

# September 11<sup>th</sup>: Transitioning from an Unfortunate Myopia to an Enlightened Dynamics

(Unpublished thought piece written in December 2001)

Partha S Ghosh

The tragic and torturous events of September 11<sup>th</sup> have definitely put a scar on the face of our civilization, which will be difficult to erase for many decades, if not many centuries to become. The terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, are not attacks on the US only, they are attacks on the basic goodness and the divine elements of human nature, which we all must be ashamed of. While we all share our emotions with the families of thousands of people who have lost their lives, and while we are all angered by the destructions of the symbols of human imagination, engineering feat and technological progress, we must however rise to a very serious challenge which threatens the evaporation of trust and innocence on which the fundamental constructs of the social and economic advance have been based.

As leaderships around the world develop collective will and resolve to address issues related to disrespect of ones inner-self and society at large, we must find ways to renew our governance mechanisms, and define new ways how parliaments of nations must work with each other. We must find mechanisms to celebrate our age-old philosophies paradoxically many of them were born in areas which are today centers of short-sighted divides, to create a world which will secure “total goodness” in our global society. It will require a fundamental shift in our responses to such events so we could secure permanent solution not temporary victories which only help to create more defectors, Short of a bold innovative approach, such events will keep haunting us and indeed the scar of the September 11<sup>th</sup> could become a permanent one. After all, in the last 100 years we have repeatedly failed to proactively check the destructive instincts of a few, like Hitler, Idi Amin and modern world terrorists, who harm the peace and goodness of many.

## US response and the tensions in South Asia:

President Bush’s resolve to take the terrorists and the nations who harbor them to tasks did gain quick support around the world, and the leadership’s success in Afghanistan to remove the Taliban government, we all hope must have contained some of the immediate threats.

While they may lack the scale and visibility of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack, waves of terrorism in Israel, Ireland, India, several nations in Africa, Central America and South East Asia over the last several decades are not new. Some how

Governments in many regions have learnt to co-exist with terrorism with low-key responses without treating the basic cancers in these societies. The US response has now created a new precedence that if terrorists who find shelters in another country shake any government's foundations, the victimized government could organize military actions against that country.

December 13<sup>th</sup> attack on Indian Parliament, while being manifestation of the terrorisms in the region, India's apparent restrained firmness and Pakistan's leadership resolve to eliminate terrorist camps in its country, need visible applause by the global community. If India acted like the US, and if Pakistan responded with vengeance we would perhaps be in the middle of the Third World war with nuclear arms ready to go off any moment. However given their heritage in the ancient civilization of the Indus-Gangetic plain, leaderships of both the nations are presented with an historic opportunity to draw strength and develop solutions from the basic principles of social good and universal toleration, the essential philosophy of the region which were articulated in the Vedas 5000 years ago. Through this process they could give birth to a new model of conflict resolution in regions which are ancient and have been at the confluence different streams of thoughts.

In view of the evolving dynamics in play, and terrorist instincts far from being eliminated (if not fueled by the nature of US response), US will need to become more strategic and innovative in organizing its *stage 2* global operation against terrorism. In that spirit, particularly given the current US engagement with South Asia and its enhanced familiarity with the region particularly Afghanistan where much of the early Indian Culture has its roots, US could perhaps be well served to view the region with a fresh perspective and in the process renew its leadership role in the World, a role it must play and is uniquely qualified to play.

*South Asia and September 11<sup>th</sup>:*

On September 11<sup>th</sup> 1893, in Chicago at the First World Congress of Religion, Swami Vivekananda the most courageous and creative figures from the Indian Sub continent spoke in the vast assemblage of great minds from all over the world, of the greatness of the ancient philosophy of the sub continent which for five thousand years harbored the basic principles of universal brotherhood which sheltered different religions from various parts of the world, as fibers of the same fabric. He along with the leaders of the Indian freedom movement envisioned Independent India that extends from almost from Hindukush to the Borders of Burma and From the Himalayas to the tip of the Indian peninsular. Leaders of Pakistan and today's India should take pride in the heritage they represent and cultivate the hope of the common people based on wider understanding of the

regions fundamental instincts of art & architecture, creation and conformation, peace and progress, and science and sociology.

As the world watches they have the historic opportunity to evolve a new paradigm of governance, which is not infected by - the shortsightedness of personal egos, and/or the limited understanding of the basic values the ancient civilizations the Indo-Gangetic plain celebrated for thousands of years.

As the world moves into the knowledge-based economy, the treasures of Indian Philosophy written four to five thousand years ago in the Vedas and Upanishads, and then enriched by Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity are of great value to modern society. Leadership of the US must now engage with the leaders in India and Pakistan to create new community in the sub continent which on one hand respects the depth of the ancient culture of the region, while on the other hand create a model of governance, which is *not* based on religion, and/or language, but based on cultural synergies which will bring the best out of the people in the region. The United States of India as a concept could work if leaders of Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri-Lanka, Nepal and today's India, could work towards the new paradigm which the world will look up to, and which will direct the attention of the people of the grass roots connect with their roots and create the buoyancy of socio-economic advance. Reduced defense spending, improved ties with roots (many of which got up-rooted during the partition of the sub continent), refocus on its heritage and education, will significantly accelerate true socio-economic development and make the region a visible contributor to the global civilization which the region deserves to play.

*September 11<sup>th</sup> and 108 years' old wisdom?*

History has repeatedly taught us violence against violence rarely leads sustainable progress. US will need to find new ways to engage with divided in less privileged societies which breed terrorists and in general destructive attitudes. The US leadership must take pride in conceiving and hosting the First Parliament of Religions in 1893 in Chicago. The messages around Universal Religion, which I call *humanism*, need to be re-examined and the G8 Leadership must find ways to re-examine the basic principles of social governance, which extends beyond physical boundaries.

Much of the last two centuries governments were organized to defend against and/or extend to with focus on territorial assets. In fact many of the boundaries in South Asia and Middle East were drawn by a few short sighted leaders from the region and the leadership of the British empire, for which today the entire global community is paying a huge price.

As we move into knowledge based economic system the US must make the world understand it is indeed relatively irrelevant where and how physical boundaries are drawn but it is more important how the boundaries of social intelligence and confidence are extended. A true engagement with Sub continent leaders to evolve creative solutions from the philosophies embedded in the ancient scriptures of the Indo-Gangetic plain might open up the problem solving space and increase our thinking capacity and fluency to resolve issues in Middle East, Central Europe and Africa. The world is at cross roads the messages of September 11<sup>th</sup> 1893 could indeed address the issues the September 11 2001 has uncovered. Harmony of our will, with the heritage and hopes of each region will I believe chart the path forward.