

Nov 04, 2016 by [Abhay K](#)

The Inspiring Obamas ^[1]

The visit of Barack and Michelle Obama has left India mesmerized, especially Indian youth. The President and the First Lady share a great chemistry, mutual admiration and warmth, rare qualities among the world's top political leaders, and could be an example for many here in India and across the world.

Michelle Obama not only made inspiring speeches in Mumbai but also danced into the hearts and minds of millions of young Indians, bringing them closer to the U.S. During her speeches she emphasized her modest background and strong values, the importance of education, and the audacity to dream big in life. She not only introduced President Obama to the students of St. Xavier College but encouraged them to ask tough questions and keep him on his toes.

President Obama began his pilgrimage with his words in the visitor book at the Mani Bhawan where Mahatma Gandhi spent 17 years of his life. He noted, *"Mahatma Gandhi is a hero not just to India but to the world,"* while the First Lady wrote, *"This visit will be one that I will always treasure. The life and teachings of Gandhi must be shared with our children around the world."* Later when they visited the Rajghat to pay tribute to the Mahatma, President Obama again paid tribute with *"...I always remember the great soul who changed the world with his message of peace, tolerance, of love...his light continues to inspire the world."* The climax of his great tribute to Gandhi came during his address to the joint session of the Indian parliament when he said, *"And I am mindful that I might not be standing before you today, as President of the United States, had it not been for Gandhi and the message he shared with America and the world."*

The Obamas rekindled the spirit of Gandhi, his message of peace, tolerance and love at a time in history when the world is gripped by waves of terrorism, extremism, fundamentalism, and the 'Clash of Civilizations' seems imminent; a time when our generation has started to forget the ideals, methods and talisman of Mahatma Gandhi.

President Obama began his historic speech at the joint session of the Parliament with these words: *"I bring the greetings and friendship of the world's oldest democracy - the United States of America, including **nearly three million proud and patriotic Indian-Americans,**"* continued with *'Bahoot Dhanyavad,'* and ended with *'Jai Hind'*. These words reflect his great sensitivity to India's language, culture and traditions. The speech was unique and historic in its liberal references to the great sons of India: Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore and Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. Some famous lines quoted include *"Where the mind is without fear..."* from Tagore's Gitanjali, and *"Ayam nijah paro veti, gananaa laghu- chetsaam, udaara- charitaanam to vasudhaiva kutumbakam"* from the **Panchatantra**, etched on the entrance to the Central Hall of the Parliament.

His reference to the invention of zero by the Indians deeply touched the heart of the entire country: *"It's no exaggeration to say that our Information Age is rooted in Indian innovations - including the number zero."* His praise for India's recent achievements in science and

technology (“from the supercomputers you build to the Indian flag that you put on the moon”) received thunderous applause from the Parliament.

While we have doubts sometimes regarding the efficacy of decision-making in our democracy, President Obama expressed unwavering faith in the ability of our democratic system to deliver, saying, *“India has succeeded, not in spite of democracy; India has succeeded because of democracy.”* He termed our democratic electoral exercise a planetary wonder: *“When Indians vote, the whole world watches...700 million voters. There’s nothing like it on the planet,”* and expressed solidarity with us in the new century: *“As you carry on with the hard work ahead, I want every Indian citizen to know: The United States of America will not simply be cheering you on from the sidelines. We will be right there with you, shoulder to shoulder. Because we believe in the promise of India. We believe that the future is what we make it.”*

President Obama came across as a true global leader, not only with great oratory skills but one who promises *‘a global partnership to meet global challenges’* between our two countries.

Obama’s greatest Diwali present to the youth of India was inspiration and motivation to believe in the promise of India, the promise of standing right there with us *‘shoulder to shoulder’* and bringing the message of Mahatma Gandhi closer to our hearts by exhorting more young Indians to join the public service. The Obamas stayed with us only for three days but have left us with three questions to ponder over:

What do you want India to look like in 20 years?

What kind of partnership do you want in 20 years from now?

How do you want to make the world a better place?

Let’s find our own answers, and these will shape the twenty-first century.
