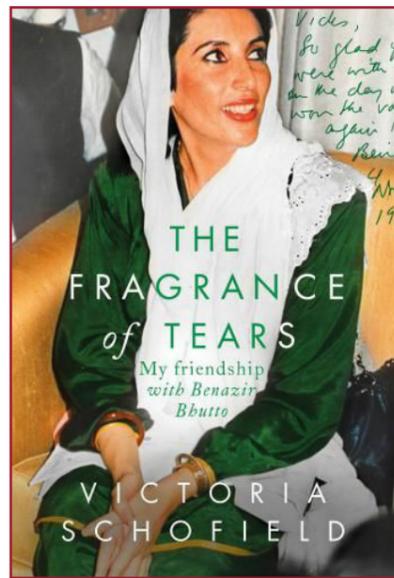


The Parliamentarian: Book Review

'The Fragrance of Tears: My Friendship with Benazir Bhutto' by Victoria Schofield

A new book about a former Prime Minister of Pakistan and her university friend from England brings a unique perspective about one of the Commonwealth's enduring historical figures.

Review by Rt Hon. Lord Lamont of Lerwick.



This book is about a friendship, a remarkably close one between the author and historian, Victoria Schofield, and Benazir Bhutto, later the Prime Minister of Pakistan. They first met at Oxford University where they were in the same college and both active in the then very male dominated world of the Oxford Union. But this friendship went beyond student politics and they remained extremely close for over 30 years.

Clearly Victoria was an exceptionally good friend to Benazir, going well beyond the cause of duty, giving much needed support during some horribly difficult events. In her 'salad days' at Oxford University, Victoria could never have imagined how she would be catapulted into the violent ups and downs of Benazir's life.

Politics everywhere is a rough trade. But in some parts of the world, as Benazir said, it is literally a matter of life and death.

In July 1977, Benazir's father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was removed from office as Prime Minister in a coup by his chief of army staff,

General Zia-ul-Haq, tried and sentenced to death in rigged proceedings. Benazir, who was away from Oxford at the time, found herself under house arrest as a 'danger to human life and property'. Anxious for her friend, Victoria set off for Pakistan intending on a short visit and found herself staying almost a year. She helped out wherever she could, even typing up notes smuggled out of jail by the former Prime Minister as he awaited his fate.

The hanging of Zulfikar Bhutto on 4 April 1979, when Benazir was only 25, was just one of several tragedies. One brother died in mysterious circumstances in the south of France, another was killed in a shoot-out with the police, her husband spent more than 10 years out of their 20 years of marriage in jail. She herself had several periods in jail, house arrest or exile before her being murdered in the prime of life.

Victoria makes clear that Benazir had not intended to go into politics and wanted a career in the Pakistani diplomatic service. But after her father's execution she felt she had an obligation to fight for his legacy.

And fight back she did, winning two elections to become Prime Minister of Pakistan. Throughout this period, the two remained in touch doing what friends always do, remembering birthdays, discussing children, sending presents, sometimes meeting, sometimes writing. Occasionally Victoria's work, as an expert on Kashmir, took her to South Asia or Benazir would come to the UK, as when her son, Bilawal, went to study at Oxford University and Victoria accompanied the proud parents on his first day.

What Victoria brings out is Benazir's astonishing grace under pressure. I myself knew Benazir Bhutto in her last years and was always struck by her concern for her friends. She told me about her negotiations with the military for her return to Pakistan. Again, I marvelled at the absence of

bitterness or any desire for revenge. "Democracy is the best revenge" she used to say. She was well aware of the danger of returning to Pakistan, but her worry was always for those accompanying her.

Benazir was a secular politician in a country where a conservative version of Islam played an increasing role. She believed that Islam and democracy were compatible, and she was determined to fight for democracy. However, her political career would never have been possible had not General Zia himself been mysteriously killed in a plane crash in 1988.

Benazir was also the first woman Prime Minister of a Muslim country. She confided to Victoria one of the reasons she married was because she realised if she did not marry, as a single woman, she would not be able to have a political career in a conservative male-dominated environment.

Historians will argue about Benazir's success or failure in office. She was of course very constrained in her freedom of action by Pakistan's deep state. But she admitted some shortcomings and was determined to do better. No one can doubt her courage. In 2007, after eight years in exile, she flew back from Dubai to Karachi to fight the forthcoming elections. Once more Victoria was by her side and witnessed the bomb attack on Benazir's

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bus, hours after landing in Pakistan. On this occasion Benazir escaped with her life but two months later, when Victoria was now back in England, the assassins finally succeeded at political rally near Rawalpindi.

Victoria helped organise the London Press Conference where Bilawal announced that he, aged 19, was now succeeding his mother as co-Chairman of the Pakistan People's Party. This was not what Benazir intended nor wanted, far from it, but party stalwarts wanted the name 'Bhutto'.

