

## **Shashi Tharoor**

### Globalization and the Human Imagination

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When the organizers of the International Festival of Literature first invited me to deliver this lecture, they suggested something that might reconcile my two worlds – the UN and literature. In conceiving my topic for today, I thought about the issues that have dominated my UN life of late: the forces of globalization, transforming the world irresistibly; the nature of the international mass media, which I try to influence as a UN official; and the changes that the age of terrorism, or "9/11" as it is known in America, had wrought in us, once its shadow had fallen across all our minds and seized our imaginations. Globalization, the media, our imagination – one could well ask: in the world after 9/11, is there such a thing as a global imagination?

In other words, I wondered: Has globalization, which has brought McDonald's and Microsoft to every land, brought Mickey Mouse and Nintendo, and for that matter Osama bin Laden and "Chemical Ali", to every mind?

With the speed of satellite and cable TV, this is a serious question. The media bring to our breakfast tables and our living rooms, and increasingly our computers and our mobile phones, glimpses of events from every corner of the globe. Any doubt I might have had about the reach and influence of global mass communications was dispelled when I happened to be in St Petersburg, Russia, for a conference and was approached by a Tibetan Buddhist monk in his robes, thumping a cymbal and chanting his mantras, who paused in his chanting to say: "I've seen you on BBC!" New communications technology has shrunk the world, and in a real sense made it all one.

And at the risk of being facetious, our major news stories reek of globalization. Take, for instance, an item circulating on the Internet about the death of Princess Diana. An English Princess with a Welsh title leaves a French hotel with her Egyptian companion, who has

supplanted a Pakistani; she is driven in a German car with a Dutch engine by a Belgian chauffeur full of Scottish whisky; they are chased by Italian paparazzi on Japanese motorcycles into a Swiss-built tunnel and crash; a rescue is attempted by an American doctor using Brazilian medicines; and the story is now being told to you now by an Indian visiting Berlin. There' s globalization.

But on Sept 11, 2001, a different challenge arose to the notion of a global imagination. On 9/11, as the Americans have taught us to call it, the 21st century was born. If, as the historian Eric Hobsbawm has suggested, the 20th century really began with the assassination in Sarajevo that sparked the First World War, it is fair to suggest that, in the impact it has already had on the shape of our era, the 21st century began with the demolition of the World Trade Centre just one day short of two years ago.

What do I mean by that? The destruction of the World Trade Center struck a blow not only at the institutions of American and global capitalism but at the self-confidence that undergirded them, the self-confidence of a social and political system that, without needing to think about it too much, believed it had found the answer to life' s challenges and could conquer them all. And of course the outrage of September 11 and the anthrax scare that followed it brought the stark consciousness of physical vulnerability to a land that, despite fighting a dozen major wars in its history, has not been directly attacked in living memory. This was the country in which a scholar could complacently propound "the end of history"; now history, like Mark Twain, has proclaimed that reports of its demise were exaggerated. In today' s ever-smaller world, geography too offered no protection. If only by bringing home to Americans the end of their insulation from the passions that bedevil the rest of the globe, September 11 changed the world forever.

But the horrifying events of that one day are emblematic of our new century in another crucial way. The defining features of today' s world are the relentless forces of globalization, the ease of communications and travel, the shrinking of boundaries, the flow of people of all nationalities and colours across the world, the swift pulsing of financial transactions with the press of a button. The plane, the cell phone, the computer, are the tools of our time. These very forces, which in a more benign moment might have been seen as helping drive the world towards progress and prosperity, were the forces used by the terrorists in their macabre dance of death and destruction. They crossed frontiers easily, co-ordinated their efforts with technological precision, hijacked jets and crashed them into their targets (as their doomed victims made last-minute calls on their cell-phones to their loved ones). This was a 21st century crime, and it has defined the dangers and the potential of our time as nothing else can.

