

**Leading Women**

A portrait of Benazir Bhutto, a Pakistani politician, wearing a white headscarf and a green shawl. The background is a warm, textured orange-red. The portrait is rendered in a painterly style with visible brushstrokes.

**Benazir Bhutto**

**CORINNE J. NADEN**

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Website: [www.marshallcavendish.us](http://www.marshallcavendish.us)

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Marshall Cavendish International (Asia) Private Limited, 1 New Industrial Road, Singapore 536196 • Marshall Cavendish International (Thailand) Co Ltd. 253 Asoke, 12th Flr, Sukhumvit 21 Road, Klongtoey Nua, Wattana, Bangkok 10110, Thailand • Marshall Cavendish (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, Times Subang, Lot 46, Subang Hi-Tech Industrial Park, Batu Tiga, 40000 Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia  
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All websites were available and accurate when this book was sent to press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Naden, Corinne J.

Benazir Bhutto / by Corinne J. Naden.

p. cm. — (Leading women)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Summary: "Presents the biography of Benazir Bhutto against the backdrop of her political, historical, and cultural environment"—Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-0-7614-4952-2

1. Bhutto, Benazir—Juvenile literature. 2. Women prime ministers—Pakistan—Biography—Juvenile literature.
3. Primeministers—Pakistan—Biography—Juvenile literature. 4. Pakistan—Politics and government—1988—Juvenile literature. I. Title.

DS389.22.B48N34 2010

954.9105'2092—dc22 [B]

2009029654

Editor: Deborah Grahame      Art Director: Anahid Hamparian

Publisher: Michelle Bisson      Series Designer: Nancy Sabato

Photo research by Connie Gardner

Cover image by Aimee Vance

The photographs in this book are used by permission and through the courtesy of:

*Getty Images*: AFP, 1, 9, 48, 55, 66, 75, 79, 81, 84; Daniel Berehulak, 4; Tim Graham, 17; De Agostini, 20; Keystone Stringer, 23; Hulton Archive, 28; Popperfoto, 45; Lichtfield Archive, 72; *The Image Works*: Topham, 9; Steve Rubin, 62; *AP Photo*: 32, 42.

Printed in Malaysia (T)

135642

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Among the Chosen Few



I

IT IS DECEMBER 2, 1988. IN THE CAPITAL CITY of Islamabad near the foot of the Himalayas, an unusual event is taking place. Under a canopy of bright lights, a woman walks slowly down the red carpet in the Presidential Palace. She is wearing the green and white colors of her country's flag. Her name is Benazir Bhutto. She is about to become the prime minister of Pakistan.

It was indeed an unusual event for Benazir Bhutto and for her nation. Pakistan is an Islamic country that lies in the northwest part of the Indian subcontinent. Many of its citizens are poor, but Benazir was born into a prominent and wealthy family. That accident of birth opened the doors to privilege and education, to the world of politics, and, finally, to her assassination.

Benazir was born in Karachi, Pakistan, on June 21, 1953. In 1988 she was sworn in as the first female prime minister of her country. At the age of thirty-five, she became the first woman and the youngest person ever to head the government of a Muslim nation.

Benazir's rise in politics was mainly due to her lineage—that is, her family's position and power. But to appreciate the full significance of her election, it is also important to know something about the religion of Islam.

## THE ISLAMIC RELIGION

The word *Islam* means “submission to God.” The followers of the religion are known as Muslims. Islam is the second-largest

**After eight years of self-imposed exile, Benazir is greeted by thousands as she returns to Karachi in October 2007 to lead her party into national elections.**



world religion after Christianity, and it has about one billion believers. The Qur'an (or Koran) is the holy book of their faith. Muslims believe that Allah (God) revealed the verses of the Qur'an to Muhammad, the prophet. The Qur'an provides spiritual and practical guidelines by which Muslims conduct their lives.

Islam is the main religion in Africa, the Middle East, and major parts of Asia. There are also large Muslim communities in Eastern and Western Europe. *The New York Times Almanac 2009* estimates the Muslim population in the United States between 1 and 2 million; however, other estimates put the number as high as 7 million.

