

Mann ki Baat: Obama and Modi talk of humble roots, focus on social issues

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By [Firstpost](#)

New Delhi: A special radio programme featuring US President Barack Obama and Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) aired on Tuesday focusing largely on social issues that plague the world and India specifically.

The 35-minute special broadcast of '*Mann Ki Baat*', which marked the bonhomie between Modi and Obama, touched on issues such as female infanticide and public health care.

The programme, recorded on Monday, was conducted by Modi, who read out the questions received from listeners across the country and both the leaders answered.

Modi said most of the questions posed by people were "connected to politics, foreign, and economic policy. However, some questions 'touched the heart'. And I believe if we touch those questions today, we shall be able to reach out to the common man in different parts of the country."

Obama, began his address with a '*namaste*' and spoke about his discussions with Modi and how his country wants to be a partner in India's endeavour to lift millions of people from poverty. He expressed his desire to partner with India in the development of infrastructure as well as in providing facilities of clean energy.



People listening to 'mann ki baat' of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Barack Obama in Lucknow on Tuesday. PTI

Obama was asked whether he, after the end of his Presidency, will work in the field of health care, particularly addressing the problems of diabetes and obesity, like Bill Gates and his wife Melinda who run the Gates Foundation. To this, the US President said he was looking forward to partnering with organisations, and the government as well as non-governmental organisations in India, around broader public health issues including obesity. Adding, that his wife Michelle, is already working on the cause.

Speaking about obesity, he said, "This is an issue that we would like to work on internationally, including here in India. And it is a part of a broader set of issues around global health that we need to address."

He said he had discussed with Modi on how a better job can be done in dealing with pandemics and making sure that there are good alert systems. If a disease like Ebola, or a deadly flu virus, or Polio appears, it is detected quickly and then treated quickly without spreading.

"The public health infrastructure around the world needs to be improved," the US President said and praised Modi for "doing a great job by focusing on these issues here in India".

He said India has a lot to teach many other countries who may not be advancing as rapidly in improving public health. "...we think that there is a lot of progress to be made here and I am very excited about the possibilities of considering this work even after I leave office."

To a question on female infanticide, Modi said there is a lot of concern because of the sex ratio in India as for every 1000 boys, the number of girls is much less.

"The main reason for this is a defect in our attitudes towards boys and girls," he said.

In this respect, the Prime Minister said, the life of the US President is an inspiration, considering the "way he has brought up his two daughters, the way he is proud of his two daughters."

He underlined that "to save the girl child and to educate the girl child is our social duty, cultural duty, and humanitarian responsibility. We should honour it."

Noting that they come from very humble backgrounds, both Obama and Modi said they had never imagined that they would occupy the top positions in their respective countries.

They said this in response to a question to Modi about an old photograph clicked outside the White House and whether he had ever thought that one day he would go inside to meet the President.

"At that time, I had never thought that sometime in my life, I would get a chance to visit the White House," said Modi who met Obama there in Washington last September.

Obama added: "The same is true for me. When I first went to the White House, I stood outside that same fence, and looked in, and I certainly did not imagine that I would ever be visiting there, much less living there."

In this context, he said, "I think both of us have been blessed with an extraordinary opportunity, coming from relatively humble beginnings. And when I think about what's best in America and what's best in India, the notion that a tea seller or somebody who's born to a single mother like me, could end up leading our countries, is an extraordinary example of the opportunities that exist within our countries."

He said there are millions of children out there who have the same potential but may not have the same education, may not be getting exposed to opportunities in the same way.

"So a part of our job, a part of a government's job is that young people who have talent, and who have drive and are willing to work for, are able to succeed.

"And that's why we are emphasizing school and higher education. Making sure that children are healthy and making sure those opportunities are available to children of all backgrounds, girls and boys, people of all religious faiths and of all races in the United States. Because you never know who might be the next Prime Minister of India, or who might be the next President of United States. They might not always look the part right off the bat. And they might just surprise you if you give them the chance."

Talking about technology, Obama said governments should reach out to people in an inclusive, open and a transparent way and engage in a dialogue with citizens about the direction of their country.

"And one of the great things about India and the United States is that we are both open societies. And we have confidence and faith that when citizens have information, and there is a vigorous debate, that over time even though sometimes democracy is frustrating, the best decisions and the most stable societies emerge and the most prosperous societies emerge," he said.

Describing technology as a facilitator, he said, "I have much greater faith in India and the United States, countries that are open information societies, in being able to succeed and thrive in this New Information Age; than closed societies that try to control the information that citizens receive.

"Because ultimately that's no longer possible. Information will flow inevitably, one way or the other, and we want to make sure we are fostering a healthy debate and a good conversation between all peoples."

Modi talked about youth power and said, "I believe, looking at the strength and reach of today's youth, I would say, Youth, Unite the world. I believe they have the strength and they can do it."

When asked "what inspires you and makes you smile at the end of a bad day at work as leaders of two major economies?" Obama said, "...the only problems that come to my desk are the ones

that nobody else solves... So there are days when it's tough and frustrating. And that's true in Foreign Affairs. That is true in Domestic Affairs. But I tell you what inspires me ... almost every day I meet somebody who tells me, 'You made a difference in my life'.

"...But it is a reminder of what you said earlier, which is, if you focus on getting things done as opposed to just occupying an office or maintaining power, then the satisfaction that you get is unmatched. And the good thing about service is that anybody can do it."

"...I think everybody knows what it is like to have a bad day at work. You just have to keep on working through it. Eventually you make a difference."

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