



# After the Rape

## A ONE WOMAN REVOLUTION IN PAKISTAN

After the rape, she could have lived in shame or commit suicide like most of the hundreds of women who suffer it every year. But no... Mukhtaran Mai decided to open a school. That simple woman from a remote village of the Punjab, who knew the Quran by heart because she never had learnt to read, had the extraordinary vision that only a change of mentality could break the brutal traditional rules. To build a school for girls where the girls were banished from education, that's what the authorities never thought about, and that's what she did.

Five years later, the little girls of the village of Meerwala and surroundings, who before would only learn the necessary house-~~old~~ skills to become good and submitted wives are now studying English and math. More important, they have discovered the sense of the word "future": they now may dream to become a teacher or a doctor. Some, like the amazing Sidra, even claim they would like to be a "Nation leader". "I want to raise the values of my nation, I want my nation to be educated", she says firmly. And like when you throw a stone in a lake, the small changes bring bigger changes. Now the parents of those little students are realizing that education can bring better roads, electricity, better laws... and pride.

Still, violence lies like a monster beneath the quietness of the countryside daily routine. And women victims of abuses are coming from all over the country to seek Mukhtaran Mai support. Mukhtar fight gave them their voice back; she made them aware they have rights. Now, they dare to denounce their aggressors, they dare to denounce the corrupted police.

The shelter for victims that Mukhtar built next to the school is a daily reminder for the girls that: "Violence only can end with culture and education", as we can read on a huge poster.

The girls in the school and the victims show two faces of the same tragedy. The first ones represent the future, the second are the past and the present. The signals of violence are projecting their shadows on the playground of Mukhtaran Mai school.

It's a story of "resilience", of how an individual can sow the seeds of change. We can feel that the young Sidra would fight to become a doctor or more, a leader: dreams are harder to fight than violence.

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