Most Muslims belong to one of two denominations: Sunni (SOO-nee; about 85 percent) or Shiite (SHEE-ite; about 15 percent). All Muslims are expected to observe the Five Pillars of Islam, which are the ritual duties upon which a Muslim's life is built. The first pillar is *Shahadah*, the basic creed of Islam and a testimony of faith. *Salat* is the ritual prayer, performed five times a day. *Zakat*, which literally means "growth," is the duty to give to the poor. *Sawm* is the practice of fasting through the month of Ramadan (the ninth month of the Islamic calendar). The word *Ramadan* means "burning or scorching," and in this case it refers to the intense heating sensation in the stomach due to thirst. Others say that Ramadan means a scorching out of sins. During this month, Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, or having sex from dawn to dusk.

As the last pillar, every able-bodied Muslim is called to make at least one pilgrimage to the city of Mecca during his or her lifetime. This pilgrimage is known as the Hajj.

A Muslim place of worship is called a mosque; its Arabic name is *masjid*, which means "a place to prostrate oneself in front of God." Historically, the mosque has also been a site of community and social



# MUHAMMAD THE PROPHET

Muhammad ibn Abdullah was born in Mecca (in modern-day Saudi Arabia) in about the year 570. Muslims believe he is the messenger and prophet of God. As a young man, Muhammad retreated to a cave in the mountains to meditate. There, according to Islamic beliefs, he began to receive revelations from God at the age of forty. These revelations form the verses of the Qur'an. Three years later, Muhammad began his public preaching. He told people to surrender to the will of God.

To escape persecution from hostile tribes, Muhammad migrated to Medina in 622. That date became the first year in the Islamic calendar, which is called Hijra (also spelled Hegira). When Muhammad died in 632, most of the Arabian Peninsula had been converted to Islam.

interaction and Islamic learning. A mosque usually has a minaret, which is a tall, slender tower from which followers are called to worship. Unlike a Catholic church or a synagogue, a mosque does not have furniture. Worshipers prostrate themselves on the floor in the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca, the most holy shrine for people of Islam.

There is a complex relationship between Islam and women in Muslim societies. Traditionally, as in many other countries and cultures, Muslims have preferred the birth of boys more than that of girls because boys represent continuance of the family line and future wages. There are also complex laws regarding the right of inheritance. In some Muslim cultures, a woman's



inheritance may be smaller than a man's because the male is held responsible for his family, which includes his parents and sisters. Today, Muslim women work in many occupations; in Pakistan, for instance, there is a growing number of female doctors, especially in rural areas.

In general, Islam prescribes modest dress in public for both men and women. In practice, however, the dress code has been more restrictive for women. Some Muslim women wear the burqa, or burka. This garment covers a woman from head to toe, sometimes just leaving slits for her eyes. Today, a Muslim woman's use of the burqa has to do with her particular culture and social class. The garment is more traditional in Afghanistan or rural parts of Pakistan, for instance, than in the rest of Pakistan or in other Muslim nations. In Pakistan's urban areas, many women cut their hair short and regard the burqa as old-fashioned. Others might stay with tradition. Benazir Bhutto, although not regarded as traditional, always wore a head covering in public.

The seclusion of women from men or other strangers in Islamic countries is known as purdah. This may include the concealing burqa as well as seclusion in a family compound. Women may spend much of their lives enclosed within the family compound walls. When a woman marries, she may enter the compound of her husband's family. In strict practice, women are allowed to leave the compound perhaps once a week to visit their families. Such rules are not prevalent today, although purdah is practiced to some degree in many Muslim nations.

In recent years, Islamic leaders have fought for more equal treatment between the sexes. There have been some changes. Aside from Brunei and Saudi Arabia (where only men can vote), women can now vote in all Muslim-majority nations.





**Showing identification cards, Afghan women clad in the traditional burqa cast their votes.**

In Lebanon, however, a woman must provide proof of education in order to vote; there is no such requirement for men.

As a woman of Pakistan born into wealthy circumstances in the mid-twentieth century, Benazir Bhutto might have led a comfortable, uneventful life. But her parents' ideas about education and culture opened up a different path.



## GROWING UP NON-TRADITIONALLY

Benazir Bhutto was the first of four children born to Begum Nusrat and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Her name means “without equal,” but her father called her Pinkie because she had rosy cheeks. In many families all over the world, the first child holds a special place. That was certainly true for the Bhuttos. Benazir’s father was extremely fond of his firstborn child, and he showed it. She grew up happy, loved, and pampered.

The Bhuttos were one of the land-rich families in Pakistan. They lived in a huge home on the outskirts of Karachi, which is the capital of Sindh province on the Arabian Sea. The Bhutto home had a staff of about twenty-one servants to care for the family’s needs.

