

## Book Review: Islam, Democracy and the West by Benazir Bhutto

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The author has two aims to write this book: first, she wants an understanding whether the democratic and autonomous institutions can grow in the Muslim world, and whether Islam and democracy are equally exclusive or not; second, she wants to analyse the existence of clash of ideals and values in different groups within Islam.

The book is divided into six chapters. First chapter, *the Path Back*, starts with an emotional arrival of Benazir Bhutto at Quaid-i-Azam International Airport, Karachi, on October 18, 2007, after eight years exile. While putting her foot on the land of pure people-Pakistan-after a long time, tears started pouring from her eyes and she was unable to stop them. By lifting her hands in prayer, she thanked Allah Almighty in reverence. Her argument is that dictatorship breeds extremism. Bhutto is of the view that war against international terrorism coincided with the suspension of democracy in Pakistan. She points out that Islamic democracy consists of notion of consultation. Similarly, in the Western democracy consultation is the main essential in any political system. There is no any kind of negation of democracy in Islam. Thus, Islamic and Western democratic systems are compatible.

In the second chapter, *the Battle within Islam: Democracy versus Dictatorship, moderation versus Extremism*, Bhutto emphasises that Islam is a universal religion. According to her, majority of Muslims in the world embrace a forbearing and loving religion. However, today this religion has been misinterpreted and misrepresented by the extremists. After that, she throws light on Jihad and its kinds with the help of Quranic injunctions. She tells that Jihad is not among five pillars of Islam (except in Khariji theory). She quotes, "Jihad is a collective obligation of the whole Muslim community (fard kifaya)." According to Bhutto, imposition of the obligation duty on the community rather than on individual is very significant and involves at least two important implications. In the first place, it means 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.

Third chapter, *Islam and Democracy: History and Practice*, deals with democratic norms and values in Islamic context. She justifies her stand by quoting the Quranic injunction that suicide bombing is by no means acceptable in Islam and in the eyes of God. Bhutto argues that along with preaching tolerance of other religions, the Quran 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 that with the passage of time, many Muslim societies have turned intolerant while the Western nations have become more accommodating and tolerant. However, Islam itself is a religion of tolerance and pluralism. She also discusses about 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 is against the idea that Muslim society should be ruled in the way Medina was governed in the first century of Hijri. Indeed the author wants to convey that democracy is the heart of Islam and dictatorship is contrary to it. Thus, Islam and democracy are not contrary to each other. She has proposed a model for the Countries of the Third World.

In the fourth chapter, *The case of Pakistan*, she thinks that the real picture of Islam has been distorted and exploited by the extremists. The author traces back the roots of international terrorism, and how America had been supporting Pakistani General Zia-ul-Haq. She further points out that Zia-ul-Haq was the man who deteriorated the political system in the country. He done away with an independent judiciary and suspended human rights. It was during this period that Pakistani ISI got involved in supporting Afghan Mujahideen. According to the author, all the Muslims across the globe are at the crossroads between past and future, between education and ignorance, between peace and terrorism, and between democracy and dictatorship.

In the fifth chapter, *Is the clash of civilization inevitable?*, Bhutto takes into account Samuel P. Huntington and other propagators of the Clash of Civilizations for their stance that the confrontation between the West and militant Islam, after the cold war, was inevitable. She criticizes them and argues that this clash was resolved. However, she wants these clashes and conflicts to be resolved through the Islamic world itself. Moreover, she has spelled out by quoting few examples that clash of civilizations do 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. Bhutto is ambitious and aspired to resolve the crises within the Muslim world and the problems between the Muslim world and the West. For this, she proposes that the potential solutions to these crises lie in tracing their root causes. The author portrays a reflection of modern Islam that confronts the harmful caricatures often perceived in the West. She has explained how West had been engaged in the countries of Middle East. As a result, corruption and dictatorship dominated the whole region.

The last chapter, *Reconciliation*, deals with the internal clash within Islam. She talks about sectarian divisions between Sunni and Shias and the failures of the leaders of the Muslim countries to face down the misrepresentation of Osama Bin Laden. Bhutto argues that it is the al-Qaeda which has distorted the image of Islam. Moreover, she 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 goes across the most contentious and hot debates both within the Muslim world itself and its relationship with West.

On the whole, I found, *Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy and the West* by Benazir, Bhutto a worthwhile and informative Book. Bhutto is correct in her over all thesis that dictatorship and western interference in Muslim countries have retarded the development of democratic norms and values. This has helped in generating the Islamic extremist threat to Islam itself and the West. Bhutto's analysis of democratic growth across the Muslim world and the history of interference in of the West in Muslim affairs is very good. She provides firsthand account of Pakistan's democratic political development, and the forces that have worked for and against democracy there. She is also clear about the goals of Islamic extremists, militants and fanatics and their supporters within the Pakistan military intelligence services.

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. 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.

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