Chapter 2

IN XANADU
A Quest

“Superb.... Marvelous.... Rich with the sights, smells, history and feel of Asia..... A classic”
- The Sunday Express (London)

Author of Nine Lives
William Dalrymple
In Xanadu: A Quest

In Xanadu: A Quest is a debut creation of William Dalrymple as he rises as a promising luminous star on the literary horizon as a travel writer. The book, first published in 1989, bears all the traits of travel writing with Dalrymple's strategic adoption of the route of Marco Polo, i.e. from Jerusalem to Shang tu in China—popular in the West as 'Xanadu'; the term applied to the place by Samuel Taylor Coleridge i.e., from the Middle East and into China following in the footsteps of Marco Polo. The book acquired extreme popularity and won the Yorkshire Post Best First Work Award and a Scottish Arts Council Spring Book Award for 1990, and was a bestseller. While in the final year of his studies, on being suggested about the opening of the Highway in the eastern Asian frontiers, “It was my then girlfriend Louisa who spotted the small article in the New York Herald Tribune which announced the opening of the [Karakoram] highway and together we decided to mount an expedition to follow in the Venetian’s footsteps” , William picks up a plan to follow the whole of the Marco Polo route which he claims at the very outset was going to be the first of its kind.

Many had, like us, set off in his tracks but no one had ever managed to complete the journey. … But in the spring of 1986 the opening of the Karakoram Highway, the mountain road which links Pakistan with China, made it possible for the first time, perhaps since the thirteenth century, to plan an overland route between Jerusalem and Xanadu and to attempt to carry a phial of Holy Oil from one to the other. The war in Afghanistan prevented the whole of Polo’s journey being followed but in principle it was now possible to follow almost all of it, and to complete the journey. (Dalrymple In Xanadu 11)

Dalrymple records his reflections of the places he visits and the people he meets. He nicely weaves the narration of his travels sometimes in the serious Historical research vein and sometimes in comic. The core success and the interesting part of his book lies in his mastery of enacting dialogue with the local persons and his co-travelers and dramatization of his experiences and the characters with whom he interacts. The entire work revolves round his scheme of following the route of Marco Polo and there by issuing his own reactions to the journey and observations of Polo,
verifying the narrations and the details provided by this senior traveler and marking his own observations on to how the scenario has withstood the course of time and traits of development.

William remains very sincere to the route of Marco Polo during the course of his travel, however, the political unrest in Iran made them to adopt certain alteration and they had to deviate from the route actually taken by Marco Polo. The journey through the entire route as it has been consciously narrated by Dalrymple remains full of uncertainty and dangers as they had to travel sometimes as nomads and sometimes as illegal occupants. Dalrymple's narration also covers the same pattern and situates the trajectory of the central journey.

Right from the initial factual interactions with Brother Fabian, the monk, who seems not to know anything about the expedition of Marco Polo whose footsteps William has planned to follow, and the history of 'Oil Phial' which stands symbolically travel of Christianity (Christian Faith) to the East; to the Palace of Chengis Khan, at the same time it also exposes the comic mood of the text which is going to be sustained throughout the text:

“You say he took this oil east with him?” he continued
“Yes.”
“What did he carry it in?”
“I don't know. A goatskin flask, perhaps.”
“He would be a bit old fashioned then.”
“A bit.”
Fabian put the finishing touches to his new wick, put it back in the oil then lit it from the one unguttered lamp.
“You still want some of this oil.”
“Please.”
I handed him a small plastic Phial.
“Not goatskin.”
“No. It comes from the Body Shop in the Covent Garden.” (6)

Dalrymple slides/skids his narrations from light mood to serious ones in regular jig-jag motions which not only contributes interest to the text but it also allows
him the opportunity to bring in the local subjects as well as a varied variety of topics to sustain and cultivate interest of the readers with a feeling and curiosity as what next. He takes enough space to narrate the details of Marco Polo's visit of the Holy Sepulchers and in its lap the History of Jerusalem and the shifts of 'Authorities' on this Holy Town. He also constructs the entire affair of initiating and the project with which Marco Polo undertook the whole expedition.

He also shares with the readers his 'own' attractions towards 'Marco Polo' and tries to convey the fact that whatever that is taking shape had its sprouting at a very early stage of his life:

At my primary school we knew all about Marco Polo. He wore a turban, a stripy robe a bit like a dressing gown and he rode a camel with only one hump. The Ladybird book which had this picture on the cover was the most heavily thumbed book on the school bookshelf. One day, my friends and I put some biscuits in a handkerchief, tied the handkerchief to a stick and set off to China. It was an exhausting walk as there were no camels in Scotland, and by tea time we had eaten all our biscuits. There was also the problem that we were not absolutely sure where China was. It was beyond England, of that we were certain, but then we were not absolutely sure where England was either. Nonetheless we strode off manfully towards Haddington were there was a shop. We could ask there, we said. But when it began to get dark we turned around and went home for supper. After consultation we decided to put the plan on the shelf for a while. China could wait. (10-11)

The statement of “Childhood Fascination” for Marco Polo makes another point clear that this particular journey is undertaken with a calculated motive of 'Writing', just as not only following Marco Polo to his route but to come out with a BOOK like him too.

Having narrated the basic preparations and the having enumerated the points of the journey being undertaken, William Dalrymple directly shifts the narrations to his travels made and the proceedings he undertakes with his companion. The pattern, as in many of his other books, here, remains that of presenting the day to day expeditions and narration of whatever comes his way on the daily tracks instead of taking stance of presenting the whole ‘passing-judgment’ style of narrations, he captures the local people who come in the natural contact and how they look at the things he notes them down with his own selective measures. The conversation he picks up and introduces in the narration provides enough hints as to highlight the peculiarities and special traits of the regions he is passing through. Through the
conversation with the Israeli couple, a young Jewish soldier and his girlfriend, at the bus stop while waiting in the queue for the bus to Acre, he pinpoints the typicality of the place and the people:

They were both tall, brown, well-built and good looking; the boy ate a packet of crisps, the girl wrapped herself around the boy. Had it not been for the machine guns that both were holding it might have been a homely scene. They were friendly; both were highly educated and at first seemed liberal and thoroughly reasonable. But when the conversation turned to Israeli affairs their replies were chilling. When I asked the boy whether he minded policing the West Bank and enforcing the illegal occupation of Jordanian territory he said that it was not a duty so much as a right, a privilege. The girl agreed. She complained that in the Israeli army women were trained to use rifles and even shown how to drive tanks, but then only given clerical jobs. She said: “What’s the use of being taught to use a gun if you’re then not allowed to shoot with it?” (18)

William also does not miss any opportunity or chance to present his own classified reactions to his present lot confrontations of some tanned with his historic opinions.