Where did the Bhuttos’ wealth come from? For centuries, a good deal of the farmland in Sindh province belonged to members of the Bhutto family. In Pakistan, as in most agricultural countries, land is equivalent to wealth. Benazir remembered this story from her childhood: The British conqueror of Sindh, Charles Napier, was touring the province in 1843. He asked who owned the land and was told it belonged to the Bhuttos. “Wake me up when we are off Bhutto’s lands,” Napier said. But when he woke up later on his own, he was still on Bhutto land. Benazir said her father loved telling that story.

Benazir’s grandfather, Shah Nawaz Bhutto, was born in the Sindh province of British India, now part of Pakistan, and went to school in Great Britain. He was knighted for his work when the British occupied Pakistan. Land given to him by the British made him a wealthy and influential landowner. He began to break the practice of requiring Bhuttos to marry only other Bhuttos—first or second cousins. This so-called arranged marriage—an ancient practice



in many civilizations—kept Bhutto land within the family. In fact, there was such a contract between Benazir's father and his cousin Amir. They were twelve and nine years old at the time. They did not actually live together. She stayed in her family home, and he eventually went to the University of California in the United States. Then he studied law at Oxford University in England before returning to Pakistan.

Despite this traditional arranged marriage, Nawaz Bhutto shocked the other Pakistani landowners because he educated his daughters as well as his sons. He even sent the girls to school! Not only was it unusual to educate daughters, but many of the landowners did not even educate their sons. They reasoned that both sons and daughters would always have land and therefore would always have a more than comfortable livelihood. Education seemed unnecessary.

Benazir's mother was also probably a bit of a shock to the other landowners. For one thing, she was college educated. Nusrat was the daughter of a wealthy Iranian businessman. She was far more cosmopolitan than even the progressive women of the extended Bhutto family, who still lived largely within the walls of their compounds. But Nusrat and her sisters rode around town in their own cars and did not wear traditional veils. Zulfikar and Nusrat were married in 1951. After Benazir's birth, her brother Mir Murtaza was born in 1954, her sister Sanam (called Sunny) in 1957, and another brother, Shah Nawaz, a year later. From the time that Benazir was old enough to understand anything, she understood that she and her sister would be educated just like her two brothers. Her father was determined to treat his sons and daughters equally. Benazir also understood at a young age that she would be the first woman in the Bhutto family to study abroad as her father had done.

Benazir was enrolled in the Lady Jennings Nursery School in



Karachi at the age of three. At age five, she went to the Convent of Jesus and Mary, also in Karachi. Irish nuns ran the convent. School hours ran from 7:45 a.m. until 1:15 p.m., with a tea break at 10:30. In the afternoons after school, Benazir and her siblings had private tutors to instruct them in English and math. The Bhutto children were always taught in English, which was the language mainly spoken in the household. Benazir also learned Urdu, the national language of Pakistan. In addition, her father spoke Sindhi, the language of his province, and her mother, being Iranian, spoke Farsi.

In her first years of school, Benazir wore a simple white dress to class. In high school, she wore a *shalwar* and *kameez*, which are Urdu terms for baggy pants and a tunic-like shirt. They were white with a long, green scarf—a *dupatta*—that crossed from the shoulder to the waist. Besides her regular schoolwork, Benazir studied Islam.

When Benazir was about nine years old, her mother, a Shiite Muslim, attempted to raise her daughter in the old ways of Islam. During a train ride to Larkana, Nusrat draped Benazir in a black burqa. Benazir later wrote that entering the world of adults was a disappointment. The black cloth blurred her eyesight, and its length made it difficult to walk. However, when Nusrat later told Benazir's father that his oldest daughter had worn the burqa, he replied that there was no need for her to wear it. He said,

**“Let her be judged by her character  
and her mind, not by her clothing.”**

And so, according to Benazir, “I became the first Bhutto woman to be released from a life spent in perpetual twilight.”



Benazir was relieved that she did not have to wear the burqa. She was even more relieved when she heard another of her father's decisions. He spoke to her mother about the practice of keeping Bhutto marriages within the family. Her father declared,

“

**I don't want the boys to marry their cousins and leave them behind our compound walls any more than I want my daughters buried alive behind some other relative's compound walls. . . . Let them finish their education first. Then they can decide what to do with their lives.**

”

In her autobiography, *Daughter of Destiny*, Benazir said her father's decision meant that he was determined to bring his children into the twentieth century.

