

## **William Dalrymple**

### **In Xanadu: A Quest,**

### **Indian Travels & Encounters**

William Dalrymple is a popular writer and art historian. He is known for his travelogues and historical narratives. He is also very active in the field of journalism. Dalrymple's best-known works include: *In Xanadu: A Quest* (1989), *City of Djinns: A Year in Delhi* (1993), *The Age of Kali: Indian Travels & Encounters* (1998). This proposed reading also studies these texts from the point of new historicism and subaltern historiography.

Dalrymple's texts are fine examples of multiple genres intersecting each other. His works attract all kinds of readers whether they are lovers of history, romantic tales or travelogues. He shifts his works between genres, modes, and medium, hence, the structure of his work becomes very complex. His texts show an engagement with colonial discourses and his attempt to rewrite history from a new perspective.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Traveling is an essential part of human life and should not be overlooked. No matter where one goes, even if it's just across town, it's a voyage, and the stories we tell and the people we meet are shaped by our travels. The term 'Travel' is derived from the Latin word 'Travailen', which means 'to travel'. Toil and labor were the original meanings.

In other words, the idea of "going on a difficult journey" may have played a role in the semantic development. Sojourn, Tour, Errand, Wander, Trip, & Movement are all synonyms for travel in the English language, and they all refer to the movement of people from one place to another. What can be called "Travel Literature" is the work of those travelers who have a creative bent and the capacity to craft their experiences with the right degree of fictitious ingenuity, and therefore give their journeys a form that can be referred to as "Travel Writing."

During the last few years, travel & travel writing have seen an uptick in popularity. It has risen to a new level of popularity as a blooming literary genre. A number of travel books appear on bestseller lists or are nominated for literary awards, according to reports. In the same way that the general audience has developed a taste for travel narratives, authors have begun to take this form seriously and to include their own travel experiences into a wide range of contemporary and historical travel novels.

Since 'Travel' is now a book topic, it has already covered a wide range of topics. There is a wide range of viewpoints from which a traveler can chronicle their journey. Pilgrimage, Conquistador and Explorer expeditions, Anthropological pursuits, and backpacking are all examples of travels that have been documented and shown in a number of ways. The growth of science and technology has broadened the scope of travel, from domestic to foreign lands, from the oceans to the polar regions, and even into space. Man's fondness and interest with travel activities is a rich source of human history and literature. It would be impossible to imagine the world as it is today if Captain Cook or Columbus had not set out on their epic journeys, or if the moguls had not left their homes to conquer remote territories, or if the Aryans had not been enslaved by the Moguls and many others like them had they not left their homes to conquer the remote lands....and many others like them had they not undertaken their risky, death-encountering expedite.

Until the twentieth century, the main motivations for human travel around the world were trade, discovery, migration for better prospects, military campaigns, pilgrimages, etc. To satisfy our insatiable curiosity about distant regions and cultures, we've developed a preference for traveling as a form of recreation in recent years. In fact, the world has shrunk as a result of improved transportation and globalization, which has led to a saturation point in geographical exploration. Many governments have aggressively promoted tourism to exotic areas, which has made it easier for people to travel large distances in the modern day. Travel writing has experienced unprecedented growth in the publishing industry in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, when geographical exploration has not been the primary focus of a travel writer.

From travel writing to historical storytelling, "The Past Is a Foreign Country: William Dalrymple's Writings" by David Edward Gibbons, released in 2015, focuses on Dalrymple's shift in style. Along with his narrative histories, Dalrymple's *In Xanadu*, *City of Djinns*, and *Nine Lives* are examined as "journey writing," "place writing," and "life writing," respectively. Hemchandracharya North Gujarat University, Patan, accepted Divyesh Kumar Bhatt's Ph.D. thesis entitled "An Analysis of William Dalrymple's Travel Writings" in 2015. An introduction and distinct chapters devoted to travel literature and the current state of travel writing are also included in the thesis's scope. By studying Dalrymple's trip novels in detail, this study illustrates Dalrymple's influence on travel writing.

A journal by Bhavesh Kumar in 2013 in *Third Front* proclaimed "Rediscovering Historical Narratives of Delhi: A Postmodern Reading of William Dalrymple's *City of Djinns: A Year in Delhi*" explores the historiographical representation of Delhi in William Dalrymple's *City of Djinns* by looking at its past as well as its transformation into a postmodern city.. The goal of this study is to uncover postmodern trademarks in the *City of Djinns* while also exploring Delhi's evolution over time. According to an A Rachana's dissertation titled, "Spiritual Quest: A Journey into Sacred India: A Study of the Travelogues of Helena Blavatsky, Paul Brunton, and William Dalrymple," the travelogues of Dalrymple and Blavatsky are examined in relation to the spiritual quest. The University of North Bengal, West Bengal, accepted Paramita Ghosh's 2012 thesis, "Travel Writing in the Novels of V. S. Naipaul and Amitav Ghosh: A Selective Study," as well. V. S. Naipaul and Amitav Ghosh, two of India's best-known novelists as well as travel writers, are the focus of this thesis. Select authors' works are examined to see if travel writing may be used as a form of social and political critique in the postcolonial environment.

