Abstract

Considered the symbol of democracy, Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto’s absence from political scene is being felt more than ever. Her quest for a just society and struggle for people’s rule holds hostage a whole generation of political activists across the land of Pakistan. An apple of her father’s eye, and a graduate of world’s most esteemed institutions, Benazir Bhutto, was propelled by family reasons to an early entry into Pakistan politics. She headed her father’s Pakistan Peoples Party on the land of chauvinists, power hungry generals, visionless clerics and authoritarian capitalists whose vested interests have made a hash of the country’s political culture. Not only was she the first Muslim woman to become head of the government, but also remained an exceptional woman politician around the globe. Her conviction was more than evident in the confident, outspoken and progressive manner in which she conducted herself in an ultra conservative state. Surrounded by down trodden but politically conscious Pakistanis, she brooked no nonsense when she came back from her first exile to Pakistan. In person, BB came across as pleasant and mild mannered, a far cry from her college marm image, always clad in Shalwar Kameez and a large white or red Sindhi Chaddar which she draped around herself. Benazir Bhutto, twice Prime Minister of Pakistan, twice dismissed, charged with security risk and by the machinations of her political, military and behind the scene adversaries, was living in comfortable exile in the Emirates, but she preferred to bear the turbulence of Pakistan. This lasted until she was made a victim of brutality by International and local actors who are now the arbiters of the fate of Pakistan. BB’s martyrdom is a formidable challenge for both, the government and the people. The challenge for the people is not to let Mohtarma’s supreme sacrifice go in vain. She lived and then died for the people of Pakistan and for their inalienable right to be the masters of their own destiny. Her dream must come true. The objective of writing this memorabilia is to help Pakistanis in having a better understanding of BB’s unforgettable contributions to our country.

Keywords: Zulfi Bhutto; Pakistan Peoples Party; BB; Jayala.
I. A Brief Sketch of her Political Life

Born in 1953, Benazir Bhutto passed through such traumatic experiences as no other politician in Pakistan has ever faced. The daughter of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who introduced the element of populism in the archaic feudal-cum-tribal society of Pakistan, suffered immensely for having donned her father’s mantle and because of her own dauntless courage. A close examination of the history of the sub-continent reveals that the Bhutto family played quite an important role in the separation of Sindh from Bombay (Now Mumbai) and throughout the period of the Muslim struggle for a homeland (Saleem, 1999, P.5). The appearance of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto on the political horizon of Pakistan during the dictatorship of Ayub Khan was an event of far-reaching significance. Equally significant was the formation of the Pakistan People’s Party which had a profound impact on the lives of millions. This background molded the character of Benazir Bhutto who was then of an impressionable age. As Zulfi Bhutto’s political heir, she inherited his courage, wisdom and determination. It was a part of her political training that Mr. Bhutto took his young daughter to Simla in 1972 where he engaged in crucial negotiations with the Indian Prime Minister, Indra Gandhi. Benazir’s training in the art and craft of governance was perfect and it helped her in facing the future with courage and confidence.

Having joined politics in the 70’s, Benazir could not have possibly imagined that she would rise to that political height in such a short time. Possessed with fairly impressive educational qualifications and having graduated from Harvard and Oxford, Ms Bhutto had to endure great torments under General Zia-ul-Haq’s prolonged period of military dictatorship after her father’s execution (Agarwal, 2001, P.6). During that period from 1979 to 1988, BB suffered a long period of torture, deprivation and exile but she never succumbed to pressures from any quarters. She remembered that her great father ZAB preferred death to a life of humiliation and refused to sacrifice his honour and dignity on the altar of political expediency or physical comfort. This factor also became the cause of BB’s persistent confrontation with the establishment in Pakistan. Those were the days when she witnessed from close quarters the grave injustices of military / religious despotic attitude and its severe impacts on the liberal society of Pakistan (Afia, 1996, P.5). Though quite young, when her father was judicially killed for his crime of making Pakistan nuclear, adopting an anti-American stance, assembling Muslim countries on one platform and giving political consciousness to the down-trodden people of Pakistan, she had the insight and the vision to discern the ravages of the times. Knowing that politics is more difficult for a woman, who is more vulnerable than a male, to take the reins of administration in a fractured society which is steeped in primitive customs and traditions, she continued her political voyage.

