



A Vision of Leadership in an Emerging World Culture

Preface: On November 8th, 2010, United States President Barack Obama concluded his state visit to India with a speech to the Indian Parliament. In his speech he described the contributions of Indian civilization to world culture and offered a vision of leadership that the Indian and United States governments could join in for the sake of universal values and human welfare. Below are some excerpts from that speech.

I am not the first American president to visit India. Nor will I be the last. But I am proud to visit India so early in my presidency. It is no coincidence that India is my first stop on a visit to Asia, or that this has been my longest visit to another country since becoming President.

For in Asia and around the world, India is not simply emerging; India has already emerged. It is my firm belief that the relationship between the United States and India - bound by our shared interests and values - will be one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century. This is the partnership I have come here to build. This is the vision that our nations can realize together.

My confidence in our shared future is grounded in my respect for India's treasured past - a civilization that has been shaping the world for thousands of years. Indians unlocked the intricacies of the human body and the vastness of our universe. It is no exaggeration to say that our information age is rooted in Indian innovations - including the number zero.

India not only opened our minds, she expanded our moral imagination: with religious texts that still summon the faithful to lives of dignity and discipline, with poets who imagined a future "where the mind is without fear and the head is held high" and with a man whose message of love and justice endures - the Father of your Nation, Mahatma Gandhi.

With the sturdy foundation of an ancient civilization of science and innovation and a fundamental faith in human progress, you have built [a nation] ever since that stroke of midnight when the tricolor was raised over a free and independent India. And despite the skeptics who said that this country was simply too poor, too vast, too diverse to succeed, you surmounted overwhelming odds and became a model to the world.

Instead of slipping into starvation, you launched a Green Revolution that fed millions. Instead of becoming dependent on commodities and exports, you invested in science and technology and in your greatest resource - the Indian people. The world sees the results, from the supercomputers you build to the Indian flag that you put on the moon. Instead of resisting the global economy, you became one of its engines - reforming the licensing raj and unleashing an economic marvel that has lifted tens of millions from poverty and created one of the world's largest middle classes.

Instead of succumbing to division, you have shown that the strength of India - the very idea of India - is its embrace of all colors, castes and creeds. It's the diversity represented in this chamber today. It's the richness of faiths celebrated by a visitor to my hometown of Chicago more than a century ago - the renowned Swami Vivekananda. He said that: "holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character."

Instead of being lured by the false notion that progress must come at the expense of freedom, you built the institutions upon which true democracy depends - free and fair elections, which enable citizens to choose their own leaders without recourse to arms; an independent judiciary and the rule of law, which allows people to address their grievances; and a thriving free press and vibrant civil society which allows every voice to be heard. This year, as India marks 60 years with a strong and democratic constitution, the lesson is clear. India has succeeded, not in spite of democracy; India has succeeded because of democracy.

As the world's two largest democracies, we must also never forget that the price of our own freedom is standing up for the freedom of others. Indians know this, for it is the story of your nation. Before he ever began his struggle for Indian independence, Gandhi stood up for the rights of Indians in South Africa. Just as others, including the United States, supported Indian independence, India championed the self-determination of peoples from Africa to Asia as they too broke free from colonialism. . . . you've been a leader in supporting democratic development and civil society groups around the world. This, too, is part of India's greatness.

Every country will follow its own path. No one nation has a monopoly on wisdom, and no nation should ever try to impose its values on another. But when peaceful democratic movements are suppressed-as in Burma-then the democracies of the world cannot remain silent. For it is unacceptable to gun down peaceful protestors and incarcerate political prisoners decade after decade. It is unacceptable to hold the aspirations of an entire people hostage to the greed and paranoia of a bankrupt regime. It is unacceptable to steal an election.

Faced with such gross violations of human rights, it is the responsibility of the international community-especially leaders like the United States and India-to condemn it. . . . We're going to show that democracy, more than any other form of government, delivers for the common man-and woman. Speaking up for those who cannot do so for themselves is not interfering in the affairs of other countries. It's not violating the rights of sovereign nations. It's staying true to our democratic principles. It's giving meaning to the human rights that we say are universal, and it sustains the progress that in Asia and around the world has helped turn dictatorships into democracies and ultimately increased our security in the world.

Promoting shared prosperity, preserving peace and security, strengthening democratic governance and human rights. These are the responsibilities of leadership. And, as global partners, this is the leadership that the United States and India can offer in the 21st century. Ultimately, however, this cannot be a relationship only between presidents and prime ministers, or in the halls of this parliament. Ultimately, this must be a partnership between our peoples. So I want to conclude by speaking directly to the people of India watching today.

In your lives, you have overcome odds that might have overwhelmed a lesser country. In just decades, you have achieved progress and development that took other nations centuries. And now you are assuming your rightful place as a leader among nations. Your parents and grandparents imagined this. Your children and grandchildren will look back on this. But only you-this generation of Indians-can seize the possibility of this moment.

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. And we believe that the future is what we make it.

We believe that no matter who you are or where you come from, every person can fulfill their God-given potential, just as a Dalit like Dr. Ambedkar could lift himself up and pen the words of the Constitution that protects the rights of all Indians.

We believe that no matter where you live - whether a village in Punjab or the bylanes of Chandni Chowka, an old section of Kolkata or a new high-rise in Bangalore - every person deserves the same chance to live in security and dignity, to get an education, to find work, and to give their children a better future.

We believe that when countries and cultures put aside old habits and attitudes that keep people apart, when we recognize our common humanity, then we can begin to fulfill the aspirations we share. It's a simple lesson contained in that collection of stories which has guided Indians for centuries - the *Panchtantra*. It's the spirit of the inscription seen by all who enter this great hall: "That one is mine and the other a stranger is the concept of little minds. But to the large-hearted, the world itself is their family."

This is the story of India; it's the story of America - that despite their differences, people can see themselves in one another, and work together and succeed together as one proud nation. And it can be the spirit of the partnership between our nations-that even as we honor the histories which in different times kept us apart, even as we preserve what makes us unique in a globalized world, we can recognize how much we can achieve together.

Barak Obama, President of the United States
November 2010