

Benazir Bhutto's Opposition Politics in Pakistan: A Study of Economic and Foreign Policies, 1990-1993

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Abstract:

This paper examines the role of Benazir Bhutto as leader of the opposition in Pakistan from 1990 to 1993, with a particular focus on her engagement with economic and foreign policies under the government of Nawaz Sharif. Drawing on National Assembly debates, official documents, memoirs, and contemporary press reports, the study argues that Bhutto adopted a dual strategy of parliamentary engagement and extra-parliamentary mobilisation. In economic matters, she relied heavily on public agitation, press interventions, and mass protests to challenge policies such as privatisation, the Yellow Cab Scheme, and the motorway project. In contrast, her approach to foreign policy remained largely institutional, with active participation in parliamentary debates on issues including Kashmir, Afghanistan, and relations with the United States. The paper concludes that while her opposition politics strengthened democratic accountability, it also contributed to political polarisation and instability during a fragile phase of democratic consolidation in Pakistan.

Key Words: Benazir Bhutto, Opposition Politics, Pakistan, Economic policy, Foreign Policy

Introduction

The period from 1988 to 1999 was unique in its nature in Pakistan's political history as that short period observed four elected governments. Unfortunately, none of these could complete its tenure as all were dismissed before time. This era was characterized by frequent institutional crises, political polarization, and the dismissal of elected governments. In such transitional democracies, the role of the opposition is critical to ensure accountability, scrutinize state policies, and to shape political discourse. However, in Pakistan, opposition politics often extended beyond

parliamentary contestation and included public agitation and extra-parliamentary mobilization due to limited institutional space for effective democratic debate.

Benazir Bhutto's tenure as Leader of the Opposition from 1990 to 1993 represents an important yet understudied phase of Pakistan's political history. This study evaluates the role of Benazir Bhutto as an opposition leader from 1990 to 1993, with a focus on her engagement with the economic and foreign policies. Most studies on Benazir Bhutto explore her role as Prime Minister. Whereas this study exclusively deals with her role as opposition leader during her first term in office, which helps to understand democratic contestation in Pakistan during the third parliamentary regime. She later adored her career as opposition leader. She writes, 'As Leader of the Opposition I could question and debate government officials and even the prime minister, and I used that power to try to preserve the social, economic, and political accomplishments of my government....'¹ At another place, she writes, 'I stood on the floor of the National Assembly, day after day, month after month, challenging the dictates of the Nawaz government.'²

Drawing on primary sources including National Assembly debates, speeches, memoirs, and contemporary newspaper accounts, the paper argues that Bhutto adopted a dual strategy of opposition. Her opposition politics on economic policy majorly included issuing statements, organising press conferences or briefings, holding demonstrations, leading long marches and rallies, etc. The issues she raised were the cooperative societies scandal, the Yellow-cab scheme, the motorway project, the privatisation scheme, etc. Whereas her approach to foreign policy matters was largely institutional, and she did not take such issues to the public on most occasions. It was characterised by her active participation in parliamentary debates and policy discussions on issues such as Kashmir, Afghanistan, and relations with the United States. It argues that on one side, her opposition politics contributed to enhancing the government's accountability and policy scrutiny; it

¹ Benazir Bhutto, *Reconciliation, Islam, Democracy and the West* (Washington: Harper Collins, 2008), 192.

² Benazir Bhutto, *Daughter of Destiny, An Autobiography* (Harper Collins-eBooks), 409. <https://bhutto.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Daughter-of-Destiny-Autobiography-By-Benazir-Bhutto.pdf>

also increased political polarisation, which complicated the process of democracy in Pakistan.

A. Economic Policies

Benazir Bhutto's regular input came on the government's economic policies, including the Cooperative Societies Scandal, the Privatisation Scheme of the government, the Motorway Project and the Yellow Cab Scheme. She raised these issues and the negative impacts of the economic policies on the people of Pakistan in both parliament and in the public.

Cooperative Societies Scandal

On the Cooperative Societies Scandal, Ms Bhutto took various steps, including criticising the government in the parliament, extending sympathy to the affected, holding press conferences and leading a long march. She also gave a logical solution to the problem.