To the proud comment of one Israeli lady at the transformation of the dreary and unfertile land into the most luxurious complex. “On the coast between Haifa and Acre we passed a line of luxury concrete hotels hung with airy lights and giving onto private beaches occupied by unairs and night clubs. The Israeli woman next to me pointed it out proudly. ‘Look’, she said, ‘We have everything!’ not wishing to give offence I nodded. But thought: ‘No. you’ve taken the oldest country in the world, one of the great centers of civilization, a kind of paradise—and you’ve turned it into suburbia’” (19).

At Acre, not preferring to go and stay in any hotel on financial ground (As William makes it clear that he had only 600 pound to see him through to Peking, twelve thousand miles away), they take Hamoudi’s lodging place. This sort of preferences prove beneficial not only on the financial grounds but it also allows them to have a close look at the local people as well as their real way of lives.

While visiting the ancient monuments and passing through the streets William constantly thinks of how Marco Polo would have found the place and culture. He mentions:

I wondered what Marco must have felt the night before he was due to set off from the relatively familiar world of the Westernize Crusader Kingdom, into
the unknown orient. He was about the same age as I and presumably of similar in inclination. Noir was the world we lived in so very different. There was a remarkable similarity, for example, between the Crusader Kingdom and the state of Israel. They had similar boundaries, both were ruled from Jerusalem, and both were effectively supported by the West. (23)

These attempts to plant the similarities show his initial attempts to convince his readers about the justification behind the adoption of the project and latent values resting behind it. It is not that William Dalrymple is the first to take this plan to follow the footstep of any famous traveler and to enact a travel work upon it. This sort of scheme gives double benefit. It offers the traveler with a readymade route, and an intact scheme of comparing the scenario as to how it was before, has it altered as it is documented by the predecessor and how the cultural heritage has been maintained with value association or is it all wiped out in the name of new transforming changes and infrastructural developments? Throughout the text William, along with his commentary over the regions and cultures he visits, goes on bringing in the accounts of Marco Polo presented in his *Travels*. Commenting on the city set up of the Old Acre, he notes:

It is still essentially a mediaval town and there are few buildings which post-date the Ottoman period. Marco Polo could probably still find his way around without too much trouble. The *funduq* of the Italian communes have been rebuilt as Mameluke han, the churches turned into mosques and the mole in the harbor topped with new stone to shelter the fishing boats- but all these occupy the same sites and preserve the same dimensions as the Crusader originals. (20)

Further furnishing the historical contexts and the scenario of the city of Acre while Marco Polo visited it, William quotes the description of the city by one of the Bishops of the city:

By the time Polo came here, it resembled, in the words of James de Vitry, one its Bishop... ‘a monster of nine heads, each of which is fighting the other. Nightly men are murdered within the city, men are strangled, women poison their husbands, whores and drug vendors are prepared to pay high rents for rooms, so that even priests lease houses to them….’ Surprisingly little has changed. (20)

Thus, this comparison scheme proves fruitful as it provides him with an opportunity to cast visions on the contemporary scenario as well as to comment upon it. He nicely in a dialogue dramatic version introduces the prevalent tension between
the Arabs and the Jews in the city from his conversation with an Arab Terji (tailor), who invites him to have tea in his shop:

We live here under an undeclared apartheid. It is just like South Africa. For the Jews there is democracy. They have freedom of speech, they can vote for whichever government they like, can go where they like and talk to whom they like. For us it is different. (24)

Along with William also goes on hinting the difficulties of the travel and the adverse physical conditions they had to go through in the texture of the narration.

Two

The second chapter he opens with how bad he felt as they entered into the city Latakia, the city across the Mediterranean Sea. They arrive here in a liner at about 10 pm. And struggle their way out of the harbor. Out in the city there was a complete mess. Next morning they set out to visit the city called Masyaf. Actually the city was not visited by Marco Polo, but in his Travels Polo has assigned a full length story of “Assassines” a creed of this part. The story relates the grudge between the Nizam-ul-Mulk and his friend …

Arriving in the city of Masyaf, a young student Nizar al-Umar invites them to his house and offers to be their host. At Nizar’s home things are very lovely for William and Laura. They are served delicious food and luxury which was a welcome thing as they had not eaten proper food for previous twenty four hours on their journey and were greatly tired too. “The family was welcoming and hospitable as only Arabs can be, Laura and I sat on a sofa and made friendly gestures while the household was paraded before us” (39).

After this “Communal-Dinner” and rest the next day Nizar escorted them to the fortress of Masyaf. At the sight of al-Garb, William brings in the discussion of Henry Champagne, who went to the ‘Old Man’ (the founder of Assassin group) as an envoy from French Crusader, St. Louis, and was gifted some precious mementoes.

Next day they visit the castle of Sheizar. The ruins of the castle are disappointing, but they remind William of one of its castellans, “The urbane and civilized Usamah ibn-Munquid, who lived a century or so before Polo; but his accounts on the medieval Middle East are lively and lifelike and put flesh and blood on the dry bones of the world of Polo’s The Travels ” (43).

