He called the Blasphemy Law a 'black law', a phrase which was repeated by some of our TV anchors to stir things up. Then some imams at Friday prayers in the largest mosque in Rawalpindi condemned the governor.

A couple of days later, on 4 January 2011, Salman Taseer was gunned down by one of his own bodyguards after lunch in an area of fashionable coffee bars in Islamabad. The man shot him twenty-six times. He later said that he had done it for God after hearing the Friday prayers in Rawalpindi. We were shocked by how many people praised the killer. When he appeared in court even lawyers showered him with rose petals. Meanwhile the imam at the late governor's mosque refused to perform his funeral prayers and the president did not attend his funeral.

Our country was going crazy. How was it possible that we were now garlanding murderers?

Shortly after that my father got another death threat. He had spoken at an event to commemorate the third anniversary of the bombing of the Haji Baba High School. At the event my father had spoken passionately. 'Fazlullah is the chief of all devils!' he shouted. 'Why hasn't he been caught?' Afterwards people told him to be very careful. Then an anonymous letter came to our house addressed to my father. It started with '*Asalaamu alaikum*' – 'Peace be upon you' – but it wasn't