

## **Nadia Murad's *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight Against the Islamic State* : A Study of Oppressed, Enslaved, and Forgotten Yazidis in Northern Iraq**

**Suman**

M. Phil

Dept. of English and Foreign Languages  
MDU, Rohtak

### **Abstract**

Nadia Murad's *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and Fight against the Islamic State* (2017) was set in a war ravaged country Iraq. The book describes the hazardous and miserable lives of Yazidis (religious minority) living in Iraq. The article aims at highlighting the oppressed, enslaved and forgotten Yazidis in northern Iraq. Problems like internal wars, oppression, religious and ethnic violence and sexual enslavement have continuously affected several countries around the world. Sometimes it leads to mass destruction. The paper aims at examining the problems faced by Yazidis in the hands of ISIS. It presents the history of Iraq and the brutalization of fundamentalists against the religious minorities; who in the name of religion persecuted innocent people. The article presents various incidents from the history of Iraq that represents the maltreatment being meted out to the religious minorities. It represents the voice against the atrocities and injustices.

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, Genocide, Persecution, Religious minority, Intolerance, Yazidi, Fatwa, Shariah

Nadia Murad, the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in Peace, 2018 was born in 1993 in a small village in northern Iraq. She belongs to the Yazidi ethnic and religious minority. In her book entitled *The Last Girl*, she presents the lives of Yazidis. In Iraq, Yazidis are supposed to be devil worshippers because of their different religious faiths to Muslims. Religious intolerance had been the cause of the atrocities against them. They had been persecuted for centuries. For a long, they had been pulled between the competing forces of Iraq's Sunni Arabs and Sunni Kurds. They were asked to deny their Yazidi heritage and convert to Sunni Arabs or Sunni Kurds. Till now, they have faced seventy three attacks against them that they used to call firman and now genocide.

Not only the Yazidis; the other ethno religious minorities has also been the subject of violence in the hands of ISIS. Nikita Malik, the Director of the Centre on Radicalizations and Terrorism at the Henry Jackson Society, in her article entitled "Surviving Islamic State: The

Plight of the Yazidi Community” has focused on the propaganda of ISIS. The issue 4 of *Dabiq*, has provided more justifications for sexually abusing captured Yazidi women, declaring that enslaving the non-believer women, and taking the women as concubines is part of Shariah that cannot be criticized.

With this book, the author has presented the oppressed Yazidis in Iraq. They were oppressed and enslaved because of their religious beliefs. They believe that before God made man, he created seven divine beings, who were manifestation of himself. Later, God sent his chief angel Tawusi Melek on earth Melek sees Adam on earth, whom God has made immortal and perfect.

According to Yazidis, Melek is their God and they think that it is only because of the divine wisdom of him, they exist in the world. But this belief has made them devil worshipper; because Muslims claim that Melek has defied Adam and therefore God. Tawusi Melek they say, is : “God’s chief angel, like Iblis, the devil figure in *Quran*”(28). This religious intolerance leads to mass destruction and genocide. The larger groups did heinous acts of violence to the minorities and forgot the basic religion of humans that should be humanity only.

Nadia has criticized the misinterpretation of various scholars to Yazidi religion. She says that this misinterpretation has terrible influences. She expresses her frustration towards the scholars, who are unfamiliar with the Yazidi oral tradition- that they say that Tawusi Melek was sent to hell for refusing to bow to Adam, which is not true. Further she adds that: “The story we use to explain the core of our faith and everything we think of as good about the Yazidi religion is the same story others use to justify genocide against us”(28).

Through this book, Nadia has also presented the history of Iraq under Saddam’s regime. He was a dictator, who made his opponent lives more miserable. Anyone who dared to raise voice against him was killed brutally. Even the leaders of opposition were not spared. He was a religious fundamentalist who want to eradicate all the religious minorities from Iraq. Earlier there were no school in Kocho, in 1970’s a new school was opened in the village, under Saddam. The education was in Arabic because it was the language of Sunni Arabs and Saddam was also a Sunni Arab. Yazidis were not depicted in history books and Kurds, who were with the Yazidis at the time of crisis; are depicted as threats to the Arabs. Broadly speaking, the education the Arabs imbibed resulted in Sunni Arabs joining ISIS. As the writer tells us: “Saddam had tried to get loyalty from Yazidis so they would side with him against the Kurds and fight in his wars”(33). Sanctions on Iraq were imposed by United Nations after the Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait in 1991, hoping that it would limit the president’s power, but these sanctions made the lives of poor people more drastic. Prices of the things hiked and Yazidis, who were already on the margins, suffered more.

In Januray 2014, the civil war in Iraq was started due to the fall of Fallujah. Fallujah is a city in the Iraqi Province of Al - Albar. The city was capture and controlled by ISIS and got victory over Iraqi government. The brutalities of ISIS were everywhere in Iraq. People were killed. The organization became stronger than the governments and resulted in forced resignation

of Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri al- Maliki. In the same year, ISIS had started to seize the northern states of Iraq, where Kocho was also situated.

Nadia Murad had witnessed ISIS. She was in the last year of her high school when ISIS knocked Kocho. At first, the villagers couldn't understand the happenings in the village but later announcements were made by the ISIS militants. As the writer tells "We are surrounded by three sides by Daesh!" they protested, using the Arabic term for ISIS"(54). The fear among the Yazidi roused; as they were watching on television about the killings of religious minorities in the hands of ISIS. Some of the men wanted to fight back, but couldn't; because it was clear that their retort will lead to ferocious results.

There was fear everywhere in Kocho. Some of the people had started to escape to Mount Sinjar, a sacred place, where the temple is situated People have faith that the mount will save them from the enemies. They took their children to the mount with them. But their escape could not succeed. The children were died due to starvation and dehydration.