A curious thing comes on the surface that their host Nizar has been fascinated and attracted towards the great English Literature and avidly follows the discussion of ‘great minds’ on BBC ‘Kaleidoscope’. And some things he claims to know, and that
with authority, more than William himself, but is sheer ignorant about the merits of his own ancient author and, when inquired by William, shows no enthusiasm to know about 

“I talked to Nizar of Usamah and told him the story of Majuju brothers whose mills must have stood nearby. He shrugged his shoulders.
“Your English books are full of good things. I am not understanding why you like so much our Arab writing.”
“Usamah is full of good things.” “Not so full as your Henry Fielding. (46)

Their next destination was Aleppo and they find a ‘talkative’ company of Krikor Bekarion, who offers them a lift for ‘company’ in his hired taxi. William puts nice finishing touch to introduce his readers with his new ‘companion’…

He had a flattish forehead, thick, curly, black hair and a magnificent loo-brush moustache which threatened to engulf the whole bottom of his face. Krikor Bekarion looked pleased to see us. He was a Christian Armenian, he told us, whose family had fled from Erzurum in 1917 during the massacres, and had managed to set to Beirut where they had set up a shoe-making firm. Then in 1976 they had been driven out of Beirut and had moved to Aleppo where they started all over again. But Krikor did not like Syria (‘too much politics, not enough profit), and so had moved to Germany where he ran a shady-sounding ‘import/export’ business. Finally he had ended up in Athens where he now possessed a restaurant, a nightclub, two girlfriends (one Greek and one English—it was she who wore socks under her sandals) and a Mercedese. He was coming to Aleppo only briefly, he said, to visit his brother, and was pleased to have us for company. He liked the English, and thought the people of Aleppo both dull and difficult—always they make problems.’ (48-49)

The description not only furnishes how the political and social unrests cause great disturbances at the individual levels or to the lives of specific groups which become the butt of hatred for the more powerful groups, it also adds ethnographical dimensions, the economical and social relationships of the local people and the general characteristics of people of the place they are travelling in. The life at Aleppo has two different faces. The Muslims are poorer and they have to lease out their children to work in factories where they are exploited, whereas the Christians like Krikor’s brother enjoy upper hand with financial capabilities and enjoy full-fledged ‘nightlife’ just as in the Western world.

The history of Aleppo, as William narrates, also glimpses the tortures and trepidations. The shifts of powers and their painful consequences descending upon the
subjects have been the instances of almost all histories, and this one is one more addition:

In all the town’s history there are only two cheering anecdotes. The first tells of the Arabs who captured Aleppo by dressing up as goats and nibbling their way into the city; the second concerns Abraham, who is supposed to have milked his cow on the citadel’s summit. It is not much in ten thousand years of history, especially when the one story ends in a massacre (after the Arabs killed the guards and opened the city gates to their friends) and the other is a legend, and untrue. It is the result of a misunderstood derivation of the town’s (Arabic) name Haleb, which comes not from the Arabic for milk (halib) but a much older word, possibly Assyrian, connected with the mechanics of child abuse. (53-54)

William thus takes care to narrate much of the locale histories too which account for his sincere research of the minute credits. After having had a good time at Krikor’s brother’s nightclub, much alcoholism and shock at Krikor’s revelation of keeping fatal weapons at hand, they leave for Turkey, with Krikor’s advice in stock with them: “Be careful with the Turks. They are bastards. Evil men. Bang! They kill. Rob money. Rape women. Big problem” (58).

Three

Ayas is their first destination in Turkey, where they reach by night and go directly to the Beach to sleep in their ‘sleeping bags’. William brings in the comments of Lord Byron on Turkey, and with that says much about the people of Turkey:

I see not much difference between ourselves and the Turks, save that we have foreskins and they have none, that they have long dresses and we short, and that we talk much and they little. In England the vices in fashion are whoring and drinking, in Turkey sodomy and smoking, we prefer a girl and a bottle, they a pipe and a pathic. They are sensible people. (63)

Later, while detailing on the Turk men and women, he also seems to approve:

Good looks have been shared out unevenly among the Turks. Their men are almost all handsome with dark supple skin and strong features: good bones, sharp eyes and tall, masculine bodies. But the women sharer their men folk’s pronounced features in a most unflattering way. Very few are beautiful. Their noses are too large, their chins too prominent. Baggy wraps conceal pneumatic
bodies. Here must lie the reason for the Turks’ easy drift out of heterosexuality. (71)

Having arrived in Turkey and perhaps having followed Marco Polo to a reasonable distance, the fact that conspicuously draws William’s attention is about Marco’s character as well as his greatly praised book: “The Travels”; and he passes his own judgment upon Polos.  

He narrates the eventful history of Ayas. (Ayas was not the part of Turkey when Marco Polo visited it.) Ayas was the place from where the Friars whom Polos were to take with them to the courts of the great Khans had deserted them in search of safety. The question is the Polos were to take to the court of Kubla Khan “one hundred men well versed in religion”, what would have made them travel all alone without the promised crews. William answers his own question with a single word: “Profit”. (67)

William tries to offer the explanation: “Polo was not the romantic gallant that legend has made him out to be; he was a hard-headed merchant’s son taking a calculated risk on a potential lucrative expedition” (67).

Yes, ‘Lucrative’ Dalrymple presents the evidence by bringing in the facts: Fifteen years later when they returned to Venice they were rich men (so much so that in 1362, nearly one hundred years later, Polo’s descendants were still arguing over the ownership of the palace which had been acquired with the profits of their forefather’s china expedition). The Polos certainly took a gamble when they watched their friars flee back to Acre, and loaded up their caravan for the long land journey to Xanadu, but it was a calculated gamble—and it paid off. (68)

On the much praised ‘The Travels’ and the glorification of Marco Polo’s name as an authority on travel writing and branding in the tourism business, Dalrymple comments:

…the book [Polo’s Travels] is surprisingly dull. Polo did not set out to write an account of his travels, despite the name by which it has always been known, nor did he write a description of a diplomatic expedition originally intended to try to save the Crusader Kingdom. It is not even a general account of the lands he passed through. He says nothing about the sights he saw (he does not even mention the Great Wall of China), and he includes very little about Asian social mores (which might have made really interesting reading). (66-67)
Their next destination is Sis. They travel by a tractor between Ayas and Sis. At the outskirts of Sis his attention is arrested by a makeshift but seemingly permanent residential colony of the ‘Yuruks’. “The Yuruks”, he notes, “are one of the last surviving tribes of Turkmen Nomads.”

At Rajep’s house, a local youth who happened to be their company and then host, Rajep voices the local tendencies and the tension prevalent between the old and the young generation in Turkey: “The people here are very conservative, and they are frightened of progress. There are many- how do I say- fanatics? They do not like what Attaturk did for this country: creating Democracy, making industry, freeing women. Many of the old man want their mullahs to rule them, like in Iran” (78). And the nutshell of the national tension is voiced in the regular conversations: “This country has two problems. One is the mullahs; the other is the Army—both want to rule the country, to stop democracy” (78). Still more concerns: “There are gangs, and many killings. Another problem for our country is that the military censor the press: we still do not have a serious newspaper” (79).

