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## Apprenticeship to Power: Nature and Extent of Political Mentoring of Benazir Bhutto Under Tutelage of her Father (1953-1977)

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### Abstract

*It has been claimed that Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a leading politician and former president and prime minister of Pakistan, mentored his daughter Benazir Bhutto in politics since her childhood. The present study was carried out to explore the nature and extent of political mentoring accorded to Benazir Bhutto by her father. It highlights three modes of mentoring employed by her father and evaluates each of them separately. The modes of mentoring employed were (a) through letters and discussions during her early age, (b) through her attendance of major political events while she was a university student, and (c) her on-job training in the prime minister's secretariat after completion of her studies. It is concluded that the mentoring on the part of her father, whether intentional or unintentional, helped her a great deal in preparing her for the future role in the politics of Pakistan.*

**Key Words:** Benazir Bhutto, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Pakistan People's Party, Democracy, Dictatorship, Pakistan, Mentoring

### Introduction

Benazir Bhutto is considered one of the rare personalities in recent political history where a young woman of hardly twenty-four years of age successfully assumed the role of a political leader in one of the most traditional Muslim society in the world and led the struggle against military dictatorship in the country against all the odds till restoration of democracy in Pakistan. She made history by becoming the youngest prime minister of Pakistan as well as the first ever female head of the government in the entire Muslim World in 1988 when the elections were held. During her political career, she served as elected prime minister of Pakistan twice as well as the opposition leader. A school of thought believes that her successful political career could be attributed to her political mentoring under tutelage of her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who prepared her as his political heir and successor. Mr. Bhutto was one of the most popular leaders of Pakistan who founded Pakistan People's Party and served the country as its president and prime minister.

### Objectives

The basic objective of this study was to determine the nature and extent of the political mentoring of Benazir Bhutto under the tutelage of her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, since her childhood and to evaluate various modes employed by him to prepare his daughter for her political role in Pakistan. It was also to examine whether the mentoring of his daughter was intentional or unintentional.

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## Research Questions

For the Purpose of this Study, a set of Research Questions was Formulated, which were as under:

- What was the nature and extent of political mentoring accorded to Benazir Bhutto by her father?
- How was the relationship between the father and the daughter?
- Was this mentoring intentional or unintentional?
- What were the modes of the mentoring employed by Mr. Bhutto to prepare his daughter for future political role?

## Methodology

In view of the nature of this study, the present researcher chose to avail oneself of the qualitative research methodology, employing the tools relating to archival and historical research and the focused interviews. In this regard the data about the subject was collected from various published and unpublished accounts as well as conduct of open-ended interviews from the persons privy to the information about Benazir Bhutto's early life, including Benazir Bhutto herself. The other interviewees included her sister Ms. Sanam Bhutto, her university-fellow Ms. Victoria Schofield and other close family friends. Another great source for data on the subject was the news-stories and interviews appearing in various newspapers about various events and happenings in which she participated under the tutelage of her father. One such newspaper that was extensively consulted was Daily Dawn Karachi, the library of which was extensively used by the present researcher. The data collected from various sources was then refined using the criterion sampling technique, which was then correlated with other contemporary resources of information. The analysis of all the data was conducted by applying the qualitative research tools and methods.

## Discussions and Results

Benazir Bhutto was born as first child of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Begum Nusrat Bhutto on Sunday, 21 June 1953 at Dr Pinto's clinic. At the time of her birth, her father was in United Kingdom, where he was pursuing the final phase of his education in law. "It was in 1952 that I got pregnant then I told him that we were going to have a child. He was so happy to hear it, that he shouted on the streets with joy, 'Oh ... I am going to be a father,'" remembered Benazir Bhutto's mother (Bhutto B. N., 1993). On her birth, she was named after Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's most favorite sister who had died at a young age while studying in a school at Poona; an aspect which only strengthened the relationship between the father and the daughter throughout their lives.

After spending sometime as a practicing lawyer as well as voluntarily lecturing law subjects at Karachi's Sindh Muslim Law College, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto turned his attention towards politics. With the passage of time he grew in his political career from serving as a minister in federal government, to a popular opposition leader, to the position of the president and prime minister of the country. During all these years he employed various modes to involve his daughter in political discourse going on in the country as well as abroad, from writing her letters and discussions on important political happenings to affording her an opportunity to personally witness the events of far reaching political consequences to giving her on job training as special assistant to prime minister when she completed her education in 1977 when he was serving as prime minister of Pakistan.

