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Indians call Obama 'Sanctimonious'

By **Richard L. Benkin**

It was too good to be true. India's Prime Minister and leader of the Indian right, and the most leftist US President in history [seemed to be getting along](#). Then on January 27, the final day of his three-day Indian trip, President Obama spoke to 1,500 people at the iconic [Siri Fort](#), and to the ears of those that heard it, [lectured](#) that "India will succeed so long as it was not splintered along the lines of religious faith." The general reaction among Indians was 'who does he think he is?' Religious conflict has been in the forefront here of late and has been one of the ways opponents have tried to attack Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Times of India, about as mainstream as media can get, in a scathing editorial titled, "[Papa Don't Preach](#)," ripped Obama for it and for using "his annual National Prayer Breakfast address to assert that Mahatma Gandhi would have been shocked by acts of religious intolerance in India" a few days later. "Consider an equivalent scenario where an Indian prime minister, on a visit to the US, uses the occasion to speculate on what Martin Luther King Jr would have thought of the Ferguson shooting last year." It notes that US-India relations were marred by "such sanctimoniousness" from both countries. "Indian leaders have stopped doing it. So should the Americans."

So it comes as no surprise that Indians are livid at news that Madison, Alabama police wrestled a 57-year old Indian national to the ground leaving him temporarily paralyzed only two weeks after he arrived in the US to help with his 17-month-old grandchild. According to accounts accepted by the police and the family, Sureshbhai Patel was out for a walk when a neighbor called the police to report "a suspicious character." Police accosted him, and though Patel clearly gave his son's house number, his limited English made communication difficult. That is when the attack occurred.

While concern for Patel's recovery is foremost on people's minds, news shows and newspapers are focusing on "Obama's hypocrisy," playing up every way we fall short along the very lines Obama chose to emphasize. The content almost does not matter. The *Times* article about Patel, for instance, contained gratuitous information about Alabama's race relations history and was accompanied by a sidebar about three Muslim students being killed at the University of North Carolina. In an [editorial](#) the same day, the *Times* accuses Obama of purposely raising health care costs, through Obamacare, by pushing a trade deal with India "that would weaken competition from generics... This is not an unintended consequence of an otherwise well-intentioned policy; it is the explicit goal of US trade policy."

US-India relations have not always been good. With a strongly pro-US Prime Minister who is also a small government capitalist, those relations were improving exponentially. While it is unlikely that this incident will derail that, it is not going away soon. Even while I was writing this article, I saw a television commercial pointedly telling Obama to "stop lecturing India." I asked people on the street about it today, and they were incensed. More than one person asked me if Obama thought he was the 'British Raj,' about the harshest thing an Indian can say about a foreigner.

Was Obama trying to assuage some of his far left allies or sticking it to Modi in the same way he treats Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu? Before Modi became Prime Minister, Obama's team made no secret of their contempt for him. Either way, there is no place for it in mature and sensible foreign policy. One would hope the President of the United States would at least be courteous.