The conversation with the senior of the family (Rajep’s Grandfather- Rajep acting as the interpreter) brings out the fact that the majority of Sis population is migrants. Rajep’s family had settled down from Salonica after the Great War. The Grandfather declines the popular belief that the Greeks and the Turks are enemies for centuries. He strongly asserts that in Salonica both the communities shared very congenial relations and lived in the spirits of fraternity.

Despite the huge volume of travel writing produced over the last five centuries, travelers’ routes and traces are often tenuous and difficult to decipher, and later travelers and travel writers have been keen to find their footsteps and to follow them….more often the routes are being retraced in order to mark the historical gap between the two moments and perhaps to throw light on the earlier work, though the connection with earlier and usually better known traveler can also serve as an attractive marketing device. (Hulme Travelling 98)

Dalrymple constantly brings in the discussion of two books: ‘The Travels’ of Marco Polo and Sir Henry Yule’s 1929 edition of ‘The Travels’. At Seljuk Hotel in Sivas in the early morning, while going through the version of Yule’s ‘The Travel’, he feels sure that Polo had failed to distinguish “the Seljuk and their greatest enemies, still nomadic Turcomen, the ancestors of Yuruks” (Dalrymple Xanadu 85). He expresses his doubts on the accuracies of Polo’s account and Yule’s silence on the historical facts. Here, we find, his expertise on History comes to make this statements
and he tries to expose the inaccuracies of the accounts and comments presented by his two predecessors on this grounds and again surprisingly draws the reader’s attention to the fact that though “Big bazaars, robbers, groups of merchants these are just the sort of things that Polo normally commented on, yet for once he is silent on commercial matters and singles out Sivas not as a treading centre, but as a site of martyrdom of the glorious Messers Saint Blaise” (87). Thus, the point of inaccuracy, he raises, is on the grounds of Sivas’s being the center of silk and carpet production. Even Sivas was the center of learning as “Sivas was renowned especially for Shifaiye Medresse-- the great medical school and mental hospital” (87). He wonders how here things escaped Polo’s observations. Having investigated in detail on saint Blaise and his vein attempts to find out the location of saint Blaise’s place or tomb in Sivas, William finds out that saint Blasie’s monumental church had been devastated during massacre of the local Christians and the evacuation of Christianity from the place. William then opens the description of Gok Medrese (an Islamic college) and refers to the 1597 edition of ‘The life of Timur, and the Armenian historian Thomas of Metsope’s description of destruction of Sivas by Timur and his army at the siege of the city. His next expedition in Sivas is to find out the sites of ‘Carpet’ production, and driving force here is to prove Yule ‘inaccurate’ as Yule claimed in his footnotes of ‘The Travels’ that the “The Anatolian carpet manufacturer had died out before 19th Century” (97). It was really a tiresome journey on account of the language problem, lack of enough information and bad roads and breakdowns in car. “And I remember the village idiot, and the punctures, both of them, and the slow, relentless fall down the slop and the impact into the shack at the bottom then the heroic attempts to keep believing in the carpets, ...” (97).

After this much of difficulties, to witness the carpet production was a rare joy for William, a unique sense of triumph makes him announce: “This was certainly small scale production, even by thirteenth century standards, yet the techniques cannot have been any different from those witnessed by Marco Polo. Yule was wrong. It is only on this much reduced scale, Carpet production had survived in upland of Anatolia” (100). (Emphasis mine)

Debbi Lisley quotes Doleen Messay’s image of ‘historical queue’, and argues: ‘What makes travel writing so significant in this respect is its explicit reproduction of the historical queue: travel writers do no choose their destination simply because the landscape is different, or because it is located in the other side of the world. They choose destinations that will allow them to go back in time as far away. For Messay the queue maintained in Western
notions of progress and evolution – “Which simply implies that the Western World is always in Front of the queue.”” (Lisley 210)

With a gesture of making his work more ‘Accurate’ and filling the slot which Polo has left blank, Dalrymple here narrates the history of Siva’s as the great center of education and presents a detailed notes how medical and mental healing operated in ‘Seljuke Shifaiye Medresse’ of Sivas which incorporated a rich library which remained accessible for both students and teachers and traces the history of the possible entry of the ‘Islamic pointed Arcs’ in the European Architectural Designs.

Next, his dialogue with local Turkish girl, Kevser, nicely pinpoints the social temperament of the Turkish especially Muslim society. With Kevser’s balanced opinions about life in Germany and here ‘at home’ in Sivas, it became clear that the advancement outside the world and especially of West might be alluring to many local people, still native ‘air of simplicity’ is powerful enough to make persons like Kevser to get rooted to it. And William’s question regarding the inferior status of women in Islamic patriarchal thinking; Kevser makes still one more distinction – that her race is not native of Sivas and they are different from the rest of Turkey, and that unlike in other groups, the girls enjoy real freedom in her society.

Their next destination is Iran, and Laura has donned the ‘enveloping black wraps in an Islamic sort of way’, a preparatory gesture to meet the political social and moral demand of the region they are entering. On the comparative comfortable journey from Sivas to Erzurum, he refers to the great rivers Euphrates which the train crosses. The truck (lorry) journey from Erzurum to Dogubayazit is also described interestingly. As they cross the Arab Nehri, a tributary of Euphrates, the landscape fixes William’s observations: “It was a long journey, through wild, upland country. The ground and the stone was dark, black and volcanic and Yuruks were moving slowly across the planisphere flats, faces cast downwards, gypsy locks tied into buns and pigtails. Some drove cattle ahead of them” (Dalrymple Xanadu 111-112).

Four

The Fourth chapter narrates William and Laura’s travel across Iran, from Maku to Saveh. On the border posts only, they receive a favourable shock against their presumptions as Iran being the Islamic country and the things would be worse; on the contrary, they are received very pleasantly.“No, they said there was absolutely no question of being put in a bus and driven through the country, nor of being given escort. The Islamic Republic of Iran was a free country” (119).
Before giving his own comments on Tabriz, the first city of Iran on Polo’s itinerary, William cites Polo’s and Ibn Batuta’s description of Tabriz in their respective works: for Polo, the place was horrible as in its historical context held the expansion of the city owing the Mongol conquest, just a single generation before Polo. He asserts the parallel to their visit to the city witnessing the same plight as it did when it was visited by Polo, namely the ‘expansion’ but this time it is owing to the recent discovery of natural oil resources within its territories.