## GROWING UP PAKISTANI

In Urdu, *Pakistan* means “land of the pure.” It is also a land of great physical beauty. It has seven of the sixteen tallest mountain peaks in Asia. The tallest is K2 in the Karakoram Range of the Himalayas. At 28,251 feet (8,611 m), K2 is the world's second-highest mountain; only Everest, also in the Himalayas, is taller, at 29,035 feet (8,850 m). Pakistan is bordered by India to the east, Afghanistan and Iran to the west, Afghanistan and China to the north, and the Arabian Sea to the south.



## THE SAVAGE MOUNTAIN

Mount Everest may be the tallest mountain in the world, but K2 is arguably the most difficult mountain to climb. The routes to the summit are harder to scale than those on Everest, and the weather on K2 is less predictable and much colder. It is said that for every four climbers who get to the summit, one dies trying.

After many failed attempts, two Italians named Lino Lacedelli and Achille Compagnoni finally reached the top of K2 in 1954. Since that time, the mountain has been climbed successfully 189 times, compared with about 1,400 times for Everest. K2 is known as the savage mountain because it is so treacherous to climb. The peak was thought to be especially deadly for women climbers. The first woman reached the summit of K2 in 1986, but the next four female climbers died in the attempt. However, in August 2008, Mi-Sun Go became the eleventh woman to scale the savage mountain.

Pakistan covers an area of about 310,320 square miles (803,725 square km), making it nearly twice the size of California. According to *The New York Times Almanac 2009*, it is the world's sixth-largest country in terms of population, following China, India, the United States, Indonesia, and Brazil. About 176 million people live in its four provinces: Balochistan, Sindh, the Punjab, and the North-West Frontier.

Balochistan is the largest province but has few people—only about 4 percent of the national total—because of the inhospitable Makran desert. Its capital and biggest city is Quetta. The largest city in the Sindh province is Karachi—the original capital and Benazir's



birthplace—on the Arabian Sea. The country's only seaport, Karachi has a population of about 18 million. The densely populated Punjab province contains Islamabad, Pakistan's capital since the 1970s, as well as Lahore, the country's second-largest city and its cultural center. The North-West Frontier Province, usually called NWFP, borders Afghanistan. Its capital city is Peshawar. This area contains many tribal peoples who are outside the control of the national government. The largest group is the Pashtuns, who through the years, have called for independence from Pakistan.

Today, Pakistan's most pressing problems are illiteracy, poverty, and lack of economic opportunity. Wherever these problems appear worldwide, they are fertile grounds for intolerance and discrimination. According to a 2008 report by UNESCO, close to 50 percent of Pakistanis cannot read. Only about 60 percent of the children attend ten years of school, and only 12 percent attend twelve years. Millions of Pakistan's people, especially those in rural areas, are classified as poor.

Pakistan is a complex land and a complex mixture of peoples. Aryans, Persians, Greeks, and Mongols have left their mark through the centuries. So has British rule. Pakistan is an Islamic state, which also heavily influences its past, present, and future. The country came into being in an effort to protect the rights of Muslims living in India.

## ANCIENT PAKISTAN

The land that shaped the life and destiny of Benazir Bhutto has two histories: the Pakistan of long ago and the nation that gained independence in 1947.

Relics of Stone Age humans have been found in Pakistan's Soan Valley near Rawalpindi in the north. They date to 500,000 BCE.



In 1974, the site of Mehrgarh was discovered on the Kachi plain in Balochistan. These people—who lived between 7000 and 2600 BCE—built mud brick houses and used tools made of copper ore. They herded sheep and cattle and grew barley and wheat.

As the plain became more arid, civilization moved on to the Indus Valley, where it flourished about 2500 BCE. At its peak, about 5 million people occupied hundreds of settlements extending to the Arabian Sea and the Himalayas. But the civilization ended abruptly. The probable causes were a devastating earthquake and the appearance of the Aryans, who began to migrate into the region. Buddhist writings of the fifth and sixth centuries BCE mention the state of Gandhara in the Indus Valley. Alexander the Great conquered much of the Punjab region around 334 BCE.

Over the next centuries, different peoples flooded the area. Muslim Arabs established deep roots during the seventh century CE. The warlord Tamerlane ransacked the northern regions in 1398. During the early 1500s, Mogul warriors invaded and remained.