It has also provoked a reaction in the United States that will, in turn, leave an indelible mark on the new century. The 20th century was famously dubbed, by Time magazine's Henry Luce, as "the American century," but the 21st begins with the US in a state of global economic, political, cultural and military dominance far greater than any world power has ever enjoyed. The US enjoys a level of comparative military power unprecedented in human history; even the Roman Empire at its peak did not come close to outstripping the military capacities of the rest of the world to the extent that the United States does today. But that is not all. When the former French Foreign Minister, Hubert Vedrine, called the US a "hyperpower" (hyperpuissance), he was alluding not only to American military dominance but also to the US as the home of Boeing and Intel, Microsoft and MTV, Hollywood and Disneyland, McDonald's and Kodak— in short of most of the major products that dominate daily life around our globe.

And yet – before 9/11, Washington had been curiously ambivalent about its exercise of that dominance, with many influential figures speaking and acting as if the rest of the planet was irrelevant to America's existence or to its fabled pursuit of happiness. After September 11, I was not alone in thinking that there would be no easy retreat into isolationism, no comfort in the illusion that the problems of the rest of the world need not trouble the United States. I found myself on CNN the night after, expressing the outrage and solidarity of those of us working at the United Nations, and I found myself saying not just that "we are all New Yorkers now" – a sentiment many have echoed – but something else: that Americans now understand viscerally the old cliché of the global village. Because 9/11 made it clear that a fire that starts in a remote thatched hut or dusty tent in one corner of that village can melt the steel girders of the tallest skyscrapers at the other end of our global village.

From this observation I went on to suggest in an op-ed in the International Herald Tribune that the 21st century will be the century of "one world" as never before, with a consciousness that the tragedies of our time are all global in origin and reach, and that tackling them is also a global responsibility that must be assumed by us all. Interdependence, I argued, is now the watchword. Today, two years later, I wonder if I wasn't wrong. One of my favourite stories about the UN Security Council is one about the American diplomat and the French diplomat arguing about a practical problem. "I know how we can solve this," says the American; "we can do this and this and this and we can solve it." The Frenchman responds, "yes, yes, yes, that will work in practice. But will it work in theory?".

Interdependence is a reality in practice in our globalizing world; but in theory, how can there be genuine interdependence when one country believes it needs everybody else that much less than everybody else needs it?

But I am not rushing to disavow my earlier faith in international co-operation. Global challenges require global solutions, and few indeed are the situations in which even the hyperpuissance can act completely alone. This truism is being confirmed yet again in Iraq, where the United States is discovering that it has a greater capacity to win wars alone than to construct peace alone. The limitations of military strength in nation-building are readily apparent; as Talleyrand pointed out, the one thing you cannot do with a bayonet is to sit on it. Equally important, though, is the need for legitimacy. Acting in the name of international law, and especially through the United Nations, is always preferable to acting in the name of national security, since everyone has a stake in the former. So multilateralism still has a future in Washington.

All the more so because the age of terror is a multilateral threat. The terrorist attack of 9/11 was an assault not just on one country but, in its callous indifference to the lives of innocents from 80 countries around the world, an assault on the very bonds of humanity that tie us all together. To respond to it effectively we must be united. Terrorism does not originate in one country, its practitioners are not based in one country, its victims are not found in one country – and the response to it must also involve all countries.

Terrorism emerges from blind hatred of an Other, and that in turn is the product of three factors: fear, rage and incomprehension. Fear of what the Other might do to you, rage at what you believe the Other has done to you, and incomprehension about who or what the Other really is – these three elements fuse together in igniting the deadly combustion that kills and destroys people whose only sin is that they feel none of these things themselves. If terrorism is to be tackled and ended, we will have to deal with each of these three factors by attacking the ignorance that sustains them. We will have to know each other better, learn to see ourselves as others see us, learn to recognize hatred and deal with its causes, learn to dispel fear, and above all just learn about each other.