“The oil wealth of the sixties or early seventies had financed a population explosion in the town” (121). His dialogue with the local Armenian narrates the terrible plight of Armenian (Christians): “We (the Armenian) are a Cow, a donkey or a camel to them. In Iran we are treated like fourth class citizens. They don’t kill us but they beat us and make us work, using our skills for their ends” (123), and also brood over the hostile and unsympathetic treatment from the Government:

Well it’s different in Iran now. The Ayatollah does not believe that all men are free or equal. He does not believe in human rights. He accepts only the morality of the Koran. For the first time in modern history a government has built as its bedrock the idea that all men are in bondage to Allah. That frightens me very much… (124).

At Laura’s command, and having weakly recovered from ‘loose motions’, he goes in search of ‘silk’ the thing which Polo (referred) mentioned Tabriz famous for. As per information Laura had collected, silk weaving was done in Osku. William after much difficulties and language problem succeeded in finding out a ‘Silk loom’ and ‘Finished dyed silk’ and triumphantly declares “to the inexpert eye they looked exceptionally fine” (128).

Faring a night journey they reach Zanjan and would be heading towards Sultaniya – “now a deserted, crumbling spread of ruins, but once the capital of Mongol Persia” (128). He also notes why ‘Sultaniya’ does not occur in Polo’s account, he traces the history and makes it clear that when Polo traveled through the land, the site was still occupied by cornfields as the city was not yet built by Ilkhan Vlijeth, the great, great grandson of Ghengis Khan. Here, at the site of ‘Sultaniya’, he capture on opportunity to describe the chroniclers of the famous historian Rashid-ad-Din. Rashid was the vizir at the court of Ilkhan Uljetu. He built his suburb ‘Rashiddya’ at Sultaniya. He believed, “It is most important that scholars should be able to work in peace of mind without the harassments of poverty”, and that “there is no greater service than to encourage science and scholarship.” He patronized many scholars with such noble thoughts in mind. Ilkhan, the Sultan, entrusted Rashid-ad-
Din to write the official history of the Mongol conquests. William nicely puts the entire commission: and admits that the ‘History of the Franks’ is the only Islamic work on Europe to be written until the Ottoman period. Still, his Western Superiority rings and becomes audible when he comments on the authenticity of the books: “His sources sometimes let him down (a papal text misled him into thinking that to Pope was in the habit of using the bent head and neck of the holy Roman Emperor as a step to mount his horse), but on the whole it is as reliable as it is unique, and is full of surprising details he knew, for example, that there were no poisonous reptiles in Ireland.” (133).

William also notes that in spite of all measures taken for the preservation of his books by Rashid – ad –Din, after the death of his patron Sultan Uljetu, he was accused of poisoning his former master and was put to death; “His family was disgraced and their estates confiscated. Rashiddya was looted and burned. All the copies of his works that could be found were destroyed. Like a Fallen Stalinist, he was airbrushed out of history” (134). Still, the copies which survived in neighboring Muslim states’ libraries are, as William admits, “along with Polo’s ‘The travels,’ ‘Jami al – Tawarikh’ the main historical source for Mongol Asia.

Another interesting thing William notes is the monument at Sultania which impressed Robert Byron too. William goes to the extent of inferring the Indian Taj and its architecture must have its preparatory seeds here in this moment. Already, in 1320, every idea in the Taj was fully expressed here in the plans East of Tabriz. The Taj is simply a refinement of Sultaniya; in its essentials it is restating an idea three hundred years old” (130).

Next in the search of the Tomb monument of the Magi; he and Laura reach the city of Saveh. En route to Saveh, William takes time to narrate the story of the Magi, as surprisingly presented by Polo, (because as per his claims Polo was interested only in mercantile affairs). The version of the Magi story occurs in St. Matthew’s gospel and the version which Polo had heard in town of Saveh interest William and offer him the point of research, thus he tries to make sense of it. In Saveh the experience of tracing the roots of the mythical Magi was not exciting. In search of a taxi, he happens to fall in hand of a policeman, who takes him to the station under the suspect of being spy. Ultimately he succeeds in winning confidence and admiration from the officer by showing his library I- card. After great search, they could not zero the spot where the monuments which Polo described stood. Still, he concludes with a note that the Magi story needs much scholarly investigation.
Nevertheless, the remarkable story told by Polo must at least open the possibility that the visit of the Magi to Bethlehem was an historical event, that these Magi came from Saveh and that an independent tradition of their visit to Palestine was maintained in the observatory town from which they set off, and in which they were eventually laid to rest. (145)

Five

From Saveh, they were to enter into Pakistan- deviating the route of Polo which they would resume from Tashkurgan, the first town in China. Since they were running very late on their time – scale, as Laura had to leave for India, they determined to travel at a stretch one thousand five hundred kilometers. Secondly as they were not on the ‘silk route’ it was going to be a ‘journey on their own’ It was quite impossible to fare journey sticking to ‘Polo’s route’ in this part of Afghanistan: “Even if we had had unlimited time it is extremely unlikely that we would have succeeded in following Marco Polo through the minefields into Afghanistan, and in the circumstances there was no alternative but to miss out that stretch of his journey and make a long detour through Pakistan” (154).

From Zahedan, they shared a mini transit with some Arabs, Ramesh, Nazir and Joe. They reached Tuftan boarder post, which they found ‘easy’ and ‘friendly’ to cross.

We discussed a price, had our rucksacks checked, paid an additional ‘departure tax’ and then waited while the guards sent away a Baluchi tribesman and his goat. It took half an hour to find a key to the border gate. At just after seven thirty we walked into Pakistan. (159)

From Taftan village, they hired a Toyota pickup of a Baluchi young man with the help of Nazir and travelled together up to Quetta – through an eventful journey and bad road – they reached Quetta where Nasir and Ramen got dropped and William, Laura and Joe resumed their journey to Lahore by Train. The overcrowded 15:30 Lahore Mail reminded him of the chaotic ‘Partition’ trains at Quetta, he also enacts the story of his great aunt; a privileged wife of commander of western command, India. After the tiring journey, they reached Lahore and at the palatial home of his Cambridge friend, Mazaffar Quizilbash.
Six

After great excursions, and tiring journey, life at Mazaffar’s luxurious house with delicious food and all ranges of luxurious seemed to give ‘never to leave this place’ notion. Another reason, he felt not to leave, was departure of Laura – the stubborn companion traveler in whose company he simply ‘got propelled’ with all the rest left to her care. Whereas, the new companion was entirely different or rather opposite to her nature, Louisa was his ex-lover now was in love with some other buddy. The last but not least was his worries about permission. They had yet to confirm the permission to travel on the Karakoram Highway and obtain permission from ‘Brick wall attitude towards the foreigners’ of the Chinese Authorities to cross into China over the Kunjerab pass.