It was not until the eighteenth century that the first European traders arrived in the region. The most important of these was the British East India Company, which became the Mogul Empire's main trading partner. Because the company had the backing of the British military, the Mogul emperor authorized it to collect taxes. That led to the idea of turning the area into a British colony. In 1784, Great Britain passed the India Act, which put the British East India Company under government control. By 1818 the company—and therefore Great Britain—had nearly complete rule of the region that would become India and Pakistan. In 1843 the British took over the Sindh province, followed by the Punjab in 1849. But the northern tribes refused to be conquered, so the British gave up and created the North-West Frontier, over which it had little control.





A mural of Tamerlane, or Timur the Great, who conquered much of western and central Asia in the fourteenth century

## THE NEW NATION

As the twentieth century neared, Hindus and Muslims in the new colony became more and more dissatisfied with British rule. In 1857, the sepoys (Indian natives who worked as soldiers for the British East India Company) staged a mutiny. Although they had many grievances, the final spark for the mutiny was the new Enfield rifle. To load the rifle, a sepoy had to bite open the cartridge, which was covered with pork fat (forbidden to Muslims) or beef fat (which Hindus do not eat).

The sepoy mutiny inspired the idea of an independent nation. The Indian National Congress (INC) was created in 1885 with the aim of



eventual independence. At the outset, the INC included the interests of both religions—Hinduism and Islam. But the Hindus far outnumbered the Muslims, who began to fear that an independent India would not have their interests at heart. They were especially disturbed in 1900, when the British allowed Hindi to become the official language of the area. That led to the creation of the All-India Muslim League in 1906. The league did not yet seek an independent Muslim state, but it concentrated on protecting Muslim liberties and rights.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah, known as the father of Pakistan, joined the All-India Muslim League in 1913, after it began to call for Indian independence. Jinnah was convinced at this point that cooperation between Muslims and Hindus would lead to an independent, united India. He became the league's president in 1916 and negotiated the Lucknow Pact with the INC. This brought the two parties together on most issues. But he broke with the INC in 1920 when its leader, Mohandas Gandhi, launched a law that violated the Non-Cooperation Movement against the British. Jinnah also became convinced that the INC would renounce support for separate electorates for Muslims, which it would do in 1928.

After World War I, Great Britain began to work toward creating an independent India. But the All-India Muslim League refused to participate in any discussion that did not include an independent Muslim state. In 1933, Rahmat Ali, a law student at Cambridge University in England, wrote a pamphlet entitled "Now or Never." In it he coined the name Pakistan, taking letters from names of the provinces he thought should form the new Muslim country.

In 1946, the British tried one last time to create a single country by proposing a plan for the new Dominion of India. But an alternative plan was proposed to divide the land into a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan. The INC rejected the alternative plan,





Mohammad Ali Jinnah (c.1945), Indian politician known as the father of Pakistan

and the All-India Muslim League planned a general strike on August 16 to protest the rejection. This nearly resulted in war between Hindus and Muslims. In the massive riots that followed in the city of Calcutta, more than 4,000 people died, and 100,000 were left homeless. At this point the partition of India seemed inevitable, so the British reluctantly agreed to the two-nation concept.

At midnight on August 14, 1947, the newly independent nations of Pakistan and India joined the British Commonwealth. But the seeds of trouble had already been sown. The trouble soon would involve Benazir Bhutto and her family.





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W

HILE BENAZIR WAS GROWING UP IN A world of books and tutors, she was also growing up in a world of politics. Her father was an educated man with degrees from both the University of California and Oxford. Although he took over management of the family business, his main interest was his country. In 1957, when Benazir was just four years old, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto became the youngest member of the Pakistani delegation to the United Nations.

For the first several years of independence, Pakistan was ruled by General Muhammad Ayub Khan and his strong military. In 1962, Khan appointed Bhutto to the post of foreign minister. During Benazir's young years, her father was away from home much of the time. Since her mother generally traveled with Zulfikar, the household staff often took care of the Bhutto children.

