Obama v/s Clinton

I read with increasing dismay Neeman Sobhan's recent piece on Hillary Clinton, entitled "BILLARY: Politics and the Woman" (February 15, 2008). For one thing, the major part of the article basically consisted of the reproduction of a petition by some "NY feminists" explaining why they were supporting Barack Obama as the Democrat presidential candidate, rather than Hillary Clinton, while the rest of the piece consisted of Ms. Sobhan's opinion (I will not call it analysis) of the matter.

Why somebody chooses to vote for one candidate over another is undoubtedly a question of personal choice, and usually based on very valid reasons. Personally, I feel that both Senator Obama and Senator Clinton have things to offer a fresh perspective in his case, and greater political experience in hers. And yes, I continue to be one of those who believe that it would be good for the US to have its first female or black president.

It is Ms. Sobhan's conclusion that women in power are likely to be no better than men who misuse their power, and therefore "the political field is hardly the proper arena for the 'Battle of the Sexes'" that I object to. By the same criterion one could argue that a black man who gains power might prove to be just as oppressive as the white man who came before him - Robert Mugabe for example! But I do not





believe that such a negative opinion must necessarily be true.

Similarly, I would like to point out to Ms. Sobhan that while feminist political analysis has never denied that women (like other oppressed minorities and let us remember than women are NOT a minority, however oppressed!) can be co-opted by wider systems that perpetuate bad behaviour, it also points out that such outsiders can only play a positive role if they are present in sufficient numbers. "Critical mass" necessary to bring about such changes is generally considered to be one-third.

And that the results can be positive when such enabling conditions are in place is amply proved by the performance of female politicians such as Gro Harlem Brundtland who went on to become the head of WHO after several years as the Prime Minister of Norway and Mary Robinson famous for her role as UN Commissioner for Human Rights after she had been President of Ireland, as well as many others.

So, given that the US political system has a long way to go before such an enabling environment is created, I would suggest that the election of Hillary Clinton (or for that matter, Barack Obama) could only be a very necessary but not sufficient first step towards bringing about such a change. It is certainly NOT the time to give up on women in politics!

Faustina Pereira

Fake Humanity

We are very shocked and ashamed after reading the report "Accident or Negligence" (January 28 2005). How can a baby of only 45 days survive in this country against so many odds? How unfortunate for her that in her country a luxurious diagnostic centre makes incorrect inferences and don't allow her to be transferred to another hospital until her dues are paid. How sad that even after her death her father couldn't hold a press conference. We get to see some very touching advertisements by these expensive hospitals but this incident has proved that the reality behind the beautiful advertisements is completely different. Hospitals and medical centres are now the most profitable businesses. A lot of people are falling victims to such negligence and baby Afia is unfortunately one of them.

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My Mother Tongue

Having read Salehin Ibrahim's Dhaka Diary story under the above title (February 15, 2008), I was dumbfounded for a while. He has shown boldness in admitting his unfortunate weakness in writing Bangla, a phenomenon experienced by many of the current young generation, mostly English medium students.

The real cause lies in the outlook of our parents towards Bangla. Whichever medium their children study in, they must ensure that their children have a good command over their mother tongue. Many parents don't even feel that they need to get their children introduced to Bangla Literature. It is awareness on their part that can play a crucial role in this regard.

Another important issue I want to pose is mixing of Bangla and English in day-to-day conversation. Although mixing of two languages is very usual in many situations especially while discussing the jargons of different subjects, unbridled, unnecessary and meaningless mixing should not be encouraged.

Various measures can be taken/imposed in order to solve these issues but in the end it's love for our own mother tongue that matters and can solve these problems once and for all.

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