This is no small challenge. With the best will in the world, it is easy to misunderstand each other. Having traveled here from America, I have to share with you – I think the evening is sufficiently advanced to do this – my favorite story of international misunderstanding. It's a true story of an American agricultural expert, sent to India before the Green Revolution, to advise on Indian farming. He goes and visits an Indian farm in Punjab, and is welcomed by the very gregarious and hospitable Sikh farmer. The farm, thanks to India's land reforms and population pressures, is about the size of this auditorium. And the Indian farmer says very proudly to the American: 'welcome to my farm.' He asks, 'do you see this national highway?' – and the American looks and sees a dirt road – 'my land goes all the way upto there.' Then he says 'you

see that irrigation canal?' And the American looks and sees a trickle of water, and the Indian says ' my land goes upto there.' And he says ' you see that bunch of trees, my land goes upto there.' He is very proud of the farm he has. Then he turns to ask the American, ' And what about you?' The American is actually a farmer from Kansas or some Midwestern state where the wheatfields stretch on for miles on end, and so he sort of clears his throat and says ' Well, in the morning I get into my tractor and drive 4 hours south to the southern boundary of my land. And I drive another 3 hours to the western boundary of my land. And then I have a sandwich and drive 5 hours north in my tractor to the northern boundary of my land. And at sundown I travel another 2 hours south to my ranch house.' The Indian farmer nods very sympathetically, and says ' I know, I know, I tooused to have a tractor like that.' The point is: what you understand depends on what your assumptions are.

When the United Nations helped reconstruct East Timor from the devastation that accompanied the Indonesian withdrawal, we had to rebuild an entire society, and that meant, in some cases, creating institutions that had never existed before. One of them was a judicial system of international standards, which in practice meant Western standards, complete with the adversarial system of justice in which a prosecutor and a defence attorney attempt to demolish each other' s arguments in the pursuit of truth. The UN experts had to train the Timorese in this system. But they discovered that there was one flaw. In Timorese culture, the expected practice for the accused is to confess his crimes and justice to be meted out compassionately. In order to promote the culture of the "not guilty" plea required by Western court systems, the UN experts had to train the Timorese to lie. Their mental processes – their imaginations – had now truly been globalized.

This brings me to the second half of my argument today. In one sense, the terrorists of 9/11 were attacking the globalization of the human imagination – the godless, materialist, promiscuous culture of the dominant West, embodied in a globalization from which people like them felt excluded. Certainly those who celebrated their act did so from a sense of exclusion. If we speak of the human imagination today, we need to ask what leads surprisingly large numbers of young people to follow the desperate course set for them by fanatics and ideologues. A sense of oppression, of exclusion, of marginalization, can give rise to extremism. Forty years ago, in 1962, the now all-but-forgotten UN Secretary-General U Thant warned that an explosion of violence could occur as a result of the sense of injustice felt by those living in poverty and despair in a world of plenty. Some 2600 people died in the World Trade Center on 9/11. But some 26,000 people also died on 9/11, around the world – from starvation, unclean water and preventible disease. We cannot afford to exclude them from our global imagination.

But that is, of course, not all. If a State cannot even offer its people hope for a better life for their children – by providing access to basic education – then how can we expect those people or those children to resist the blandishments of terror? It should come as no surprise that the Taliban recruited its foot soldiers from the religious schools or madrassas that were the only source of nurture and "education" for the many children who had no other source of knowledge available to them; who learned not science or mathematics or computer programming at these schools, but rather only the creed of the Koran and the Kalashnikov – the Koran crudely interpreted, the Kalashnikov crudely made. Their imaginations were, as a result, anything but global.

Which brings me back to the question I raised at the beginning: have we fallen into the dangerous illusion that the human imagination can be globalized? In considering an answer, we have to look at the global mass media. The mass media reflects principally the interests of its producers. What passes for international culture is usually the culture of the economically developed world. It's your imagination that is being globalized. American movies and television shows, in particular, can be found on the screens of most countries.

