

school tomorrow.’ When my father asked why, he explained it was his village’s turn to work on Fazlullah’s buildings.

‘Your prime responsibility is to teach the students,’ replied my father.

‘No, I have to do this,’ said Nawab Ali.

My father came home fuming. ‘If people volunteered in the same way to construct schools or roads or even clear the river of plastic wrappers, by God, Pakistan would become a paradise within a year,’ he said. ‘The only charity they know is to give to mosque and madrasa.’

A few weeks later the same teacher told him that he could no longer teach girls as ‘the *maulana* doesn’t like it’.

My father tried to change his mind. ‘I agree that female teachers should educate girls,’ he said. ‘But first we need to educate our girls so they can become teachers!’

One day Sufi Mohammad proclaimed from jail that there should be no education for women even at girls’ madrasas. ‘If someone can show any example in history where Islam allows a female madrasa, they can come and piss on my beard,’ he said. Then the Radio Mullah turned his attention to schools. He began speaking against school administrators and congratulating girls by name who left school. ‘Miss So-and-so has stopped going to school and will go to heaven,’ he’d say, or, ‘Miss X of Y village has stopped education at Class 5. I congratulate her.’ Girls like me who still went to school he called buffaloes and sheep.

My friends and I couldn’t understand why it was so wrong. ‘Why don’t they want girls to go to school?’ I asked my father.

‘They are scared of the pen,’ he replied.

Then another teacher at our school, a maths teacher with long hair, also refused to teach girls. My father fired him, but some other teachers were worried and sent a delegation to his office. ‘Sir, don’t do this,’ they pleaded. ‘These are bad days. Let him stay and we will cover for him.’

Every day it seemed a new edict came. Fazlullah closed beauty parlours and banned shaving so there was no work for barbers. My father, who only has a moustache, insisted he would not grow a beard for the Taliban. The Taliban told women not to go to the bazaar. I didn’t mind not going to the Cheena Bazaar. I didn’t enjoy shopping, unlike my mother, who liked beautiful clothes even though we didn’t have much money. My mother always told me, ‘Hide your face – people are looking at you.’

I would reply, ‘It doesn’t matter; I’m also looking at them,’ and she’d get so cross.

My mother and her friends were upset about not being able to go shopping, particularly in the days before the Eid holidays, when we beautify ourselves and go to the stalls lit up by fairy lights that sell bangles and henna. All of that stopped. The women would not be attacked if they went to the markets, but the Taliban would shout at them and threaten them until they stayed at home. One Talib could intimidate a whole village. We children were cross too. Normally there are new film releases for the holidays, but Fazlullah had closed the DVD shops. Around this time my mother also got tired of Fazlullah, especially when he began to preach against education and insist that those who went to school would also go to hell.

Next Fazlullah began holding a *shura*, a kind of local court. People liked this as justice was speedy, unlike in Pakistani courts, where you could wait years and have to pay bribes to be heard. People began going to Fazlullah and his men to resolve grievances about anything from business matters to personal feuds. ‘I had a thirty-year-old problem and it’s been resolved in one go,’ one man