Before leaving for the Karakoram Highway, William does not miss the opportunity to visit the fine Moghul monuments of Lahore which he qualifies as his favorites viz. Jahangir’s tomb interests him for the accounts on it he has read and researched as they come from one of his travel heroes-Tom Coryat. The monument, as reported by Coryat, was built by Nur Mahal Jahangir’s favorite Begum – ‘A famous beauty and an exceptional and talented woman’. William finds the Tomb very interesting and homely too, and description covers every minute details, which William is master of. William briefly and nicely relates the consequence and fate of Tom Coryat and cites Sir Thomas Roe’s opinion that “Tom Coryat’s work would have been most voluminous work” had he not met his premature end.

The battle to get permit ultimately came to the conclusion that ‘no permission’ was required either to travel on Karakoram Highway or the Kunjerab Pass, since Britain, Pakistan and China were friendly nations.

The expedition thus, gets a new start William and Louisa start a fresh from Lahore to Manshera, a small station at the height of eight thousand feet on the Himalaya range. At the night stay, in the ‘self service’ hotel, they come to hear weird and wild stories about the cannibalism and infanticide exercised by the Pathan tribes. In Manshera, he also visit the site of Maurya emperor Ashoka’s rock edicts and enacts the interlude of Ashoka’s regime and gives a long sympathetic account of James Princep’s toil of translating the Indian script and his companion and William’s own great grandfather James Pattle’s sad chronicler and go to bed that night with “our ears still ringing with dangers awaiting us up the road in Gilgit and Humza. They travelled with the road contractor in his car until the car met with a minor mishap and broke down. Fortunately they came out safe from the accident. They happened to arrive at a government Circuit house meant for the Officers on the inspection on the Highway.
Here, having rested for night, William happens to notice the high hill beyond the river, which, he was informed by the caretaker, was the famous ‘Pirsar’.

He goes up the ‘Pirsar’ alone and attributes his climb with Alexander-the great. He claims it completing a circle as he in recent past visited Alexander’s birth place, and this was last point from where Alexander had returned. Witnessing the ‘shin’, he tries to explain Macedonian’s connection with ‘shin’ and with pride claims: “it is an interesting thought that I may not have been the first Western to be presented with a goat leg by Gujars. It could well be an honor that I unwillingly shared with Alexander the great” (212).

Next morning after passing rainy and night, they set out on foot and eventually picked up by nine Afghans- in their Datsan truck, who were going to the Chinese border. Through the interactions with them, William brings out that the staunch, orthodox Islam had little influence on them, rater they were interested in ‘Brothels in “Inglizstan” (Britain). Only the older one among them seemed loaded with religious pact. He showed disgusting reaction at Laura’s using ‘Sony Walkman’- as according to him, it was against ‘The Law of Islam’ but ironically his obedient sons were fascinated to it, and even tried it when he was asleep’.

Here, on the road very interesting incident takes place and William is bold enough to report it which issued forth his own buffoonery. On the road, two guards only demanded his and Luisa’s signatures in the ledger, whereas without perceiving the matter he began to react unreasonably and unnecessarily with hi-pitched show off.

William nicely describes the lands and societies which he comes in contact. And like a consummate painter just a line here and a line there, he in brief nicely presents the picture of the society and culture. Hauza valley makes its way in this way:

The people of Hauza are Isma’ilies. For generation they lived by robbery and slave trading and they are still supposed to practice infanticides. They are renowned for their longevity and their taste for butter buried in the ground for the one hundred years. (215)

“Never have I seen men who derived so much enjoyment from the administration of bureaucracy” (216) – these are the words with which William reacts to the strict procedures he and Louisa made to go through at Chinese border post. They reach ‘Tashkurgan’ – the first town in China and it is described on three plains:

1) As the important centre on the silk route
2) Geographical description
3) How Polo would have found it.
Since, they were back on Polo’s route for the first time since Yazd, William returns to Polo from Tushkurgan, and asserts that ‘Polo would have recognized only one building in Tushkurgan today i.e. ‘the stone tower’

It is here in Tushkurgan the capacity to face the hardships and unfavorable circumstances reach to the culmination and this bring out the reflection: “There are moments in all long journeys when the whole business of travelling seems utterly futile. One feels homesick, tired and above all bored. Nothing pleases. Everything palls. For me this moment came in Tushkurgan” (220). Entering into a humiliating struggle with the Hazzies, they managed to leave this place with a notion ‘not to visit it again in life,’ and arrive at ‘Kashgar’.

Seven

At the Chini Bagh, he makes an elaborate search for the ‘Victory Model Lavatory’ but in vain, and describes in detail the days of Macartney. These days witnessed a curious fusion of cultures and thawing relations among the Englishers and the Russian. But the picture has been thoroughly changed at present. “Muslim Kashgar is under assault from Marxist Peking, and the town still bears the scars of the Great Proletarian Revolution of late Sixties” (230).

In Kashgar, Mick, ‘a tall, languid Hippy with a spindly body and a baffled expression’, took them on a tour to Kashgar where they came face to face with the local culture, trade and specialties like the manufactures of Chinese ‘noodles’. On this trip William happens to meet Salindi a local Muslim youth, who studies at Urumchi University. William moved with him, interacted and came to many (mis) conceptions regarding the West which made their way via James Bond movies and unscholarly books. William went for matinee and the next day, he was to visit ‘Nestorian Christians’ in Kashgar, Salindi claimed “that there remained few families of the sect still practicing ‘Nestorian Christianity’ – a sect which long ago got segregated from the main Stream Christianity and was a powerful source of influence of Christianity on Changes Khan, but, owing to Louisa’s critical illness, he missed the appointment and Salindi left, and William missed an opportunity to bring out the details of the ‘sect’ – long thought to have extinct in the course of time. He also visited the: ‘the Kashgar Sunday Market’. Where they witness the local folks enjoying the time of joy:

in front of us was a vast field of swarming humanity cloaked in an enormous haze of risen dust. In its detail the market resembled the weekday bazaar, but the total effect was very different. It was a fair and a carnival, a masque and a
festival, crowds and noise, smells and treasures, a mirage through a dusk of
dust. (253)

From there, they went to the tomb of Akbar Hoja, and went to bed with a
decision to continue their journey into the restricted regions without permission.
Through the first attempt was an utter failure; early morning in the bus-station, they
were caught by the police-officials, but ‘luckily’ got a lift in an Army truck to cross
the enormous desert of Taklimakan. (In Turkey – it means ‘go in and you won’t come
out’.)

