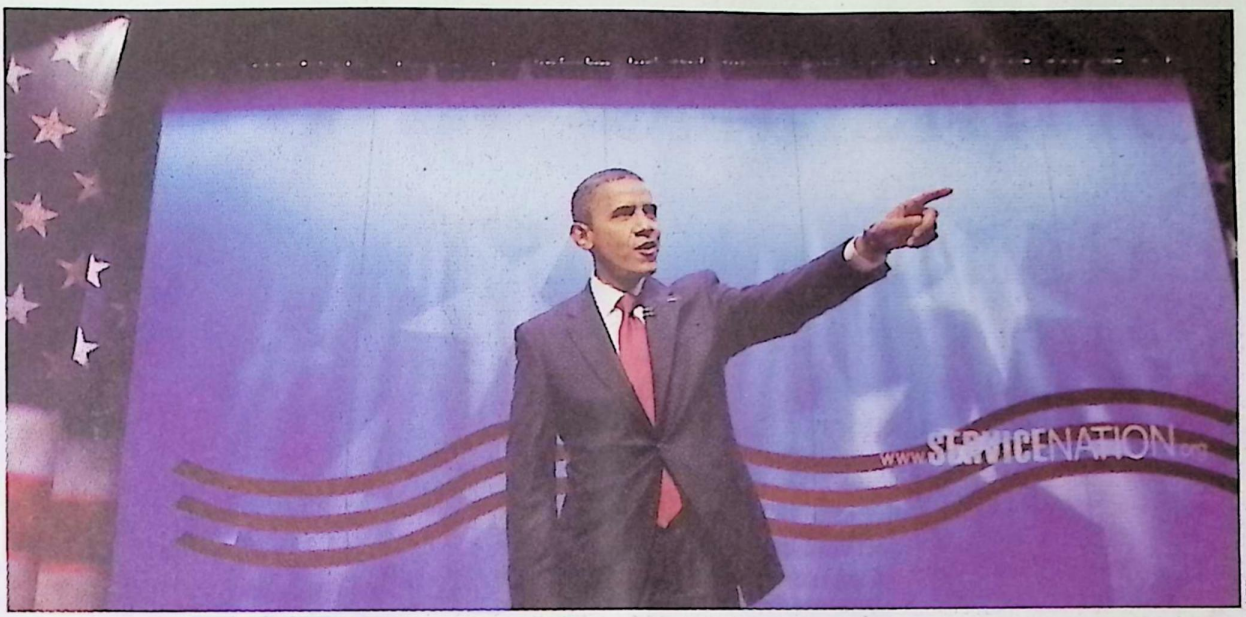


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segment of the population that is, for the first time, in a very good position to make an informed choice without much effort.

Where I hope we do make an effort is in passing on the information we receive, gather or come across to those who are not so fortunate. I hope we visit the Election Commission and gather the information for ourselves from a reliable, independent source. I hope each one of us thrives in the role of a point of dissemination.

We can start slow. Pass it on to our friends. Tell them to pass it on to theirs. Then we can concentrate on our own constituency. Eventually, we may go around different parts of the country carrying photocopies of the candidates' information for that constituency.

Travelling around Bangladesh in winter is an amazing experience anyway. Stop random strangers on the street and ask if they're from the constituency. If they are, and show a genuine interest in the election, hand them a copy of the candidates' information. If they say they can't read, talk to them. Be objective. Be nothing more than a voluntary source of information. It is not the type of thing one can do alone. A few like-minded individuals working in small groups would be ideal.

But as I write, I realise that it is not the type of thing that can be seen as work. Don't have numbers in your head. Even if its only your nearest cha-wala or a very impressionable young cab driver you manage to help make an informed choice, be proud. Do it all in the spirit of sharing.

I mentioned earlier how America had just witnessed a transformational election. It was truly transformational because a transformational figure, Barack Obama, was swept to victory by a transformational electorate, the Americans with eight years of George W. Bush behind them.

It's not as if they come along often anyway, but there is certainly no prospective transformational figure in the political scene in Bangladesh today. But an electorate taking its first steps towards informed decision-making would be a very significant juncture in the course of our politics.

Obama's victory went to show how a strong grass-roots movement allied with an astute sense of how to utilise technology can create an unstoppable force. It would not be quite applicable here yet, but the grassroots-technology combination is the future of political campaigns. To whatever extent I have proposed it here, it has obviously not been in favour of any political party, but altogether a rather more important cause.

It is inevitable that millions of voters will be voting without actually knowing anything about their candidate in our upcoming election. Many of them, if they knew, would not side with anyone involved in murder. But unknowingly, many will. Some of these votes can be saved if people who do know make sure they just talk to people over the course of this month.

Eventually, as we move from informing voters to actual informed voting, which may take many years still, this may hopefully produce the better class of politician that we seek. Politicians who know they haven't bought their votes – the people have chosen them. They haven't forced people to vote for them – the people put their faith in them. Politicians who know they must conduct themselves in an informed way, for they are the informed choice, of an informed people.

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