Nawaz Sharif and some cabinet members were allegedly involved in the cooperative societies scandal and siphoning of 17 billion rupees of public funds.³ Forty Cooperative banks in Punjab, while violating their charters, had given several unsecured loans to Nawaz Sharif and Shujaat Hussain's families. Most of the societies which incurred huge bad debts, including National Industrial Credit and Finance Corporation (NICFC) and the Services Co-operative Credit Corporation, belonged to *Islami Jhamuri Itihad* (IJI)'s MPAs of Punjab.⁴

Ms Bhutto claimed that after taking fifteen billion rupees from NICFC, the federal government attempted to bankrupt the company. She held the Shujaat group and the Ittefaq group of companies accountable for the entire circumstances.⁵ The other opposition leaders also criticised the government for mismanagement and corruption within these societies, which were actually meant to provide loans to its

³ Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*, (Karachi: OUP, 2013), 424

⁴ Tahir Kamran, *Democracy and Governance in Pakistan* (Lahore: Peace Publications, 2008), 150.

⁵ Anna Suvorova, *Benazir Bhutto: A Multidimensional Portrait* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 193.

members. The mismanagement ultimately led to a collapse, which affected millions of Pakistanis with financial loss.⁶

Benazir Bhutto, while criticising IJI's leadership and the government, said at a press conference on October 31st, they would "turn Pakistan into a banana republic."⁷ She further said, while addressing the National Assembly of Pakistan during a discussion on the Presidential address, that mishandling of the Cooperative scam had dimmed Mr Nawaz Sharif's public veneer. She also raised a question on undue support by the President of Pakistan to the government on this issue. She said, "The President chooses to ignore the shameful effects of the collapse of the Cooperative Societies. The opposition political parties, including Benazir Bhutto, emphasised that since the investigation was against the current prime minister, he had to step down from his position."⁸

Benazir expressed her sympathy to all of the unfortunate individuals who had invested their money, especially savings, in those corporations. While talking to the parliament, she said:

This is the money of the widows, this is the money of the orphans, this is the money of the pensioners, *jawans*, civil servants, small classes, middle classes, lower middle classes, and farmers who kept their money ... and who robbed it? The Prime Minister, who doesn't have the guts to be present here today, Mr Speaker. He doesn't have the guts to come over here and answer before this august Assembly, how in violation of all rules, how in violation of all regulations, he took the money of the poor of this country, he took the money of the labourers of this country, and he embezzled it ..!⁹

She explained to the House that she had known about Cooperatives' corruption since Nawaz Sharif was Chief Minister, and she had raised the issue at that time, but the people in power in Punjab did not cooperate with her. She presented evidence that

⁶ Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1999), 320.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Benazir Bhutto's Address to the National Assembly of Pakistan, 15 October 1991, Panhwar, Comp. *Issues in Pakistan: Selection of Speeches in National Assembly (1990-1993)*, 36.

⁹ Panhwar, Comp. *Issues in Pakistan: Selection of Speeches in National Assembly (1990-1993)* by Benazir Bhutto, 35. <https://bhutto.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Issues-in-Pakistan-by-Benazir-Bhutto.pdf>

PM knew NICFC was going to collapse, and even then, he withdrew substantial funds from it. She also blamed Punjab's government, which misreported to the public on the sound working of the Cooperatives to 'lure and seduce innocent depositors.'¹⁰

Benazir, along with the other opposition leadership, including Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan and Qazi Hussain Ahmad, insisted that a high-level commission be established to look into the issue under the direction of the Supreme Court's judgement. In response to opposition's follow-up and raising the issue on various forums, the government established a twelve-member committee to probe into the matter, but nothing came out of the effort.¹¹ The government further established the Cooperation Liquidation Board in 1991 to liquidate the cooperative societies, which also safeguarded the interests of powerful defaulters rather than the depositors of cooperative societies.¹²

Ms. Bhutto took all PDA leadership on board and decided to take the issue to the public as press conferences and speaking in the Parliament were not enough to pressurise the government. They decided to start a long march against the persecution of the masses on the Cooperative societies scandal and on other issues. PDA started preparation for the long march, and on February 6, it held a protest demonstration in Multan before the march's commencement.¹³ Benazir said while addressing the procession that they were discontented with the government and the system as well, which was a product of rigging.¹⁴ She assured the public that they would keep protesting until the administration was overthrown. Later, Benazir Bhutto, along with Ghulam Mustafa Khar, Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan and others led a long march on February 17, 1992. Speaking to Pakistani masses and workers in

¹⁰ Ibid., 37.

¹¹ Naumana Kiran, "Federal Cabinet in Pakistan: Role in Policy Formulation, 1988-1993," *Journal of Historical Studies* Vol. 8. No. 2 (Jul-Dec 2022): 14.

¹² Ayesha Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics* (London: Harvard University Press, 2014), 275.

¹³ Ghafoor Ahmad, *Nawaz Sharif Ka Pehla Daur e Hakumat (First Regime of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif)* (Lahore: Alqamar Enterprises, 1997), 280.

