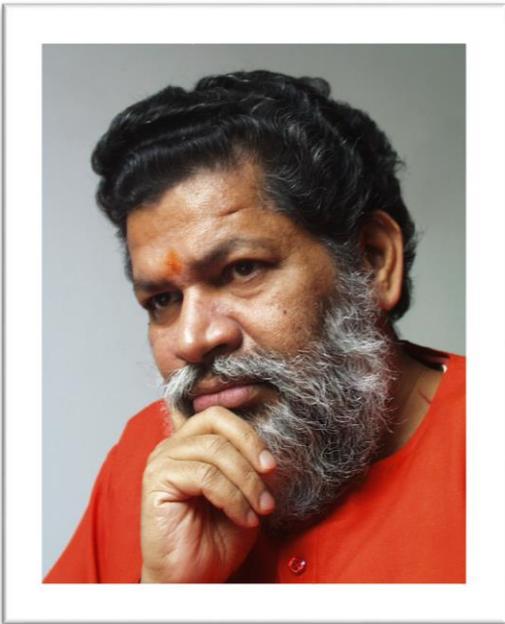


- Impressions on the New President for the US - Black Family in the White House

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Americans are voting to elect the first Afro-American president. The polls predict a landslide for democratic candidate Barack Obama. History has come to full circle. A Black, whose ancestors were sold as slaves, becomes the commander-in- chief of the most powerful nation of the world. A Black family in the White House, not as butlers and maids, but as the Chief Executive and the first lady.

In one sense this historic event is fulfillment of the spirit of the American people. There is a nation dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal, regardless of religion, race, gender, language or nationality. America doesn't bother about your past; it is all about your future. As Barack Obama very eloquently put it 'America believes that your destiny is not written before you are born'.

It is a land of opportunities and dreams—full of rags to riches stories. America is the land of Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., and now Barack Obama.

I was a supporter of Hillary Rodham Clinton. But she couldn't make it against the blistering storm of this young Afro- merican, an upstart from the back waters of Chicago. With great determination, panache, silver-tongued oratory and the sheer force of character this one term senator from Illinois trounced the two terms New York senator and former first lady. Then I expected that Obama having proved his point would gracefully ask Hillary to be the presidential candidate and him as her running mate.

Something like a young African male brings and offers his trophy at the feet of his hereditary chief. That would have been a great moral revolution in a culture in which the winner takes it all. But Obama is a master champion, charmer of masses, heartthrob of the young and harbinger of the future- fate wanted him to have all the glory.

It will be historic: an Obama win. The love child, born on 4th August 1961, of a Black Kenyan man and a Kansas White woman, in the enchanted island of Hawaii. Obama is not fully Black, but is of mixed race and was brought up by White grandparents. For four years, in his early childhood, Obama lived in Jakarta with his second father, an Indonesian, whom his mother married. Obama had his education in California, New York and got his doctor in Law from Harvard, where he was three times editor

of Harvard Law Review. He wrote his first book 'Hopes of My Father' soon after. This autobiographical work describes his early life, his community work in Chicago and his visit to Kenya in search of his roots and identity. Obama is a masterly writer, a weaver of gripping stories. He was not an exceptional student, but was intelligent, innocent and intent. People loved him.

I said that history has come to full circle with Obama in the White House. Especially when American capitalism is biting dust. The collapse of Wall Street, the end of American financial dominance and the emergence of other power centers have framed the spectacle of a Black man's ascendance to power in a white dominated nation, whose economy is equal to the combined GDP of China, Japan, India and Germany and whose Defense expenditure is equal to the rest of the world.

Long ago, in 1619, a Dutch Ship brought the first batch of twenty enslaved Africans to James town, the Virginia Colony of British North America. Subsequently 500,000 Black Africans were transported to America in chains to work in the plantations of white masters. Nearly 240 years passed until 13th amendment to the constitution officially ended slavery in 1865. The 15th amendment passed in 1870 ensured right to vote to all male citizens regardless of color or previous condition of servitude. It is incredulous to note that it took another fifty years for the lawmakers to pass an amendment granting voting rights to women.

Hindus believe in Karma. The whites are paying their karmic debt to the Blacks. With the first Black president in the white house the Blacks have redeemed their honor and the whites have cleansed their soul and United States of America has fulfilled its constitutional pledge. All are winners in the game. All Americans can celebrate Obama's victory. Such occasions come but rarely in history.