Nadia, a courageous Yazidi women wanted to revolt from the very beginning. She dared to stop the militant's truck by standing in the front. She was inspired by her father. Though, she was not happy with the second marriage of his father with Sara; but never uttered a word against him. She was fond of her father's bravery. He was against injustices on any basis. He used to raise his voice against evils. One day he encountered a heart attack and died. Time and again, she, along with her family misses the head of the family. The author feels her father's absence. She thinks that if her father be there in Kocho, the condition would have been different. He might have dealt them with more courage instead these Peshmerga and other parties.

The story of the book revolves around Nadia. She has told about her experiences as a captive of Islamic states. With her story, the real face of ISIS came out. In the name of religion, Yazidis were oppressed and justified for the treatment. The terrorist groups made their own interpretation of Islam. Thousands of Yazidis were made slaves. Even the pamphlets and magazines were also released to provide more guidelines to the captives that they can be raped systematically.

ISIS took sexual violence as a weapon of war. Nadia was sold in the markets and on Facebook by ISIS militants. They were forced to convert but not killed. After the conversion, they were made Sabayas. It was approved by the Research and Fatwa Department to make Yazidi girls as sex slaves. The bureaucracy of evil on a large scale can be easily seen through the depiction of the incidents by the author. As the writer says:

It was the first time I had heard the Arabic word applied to me. When ISIS took over Sinjar and began kidnapping Yazidis, they called their human spoils sabaya (sabiyya in singular), referencing to the young women they would buy and sell as sex slaves. This was part of their plan for us, sourced from an interpretation of *Koran* that had long been banned by the world's Muslim communities, and written into the fatwas and pamphlets ISIS made official they attacked Sinjar. Yazidi girls were considered infidels, and according to the militant's interpretation of the *Koran*, raping a slave is not a sin. (123)

Mosul was serving as the capital of the Islamic State in Iraq. Taking over the city was a huge history for ISIS. The Kurdish and central Iraqi forces, meanings, swore that they would take the city back from the Islamic State militants. Young girls were taken to the slave markets in Mosul. There were a large number of militants came to buy the girls. Girls were selected by people, who were leaders and the other bureaucrats. Hajji Salman, a judge in Mosul, took Nadia with him. For him, Yazidis were infidels. He was happy with such treatment of Yazidis. Later, he took Nadia to court and converted into Islam. Nadia became a Sabaiyya of Hajji Salman. She was raped by him every day in his captivity. Many a times, she tried to escape but could not succeed in early attempts. One day, she was caught by the guards of Hajji Salman while escape. The punishment was rather more ferocious. She was raped by three guards until she became unconscious. The next day, she was sold to some other man, Hajji Amer. One day, she managed to escape from Hajji Amer's house and reached to a Muslim family in Hamdaniya. The family helped her in all possible ways. She contacted to her brother. The son of the family, Naseer took the risk to send her to her family living in the refugee camps. Naseer pretended to be the husband of Nadia, so that no one questions her about identity. They got success and Nadia was with her family. Many of the girls were escorted from ISIS. Sometimes, a large amount had to give the militants to release the girl captive.

History has been the witness of atrocities against the religious and ethnic minorities. Nobody can forget Adolf Hitler, a German politician and the leader of Nazi Party, who was the mastermind of the Holocaust. It was a preplanned genocide and led by a racist spirit that regarded Jews as "parasitic vermin" worthy only of eradication. Nazis condemned all of Europe's Jews for ruination.

The brutal killings of Yazdis in Iraq, is known to everyone. In the name of religion, ISIS violated the entire Iraq. Religious minorities had to go through harsh punishments. They were either sentenced to death or converted. The author, through her witnessed eye and experiences has expressed the reality of Islamic State. *The Last girl* is not only a memoir; it takes the reader to the history of Iraq where the larger groups had been the cause of the sufferings of the minorities. Yazidis suffered because of their religious beliefs and more prominently for being poor. Poor are always the easy targets of the people in power. Yazidis had no jobs and education in the past. They were not even the part of constitution under Saddam's era. Later in 2005, they were mentioned as religious minorities and became the part of the constitution but the violence against them didn't stop. Even today, there are a large number of Yazidis who are the captives of ISIS. With this book, Nadia wants to tell the world about the story of the Yazidis in Iraq and wants ISIS to justice. At last she says that: "I want to be a last girl in the world with a story like mine"(306).

## Work Citations

“Battle of Fallujah (2014).” *Wikipedia*, [http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Fallujah\\_\(2014\)](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Fallujah_(2014)).

Jalabi, Raya. “Who are Yazidis and Why is ISIS Hunting Them?” *The Guardian*, Aug. 2014, [www.google.com/amp/s/amp.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/07/who-yazidi-isis-iraqi-religion-ethnicity-mountains](http://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/07/who-yazidi-isis-iraqi-religion-ethnicity-mountains).

“Iraqi Civil War.” *Wikipedia*, [http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraqi\\_Civil\\_War\\_\(2014-2017\)](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraqi_Civil_War_(2014-2017)).

Malik, Nikita. “Surviving Islamic State: The Plight of Yazidi Community.” [www.forbes.com/nikitamalik/2018/09/18/Surviving-State-the-Plight-of-the-yazidicommunity/#653298a177od](http://www.forbes.com/nikitamalik/2018/09/18/Surviving-State-the-Plight-of-the-yazidicommunity/#653298a177od).

Murad, Nadia. *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight against the Islamic State*. England: Virago P, 2018.

“Victims of the Nazi Era: Nazi Radical Ideology.” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/victims-of-the-nazi-era-radical-ideology>.