



Daughter of The East: A Mirror to Pakistan

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Abstract

This paper will trace the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto's journey from early childhood to her ascension to power in 1988. As a daughter of a Prime Minister herself, Bhutto had big shoes to fill after the execution of her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. This paper will talk about her life before the political upheaval, her dreams and ambitions, and how her relationship with her father led her to politics and power. Benazir Bhutto's identity and life are thoroughly intertwined with the essence of her country, Pakistan.

Keywords: Autobiography, Politics, Father-Daughter Relationship, Dissent, Identity

Introduction

The words that may come to mind after reading Benazir Bhutto's, *Daughter of The East* (1988) are "The horror, the horror." Bhutto reflects on the horrors that Pakistan went through on its quest for democracy. Bhutto throws light on Pakistan's journey towards the modern era and a stable democratic government, and this journey was never easy. It was a complete package of military coups, overnight dissolving of governments, unwarranted killings and tortures, unreasonable imprisonments, and whatnot. When Pakistan was formed on 14 August 1947 on its separation from India, although the All-India Muslim League got what it wanted: a free and separate nation for the Muslim majority of India, they weren't very successful in marking a forward-going progressive trajectory for the developing country. Aisha Jalal, in her book, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah* (1985), argues that Mohammad Jinnah, the leader of the All-India Muslim League, was not in favour of partition, but instead, he wanted to create a shield of protection for the areas where Muslims were a minority using the power of the regions where Muslims were a majority. He even said, "What was Bengal without Calcutta." (Jalal). Jinnah's plans were upended, and Pakistan was separated from India. Jinnah's interests did not align with the interests of the Indian congress and Britishers, resulting in a mutilated Pakistan on two different ends of the Indian subcontinent. After independence in 1947, Pakistan and Jinnah had big hopes of seeing the world's Muslims united under the banner of Islam, and hence, the process of making Pakistan an Islamic state started so that it could lead all the other Islamic nations in the future. But their bid for leadership with other Islamic countries was not very successful. Moreover, there started to be conflicts with both India and Afghanistan. After Jinnah died in 1948, the inner struggles of the Pakistani government intensified. Troubles between East and West Pakistan became more prominent, and after the death of Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan in 1951, things got even more chaotic. From 1951 to 1958, Pakistan saw the rule of 6 different Prime ministers, after which, in 1958, President Iskander Mirza enforced martial law in a bid to extend his term in office, which again proved to be unsuccessful, and Pakistan remained under martial law till 1971 under the dictatorship of General Ayub Khan. During this period, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto started his Pakistan People's Party. He was elected Prime Minister in 1973, and democracy was restored to Pakistan, and for the first time since 1958, some progress was seen in Pakistan. All through this, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto kept his children in the loop of politics and what was happening; his daughter Benazir Bhutto was brought up under his shadow as a loving parent and a political mentor. In future, Benazir will follow in her father's footsteps to restore democracy to Pakistan after another military coup and a long term of martial law.

National Identity and Individual Identity

Daughter of the East (1988) is as much Benazir's autobiography as much as it's Pakistan's. Benazir was born in a traditional Muslim aristocratic family and was the eldest of four children. Benazir idolized her father, and due to her father's political career, she and her siblings were exposed to politics and foreign dignitaries from a very young age. Her father introduced them to those dignitaries and let his children form their own opinions about them. Zulfikar Bhutto encouraged all his children towards education, even going against the conventions of his culture and religion to educate his daughters, admitting them to the best schools and sending them abroad for higher studies. As a child, Benazir's sense of responsibility developed early even though she hailed from a well-to-do family; her recollections of when she was eight, and her parents would leave her in charge of the house and her siblings as she was the oldest, she writes, "my mother would give me money for food and household supplies which I hid under my pillow. Though I was just learning my sums at school, every night in her absence, I would climb on a stool in the kitchen and pretend to go over the accounts with Babu." (Bhutto 33, 1988) She lacked nothing regarding her education and was told from age four that she would go abroad for her studies. Her relationship with her father was special; she and her father were always very close. Even while living abroad, her father used to write to her regularly. It could be said that the letters that her father wrote to her were the very thing that strengthened their bond.

At that time, letter writing kept up the bonds between people, and we also see it between Indira Gandhi and Nehru. As a father, Nehru wanted to reach out to the heart of Indira and cultivate her into a thinking, questioning, and critical being. He wanted her to think, relate to the world around her, ask difficult questions, and think about the world through a grasp of history, rationality, science and culture. Even in prison, Nehru continued to write letters to his daughter to cultivate the curiosity in her that he went through. Letter writing provided him a way to have a relationship with his daughter that was restricted to him because of being miles away from her.

Like Nehru, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto also wrote letters to his daughter, Benazir. He mentions this very fact in one of his letters to his daughter while comparing her with Indira Gandhi, saying that the only thing they have in common is that they both are very fierce women and that both their fathers wrote letters to them from prison. Zulfikar was a very busy man, but that didn't stop him from caring about his children's education and upbringing, so he kept track of it by phone or letters whenever he was away. When Benazir went to Harvard, letters became an intimate way to stay in touch while imparting his experiences and teachings to his daughter. These letters became even more critical to their relationship after General Zia ul Haq arrested Zulfikar. While in prison in 1977 and for the next five years, his letters kept Benazir and her mother in prison cells of their own. The bond that a father and daughter share is extraordinary, as a father is the first authority figure in a child's life and most of the time father becomes the child's ideal, who paves the path for them. Benazir's bond was one of the most important things to her. All she did in life, and what she became, was keep his legacy going. Her father's words and love carried her through everything in life, "You are the heir to and inheritor of the most ancient civilization. please contribute to making this ancient civilization the most progressive and powerful." Zulfikar's letters to his daughter were a compilation of his thoughts and views on the world, its people and politicians, and their ways and ideas. In short, he passed his mantle to his daughter from his prison cell without saying outright that he wanted her to follow the path he once started on. He advised her on how to be a leader, please her people, and all she needed to lead her country towards a bright and free future. It was his love for his people and his desire for democracy that Benazir carried forward as her inheritance from her father. In her own words, she says, "Another Bhutto dead for his political beliefs. Another activist silenced. We go on, of course. Grief will not drive us from the political field or from our pursuit of democracy." (Bhutto 307)