## Letters, Meetings and Discussions

One such mode employed by her father to help her make sense of the political events and issues during her early life was writing her extensive letters during her early life. "The example before him, perhaps, was

that of Jawaharlal Nehru of India who had written extensively on a wide variety of subjects to his daughter, Indira Gandhi”\_(Shaikh 2000). He started writing letters to his daughter when they had hardly even learnt to read in school. “At Murree my father continued our political education by mail. Shortly after he returned from the summit of Non-Aligned Countries in Jakarta, he wrote us a long letter elaborating on the self-interest of the Superpowers in the United Nations and the resulting neglect of Third World countries. One of the nuns sat Sanam and I down on a bench in the school garden and read the letter to us in its entirety, though we understood little of its content” recollected Benazir (Bhutto B. , 2007, p. 38).

As Benazir Bhutto grew in age, so did her father in his political positions. In 1963, when she was ten years old, her father was appointed as the foreign minister of the country. “[He] was well qualified to fill it on account of his penchant for foreign affairs, his abilities, and his academic background”\_(Yousuf 1998). Being an extrovert, he had personal relations with the world leaders. Narrating one such interaction of her father in 1963 with US President Kennedy in the White House, Stanley Wolpert wrote that while seeing him off, President Kennedy remarked, “‘If you were an American, you would be in my Cabinet’. Zulfikar retorted, ‘Be careful, Mr. President, if I were American, I would be in your place.’ At which they both laughed heartily.”\_(Wolpert 1993).

A little later same year, Benazir Bhutto was traveling with her father in a railway cabin, when her father woke up his sleeping daughter telling her, “‘This is no time to sleep,’ he said urgently. ‘There has been a great tragedy. The young President of the United States has been shot.’ Though I was only ten and had heard only vaguely of the US President, my father made me stay by his side while he received the latest bulletins on the condition of President John F. Kennedy, a man whom he’d met several times and whom he admired for his liberal views” (Bhutto B. , 2007).

Her father also afforded her and other children to meet with important foreign dignitaries when they visited Pakistan. “When he told us one day that we were to meet ‘some important men from China’ I was very excited. My father had often spoke highly of the Chinese Revolution and its leader Mao Tse Tung... I was sure one of the men was going to be Mao.... But I was quite disappointed when the important Chinese men did not include Mao, but the premier of China, Chou En-Lai and two of his ministers” remembered Benazir Bhutto in her autobiography (Bhutto B. , 2007, p. 37). Other important people that she met during her childhood included US Vice President Hubert Humphrey.

## Personal Participation in Important Events

Once Benazir Bhutto matured enough and started going to university, her father started involving her in important political events practically. One such occasion was her participation in the UN Security Council meeting, at the age of eighteen years, held in December 1971. It was the time when war between Pakistan and India were in the last phase of a full-fledged war and the East Pakistan was about to emerge as Bangladesh. As a last resort to rescue themselves from the ugly outcome of that war, the military regime of General Yahya Khan designated her father as deputy prime minister and foreign minister and asked him to represent Pakistan at the UN forum. Benazir was a student at Harvard University at that time. Her father cabled her to meet him in New York at Pierre Hotel on 9 December and asked her to assist him during his stay in New York (Bhutto B. , 1999).

Narrating the presence of Benazir Bhutto with her father in New York during those fateful days, Iqbal Akhund, then serving as a Pakistani diplomat there remembered: “Benazir, who had come down from Harvard, was at the table beside her father. He referred to her presence in his speech, saying that he had asked her to come down for Security Council’s meeting, so that when she grew up she would remember these difficult and tragic moments in the country’s life and would learn that in the worst of times a nation must hold its head high and in the darkest moments look to the future with hope”\_(Akhund 1999).

She fully devoted herself in assisting her father in his hectic efforts to save the remaining Pakistan. He held one such meeting with US National Security Advisor, Dr Henry Kissinger, who later became the US

Secretary of State as well. Writing about the efforts of her father during that winter he wrote: "The next morning, still in New York City, I met for breakfast with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who had been appointed Deputy Prime Minister a few days before. . . elegant, eloquent, subtle, Bhutto was at last a representative who would be able to compete with the Indian leaders for public attention. . . . I found him brilliant charming, of global stature in his perceptions. He could distinguish posturing from policy. He did not suffer fools gladly. Since he had many to contend with, this provided him with more than the ordinary share of enemies. He was not really comfortable with the plodding pace of Pakistan's military leaders. . . . But in the days of his country's tragedy he held the remnant of his nation together and restored its self-confidence. In its hour of greatest need, he saved his country from complete destruction" [\\_\(Kissinger 1979\)](#).

