

Reading Terror/Terrorised Readings: Sacred Wood Revisited

by ASHUTOSH MOHAN

A serious reckoning of the contemporary inevitably though sometimes inadvertently entangles itself within the vicious contours of terror. It is a reality which confronts the human being not merely engaged in academic polemics but in simple innocuous day to day living which may include reading/interpretation of jingoistic melodrama in reportage or serious academic treatise or even the joy (essence) of fiction. The significance of the aforesaid statement betrays sincere apprehensions of the writer vis-a-vis a world constructed and narrated through a paradigm of power and co-ordinates realized and erected through violence. We the eternal reader have since time immemorial dreamt/read our dreams and realities, offered to us by these perpetrators of 'terror' deviating not in kind but essentially in terms of degrees. Since 'terror' has always been a weapon of the powerful the impact of it within the contemporary spatio-temporal reality achieves multifold valency. The multi-valent directions of violence as they impact the already porous under-developed social system could not easily be debated away or diffused in terms of structured rhetoric of 'co-lateral damage'. Thus the reader is left with measures which in a subtle, surreptitious manipulation catch him within the closed binary of either/or, i.e., to read and structure oneself within the same paradigmatic finality offered through the co-ordinates of violence or to suffer/annihilated as victims of co-lateral damage or more-so-ever what Chomsky says a 'deliberate genocide' of the vast innocent humanity. Thus the contemporary compels a mandatory praxis on a serious and sensitive interpreter, a strategy to decisively decode the violent narrative so as not merely to escape massacre but rather

reassert and locate the joy (essence) of simple and sincere, heartfelt sympathetic 'reading'. The mode of assertion as is evident remains within the designed and the designate practice of the reader but it should be made clear that before a quantum leap, a system, if it has to be viable, should ensure enough reservoir of energy which, within the given framework is available only and only through the joy (essence). The debate may appear naïve and innocuous/weak from a certain perspective, yet the endeavour is to encounter and gradually diminish and diffuse the same. The naiveté as apprehended in the strategy of joy (essence) of reading as a counter-valent force is not totally uncalled for, yet as Einstein once admirably said, 'you can never solve a problem on the same level you created it', it provides us with a space within which at least the onus to define the level resides with us. Haven't we since ages survived the sheer cacophony of violence and terror drummed endlessly within and without us? Now certainly at this juncture we have to and should create our own harmony as we read the life.

It is a truth beyond reckoning that reading terror and terrorized readings coalesce in connivance to reign through the modes of violence over the pliable consciousness of the vast 'silent majority', leaving aside the meager segment of 'the political class' pegged down by Chomsky at a mere twenty per cent of the human mass on our planet. The issue here is to bring to focus and analysis the hierarchical order between the two essential contemporary processes mentioned in the title itself viz., reading terror and terrorized readings. As is already surmised, the contemporary collates these two; yet through the parameters of hierarchical chronology

the latter i.e., terrorized readings precede the former. In the dilapidated scenario of the so called savages of under developed countries, or to put it temporally, the colonized, the advent of 'written' acted as a harbinger of terror. The tools of the colonizers always essentially included an overwhelming presence of 'the written'; the dominance and its multifarious mores, relied overwhelmingly on 'the written words' which when 'read' civilized the savage yet defined and categorized him as a denoted slave. The whole enlightenment project was meticulously carried out through the violence of 'the written' over the so-called colonized minds of the 'reading' illiterate masses. The blatant hegemony adopted yet another stratagem in the post industrial late capitalist era. Now the stress of 'the written' is not so much on formulation or rigid categorization; the recent avatar is a Trojan horse which has innocuously barged through the economic and socio-political ranks of the so called decolonized and invaded/terrorized the recently liberated minds through the cultural subterfuge of openness and multiplicity. The subtle agenda of legitimization of multiple choices and meanings certainly could easily be correlated in terms of the essential ingredient of violence and consequently 'terror', i.e. surprise. The liberated mind of erstwhile colonized willingly took the bait of multiplicity feigning blatant ignorance towards being appropriated within a system which locates it and yet marginalizes the significance of the much cherished meanings/choices. This crass acceptance of a system that relies on the logic of infinite regression is leading the silent/surprised majority towards an abyss of total socio-political and cultural inhalation. It should be mentioned at this

juncture or rather stressed in clear terms that the majority that is the left-over of the political class in its silent acceptance could not be simply projected as victims of a genocide to be sympathized with; on the contrary their silent acceptance of the bait locates them within the violent system and its inhuman practitioners of terror. The dominance of violence in societies which have been rendered economically weak culminates in a scenario where the surprised/terrorized masses openly play the multiple choice game are in fact ironically left with limited, i.e. very few choices and ultimately end up in a Russian roulette scenario. In other words the terrorized readings design a system which appears as user friendly and 'open' yet in reality propels towards a society where the only choice left for survival and existence is in terms of religious fundamentalism or some other culturally defined masquerade.

