

## **Obama's question-answer session at St Xavier College, Mumbai**

**Obama:** I normally don't like speaking after Michelle because she is such a good speaker.

When I travel, we always try to set up meeting with the next generation. We want to find out what your fears and plans are.

We have both looked forward to this visit for quite some time. I have an extraordinary amount of respect for the rich, diverse civilization here. I have drawn inspiration from your freedom movement, marveled at economy and democracy here. I have enjoyed wonderful friendship with your Prime Minister.

The partnership between India and US has limitless potential to improve American, Indian lives. It has the potential to be the anchor of security for Asia and the world. US-India relationship will be indispensable. The world's two largest democracies share common values of tolerance.

In meeting with survivors, I saw first hand the resilience of Indians. We also share struggles for justice and inequality. I was humbled to visit Mani Bhavan.

At yesterday's summit, I discussed potential for greater economic cooperation, trade, investment and jobs. Americans and Indians draw inspiration from tradition and faith.

Tomorrow, I'll meet with PM, many other leaders. It is a privilege to address the Indian Parliament. There will be specific announcements on terror, environment change and development of democracy around the globe.

India is not just a rising power, I believe that India has already risen, taking its rightful position in Asia, world. It is good for the world and for the US. India's future won't be determined only by CEOs.

You are future leaders, future educators, entrepreneurs and future electors. More than half of all Indians are under 30 years old. It is a great statistic. Every single child holds promise of greatness.

The living standards in India have improved, democracy has faced terror, assassinations. The future of this country is now in your hands.

What do you want India to look like in 20 years? No one can answer this but you. You can always improve the democracy. You can always forge a more perfect union. Grow even more, this enormous middle class that can fuel growth. Together with US, you can seize opportunities offered. Clean energy technology, frontiers in outer space, prospect of peace beyond our borders.

What kind of partnership do you want in 20 years from now? A farmer showed me how he can get crop information and increase productivity. Many of these are result of collaborations between India and the United States. Tomorrow, I will discuss with

(your) Prime Minister how we can advance this cooperation. India can become a model for countries that are striving for food security. While innovations are Indian, lessons can be learned (from) around the world.

We must remember that in some places, future of democracy is much in question. Elections are being held right now in Burma which will be anything but free and fair, according to reports. We must speak out for universal human rights.

How do you want to make the world a better place? This is your century to shape. There are powerful examples before you.

For even within this time of progress, there is repression, extremism, war, poverty. You as a citizen have opportunity to make the world a better place. Lives that you lead will determine if others will get the same opportunity.

Hope you keep that light burning within you.

**Question:** What is your opinion on jihadis?

**Obama:** The phrase jihad has a lot of meanings within Islam and is subject to different interpretations. Islam is one of the world's great religions. More than a billion people who practise Islam, the overwhelming majority view their obligations to their religion as ones that reaffirm peace, fairness, tolerance. All of us recognize that this great religion in the hands of a few extremists has been distorted to violence, which is never justified. One of the challenges we face is how do we isolate those who have these distorted notions of religious war. We can all treat each other with respect and mutual dignity. We should try to live up to universal principles and ideals that Gandhi so fought for. We live in nations of diverse religious beliefs. It's a major challenge in India and around the world. Young people can make a huge impact in reaffirming that you can be a strong observer of your faith, without putting somebody else down or visiting violence on somebody else. I think a lot of these ideas are formed very early and how you respond to each other is going to be as important as any speech that a president makes in encouraging the kind of religious tolerance that is so important, in a world that is getting smaller and smaller. More and more people of different background and different territories and ethnicities are interacting and learning from each other. All of us have to fundamentally reject the notion that violence is the way to mediate our differences.

**Question:** In today's world there is more of materialistic frame of thought among the new generation. What do you believe is a possible methodology that your government or government's around the world can adopt, to basically incorporate the core human values of selflessness, brotherhood over the materialistic frame of thought that people work by today?

**Obama:** It is a terrific question and I am glad you are asking it. India is making enormous progress because like US it has this incredible entrepreneurial spirit. We should not underestimate how liberating economic growth can be for a country. In the United States, I used to work with a lot of churches before I went to law school. One of the common phrases among pastors was that it's hard to preach to an empty

stomach. If people have severe, immediate material needs: shelter, food, clothing then that is their focus. Economic growth and development that is self sustaining can liberate people. Expand their horizons for the good. Don't want anyone to be dismissive of a healthy materialism. In a country like India, there are a lot of people still trapped in poverty. You should be working to lift folks out of poverty and companies and businesses have a huge role in making that happen. Having said that, if all you're thinking about is material wealth, then that shows a poverty of ambition. When I was visiting Gandhi's room, here in Mumbai, the only objects were a map, a spinning wheel, some sandals, few papers and this is a man who changed history probably like no one else in the 20th century. He had nothing except an indomitable spirit. So everyone has a role to play. So those of you who are going into business, I think it's wonderful that you are going into business and you should pursue it with all your focus and energy. Those of you inclined to teach or go into public service you should also feel encouraged that you are playing just as critical a role and whatever occupation you choose, giving back to the community and making sure you're reaching back to help people, lift up people who may have been left behind is a solemn obligation. And by the way it's actually good for you. It's good for your spirit. Good for your own moral development. It will make you a happier person, knowing that you have given back or contributed something. I think another thing that India and United States share is a healthy skepticism about public service, particularly electoral politics.

Some of it is for good reason, some are of view that government can't do anything right. Here in India one of the biggest impediments to development is the fact that, in some cases, the private sector is moving much faster than the public sector. I would just suggest and hope that some of you will get involved in public service. You might not see progress as quickly but India is going to need you not just as business leaders but as leaders who will make government more responsible. That's important because otherwise you'll get an imbalance.