Her father's suite in the hotel served as a makeshift office. She was handling the telephones while he was meeting with diplomats and other influential persons in an effort to stop further onslaught from Indian side. "The telephones at the Pierre ring non-stop. One afternoon I take a call from US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger on one line, and one from Huang Hua, chairman of the delegation from the People's Republic of China, on another. Henry Kissinger is very worried that the Chinese will intervene militarily on the side of Pakistan. My father is worried that the Chinese won't," recalled Benazir in her autobiography. "'Interrupt the meetings' my father tells me. 'If the Soviets are here, tell me the Chinese are calling. If the Americans are here, tell me that the Russians are on line or the Indians. And don't tell anybody who really is here. One of the fundamental lessons of diplomacy is to create doubt: never lay your cards on the table" [\\_\(B. Bhutto 2007, 57\)](#).

Another such occasion to witness history in making for Benazir Bhutto arose when she returned to Pakistan from Harvard during summer break of 1972. By then Bangladesh had been born out of East Pakistan and her father had become the president of the remaining Pakistan. India held more than 93,000 Pakistani soldiers as the prisoners of war and occupied 5139 square miles of Pakistani territory. On the other hand, Pakistan held only 637 Indian personnel and 69 square miles of Indian territory [\\_\(Syed 1992\)](#). The balance of power was clearly in favor of India. Her father wanted to retrieve maximum from what the country had lost on the battleground. When he invited her to accompany him to Simla in India where he was meeting Indian Prime Minister to ease tensions between the South Asian neighbors, she readily accepted the invitation.

While on the way to Simla, her father couched her few lessons of politics. "Everyone will be looking for signs of how the meetings are progressing, so be extra careful. You must not smile and give the impression you are enjoying yourself while our soldiers are still in Indian prisoners-of-war camps. You must not look grim, either, which people may interpret as a sign of pessimism.' 'So how should I look? 'I've already told you. Don't look sad and don't look happy,'" went on the conversation between the father and daughter (Bhutto B. , 2007, p. 60). "I wondered, if I am not supposed to be happy or to be sad, what was I supposed to be. But I suppose I managed it because he was quite pleased with me," recalled Benazir Bhutto in her London apartment in the summer of 1999 [\\_\(B. Bhutto 1999\)](#).

She met Mrs. Indira Gandhi for the first time who was at the airfield to greet Pakistani president and his entourage. "I had read so much about Mrs. Indira Gandhi and when I met her I was so surprised to see that she was smaller than I had thought, and she was gentler than I had thought" (Bhutto B. , 1999). After their arrival serious parleys started between the official delegations of the countries. The Indian side wanted Pakistan to recognize newly created Bangladesh, accept the new cease-fire line in Kashmir as permanent boundary, sign a 'no-war' pact with India, agree to reduction in armed forces as well as defense expenditure, and similar other conditions, which were very difficult for Pakistan to accept (Syed, 1992).

Away from these formal parleys, her role was to serve as an informal ambassador of goodwill. When she visited a bookstore on the Mall Road of Simla, it made headlines in the newspapers. The news story released by UPI news agency went with the headline, "Benazir Goes Shopping, Bystanders Cheer." The story read, "SIMLA, June 28: Miss Benazir Bhutto today went shopping while her father, President Bhutto

was holding talks with Mrs. Indira Gandhi. The 18 years old Benazir went to the fashionable shopping center, the Mall, and bought three books. She was cheered by bystanders as she went through the bazaar” [\\_\(Dawn, Benazir goes shopping, bystander cheer 1972\)](#).

It was for the first time that she was facing the limelight of media. Not only the local media but even the international media outlets were covering her activities. In one of its issue, the Tribune observed, “Though dressed in a modern manner, Miss Benazir’s behavior is typically Oriental. No high-pitched talk, no open-mouthed laughter, no giggles, but a pleasant smile played on her lips and eyes. She is quite reserved, but highly observant and understanding”. Describing her visit to the Himachal Government Emporium, the ‘Tribune’ wrote that as she came out of the emporium, “Miss Bhutto stood up on the steps to acknowledge the greetings of the huge crowd. ‘Khuda Hafiz’ she said and slipped into the car” [\(Dawn, Benazir visits museum 1972\)](#).