The phrase 'reading terror' employs and interprets reading as a process of constructing and defining of the self and the nations. In a recent statement Chomsky has categorically stated that terrorism is not the weapon of the weak. It is primarily a weapon of the strong, overwhelmingly, in fact. The acts of terror, the so called acts/written of the powerful could never be termed or labeled as terrorism because it is the strong and the powerful, and it is a historical fact, who control the doctrinal system. While the collective humanity stands at the infantile stage of the new millennium, we have retained the flavour and the violent fervour not in terms of the residual impact of terrorized readings but have vehemently enacted the climactic through our readings of terror. It has so deeply embedded in our structural apprehensions that the very process of ideational assimilation is deeply infected and betrays a definite tilt or may be even a liking for terror. This process of reading of terror totally eliminated the content of essential joy/

play, which sustained and pervaded the socio-economic fabric and literary discourse till the last phases of the millennium gone by. Through the aforesaid statement we cannot wish away the gory details and the melodramatic history of the era gone by, yet it could easily be asserted that the elements which define and erect terror, viz. surprise and unpredictability were totally absent from that scenario. Thus the readings of terror with which we have to co-exist which we chose as the most viable option is here to stay as a permanent scourge unless or until a viable and equally powerful alternative is erected to counter the same. The contemporary, meanwhile moves on as a juggernaut demolishing whosoever and whatsoever en route. The movement and the trajectory of this demonic process gains momentum as it is propelled by our apprehensions/readings of terror, in a society like ours these readings and apprehensions need very little space and time to literally flare up and materialize in violence which imprints not merely minds, which enslaves not only conscience but rather realizes and enacts a scenario where the whole of the humanity is held up for ransom. Riots, rapes rage ravenously as we read the relevant and relegate the essential. The socio-cultural fabric of our country rendered porous and pliable through terrorized readings, now in its tattered state offers the distraught masses pseudo religious totems to fall back within the same vicious cycle of violence. The pseudo-religious fervour and the increasing momentum with which it is getting a stranglehold over our mind and social mass is not through sheer chance, but rather fits too neatly in the design where the multiple choices shrink into a minimum few fundamentalist ones. The minds and the souls thus captured unleash a trail of terror and violence so gruesome that it needs to be written in the blood of our brethren and if we not yet refuse to read it the trail certainly moves towards our thresholds and

footsteps.

Charles Hauss while he wishes to transform the new world order, (read *disorder*) talks of a movement beyond confrontation through modes of thinking which rely heavily on bifocals to assimilate the gaps which bogged down our ability to avoid confrontation/violence/terror. It appears that Mr. Hauss's optometrist suffers from acute myopia and thus while his patient puts on the prescribed corrective lens, people with clearer vision move on in search of viable alternatives.

For a student of literature it is a simple tale that acts not only as bread and butter but even more so as a treatise to enjoy and to interpret through.

In the sacred grove of Nemi, near Rome, there grew a certain tree, round which at any time of the day, and probably far into the night, a grim figure might be seen to prowl. In his hand he carried a drawn sword, and he kept peering warily about him as if at every instant he expected to be set upon by an enemy. He was a priest and a murderer; and the man for whom he looked was sooner or later to murder him and hold the priesthood in his stead. Such was the rule of the sanctuary. A candidate for the priesthood could only succeed to office by slaying the priest, and having slain him, he retained office till he was himself slain by a stronger or a craftier.

This rule of succession by the sword held sway, as we have already seen so far in our discussion, but to bury the hatchet we have to pick up the simple word to write and to read through this very (s)word so that the coming generations may read the essence of joy thus written.

Notes

1. See Charles Hauss, *Beyond Confrontation*, Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger, 1996, p. 11.

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