This ‘Taklimakan’ desert has been the cockpit of various & varied talks of
weird happenings and from the time of ancient, including Polo, the travelers have
enacted their own versions of weird tales about this desert, so how can William be an
exception? The difference is only, he himself does not come across any bit of things
his predecessors have reported, but he fills the gap by presenting their versions of
strange legends of this region.

Arriving in ‘Yarkand’ William notes down Polo’s entry about the people of
this town. Polo pointed out that the people of this area were plagued by goiter. At
present, he observed there were no traces of this disease apparently visible in the
people around him. Here, they wanted not to be noticed much but on the contrary,
being foreigners and entirely different in physique, they attracted much public
attention.

From Yarkand, they somehow managed to get another lift – this time it was a
cattle-truck, not loaded with cattle but persons, up to a ‘han’. Next day before dawn,
they searched for a lift from Khotan to Keriya, they got a dumper truck, the only
option they had and since there was no vacancy in the drivers’ cabin, had to occupy
their place on the top of pile of coals. It was a tiring and very difficult journey.

Stay in Keriya proved much eventful. They were dropped at a caravanserai,
and there they ran into the group of officials and the governor of Keriya himself, in
the full swing of a jovial party. They learnt that the party was offered to the German
scholars but after some initial hesitation William and Louisa were ‘adopted’ by the
governor along with the Germans. The governor himself secured tickets for them to
Charchan, but they were noticed by the Keriya public security Bureau – from whom
they literally ran away, they boarded the dawn bus with the help of Governor’s tickets
and reached Niya, at midnight. They decided to change the vehicle (i.e. bus, because
they knew the Charchan public security must be looking for them on bus) and once
again reached Charchan on the pile of coal through a long and tiresome journey: “The
next two days were exhausting. The constant worry of being detected, occasional
pangs of hunger and thirst, the physical efforts of digging ourselves out of sand dunes, the day time heat and the extreme night-time cold. All these different strains began to take their toll” (273).

Even after reaching Charchan, the things grew worse:

Neither of us could sleep. A day exposed to the full glare of the desert sun had given us both bad sunburn, while the night chill was unbearable. We lay awake in our coal grimed clothes, at once burning and shivering, a combination that was as unpleasant as it was unusual. (273)

The thing were so aggravated and the journey so tiring and horrible that at the Oasis of Charchalik, Luisa announced that she was quite incapable of going on “if I spent one more minute in truck, she said quietly but very firmly ‘I will die’ ” (274). Thus, they let go the truck – and got refreshed and as feared it was here that they were discovered by the police and sent back to Peking.

**Eight**

The last part narrates the journey by train from Keriya to Peking. The train journey makes them confront a new facet of Chinese people and culture. Dalrymple notes down had Polo arrived in China one month later on his expedition, he would have met the Khan here in his new capital Khan Balik in Peking and in that sense William his own expedition would have also got completed. Polo arrived in China in May and during that time Chengis Khan had been in his famous summer palace – Shang Tu, i.e. – Coleridge’s Xanadu.

Dalrymple’s giving much importance to his female counter parts first ‘Laura’ and ‘Louisa’ perhaps – is an attempt to react to the much debated ‘Patriarchal Embossing’ to the travel texts. By assimilating with the people of the places he travels or ‘stays’, by attempting to be as much ‘local’ – William tries to overcome the blame of the superior-centric treatment of the narration often put on the western travel writers especially in the post colonial differences i.e. “Contemporary travel writers certainly recognize how the forces of globalization have changed cultural encounters forever. Some respond by reviving matrices of colonialism and patriarchy and foregrounding cultural differences (i.e ‘they’ are still different from ‘us’)” (Lisle 75).

Other travel writers seek to manage cultural differences – to locate, place and administer it within a framework of universal norms. Cosmopolitan Travel Writers seek out difference in order to welcome it, include it and celebrate it: it doesn’t matter if ‘they’ are different from ‘us’, as long as ‘we’ – and that means everyone – can join together and celebrate those difference. In Peking for the last attempt to
accomplish their expedition, William and Louisa act hectically. Before they left China forever to rejoin their college term once again, they had five days in stocks. Their calculation counted two days of journey from Peking to Duolon – the nearest town to the ruins and two days back – thus they were felt with only one day spare to complete the journey to the ruins of Xanadu only on the condition if everything went as per their plans. They had only the Bushell’s article as their guide. Dalrymple here, attributes the discovery of Xanadu ruins to the physician at British legation in Peking, Dr. S.W. Bushell, According to him, if he & Louisa succeeded in reading the signboard – “Prohibited area for the foreigners” – then also they would be the first Europeans to witness the ruins for over a century. They manage to get up to Chengde, the old Jehol, site of the summer palace of the Manchu dynasty, by train and had got a hotel for accommodation.

From there, they got a lift in a truck to reach Zheng Lan Qi. It happened to be a small town. According to their plan, they were five miles close to their destination. But the things were not to go according to their own planning. In the morning as they were getting ready to stroll on the last patch of their journey, the door was knocked and to their astonishments there were Mongol Public Security Guards. They instantly understood they were under arrest and there was no way left but would be deported to Peking. “The idea of travelling twelve thousand miles, only to be detained and deported five miles from our destination was too much to bear” (296). Somehow, perhaps from the efforts of the interpreter teacher couple, the local Party cadre was brought in to the matter, and they were taken to the site of 108; the court of Kubla Khan. It was really a great surprise to them. “We had travelled twelve thousand miles to get to this spot. We stood at the base of the ramp leading up to the throne dais. Here, seven hundred and eleven years before, Marco Polo had also stood at the end of his outward journey” (299). Together they recite the lines of ‘In Xanadu’, the famous poem of Samuel Coleridge, only to earn the reaction from the accompanying Mongols that “English people are very, very bonkers” (300).