## **IN XANADU: A QUEST**

William Dalrymple's first novel, *Xanadu: A Quest*, is a potential literary star on the rise as a travel writer. From Jerusalem to Shang tu in China, popularly known as 'Xanadu' in the West, Dalrymple follows in the footsteps of Marco Polo by adopting the route he took in the Middle East and into China, i.e., from the Middle East into China following in the footsteps of Marco Polo. As a result of its enormous success, the book was named Yorkshire Post Best First Work Award & Scottish Arts Council Spring Book Award for 1990. After hearing about the upcoming opening of the Karakoram Highway in eastern Asia, William and his girlfriend Louisa "decided to mount an expedition to follow in the Venetian's footsteps" while in their final year of school. William picks up a plan to follow the entire Marco Polo route which he claims at t.

Many had attempted to follow in his footsteps, but none had ever made it to the end.... A phial of Holy Oil from Jerusalem to Xanadu could only be carried overland for the first time since at least the thirteenth century when Pakistan and China's Karakoram Highway opened in the spring of 1986, making it conceivable for the first time in centuries to plan an overland route. Because of the war in Afghanistan, it was not possible to follow Polo's voyage to its fullest extent, but it is now theoretically conceivable to do so almost entirely and complete the journey. For example, (Dalrymple *In Xanadu* 11), Dalrymple keeps a journal in which he reflects on the locations & people he visits. He does a great job of incorporating both serious historical study and lighthearted humor into his tales of his travels. A big part of his book's appeal is the way he masterfully portrays his interactions with the people he meets along the way, both in terms of the people he meets in real life and the fictional characters he creates. The entire work centers around his plan to retrace Marco Polo's itinerary, validating Polo's narrations and details, and making his own observations on how the scene has changed over time.

Due to the political upheaval that took place in Iran, William and his companions had to make some adjustments to the path Marco Polo took. Dalrymple's careful narration of the entire path, as it has been described, remained full of uncertainties & hazards because they had to wander as nomads and illegal

inhabitants at times. The narrative of Dalrymple follows the same pattern and places the course of the principal journey.

This particular journey is being performed with the premeditated motive of 'Writing,' just as not only following Marco Polo along his path but also to come out with a BOOK like him, as made obvious by the statement of "Childhood Fascination" for Marco Polo. William Dalrymple immediately turns the narrative to his travels and the actions he does with his friend after describing the fundamental preparations and the points of the voyage. As in many of his other publications, the pattern here is to depict the day-to-day explorations and narrative of whatever happens on the daily tracks that he follows. It's not only about the author's perspective; rather, it's about how the people in the area view the things he's writing about and how he chooses to portray it to them. Using the dialogue that he picks up and incorporates in the narration, he reveals the unique characteristics of the locations he is going through.

At the bus station, while waiting in line for the bus to Acre, he strikes into a discussion with an Israeli pair, a young Jewish soldier and his girlfriend:

While the lad munched on some crisps, the girl embraced him. They were both tall, brown, well-built, and attractive. It could have been a peaceful situation if not for the machine guns that both men were brandishing. At first glance, they appeared to be liberal and moderate; they were, in fact, really nice and knowledgeable. However, their responses were shocking when the subject went to Israeli politics. Asked if he was okay with enforcing the illegal occupation of Jordanian territory in the West Bank, the child said that it was not a duty, but more like a luxury. The young lady consented. Despite being trained to operate guns and tanks, women in the Israeli army are only assigned clerical positions. What's going on?"

As a result of William's current lot clashes with some tanned with his historic views, he also presents his own classified responses.

Commenting on an Israeli woman's claim that her land had been transformed into the "most luxurious complex" in the country. Luxury concrete hotels with airy lights lining the coast between Haifa and Acre, leading to private beaches populated by unwashed beachgoers and nightclubs, were our next stop. Next to me,

a proud Israeli woman said, "It's Israeli!" Look, she exclaimed, 'We have it all!'" I nodded, trying not to offend anyone. No. You have taken the oldest country in the world, one of the great centers of civilisation, a form of heaven and made it into suburbia. "But I thought: " They stay at Hamoudi's apartment in Acre because they can't afford to stay in a hotel (William says he only had 600 pounds to get him to Peking, 12,000 miles distant). In addition to the financial benefits, this type of choice helps them to have a better sense of the local people and their way of life. William can't help but wonder how Marco Polo would have reacted to the city and its people as he strolls about the old ruins. He makes a reference to the fact that:

My thoughts turned to the night before Marco was going to leave the familiar world of the Westernized Crusader Kingdom for the unknown Orient. He was in his early twenties, and he seemed to share my interests. The realm of noir was an universe apart from the one in which we lived. For example, there was a striking resemblance between the Crusader Kingdom and the Roman Empire.

The country of Israel both had comparable borders, was ruled from Jerusalem, and was supported by the West.

His earliest attempts to convince his readers of the project's legitimacy and the latent values laying underneath it are shown by these attempts to plant the analogies. If you want to follow the footsteps of a famous traveler and write a book about it, William Dalrymple is not the first to do so. This type of plan has two advantages. It provides the traveler with a pre-planned route and a complete framework for comparing the current situation with how it was in the past, how it has changed since the predecessor described it, and how the cultural legacy has been preserved value linkage or is it all erased by fresh changing adjustments and infrastructure developments? Throughout the book, William brings in Marco Polo's stories of his travels in his commentary on the regions and civilizations he explores. When discussing the city's layout, he says:

There are few Ottoman-era structures left in the city, which is still mainly a medieval town. There is a good chance that Marco Polo could still get around without too much difficulty. It has been rebuilt as a Mamelukehan, the churches have been changed into mosques or a mole has been covered with fresh stone to

protect the fishing boats, but all of these are located on the same plots and have the same dimensions as the Crusader originals.

Dr. Rinku Pawar