Benazir was said to be a strong, independent, and charismatic woman who won over both the east and the west. Despite President Zia's efforts at tarnishing her image by playing the religion and woman card, Benazir emerged victorious. In 'A Conversation with Akbar Ahmed' by Gustaaf Houtman, Ahmed called Benazir "a woman with charisma," but a charisma that came with the 'Bhutto' name. He talks about how charisma is not passed down as inheritance but something a person has of their own, but for Benazir, he says, it was her familial charm that worked so well for her. Because when she stood up for the people, she portrayed herself as the daughter of the martyr Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and a sister of the people of Pakistan. She carried on her father's message and promises. Benazir is dismissed like this several times, mainly because of her inability to keep up her government, not once but twice. At first, she was undermined by the politicians and other heads of terrorist groups in Pakistan and other Islamic nations, and the second time, along with all these, her mother also asked her to step aside and let her brother Murtaza who was the male heir to the Bhutto legacy take the leadership. These factors and charges against her unstable government

were used to dissolve her government twice. In her autobiography, she mentions the first time when she went on stage to give a speech on her father's behalf in a rally; at that moment, she realized that it was nothing like giving an address at the Oxford union, and she was very nervous on talking to people for real, instead of a group of intellectuals at Oxford. Ever since Benazir was a child, she was exposed to the world of politics due to her father, and that made her want to follow a different path in life, albeit one that would still let her help her father. She wanted to be in foreign services and eventually become an ambassador for her country. But her plans don't pan out as her father was arrested in July 1977, and a military coup ended his rule. As a young woman, when she went to Harvard, she was very much intimidated by America, but her drive to succeed and not let her father down made her capable of doing everything. Her time at Harvard was precious; she made many friends and memories there, but after four years, she had to leave and go to Oxford for further studies. Her father pointed out that American education was outstanding, but it was conducted relaxed, whereas, at Oxford, she would find new horizons and a sense of discipline. Benazir's life at Oxford was her first step towards following her father. In a letter to Benazir, her father wrote, "I feel a strange sensation imagining you walking on the footprints I left at Oxford over twenty-two years ago. I see your presence like mine in flesh and blood, over every cobble of the streets of Oxford, over every step you take on the frozen ladders, through every portal of learning you enter- your being at Oxford is a dream come true." (Bhutto 70-71) Her father wished his daughter followed his steps, carrying his word and dream forward. Although Benazir studied at Harvard and Oxford, she loved her time there, but her love for her own country prevailed, and she returned to Pakistan after her studies to help her father. In an interview, when asked about her ideal by Akbar Ahmed, she said she greatly admires Fathima, the daughter of prophet Mohammad. Benazir, throughout her life, is often compared with Fathima in how she carries on and sacrifices for her father's legacy, just like Fathima did.

Benazir became the youngest leader of a country in the world and the first woman leader in an Islamic nation. Sakina Jangbar calls Benazir a "willful Muslim woman" who, despite all challenges, prevailed and never abandoned her religion but kept it close to her on her journey. She points out the prayers that Benazir mentions in her autobiography and how she always dressed modestly and maintained the decorum of a Muslim woman even while she was abroad and campaigning. Benazir's father gave her permission not to wear a veil, and from then on, even not wearing a veil, Benazir was nothing but a respected Muslim woman leader who fought for a vision that her father saw. Although Benazir followed her father, she was not the same as him; her circumstances and struggles made her different. She became an image, a symbol for her people; she rallied with her visions of freedom and democracy, but was she successful in any of it? Her failed governments suggest that she was not a very successful administrator, and her government was dismissed on corruption charges on both occasions.

Shahid Mahmood says in his article, "When Bhutto was sworn in as Prime Minister in 1988, she very quickly began to flex her considerable hubris, with her husband Asif Ali Zardari, a man known for his unashamed corruption, appointed as the national exchequer." Mahmood talks about how he, along with the whole of Pakistan, was swept up into believing a dream that was Benazir Bhutto, but very soon, it was shattered. Around 1994, new rumours began to spread about Bhutto's indifference and complicity in kidnappings, widespread rioting, extra-judicial killings and whatnot. The symbol that was Benazir was still there; citizens rallied behind her, as is evident in her autobiography, *Daughter of The East* (1988). and she once again returned to Pakistan to stand up in elections. Still, unfortunately, she was robbed of it by her assassination.

In her own words, Bhutto painted a picture on an already messy canvas, but the details of her image were sharp and stood out in the dirty politics of her country. In *Daughter of the East* (1988), Bhutto traces her life to Pakistan. She said, "I am honoured and I am blessed. God willing, I will return to my homeland and once again lead the forces of democracy in electoral battle against the entrenched power of dictators, generals and extremists. This is my destiny. And as John F. Kennedy once said, 'I do not shrink from that responsibility, I welcome it.'" (Bhutto xx)

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