Her coverage was confined to print media but even official electronic media was covering her. India’s official radio, All India Radio (AIR), interviewed her and the contents of her talk became subject of the next day’s newspaper stories. Daily Dawn reported this interview in its 1<sup>st</sup> July issue with headline: “Benazir Impressed by Friendliness of Indian People.” The story read, “SIMLA, June 30: Miss Benazir Bhutto said here that she was very much impressed by the love and feelings shown by the people of India. She was giving an interview to AIR correspondent this evening ... She hoped some fruitful results would come out of the talks ... She thought that the people of India are eager to have friendship with Pakistan ... Miss Benazir Bhutto simple, unassuming 18-year-old daughter of President Bhutto, has been widely praised by the Indian press for her culture and manners ... Today was another busy day for her in Simla. She visited two schools. She witnessed a gymnastic display and an opera” [\\_\(Dawn, Benazir impressed by friendliness of Indian people 1972\)](#).

While she was not part of the team negotiating the accord, her father discussed the matters under discussion with her. The parleys hit the rock but in an extraordinary move her father and Mrs. Indira Gandhi could save the day through their statesman ship in the wee hours of 3<sup>rd</sup> July. So unlikely was the accord that even an electric typewriter was not available in *Himachal Bhavan*, and one was sent for to type the accord. The parchment paper on which the document was to be typed was not available either and was to be procured too. Then Mrs. Gandhi’s seal of office had to be sent for from her residence, seventeen miles away [\\_\(Dawn, How it come about 1972\)](#). It is this accord which has ushered the longest period of peace in the subcontinent, while the two countries had fought three wars in a span of less than 25 years.

When she was about to complete her graduation at Harvard, she desired to pursue her further studies at same place but her father desired that she may move to Oxford, where he himself had studied. Her mother flew from Pakistan to attend her graduation ceremony at Harvard. One of US Department of State’s declassified memo, which was addressed to the US Secretary of State, mentions her graduation as well as the presence of her mother in US: “Begum Bhutto, wife of Pakistan’s President, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, will be in the U.S. June 11-20 on a private visit to attend the graduation of her daughter, Benazir Bhutto, from Radcliffe ” [\\_\(R. Khan 1999\)](#).

On invitation of her father, she attended ceremony when the Constitution of 1973 stood formally enforced in Pakistan and her father took oath of the Prime Minister (Bhutto B. , 1999). Her father had made tremendous efforts to frame a Constitution that was acceptable to all the divergent ethnic, cultural and ideological groups in the country. Then there was a chronic controversy about the presidential or parliamentary form of government. Yet another issue to be addressed was the balance of power between the federal and the provincial governments. But, through political accommodation given to various competing political forces, he was able to cement consensus and on 10 April 1973 the National Assembly adopted the Constitution without dissent. Under the new framework, the federal parliamentary system with a bicameral legislature and a Constitutional head was devised. Accordingly, the executive authority lied in the Prime Minister. “The 1973 Constitution came into effect on 14 August 1973 and has proved to be Zulfikar

Ali Bhutto's most significant achievement" [\(Raza 1997\)](#).

The following year, her father again called her to witness first hand another great event; the Islamic Summit Conference held in Lahore in 1974. "My father called me back for the Islamic Summit in Pakistan in February, 1974. I was there and I met all the leaders from President of U.A.E. to Amirs of Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain," she remembered (Bhutto B. , 1999). This was one of the most important assembly of the top leaders from all the thirty-eight Muslim nations, comprising one fifth of the humankind. "By bringing together on the same platform Yasser Arafat, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, Colonel Qaddafi, and Presidents Assad, Sadat, and Boumedienne, Bhutto ensured that the world spotlight fell on Pakistan. Lahore with its Mughal splendors and historic place in Pakistan movement provided the perfect backdrop" [\(Talbot 2012\)](#).