Who else makes the cut to enter the global imagination in our brave new world? Yes, there is the occasional third world voice, but it speaks a first world language. As far back as the first Congo civil war of 1962, the journalist Edward Behr saw a TV newsman in a camp of violated Belgian nuns calling out: "Anyone here been raped and speak English?" In other words, it was not enough to have suffered: one must have suffered and be able to express one's suffering in the language of the journalist. Which leads to the obvious corollary question: Are those speaking for their cultures in the globalized media the most authentic representatives of them?

Can the Internet compensate? Is it a democratizing tool? In the West, perhaps it has become one, since information is now far more widely accessible to anyone anywhere. But that is not yet true in the developing world. The stark reality of the Internet today is the digital divide: you can tell the rich from the poor by their Internet connections. The gap between the technological haves and have-nots is widening, both between countries and within them. The information revolution, unlike the French Revolution, is a revolution with a lot of *liberté*, some *fraternité*, and no *égalité*. So the poverty line is not the only line about which we have to think; there is also the high-speed digital line, the fiber optic line – all the lines that exclude those who are literally not plugged in to the possibilities of our brave new world. The key to the Internet divide is the computer keyboard. Those who do not have one risk marginalization; their imagination does not cross borders.

These concerns are real. If they are addressed, if the case for overcoming them is absorbed and applied, the 21st century could yet become a time of mutual understanding such as we have never seen before. A world in which it is easier than ever before to meet strangers must also become a world in which it is easier than ever before to see strangers as no different from ourselves.

Ignorance and prejudice are the handmaidens of propaganda, and in most modern conflicts, the men of war prey on the ignorance of the populace to instill fears and arouse hatreds. That was the case in Bosnia and in Rwanda, where murderous, even genocidal ideologies took root in the absence of truthful information and honest education. If only half the effort had gone into teaching those peoples what unites them, and not what divides them, unspeakable crimes could have been prevented.

Freedom of speech also guarantees diversity. As an Indian writer, I have argued that my country' s recent experience with the global reach of Western consumer products demonstrates that we can drink Coca-Cola without becoming coca-colonized. India' s own popular culture is also part of globalization – the products of "Bollywood" are exported to expatriate Indian communities abroad. The success of Indian films and music in England and the United States proves that the Empire can strike back.

And it' s not just India. A recent study has established that local television programming has begun to overtake made-in-America shows in more and more countries. And as the globalizing world changes, it does not do so only in one direction. In England today, Indian curry houses employ more people than the iron and steel, coal and shipbuilding industries combined.

In my first novel, *The Great Indian Novel*, I reinvented a 2000 year-old epic, *The Mahabharata*, as a satirical retelling of the story of 20th century India, from the British days to the present. My motivation was a conscious one. Most developing countries are also formerly colonized countries, and one of the realities of colonialism is that it appropriated the cultural definition of its subject peoples. Writing about India in English, I cannot but be aware of those who have done the same before me, others with a greater claim to the language but a lesser claim to the land. Think of India in the English-speaking world even today, and you think in images conditioned by Rudyard Kipling and E.M. Forster, by the Bengal Lancers and "The Jewel in the Crown". But their stories are not my stories, their heroes are not mine; and my fiction seeks to reclaim my country' s heritage for itself, to tell, in an Indian voice, a story of India. Let me stress, a story of India; for there are always other stories, and other Indians to tell them. How important is such a literary reassertion in the face of the enormous challenges confronting a

country like India? Can literature matter in a land of poverty, suffering and underdevelopment? I believe it does.

