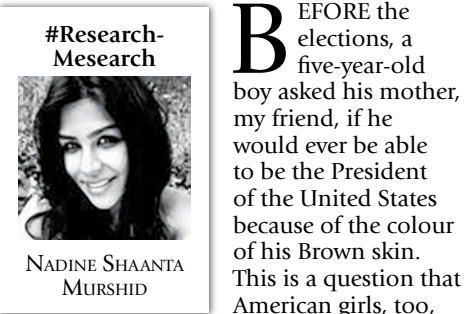


US ELECTIONS

# Representation matters but it is not enough



BEFORE the elections, a five-year-old boy asked his mother, my friend, if he would ever be able to be the President of the United States because of the colour of his Brown skin. This is a question that American girls, too, have been asking their parents forever.

That’s because they have never seen themselves represented at that level.

That is about to change as Kamala Harris is set to become the first woman, the first Black person, and the first Brown person to become the Vice President of the United States. The excitement, if the celebrations in my neighbourhood are anything to go by, is electric.

But it hasn’t come easy.

The intersectional biases that have been exposed in response to Kamala Harris’s VP nomination underscore the experience of Black and Brown women in America. Donald Trump called her a monster, twice, paying homage to the racist, dehumanising idea that Black people are dangerous. Radio host Rush Limbaugh accused her of “sleeping her way up,” as if women of colour cannot advance their careers in any other way. TV talk-show host Tucker Carlson termed her a “phony,” in an obvious attempt to question her citizenship, and then went so far as to accuse her of going after the presidency. Not surprisingly, Twitter mobs launched a “birther” attack popularised during the Obama regime.

With Kamala Harris’s rise we are reminded of the identity policing to which we are all subjected as women of colour. Forever “Others”, many Bangladeshi immigrants and their children have been coerced to “assimilate” and aspire to whiteness. Accordingly, many of our immigrant friends and family in the United States buy into the myth of meritocracy and hard work. They see the United States as a land of opportunity. Now, they will point at Kamala Harris and imagine that we too can rise to her level. That’s why representation matters.

But that is also where tokenism fails us.

When one Kamala Harris rises (or is allowed to rise), she becomes the face of “equality” when none exists—white men continue to dominate US politics even as record numbers of women candidates have participated this election season. Women represent less than third of both the House and Senate candidates, but 50 percent of the population. Meanwhile, Black and Brown women representatives are so few and far between that when there are a handful of them, they get their own name (the “Squad”, featuring Ilhan Omar, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ayanna Pressley, and Rashida Tlaib). This is what diversity without inclusion and equity looks like. It is meant to pacify all of us who believe in the value of racial justice.

And it works, for the most part. If Kamala Harris can do it, so can we, we believe, without considering that this is exactly why she’s been put there. When we fail to succeed in our endeavours—indeed, not all Brown immigrants from South Asia, indeed Bangladesh, are typically “successful”—we look at ourselves as the problem, not the structural barriers that are meant to keep us in our place, keep us busy, keep us apolitical, like good immigrants, with our heads down, forever trying to appease the master. And when we question it, we are directed to Kamala Harris and the members of the Squad. Their success is used against us. We are reminded that we are responsible for our failures. In this land of opportunity, we just didn’t work hard enough.

We must break these myths. And the only way to do so is by continuing the fight for racial justice, dismantling the systems that produce (racial) inequity. Certain gains have been made this election season that will directly benefit the working class, spurred, no doubt, by the social mobilisation and uprising this summer. For example, Florida, Portland, and Maine voted to eventually raise the minimum wage to USD 15 an hour, for rent control, and against the use of facial recognition software for surveillance purposes. All members of the Squad were re-elected. Pramila Jayapal, whose key platform is “Medicare for All”, and Ed Markey, a co-sponsor of the Green New Deal, were elected. Many referendums were passed to fund public schools through higher taxes, including in red states. These are all good news, and proof that organising works. But

these are not enough.

As the Biden-Harris administration gets ready for business (because what else is it under capitalism?), we must hold them to their election promises: paths to citizenship for those classified as undocumented, health care for all, a judicious response to Covid-19. These are all intersectional issues of race, gender, and immigration. Undocumented workers are used as cheap labour but compensated poorly, without benefits, while unaccompanied children remain anxious



Sen Kamala Harris has become the first woman of colour ever elected to the vice presidency in the United States. PHOTO: REUTERS

about the future of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). Meanwhile, migrant families torn apart are still waiting to be reunited. Black and Brown people continue to die from Covid-19 at disproportionately higher rates than their white counterparts. Black, indigenous and other people of colour are routinely denied proper healthcare—they are either ignored or treated with aggressive solutions—while the United States is the only OECD nation with a rising maternal death rate.

