

sat there in our famous mosque, Tabligh Markaz, like the master of our land. He was the guarantor that the Taliban would lay down their arms and there would be peace in the valley. People visited him to pay homage and kiss his hand because they were tired of war and suicide bombings.

In March I stopped writing my blog as Hai Kakar thought there was not much more to say. But to our horror things didn't change much. If anything the Taliban became even more barbaric. They were now state-sanctioned terrorists. We were disillusioned and disappointed. The peace deal was merely a mirage. One night the Taliban held what we call a flag march near our street and patrolled the roads with guns and sticks as if they were the army.

They were still patrolling the Cheena Bazaar. One day my mother went shopping with my cousin as she was getting married and wanted to buy things for her wedding. A *talib* accosted them and blocked their way. 'If I see you again wearing a scarf but no burqa I will beat you,' he said. My mother is not easily scared and remained composed. 'Yes, OK. We will wear burqas in future,' she told him. My mother always covers her head but the burqa is not part of our Pashtun tradition.

We also heard that Taliban had attacked a shopkeeper because an unaccompanied woman was looking at the lipsticks in his beauty shop. 'There is a banner in the market saying women are not allowed to be in your shop unaccompanied by a male relative and you have defied us,' they said. He was badly beaten and nobody helped him.

One day I saw my father and his friends watching a video on his phone. It was a shocking scene. A teenage girl wearing a black burqa and red trousers was lying face down on the ground being flogged in broad daylight by a bearded man in a black turban. 'Please stop it!' she begged in Pashto in between screams and whimpers as each blow was delivered. 'In the name of Allah, I am dying!'

You could hear the Taliban shouting, 'Hold her down. Hold her hands down.' At one point during the flogging her burqa slips and they stop for a moment to adjust it then carry on beating her. They hit her thirty-four times. A crowd had gathered but did nothing. One of the woman's relatives even volunteered to help hold her down.

A few days later the video was everywhere. A woman film-maker in Islamabad got hold of it and it was shown on Pakistan TV over and over, and then round the world. People were rightly outraged, but this reaction seemed odd to us as it showed they had no idea of the awful things going on in our valley. I wished their outrage extended to the Taliban's banning of girls' education. Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani called for an inquiry and made a statement saying the flogging of the girl was against the teachings of Islam. 'Islam teaches us to treat women politely,' he said.

Some people even claimed the video was fake. Others said that the flogging had taken place in January, before the peace deal, and had been released now to sabotage it. But Muslim Khan confirmed it was genuine. 'She came out of her house with a man who was not her husband so we had to punish her,' he said. 'Some boundaries cannot be crossed.'

Around the same time in early April another well-known journalist called Zahid Hussain came to Swat. He went to visit the DC at his official residence and found him hosting what appeared to be a celebration of the Taliban takeover. There were several senior Taliban commanders with armed escorts including Muslim Khan and even Faqir Mohammad, the leader of the militants in Bajaur, who were in the middle of a bloody fight with the army. Faqir had a \$200,000 bounty on his head yet there he was sitting in a government official's house having dinner. We also heard that an army brigadier went to prayers led by Fazlullah.

'There cannot be two swords in one sheath,' said one of my father's friends. 'There cannot be two