**Question:** You've mentioned Gandhi a lot. How do you implement his values in your day to day life and how do you expect people in US to apply his values?

**Obama:** He, like Dr King (and) Lincoln, is someone I'm constantly studying. I'm often frustrated by how far I fall short of their example. I do think that at my best what I'm trying to do is to apply principles that fundamentally come down to all something shared in all the world's religions, that is to see yourself in other people. To understand inherent worth and dignity of every individual regardless of station, rank or wealth. And absolutely cherish and value that individual.

But I tend to judge any particular policy based on is this advancing that spirit, it's helping individuals realize their potential. That all children are getting education so that I'm not just worried about my children. I'm thinking first and foremost about my responsibilities towards US. But can't ignore hardships in other countries. That more than anything is what I carry with me on a daily basis.

**Question:** You used the word 'change' a lot. After your mid-term elections, seems people have asked for change. How will that affect young India?

**Obama:** US has gone through toughest phase since 1930s. India weathered it better than many countries. Most of my work with PM was focused on making sure that world financial system didn't collapse. Although we stabilized the economy, unemployment in US is very high now. People are frustrated. We're not making progress quickly enough. When people are not happy, it is their right and duty to express this. That's a good thing. My obligation is to make sure that I stick to the principles and ideas that will move America forward because I profoundly believe, we have to invest in education. Invest in a strong infrastructure. It also requires me to make some mid course adjustments and corrections. It will be done through discussions with Republicans. There will be agreements and disagreements. I think that US has enormous fondness for India. I believe India will be critical partner with US in the 21st century. It was true when Bush was president, it was true when Clinton was president. Fundamental belief will not be altered in significant way. At a time when we're still recovering from this crisis, how do we respond to challenges of globalization. For most of my lifetime, US have had such dominant economic power, such a large market. Now because of incredible rise of China, India and Brazil, US still remains the largest economy but there's competition out there. That's potentially healthy. This will keep US on its toes. I'm positive we can compete. We've got the most dynamic entrepreneurial culture. But it means we'll have to compete. I think there will be a tug of war within US between those who see it as a threat and those who welcome an open world. I believe that US will grow in trading with Asia. We want access to your markets. If you have good products to sell us, it'll be win-win situation. It will create jobs in US. We will have to negotiate. If India was protecting certain sectors of its economy, it didn't have an effect on us. Now things have changed. Now it's not unfair for US to say that if our economy is open to everybody, countries have to open up markets for us. If we can have those kinds of conversations, then we'll be fine. There has to be reciprocity with our trading partners.

**Question:** Why is Pakistan so important an ally to America that so far America has never called it a terrorist state?

**Obama:** Pakistan is an enormous country, strategically important for US and the world. People have enormous potential. Also right now a country that within it have some extremist elements. That's not unique to Pakistan but it does exist. Pakistan government is very much aware of that. What we have tried to do over the past year is to engage aggressively with Pakistan government that we want nothing more than a stable, prosperous Pakistan. That we will work with Pakistan to eradicate extremism, that we consider a cancer that can engulf the country. They now understand the threats within their borders. Progress is not as quick as we'd like. North-West territories are very entrenched, very difficult to aim. (The) Pakistan Army has shifted focus on those areas. They have to adapt to these new dangers. They are not trained to do this. There is a growing recognition of the problem. Our feeling has been to be honest and forthright.

Pakistan was born out of much tragedy and violence. May be surprising to some of you, but I think India has the biggest stake in the success of Pakistan. If Pakistan is unstable, that's bad for India. If it's good and prosperous, that's good. India is on the move. My hope is over time, trust develops between the two countries. That dialogue

begins over less controversial issues, before moving on to more controversial issues. I hope both can live side-by-side in peace. It will not happen tomorrow but I hope you achieve that goal. We can't impose that on India and Pakistan. Eventually India and Pakistan have to work towards it.

**Question:** My question relates to your Afghan policy, in light of your recent statements that troop withdrawal would start in 2011. There have been recent developments that would indicate that US has been in talks with Taliban so as to strike out a stable government in Afghanistan. Does it point to the inability of the US to take a military control of the tumultuous southern region?

**Obama:** I have said that in summer of next year, we will begin drawing down troop levels. But not withdraw all troops. I don't want to be in the same situation in seven years from now. If you think about it, it's been 7 months since elections in Iraq. Violence levels are lower. It is possible to train effective indigenous forces so they can provide their own security and politics can resolve differences. Afghanistan is more complex. The civil services are very underdeveloped. Pace at which we're going now is going to be determined by military issues and politics. Is it possible for a sizable portion of Pashtu population in Afghanistan to feel that their ethnicity, culture, numerical position in country is adequately represented? We've said to Karzai that if former Taliban or current Taliban say they'll disassociate from violence, Al-Qaeda, and women are treated with rights just the same as men, then we will support their position. There are elements affiliated with organizations that are irreconcilable. They will be there. There will need to be a military response similar to the kind we saw in Mumbai or in New York after 9/11. I do think that there are lessons that India has to show to Afghanistan, countries in Sub Saharan Africa. If we can increase farmers' yield by 20-25 per cent and they can cut out the middleman that goes a long way in encouraging them to affiliate with modern world. Pakistan has to be a partner in this progress. All countries in the region have to contribute. US can't do this alone.

Around the world, your generation is poised to solve some of my generation's mistakes and my parents' generation's mistakes. You'll make your own mistakes. You'll have you own views on how nations police each other, where there is genocide, ethnic cleansing.