Structurally, we demand anti-racist practices and equitable policies across the board. Kamala Harris has already promised

to “root out systemic racism.” Our job is to hold the administration accountable. We demand the dismantling of racist institutions, such as the system of policing. We demand housing justice, economic justice, and climate justice. We demand reparations for Black Americans. We demand that Guantanamo Bay is demolished. We demand that all policies are reviewed through the lens of racial equity. Start by asking, does this policy harm members of different social identity groups? Can human bias at the provider level result in disproportionate outcomes for different groups? When policies are found to be inequitable, they must be revised or abolished as needed. A diverse body of experts must be hired to do this work.

Individually, we cannot be satisfied with crumbs—economic successes which divert attention from the entire loaf of bread: a just and equitable society.

An increasing number of young Bangladeshi Americans are working to that end. For example, Sahana Hanif is running to represent Brooklyn’s 39th District in the New York City council, while Bangladeshi Americans for Political Progress (BAPP)

has been working to “create a Bangladeshi-American voting bloc in New York to elect political candidates and advocate for legislation that protects and advances the well-being of working-class and low-income communities.” But we must also reckon with the idea that many of us align with conservative values. Abortion, for example, while not a political issue in Bangladesh, becomes one in the United States, while fiscal conservatism is appealing as it is “the smart thing to do.”

What this election season tells us is that the United States is a deeply divided country. We see that in our personal lives, too. Like most of my white friends, many of my Bangladeshi immigrant friends and I have relatives or even friends who vote with their bank accounts and stock options, voting against the interests of their communities. Even if they don’t believe in it (sometimes they do), they accept the anti-Black racism, misogyny, Islamophobia, anti-immigration sentiments, and other forms of bigotry for financial gain. Why does that matter? I have heard them ask. Somehow it is not clear to them that racist policymakers make racist, inequitable policies. But that is what capitalism does. It makes economic achievement the only acceptable form of success, one that has to be achieved at all costs.

We have to start “talking to our cousins,” as they say, remind them that immigrants have forever been used to drive a wedge between racial groups, between whites and Blacks, remind them of the role that the rhetoric around “good” and “bad” immigrants has had in dividing our own communities.

This election season we have all had to clean house. By next election, maybe we won’t need to. By then, we will no longer be pawns sacrificing ourselves for white supremacy’s reign.

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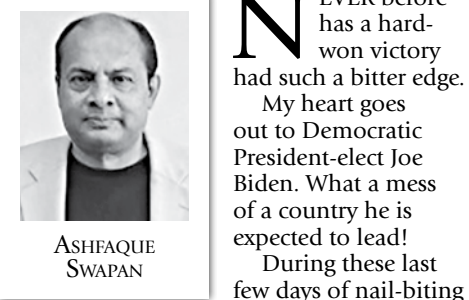
As I was walking back home from the celebrations on Saturday night, I spotted an elderly woman in a hijab, maybe of Bangladeshi descent, sitting on a folding chair in the middle of Bidwell Parkway. In her hand she held a gigantic rainbow flag as the crowd roared around her.

It made me think: we got this.

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# Joe Biden eyes arduous path after historic election



NEVER before has a hard-won victory had such a bitter edge.

My heart goes out to Democratic President-elect Joe Biden. What a mess of a country he is expected to lead!

During these last few days of nail-biting suspense as Biden reached the electoral vote target, President Donald Trump, to nobody’s surprise, did what he has done all his life whenever he is backed into a corner. He filed a flurry of frivolous lawsuits. He issued a ludicrous, legally untenable call to stop counting votes. He made an appalling claim of electoral fraud without a shred of evidence. It felt uncannily like post-election Bangladesh, and that is not a compliment.

Earlier, pollsters expected a blue wave that would sweep Democrats into the US Senate and add a few House seats. Well, the American people had a rude surprise in store for all of us. The Senate appears out of reach, and Democrats have lost seats in the House.

This is a terrifying turn of events.

After all is said and done, the most important takeaway from this election for me is the shame it has brought upon the US.

Yes, I’m looking at you, Trump voters. All 70 million of you.

This is not about partisan disagreement. It’s about facts, common sense, judgement and decency. Let’s take a quick look at the man you just voted for.

Trump has mismanaged one of the most serious public health crises of the US in a century. He has falsely dismissed the severity of the virus. He has pooh-poohed public

health measures, making the US the only nation in the world where wearing a mask is politically controversial.

The consequences have been devastating. With just four percent of the world’s population, the US has one-fourth of global Covid-19 deaths.

You, Trump voters, enabled it. The Associated Press reports: “US voters went to the polls starkly divided on how they see President Donald Trump’s response to the coronavirus pandemic. But in places where the virus is most rampant now, Trump enjoyed enormous support.”