¹⁴ Lawrence Ziring, *Pakistan in the Twentieth Century: A Political History* (Karachi: OUP, 1997), 538.

various places, Benazir stated that the nation was currently deeply disappointed. She ensured the public of her support everywhere.¹⁵

PPP supported the victims of companies and cooperative societies who demonstrated in front of Parliament House. They were holding banners stating that the Prime Minister should pledge to stop eating corpses, cease shielding criminals, and punish those who robbed the poor. They were yelling that they needed to get paid right away. In front of the Parliament, demonstrators called *Azan* and condemned the guilty parties and persons responsible for it.¹⁶

Ms Bhutto also gave a logical solution to the issue. She said:

According to the Cooperative Banking Laws, anybody who takes a loan is a member of that Cooperative and equally responsible for that Cooperative. Therefore, when a bank collapses, the assets of those who are responsible should be seized, should be sold, and the money taken from them should be paid to the widows, the pensioners and the orphans That is the solution ...!¹⁷

Although her efforts to solve the problem and to compensate millions of the affected did not bear fruit, she continuously raised her voice on the issue on various forums. She also expressed her sympathy for the people who had been affected by the scam.

Privatization Scheme

Nawaz Sharif's privatisation plan drew sharp criticism from the opposition for its alleged favouritism and lack of transparency. Benazir Bhutto always took credit for her government having introduced privatisation in the country. 'We are the people who introduced privatisation.' She highlighted PPP's pioneering role in privatisation and cited that 15% shares of PIA were sold by her regime, which raised 30 crore rupees. She said, 'I do not need to point out that the recent economic reforms are not the invention of Nawaz Sharif, as deregulation and privatisation

¹⁵ Rais A. Khan, "Pakistan in 1991: Light and Shadows," *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXII, No.2 (February 1992), 199

¹⁶ *The Nation*, 1st June, 1992.

¹⁷ Benazir Bhutto's Address to the National Assembly of Pakistan, 15 October 1991, Panhwar, Comp. Issues in Pakistan: Selection of Speeches in National Assembly (1990-1993), 38.

were introduced by the PPP and their implementation had begun during the PPP's regime.'¹⁸ Bhutto accused Sharif of distorting PPP's legacy of deregulation and privatisation to favour loyal business monopolies, harm labour, and foster corruption.¹⁹

Her major objection to Nawaz Sharif's privatisation policy was to the process and method. In her words, 'the process of privatisation has ruined the country's economy.'²⁰ While objecting to the decision-making process related to privatisation, she said:

This monarchical system, which restricts decision-making to a selected group of people gathered around the prime minister's court, caused the government to make costly errors. Government by cabal rather than institution has exposed the government to greater political danger. Additionally, it results in informal governance that is ineffective and inefficient.²¹

She also questioned the whereabouts of proceeds from privatising profitable public sector enterprises such as cement factories, Pak-Saudi Fertiliser, Ghee Mills, and Zeal Pak Cement, arguing that the sales enriched a select few rather than benefiting the public, while still imposing taxes despite the revenue.²² She was also against the privatisation of some other state-owned enterprises like the Pakistan PVC mill in Gharo, the Thatta cement factory and the Thatta sugar mill, etc. She described the whole episode of privatisation as 'looting and plundering'²³ the nation's resources.

Besides criticising the privatisation plan and working of the Privatisation Commission, she even criticised the role of the President and said, "the President has cleverly sidetracked the matter of responsibility. The actual terms of the reference of the Commission give the lie to those high-sounding claims. The terms of reference exclude from the Commission's study the task of identifying persons

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *The News*, 6 November 1991.

²⁰ Benazir Bhutto's address to the National Assembly, cited in Sani H. Panhwar, *Comp. Issues in Pakistan: Selection of Speeches in National Assembly (1990-1993)* by Benazir Bhutto, 73.

²¹ Ibid., 77.

²² *The News* 1st November, 1991.

²³ *The News* 4 November, 1991.

who have taken illegal advantage. How can this nation know who has taken illegal advantage when the Commission is not allowed to look into the misconduct of those holding public offices?"²⁴

She accused the scheme of being designed solely to enrich a selected few or a particular class. In her opinion, 'Nawaz Sharif's special contribution has been to do everything at reckless speed, with little regard for the fact that the purpose of reform is frustrated through imprudence, perversion and lack of integrity. His denationalisation policy has meant a dislocation for the masses.'²⁵ While the government claimed that the policy would benefit both the state and the people of Pakistan, it instead concentrated wealth in the hands of a privileged few. It favoured Punjabi Chinioties and other entrepreneurs and industrialists, mostly based in Punjab.²⁶

The second strategy to give a tough time to the regime's policy of privatisation was holding press conferences and media talks. On different occasions, she raised multiple relevant issues. She claimed that she had evidence on Nawaz Sharif's acceptance of a bribe of Rs. 30 crores in order to sell the Muslim Commercial Bank to his close associates. In support of her argument, she said Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto nationalised banks due to widespread corruption. "The nation did not benefit from de-nationalisation."²⁷ On another forum, she said that, being an industrialist and businessman, the PM wanted to get the maximum share in the profit from the de-nationalisation process.