In 1963, when Benazir was ten years old, she was sent to the Convent of Jesus and Mary boarding school in Murree along with Sunny, who was then seven. Life was different for the Bhutto girls during their two years at Murree. For one thing, they had to make their own beds and shine their own shoes. For another, the school had no central heating system, so it was quite cold during the winter months. Benazir and Sunny slept in dorms with about twenty other girls. Their father told the nuns that his daughters were to be treated like any other student. Even from a distance, he was never out of touch with their education. By letter or telephone, he had reports on their progress. When they

**Called the savage mountain, K2 is the world's second-highest peak, topped only by Mount Everest.**



were at home and he returned from a foreign trip, he asked for first-hand accounts of their studies.

Sometimes, when Benazir had time off from school, she traveled with her father. She remembered an incident in his private railroad car in late 1963. Bhutto woke his daughter to tell her that the young president of the United States, John F. Kennedy, had been assassinated. She also remembered meeting important government leaders who traveled to Pakistan, such as Chou En-lai, the premier of China, and U.S. vice president Hubert Humphrey. Benazir recalled that she mistook Humphrey for comedian Bob Hope, whom she had seen in a movie.

## A GOVERNMENT IN TURMOIL

Ink had hardly dried on the documents that created India and Pakistan when trouble started. When the British set the nations' boundaries, they divided Pakistan into two parts, separated by India. The reason for this unusual arrangement was that the heavily populated Muslim areas were on opposite ends of the subcontinent, 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) apart. So, the new country was divided from the start; the northeastern area was named East Pakistan, and the northwestern region was called West Pakistan.

The separation was a disaster for two reasons. To get from the eastern to the western parts of Pakistan meant crossing through a foreign country—India. In addition, the Bengali people who dominated the east region were much different in language and culture from those in the west, even though they were all Muslims. The Bengalis feared that the west, which held the real political power, would not protect their interests. They were even more convinced when Urdu was declared the only state language of Pakistan. Most of East Pakistan spoke Bengali. Almost immediately, the Bengalis began to press for





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## JAMMU AND KASHMIR: THE DISPUTED LAND

For a small region about the size of Utah, Jammu and Kashmir has long been the site of a large dispute. It covers some 85,000 square miles (220,000 sq km) of the subcontinent of India. Only about 5 percent of this mountainous land can be farmed. Even so, agriculture is its main source of income. However, its breathtaking mountain scenery attracts many tourists each year. The Indian-held part of the region in the south and east has most of the fertile land and most of the population, which numbers some 10 million people.

and Kashmir, Pakistan has 30 percent, and China has occupied 10 percent since 1962.)

In the midst of fierce fighting, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto delivered a fiery speech at the UN Security Council in New York City. He condemned India for its actions and declared,

**“ We will fight for a thousand years. ”**

But after about two weeks, both India and Pakistan yielded to strong political pressure from the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. The United Nations stepped in to stop the fighting. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Ayub Khan drew up a peace treaty calling for troops to withdraw to prewar boundaries. That move turned out to be very unpopular in Pakistan, and later, Bhutto himself criticized the final treaty. Because of his growing disagreement with Khan, Bhutto





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the young girl to adjust to being around so many strangers. For the first time in her life, she was among people who did not know that she was the daughter of a wealthy and prominent family in her country. In fact, many of the young women of Radcliffe at the time were unaware that there was such a nation as Pakistan. In her autobiography, Bhutto writes of adjusting to life in college:

**“I was attentive to her [Nusrat’s] directions for prayer, but not to her wardrobe [a warm woolen garment] which was impractical in the rain and snow and set me apart from the other students. I . . . re-emerged in jeans and sweatshirts from the Harvard Co-op. I let my hair grow long and straight and was flattered when my friends in Eliot Hall told me I looked like Joan Baez.**

**”**

Gradually, Benazir made friends, and her shyness subsided. There was so much going on, such as nationwide protests against the war in Vietnam. Benazir joined thousands of American college students who marched on Boston Common and in Washington, D.C., to protest the continuing conflict. At the Washington rally, she had her first experience with tear gas.

At Radcliffe, Benazir befriended John Kenneth Galbraith and his family. Galbraith was an economics professor at Harvard and had been ambassador to India. Benazir’s father had written to Galbraith and asked him to keep an eye on his daughter. She often





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# LEADING women

## Benazir Bhutto

**“ I am what the terrorists most fear...We must be out on the streets or the terrorists win. ”**

Women leaders of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have powerfully influenced the course of major political events and have spearheaded social change on an international scale. Some women were elected to public office and others were appointed to key positions in government. Some were leaders who served in the private sector. All were products of their times and made an indelible mark on those times.

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