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BOOK REVIEW

Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy & the West

Benazir Bhutto

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Reviewed by Naheed S. Goraya

University of the Punjab, Lahore

Benazir Bhutto's last book, "*Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy & the West*" just completed two days before her assassination, offers a distinctive opportunity to see her accepted wisdom and thoughts in the final weeks of her life. It is a great scholarly approach towards realism in the Muslim world and democracy in this region itself. The book is almost bound for Western leaders and thinkers. It is a good attempt to let somebody see that extremism in the name of Islam and Western supported dictators have a kind of direct relationship. The author has two aims to write this book. First, she wants an understanding while analyzing, is it likely to happen in today's world that the democratic and autonomous institutions can grow in Muslim society and whether Islam and democracy are equally exclusive or not. Secondly, the existence of clash of ideals and values in different groups with in Islam.

The book is divided into six chapters, starting with an emotional arrival of Benazir Bhutto at Quaid-e-Azam International Airport, Karachi on October 18, 2007 after eight years exile, "But as my foot touched the ground of my beloved Pakistan for the first time after eight lonely and difficult years of exile, I could not stop my tears from pouring from my eyes and I lifted my hand in reverence, in thanks, and in prayer". These were the days when Musharraf had dismissed Supreme Court and the constitution was suspended. She writes how she was going to be a victim of an unsuccessful suicide attack (Saniha Karsaz) that still killed 179 people. It is the author's argument that "dictatorship breeds extremism." She thinks that if her government "had continued for its full five-year term, it would have been difficult for Osama Bin Laden to set up base in Afghanistan in 1997 when he established Al Qaeda to openly recruit and train young men from all over the Muslim world." She says, "The age of international terrorist war actually coincided with the suspension of democracy in Pakistan." She is of the view that majority of Muslims in the world embrace a forbearing and loving religion. But today this religion has been taken up by the extremists. Then the author writes about *Jihad* and its kinds with the help of

Quranic injunctions. While discussing that *Jihad* is not among five pillars of Islam (except in Khariji theory), the author quotes, “*Jihad* is a collective obligation of the whole Muslim community (*fardl-kifaya*).... If the duty is fulfilled by a part of the community it ceases to be obligatory on the others; the whole community however falls into error if the duty is not performed at all. Imposition on the community rather than on individual is very significant and involved at least two important implications. In the first place, it meant that the duty need not necessarily be fulfilled by all the believers....In the second place, the imposition of the obligation on the community rather than on the individual made possible the employment of *jihad* as a community and, consequently, a state instrument.”

The writer justifies her stand by quoting the Quranic injunction that suicide bombing is by no means acceptable in Islam and in the eyes of God, rather a central moral value, "For this reason did We prescribe to the children of Israel that whoever slays a sole unless it be for manslaughter or mischief in the land, it is as though he slew all men; and whoever keeps it alive, it is as though he kept alive all men; and certainly Our messengers came to them with clear arguments, but even after that many of them certainly act extravagantly in the land." She talks about the issue of terrorism and the religion, “The *Quran* does not simply preach tolerance of other religions; it also acknowledges that salvation can be achieved in all monotheistic religions.” Through out in the book, she elucidates things both from *Quran* and her experiences from Pakistan. The author feels pity in the situation that with the passage of time, many Muslim societies have turned intolerant while the Western nations have become more accommodating and tolerant, while Islam itself is a religion of tolerance and pluralism.

The author also discusses about the sects, women rights and dress code revealed by Islam. She explores that the equality of women does not only apply in terms of political and social rights but also in religious terms. She has also written about 19th and 20th centuries that the Muslim democratic movements anticipated constitutions that were unflinching with universal human rights. She is against the idea that Muslim society requires to be ruled in the way Medina was governed in the first century. Indeed the author wants to convey that democracy is the heart of Islam and dictatorship is contrary to it. According to her, Islam and democracy are not contrary to each other and it is the time when our country is in need of democratic changes. She has proposed a model for third world countries. She has spelled out by quoting few examples that clash of civilization does not exist between Islam and west, rather it is within Islam itself: Modernism vs. regression, reformist vs. traditionalist, freedom and education vs. oppression and ignorance. She draws the development of democracy in Islamic countries through out the world which is only due to democratic institutions. In her book, she aspires to “trace the roots, causes, and potential solutions to the crisis with in the Muslim world and the crisis between the Muslim world and the West.” The author thinks that today the real picture of Islam has been distorted and exploited by the extremists. The author draws the roots of international terrorism and how America had been supporting Pakistani General Zia-ul-Haq. She further

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writes about Zia-ul-Haq that he was the man who deteriorated the political system in the country, by doing away with an independent judiciary and human rights were suspended. It was during his period that Pakistani ISI got involved in supporting Afghan Mujahideen. She has spoken out all the Muslims across the globe that are at the crossroads between past and future, between education and ignorance, between peace and terrorism and between democracy and dictatorship.

