

# Superhero is mightier than the sword

BY **Amy Fallon**

**A FEW** years ago, the school that Shakila goes to in Afghanistan was attacked while she was in class.

The students were unharmed, but two teachers died, and some teachers still have disabilities from the attack.

"The school was burned," says Shakila, who's 14, who comes from Samangan province in the Middle Eastern country's centre.

## A WAR ON EDUCATION

After the attack, the school was closed.

"I had just started class one and had only been to school for a few weeks when my parents pulled me out for security reasons," Shakila told Human Rights Watch, an organisation that fights for human rights.

The attack was carried out by the Taliban, an extreme religious and military group, which say girls shouldn't get an education.

It has attacked hundreds of schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

But one superhero is fighting these baddies.



## HIDDEN IDENTITY & WEAPONS

Burka Avenger, also called Miss Burka Jiya, is a school teacher in a popular TV show for children called *Burka Avenger*.

It is on TV in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Indonesia, where extremists also operate, "to make people laugh, to entertain and to educate", says Haroon Rashid, who made it.

The cartoon superhero wears an outfit similar to a burqa – a veil worn by some Islamic women – to hide her identity, and her weapons, books and pens, while fighting terrorists at night in Halwapur, a fictional town in Pakistan.

Each *Burka Avenger* episode ends with a moral, or a lesson. One example is this: "It is your right to be educated whether a boy or a girl. Do not let anyone take that right away from you."

Mr Rashid, a Pakistani pop star, started the show in 2013 after he read about girls' schools being damaged and closed.

## POSITIVE ROLE MODEL

"The TV series has struck a positive chord with people all around the world," he says.

"Many parents have been blogging about watching *Burka Avenger* with their children."

Australia has given more than \$1.26 billion since 2001 to help Afghanistan, including help for schools, said Bede Sheppard, from Human Rights Watch.

He hopes the foreign affairs minister, Julie Bishop, will join the Safe Schools Declaration, an international promise to do more to protect students, teachers and schools during wars.



Above and left, the heroes and baddies from the TV show *Burka Avenger*, including the main hero Jiya, above centre, a school teacher also called *Burka Avenger*, who fights the terrorists who shut down girls' schools.

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