By the closing phase of her education at Oxford, Benazir Bhutto was transformed into an active and highly self-confident person from a shy Benazir during the initial phase of her studies at Harvard. "She was often with people, going out for lunches, going out for dinners," remembered her friend Victoria Sheffield, who was one-year junior to her in the same college [\(Schofield 1999\)](#). Subsequently, she participated in the election for the president of prestigious Oxford Union debating society and made history by becoming its first Asian woman to hold that position in more than 150 years' history of the society. After assuming her office, she made concerted efforts to open its doors to people from varied backgrounds. "She opened it to everybody, so that everybody should have a chance to see what Oxford Union was like, and it was absolutely packed," observed Vitoria Schofield who was elected as librarian of the Union (Schofield, 1999).

## On-Job Training

When she completed her education and returned to Pakistan, the next phase of her mentoring at the hands of her father began: this time on job training. Her father proposed her to assist him as an advisor to the prime minister to get a feel of the real politics and business of government in Pakistan. However, she was inclined to join foreign service of Pakistan as a career diplomat. As the competitive examination for civil services of Pakistan, which included the foreign service, were due in December, her father suggested her to take up the job for six months. "Get the first-hand knowledge of the politics of Pakistan. Assist me in my office for the next six months. If it is of some interest, you may continue. Otherwise you may go to join the Foreign Service," she remembered (Bhutto B. , 1999).

She agreed on this arrangement and was allotted an office next to her father's office in the Prime Minister's Secretariat as an Advisor to the Prime Minister. She was given the task of dealing with the inter-provincial coordination committee. The Committee was constituted to help sort out differences between the provinces and the federal government. The significance of this assignment given to her was that throughout the history of Pakistan, the relations between the federation and the provinces have usually not been smooth. Since its inception, one of the stumbling block in Pakistan's Constitutional and political development has been the "distribution or allocation of powers between the federal government and the provinces; the question of autonomy for the provinces" [\(Mahmood 2000\)](#). In fact, the country witnessed its biggest debacle when it broke up in two in 1971 due to a crisis emanating from the demand for more provincial autonomy. In that context it can be safely said that her father wanted her to be more acquainted with the core issues.

In addition to these responsibilities of provincial coordination, she was also assigned to prepare summaries of various cases to be submitted to the Prime Minister. "After I did my first day summary, my father was furious," she recalled. "He said, 'This is rubbish. This is like a high school graduate. It is not like a college student who had graduated from Harvard or Oxford.'" (Bhutto B. , 1999). Actually she had just summarized the summaries coming from various divisions and ministries for the orders of the prime minister. Her father told her that he would like to see her critical analysis of the submitted cases so that he can take objective decisions. "Next day I changed my course of action and gave a critical review of the

proposals, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses. So, the next day he was very happy with me. He said this is what he wanted me to do" (Bhutto B. , 1999).

This arrangement continued till her father's government was toppled through a military coup on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1977. Subsequently her father was executed in April 1979 following a highly controversial court verdict. In the aftermath of these tragedies, she assumed the leadership role in the party formed by her and rose to the position of prime minister of the country. She firmly believed that her father's mentoring in the politics of Pakistan since her early age helped her great deal in playing her role effectively in the subsequent phase of her life (Bhutto B. , 1999).

## **Conclusion**

From the foregoing discussion it is evident that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto mentored his daughter Benazir Bhutto in politics since her early age. However, there is no evidence whether the mentoring on his part was deliberate with a clear aim to prepare her for a future political role. It appears that he tried to groom all his children in the art of politics, but only Benazir Bhutto responded with interest. During her early years of life, the mentoring modes employed by her father were writing her letters on important national and international events and happenings as to help her make sense of them. He also held discussions on political issues in order to arouse her interest and curiosity in the subject. Then, he afforded her opportunities to meet important political personalities, whenever possible. Once Benazir Bhutto grew in age and joined university for education, her father helped her to witness herself and participate in the important political happenings, which included the proceedings of UN Security Council meetings in the fateful days of Pakistan-India war of 1971, the Simla Agreement between Pakistan and India in 1972, enforcement of the Constitution of 1973 in the country and the Islamic Summit Conference in 1974, to name a few. Once she completed her university education, he appointed her to work as an advisor to the prime minister on the subject of provincial coordination, giving her a sort of on-job training. Coupled with her personal qualities of head and heart and benefit of quality education received at some of the best educational institutions in the world, her father's mentoring helped her a great deal in reaching to distinction in her subsequent political career.

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