She portrays a reflection of modern Islam that confronts the harmful caricatures often perceived in the West. The author has explained how West had been engaged in the countries of Middle East and that resultantly led to corruption and dictators as rulers. She has courageously called for a transformation in the religion Islam. According to the author, everything is possible and every goal can be achieved but through the democratic ideas. The author describes in detail the history of Pakistan's initial days and the political governments and upheavals through out after its inception. She has placed Pakistan at the heart of Islamic world, under cordon from internal forces that hunt for "exploit religion for their own political agenda". She tells about her meeting with General Pervez Musharraf in New York and a proposed dialogue between both. She has made accusations about Musharraf and that he had already planned for poll-rigging for the elections of 2008. The most interesting part of the book is her argument with Samuel P. Huntington and the rest of the Clash of Civilizations crowd, who said that a confrontation between the West and militant Islam, inevitable after the cold war, was resolved. But the author wants these conflicts and clashes to be resolved through the Islamic world itself. She has also written about inter-cultural relations, science and technology.

The last part 'Reconciliation' deals with the internal clash within Islam. She talks about sectarian divisions between Sunni and Shias and the failures of the leaders of Muslim countries to face down the misrepresentation of Osama Bin Laden. The author is of the view that Al Qaeda has distorted the image of Islam and emphasizes to have a reformist, pluralistic and modern Islamic society. Then she presents the examination of various countries like Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia, Iran, Mali, Kazakhstan and India. She judges against Osama Bin Laden's "attempt to exploit, manipulate and materialize Islam" to terrorist acts committed by other religious fanatics: "whether Christian fundamentalists' attacks on women's reproductive clinics or Jewish fundamentalist attacks on Muslim holy cites in Palestine." She goes across the most contentious and hot debates both within the Muslim world itself and its relationship with West.

The good thing about the book is that she has discussed beautifully how the democracy can be created in the Islamic world. According to the author, economic development can be made by investing income of major oil producing countries. She discusses how the Muslims who are working in the West can be brought to do services. She invites the Western world to formally recognize the lingering smash up of colonialism. The book ends with a recommendation for a better-off world as she foresees a Marshall Plan for the Muslim World which could be applied to the poor Muslim nations.

The name of Benazir is only on the title of the book and reader's note has been given by her old friend and adviser Mark A. Siegel that indicates that they worked together on the manuscript. It is a must learn book for those who want to understand why the bond between the Muslim world and West has been deteriorated. It is a great book for those who want to explore Islam, both past and present, US foreign policy during the times of colonialism and cold war, the problems being faced by Middle-East and Pakistan. Few parts of the book definitely carry merit to be remembered as the last evidence of the author. This book is a vital gift for all the people. But like every aspect, it has its limitations too. Although the author very boldly has discussed the relationship between faith and politics in the Muslim world yet the book fails in substance as too much has been written to appease those who consider Muslims as radical. The accomplishments of Bhutto family are overstated but their mistakes have been overlooked. Moreover, she has talked sarcastically about the Islamization of ex-Pakistani President Zia-ul-Haq while never pointing out about her own failures in politics. In due course, the book is symbolically important because it discloses the author's new and a far more judicious approach to international politics. Her conclusions are inspiring, "I appreciate that what I propose-from what the Muslim states must do to what the West must do- is huge and many seem daunting and even impossible. I make these recommendations because the times require something more than business as usual. Much of what is recommended is somewhat out of the box. But staying within the box has brought poverty, ignorance; hopelessness, violence, and dictatorship are to far from many Muslims around the world. Staying within the box has set Islam and the West on a dangerous and unnecessary collision course. It is time for new ideas. It is time for creativity. It is time for bold commitment and it is time for honesty, both among people and between people. It is time for reconciliation." The author has written this book to present the actual effective picture of Islam to the people with positive and optimistic gesture. She hopes herself to be the catalyst for change in bringing democracy to Pakistan as she quotes Iqbal who had said long ago: "Tyranny cannot long endure". It is a rational plea for a new approach to democracy in the Islamic World.

One of the strong points of the book is her evaluation and analysis of Islamic history as the author accounts how different groups and sects have developed. The book is alternately fascinating having a visionary analysis of the author and a very convincing read so far. It is really a rational, sound and heartfelt plea for the support of an open and democratic Pakistan.