In the course of her political struggle, she was detained in Sukkur jail where she underwent the worst moments of her life but that periodic torture could not challenge her integrity and she proved to be a hard nut to crack. Later on, during her first exile in France, she lost her loving revolutionary brother Mir Shahnawaz Bhutto who was mysteriously found dead in his apartment. That event left a deep impression on her mind. However, the heroic sufferings of the Bhuttos in Pakistan politics became a captivating factor in influencing the political cognition of the uneducated but culturally sensitive masses and she decided to come back in April 1986 (William, 1997, P.7). With the death of General Zia-ul-Haq and general elections in 1988, BB was sworn in as the first Muslim woman Prime Minister of Pakistan. During her premiership, she tried to brighten
the path of democracy and freedom and to illuminate new ways for progress and prosperity of the people by bringing foreign investment, expertise and trade opportunities. She always aspired for a society free from exploitation and discrimination; in particular, she strived for an environment where women were not subjected to humiliation, torture and victimization (Paracha, 2002, P.16). In spite of the aggressive campaign mounted against the concept of “Women Prime Minister” and Pakistan People’s Party, BB never flinched from her commitment of social justice and democratic empowerment.

Even though constrained by the civil-military establishment, BB tried to get enough degree of freedom to produce real social, economic and political change. She worked to admit into the political system the groups of marginalized people economically liberated by her father thus helping to finally close the great divide that had bedeviled Pakistan for so long (Khalid, 1995, P.9). But the Islamabad establishment was not ready to give BB a chance to bring major changes in the ongoing political environment. Pertinently, BB accepted some conditions like the formation of an informal governing council that included the President, the Prime Minister and the Chief of Army Staff and gave the establishment the portfolios of foreign policy, defense policy and nuclear program, but even then her government was sacked on the charges of failure in the maintenance of law and order and corruption etc.

Again in opposition, BB stressed on the need to develop a genuine federal structure in the country, built upon the strength that diversity, properly handled, could yield positivism. Like Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif too felt constrained by the “troika” arrangement and his efforts to gain independence met with the same fate (Saliha, 2004, P.7). Yet another election resulted in BB coming back to power as the Prime Minister. She began governing the country differently and with greater responsibility. She freed the private sector and invited foreign investment in the energy sector and other important areas. She made tremendous efforts to shorten the divide between the country’s social and political structures. Her structural reforms were inclined to undertake all the difficult tasks that were required to be resolved earlier. However, her initiatives were seen with suspicion. Again, the civil-military establishment seemed unable to control its voracious appetite for accumulating control of the government. The establishment knew that if the political process or system was allowed to evolve as envisaged in the constitution, they would lose a great deal of power to the real representatives of the people. There is considerable truth in the assertion that a few individuals working in concert with the Peoples Party’s President Farooq Leghari, were moving against the democratically elected government (Zabeeh, 2006, P.7). These elements created political instability in the country and BB’s government was overthrown again, this time by its own President. BB was of the view that establishment wanted to keep the political system off-balance, stepping in whenever a democratically elected government seemed to be settling down for a longer tenure. The office of the President was accused of leading conspiracies against People’s Party government at the behest of either the behind the scene operators or international financial community.

By the time Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was dismissed for the second time in six years, Pakistan was perceived to be among the hub of religious extremism in the world (Robert, 2006, P.11). As a consequence of those developments, foreign investors and expertise started moving back or to other markets, thus damaging the already fragile
economy of the country. In the second tenure of Nawaz Sharif, BB proved to be the most sought-after politician of South-Asia, constantly chased by the Western media. In an interview with the foreign press she announced that she would pursue the policy of cooperation with the Nawaz government. On the other hand, her adversaries dealt adversely with People’s Party by using tactics based on political vendetta and BB’s husband Asif Ali Zardari was jailed on charges of corruption and abuse of powers. In June 1997, BB contended that the troubles faced by the country were part of some “Great Game” while proposing setting up of a broad-based national government (Shakir, 2005, P.3). That supra-constitutional ploy, she maintained should be mandated to analyse the challenges faced by the nation, removing hunger, poverty and uniting the nation. Meanwhile, she tried to rebuild her power base among the people by highlighting government’s irregularities and unconstitutional measures. On the other side, within two years of assuming office, Nawaz Sharif had accumulated such power that it provoked the power brokers, and ultimately resulted in another military coup by his appointee General Musharraf.

