



SAME TUNES, THOUGH... US President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama watch a cultural event in Mumbai. — AFP

Is simply heartwarming enough?

INDIA

It will not be easy for India to reconcile its core values of human rights and democracy with its real politick

Dr Bhaskar Balakrishnan



President Obama's three day India visit, warmed Indian hearts and won their minds by its many firsts. His longest state visit, tributes to Indian democracy and struggle for development, Mahatma Gandhi's ideas firing the quest for civil rights in the USA including even Obama's own meteoric political rise – there was no shortage of tributes couched in vibrant words and uttered in Obama's superb oratory. His address to the Parliament was with full knowledge of its impact on over one million Indians, including nearly 3 million Indian Americans in the US.

Overcoming the gloomy shadows of electoral reverses in the mid-term elections, Obama sought to project his visit as one that would create jobs for the struggling US economy. This may have been more symbolic than real, with some 50,000 jobs hardly

matter in the context of US overall unemployment. But Obama knows how important symbols can be, and the economic benefits of his visit to Asia are being projected to defuse criticism of his administration. Visits to a large complex democracy like India from an equally large and complex democracy like the US are never easy, but Obama and his wife Michelle charmed India and handled the challenges superbly.

Indians were disappointed by his position on outsourcing, which is a natural consequence of globalisation and global connectivity. Such a transformation has already taken place in production of goods with production being globally dispersed to achieve maximum benefits. Similarly outsourcing is an inevitable result of companies seeking to optimise services production and delivery. India has rightly held to the position that one cannot have market economics and globalisation but exclude outsourcing.

Some \$10 billion in business deals were announced with a mammoth 250 strong business delegation in tow. India's Space organisation and some other entities were removed from the US technology sanctions list leaving only the Atomic Energy establishment on the list. Obstacles to civil nuclear commerce remain, though the US would get equal treatment in this sector. The US agreed to work to include India in the NSG a club that maintains nuclear export restrictions — a membership that will help India block nuclear technology transfers to Pakistan

but also require it to be more active on Iran.

The sour notes, if any, at Mumbai were soon eclipsed by the positive elements in the Delhi part of the visit. The clear endorsement of India's claim to a permanent seat in a reformed UN Security Council and the statements on Pakistan, were music to Indian ears. Never mind that India was gently chastised for being soft on Myanmar's regime and Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Obama gently reminded India that membership of the Security Council meant certain responsibilities, not the least doing something to deal with gross violators of human rights. It will not be easy for India to reconcile its core values of human rights and democracy with its real-politick when it comes to regimes that brutally oppress peaceful struggles for basic human rights such as in Myanmar. India does not have leaders of the stature of Jawaharlal Nehru any more and,

therefore, civil society will have to lead this effort.

India was praised as a beacon of democracy in the developing world, having managed to remain true to this ideal despite immense problems. The subtext of this is the expectation and hope that India's democratic system will prove to be a more durable, sustainable, and responsible model of human development than China's authoritarian and rapacious path, including coddling of dictators, the so-called "Beijing consensus", of late apparently becoming more popular in many parts of the world.

Coming on the heels of the past few weeks when many Indians felt disgusted with the tolerance of large scale corruption and short sighted antics of political leaders, Obama's words came as a veritable balm on sore wounds. Obama's fulsome tributes to Gandhi must have pricked the conscience of many Indian leaders who seem to pay only lip service to his values and ideals. His resounding statement on the common values and ideals shared by both countries should stimulate many in India to introspect and think how much more could have been achieved if more Indians had stood firmly with the values and ideals of the leaders of its freedom struggle. Even now it is not too late to revitalise India's commitment to its core values and ideals, before the rot in its body politic becomes irreversible.

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Obama's address to parliament touched the hearts of more than a billion Indians, and many more who have made the US their second home