My novel begins with the proposition that India is not, as people keep calling it, an underdeveloped country, but rather, in the context of its history and cultural heritage, a highly developed one in an advanced state of decay. Such sentiments are the privilege of the satirist; but as a novelist, I believe, with Molière, that you have to entertain in order to edify. But edify to what end? What is the responsibility of the creative artist, the writer, in a developing country in our globalizing world? In my own writing I have pointed to one responsibility – to contribute towards, and to help articulate and give expression to, the cultural identity (shifting, variegated, and multiple, in the Indian case) of the post-colonial society, caught up in the throes of globalization. The vast majority of developing countries have emerged recently from the incubus of colonialism; both colonialism and globalization have in many ways fractured and distorted their cultural self-perceptions. Development will not occur without a reassertion of identity: that this is who we are, this is what we are proud of, this is what we want to be. In this process, culture and development are fundamentally linked and inter-dependent. The task of the writer is to find new ways (and revive old ones) of expressing his culture, just as his society strives, in the midst of globalization, to find new ways of being and becoming.

As a writer committed to Indian pluralism, I see cultural reassertion as a vital part of the enormous challenges confronting a country like India – as vital as economic development. We are all familiar with the notion that "man does not live by bread alone". In India, I would argue that music, dance, art and the telling of stories are indispensable to our ability to cope with that vital construct we call the human condition. After all, why does man need bread? To survive. But why survive, if it is only to eat more bread? To live is more than just to sustain life – it is to enrich, and be enriched by, life. Our poorest men and women in the developing world feel the throb of imagination on their pulse, for they tell stories to their children under the starlit skies – stories of their land and its heroes, stories of the earth and its mysteries, stories that have gone into making them what they are. And (since my second novel was about Bollywood) they see and hear stories too, in the flickering lights of the thousands of cinemas in our land, where myth and escapist fantasy intertwine and moral righteousness almost invariably triumphs with the closing credits.

Globalization, its advocates say, is about growth and development. But it cannot just be a set of figures on GNP tables, a subject for economists and businessmen rather than a matter of people. And if people are to develop, it is unthinkable that they would develop without literature,



without song, and dance, and music, and myth, without stories about themselves, and in turn, without expressing their views on their present lot and their future hopes. Development implies dynamism; dynamism requires freedom, the freedom to create; creativity requires, quite simply, imagination.

But in speaking of a cultural reassertion of imagination, I do not want to defend a closed construct. I believe Indians will not become any less Indian if, in Mahatma Gandhi's metaphor, we open the doors and windows of our country and let foreign winds blow through our house. For me the winds of globalization must blow both ways. The UNESCO Charter memorably tells us that "as war begins in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the foundations of peace must be constructed". This is true not just of war and peace, but of the entire fabric of human life and society – which must be constructed in the mind. As the acolytes of Osama bin Laden or the young footsoldiers of the Taliban have taught us, the globe will always have more than a single mind. And that is why cultural diversity is so essential in our shrinking globe. For without a multiplicity of cultures, we cannot realize how peoples of other races, religions or languages share the same dreams, the same hopes. Without a heterogeneous human imagination, we cannot understand the myriad manifestations of the human condition, nor fully appreciate the universality of human aims and aspirations. This is why, as a writer, I would argue that the specificities of literature are the best antidote to the globalization of the imagination.

Not that literature implies a retreat from the globe: rather, it is the mind shaped by literature that understands the world and responds to its needs. Literature teaches us to empathise, to look beyond the obvious and beneath the surface, to bear in mind the smaller picture – of the ordinary human beings who are ultimately the objects of all public policy. And above all, to remember always that there is more than one side to a story, and more than one answer to a question. Those are fairly useful prescriptions for public policy makers in the era of globalization.

But literature presupposes learning. When we look at the world around us, we can see how vital education is. It is ignorance, not knowledge, that makes enemies of people. It is ignorance, not knowledge, that makes fighters of children. It is ignorance, not knowledge, that permits tyranny rather than democracy. It is ignorance, not knowledge, that makes some argue that human conflict is inevitable. It is ignorance, not knowledge, that makes others say that there are many worlds, when we know that there is only one. Ours.