The assessment of Benazir Bhutto's role in the privatisation policy of the regime brings to the surface that her major objection came to the decision-making process and the method of privatisation. She wanted the privatisation process to be

²⁴ *National Assembly of Pakistan Debates*, 16 February 1992. www.na.gov.pk.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 78

²⁶ For a detailed study on the privatisation policy of Nawaz Sharif's government, please see Naumana Kiran, "Federal Cabinet in Pakistan: Role in Policy Formulation, 1988-1993," *Journal of Historical Studies Vol. 8. No. 2* (Jul-Dec 2022): 9-12

²⁷ *The News*, 5 November 1991.

fair and open, and its benefits should reach the public, too. She tried to bring the public to her support on the point, too.

Motorway Project and Yellow Cab Scheme

Benazir Bhutto criticised two landmark projects of the Nawaz regime, i.e., the motorway project and the yellow cab scheme. She believed that the motorway between Lahore and Islamabad, costing approximately 1 billion US dollars, was one of the ostentatious policies of the regime.²⁸ She considered the social betterment and upgradation of the standard of living of common people as a more important task than projects like motorways. While addressing the National Assembly, she said, ‘The financial resources of the country have been diverted from the social sector to showpiece projects such as the motorway...’²⁹ She also raised allegations of corruption, besides negating its utility. She gave a detailed list along with the evidence of corruption of the government in various projects, and motorways were one such project. She said, ‘I have given you the charge sheet so I will not go into further cases of corruption...the gross irregularity in the award of one billion dollars in Lahore/Islamabad motorway.’³⁰

Benazir Bhutto criticised the yellow cab scheme on the basis that it was favouring PML-N workers and sympathisers. It was alleged by the opposition that expensive cars were imported in the name of taxis and then given to the supporters to oblige them. The whole process lacked a clear selection process for recipients, and there was no transparency. As a result of no checks and balances on the system, a large number of vehicles were not used as taxis but were used as luxury cars. It all resulted in financial loss for the exchequer, instead of improving the plight of the common man, which should be the basic objective. She also criticised the PM’s policy of giving a loan of Rs. 300,000 to buy a taxi. Approximately 40,000 households were finally able to get 95,000 taxis, buses, and trucks through loans. According to her, through this scheme, the money was just wasted as the vehicles

²⁸ Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*, 424.

²⁹ Benazir Bhutto’s address to the National Assembly, cited in Sani H. Panhwar, *Comp. Issues in Pakistan: Selection of Speeches in National Assembly (1990-1993) by Benazir Bhutto*, 73.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

were used by the influential people to transport their children to schools and for other such purposes instead of being used by the poor as a taxi car to earn their livelihood.³¹ It is reported that about 750 million US dollars, a significant amount of foreign exchange, was put into it. At a very great cost, it gave jobs to a few people only on the basis of political rather than economic reasons.³² The opposition pointed out that the scheme diverted resources from more pressing needs and failed to create sustainable jobs.

The third point of criticism was on the method of approving these two schemes. The PM had involved only the inner-circle ministers to approve and launch the schemes.³³ Ms Bhutto claimed that the Motorway project was unjustifiable, as no government guided by economists and planners would have approved it. With only about ten thousand vehicles using the toll route, the revenue generated would be insufficient to cover construction and maintenance costs. She was of the view that these low-priority and high-cost projects, like motorways, will definitely hinder the economic progress of Pakistan and will jeopardise the balance of payments of the state of Pakistan. While addressing the session of the National Assembly of Pakistan, she said, Mr. Speaker, I ask a question: why has our fiscal deficit gone up? It is because of the wasteful expenditure of 35 billion on a motorway.³⁴

Long marches were a constant technique employed by the opposition to protest against the government's economic policy. At different times, three rounds of long marches were conducted nationwide, but without major results. Although opposition led by Benazir Bhutto extended all possible efforts to remove the government, the objectives of the long march could not be achieved completely, though it loosened the grip of the government on administration and law and order in the state.

Benazir's adoption of a dual strategy on economic policies reflects that her institutional performance could not influence the government's decisions and

³¹ *National Assembly of Pakistan Debates*, 16 June, 1993, www.na.gov.pk.

³² Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*, 424.

³³ Government of Pakistan, *Economic Survey, 1996-97*, 92 cited in Kiran, "Federal Cabinet in Pakistan: Role in Policy Formulation, 1988-1993", 13.

³⁴ *National Assembly of Pakistan Debates*, 16 June 1993, www.na.gov.pk.

strategy, so she had to take the issues to the public. By highlighting the privatisation, the Yellow Cab Scheme, and the motorway project as means of patronising industrial elites and favouring PML's supporters, she not only attracted the attention of the general public but also pressurised the government. This also resulted in political polarisation, where economic issues remained under discussion in press conferences, media talks, long marches, etc. In contrast to this confrontational approach on economic matters, her strategy on foreign policy remained largely institutional.

B. Foreign Policy

Ms Benazir Bhutto played a significant role in shaping Pakistan's foreign policy by pointing out flaws and issuing guidelines on the basis of her experience. She generally talked about the state's policy towards India, Afghanistan, the United States and other issues, including the Kashmir Issue, the Babri mosque crisis, the nuclear program and Pakistan's stand on Iraq's attack on Kuwait. She always emphasised developing friendly relations with the neighbours of Pakistan. She constantly remained concerned about the isolation of Pakistan internationally and blamed the government for its weak foreign policy.

Policy towards India: Babri Mosque Crisis and Kashmir Issue

Benazir Bhutto stayed active to criticise the government's policy towards India generally and highlighted the Babri Mosque crisis and the Kashmir issue specifically. She strongly condemned the demolition of the Babri mosque and vehemently criticised the Indian government for handling the situation. She demanded an independent inquiry into the matter. She condemned it as an act of religious intolerance and a violation of Muslim heritage.

The Babri mosque was in Ayodhya, India. It was one of the largest mosques in Uttar Pradesh, India. It was built in 1528-29 AD by Mr Baqi, on the order of the Mughal ruler Babar and was named as Babri *Masjid*. According to an unconfirmed report, Mir Baqi destroyed a preexisting temple of Rama at the site. Beginning in the 19th century, there were numerous disagreements and court cases between Muslims and Hindus regarding the Ayodhya dispute, which centred on the site's history and whether a former temple was destroyed to build the mosque or

not.³⁵ Leaders of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* and *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* assembled at the Babri *Masjid* to pray. The outer barrier was broken about midday when a young Hindu was "vaulted" onto the dome. Soon after that, a big group of Hindus began tearing down the mosque. They were shouting that Pakistan and the mosque should be destroyed.³⁶

In response to the tragedy, masses in Pakistan, under their political and religious leadership, mostly from the opposition side, began demonstrations. They also observed a nationwide strike. Pakistani citizens began attacking Hindu religious sites, and the government used force to stop them. Numerous protesters arrived in Islamabad and demonstrated in front of the Indian embassy. A frantic mob attacked the embassy. Police used force in order to stop them, injuring numerous people.³⁷ Twenty-three casualties were also observed during the demonstrations in Pakistan. Ms Bhutto criticised the use of force by the government against innocent citizens.

PM Nawaz Sharif convened a meeting of all parties to discuss this matter and to develop a consensus on the issue. Opposition leaders, including Benazir Bhutto, Sardar Mazari, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, Asghar Khan, Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, and Pir Pagara, chose not to attend the conference.³⁸ The meeting was held at the Prime Minister's Secretariat in Islamabad without the prominent opposition parties. At the end of the meeting, the Islamabad Declaration was announced, in which the government demanded the protection of all religious places of Muslims in India from the Indian government. PM remarked as he addressed the gathering. 'I am really depressed since the day this incident took place... I will not

³⁵ In April 1984, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad started a campaign to gather public support for Hindu access to the Babri Masjid. On 25th January 1986, a lawyer, Umesh Chandra Panda, appealed to the court to remove the restrictions on Hindu worship in the Babri Masjid. Rajiv Gandhi's government ordered to open the locks on the Babri Masjid gates, and all Hindus were given access to the site. and the mosque gained some function as a Hindu temple. Communal tension in the region worsened when a senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader, L.K. Advani, started a rath yatra.

³⁶ *Dawn News*, 7 December, 1992.

³⁷ Saeed Shafqat, "Pakistan Under Benazir Bhutto," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 36, No 7 (July 1996), 657.

³⁸ Sardar Muhammad Ch, *Nawaz Sharif Teri Raho Ka Seedha Musafir*, (Lahore: Al-Faisal Publishers 2000),168.

sit quietly until its reconstruction.³⁹ He was disappointed by the boycott of the meeting by the opposition, but expressed his willingness to bring them on the same page with the government.