Staying at Dubai during another exile, BB had been anxious from the outset over the rise and persistence of sectarian, fanatic and exclusionary tendencies in Pakistan’s social and political life. In lecture after lecture, she warned of this menace to society which was gaining much momentum in the “war against terrorism”. Although her party got sizeable position in the elections of 2002, but her absence in the parliament was felt everywhere in Pakistan since nobody could imagine of Peoples Party in the Assembly without BB (Nageen, 2007, P.9). She always had the reputation of being a brilliant parliamentarian amongst the elite politicians. However, it was also uncommon for her opponents simply to disappear. She opposed the martial-law like emergency military rule of General Musharraf and pleaded the case of democracy in her countless lectures at think tanks and universities around the globe, Europe in particular. Meanwhile, significant changes took place in 2007 when General Musharraf came into clash with a social - group urban, middle class professionals in media, judiciary, small traders and NGO's (Sultan, 2004, P.8). The political unrest brought down the semi-civil semi-Fauji Government and the circumstances provided an opportunity to both BB and Nawaz Sharif for a reentry in Pakistan politics.

BB came back with a new vigour, categorically demanding on transfer of power to democratically elected civilian government but there was a high price to be paid for her voice. Despite the considerable stigmata in her past and the long gap in exile, she had remained the leader of the largest national party which was not acceptable to the ruling elite. Her return to the country and the incredible enthusiasm and national response to her call for democracy bear testimony to her popularity. The Karachi carnage of October 18 & 19 was a reaction of power thieves, who had inflicted horrors upon Pakistan over the years. But BB stood up to them. They continued sowing their hatred of her but Benazir's appeal was crossing boundaries, resonating with all Pakistanis – Balochis, Punjabis, Pakhtuns, Sindhis, Kashmiris, Baltistanis, Sunnis and Shias, Muslims and non-Muslims (Paul, 2005, P.13). She pointed the finger at rogue remnants in the Musharraf regime from the days of the Zia regime. The rogue characters in the Musharraf administration with the likes in international networks and transnational extremists launched a meticulous fatal attack on BB when she came out of Liaqat Bagh procession on 27-12-2007. But in her death, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto became larger than life. Her martyrdom pushed everything up in the country as this was an irreparable loss, not just for Pakistan, but for
the world at large, signaling harm of alarming proportions for the Federation. Her husband, Asif Ali Zardari acted wisely by proclaiming "Pakistan Khappey", thus leaving aside the reactionary, rather secessionist, tendencies of the Sindhis. Following BB's martyrdom, the PPP leadership demanded the kind of United Nations – mandated investigations which were ordered in the case of ex-Labenese Prime Minister Rafik Harriri, under Security Council Resolution 1595 (Najam, 2003, P.1). Given the stature and international standing of BB, the demand merited attention. The inquiry and probe is underway.

"Bhattos are alive!" What has made Bhuttoism a real political phenomenon is not much its message but its remarkable endurance. Bhuttoism survived and contributed to the triumph of Benazir Bhutto and the Pakistan Peoples Party in all odds. Certainly, it is the consequence of the conspiracies of the establishment against the fulfillment of people's agenda that has led Bhattos to sacrifice. Bhuttoism is a romance, and a charisma that enables Pakistan Peoples Party to steer clear of what the people want for themselves and for the country. BB led the party and the country as a staunch and lonely symbol of the Federation with the same charisma, till her last breath.

II. Her perception of Pakistan and Democracy

In the past six decades, Pakistan has moved precipitously away from the country its founding father had envisioned and the people had created at costs beyond counting. Although the phenomenon of Bhuttoism was bought with great enthusiasm by the poor and the lower middle classes in both urban and rural areas, yet the civil-military establishment and its all natural and unnatural allies, continue to deprive people of their basic rights.