In many ways, the fundamental conflict of our times is the clash between, no, not civilizations, but doctrines – religious and ethnic fundamentalism on the one hand, secular consumerist capitalism on the other. Thanks to globalization, the world is coming together into a

single international market just as it is simultaneously being torn apart by civil war and the breakup of nations. The author Benjamin Barber has written of the twin prospects facing humanity as "Jihad versus McWorld" – "Jihad in the name of a hundred narrowly conceived faiths against every kind of interdependence,... against technology, against pop culture, against integrated markets; against modernity itself" versus a "McWorld" of globalization run rampant, a world of "fast music, fast computers and fast food – with MTV, Macintosh and McDonald' s pressing nations into one commercially homogenous theme park." Both Jihad and McWorld, of course, end up by obliterating our most precious possession – our identity.

Every one of us has many identities. Sometimes religion obliges us to deny the truth about our own complexity by obliterating the multiplicity inherent in our identities. Islamic fundamentalism, in particular, does so because it embodies a passion for pure belonging, a yearning intensified by the threatening tidal wave of globalization as well as by the nature of Middle Eastern politics. Of course there is something precious and valuable in a faith that allows a human being to see himself at one with others stretching their hands out towards God around the world. But can we separate religion from identity? Can we dream of a world in which religion has an honoured place but where the need for spirituality will no longer be associated with the need to belong? If identity can relate principally to citizenship rather than faith, to a land rather than a doctrine, and if that identity is one that can live in harmony with other identities, then we might resist both Jihad and McWorld.

And for that we must promote pluralism. To strike a personal note, my own faith in religious pluralism is a legacy of my upbringing in secular India. Secularism in India did not mean irreligiousness, which even avowedly atheist parties like the Communists or the southern DMK party found unpopular amongst their voters; indeed, in Calcutta' s annual Durga Puja, the Communist parties compete with each other to put up the most lavish Puja pandals. Rather, secularism meant, in the Indian tradition, a profusion of religions, none of which was privileged by the state. I remember how, in the Calcutta neighbourhood where I lived during my high school years, the wail of the muezzin calling the Islamic faithful to prayer blended with the chant of the mantras at the Hindu Shiva temple and the crackling loudspeakers outside the Sikh gurudwara reciting verses from the Granth Sahib. And just two minutes down the road stood St Paul' s Cathedral. Students, office workers, government officials, were all free to wear turbans, veils, caps, whatever their religion demanded of them. That is Indian secularism: accept everyone, privilege no one; nothing is exceptional, no one is humiliated. This secularism is under threat from some in India today, but it remains a precious heritage of all Indians.

Pluralism can only be protected by supporting the development of democracy at a local, national and international level to provide a context for cultural pluralism to thrive. We must encourage a liberal, free-thinking education that opens minds everywhere rather than closes them. We must take a stance of respect and humility in our approaches to others, to strive for inclusiveness rather than marginalization.

When the terrorists of today and tomorrow have been defeated, our world will still be facing, to use UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan' s phrase, innumerable "problems without passports" – problems of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, of the degradation of our common environment, of contagious disease and chronic starvation, of human rights and human wrongs, of mass illiteracy and massive displacement. These are problems that no one country, however powerful, can solve alone, and which are unavoidably the shared responsibility of humankind. They cry out for solutions that, like the problems themselves, also cross frontiers.

Today, whether one is from Tübingen or Tallahassee, it is simply not realistic to think only in terms of one' s own country. Global forces press in from every conceivable direction; people, goods and ideas cross borders and cover vast distances with ever greater frequency, speed and ease. The Internet is emblematic of an era in which what happens in South-East Asia or Southern Africa ? from democratic advances to deforestation to the fight against AIDS – can affect lives in Germany. As has been observed about water pollution, we all live downstream.