Opposition political Parties, led by Benazir Bhutto, called a separate meeting of all opposition parties in Lahore on the same day. It was attended by Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi, Fazlur Rehman, Ghulam Mustafa Khar, Peer Pagara, Kausar Niazi, Sajid Naqvi, Tahirul Qadri, and Ejaz Jatoi, etc. Benazir, while addressing the meeting, said that Nawaz Sharif's All-Parties meeting was actually a gathering of his cabinet ministers. She claimed that this situation demonstrated Nawaz Sharif's isolation on the issue.⁴⁰ It was agreed by all who were present that until Nawaz Sharif was serving as PM, the opposition would not participate in any Round Table discussions.

Benazir Bhutto also suggested that Nawaz Sharif should call a meeting of the National Assembly in order to take all political parties into confidence on the Babri mosque issue and Pakistan's policy on Kashmir. In the National Assembly, she strongly criticised Nawaz Sharif for his silence regarding the demolition of the Babri Masjid. She further added that in similar circumstances, when she was holding the power, fanatic Hindus had threatened to demolish the mosque, but she courageously pressed the government of India to take preventive measures, and ultimately the Indian government remained successful in pacifying the fanatic Hindus.⁴¹ Benazir wrote in a letter to the government that the opposition was prepared to engage in dialogue with the government for the national consensus. Additionally, she established a committee including Abbas Chandio, Masroor Ehsan, and Asif Ali Zardari, etc., to look into the Babri Mosque demolition and to suggest a strategy on the issue.⁴² She emphasised that PM could not escape from his poor stance with regard to the demolition of the Babri mosque in India.

³⁹ Ghafoor Ahmad, *Nawaz Sharif Ka Pehala Daur e Hakumat*, 467.

⁴⁰ Attar Chand, *Pakistan Party Politics, Pressure groups and Minorities*, (London: Commonwealth Publishers, 1991), 106.

⁴¹ *Debates of the National Assembly of Pakistan*, 27 December 1992, www.na.gov.pk.

⁴² Ghafoor Ahmad, *Nawaz Sharif Ka Pehala Daur e Hakumat*, 478.

The leader of the PDP renounced the government's policy on Kashmir, too, asserting that it could not effectively elevate it on a global level. One of the factors behind the weak Kashmir policy was the regime's persistent inability to appoint a competent foreign minister.⁴³ Ms Bhutto said that Nawaz Sharif was the first ever Prime Minister of Pakistan who would be remembered in history for deserting the people of Kashmir in their struggle for self-determination in the light of UN resolutions. She accused Sharif of betraying the Kashmir liberation struggle, dashing Pakistani aspirations, and potentially sacrificing the issue for his own political survival. She said while addressing the Parliament:

Nawaz Sharif's regime has failed to evolve a policy of national consensus on Kashmir. By introducing the offer of the "third option," Mian Nawaz Sharif has not only abandoned Pakistan's traditional stand of adherence to the UN resolutions but also betrayed the liberation struggle of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, as well as demolished the hopes and aspirations of the people of Pakistan. There are widespread fears that Nawaz Sharif might barter the Kashmir issue in the interest of his personal power struggle.⁴⁴

Ms Bhutto used the Babri mosque crisis as a source to criticise the ruling government till the end of the regime. She also blamed the government for sidelining the issue of Kashmir internationally. However, tensions in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir simmered throughout his tenure.

Pakistan-US Relations and Nuclear Program

Benazir Bhutto commented on the government's policy towards the USA and highlighted that the lowest ebb of the relations had been reached between the two countries. She said that the USA was working to declare Pakistan a terrorist state, which would deny Pakistan all economic and defence aid, and that would be really harmful for the country's growth.⁴⁵

⁴³ *The News*, 8 November 1991.

⁴⁴ Benazir Bhutto's Address to the National Assembly of Pakistan in Response to the President's Address, Panhwar, Comp. Issues in Pakistan: Selection of Speeches in National Assembly (1990-1993), 71.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 70

Benazir Bhutto offered alternative perspectives to the government, particularly on the nuclear program of Pakistan and relations with the United States. While discussing Pakistan's nuclear policy in the house, she said:

Nawaz Sharif administration's handling of the nuclear issue over the past two years has led to widespread public demoralisation, offering no positive outcomes. Despite well-known international pressures led by the United States, alongside European nations and now Japan, the regime has failed to reassure the global community of Pakistan's steadfast commitment to a peaceful nuclear program that safeguards national security. Prime Minister Sharif bears direct responsibility for the erratic and irresponsible remarks on the matter issued by his Minister of Defence Production, the Foreign Secretary, and even himself at various times.⁴⁶