As the successor of people's role model Zulfi Bhutto, BB believed that in order to run an economic system dominated by the elite class, she had to concentrate political power in the hands of deprived and marginalized groups of society. To achieve this end, she began to make people realize that democracy is the only solution to social, political, economic and even personal frustration. Time and again, she highlighted the factors hindering democratic development. She said that military played a decisive role in Pakistan politics inspite of the fact that the end of cold war proved to be an important obstacle for the military to take over. In her view, foreign countries had thwarted Pakistan's democratic development more than they promoted it, particularly, the Western support for Islamists in pursuit of their strategic interests, gave enormous strength to greedy generals, selfish bureaucrats, inhuman feudals and merciless tribal elders who could never be interested in a true democratic development of the society. She also included the authoritarian capitalist class among the evil, for they support the government as long as its monopoly is secured. She declared the theocrats as a cultural barrier to the growth of democracy. She knew that religious political parties do not form the basic units of democracy, instead they constitute fellowships to elect "specific persons" who represent intelligence organs (Paracha, 2002, P.17). BB always stressed on the need for having a judiciary independent of the executive, but did not subscribe to judicial activism, as intervention of one organ of government may risk the independency of the other.

Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto has been often criticized for her selection of weak and unskilled persons as ministers and party office bearers. She was also blamed for moving
away from her father’s vision by depending on ex-intelligence officials and non-political business community for running the affairs of the state and the party. There is no denying the fact that she opted for bureaucrats on a number of occasions in preference to her political colleagues because she thought that the former would be more pliable than the latter in an environment where she had lost faith in the ability of her fellows. On the other hand, she was surrounded by strong check and balance of intelligence community who always tried to wean BB away from principal members of her team. Although, her critics say that she was powerless as the prime minister because she had become a prisoner in the hands of establishment but the explanation may be given that after years of struggle, during which she had weathered many a storm, suffered rude shocks by the betrayal of many senior stalwarts and uncompromising attitude of the power brokers, she had been left with minimum options which she undertook. One may argue that the policies of her two governments did not produce the desired results. There is also an argument that she did not have a fresh program or agenda, which could inspire the people of Pakistan. However, the critics do not substantiate on the fact that she was never given a complete role to play as an elected chief executive of the country. Her elected governments were overthrown on one pretext or the other and along with her, the people of Pakistan were made to suffer. But as an opposition leader she tried her best level to contribute to people of Pakistan by raising the voice for democracy.

Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto in her speeches and statements, suggested that a free media, regular elections, respect for human rights and provision of economic opportunity for all should be the policy cornerstone of every political party so that Pakistan could stand out among the leading democracies of the world. With reference to Pakistan's major problem, the ever-increasing terrorism of revivalist extremists, BB declared that the unity of the country shall not be allowed to be challenged and that a conservative theocratic state shall not be acceptable (Shamshad, 2008, P.7). Her determination to handle this issue with an iron hand, without conceding even an inch to mullahs, was evident. The tone and tenor of her statements regarding integrity of the country were unmistakably indicative of the fact that BB was a federalist and a great patriot. Before her martyrdom she gave some new slogans to the people, which were not only reflective of her overflowing confidence, but also pointed towards the direction of her policies as to the future course of action of the country. On the changed political front, she coined the slogan "More of Pakistanis, less of State" (Shazia, 2008, P.3). This was a clear indication of her preference for the people and their issues. It will not be out of place to mention that BB's political ideology was based on not only the strengthening of democratic institutions, but also on the principle of revengeless politics. She managed her party and the country above such extremism and always said that democracy is the best revenge.

Benazir Bhutto fully knew the risks involved in challenging the status quo which has earned her a place in people's hearts. Being involved in politics in an insecure environment, BB was actually aware of all the threats from inside and outside the country. On returning to the country, she hoped for Pakistan to become a salon for young Pakistanis to freely air their thoughts and a platform for women to take active part in the nation building process. Pertinently, on signing the charter of democracy, she maintained that Pakistan is heading in a direction of a possible civil war that can lead to unprecedented devastation. She agreed with Nawaz Sharif's viewpoint that political leadership on both sides need a way out of the chaotic situation and regime change in the country could provide a way to both sides to get out of the situation. She was of the
opinion that re-socialization of Pakistani society depends on two critical factors; the change in stereotype perceptions of the armed forces and a revised strategy of the international community vis-à-vis Pakistan. Talking to foreign press in Karachi before her martyrdom she stated that there is a drastic need to reform civil-military relations to avert indiscipline, conspiracies and mismanagement in the hostile economic competition of the world. She listed a few components of the required change: (1) increased transparency of defense policies and a great supervisory role by parliament and public opinion (2) relative political neutralization of the armed forces (3) national emancipation with pro-people doctrines (4) abolition of obtrusive discrimination against liberals and a paradigm shift in establishment’s approach (Aril, 2006, P.15).