Robert Kagan' s famous, if fatuous, proposition that Americans are from Mars and Europeans from Venus has gained wide currency lately. If that is so, where are Africans from ? Pluto? They might as well inhabit the most remote planet for all the attention they are paid by either Americans or Europeans. Yet their problems are an affront to our consciences. Individual countries may prefer not to deal with such problems directly or alone, but they are impossible to ignore. So handling them together internationally is the obvious way of ensuring they are tackled; it is also the only way. Everyone – Americans, Germans, Indians – will be safer in a world improved by the efforts of the United Nations, efforts in which all the world' s people have a stake and all enjoy the opportunity to participate. And these efforts will be needed long after Iraq has passed from the headlines.

I have perhaps taken too long in tackling the themes I raised at the beginning of this talk. So let me pull my threads together.

In much of the world there exist societies whose richness lies in their soul and not in their soil, whose past may offer more wealth than their present, whose imagination is more valuable than their technology. Recognizing that this might be the case, and affirming that the imagination

is as central to humanity's sense of its own worth as the ability to eat and drink and sleep under a roof, is part of the challenge before the world today. The only way to ensure that this challenge is met is to preserve cultural and imaginative freedom in all societies; to guarantee that individual voices find expression, that all ideas and forms of art are enabled to flourish and contend for their place in the sun. We have heard in the past that the world must be made safe for democracy. That goal is increasingly being realized; it is now time for all of us to work to make the world safe for diversity.

There is an old Indian story about Truth. It seems that in ancient times a brash young warrior sought the hand of a beautiful princess. The king, her father, thought the warrior was a bit too cocksure and callow; he told him he could only marry the princess once he had found Truth. So the young warrior set out on a quest for Truth. He went to temples and to monasteries, to mountaintops where sages meditated and to forests where ascetics scourged themselves, but nowhere could he find Truth. Despairing one day and seeking refuge from a thunderstorm, he found himself in a dank, musty cave. There, in the darkness, was an old hag, with warts on her face and matted hair, her skin hanging in folds from her bony limbs, her teeth broken, her breath malodorous. She greeted him; she seemed to know what he was looking for. They talked all night, and with each word she spoke, the warrior realized he had come to the end of his quest. She was Truth. In the morning, when the storm broke, the warrior prepared to return to claim his bride. "Now that I have found Truth," he said, "what shall I tell them at the palace about you?" The wizened old crone smiled. "Tell them," she said, "tell them that I am young and beautiful."

So Truth is not always true; but that does not mean Truth does not exist. The terrorists failed to see their victims as human beings entitled to their own imaginations. They saw only objects, dispensable pawns in their drive for destruction. Our only effective answer to them must be to defiantly assert our own humanity; to say that each one of us, whoever we are and wherever we are, has the right to live, to love, to hope, to dream, and to aspire to a world in which everyone has that right. A world in which the scourge of terrorism is fought, but so also are the scourges of poverty, of famine, of illiteracy, of ill-health, of injustice, and of human insecurity. A world, in other words, in which terror will have no chance to flourish. That could be the world of the 21st century that has just been born, and it could be the most hopeful legacy of the horror that has given it birth.

Since you have been told I am an Indian writer, let me tell you an Indian story – a tale from our ancient Puranas. It is a typical Indian story of a sage and his disciples. The sage asks his disciples, "when does the night end?" And the disciples say, "at dawn, of course." The sage says, "I know that. But when does the night end and the dawn begin?" The first disciple, who is

from the tropical south of India where I come from, replies: "When the first glimmer of light across the sky reveals the palm fronds on the coconut trees swaying in the breeze, that is when the night ends and the dawn begins." The sage says "no," so the second dsiciple, who is from the cold north, ventures: "When the first streaks of sunshine make the snow and ice gleam white on the mountaintops of the Himalayas, that is when the night ends and the dawn begins." The sage says, "no, my sons. When two travelers from opposite ends of our land meet and embrace each other as brothers, and when they realize they sleep under the same sky, see the same stars and dream the same dreams – that is when the night ends and the dawn begins."

There has been a many a terrible night in the century that has just passed; let us preserve the diversity of the human spirit to ensure that we will all have a new dawn in the century that has just begun.

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