She, on various occasions, quoted the success of her ex-government's policy towards the USA. She shared that the US President and his wife had given a warm reception to her in the President's house during her visit to the USA and that the US government even released aid to Pakistan.⁴⁷ She raised the issue in the All Parties Conference (APC), too. While addressing the APC, she said that the country was facing great internal and external threats. The United States had imposed a ban on Pakistan's economic and military aid, and the international donor agencies had imposed harsh conditions which were against national prestige and honour, and that was not acceptable.⁴⁸ Later in an interview, she criticised Nawaz Sharif's America policy as a failed one and that Pakistan continuously faced the threat of being declared a terrorist state.⁴⁹

Although Ms Bhutto constantly gave her input on Pakistan's policy and downward trend in relations with the US, the state generally had not given heed to the points she had raised.

⁴⁶ *National Assembly of Pakistan Debates*, 27 December 1992. www.na.pk.

⁴⁷ Benazir Bhutto, *Daughter of Destiny, An Autobiography* (Harper Collins-eBooks), 402. <https://bhutto.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Daughter-of-Destiny-Autobiography-By-Benazir-Bhutto.pdf>

⁴⁸ *The News*, 13 August 1991

⁴⁹ Sani H. Panhwar, Compiled and Edited. *View Point: Benazir Bhutto, Collection of Articles, Interviews and Speeches*, 215. <https://bhutto.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/View-Point-Benazir-Bhutto.pdf>

Afghan Policy

Nawaz Sharif's governments continued to support the Afghan opposition while leaving the country's Afghan policy in the hands of the military. It went against Pakistan's commitments under the Geneva Accords to refrain from meddling in its neighbour's domestic affairs.⁵⁰ While addressing the National Assembly of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto criticised the government policy on Afghanistan in these words:

Afghanistan today is torn by a civil war as a result of Islamabad's bungling over the last year. While the Afghan refugees' repatriation to their country has not been made possible, international aid has dried up, and three million refugees are adding to Pakistan's economic hardship. The Durand Line has virtually ceased to exist on the ground as an international frontier. The writ of the government of Pakistan no longer applies to that border.⁵¹

She briefed the House on her government's efforts (1988-1990) on the Afghanistan issue. She said that in July 1990, the PPP government acknowledged the realities in Afghanistan and sought a UN-sponsored settlement through a transitional mechanism. However, when I proposed accepting such a settlement that represented all Afghans, I was criticised for being soft. As late as May 1991, when the UN came up with a major proposal for a transitional arrangement, the government did not seize the opportunity. I am proud to say that the high ground of the PPP government's policy has been vindicated. Speaking to the Writers' Free Union of Afghanistan in early 1991, I endorsed the United Nations Secretary-General's proposal for transitional arrangements leading to UN-sponsored elections. I supported an immediate ceasefire and the cessation of arms supply to the belligerent forces, also known as negative symmetry.⁵²

⁵⁰ V.Y. Belokrenitsky and V.N. Moskalenko, *A Political History of Pakistan 1947-2007*, (Karachi: OUP, 2013), 327.

⁵¹ *National Assembly of Pakistan Debates*, 16 February 1992. www.na.gov.pk.

⁵² *National Assembly of Pakistan Debates*, 16 February 1992. www.na.gov.pk. Later, she had mentioned details of her personal efforts and the efforts of her government to install a proper and well-agreed political set-up in Afghanistan in 1989-90. For further details, please see Benazir Bhutto, *Daughter of Destiny, An Autobiography* (Harper Collins-eBooks), 398-401.

With the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan, Benazir was of the view that Afghanistan shared a very long and porous border with Pakistan and therefore, the withdrawal must be peaceful for the security of Pakistan.⁵³ Unfortunately, the donor countries had also refused to aid Afghan refugees, and this had created a negative impact on Pakistan's economy, as the burden of 3.5 million Afghan refugees had to be borne by our economy.⁵⁴ 'Since our economy must bear the weight of 3.5 million Afghan refugees, the donor nations have also ceased providing aid to the refugees, which has had a detrimental impact on our economy.'⁵⁵ She emphasised to the government that it should work on getting donations for the refugees from other sources.

