**[Kamala fever](https://www.dawn.com/news/1589720/kamala-fever)**

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ON Nov 7, 2020, an ebullient Kamala Harris took the stage as the first woman and the first woman of colour to be elected vice president of the United States. Her history-making speech, delivered at the end of a long and trying week in America (and much of the world), will undoubtedly be quoted widely. Harris’s candidacy and her victory represent for Americans, and for others around the world, the power of possibility.

Here was a child of immigrant parents, a mother from South India and a father from Jamaica, who had surpassed countless obstacles and made history. Women wept in the audience and at home as Harris delivered her most memorable line, “I may be the first woman in this office, but I will not be the last.”

**Read**: [*Kamala Harris breaks barriers as America's next vice president*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1589130/kamala-harris-breaks-barriers-as-americas-next-vice-president)

In South Asia, where women’s successes are, as a matter of habit and routine, looked at with scepticism, there was less excitement. Some Indians immediately tried to claim her, not because she represents the potential of Indian women, but because she may deliver up choice tidbits of concessions to the Modi administration. Many Muslims took the bait and immediately began to critique and denounce Harris based on vague connections and support for Israel.

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Neither, of course, are correct; unlike many other Indian-American candidates (Tulsi Gabbard, for example), she was not close to the pro-Modi diaspora Indian community.

Kamala Harris, like Barack Obama before her, is an expression of the amalgam of cultures, languages and diaspora that is America today. Her mother, Shyamala, arrived in the United States at 19 to pursue a PhD. Soon after, she met and married Harris’s father, a Jamaican immigrant. When the marriage ended, Shyamala decided to raise her daughters on her own, and that is exactly what she did, working all the while as a cancer researcher.

The election of Harris reiterates that immigrants are not the despicable interloping outsiders Trump has made them out to be

In her daughters, she instilled a tireless work ethic, a tough-as-nails sense of fortitude and the belief that they could overcome any obstacles in their way. After graduating from high school, Harris went to Howard University, one of the historically black colleges and universities, before going on to law school. Her career since has been a series of firsts, from becoming the first woman of colour to serve as attorney general of the state of California, and then all the way to the vice presidency a mere four years after she was elected to the Senate for the very first time.

In Pakistan, girls are often told that they, too, can be anything, but this is far from the truth. When Pakistan did elect a female prime minister, she belonged to a class of landed elite so powerful that it rendered her gender an afterthought. In India, Priyanka Gandhi is undertaking the family business of politics along much the same lines.

Even in the United States, this very nearly happened. Unlike Kamala Harris, who is a truly self-made woman, Hillary Clinton rode on the coattails of her husband, using her access to the presidency to make a political career for herself. It would be correct to say that had it been Hillary Clinton rather than Kamala Harris who broke the glass ceiling and was elected, it would be a less compelling case for the power of a self-made woman.

Given the age of President-elect Joe Biden, it is entirely possible that he will choose not to run for a second term. Even before Harris was selected, there were plenty of rumors about how Biden’s vice presidential candidate would find himself or herself running for president. It is possible, given this view, that Kamala Harris’s speech was the beginning of her campaign for 2024. She is already the first female vice president; she may soon be president of the United States.

The positioning of immigrants within American political discourse has been tested in the past four years. Led by his xenophobic and Islamophobic adviser Stephen Miller, Trump has done everything to undermine the possibility of ‘becoming’ American. The push to realise a white nationalist agenda has meant that the definition of American has been theoretically and visibly reduced.

The election of Harris thus represents a retaking, a reiteration, that immigrants are not the despicable interloping outsiders Trump has made them out to be, but, as in the case of Harris’s own parents, are raising the future leaders of the nation.

It is hard not to want to wish for the existence of similar possibilities in Pakistan. Structural problems, a male-dominated and majoritarian society, the rapacious constrictions presented as essential by clerics all collude to make this almost impossible. Ideas of what a woman should be or must be revolve around clothing or piety or domesticity such that the women who do want to do something more, rise above and lead, are left to sob amid the wreckage of their dreams.

Pakistan must change. The achievements of other women in other countries reveal a bold new world where the primordial questions of skin colour or sect or whatever else are being transcended. Connectivity enables exchanges within an instant, and yet the Pakistani woman who may be a lawyer or doctor or scientist has to worry about whether her mother-in-law will be upset if she stays late at work in order to finish an assignment.

Soon, the second most powerful woman in the United States, arguably the world, will be a black and South Asian child of immigrants. The issues and enthusiasm around this event have the power to galvanise and inspire women all around the world. Pakistani women also need to think about transcending barriers and breaking ceilings. As Harris’s election reveals, over 200 years of history, of obstacles and exclusions all in the favour of white men, can be overcome if a woman and her country come together.

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