Obama drew huge crowds wherever he went. In Berlin a record crowd of 200,000 people came to hear him speak that he was proud of being a world citizen. In Iowa, a massive crowd of 100,000 people came to hear him expound economic policies. It was the same hysterical

crowd wherever he went- in Minnesota, Florida, Virginia and Portland and the democratic national convention. Obama comes to office as a world leader, loved and feted by all, as a true world citizen, with African, Asian, Islamic and Christian backgrounds. A true liberal with Anglo-Saxon education.

Barack Husain Obama comes to office with an unblemished personal history. The whole world wants him to succeed. He inherits a much weakened and tarnished America. Perhaps he is the right person with a humble background and Black pedigree to represent America as its fortunes decline in a world of multipolar powers. United States of America owes a trillion dollars each to China, Japan and the Arab nations. Its combined debt is ten trillion dollars, 70 percent of GDP. Medicare and social security indebtedness is a whopping 43 trillion dollars. It imports 70 percent of oil requirements. Americans stores are flooded with cheap consumer goods from China and other East Asian countries. Its car industry, the signature of American mobility, is in shambles.

The world may or may not love America with Barack Obama in power, but what is certain is Uncle Sam will be feared less, with a Black man at the helm of affairs.

Is it the end of Anglo-Saxon Era? The beginning of the end of a success story that began with the British colonization of India and America? The Second World War was fought by the British Empire and won by America and Russia. During the cold war period America witnessed unprecedented economic growth, supreme military power status and also became the acclaimed leader of democracies around the world. Soviet power imploded and collapsed and America was hailed as the sole super power. Some neocon thinkers even predicted the end of history and the arrival of the last man in the rational choice maker and the ultimate idea in market democracy. America was at the zenith of power and prestige when terrorists attacked and blew up the Twin Towers, the symbol of capitalism and crashed into Pentagon, the symbol of military might.

Power is shifting to the East, mainly to China. A weakened America under Obama, both literally and figuratively, may go back to its old style of self-sufficient inward looking mode. More taxes, more tariffs, more barriers to international trade [to keep jobs home], more money for social welfare; may be more for education, for infrastructure, more for alternate sources of energy and less for defense.

I am not sure if Obama will go for immediate withdrawal of forces from Iraq,(though delay will make him look worse than Bush), but he will certainly continue operations in Afghanistan fighting against an emboldened Taliban and Al Quaida and continue to deal cautiously with a more belligerent Pakistan and Iran. If Obama withdraws troops from Iraq in haste, it will doom Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Israel, and cause a resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism in the heartland of Arabia. Iran will go for Nukes upsetting the balance of power in the Middle East. India will face a resurgence of violence in Kashmir and China will tighten its arm around Taiwan and let a nuclear North Korea distract Japan and South Korea. A weakened NATO with a humbled America will face an emboldened Russia flush with petro-money. When the dust is settled in 25 years' time, China will be a prowling lion and America a limping pachyderm. There is possibility of war in the Middle East, on the Line of control in Kashmir, on Russian borders, between Koreas and wide spread clashes in Africa resulting in famine and epidemics. The UN, which is already weakened by America's unilateralism, will look on helplessly and China, the most powerful nation, will keep chewing bamboos (after the leisurely pandas) waiting to fish in troubled waters.

Anglo-Saxons have lost their enlightenment values and zeal. Their secularist moral relativism and intellectual post modernism on one side, and the unique American atavist evangelical anti-science-ism and corrupting consumerism on the other, has brought the enlightenment experiment of the last 400 years—human rights, rule of law, markets, democracy, freedom, equal opportunity, rational choices—to a grinding halt in the collapse of globalized financial institutions.

Barack Obama has fought glitteringly to pick up a job that has lost its glitter. He was riding a wave which denied him the opportunity of learning swimming and which ironically has drowned all the expert swimmers. His has to swim back to safety in choppy waters. The angry Blacks, the disgruntled youths, the illegal Hispanic immigrants, the almighty media, the starry eyed females, the arrogant Hollywood moguls and insecure Silicon Valley netizens and the rest of the growling world will ask for their pound of flesh. They followed the prophet into the Promised Land.

I pray for Obama, before they turn into a pack of hungry wolves, may the good Lord give him a magic wand!

Swami Bodhananda
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