The APC, called by opposition parties, also discussed Pakistan's Afghanistan policy and found that there were significant external and domestic threats to the nation. Pakistan's economic and military assistance had been banned by the United States, and the international donor organisations had placed severe restrictions that were unacceptable, which were against Pakistan's honour and national prestige.⁵⁶ On the basis of the above facts, Benazir claimed that Nawaz Sharif's foreign policy was, therefore, a glaring failure. It didn't seem to have any direction, and Pakistan's global isolation grew during his regime. There was a new low in relations with neighbouring countries. It proved that Nawaz had limited exposure to and knowledge of foreign affairs management.⁵⁷

Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan, however, could not be improved, and the Afghan refugee crisis also persisted during this period.

Iraq-Kuwait War

Pakistan's policy on the Iraq-Kuwait war and on the Middle East was also considered unsuccessful by Benazir Bhutto. She said that Pakistan could not get any

⁵³ *The News*, 13 August 1991

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Benazir Bhutto's Address to the National Assembly of Pakistan in Response to the President's Address, Panhwar, Comp. *Issues in Pakistan: Selection of Speeches in National Assembly (1990-1993)*, 69.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*. 424.

benefit out of her support to the USA on the Iraq-Kuwait war, whereas other countries with similar policies, including Egypt and Turkey, had reaped maximum benefits. She again was concerned about the common man and said:

The retrenchment of Pakistan's workers from the region continues. The latest report indicates that as many as 50,000 Pakistanis are under the threat of being deported from the Emirates and Saudi Arabia. Thousands of Pakistani workers have been forcibly collected by the military in camps in order to be deported by sea. Such a deplorable state of affairs exhibits the incompetence and total lack of diplomatic vision by the Nawaz Sharif Government.⁵⁸

In contrast to Benazir's approach to economic policy, her engagement on foreign policy matters was institutional and restrained. She mostly gave her input on various matters in the parliamentary debates, policy discussions and in formal forums. This also reflects that mass mobilisation is not a recommendable strategy in Pakistan, where foreign policy formulation is a domain of civil-military consensus. Further, little acceptance of her point of view by the government of Nawaz Sharif reflects that the political system of the 1990s did not welcome the opposition's input on designing foreign policy.

Ms Bhutto's journey as an opposition leader was not without challenges. Besides the challenge of fatigue, hard labour during long marches and demonstrations, she faced life threats, intimidation from ISI, imprisonment of her husband and other difficulties. She also faced assassination attempts, as well as health issues.⁵⁹ The greatest of all challenges was provided by the patriarchal culture of Pakistan, where a reasonable number of religious leaders were not ready to work under her leadership. In spite of all such challenges, she continued her work as opposition leader with maximum potential and hard labour. She often got engaged in public discourses and held press conferences. Her role and involvement in parliamentary debates to criticise the policies of the ruling regime are commendable.

⁵⁸ Benazir Bhutto's Address to the National Assembly of Pakistan in Response to the President's Address, Panhwar, Comp. *Issues in Pakistan: Selection of Speeches in National Assembly*, (1990-1993), 71.

⁵⁹ Benazir Bhutto, *Daughter of Destiny*, 410-11.

Conclusion

Benazir Bhutto, as an opposition leader from 1991 to 1993, played a significant and dynamic role in making the government conscious of flaws in its economic and foreign policies. The study finds that her main criticism was of the decision-making process and the method of implementation of economy-related schemes. Such schemes, in her opinion, were beneficial for only a select few. She always showed concerns about the common man and wanted the government to shape up policies for the betterment of low-income groups of society. This strategy resulted in both positive and negative connotations; on one side, the government remained conscious before introducing policies, on the other side, extra criticism hid positive sides of the policies too. The study further discovers that Benazir Bhutto was always vigilant and fulfilled her responsibility as the opposition leader on foreign policy issues. She constantly stayed active in parliamentary debates to give her input on foreign policy matters, including Afghan, Kashmir and nuclear policy. She also criticised not appointing the foreign minister and the downward trend in Pakistan's policy towards the USA, India and other countries. The study reaches the conclusion that adopting two different approaches to deal with economic policy and foreign policy was a relatively calibrated and context-specific strategy of the opposition leader. She discussed flaws in the economic policy of the government, not only in the parliament but also outside of it. She held press conferences, issued statements to the media, held All Parties conferences, went on long marches even for the public good and to show her support to the common people whose interests were harmed by various economic policies, including Cooperative Societies Scandals, Yellow Cab Scheme and privatisation policy, etc. At the same time, she did not take issues related to foreign policy in public. She discussed such issues in detail in the parliament and in meetings with politicians. Her expertise in foreign matters resulted in her being the chairperson of the Parliamentary Committees on Foreign Affairs in 1993.

Overall, the study suggests that Bhutto's tenure as opposition leader was not merely reactive but strategically adaptive, reflecting both the structural limitations of Pakistan's political system and the evolving nature of opposition politics in a transitional democracy.

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