The title of the book “In Xanadu: A Quest” instantly brings to our mind an image of the author's meticulous travelling expeditions. Dalrymple delineates his experiences on the entire trip as a Cambridge student with highly educated upper-class mentality, constantly consulting the previous Travel–Accounts and enters into an incessant exercise of drawing comparisons between the landscapes represented in the texts of his predecessors and how he finds it as and when he himself visits them. His tonal bent constantly tries to trace the Colonial upper hand. The characterization of the central figure, the narrator, is also done very strategically to emboss the upper-
class; well-educated youth maintaining an evaluative gaze on the comparatively ‘backward' and 'developing' East. The analysis of this three facet persona of Dalrymple is rightly done by Dorgelo in his doctoral thesis as “There are up to three Dalrymple figures involved in each text: the central, autobiographical character, the narrator, and finally the author / public figure.... and the iterations of the autobiographical character as "William" (Dorgelo Thesis). Dorgelo asserts giving the point of Edward Said's argument, “Orientalism is premised on exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West”, in that case, In Xanadu is a nostalgic tribute to past European travel to and writing about the Orient, and a central component of the protagonist’s characterisation is this unspoken relationship with Orientalism. In essence Dalrymple studies the people and places he comes across and comments on their way of life, occupations and typicality and works to trace differences and all this he does with a hypothetical western audience in mind. The common similes he uses to convey and to drive the points home all are drawn from the western familiarities which are enough to convince the subconscious currents while the creative exercise is on.

Travel writing has been labelled for its treatment and adoption of ‘Patriarchal’ and ‘Anglo-centric’ interweaving. Many critics have argued that the ‘Narrative Voice’ of the most of the texts of travel writings often tries to establish this masculine superiority in seemingly conscious tonal varieties or sometimes the process goes on at the sub-conscious levels. Dalrymple’s giving much importance to his female counterparts first Laura and then Louisa is perhaps his attempt to eliminate this sorts of blames from his texts, “It must be obvious to anyone who reads this book that I owe an enormous debt to two people without whom the whole enterprise could never have got off the ground. I dedicate this book with love and apologies to Laura and Louisa” (Dalrymple In Xanadu Forward), still their involvement in the composition of the things and selection of the issues does not play a vital role, and it is never issued or hinted by the author whether any of his companions maintains log book and ultimately intends to write down or publish a book or paper on the same trip. Similarly, by assimilating with the people of the places he travels or ‘stays’ and trying to maintain proficiencies in the local languages and to partake in the very one to one daily routine of the local public life, Dalrymple seems to make conscious efforts to keep his works free from being stamped as the works written with super ordinate temperament. Dorgelo rightly observes in his thesis, “...through his public appearances, wardrobe and the arguments he makes, Dalrymple seeks to collapse the
Debbie Lisle in *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* justly analyses the different approaches adopted by the contemporary travel writers: “Contemporary travel writers certainly recognize how the forces of globalization have changed cultural encounters forever. Some respond by reviving matrices of colonialism and patriarchy and foregrounding cultural differences (i.e. ‘they’ are still different from ‘us’). Unhappy with the colonial and the patriarchal tone of that project, other travel writers seek to manage cultural differences – to locate, place and administer it within a framework of universal norms. Cosmopolitan travel writers seek out difference in order to welcome it, include it and celebrate it: it doesn’t matter if ‘they’ are different from ‘us’, as long as ‘we’ --- and that makes everyone --- can join together and celebrate those differences” (Lisle 75).

All throughout the book and in the presentation of the journey and encounter accounts, Dalrymple maintains a sort of decency. Though he is young graduate student and travels with young and beautiful ladies, his advances never acquire sexual tinge. In their travels throughout the Turkish Empire William and Laura had to act as a married couple, still there is no trace of physical attraction. Instead William feels a kind of guardian pressure from Laura. When he was suffering from the loose motion at Anatolia and wants to rest still more, Laura comes from her mission and directs him to go to the village side and to look for the carpet makers, William complaints about his health, even at the time of departure too, Laura commands him to get ready instructing him to take and not to take certain food.

But the same child like William becomes different in the company of Louisa. Here he starts taking lead of the expedition as now his companion is quite lazy and he is senior and experienced in the expedition. Louisa whom he calls Lou out of previous affinities, joins him from Karachi and then onwards they continue their journey together. There are many places where William makes reference that he was Lou’s ex-boyfriend and feels jealous of her present boy-friend. At one place he cannot help admiring Louisa’s physical charms, and for the first time seems losing control on his decent gentlemanly narrations: “As I talked to her I took in her neat figure. She had
such intelligent curves” (203). And at the last phase of the journey, being sheer helpless and in the great state of low spirits he resorts to use an ‘F’ word.

Another important thing is William’s jovial flow of narratives. He stuffs the narrations through his peculiar sense of humour. Sometimes there are joyful instances of the natives’ enthusiasm of talking in English and through improper or uncertain use of the words or nativised pronunciation of English words help him cut jokes. (At Pakistan border bottom, in turkey socks, at carpet place village)

The overall impression of the book as a travel book can be summed up as it takes the reader within it and sways him/her with its narratives and brings him/her face to face with what the author encounters in the first person singular narrative. It also envelops within its scope the local as well as the historical issues which directly or indirectly affect the local public life and through these details the readers are benefited to have a wider scope to understand the culture and the way of life which otherwise they would never have been able to access without leaving their own home. The places which the author visits are decently and elaborately described with the author’s consummate skills of narrative art. Sometimes the scene or the persons whom the author meets or deals in are put on pages with just in outline words and in the fashion of a caricature artist the whole scene or the person comes alive before the eye or vision of the reader and gives him/her an impression that he/she were personally present there. For this the writer sometimes resorts to the narrative descriptions and sometimes with a line or two of direct dialogues would sufficiently project what pictorial effects he wants to strike.

More precisely, the readers have a brand new interpretation and scholarly comments on the accounts of Marco Polo which William Dalrymple has taken as the foundation of his travels. Because as he studies and re studies ‘Travels’ for his explorations his understanding about it develops and it makes it way in the book thus, it benefits the reader from the historic purviews.
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