**Would anyone fill the political vacuum left by Benazir Bhutto II?**

[M Alam Brohi](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/m-alam-brohi/)

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The disturbing news of the martyrdom of Benazir triggered violent protests and riots overwhelming the country especially her native province of Sindh.

The people demonstrated their maddening anger by pulverizing everything coming in their way. Cars were burnt; banks looted; buildings set on fire; railway tracks and stations destroyed. Nothing remained safe from the public wrath. For a moment, it struck that all this was premeditated. Mobs had sprung from nowhere fully equipped and armed to plunge the mega city of Karachi and other towns of Sindh in chaos. The PPP leaders were aghast; the law enforcement agencies immobilized; the rulers helpless. This mayhem continued for two days with mobs ruling the roost.

No postmortem of Benazir was done under her spouse’s instructions. The crime site was hosed clean by the police administration of Rawalpindi. Her lifeless body was flown to Larkana for burial in the mausoleum of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The grief-stricken people of Sindh especially of Larkana and surrounding towns were receiving the fourth body of Bhuttos within a span of 28 years and burying them mournfully in Garhi Khuda Bukhsh. Their sorrow was too big; their sense of loss too enduring; their adoration of Bhuttos self-perpetuating – to be callously exploited in later years by the party leadership to seek power in the name of Shaheeds of Garhi Khuda Bukhsh like greedy mausoleum caretakers (mujawers).

At this moment, the soul of Benazir must have looked to the skies and cried to the people of Sindh, ‘had thee forsaken me, too’.

Benazir was a redoubtable and resilient politician of international standing, an intelligent political strategist, a consummate lobbyist, a combative debater, a prolific writer, a proficient communicator, a great patriot, a loving and caring leader, a kind woman, a doting mother and committed wife. She was the true reflection of her father’s populist leadership. Her foibles as a person and her lapses as a political leader notwithstanding, she was an asset to Pakistan. Her assassination was a true national loss, a blow to the federal structure of the country. In her tragic death, she stood loftier than her peers – an iconic stature claimed only by M.A. Jinnah and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Sadly enough, she wasted her two terms of power in unnecessary quarrels with her Generals, Chief Justice and President; mother and brother and tried unsuccessfully to defend the indefensible position of her spouse in the corruption charges, and his prolonged row with Mir Murtaza, and was unable to leave behind any marked legacy in terms of political, social and economic achievements that could withstand the ruthless and unbiased scrutiny of the future historians. However, she successfully maintained Z.A. Bhutto’s mystic union with the multitudes, his instinctive understanding of their mood and intuitive empathy with their woes that kept them bonded with the Pakistan People’s Party. In my view that was her only legacy which ensured the continuous popularity of the PPP during her leadership.

The general elections of February 208 were held on time. The people of Pakistan showed their love for Bhuttos once again and returned the PPP with majority seats in the National Assembly. Even in her death, Benazir, indeed, crowned the PPP with electoral success. Her tragic assassination stirred a wave of anger and sympathy that translated into votes for the party in all the four provinces. The party formed the governments in the centre and the provinces of Sindh and KPK. The PPP under Zardari had the unique opportunity to occupy all the top slots and headed the coalition governments in Sindh and KPK.

The five-year rule in the centre and Sindh and KPK gave nothing to the people of Pakistan except scandals of corruption, disappointment and despair. The only achievements the PPP Government under Asif Zardari can boast of were the 18 th Amendment in the Constitution devolving powers to the provinces and the seventh National Finance Commission Award. These monumental political achievements were obscured by the tales of mega corruption in federal and provincial administrations.

The party would soon reap the painful results of what it sowed. The flowers on the grave of Benazir had hardly dried up when it was severely battered in the Punjab, KPK and Balochistan in the general elections of 2013. Only Sindh returned it to power in the name of Bhuttos. Even the young Bilawal, after his inopportune elevation to the chairmanship, finds it hard to redeem it from the abysmal political wilderness the Zardaris have pushed it in. He is profuse in rhetoric and lacks in determination to overhaul the party doing away with the corrupt and ill reputed leadership. The multitudes look upon him as the shadow of Asif Zardari rather than the heir of the Bhuttos’ political heritage.

Though the PPP occupied power for five years in Islamabad from 2008 to 2013 and has since been ruling Sindh, the murder case of this epoch making leader was conducted in an anti-terrorist court of Islamabad like that of an ordinary person by the inept FIA pleaders. No attorney of high legal caliber who abundantly crowd in the PPP was engaged to pursue and plead her case.

None of the known legal minds like Farooq Naik, Latif Khosa and Aitzaz Ahsan was engaged to pursue the murder case of Muhtarma Benazir in the anti-terrorism court. The prime witness in Benazir murder, Khalid Shahanshah, was gunned down in Karachi and a FIA pleader, Zulfikar Shah in Islamabad.

The PPP regime failed to unearth the culprits behind these two crimes. How painful is it that her murder trial carried less importance to the party leaders than the dollar smuggler, Ayan Ali for whose bail Mr. Latif Khosa was running helter and skelter? When the anti-terrorist court gave its verdict in the Benazir case, a retired officer of the Pakistan Administrative Services from Sindh and a good author bitterly captioned his comments as “Nedhanki Jo Case” (an abandoned woman’s case). At this moment, the soul of Benazir must have looked to the skies and cried to the people of Sindh, ‘had thee forsaken me, too’. Politics is the game of sword, blood and songs.