Alongwith the institution of these structural changes, she suggested that health has to be restored to the economy which lost the dynamism of earlier years. Her new plan was to achieve rates of growth in the national economy twice as high as the rate of increase in population so that Pakistan could reduce incidence of poverty very significantly. It is worth mentioning that BB, while staying at abroad, advised Pakistani diaspora to send a large proportion of their savings to their home country as foreign exchange. Benazir Bhutto actually wanted to have a political system becoming fully representative of all classes of society and the government being fully responsive to the people. BB’s vision of Pakistan was based on a simple assumption that democracy can break the force of the status quo and change the repressive order. She had understood the demand of time by comprehending the nature of the extra-ordinary change that is occurring presently inside the country but she was not allowed to overcome that challenge or set the new course for many generations to come.

III. Conclusion

The National Assembly and the Senate now continue proceedings without BB’s sobering influence. The media, print as well as electronic, miss her – “She really used to liven things up”, they say. The workers of Pakistan Peoples Party feel that she had a lot more to contribute for the country and the party. The women believe that she might not have been a fiery feminist but she opened such avenues for the women of Pakistan as never before. As Prime Minister she tried to cultivate an image for Pakistan which received a favourable acceptance in the world, the Muslim countries in particular. She stressed on evolving areas of cooperation between India and Pakistan which were largely unaffected by the downward trends of both the neighbours. She made tremendous efforts to present Pakistan as a responsible player on the chessboard of world politics. The continuing democratic set up and pursuit of a policy of economic liberalism based on public-private partnership were her paramount goals. She strived for a cohesive relationship between USA and Pakistan by skillfully negotiating on a number of occasions. As an assertive speaker both in the media and public forums, she rejected American perception of Pakistan as an irresponsible nuclear state. She sought to go beyond the official America to approach the American think tanks, scholars and independent media for a better understanding on all the concerning issues. On the forum of U.N.O she made it clear that the bottom line of Pakistan’s nuclear diplomacy has been that there should be a regional solution of the problem of nuclear proliferation is South Asia. During her political life she stuck to her position on sensitive issues and never compromised on any issue below dignity.
Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was an advocate of peace in and around Pakistan. And to achieve peace, she gave her life fighting the existing perceptions and norms that challenged her vision. She endured countless tortures and witnessed the killings of her father, brothers and Jyalas or party workers. She began suffering in early years what most do not see in a life time. But her resilience and fortitude saw her through the darkest of hours, the bleakest of times. It is this resilience, this courage, this love for her country that is her legacy to us – her nation. Undoubtedly, her abilities and charisma can never be forgotten, nor the leadership that she possessed. Being aware of the threats to her life, she decided to challenge the despotic rule of the establishment by bringing millions of people on the streets thus making inroads for democracy. On that fateful day, when she sacrificed her life for people’s cause, Pakistan was in flames and chaos. But her party, leadership and the workers chose to dress the wounds and ease the hurt, following the political theme of their beloved leader. In her own words while describing her political theme, she said “It is imperative for all of us to fight to save Pakistan by saving democracy and democracy brings development and marginalizes the anti-people status-quo forces.” These were the goals for which BB invested her wit, skills, personal feelings and political ideas.

Today Pakistan is blessed to be a democracy – a state reached after so many sacrifices of Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. It is, now, the responsibility of the Pakistanis to work together to strengthen democracy which allows the sentiments, beliefs and role of a deprived majority to actualize its perspective and preferences, with due respect to others. To de-legitimize the tyrannical powers and expose injustice to its fullest. Benazir Bhutto’s vision and sacrifices will continue to be our guiding light – today and the days to come.

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