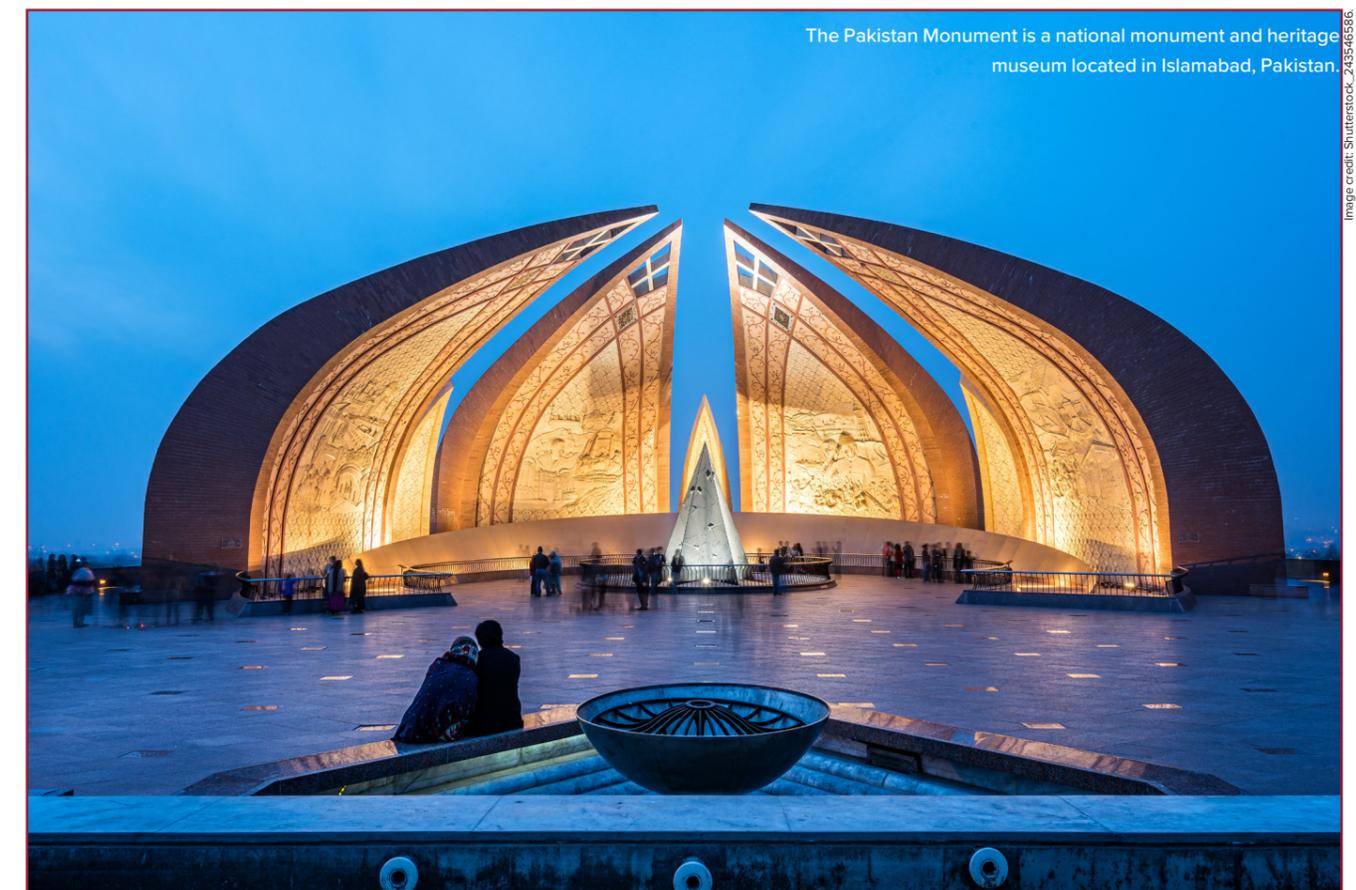
This book is not a biography. The author does not pretend to be detached nor to

make an assessment of Benazir's career. But what she has given us is a moving insight into a friendship and the family life of a politician facing challenges of a kind we in the West can scarcely imagine.

Book review by Rt Hon. Lord Lamont of Lerwick. Lord Lamont is a UK Parliamentarian who was elected to the House of Commons seven times between 1972 and 1997. He served in several UK Governments as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Chief Secretary to the Treasury as well as Ministerial roles in Defence, Trade and Industry. He was made a life peer in the House of Lords in 1998 and hold many official roles in public life.

About the Author: Victoria Schofield is a historian and commentator on international affairs, who has written for the Sunday Telegraph, The Times and the Independent and has published many books on a wide range of topics. She holds many memberships and affiliations and is the Chair of the Editorial Board of *The Round Table*, the Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs.

'The Fragrance of Tears: My Friendship with Benazir Bhutto' by Victoria Schofield (published by Apollo/Head of Zeus) is available at all major bookshops and online at via Amazon: <https://amzn.to/2Gy4Fbr>.



The Pakistan Monument is a national monument and heritage museum located in Islamabad, Pakistan.