Amid nationwide celebrations of the projected victory of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, President Donald Trump said the “election is far from over”, a statement that his supporters have echoed at rallies in several states. PHOTO: REUTERS/JIM URQUHART

within a whisker of winning the presidency.

There’s no way to sugarcoat this.

Trump’s loss will make him even more dangerous. He is now a wounded beast, dangerous and ferocious. Now that he has almost pulled off another implausible victory, he will continue to rule the roost in his party.

And what of his party? Trump has led to a precarious hollowing out of the Republican Party. It is now devoid of policy and has become a cult. It’s like the inmates have taken over the asylum.

But Trump did not begin this rot. It goes back a long, long way. For many decades, Republican leaders like former President Richard Nixon and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich promoted racially tinged, bomb-throwing politics powered by incendiary hatred. Now the chickens have come home to roost. Under Trump, the party has completed its transition to a party of white grievance. Its short-term benefits are indubitable, but this is a Faustian bargain. Just look at California. A state Republican Party that once gave us Republican presidents like Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon is today completely sidelined in the state because of its shrill anti-immigrant bias in the past.

Democrats, meanwhile, should draw inspiration from the positive developments and gird their loins for the tough battles ahead. Democrats last won Arizona in 1996 and Georgia in 1992. They won both states this time around.

Georgia! In the belly of the deep South, once a Confederate pro-slavery state, it used to be solidly Republican in past presidential campaigns.

Take a bow, Stacey Abrams. This African American Democratic gubernatorial candidate narrowly lost to Gov Brian Kemp in 2018 in a dubious election. She refused

to take her eye off the broader prize. She has been indefatigable in enrolling voters, putting Georgia in the Democratic column.

Democrats owe the White House to the sagacity of African Americans. To the party’s enormous credit, it gave them the final say in choosing its nominee.

Many loved the populist policies of Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders. I did, too. African Americans knew better. Their bitter experience made them sceptical. They knew all too well the broader public’s limited tolerance of progressive policies and its susceptibility to cries of “socialism.”

African Americans essentially brought Joe Biden back from oblivion. It was a masterstroke. The Trump campaign tried in vain to paint Biden as a left-wing extremist.

We mustn’t also forget the racist bias of the electoral college. Even with a massive margin of four million votes, Biden had to fight pitched battles in battleground states where white non-college voters had a lopsidedly big say.

Finally, it was African Americans who provided the final push for Biden by showing up to vote in massive numbers in Detroit and Milwaukee and Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. These cities are in the traditional Democratic states of Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, which had flipped in 2016 to Trump. Biden won all three states by extremely slim margins.

Take a bow, African Americans. In poignant scenes repeated all over the country, you showed up and waited for eight, ten, twelve hours to vote.

Thanks to you, come January, we will have President Joe Biden instead of President Donald Trump.

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Ashefaque Swapan is a contributing editor for *Siliconer*, a digital daily for South Asians in the United States.

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



NOVEMBER 9, 1989  
Opening of the Berlin Wall

Long a symbol of the Cold War, the Berlin Wall, erected in 1961 and eventually extending 28 miles (45 km) to divide the western and eastern sectors of Berlin, was opened by the East German government on this day in 1989.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Flavorless

6 Freshwater fish

10 Debussy composition

11 Watchful

13 Japanese dog

14 Wild party

15 Filming site

16 Tiny

18 Vining plant

19 Period of stress

22 Equip

23 Departed

24 Patriot Allen

27 Breath fresheners

28 Basketball's

O'Neal, for short

29 – de deux

30 Real pity

35 Steal from

36 Feedbag bit

37 Compete in the ring

38 Studio sign

40 Steer clear of

42 Water sources

43 Stair part

44 Look for

45 Refine ore

DOWN

1 Wild party

2 California cager

3 Friendliness

4 Tennis need

5 Enticed

6 Insertion symbol

7 In the style of

8 Exercise program

9 Forestall

12 Illicit meetings

17 Easter find

20 Baghdad native

21 “Wouldn’t that be great!”

24 Thirdparty account

25 Royal seats

26 Loft item

27 Augusta tourney

29 Links org.

31 From Oslo, to natives

32 Lower in esteem

33 Work the runway

34 Use, as force

39 – de France

40 Energy

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO [dsopinion@gmail.com](mailto:dsopinion@gmail.com).

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

R	I	C	O	L	A	P	S		
R	E	C	A	P	A	G	I	T	A
A	L	E	R	T	T	O	R	O	S
V	A	M	P	I	R	E	A	N	T
E	T	A	M	O	N	S	T	E	R
D	E	N	T	A	L	A	E	R	O
S	T	I	R	T	I	E	T	A	C
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N	E	T	S	T	E	S	S		

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

